

Performance of autonomous executive agencies in Ghana's politicized environment: A comparative analysis

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Abstract

The search for result-oriented state institutions has been on the ascendancy in both academic and development discourse. Deploying the exploratory and qualitative methods of research, this study comparatively examined the performance of five autonomous executive agencies (National Petroleum Authority, Food and Drugs Authority, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority, Securities and Exchange Commission and Ghana Revenue Authority) in Ghana's public sector using the New Public Management theory and Roll (2014) criteria of pockets of effectiveness as theoretical foundations. The study found that all the agencies deployed NPM ideals such as decentralization, e-governance, institutional collaborations, public private partnership, performance contracts and stakeholder involvement. These ideals significantly shaped their performance in achieving their mandates of providing public goods and services to the citizenry. The success of these agencies hinged on visionary leadership with passion for political rapport; political navigation and commitment to implementing the NPM ideals. However, poor conditions of service resulting in high labour attrition, excessive partisanship, political interference, and low level of ICT were the Achilles Heel of these autonomous executive agencies. State institutions can perform well with the appropriate mix of NPM, institutional autonomy blend with political responsiveness.

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Introduction

Ghana's political landscape is characterized with excessive politicization which affects every fibre of operations resulting in unpredictable and turbulent environment with consequences for service delivery. The public sector has been described as unsatisfactory and unhealthy (Ayee, 2019) despite several reforms from the 1960s. However, some institutions are performing well – usually called islands of excellence (Daland, 1981; Leonard, 2008). Dynamics like effective leadership, decentralization, management vision, capacity development and insulation from political influence accounts for the success (Agbevade, 2022; Wil 2013a; 2013b; Kuwajima, 2016; Roll, 2014; Owusu, 2006). These institutions are mostly not the traditional Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) but new ones called autonomous executive agencies established by Acts of Parliament with specific mandates.

Diverse reform strategies have been implemented in Ghana aimed at making state institutions result-oriented (Ohemeng & Ayee, 2016; Ohemeng & Anebo, 2012; Agbevade & Tweneboah-Koduah; 2020). Studies on the performance of state institutions in Ghana either generally examined the public sector or focused on specific institutions making comparative studies on autonomous executive agencies uncommon (Agbevade, 2022; Owusu, 2006; Ayee, 2017). This article contributes to the literature on pockets of effectiveness in Ghana by comparatively examining five autonomous executive agencies (Food and Drugs Authority, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority, Ghana Revenue Authority, National Petroleum Authority and Securities and Exchange Commission) by interrogating their effectiveness, achievements, success factors and the challenges using Roll (2014) framework of pockets of effectiveness (PoE) and new public management (NPM) model. The paper proceeds as follows: the theoretical framework, conceptualizing PoE, method, findings, discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

Theoretical framework

The New Public Management (NPM) model underpinned the study. NPM emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Anglo-American countries with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as proponents (Klijn, 2012). NPM is characterised with lean governments, free market and private sector participation for efficient public sector. The need for responsiveness, customer-oriented service delivery and evidence of government performance gave currency to NPM (Heinrich, 2011). NPM has no universally accepted definition because it is chameleonic and changes form to fit into local contexts (Pollitt et al, 2007). In this study, NPM means a body of managerial thoughts or an ideological system that exports private sector approaches into public sector management. In NPM, the traditional model of public organization and delivery of public services is replaced by a market-based public service management or enterprise culture (Larbi, 1999; Walsh, 1995; Ayee, 2008). In short, NPM is aimed at making the public sector more effective through the infusion of private sector ideals such as public-private partnership, contracting out, performance management etc (Pollitt et al, 2007).

Goal specification and monitoring are two dynamics that shape success in NPM. The former involves target setting for performance evaluation while the latter guides efforts aimed at goal attainment (Klijn, 2012). NPM is characterised with four contradictions and incompatibilities (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). These are emphasising quality and cost reduction; tension between political control and administrative autonomy, cost saving and performance improvement and staff motivation and weakening tenure. Consumer sovereignty has also been questioned because of its potential to weaken the position of elected political elites (Aberbach & Christensen, 2005). The NPM model is deployed as a reform mechanism and Roll (2014) PoE framework to examine how the autonomous executive agencies navigated the political maze in Ghana's public administration to attain excellence. Roll (2014) classified state institutions as PoE using four criteria which are (i) relative effectiveness in providing officially mandated public goods and services; (ii) capacity to provide these public goods or services throughout the country; (iii) mode of public goods or services delivery should be in line with human rights principles and laws of the country concerned; and (iv) period of persistence of at least five years.

Conceptualizing pockets of effectiveness

Daland (1981) was the first to call public sector organizations “pockets of productivity”. These are state institutions which prosper in environments that are generally hostile to administrative reform and effectiveness. Alternative expressions such as pockets of excellence, high-performance organizations and islands of excellence have been used (Leonard, 2010; Bebbington & McCourt, 2007). Roll (2014) defined “PoEs” as public organizations that have been relatively successful in providing their official mandates of public goods and services despite environmental difficulties where effectiveness in public service delivery is not the norm. PoEs function in environments that are generally characterised with corruption, nepotism, patronage, poor governance and weak public sector (Daland, 1981; Leonard, 2008;2010). The performance of these organizations is influenced by both internal and external factors. The internal factors consist of the organizational strength, culture and proactivity (Roll, 2014) while political institutions and direction of the underlying political economy are the elements constituting the external environment. The success of state institutions is dependent on the mix and timing of benefits and costs these factors generate for the political authorities (Leonard, 2008). The sustenance of success is hinged on the legal framework, management team, organizational reputation, incorruptibility, effectiveness and insulation from political interference (Roll, 2014).

Empirical studies on PoE have highlighted the determinants of success (Wil, 2013a; 2013b; Kuwajima, 2016) while in Ghana, studies specifically identified decentralization, public private partnership, employee engagement, e-government and remuneration as the drivers of effectiveness of state institutions (Agbevade, 2022; Owusu, 2006). Focusing on the Ministry of Finance as a PoE in Ghana, Abdulai & Giles (2019) enumerated elite cohesion, politicization of bureaucratic appointments, political business cycle, donor

support, organizational culture and leadership longevity as success factors. Agbevade (2022) and Ayee (2019) singled out the DVLA as emerging PoE in Ghana's public sector. From the reviews, there is dearth of research on comparative studies on the dynamics that shape the performance of autonomous executive agencies, this study therefore fills this lacunae by comparatively examining five of Ghana's autonomous executive agencies to tease out the similarities and differences in achievements, the propelling and repelling factors, what has worked, what has not worked for the purposes of best practices.

Methods

Research design

The study is exploratory and qualitative in approach because it emphasized words rather than quantification in both data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2012).

Sampling approach

Purposive sampling was used to sample respondents with the requisite knowledge in the subject matter. These respondents were selected from the case study institutions following a request to collect data. The various institutions assigned specific officials with relevant knowledge to respond to the interview guide. A total of 26 respondents were sampled as data saturation was attained with the 26th respondent. Additionally, five agencies were selected following a survey of ranking autonomous regulatory executive agencies in Ghana.

Data collection

Data collection was done between June and December 2023 using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through face-to-face interviews with key informants using a standardized interview guide to solicit uniform information. The interviews were recorded with prior approval of the respondents and transcribed. Secondary data was gathered from reports, journal articles and book chapters to complement the primary data.

Data analysis

Data analysis was done iteratively until saturation was attained with the 26th respondent. Following the data collection and transcription, the data was hand coded because of the small size of the variables. Based on the coding, common themes like policy formulation and implementation, business plan, recognition and international certifications emerged as factors accounting for effectiveness. Decentralization, e-governance, performance contract and public private partnership were common NPM ideals implemented by the agencies. These themes formed the basis for the findings and analysis.

Findings

Effectiveness in service delivery to the citizenry

Effectiveness refers to the achievement of the final aim and involves comparing set objectives with actual achievements (Kjurchiski, 2014; Veiss, 2012). Table 1 presents the mandate of the five agencies. The FDA for the 25 years of its existence have ensured the safety and quality of both local and foreign food and drugs through the registration of 22,000 food and drugs on the Ghanaian market and licensing of 4,000 facilities in the food and drugs sectors as hygienic. Between 2013 and 2022, the DVLA registered 1,709,679 vehicles of all categories, renewed roadworthy for 10,715,396, conducted 1,229,155 computer-based tests and 908,504 in traffic tests for clients. The GRA has provided services to the citizenry through the provision of an enabling environment for taxpayers to fulfill their tax obligations, advising taxpayers and the provision of relevant platforms and modes of payment. Over the years, the GRA has diversified the mode of tax payment. These are through the GRA portal (www.gra.gh.gov/taxpayers.com), payment using mobile money, any of the 23 commercial banks in Ghana, credit card and cash at GRA outlets. The NPA has equally been effective through the maintenance of a stable supply and quality assurance of petroleum products, curtailed shortages, petroleum products standardization to meet climate change requirements, sustainability goals, and optimal pricing of petroleum products. Others include the fight against illegal petroleum activities such as smuggling, fuel adulteration, product diversions, tax evasions, increased industry safety through rigorous inspection and monitoring exercises, client responsiveness and registering thirty categories of petroleum service providers (PSPs). The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) have regulated and promoted the growth and development of an efficient, fair, and transparent securities market in which investors, and the integrity of the market have been protected.

The achievements of the regulatory agencies

The achievements are comparatively discussed under five main headings. These are policy formulation and implementation, strategic planning, attainments, recognitions/awards, and international certification.

Policy formulation and implementation

Policy is a goal-oriented activity which specifies the basic principles to pursue in attaining specific targets. It interprets the values of society and is usually embodied in the management of pertinent projects and programmes (Coning & Wissink, 2014). The five agencies formulated and implemented specific policies to achieve their mandates. The FDA developed a policy on educating the citizenry on health, safety and general well-being issues relating to food and drugs. It designed and developed advertisements in both the print and electronic media, leaflets etc. Example is “Take back unwanted

medicines (TBUM). This positively influenced the behaviour of the citizenry towards food and drugs. Similarly, the DVLA implemented policies on due process in accessing its' services through the same medium as the FDA. The GRA also educated the citizenry on the importance of honouring tax obligations, the process, the deadlines for filing of tax returns and the consequences of failure. The NPA implemented policies in the deregulation of petroleum infrastructure, petroleum pricing and supply to allow for private participation in the petroleum downstream sector. Prior to the establishment of the NPA, government, through the National Petroleum Tender Board, dominated the petroleum sector but through the NPA, the petroleum sector has been liberalized for private sector participation. The NPA have registered thirty categories of PSPs. In price deregulation, the NPA in 2015 transferred the determination of prices of petroleum products to the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs). This feat was possible through the establishment of a self-regulating formula with various elements that OMCs factor in determining their prices at the pumps. The NPA as a regulator monitor through the Digital Retail Fuel Monitoring System. The policy initiatives have resulted in the meeting of international standards of petroleum products, infrastructure improvement in the downstream industry, fair competition and pricing among industry players, safety protocols and sustainability through the promotion of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) to ensure increased nationwide penetration whilst reducing deforestation and pollution caused using wood fuels.

The SEC also formulated and implemented policy guidelines (Box 1). To bring its operations closer to the citizenry, it prioritized investor education and conducted multiple outreach programmes to improve financial literacy and capital market inclusion. An example is "Time with SEC".

Strategic/Business planning.

Strategic plan is a blueprint designed by organizations to guide their operations which make them proactive and futuristic. This is a novelty in Ghana's public sector. At the DVLA, two-year business plan was always formulated. Business plans are for two years; 2017 to 2019, 2020-2022, 2023-2025 and were underlined by purpose of each unit, department and station to double productivity within two years. The plans had six pillars: image uplift, service optimization, financial autonomy and sustainability, customer focus, human capital development and research, business development and innovation. The strategic plans were bottom-up in approach, technology and people centered and periodically reviewed to reflect prevailing situations. The GRA started implementing strategic plan in 2012. Just like DVLA, the GRA also uses the bottom-up approach and reflection of existing circumstances in its strategic plan. The GRA has implemented four strategic plans; 2012-2014, 2015-2017, 2018-2022, and 2023-2025. Whereas the DVLA strategic plan had six pillars, the GRA had ten transformational pillars. These are the introduction of Integrated Customs Management System (ICUMS), cashless policy, data sharing with other regulatory agencies, robust ICT infrastructure systems, filing

of taxes, human resource practice, intra-net for internal communication and Electronic Tax Clearance Certificate (ETCC), E-VAT invoicing system. Example is the installation of software in major shopping malls to help GRA in getting real-time feedback for tax purposes. Others include the centralization of audits, establishment of tax audits and quality assurance department, operation drag-net for the GRA to identify tax evaders. About 28 cases of defaulters were pending in court expected to rake in about Gh¢ 700 million as of 2023. The SEC on its part has developed a 10-year capital market strategic blueprint aimed at a robust, efficient, diversified, and well-regulated capital market, attracting both domestic and international investors. The NPA also developed a Medium-Term Strategic Plan spanning 2022 to 2024 that guides its operations.

Table 1: Autonomous executive agencies, year of establishment and mandate

No.	Name of Agency	Year of establishment	Objective/Mandate
1	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA)	1999	To promote good driving standards in the country and ensure the use of road worthy vehicles on the roads and in other public places.
2	Food and Drugs Authority (FDA)	1997. Prior to this there was a Food and Drug Law 1992 (PNDCL 305B)	To provide and enforce standards for the sale of food, herbal medicinal products, cosmetics, drugs, medical devices and household chemical substances.
3	Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA)	2009. This is an amalgamation of three revenue agencies namely Customs, Excise and Preventive Service, Internal Revenue Service and Value Added Tax Service	Provide a holistic approach to tax and customs administration. Reduce administrative and tax compliance cost and provide better service to taxpayers. Promote efficient collection of revenue and equitable distribution of tax burden and ensure greater transparency and integrity. Ensure greater accountability to Government for the professional management of tax administration. Improve information linkage and sharing of information among the Divisions of the Agency. Provide a one-stop service for taxpayers for the submission of returns and payment of taxes. Provide common tax procedures that enable taxpayers to be governed by a single set of rules. Provide for other matters related to the improvement of revenue administration.
4	Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)	2016 with amendment in 2021.	To regulate and promote the growth and development of an efficient, fair and transparent securities market in which investors, and the integrity of the market are protected.
5	National Petroleum Authority (NPA)	2005	To regulate, oversee and monitor activities in the petroleum downstream industry and where applicable do so in pursuance of the prescribed petroleum pricing formula.

Source: Author's compilation, 2024

1. Security Industry (NOMINEE) Guidelines
2. Licensing_Requirements_for_Market_Operators
3. Regulatory_Sandbox_Licensing_Guideline
4. Conduct_of_Business_Guidelines
5. Guidelines on holding of electronic or virtual annual general meetings by issuers and other capital market operators
6. Guidelines on Market Levies for 2020
7. Guidelines on Reporting Accountants 2020
8. Guidelines on Auditors 2020
9. Guidelines on REITS 2019
10. Guidelines on Warehouse Receipts 2019
11. Guidelines on Commodity Exchanges 2019
12. Guidelines on Market Levies for 2019
13. Guidelines Private Funds April 2018
14. Guidelines on Market Levies for 2018
15. Guidelines Market Levies Final
16. Mandatory Disclosure Items for Public Companies
17. Guidelines On Market Levies For 2023
18. Securities Industry (Registration of Securities) Guidelines 2022
19. Securities Industry (Over-The-Counter Market) Guidelines 2022
20. Securities Industry (Note Trustees) Guidelines 2022
21. Securities Industry (Issuing House) Guidelines 2022
22. Securities Industry (Self-Regulatory Organizations) Guidelines 2022
23. Investment Guidelines for Fund Managers
24. Credit Rating Agency Guidelines

Box 1: Policy guidelines issued by Securities and Exchange Commission, 2016-2022

Attainments

Public administration pursues both quantifiable and non-quantifiable public goods and services. Even though the agencies are in the service bracket, their services could be quantified to ascertain the quantitative achievements.

The FDA conducts laboratory tests on food and drugs to ensure their wholesomeness for public consumption. Through this, the FDA have been able to register 22,000 products and licensed 4000 facilities to operate in the food and drugs industry. Through the testing and licensing, they issued specific registration and barge numbers to the registered products, which manufacturers indicate on their products and promotional materials. This implies that any food and drug product without FDA registration number has not been vetted and approved hence unwholesome for consumption. Quantitative data available on the DVLA shows that over a ten-year period (2013 -2022), the DVLA has recorded 10,715,396 as roadworthy certificates issued, 1,709,679 for vehicle registration, 1,229,155 and 908,504 as computer-based and in-traffic tests respectively. With SEC,

the Commission facilitated the consolidation of the asset management industry, streamlined operations and enhanced its effectiveness. Through these interventions, the Commission was able to preserve the investments of over 77,000 retail investors and over 4,700 institutional investors. The investment portfolios of the affected firms amounted to approximately GH¢8 billion. The actions affected 249 licensed representatives. The quantitative achievement of the GRA is in monetary terms (Table 2). Five-year data shows that aside from 2018 and 2019 that GRA failed to achieve the set targets, 2020 to 2022 demonstrated otherwise.

The NPA implemented Retail Fuel Monitoring System which is estimated to generate revenue for the state and avoid staggering losses. For instance, the Vice President in launching the Retail Fuel Monitoring System on April 7, 2021, lamented that “between 2015 and 2019, government lost Gh¢4.7 billion in tax revenue as a result of illegal activities in the petroleum sector”. He continued, the initiative by the NPA would end the malady of revenue losses and significantly boost government **revenue**.

Table 2: Five years performance of the GRA 2018 to 2022 in Ghana Cedis

Year	Target	Actual performance	Variance
2018	39.8 billion	37.6 billion	Negative
2019	45.1 billion	43.9 billion	Negative
2020	42.7 billion	45.4 billion	Positive
2021	57.0 billion	57.4 billion	Positive
2022	71.9 billion	75.7 billion	Positive

Source: Field work, July 2023, GRA.

Awards and recognitions

The islands of excellence of the executive agencies brought some laurels to them. In 2022, the Centre for Laboratory Services and Research (CLSR) at the FDA was recognized as the Best Public Health Laboratory Centre. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mrs. Delese Darko was also adjudged the Best Public Sector CEO at the maiden Ghana Medical Laboratory Excellence Award 2022, organized by Africmedia Galaxy and Health Facilities Regulatory Agency (HEFRA). The DVLA also received recognitions: Excellence in Public Procurement (Silver), Innovative use of Technology in Public Procurement and Supply (Bronze) and the Deputy Director, Procurement and Stores, emerged as the leader in the top 20 procurement and supply chain industry. The DVLA was first runner up as the most innovative public sector institution at the Inspirational Public Sector Leadership Awards ceremony. At the Fourth Edition of the African Human Resources Innovation Awards, 2022, the Authority won three awards, namely: the HR transformation in public

sector organization of the year 2021, the CEO won the Most People Focused Award; the head of human resource was also adjudged Woman HR Professional of the year 2021. In customer care, the Authority was declared the best in customer service delivery in the public sector at the Fourth Ghana Customer Service Index Awards (www.dvla.gov.gh). In 2019, the DVLA was adjudged the policy and administrative reform organization of the year by the Ghana Integrity Initiative having been rated as the second most corrupt institution in Ghana in 2016/2017 (Agbevade, 2022). At the NPA, Mrs. Linda Asante, a Deputy CEO, won the leadership excellence award for 2023 in the Energy Sector. The institution was crowned the corporate social responsibility (CSR) organization of the year 2023. The CEO Dr. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid won the outstanding public sector leadership award for 2022. The Board Chairman Mr. Joe Addo-Yobo also emerged as the Public Sector Board Chairman of the year 2022. The CEO won the CEO of the year 2022 at the Ghana Business Awards. Ghana CEOs Excellence Awards 2021 also recognized the NPA CEO for professionalism, innovation and sterling leadership. The Deputy CEO also received the most outstanding female award in the oil and gas sector.

International certifications and standards

Due to globalization, most of the executive agencies have been striving for best practices. These efforts have paid off. To begin with, the laboratories of the FDA have received international recognition for quality control. The five laboratories of the FDA are all ISO 9001 (2015) and ISO 1702 (2017) standards and accredited for 58 different tests. In addition, FDA laboratories are World Health Organization (WHO) prequalified laboratories which implies that test results from FDA laboratories meet international standards. This made the FDA the first in West Africa and second after Tanzania in food and drugs regulation. Furthermore, the FDA has been designated, accredited and certified as the Regional Center for Regulatory Exchanges (RCORE) for medicine registration and pharmacy-vigilance. As of June 2023, FDA has trained 80 practitioners and regulators across the African continent. DVLA, like the FDA, has also attained ISO 9001 standard to make its services accepted globally. On the part of the NPA, efforts were underway to get ISO certifications. Even though the NPA does not have any ISO certification, most of the technical staff are professionals certified by the American Petroleum Institute (API). The SEC achieved the status of a full signatory to International Organizations for Securities Commissions (IOSCOs), Multilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MMOU), thereby strengthening its operations and regulatory alignment with international standards. In addition, the SEC has also spearheaded the amendment of Sections 35 and 37 of Act 929, 2016 to align Ghana's securities industry regulatory framework with the requirements of the IOSCOs, MMoU, and thereby enhancing regulatory compliance. The SEC is a member of the Sustainable Banking and Finance Network (SBFN).

Strategies implemented to attain the island of excellence

The NPM ideals implemented to attain the PoE were anchored on effective and visionary leadership with emphasis on some specific strategies. These strategies are discussed and elaborated below.

The first strategy is decentralization, which has been defined as a process that reallocates resources, power and authority from a higher, more central authority to a lower one (Bevir, 2009). These agencies, except for the SEC, deployed this NPM ideal by creating offices across the country for easy access to their services. Administrative decentralization was the common form as the decentralized offices did not make policy decisions but rather implemented what was decided by the headquarters offices. It emerged that the DVLA, NPA, GRA and FDA had 37, 9, 146 and 12 with nine other offices at entry points respectively. It is instructive to note that the GRA operates a three-tier decentralized system that includes Area Offices (5), Taxpayer Service Centres (60) and Collection Point Centres (41). There are forty Boarder Posts operated by the Customs, Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS). Regions such as Oti, Savannah and North-East did not have any of the decentralized offices because they were new regions created in 2019 as part of government's decentralization agenda.

The second strategy is e-governance. E-governance is the management of government and governance practices using ICT. It makes government more accessible to citizens and strengthens communication among citizens, civil society, market players and government agencies (Fisher, 2012). The FDA adopted the product functionality test (PFT) which linked the decentralized units to the headquarters for transaction correspondence purposes. This software allows the decentralized units to process data of clients at their units and directly transmit them to the headquarters. DVLA also automated its operations such that customers can fill forms; initiate the process of roadworthiness, drivers' license and vehicle registration online. Transactions with the SEC and NPA are also done online. All these five agencies allow payments for their services online. The NPA is implementing four e-governance apparatus, namely Enterprise Relational Database Management System (ERDMS) aimed at monitoring the value chain of both local and imported petroleum products, export from depots and tax accountability purposes. Petroleum Product Marking Scheme (PPMS) to ensure integrity of petroleum products. National Fuel Monitoring System (NFMS) which comprises of the Automatic Tank Gauging Systems (ATGs) and the Forecourt Monitoring Systems (FMS). The ATGs helps monitor the stocks, integrity and quantity of the petroleum products being sold at the various petroleum retail outlets. The FMS offers real-time monitoring of the forecourt activities of petroleum retail outlets and Electronic Cargo Tracking Systems (ECTS) for real-time monitoring of Bulk Road Vehicles (BRVs) through hardware installations on the BRVs.

The GRA has also employed e-governance extensively through the automation of tax

payment services, the use of Revenue Assurance Compliance Enforcement (RACE), the Integrated Customs Management System (ICUMS), or UNIPASS for improvement on the paperless port system. The utilization of these e-governance mechanisms allowed citizens to transact business with these agencies (G2C) and allowed inter-agency information transmission (G2G).

The agencies implemented e-governance in human resource management, known as government to employees (G2E). This manifested in the execution of the smart workplace. The G2E made it possible for all human resource functions like employee leave, pay slip, training and development, promotions, login and logout, employee communication among others to be handled electronically. This tool did not only curtail excessive delay, documentation and bureaucracy but also served as an avenue for record keeping and promptness in human resource management functions.

The third strategy is public private partnership (PPP). PPP is defined as a contractual agreement between a public entity and a private sector party, with clear agreement on shared objectives for the provision of public infrastructure and services traditionally provided by the public sector. Contracting out is the form of PPP implemented by some of the agencies. DVLA for instance outsourced services such as vehicle testing for roadworthiness and eye testing for drivers' license to private organizations. DVLA also liberalized its operations for the private sector to operate driving schools to make it easier for the citizenry to acquire the license. The NPA outsourced all the e-governance strategies to the private sector to allow for effectiveness and efficiency. The FDA and the SEC did not contract out any of their services because of the sensitive nature of their services to public and national security. This explains the myriads of operational challenges confronting these two institutions.

Performance contract was the fourth push factor. The agencies had predetermined performance targets to achieve. These served as a guide for them. The State Interests and Governance Authority (SIGA) was established in 2019 to facilitate performance management of state institutions and other prescribed bodies, within the framework of government policy, to ensure that they operate efficiently, effectively and profitably thereby contributing towards the socio-economic development of Ghana (Republic of Ghana, 2019). Each of these agencies signed a performance agreement with the SIGA and these agreements were monitored and evaluated annually. In addition, SIGA also introduced Public Enterprises League Table (PELT) as a performance management tool to enhance efficiency, productivity and profitability. The PELT is linked to the performance management contracts that the agencies signed with SIGA. The performance contract together with the PELT engineered competition among these agencies. "We are concerned about our performance for two reasons; first, the performance is being compared with that of other agencies and second, if we do not meet the performance target, SIGA will come after us" (Business Development Managers of FDA and DVLA).

Bottom-up and stakeholder engagement was another strategy. Decision making in all the agencies though emanated from the top hierarchies, the inputs of employees

and other industry actors were sought. For instance, at the GRA, annual targets were set by the management together with employees based on the gross domestic product (GDP) and tax buoyancy. Decisions reached were then expanded to get the input of the Ministry of Finance. In the same vein, the DVLA requests all decentralized units to submit their targets based on unique situations at their units, these were collated, and a retreat organized for internal stakeholders to finalize the targets for the year which is presented to the Board of Directors and Ministry of Transport. “The NPA recognizes the essential role played by our stakeholders, their investments, hence implements all projects and policies with their involvement”. All policies are implemented to ensure a balance between government, private, and consumer interests”. At SEC “key emphasis on fostering a continuous and robust dialogue with market participants has been pivotal in achieving its mandate. Additionally, the Commission’s commitment to adhering to service charters across various departments has played a crucial role in elevating the quality of service. Furthermore, the SEC remained attuned to the evolving needs and concerns of stakeholders, ensuring a proactive approach to addressing market trends and fostering a responsive regulatory environment. This reinforced the SEC’s commitment to adaptability, agility, and effective market oversight in the ever-evolving landscape of the securities market”.

Finally, the use of human resource interventions. Mechanisms such as employee training and development, employee recognition and motivation, teamwork and sense of urgency were fully deployed. Other measures like unity of purpose between employer and employee, ethical and professional conduct were enforced. At the DVLA, employees were educated on the need to be proactive, have a sense of urgency and treat clients with respect. Pioneer employee recognition was utilized at the FDA. This resulted in low labour turnover, high level of institutional memory and commitment. The NPA invested heavily in the capacity development of employees to enhance their competence.

Institutional collaborations

The five agencies did not operate in silos rather there was inter-agency relationship (Table 3). These institutions operated in an interdependent manner with the GRA collaborating with all the other four for taxation purposes. The DVLA, FDA and NPA collaborated with the Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) for standardization purposes. Similarly, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) featured prominently in the operations of the DVLA, FDA and NPA because of the impact of their operations on the environment. All the agencies collaborated with the law enforcement agencies for enforcement and compliance reasons. The collaborative role of local governance units is also highlighted by the findings through the issuing of permits to actors within their jurisdictions. The media (electronic, print and social media) were employed as a bridge between the agencies and the citizenry for information and education purposes. The agencies also had parent ministries whose broader frameworks they operated within.

Challenges to the islands of excellence

Even though the agencies implemented human resource interventions for staff retention, they had high rate of staff attrition due to poor conditions of service. Political interference in appointments especially when there was alternation in political power. This occurs at the level of Chief Executives due to Articles 70 and 195 of the 1992 Constitution which gives appointing powers to the president as well as mass termination of appointments. The operations of the agencies were politically interfered with. For instance, political interference at the ports for tax waivers or to reduce tax for political entrepreneurs. Vehicle registration, renewal of roadworthy certificates and drivers' license were some areas of interference at the DVLA. At the FDA, the interference was minimal because of the health implications that compromises might have on the citizenry. For instance, a client lodged a complaint with the President about the inability of the FDA to approve a product. When the CEO explained the issues to the President and the implications if approved following a summons, the President commended the CEO of FDA for applying the laws (Director of General Services, FDA, 2023). The SEC is battling with perceived political interference in its operation targeted at industry players perceived to be aligned with the opposition political parties.

Resource constraints in human, fiscal and logistics. Government subventions to these institutions, especially the FDA, SEC and GRA mostly delayed. Making matters worse was the government's directive of capping the amount of internally generated funds that the agencies can retain. Erratic supply of technological services leading to unstable supply, low network for both service providers and users.

Human and cultural issues such as corruption and conflict of interest. At the NPA, this manifested in the smuggling of petroleum products to neighbouring countries resulting in tax evasion, adulteration of petroleum products by some service providers and difficulty in balancing the interest of the multiple stakeholders. The case of the SEC is striking a balance between investor protection and promoting market efficiency together with innovation in the capital market. Officers at the DVLA sometimes issued license and roadworthy certificates to unqualified people and vehicles respectively and the uncontrollable activities of intermediaries (*goro boys*).

Table 3: Executive Agencies and their local collaborative institution

SN	FDA	DVLA	SEC	GRA	NPA
1	Ghana Standards Authority	Ghana Standards Authority	Bank of Ghana	DVLA	Ghana Standards Authority
2	Environmental Protection Agency	Environmental Protection Agency	National Pensions Regulatory Authority	National Identification Authority	Environmental Protection Agency
3	Water Research Institute	Ghana Revenue Authority	Financial Intelligence Centre	National Insurance Commission	Ghana Revenue Authority
4	Ghana Health Service	Data Protection Agency	Ghana Deposit Protection Corporation	Social Security and National Insurance Trust	Ghana National Fire Service
5	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies	National Identification Authority	National Insurance Commission		Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
6	Narcotic Control Commission	National Road Safety Commission			Department of Factories Inspectorate
7	The Veterinary Service				
8	National Vaccines Safety Authority				
9	Law enforcement agencies	Law enforcement agencies	Law enforcement agencies	Law enforcement agencies	Law enforcement agencies
10	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Transport	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Energy

Source: Author's compilation, July 2023

Discussion

The study revealed that the five autonomous executive agencies used diverse NPM strategies such as decentralization, e-governance, human resource interventions, bottom-up approach in decision making, private sector participation, stakeholder engagement, and performance contract in ensuring effectiveness in service delivery and subsequently being responsive to the citizenry. These strategies did not only fulfill the Roll (2014) criteria of pockets of effectiveness but also fulfilled key constitutional requirements under the Directive Principles of State Policy, notable ones being decentralization and democracy (Articles 35(3), 35(6d)), public private partnership (Article 36(2d)), bottom-

up approach in decision making and stakeholder engagement (Article 36(11)). These agencies have existed over five years and have consistently been effective over the period and above all, the strategies deployed were in line with the human rights principles and laws of the country since they were not discriminatory. In short, the strategies were hybrid making it possible for citizens of all backgrounds to access the agencies' services.

Generally, (administrative) decentralization has been echoed as a mechanism for improving public sector performance and service delivery in Ghana (Dick-Sagoe, 2020, Ahwoi, 2010) as it enhances uniformity in policy implementation and decongesting at the centre. Decentralization makes it possible for the citizenry to access public goods and services wherever they are. As demonstrated in the study, because of decentralization, especially by the DVLA, FDA, GRA and NPA, the citizenry had access to their services with ease. However, effective coordination between the decentralized units and the headquarters coupled with powerful officials with authority are key variables for the sustainability of success. The use of e-governance by the agencies is underscored in literature. Ghana is a leader in Africa in the deployment of ICT in public sector management as the country received high score in the United Nations E-Participation Index placing 86 (0.4545) and 82 (0.5342) positions in 2022 and 2024 respectively out of 193 countries (Arlet & Wager, 2024). E-governance has strengthened governance and its attributes of accessibility, responsiveness, participation etc. Institutional frameworks such as the National Information Technology Agency and National Communication Authority have been established to ensure implementation. The success of every organization depends on its' human resources. The study found that the entities implemented diverse human resource management strategies to bolster the commitment of the employees for improved productivity. In the works of Owusu (2006), human resource management practices such as employing the right caliber of people and effectively motivating them distinguish performing state institutions from non-performing ones. Whereas Owusu (2006) identified high remuneration as the distinguishing factor, this article identified other variables such as recognizing pioneer employees, the soft issues in human resource management such as attitudinal, behavioural, professional and ethical issues, unity of purpose etc as dynamics shaping employee performance in the selected agencies. The various institutions collaborated with each other in the service delivery. This emphasizes the importance of collaborative governance. State institutions in Ghana are assumed to be working in silos (Ayee, 2017), however, this study revealed otherwise since the various agencies collaborated with other institutions in the performance of their mandates.

Political interference, bureaucratic malady, poor conditions of service leading to high rate of labour turnover, technological setbacks, and limited budgetary allocation were identified as some of the challenges faced by these agencies. These findings are in tandem with existing literature (Bonsu, 2024; Ayee, 2017; Agbevide, 2022; Owusu, 2006).

Recommendations

To sustain effectiveness, the paper proffers five main recommendations to avert backsliding of these autonomous executive agencies. First, there should be improvement in the conditions of service of the employees of these agencies to reduce attrition and labour turnover on one hand and attract competent employees to their fold. These should take the form of employee motivation; performance-related pay, career advancement opportunities, convergence of employee and organizational goals, and human resource development. Secondly, there should be minimization or neutralization of political interference. In this regards, two things are suggested: (i) amendment of Articles 70(1&2) and 195(1) to empower independent bodies like the Public Services Commission to appoint public officeholders based on the Weberian principle of meritocracy instead of the President who end up appointing mostly based on the spoilt system, and (ii) the complementarity of politicians and bureaucrats while striving for ethics and professionalism. Thirdly, there should be sufficient budgetary allocation, timely release of same and financial autonomy of the agencies in resource utilization. While emphasizing these, agency spending officers should ensure judicious utilization of allocated scarce resources. Also, the agencies should establish offices in the Oti, Savannah and North-East regions to deepen decentralization to improve access to their services. Finally, vigorous pursuit of ICT through enhanced ICT infrastructure and capacity building for both citizens and employees.

Conclusion

The study comparatively discussed the effectiveness, achievements, strategies and challenges of executive agencies in Ghana's public sector. The agencies formulated and implemented NPM ideals to attain their objectives. These NPM strategies culminated into series of success stories as enumerated above. Amid these successes, the agencies were plagued with hiccups such as limited budgetary allocation, political interference and labour turnover that threatened the sustainability of the pocket of effectiveness.

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