

Nicolaus Herman Shombe

**Coordination and Cooperation Problems in Public Offices: An Empirical Study in
Tanzania**

National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

Summary of the Dissertation

The capacity of the state to efficiently deliver public goods and services is critical for achieving socioeconomic development of a country. Until present, state capacity remains weak in many countries, especially in developing countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). A number of studies have been conducted to explain the nature and sources of incapability in public sector in developing countries. However, most of these studies focused on organizations which provide public services such as schools and hospitals, or individuals such as teachers and doctors. In contrast, services provided by public policy making organizations such as the Ministry offices in the central government are much more difficult to define, observe, and hence measure. This might explain the absence of rigorous studies focusing on public policy making organization in the literature.

Motivated by the existing gaps in the literature, this study attempts to investigate the nature and sources of inefficiency in central government offices. It focuses on the two basic, frequent, and important activities of government officials. These are formal meetings and paper document files. Traditionally, governments have been functioning through meetings and documents to coordinate workers and organization activities. Hence, efficient meetings and filing should ideally lay the foundation for effective governments. However, both workers and leaders often complain about unproductive meetings and poor document filing.

The abovementioned situation resembles coordination failure which is widely studied in the laboratory experiments. Such experimental studies have established that coordination failure is the common cause of inefficiencies and poor workplace productivity. Additionally, those studies have established that leadership, communication, group size, and incentives are correlated with coordination failures. Nonetheless, these correlates have not been tested in the real work environment. I collected data on office plenary meetings and office document files in 63 offices from 21 ministries in Tanzania. A total of 63 supervisors and 189 frontline workers were interviewed in this survey.

Chapter 3 studied plenary staff meetings in the level of departmental sections which are the lowest level of administration in the ministries structure in Tanzania. Results show that, workers in the government ministries in Tanzania on average, spend at least four office hours per week for the plenary meetings. Such meetings customarily start late, haphazardly prepared, and provide unsatisfactory information. The descriptive results further show significant differences between supervisors and their subordinates in terms of the reported number of meetings per week, satisfaction with office meeting outcomes, the frequency of communication, and extent of punctuality. Also, there are some significant differences across departments in the same ministry in terms of the quality of the meeting practices.

To advance the analyses, I implemented different regression analytical models. The results, in chapter 3, show that leadership by example, leaders' communication, and workers communication about punctuality can significantly reduce unpunctuality to the meetings. Intriguingly, the results show that while workers dislike meetings which start late, meeting lateness is a common practice and one of the main causes of lateness is late arrivals. The finding is confirmed by regression results which suggest that lateness is likely to increase

when workers are late and vice versa. The finding implies that the chronic meeting lateness represents a suboptimal equilibrium of a game in Tanzania's government offices. Also, in all scenarios, findings show that meetings tend to be more unproductive when start late.

Chapter 4 explores the factors associated with the amount of time workers spend to search for a working file when needed, length of time to find document(s) within the file, and extent of incidences of misfiling of official documents. I find that government office workers tend to spend a significant amount of office time searching for working files and in most cases, documents are missing in the appropriate files. In fact, about 90 percent of workers admitted that they are not satisfied with filing situation in their offices. Surprisingly, however, only 20 percent of workers reported to complying with the filing guidelines. Furthermore, the estimates show that there is significant difference between leaders and workers on the extent of filing problems and workers actions. Also, there is significant difference between departments in terms of the filing problems whereby offices with less filing problems are the one which experienced more leadership by example (i.e., leaders themselves demonstrated filing in their offices).

The estimations results indicate that worker's actions on filing, office leadership, and frequentness of communication about proper filing are the main correlates of quality of filing. However, a larger office, which is defined by the number of workers, is likely to have more filing problems than a smaller office. Unexpectedly, the effect of incentives (reward and sanctions) was found to be insignificantly correlated with file tracing time and incidences of missing documents but not with disarrangement of documents in the file. One possible explanation is that monitoring is less difficult to detect individuals who filed wrongly in the file than to tracing who caused missing documents or removed document from the folder.

Interestingly, the presence of filing standing rules and guidelines in the office has no independent role on the quality of filing but it complements the leadership input. Thus, leadership matters, particularly when it is institutionalized (e.g., establishment of rules and laws). These findings together, are consistent with the existing literature from laboratory coordination games which suggest that inefficient practices in the government offices are somehow similar to coordination failure.

To the best of my knowledge, the existing literature in economics, public administration, and political science is almost lacking detailed empirical evidence suggesting coordination failure as the sources of poor performance of government offices in developing countries. Specifically, the literature has neither associated government office incapability with strategic interactions of government office workers nor coordination failure. The main contribution of my dissertation is fourfold. First, it contributes to the scholarly literature on the public sector performance by attempting to provide empirical evidence of source of inefficiencies in government offices based on the detailed survey data. Second, it focuses on the actual policymaking organization at the lowest level of public administration in the ministries, which is an important workplace where most of day-to-day functions of government take place. Third, the study focuses on the key mechanisms by which governments coordinate workers activities and considers public servants as a group of people interacting strategically and use game theory interpretation to provide evidence of coordination failure from the field. Forth, and last, the empirical findings in chapters 3 and 4 have policy implications. I discuss such policy issues in chapter 5 of the dissertation.