

# APPLICATION OF THE ANOMIC THEORY ON THE PHENOMENON OF DISENGAGEMENT LETHARGY IN THE IMO STATE PUBLIC SERVICE, NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

Anomie is used in sociology to describe a condition where the norms and values of a society or an institution are in flux or even partially destroyed. The public service is the most potent organ for the implementation of the policies and programmes of government. It is operated based on rules and regulations, which the public servants are conversant with. In spite of these rules and regulation, there are cases of infringements by public servants, the custodians of these rules especially with respect to the fear of voluntary disengagement. This study sets out to find out if the phenomenon of disengagement lethargy exists in the public service in Imo state, as such is a serious misconduct. The anomic theory was used to explicate its prevalence. It also looked at the causes and concomitant effects and probable remedy. The study which is essentially library research and explorative, observes that disengagement lethargy is prevalent in Imo State public service. It is caused by the over weaning ambition of some individuals, the harsh economic environment, and the erosion of the authority of regulatory instruments and apparati. In view of our findings, we recommend that public service in Imo state should be re-organized. We also recommend the re-orientation of the public servants and reappraisal of the regulatory instruments and apparati. It is only through these measures that the public service can be rescued from its slide to anomic conditions.

**Keywords:** Disengagement, Retirement, Lethargy, Anomie, Public and Civil service

## **Introductory Background and Problem**

Emile Durkheim is regarded as one of the founding fathers of the subject, sociology. One of the achievements of Durkheim was to delineate a theory of society which can be applied to all societies. According to McGee (1980), sociology as a discipline, is the search for the social causation of human behaviour. This then suggests that sociology is best understood as a means of asking particular kinds of questions about our environment, seeking and producing answers or explanations to the questions.

According to Coser and Rosenberg (1976), scientific theories are general statements or set of statements that explain many different facts by reference to underlying principles and relationships. Social theory, on the other hand, is a set of verified rules and ideas which attempt to explain the underlying principles concerning social phenomena (Iheriohanma, 2002). Bilton *et al* cited in Ugwulebo (2003), and Opara (2005) posit that a theory is a set of system of ideas held to explain a group of facts or phenomena. Opara (2005) went further to state that a theory deals with the relationship between facts. These facts should be obtained and arranged after a particular systematic order.

In the view of Durkheim, the society is a moral phenomenon. There is a common conscience which its observance of common rules leads to common good, which in turn leads to harmony and stability. A breach, deviation or infringement on the rules or values leads to

disharmony which Durkheim regards as anomie. Anomie is simply described as a state of normlessness (Iheriohanma, 2002); it is used by Emile Durkheim to describe a society that is without values, norms, rules, and direction.

Furthermore a society, whether mechanical or organic, in Durkheimian analysis, is made up of parts held together by sameness (mechanical) or by division of labour (organic). An anomic condition in one part affects the whole. Modern societies are made up of organizations and institutions built on rules and regulations. Public service is one of the organizations established during the colonial period in Nigeria (Maduabum, 1992). Its primary function was to serve as a link between government and the people to ensure social order and stability and to ensure effective and efficient implementation of government programmes, policies and projects.

According to Nwachukwu (2005), public service is an organization that carries out its activities in line with the prescribed rules and regulations as stated in the Public Service Rules (PSR). These include earnings, rights and obligations, expenditure, rules on engagements and disengagements. Furthermore, Adewumi and Idowu (2012), see the public service as an employment system that is based on hiring, retraining, retaining, promoting and disengagement of employees based on prescribed rules and regulations. However, the 2010 Imo State Government White Paper (GWP) on downsizing and rightsizing showed that in the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA), many public servants over-stayed their service period. This is shown in Table 1.

#### **Imo State Government Establishments Where Public Servants Overstayed their Period of Service**

| <b>S/N</b> | <b>Name of Establishment</b>                         | <b>No. of Officers</b> | <b>Remarks</b> |
|------------|--|------------------------|----------------|
| 1          | Ministry of Works and Housing                        | 33                     |                |
| 2          | Ministry of Health                                   | 106                    |                |
| 3          | Ministry of Justice                                  | 38                     |                |
| 4          | Ministry of Finance                                  | 33                     |                |
| 5          | Ministry of Information and Strategy                 | 27                     |                |
| 6          | Ministry of Youths and Sports                        | 7                      |                |
| 7          | Ministry of Education                                | 23                     |                |
| 8          | Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development     | 16                     |                |
| 9          | Ministry of Culture and Tourism                      | 5                      |                |
| 10         | Ministry of Public Utilities and Rural Development   | 34                     |                |
| 11         | Ministry of Petroleum and Environment                | 9                      |                |
| 12         | Ministry of Planning and Economic Development        | 6                      |                |
| 13         | Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs | 5                      |                |
| 14         | Ministry of Commerce and Industries                  | 33                     |                |
| 15         | Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources        | 111                    |                |
| 16         | Office of Head of service                            | 15                     |                |
| 17         | Government House                                     | 22                     |                |
| 18         | Deputy Governor's office                             | 4                      |                |
| 19         | Bureau for Poverty Alleviation                       | 1                      |                |
| 20         | Customary Court of Appeal                            | 19                     |                |
| 21         | Imo House of Assembly (IMHA)                         | 8                      |                |
| 22         | Civil Service Commission (CSC)                       | 6                      |                |

|    |  |    |  |
|----|--|----|--|
| 23 | Local Government Service Commission        | 2  |  |
| 24 | Judiciary Service Commission               | 2  |  |
| 25 | Imo State Independent Electoral Commission | 1  |  |
| 26 | Imo State Audit                            | 9  |  |
| 27 | Local Government Audit                     | 2  |  |
| 28 | Board of Internal Revenue                  | 19 |  |
| 29 | High Court                                 | 42 |  |
| 30 | SSG office                                 | 6  |  |

**Total=591**

**Source:**

Adapted from Government White Paper (GWP) on Downsizing and Rightsizing of Officers in Imo State Public Service, July 2010.

This study therefore wishes to examine the reasons behind this fear of disengage men retire mention the part of the public servants using the Anomic theory as a framework of reference.

In both the Federal Republic of Nigeria Civil Service Manual (Handbook) and the Imo State Public Service Charter, it is stated among other things that:

- a) The Civil Service is a disciplined service. This means that rules and regulations are made and should be adhered to and the interest of the service kept paramount.
- b) It is orderly and ensures that orderly administration of the state and country is continuous.
- c) The public service is indispensable since it continues the traditional role of keeping the functions of government running, no matter what changes occur in the administration of the state or the country.

The government white paper on downsizing and rightsizing of officers in Imo State Public Service in 2010 shows that about Five hundred and ninety one (591) officers over-stayed their statutory period of employment in service. Some of them exceeded their service period by as much as 4 years. They were earning salaries within this period. In the same vein, the report of the Personnel Audit Committee for the Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB), Imo State, in the year 2000, showed that Two hundred and twenty-eight (228) members of staff were found to have over-stayed their period. About One hundred and three (103) of them were found to be over- aged, sick, weak, feeble, and unproductive, and they still remained in service for fear of disengagement – voluntarily or otherwise.

From the above, one may begin to ask, if the rules are no longer observed. Why is there fear on the part of public servants to retire voluntarily from service even when there is ample evidence for them to do so? According to Izuwa (2000), Agulanna and Agulanna (2003), Nwachukwu (2005), rules and regulations and policies are not merely normal ways of doing things in public service, rather behind these rules, regulations, and policies lie moral obligations. This means that it is not just that public servants should learn how to observe and implement policies and programmes of government, their role-partners, that is, the members of the public they come in contact with and serve, expect them to behave in certain ways. They should not be non-conformists to prescribed rules and regulations as this would constitute an infringement to the common good of the people. This is what Emile Durkheim would refer to as *anomie* - that is when people deviate from normal ways of behaviour, and in our case here, the public servants refusing to retire from service as and when due or as compelling reasons arise.

In the light of these reports on the public service, it is pertinent to ask if we now have disengagement lethargy in the public service that in the year 2010 about six hundred (600) public servants as shown in table one over-stayed beyond the statutory period of their service. This may be as a result of fear of retirement and or by the staff. Again this phenomenon - the disengagement lethargy, that is the unwillingness, reluctance and slack on the part of the public servants to retire from service, may constitute an anomic situation to the public service in Imo State, since this may tend to disrupt and dislocate the functioning of the system. Furthermore, this study seeks to investigate the extent the anomic theory explains this phenomenon. It investigates the problem and the effects this disengagement lethargy or fear and unwillingness to retire has on the public service and society at large, and how this problem of disengagement lethargy can be addressed to strengthen the productivity of the public service in Imo State. All the above constitute the problem of study of this investigation using the anomic theory as a frame of reference.

The study poses the following questions:

1. Is there the fear of disengagement existing in the Imo State public service?
2. Does the phenomenon of unwillingness to disengage or retire constitute anomic situation in the public service in Imo State?
3. To what extent does the anomic theory explain the social phenomenon of disengagement lethargy in Imo State public service?
4. What are the effects of reluctance to retire among staff on the public service and society at large?
5. How can the problem of fear of disengagement be addressed to strengthen the productivity of the public service in Imo State?

The general objective of the study is to examine if there is the fear of disengagement or retirement in the public service in Imo State, using the anomic theory as a frame of reference. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine if the phenomenon of unwillingness to disengage or retire constitutes an anomic situation in the public service in Imo State.
2. Examine to what extent the anomic theory explains the social phenomenon of disengagement lethargy in the public service in Imo State.
3. Examine the effects of reluctance to retire amongst staff on the public service and society at large.
4. Suggest how the problem of fear of disengagement or retirement can be addressed to strengthen the productivity of the public service in Imo State.

The investigation has both the theoretical and practical significance. In the anomic theory, though a classical theory, Durkheim was trying to establish a theory that will be a tool for the analysis of both his time and future social phenomena. The application of the anomic theory on the phenomenon of disengagement lethargy or fear of retirement, as the case may be, will be adding to the existing knowledge on Durkheim's anomic theory. The study will support the view that the classical theory such as the anomic theory is as much relevant a theory as, and important in the analysis of, and explanation of the present day social phenomena such as the issues of unwillingness, reluctance and slack, on the part of the public servants, to retire or disengage from the public service. The public service is generally recognized and accepted all over the world as the main institution for the formulation, propagation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programmes of

government. In this regard there is no viable alternative that has taken the place of the public service in the delivery of government programmes and projects to the citizenry of any state. In this view, Durkheim's concern about social order is of practical relevance here. In the Imo State Public Service Charter, one of the hallmarks of public service is discipline where rules and regulations are strictly adhered to. If there is unwillingness to retire on the part of the public servant, it is antithetical to the norms, and this therefore needs to be evaluated and addressed. The result of this study will help both the individual public officers and the government to devise a means to arrest the situation.

In this study we used the qualitative method of research. This research relies on secondary data. Qualitative approach according to Pickard (2007) can also be an empirical study. This involves exploration of relationship using textual, descriptive, narrative, and analytical techniques rather than numerical data. In consideration of this, textbooks, academic journals, published and unpublished but related to the area of bureaucracy, public administration, public policy and public service were used. This helped us to evaluate the application of the anomic theory on the phenomenon of disengagement lethargy in the public service in Imo State.

### **Contextual Definition of Terms**

#### **Anomie**

Emile Durkheim used it to describe a state in which social facts have lost their coercive powers and people do not know which rules to follow. It is a condition of normlessness, being without values that result from the weakening or dissolution of the social ties between people. In this study, anomie is used to describe a situation where public servants fail to abide by the rules and regulations, especially in the area of disengagement from public service. This involves failure of the public servants to play by the prescribed extant rules.

#### **Disengagement**

In this study, disengagement refers to the release or relieving of an employee from his/her job. In other words, the employee stops or is stopped from working in the public service. This will include retirement, retrenchment, and termination of appointment, dismissal from service, forced resignation, and withdrawal from public service.

#### **Lethargy**

This refers to the extreme lack, unwillingness, enthusiasm and fear for doing something. It involves depression and fear for doing something.

#### **Disengagement Lethargy**

This refers to the unwillingness, reluctance, slack and refusal of public servants to withdraw from rendering service or stop work in the public office which one occupies at the expiration of the stipulated or statutorily stipulated period or as may be required by exigencies of government policy. This may be as a result of an employee's failing health or reorganization of the establishment.

#### **Public Servants**

This refers to individuals who are engaged as employees in the civil service, government parastatals, companies and statutory agencies and the judiciary.

### **Public Servant and Civil Servant**

It should be noted here that any employee of government not appointed by the Civil Service Commission (A body responsible for the recruitment of civil servants) is regarded as a public servant. While every civil servant is a public servant, public servants are not regarded as civil servants. However, Decree 43 of 1988 apparently removed the differentiating line. The concepts of public service and civil service, in this study, will be used interchangeably. Also, the terms, public servant and civil servant, will be used in the same vein.

### **The Concept of Anomie**

Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist used the concept of anomie to describe social pathology or morbidity. This means viewing the society as sick or suffering from disease as a result of infraction of social values.

Brown (1981) considers Durkheim's view of society to the idea that individuals are, or should be integrated into a community. That is, members of a society, community, institution, establishment or an organization should be integrated into their groups, values and norms. According to Durkheim, this will enable the said group to achieve social order, stability and progress. According to Iheriohanma (2002), individuals are integrated into their society from a Durkheimian perspective, through the persisting elements of the collective conscience. This makes society strong and stable and gives personal security to the individual. In other words, roles and norms are not merely normal ways of doing things, rather behind these roles and norms lay moral obligations.

In the public service which we are looking at, public servants are not expected to learn how to play the role of public servant in isolation. People whom they come into contact with as they render them services expect them - the public servants - to behave in certain ways. If this expectation is not met, the public servant may be seen as a deviant and a non-conformist. This deviation from the rules, when replicated in many instances and by many individuals, may constitute a problem to the society, community, organization or institution. In this case, the organization/society becomes deceased according to Durkheim. If the rules and regulations guiding retirements, dismissals, and other forms of disengagement from public service are continually and serially infringed on by public servants, it then means that the institution will soon atrophy and this may likely affect the other areas of the society. The succession process is likely to be disjointed which may lead to skirmishes, quarrels and other vices antithetical to the service.

### **The Human Nature and Human Behaviour**

Iheriohanma (2002) stated that Durkheim discusses human nature by raising the question, "what is social fact?" According to him, social facts are ways of acting, thinking and feeling that are, to some extent, common to a number of people. These social facts are more than behavioral guide. They have coercive powers and individuals are expected to conform to maintain social order and stability. Nnam (2014) argued that Durkheim felt that the social order is biased on a fairly concrete moral order, a code of right and wrong in which some things are required and other things are prohibited. Nnam concluded that by this individuals are products of society not creators of society. Public servants are expected to function within a given social milieu. This is why, in the view of Durkheim, both economic recession and boom can undermine the norms and values of everyday life of an individual, society or community. According to Agulanna and Agulanna (2003), the harsh economic environment contributes to the issue of unwillingness, reluctance or slack on the part of the public servants to leave service as and when due for loss of regular source of income and failure to invest on any economic venture while in service.

## **The Public Service**

The public service plays a critical role in the success of any government. Ademolekan (1988), states that the colonial government was characterized by what may be called the fusion of politics and administration. Ademolekan went further to suggest that the principle of a career public service was considered essential for the parliamentary system of government that was established in the attainment of independence. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides in section 169 that “There shall be a civil service of the Federation.” The Imo State Public Service Charter describes the public service as the tool which the government uses for planning and execution of its programmes. Nwachukwu (2005) describes the civil service as an enforcement corps, organized and structured to ensure the attainment of the political organization or the political coloration of government. This makes the public service apolitical.

Idode (1989) is of the view that we deal with administration when current business is disposed of in accordance with existing rules and regulations. He said that administration is rationalized and ordered. According to him “it is the realm of certitude where the contours of the land are already known, and only need to be traced to locate a particular sport.” One can say that this may be the reason why the public service has, over the years, undergone series of reformation for a better service delivery.

Eme and Onwuka (2010), see the civil service as about the most significant single institution affecting the lives of citizenry in a polity. According to them, the civil service influence is all pervasive especially in the present day Nigeria. This means that whatever affects the public service has a ripple effect on the rest of the members of the Nigerian public. Arowolo (2012) stated that for the public service to deliver on its constitutional mandate, it is endowed with certain characteristics. They include:

- **Anonymity** Public servants are required to be anonymous. Their names remain silent in any public or government decision or policy, even when they may have initiated, perfected and promoted such policy. It is only the political head of the ministry, department or agency that takes the credit or blame as the case may be.
- **Impartiality** In the course of their duty, public servants are expected to treat issues and or individuals on equal bases, irrespective of their personal feelings or sentiments. It must be based on extant rules.
- **Political Neutrality** Public servants are constant quotients as far as administration is concerned. They are expected to maintain political neutrality in carrying out their assignments. They are not expected to engage in partisan politics. Any public servant that is interested in partisan politics should first of all resign from his public service appointment.
- **Permanence** Public servants are assured of the security of their appointment. They are not expected to be disengaged from public service arbitrarily. Their disengagement must follow due process as provided by extant rules and regulations.
- **Official Secrecy** Public servants are expected to keep official secrets. They should not disclose such matters to anybody even if it affects them as individuals or any relation of theirs. The importance of this characteristic of the public service may have been reduced by the enactment of the freedom of information bill.

- **Merit** Appointments, promotions and advancement in the public service or into the public service are required to be based on merit. There must be prescribed requirements. Any public servant or prospective public servants are considered on such prescribed requirements. This will include competency, experience, skill acquired and or academic qualification(s).

### **Misconduct in the Public Service**

The public service, as has been stated, has remained the most potent organ for the implementation of the policies and programmes of government, there are rules, regulations and guidelines which guide and regulate public servants in the performance of their official duties. Nwachukwu (2005), observed that many public servants though aware of these rules and regulations or guide-lines act in contravention of these extant rules, and in most cases, intentionally. Nwachukwu went further to state that the penchant for public servants to disregard the rules and regulations has constituted a source of worry to government. This is supported by the former governor of Imo State, His Excellency Chief Achike Udenwa in his preface to the Imo State revised Public Service Rules (2001) when he said:

As a result of this disdain for rules and regulations in the public service, public officers have developed the penchant to operate outside these rules. Most public officers now conduct themselves in a manner that indicates that there are no rules and regulations that guide their conduct and performance of their official duties. I wish to emphasize that the public service rules constitute an essential ingredient of the rule of law which is one of the pillars of democracy.

### **Evidence of Disengagement Lethargy as Misconduct in the Public Service**

The above comment by a former Chief Executive of Imo State underscores the degree to which regulations guiding the public service have been desecrated. Disengagement lethargy has been described as the slack, reluctance or unwillingness of public servants to leave office at the expiration of the stipulated period either by service, age or other exigencies such as health challenges. One of the ways a public servant can extend his service is by official contract appointment and distortion/falsification of records. Public Service Rules (PSR) chapter IV, section 4 listed the following among others as acts of serious misconduct in the public service.

- i. Willful act or omission or general misconduct to the scandal of the public
- ii. Suppression of records
- iii. Dishonesty
- iv. Falsification of records
- v. Failure to keep records/failure to keep accurate records.

When a public servant distorts his age or period of service to elongate his service period, it may bring distortion and disruption to the system at least in the succession process. This may also bring schism, intrigue, quarrels and such other vices that are inimical to the effective and efficient functioning of the system.

The Government White Paper (GWP) published by the office of the Secretary to the State Government, Owerri, as in table 1 showed that sixteen (16) Government Ministries and Seventeen (17) Extra-Ministerial Departments had officers who did not disengage from service as at when due. The report/records show that about 600 staff were discovered to have over stayed in their work place, some staying up to four (4) to six (6) years beyond the statutory period. The number of staff affected is as shown in table 1. When 600 members of staff are involved in 33 government establishment then it is a serious issue. The committee



that investigated the matter also observed that consistently sick officers were being pay-rolled for years without reference to the Medical Board. The committee went further to recommend that some members of staff who were too old and fragile and who were still on the pay roll of government, should be compensated and laid off. All these go to prove that disengagement lethargy is a phenomenon in

the public service in Imo State, Nigeria. Furthermore, the report of the Personnel Audit Committee for the Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB) Imo State, 2000, showed that out of the 7,696 staff strength, about 660 staff members had overstayed either by age or by service year. Some of these public servants exceeded the statutory service by four (4) years and above. (Source- GWP on the Personnel Audit Report on SEMB, Owerri, Imo State, 2000).

Furthermore, the committee report on staff rationalization in the public service recommended the prompt payment and settlement of public servants disengagement benefits. The failure of government to address this singular issue and others will continue to encourage public servants to engage in acts that will enable them to stay longer in service beyond the stipulated period. If disengagement benefits are paid coupled with proper public enlightenment, the phenomenon of disengagement lethargy will be greatly reduced.

The forgoing report about the public service sufficiently shows that there is unwillingness, reluctance and fear on the part of the public servants to disengage from service. These arise from the fact that they are no longer sure of the payment of their disengagement entitlements, nor sure of regular pension. This brings discontent to the larger members of the society. When public servants distort their records, they flout the provisions of the public service rule. When this gives them opportunity to overstay in the public service, it also infringes on the ethics, rules and regulations guiding the public service. It means the individual no longer shares the collective conscience. On the other hand, when the system (The government establishment) does not provide the individual with the hope in the future in case of disengagement, then it weakens the regulatory apparatus. What follows is normlessness. A visit to any government office and minimal interaction with public servants will underscore the provision above, where correspondences stay longer than necessary before a response is obtained. In some offices files and records are poorly kept and most times nonexistent.

The phenomenon of disengagement lethargy culturally constitutes anomic situation in the public service in Imo State. As noted in the report, many of the officers are over aged, frail and unproductive. About 148 officers could not appear before the personnel audit committee as a result of ill health, but they are on government payroll. They were recommended for compensation and lay off. About 132 were considered incompetent. This situation will definitely give rise to inefficiency, unproductivity, poor output and loss of revenue by the government.

The public service is very important in the delivery of government policies. It is a vehicle through which programmes, projects and policies are initiated, designed and implemented. When this vehicle is mal-functional, definitely it cannot deliver the goods. In a situation where records are not properly maintained, especially as it concerns retirement and disengagement, it gives rise to poor planning and consequent defective implementation. He who fails to plan well, plans to fail dismally. When public servants fail to disengage as and when due, it deprives the younger ones employment or advancement for junior ones in the service. At the same time, government will be paying for work not done or at best, work not properly done. This is loss of revenue. Money that would have been used for other productive areas is channeled to unproductive workforce. The society loses. Disengagement lethargy brings quarrels and schism. If an officer refuses to leave office when he is supposed to, the

officer who should succeed him may not be happy. This brings rivalry, uncooperative attitude and other vices detrimental to the service. This situation will negatively impact on the system as the operators appear to be working un-harmoniously. It will actually lead to disharmony and normlessness.

Disengagement from service, whether voluntary or compulsory, attracts benefits. The only disengagement that does not attract any benefit is dismissal or termination, which is a disciplinary action by government. However, as Ejiofor (1987) succinctly put it, the typical Nigerian public servant today is in such a serious economic crisis and distress that probably the only interest he has in continuing to work in the public service is the retirement benefits.

### **Reasons for the Fear of Disengagement**

#### **i) Non-payment of Disengagement Entitlements to Employees**

The government for some time has failed to pay gratuity to her retired employees. Writing in the Nigeria Horn, October 21, 2013, Nwanguma regretted the shabby retrement successive governments in Imo State have meted to retirees in the state. He referred to the case of Imo Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) staff that were waiting for 35 months pension arrears and gratuity. The same situation applies to the retirees of Imo Newspaper Limited. Nwanguma also stated that there are about 2000 employees in Imo State public sector who have retired and are being owed their gratuity. Furthermore, monthly pensions of disengaged staff are paid irregularly. This does not encourage those who are still in service. This situation only instills fear in those who are still in service, hence the unwillingness to withdraw from service for fear of hunger, starvation, sickness or even death. The only alternative is to devise a means to prolong their stay in the public service which may include distortion and destruction of their service records.

#### **ii) Low Wages and Salaries**

Employees in the public sector service earn very low wages. In Imo State, the minimum wage is about Twenty thousand naira (N20, 000.00) monthly. This translates to about Seven hundred naira (N700) per day. This is less than one United States dollar per day. It is difficult to make savings with this level of earning. The alternative desirable will be to remain in service, even when the individual is not fit. He will prefer to remain and keep the present employment where he is sure of regular income, even when there may be enough reasons for the individual to disengage from service. If the individual disengages as may be required by statutory provisions without anything to fall back on, the person is likely to suffer hunger, starvation, sickness or death. This brings about the unwillingness to disengage from service.

#### **iii) Delayed Promotions**

In the public service, promotions are not carried out as and when due. If an individual is expecting a promotion while due for retirement which will enhance both the officer's pensions and gratuity, the tendency is to find a way to stay and benefit from the promotion. This constitutes serious challenges to the government.

#### **iv) Non- Harmonization of Pensions**

When salaries are reviewed for public officers who are still in service, the same is not extended to pensioners even though the individual should have had it normally. It discourages disengagement from service especially those in higher cadre e.g. from directors to the position of permanent secretary. While a retired director earns about N150, 000.00 as pensions, a permanent secretary earns about N500, 000.00. Their gratuity is about N6million and N18million respectively. The disparity is over yawning. Government should therefore

address these serious challenges by ensuring that salary reviews are carried out simultaneously for both serving and retired officers.

**v) Inflation**

The high rate of inflation in Nigeria is another factor that encourages disengagement lethargy in the public service in Imo State. As stated earlier, wages in Nigeria are low. The poor wages and salaries paid are further depreciated by high cost of living which does not encourage savings. The fact must be appreciated that it is not easy to raise capital for business operation. This may be one of the reasons the public officers find it difficult to disengage from service. There is the fear that there will be nothing to fall back on or that will guarantee regular source of income to take care of oneself and other dependant relatives since the individual has no investment or business.

**vi) Ignorance**

According to Nwokoro (2012), the basic task of prospective entrepreneur is to identify investment opportunities. He went further to say that the individual needs to monitor his/her environment to identify market gaps. Many public sector officers who may have the opportunity of saving some money are not aware of some viable business opportunities which can give them enough profit to sustain life outside the public service. They can embark on palm oil and kernel processing business or rice, cassava or other agricultural products which abound in the villages and rural communities. The disengaged officers can also pool whatever resources they have together bearing in mind that it is little businesses that grow to become big or large establishments.

**vii) Instigated Corruption** It is also pertinent to mention that the non-payment of benefits leads to employees' corrupt practices at the least opportunity. Public servants who are in a position to appropriate money in the interest of the masses, whom they are supposed to serve, convert such public fund to personal use. These funds are, in most cases, taken outside Nigeria where they become investible funds in those countries thereby creating employment for citizens of these countries while our University graduates languish in Nigeria without jobs.

**Application of Anomic Theory on Disengagement Reluctance / Lethargy**

To Durkheim, the social order precedes all human life. People are born into the social groups that already exist; individuals are only required to cue into them. Any infraction due to personal ambition or desire constitutes *anomie* to the society or group. However, Merton modified Durkheim's usage of the word and applied it explicitly to deviant behaviour. Merton identified two related elements to elucidate his postulation, i.e. cultural goals and institutionalized means of achieving the goals. Coser and Rosenberg (1997) and Iheriohanma (2002), respectively define cultural goals as the things a society's normative system considers as worth being, having, and worth striving for; while institutionalized means are the ways a society accepts as legitimate for attaining the cultural goals. According to Nnam (2014), *anomie* in Merton's usage arises when individuals are unable to obtain the goals they have been taught to strive for with the means that the society puts at their disposal. In Merton's view, according to Nnam, a common reaction to this situation is to engage in deviant behaviour or what could be regarded as innovation.

In the public service, one may suggest that there are many opportunities for officers in the higher class to achieve their goals. The same cannot be said of the junior officers (e.g. clerks and messengers). It does appear that there is a greater tendency for the junior personnel

to engage in illegitimate acts, if it gives them a better material gain and the opportunity presents itself. This tends to agree with Merton's postulation that innovation in particular is a characteristic of the lower class (Merton, 1938), cited in Nnam, (2014). He further stated that the lower class is where access to legitimate means is limited and the strain towards anomie is most severe. According to Nnam (2014), the groups in lower class who are encumbered by structural blockages employ unlawful means in an attempt to achieve the cultural over-emphasized goal (success) of the society. However, the report on the Personnel Audit Committee for the Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB), Imo State as published by the office of the Secretary to the State Government in the year 2000, has it that "officers on salary Grade Level 13-15 constitute 26% of the entire staff and earn almost about 42% of the salaries paid to the entire staff". It went further to state that "the management staff form the target group for retirement but they stop at nothing to escape retirement and block the opportunities for the younger ones in service." The report here does not support the suggestion of Merton or Nnam that the lower cadre personnel are inclined to indulging in malpractice. The report rather indicted the upper cadre which supports the view of Wood and Wood (1999) who argued that generally, the people most reluctant to retire are those who are better educated, hold high status jobs with a good income and find fulfillment in their work. This may lead to skirmishes, conflict of interests, break down of the system in view of the fact that those who are waiting and are eager to be elevated to such positions are denied the opportunity. This reluctance on the part of senior management staff who are principals of secondary schools does negatively impact on the system. It tends to frustrate those who are expected to be appointed to the position of secondary school principals. This frustration may lead to discouragement and low productivity which Durkheim will regard as anomic.

Furthermore, Emile Durkheim used the concept of *anomie* to explain deviant behaviour. He focused on the way in which various social conditions lead to overwhelming ambition and now in turn, unlimited aspirations ultimately produce a breakdown in regulatory norms. Durkheim held the view that sudden depression or sudden prosperity and rapid technological change lead men to aspire to goals that are extremely difficult if not impossible to attain. He posited that prosperity could have much the same effect as depression especially if upward changes in economic conditions are abrupt. This abruptness in economic changes presumably heightens aspirations beyond possibility of fulfillment, which in turn puts a strain in the regulatory apparatus of the society.

Merton, in his postulation, systematized and extended the theory of *Anomie*. He focused attention to patterns of disjunction between culturally prescribed goals and socially organized access to them by legitimate means. According to Opara (2005), Merton's postulation is that goals and norms may vary independently of each other and that this sometimes leads to mal-integrated states. Merton's averment is that a strong emphasis upon specific goals without corresponding emphasis upon institutional procedures leads to anomie - normlessness.

From the above, we find that while Durkheim emphasized on the attitude of the individual - that is concerning aspiration and ambitions - Merton dealt with individual aspirations and ambitions regulated by the system in which the individual finds himself. In the public service in Imo state which this study is examining, while there are rules and regulations guiding activities including achievements, there appears to be hindrances through which a public servant can achieve a desired aspiration or goal even when he has observed the norms. It means that something must be wrong with either the rules or the system or both. The individual has no choice but to device a means (innovation in Merton's analogy) to achieve his desired aspirations, ambitions or goal. This definitely will distort the system which Merton regards as *anomie* or state of normlessness. When public servants refuse to

disengage according to prescribed rules, it actually disturbs, distorts and dislocates the public service e.g. rivalry, schism, quarrelling etc. This constitutes a serious challenge to the system.

In the works of Max Weber, the concept or notion of 'action' is important. To Weber, the defining feature of action is its meaningfulness. Rex (1980) stated that the work of Weber, like that of Pareto, is sharply differentiated from that of Durkheim. According to Rex, it does not mean that Weber accepts the intuitive method of sympathetic introspection as the basis of his sociology. In his view, what Weber suggested is that the theoretical constructs of sociology should be built up from the basic model of the motivation of a hypothetical actor. The hypothetical actor is a theoretical construction and statements about his motivations have empirical implications so that it is possible to verify them objectively. Opara (2005) is of the view that Weber's scholarship was more concerned with individuals. Social action of Weber is a behaviour undertaken by one person while taking into account another person's. It is best understood in terms of ends and means; goals and how they are achieved. In Max Weber's view, an individual chooses a goal and an efficient means of achieving it, after considering the consequences, the individual is being rational and legal. This type of action is more acceptable in bureaucratic setting. The problem of this Weberian view is that, that action may be rational to the individual and may not actually be right, equitable, and fair to both the individuals the action may affect or to the entire system. That a public servant chooses to elongate his stay in office beyond the stipulated period may be beneficial to him as a person but it is adverse to another person or the system, at least to the next in rank who should take over based on seniority/rank.

Talcott Parson's sociology is analyzed in terms of his systems model of society. Parsons initially viewed human beings as mere puppets responding to historical and social processes. Brown (1979) is of the view that the focus on action is maintained throughout Parsons' sociology, but as he developed his theories, the voluntary, self-willed element of human action disappeared in Parsons' theory. At first, he stated that meaningful "action must be subjective", that is, action is initiated by the actor, and however, it takes place in a social situation. In most cases, actors do not have unfettered freedom to act as they deem fit. Nevertheless, in the last analysis, action is the deliberately willed behaviour of the actor; it is in other words voluntary. A public servant, who decides to distort his service records to elongate his stay in the service, is purely taking a personal decision. He may be responding to adverse external social environment. In this case, it is the fear of losing the source(s) of the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, and clothing. When public servants become reluctant to disengage (disengagement lethargy) as prescribed by extant rules, they may be responding to the social environmental conditions, outside the public service, which in most cases they view as unfavourable, especially when they have not made adequate arrangements, that is, investments to take care of themselves on retirement.

While it may be argued that most rules are generally agreed to by all the members of a society or organization, empirical research, according to Nwachukwu (2005), reveals variations in people's attitude. Ugwulebo (2014) captures this when he postulated that when public servants watch their political leaders and their cronies toy with "Ghana must go" bags, while they are compelled to atrophy in the wilderness of want, their psyche will suffer the worst injustice and great bruises. This challenges the moral being of the public servant. Whatever is seen as the rule may become meaningless to the individual (Iheriohanma, 2009). Ugwulebo (2014) went further to say that "when workers are being owed their salaries and allowances, frustration usually becomes their neighbour. To such staff, the much talked about increase in productivity remains a veritable farce. Instead, sabotage may be a viable option". This viable option may include elongation of one's stay in service through distortion of service records. By staying beyond statutory period, the individual will be looking for a

“juicy” posting or deployment to engage in corrupt practices or to save money to achieve a desired goal, since outside the service the entitlements are not paid. The individual may still have children to train in school; he may not have a house of his own or any investment. This leads to frustration, which cannot be said to be a normal situation. In this case, the system is disjointed; the individual is devastated economically and probably socially as he may find it difficult to fit into the society. He may have wasted greater part of his youthful and useful life in service, while adjusting his records. This can be anything but normal. It is anomic to both the individual and the system and also the society at large.

The anomic theory is relevant in this study as it tends to analyze the impact of the unwillingness, the slack or refusal of public servants to disengage from the public service as and when due. It actually constitutes a malaise in the system and society. Igbo and Anugwom (2002) cited in Nnam (2014), applauded the anomic theory when they said that social problems (such as kidnapping ) and distortion of records by public servants are often associated with changes induced by the adoption of innovations in the society. Furthermore, Akinyemi (2002), cited in Nnam (2014) explains that when people are asked to pursue economic success and are at the same time denied means of achieving it, there is a goal blockage; the aspiration is frustrated and may lead individuals to choose illegitimate means such as distortion of records and elongation of service period to achieve goals.

In this study, we found out that Merton’s postulation definitely describes the present situation in the public service and the situation in Nigeria, where material wealth has become the major yardstick for measuring success and where people have little or no regard for the rules of the game (Iheriohanma, 2009). Nigerians now glorify and worship wealth without raising an eye brow on how such wealth is acquired. Where these mindsets exist, coupled with weak formal and informal social control, the resultant effect is anomie as can be found in the public service in Imo state where majority of the public servants are reluctant to retire. From the above we observe that anomic theory could be used to explain a social context in which the moral order had broken down for an individual or group. It explains a situation in which the normal social structural constraints in behaviour have become un-operative or are weakened. When public servants engage in the distortion of their personal or personnel records for pecuniary interest such as remaining in service beyond the statutory service year or age, thereby avoiding disengagement, this could be described as a situation of normlessness. Ugwulebo (2014) posited that “ when workers cannot meet their basic needs, but barely send their children to school, settle hospital bills, settle electric and water bills, etc., expecting increased productivity from workers (or even efficiency and sincerity) is akin to expecting a love letter from water buffalo”. This justifies Merton’s averment that a strong emphasis upon specific goals without corresponding emphasis upon institutional procedures leads to anomie -normlessness. When a worker has spent about 35 years in service, and the children are still in post-primary school, he has no house of his own, has not made any investment to assure or guarantee a steady source of income and is not sure of his gratuity or pension, there is the tendency that the worker will be unwilling to retire or leave office for fear of a bleak future.

As stated by Emile Durkheim, an anomic situation on one part of the body affects the other parts. The same thing applies to the society. When a part has been infracted, it also reflects on the other parts of the society. In the public service, when rules and regulations are not followed, it affects the entire system. When individuals refuse to retire from the public service because they are not sure of a continued regular source of income, the society is at a loss. It leads to loss of revenue, incompetence, inefficiency, unproductivity and unemployment. Those who are supposed to retire block the chances for the younger ones.

### **Adverse Effects of Disengagement Lethargy: A Synthesis**

Disengagement lethargy has been described as the unwillingness, reluctance, slack or refusal of the public servants to leave office which they occupy at the expiration of the statutorily prescribed period. When they reluctantly refuse to retire, the following may arise:

a) **Succession problem** Public service is an orderly institution. There is a ranking process in its positions. When a substantive officer leaves (as a result of retirement), the next in rank takes over. In a situation where a substantive officer fails to leave when he is due as a result of fear or lethargy, then there is a problem of succession. This leads to scheming, and in most cases, fetishism and diabolism.

b) **Economic problem** There is loss of revenue on the part of the government. The reports on downsizing and rightsizing in the public service and personnel audit in the Imo state Secondary Education Management Board (SEMB) showed that about four hundred (400) members of staff who were sick, disabled, weak and frail were being pay-rolled and paid for upwards of about a period of 4-5 years without actually doing any work. This means that their output is zero. If they had been disengaged and settled, the money spent on them would have been used for a profitable investment and more energetic youths would have been employed.

c) **Social problem** According to Bremer (1966), as cited by Agulanna and Agulanna (2003), the unhappy person is the one without employment. No amount of money can take the place of work. A public servant who may have disconnected his social ties and relations with people in the village or community may find it difficult to fit in on retirement. He may find it difficult to integrate into the community. This situation is not normal.

### **Summary**

In this study, we have tried to evaluate the application of the anomic theory on the phenomenon of disengagement lethargy in the public service in Imo State. The anomic theory by Emile Durkheim and Robert Merton was used to explain the consequences of the individual in the society who fails to adapt and adopt the society's preferred and prescribed goals and ways of achieving such goals respectively. This results to normlessness. From our study, we found that disengagement lethargy as a phenomenon is not only present in the Imo State public service but rampant. When public servants distort their records to enable them over stay in the service, they have flouted the rules and regulations of the public service as an institution. The system that fails to provide adequate economic securities which will guarantee decent living outside the service is equally anomalous. The resultant effect is abysmal performance of the public service in the deliverance of quality service to the citizenry. The study is of the view that if the public servants that operate it abide by the rules, it will reduce the attendant vices, such as schisms, strife, unemployment, laziness and poverty. This agrees with the position of Iheriohanma (2011) which suggested that the development of adequate human and institutional capacity, physical infrastructure as well as implementation of relevant policies are necessary to seize the opportunities that globalization presents.

### **Conclusion**

The public service in Nigeria emerged over the years as the most critical and strategic part of national development. According to Arowolo (2012), to ensure efficient and performance-oriented public service, there should be a continued operationalization of the system based on

the laid down rules and regulations and adherence to the public service specific characteristics which include, anonymity, impartiality, political neutrality, official secrecy, permanence and merit. It is expected to play by the rules. Any dislocation in the system will definitely affect the larger society. Any anomaly will lead to normlessness. When the public service suffers, the larger society is likely to suffer. All unethical behaviour such as quarrels, schisms, inordinate ambition, graft, distortion of records and other similar acts should not be associated with the public service and this is where the anomic theory becomes relevant as an explanatory tool.

### **Recommendations**

The study makes the following recommendations.

- There is the need to re-assess and re-evaluate the sanctions stipulated by the Public Service Rule (PSR) on certain official misconduct like distortion of employment records and details of employees. In a situation where salaries earned beyond the stipulated service period by an officer is regarded as having been earned in good faith is anomalous. If such salaries are not recovered, this cannot deter people from illegitimately extending their service period if the opportunity presents itself. The regulatory instrument therefore requires revision.
- Public servants themselves appear to have lost faith in the public service as things appear to have gone awry. Policy initiation, evaluation, and implementation appear to be laced with political sentiments. Partisan politics should be separated from administrative procedures. Appointments, promotions, deployments and discipline in the service should follow due process.
- The economic conditions appear to influence and instigate most official misconduct in the public service, including disengagement lethargy. The fear of the un-known and unfavourable economic environment especially outside the service induces the urge to stay put in service rather than disengage. Government should therefore improve the welfare packages of public service both during and after service. Salaries, entitlements, and benefits should be paid as and when due.
- There should be serious and aggressive public enlightenment for both in-service and out-of-service public servants to think outside the box. There are many viable economic activities an individual can engage in with appreciable capital. Government should encourage entrepreneurship by providing the necessary enablement including financial assistance to a public servant who wishes to establish a small scale business, even while in service as a pre-retirement engagement.

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