

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND STAFF PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The myriad of problems affecting the public sector in Nigeria have come about largely as a result of lack of effective leadership that will be the role model to fast-track organisational progress and expansion via improved staff performance. Organisations are headed by administrators who are expected to lead their subordinates towards greater performance that meets or exceeds organisational goals. Depending on the situation, leaders could employ democratic, autocratic or laissez-faire leadership styles to get organisational goal and objectives achieved. Thus, the paper aims at determining the link between effective leadership and staff performance with reference to the Nigerian public organisations. Contingency theory is adopted as the underpinning theory for the study. Data are generated from secondary sources and analysed thematically using content analysis. The paper discovered that for Nigeria public service or organisations to overcome the challenges of leadership in the country's public bureaucracy, those on whom the burden of leadership has been entrusted must fully comprehend their responsibilities, duties and obligations. They must also be exposed and be prepared to face the challenges of leadership in developing their respective organisations and the society at large. Also, findings reveal that lack of vision, political will, transparency, accountability, lack of adequate motivation among others negatively affect staff performance and consequently deter the growth and progress of the public organisations in championing the course of overall development. It was recommended among others that there is the need for the enthronement of transformational democratic leaders founded on distinct sound value systems with probity and accountability and those that have priority for the welfare of the staff and the overall organisational goal. The paper concludes that only leadership with maximum empathy for the people, particularly the staff, can be relevant to the overall organisational goal and objectives especially in the Nigeria public service.

Keywords: Effective leadership, staff, performance, public service

1.0 Introduction

Globally, effective leader is key to the transformation of every organisation and the society in general. The art of governance is a complex task that requires a lot of sacrifices, dedications and commitments from the leaders in order to secure the present and to make sure there is sustainable development in all ramifications of the organisational settings in sustainable way. Thus, global concern for good leadership necessitates an examination of how effective leadership impacts on staff performance especially in the public sector.

Shrivastava and Nachman (1989) identified four effective leadership patterns which include the leadership making roles for others and controls their performance through direct supervision, personal traits, personality and charisma; and direct control. Effective leaders are concerned with setting up a framework of where the organisation needs to be in the future by setting a direction for the organisation.

In today's dynamic global working environment, there is growing evidence to suggest that organisations are now recognizing the impact leadership styles have on both employees' wellbeing and organisational outcomes (McCarthy, Almeida and Ahrens, 2011). Leadership is a major factor that contributes immensely to the general wellbeing of organisations and nations (Odumeru and Ifeanyi, 2013). Leaders motivate employees by encouraging them to contribute ideas and innovations, which results in a fulfilling and enriching work environment (Khaliq, 2001) to achieve greater performance.

In Nigerian, the employees are valuable assets that the leaders have to place a high premium on increasing their performance levels in order to achieve the predetermined objectives that are in line with the policy objectives of the government at all levels. Many leadership models differentiate two main types of leadership behaviours: task-oriented, which has a strong focus on targets, close supervision, and control of subordinate actions, and relationship-oriented behaviour, which focuses on sensitivity to individual and group needs, care for group tensions and focus on harmonic working relations (Euwema, Wendt and Van Emmerik, 2007). These leadership behaviours are also referred to as directive and supportive leadership respectively (Northouse, 2013).

According to Adamaechi and Romaine (2002), leadership is very imperative in any form of association and it can mean the difference between success and failure of any group or joint activity. Effective leader not only inspires subordinates' potential to enhance efficiency but also meets their requirements in the process of achieving a certain predefined objective (Lee and Chuang, 2009). In addition, leadership have a paramount importance for it has a strong power to create a level playing field for all employees in organisations there by promoting merit-based development path for all its staff members (Basit, et al.,2017).

Therefore, the quest for effective leadership is a sine-qua-non for improved staff performance. Unfortunately, in the Nigerian public service, the public organisations were blamed for their high involvement or over concentration of the leaders in terms of decision making, lack of dedication and commitment, mismanagement, lack of transparency and accountability, low incentives, poor staff motivation, inconsistent promotion among others. On the other hand, the management at different levels blames their employees for their poor performance, lack of skill, nonchalant attitudes.

The questions then are: what are the qualities of effective leaders that might better serve the quest for improved staff performance in the Nigerian public service? What are the prerequisites of effective leadership in the public sector? What is the nexus between effective leadership and staff performance in the Nigerian public service? What are the challenges of leadership especially in the 21st century Nigerian public service? What are the ways forward? Therefore, it is the major objective of this paper to look at the nexus between effective leadership and staff performance with reference to the Nigerian public service/organisations. Secondary data was used to generate data for the study and the data were analysed thematically using content analysis.

Therefore, the paper is divided into five sections. Section one is the introductory segments that captures the brief background information on effective leadership and staff performance with reference to the Nigerian public service. Section two features the brief conceptual clarifications of effective leadership, staff performance and public service. The theoretical framework for the study is featured in section three. Section four focuses on discussion of results in relation to the nexus between effective leadership and staff performance in the Nigerian public service. Section five comprises conclusion and recommendations.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

Concept of Leadership and Effective Leader

There is no consensus definition of leadership. Leadership is the art of influencing the behaviours of others toward a particular direction. Generally, leadership can be conceptualized as a process of influencing others towards the achievement of some common goal (North house, 2013). A useful definition of leadership is that put forward by Robbins, Judge and Vohra (2013) which states that leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals. Organisations whether public or private need strong leadership and management for optimal effectiveness. Leaders are needed today to challenge the status quo, create visions of the future, and inspire organisational or societal members to want to achieve the visions. Northouse (2004) defined leadership as a process consisting of transactions between the leader and the followers. It is a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

On his own part, Ogbeidi (2012) defined leadership as a body of people who lead and direct the activities of a group towards a shared goal. In another word, leadership means harnessing individual differences, strengths and weaknesses of persons into achieving stated goal. However, a leader is one who motivates a group to achieve a common goal. A good leader is impartial and responsive. He treats every member of the group equal and attends to each individual's needs appropriately. A good leader must be flexible and firm.

On the other hand, effective leader defines key and crucial organisational change moments, creates appropriate strategies and translates such strategies to actions in operational terms for the change direction required. The qualities of an effective leader include focus, big picture, visionary, good communication, delegator, motivator, self-aware, compassionate, open-minded etc. To share the vision adequately, Bennis (1989), in his work entitled 'On Becoming a Leader', says "leaders are people who are able to express themselves fully, know what they want, why they want it, and how to communicate what they to others in order to gain their cooperation and support.

Wilheim (1996) states that "effective leaders have the vision required to see things differently from others. A core characteristic of all effective leaders," he concludes "is the ability to have a vision of where they are trying to go and to articulate it clearly to potential followers so that they know their personal role in achieving that vision. In analysing leadership competence, Decrane (1996) said that there are four fundamental qualities that have remained constant over time: character, vision, behaviour and confidence. He observes "leaders who can spark the imagination with a compelling vision of a worthwhile end that puts us beyond what is known today, and who can translate that into clear objectives, are the ones we follow.

According to Awofese and Odeyemi (2017) leaders essentially direct the workings of the collective towards attaining a jointly shared end. It requires explicit organisational ability, strategic thinking and character laced with vision and goodwill. It is then expected that one who carries the leadership responsibility must, inter alia, possess traits of tact, vision, charisma, character and goodwill as team members expectedly ascribe leadership to individuals, they trust in positively shaping the attainment of desired ends. Public leaders abound in decision-making positions of public life. These include people who hold decision-making positions in government, and people who pursue such placements by all means possible.

However, there are various styles of leadership. Leadership style is the combination of traits, characteristics, skills and behaviours that leaders utilise when interacting with their subordinates or followers (Jeremy, Melinde and Ciller, 2011). However, this research paper emphasized only on the three styles of leadership described by Levin. These are democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles and their respective relationship and effect on employees perceived performance (Billig, 2015). Kumar (2005) defined *laissez-faire* as a leadership style where employees independently decide their own matters as the leader gives maximum freedom to their subordinates. *Autocratic* leadership is a style whereby the boss only has decision making rights with no shared vision, little motivation, commitment, creativity and innovation (Khan, et al., 2015). According to Gastil (1994), *democratic* leaders, unlike other leaders believe in group participation and majority rule in the decision making.

For the purpose of this paper, a leader is a person who is visionary and courageous that influences a group of people towards an effective and efficient result. He is the one entrusted with the responsibilities of formulating and executing policies that are supposed to be true reflections of the yearnings and aspirations of the organisation but by not undermining the general well-being of the employees. A leader is the person with the ability to influence the behaviour of others to achieve desired goal in a given situation with reference to the Nigerian public service.

Staff Performance

Performance is considered as an important activity that provides both goals and methods to achieve the organisational objectives and also provide the achievement level in term of output. Performance

according to Prasetya and Kato (2011) is the attained outcomes of actions with skills of employees who perform in some situation. In addition, performance is any collaborated effort made by employees which by increasing the productivity and profitability leads to success of an organisation (cited in Basit, et al., 2017). According to Pattanayak (2005), employee performance is any effort made by an individual towards the achievement of some goal which can be observed and evaluated.

An organisation is judged by its performance; hence the word “performance” is utilised extensively in all fields of management. Despite the frequency of the use of the word, its precise meaning is rarely explicitly defined by authors even when the main focus of the article or book is on performance.

Further, Mullins (1999) argues that job performance is the product of ability multiplied by motivation ($JP = A \times M$). Furthermore, job performance is ultimately an individual phenomenon with environmental factors influencing performance primarily through their effect on the individual determinants of performance – ability and motivation.

Insights gotten from definitions of employee job performance above are that, it is the individual employee who either performs or fails to perform a task. Therefore, in order for an organisation to perform an individual must set aside his personal goals, at least in part, to strive for the collective goals of the organisation. It also follows that appropriate application of leadership styles as situation demands enables greater participation of the entire workforce and can also influence both individual and organisational performance.

Ngozi and Obianuju (2015) see employee performance can be decomposed using employee commitment, meeting deadlines, achievement, quality of output/work, responsibility, operational efficiency and effectiveness, positive attitude to work, excellent customer service delivery, rare cases of absenteeism, job satisfaction, increased productivity, working with less supervision, growth, low turnover of top talents and harmonious work relationships amongst others.

Public Service

Public Service is the agent of government that is charged with the responsibility of providing basic social services. In Nigeria, the term public service covers the civil service judiciary, police, prisons, public enterprises, local government among others. While, Edei (2008) views public service as all organisation that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policy decisions and delivering services that are of value to the citizen. Chapter VI of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria part 1(1) and part 11 (c) provides for a Public Service at the federal and the state level of the government (Local government inclusive). In this paper, public service is used interchangeably with public organisations.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Contingency Theory

This study is utilised the contingency approach of leadership which has the assumption that there is no single style of leadership appropriate to all situations. The most suitable theory for this study under the contingency theories of leadership is the Fiedler’s contingency model. It is also known as the favourability of leadership situation. Sapru (2013) states that Fiedler contingency model suggests that effective group performance depends on the proper match between the leader and the degree to which the situation gives control to the leader.

In other words, the success of a particular leadership style depends, largely on the particular situation at that time. For instance, when the time is short and the outcomes of the decisions are likely to have little impact on subordinates, a more autocratic style may be more effective to get the job done quickly. While, where the subordinates are active and responsible, a more participatory style of leadership may be more effective. He attempted to categorize leaders as task-centred and relations-centred on the bases of a psychological test called the least preferred co-worker. Fiedler recommended three dimensions which determine the favourability of the situation that leads to leader effectiveness. They include the following;

- i. **Leader Member Relations:** This implies the level of respect subordinate have for their leader, the level of trust and confidence which leads to achievement of the organisation goals.
- ii. **Task Structure:** This deals with the level of clarity of task and the feasibility of achieving the desired outcome by detailed instrument.
- iii. **Position Power:** This refers to the power the leader has as a result of position in the hierarchy and the amount of authority the leader can exercise over hiring, firing, discipline, promotion and salaries increase; this could be rated strong or weak.

The contingency theory of leadership is best suitable for this study as the situation would determine the course of action. Also, a leader is not expected to possess single leadership behaviour. Ajadi, Adedeji and Kola (2009:34) state that different leadership tracts and skills are required in different situation. The implication of Fiedler's Contingency theory to this study is that; in public service especially with reference to Nigeria, it takes a dynamic leader to identify the missing link between an existing Public Service mission, management culture and the public interest. This implies that the leaders must strive to building a public service that will promote and encourage the provision of their subordinates social and psychological needs in order to attain via underlying values of the nation as enshrined in the Fundamental objectives and Directives Principles of State Policies, as prescribed in Chapter 11 of the (1999) Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

4.0 Discussion of Results and Findings

Prerequisites of an Effective Leadership

Effective leader has the following qualities: a good role model; effective communicator; focus on the positives; show, don't tell; ask for feedback; understands others motivation; people-oriented; capable of making hard decisions; inspires confidence in team efforts; thinks strategically; leads from the front; capable of developing new opportunities; directs team efforts with vision and uses effective communication. Other qualities of an effective leader are briefly explained thus;

- i. **Strong Emotion & Conviction:** An effective leader also demonstrated transformational and charismatic leadership. According to Adedeji (2001), It is equally believed that an effective leader is a man of strong emotions, convictions and driven by a passion for moral justice, intellect and integrity.
- ii. **Focused & Visionary:** As a leader, one should exert influence, but he was also influenced by and accountable to the people. He attempted to be effective and legitimate, continually looking for ways to balance the competing needs and wants of the people in order to build on shared values.
- iii. **Disciplined & Good Communicator:** An effective leader had to communicate his passion about change so others could share in it and then get them to work as a unit, contributing their best towards the achievement of that vision.
- iv. **Passion for Transformation:** As an effective leader, he focused more on transformational style. Therefore, as an effective leader to manage the Nigerian public service, one is supposed to strive to improve the leadership skills and help everyone within the sphere to get the most out of life. Therefore, there is need for a clear vision (both short and long term), knowing and utilising one's strengths and gifts (talents & potentials), being passionate toward others, setting definitive goals and follow concrete action plans (SMART Analysis) and motivate others to greatness (praise, recognition, reward, promotion etc.).

Effects of Effective Leadership on Staff Performance

An effective leader has to be a fearless, pragmatic, and visionary leader with transformative ideas. Yet he was despised by some because of his authoritarian style of political leadership. Even so, how best to capture and dispassionately examine his legacy is what many scholars and public intellectuals would grapple with for decades.

A leader's power to lead comes from both formal authority due to his or her personal qualities including reputation, skill or personality. According to Fielder (1967), a leader has to combine both autocratic and democratic style of leadership and if possible, join the laissez-fair leader.

Leadership is an indispensable requisite for the success of any organisation (Lewis & Gilman, 2013). In the recent past years, leadership has engaged as a new effective approach for managing the employees and organisation at large. This gives importance to the strategic integration of new leaderships into effective management of employees and to improve the employee productivity (Gong, Huang & Farh, 2009).

Effective leadership enhances the productivity of employees in all the sectors of the economy in a country. According to Graen, Damsereau & Minami (2013) leadership impacts productivity in the following ways; it improves employee morale, it is a source of motivation, forms basis for cooperation, allows for allocation of work on the basis of capability, gives necessary guidance and creates effective communication. Thus, as organisations grow and expectations about their performances increase, demand for good leadership tends to multiply.

Most research showed that leadership style has a significant relation with employee performance, and different leadership styles may have a positive correlation or negative correlation with the employee performance, depending on the variables used by researchers (Fu-Jin, Shieh & Tang, 2010). Leadership has a positive influence towards employee performance (Shahab & Nisa, 2014) and therefore play important roles to ensure the increase of organisation and individual performance (Gul, Ahmad, Rehman, Shabir & Razzag, 2012). Performance, explained as the accomplishment, execution, carrying out, working out of anything ordered or undertaken (Armstrong, 2010), is greatly influenced by leadership style (Walumbwa, Mayer, Wang, Workman & Christensen, 2011).

In order to stimulate and influence subordinates' extra-role behaviours, public managers may consider acting as role models for their subordinates by demonstrating extraordinary technical ability, being persistent in coping with difficult tasks, and by acknowledging the employees' value and input (Srithongrung, 2011). As a result of this, employees will be motivated to put in more effort to improve their performance.

Other researchers have also confirmed the effect of leadership on employee performance. Leadership inspires and motivates employees to work hard towards organisational objectives and help the organisation succeed. Armstrong further indicated that high performance comes about as a result of appropriate behaviour, especially discretionary behaviour and the effective use of required knowledge, skills and competencies which is influenced among other things by leadership style. Thus, employees choose to perform the tasks as a result of their identification with the leader. Studies on leadership have identified positive relationship between leadership style and performance at various levels.

The effectiveness of public organisations in Nigeria is determined by the competence, motivation and the general effectiveness of staff. More so, the provision of staff development and training programmes become imperative in order to improve the subordinates' quality, hence, the quality-of-service delivery depends largely on the quality and quantity of employees. It is the responsibility of Leaders in the Public Service to adopt leadership style that will encourage her staff to put in their best in order to achieve the desired goals. This implies that the leader must exhibit good administrative behaviour that will propel his followers, giving the impression that he is supportive of their effort and recognizes subordinates personal worth.

Leadership Challenges in Nigeria Public Service/organisations

Luthans (1973) says that poor leadership style brings low morale on the part of the workers in the sense that they will feel reluctant in carrying out the job assigned to them. This is because what they get from their leader is what they least expected. Duncan (1980), in his own view, says that the effect of poor leadership style on employees will give a negative result which will lead to disharmony in the organisation. It can be in the form of industrial strike action, demonstrating, poor response to management rule and regulations etc. He went further to say that when workers are being maltreated and

neglected in their place of work; they will show their grievances by engaging themselves in one type of demonstration or another, and thereby hampering smooth and predetermined planned processes of achieving the organisational goals.

Nigerian public service has a dearth of genuine leaders and some of the manifestations of the leadership failure in the public organisations are as reflected thus:

- i. **Lack of Commitment:** Commitment is the compelling force for sound leadership quality, the ability to do what is right, what is relevant and what is attainable within the context of patriotic nationalism. Many observers of the development and crisis in Nigeria since independence agree that poor leadership due to lack of political will or commitment has been a major factor affecting the public sector.
- ii. **Absence of Accountability and Transparency:** In Nigeria, there has been absence of transparent and accountable leadership. A government is deemed to be accountable when its leaders are genuinely responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of their citizenry. Thus, the leaders at federal, state and local government levels are neither accountable nor transparent, while due process is to a larger extent boycotted.
- iii. **Corruption:** Although corruption is a global scourge, Nigeria appears to suffer tremendously from this malaise. Every one appears to believe that the nation has a culture of corruption; Nigeria is a rich nation floating on oil wealth, but almost none of it flows to the people. The countless reforms and lack of transparency and integrity of our leaders have left Nigeria corrupt as ever. In 2009, the global corruption perception index (CPI) revealed that Nigeria occupied the 130th position out of 180 countries surveyed. The country has dropped from 144 in 2018 to 146 in 2019 on the annual corruption perception index (Transparency International).
- iv. **Nepotism:** A further cause of leadership trouble in Nigeria is the fact that Nigerians at times push their leaders into corrupt practices. Emphasis on ethnic origin is yet another leadership challenge in Nigeria. Ojukwu (1989) in Chris (2016) observed that “tribalism is perhaps the one factor that has nullified all our efforts.
- v. **Lack of Staff Motivation:** Leadership inspires and motivates employees to work hard towards organisational objectives and help the organisation succeed. Failure of most of the leaders in the public sector to provide welfare facilities to their employees negatively affect the staff performance.
- vi. **Non-Participation of Subordinate in Decisions:** Another factor that leads to the failure of the leaders in the public sector is non-involvement of employees in the decision-making processes.

Therefore, in Nigeria, insufficient or low performance and inefficiency are some of the effects of poor leadership on the employees since the employees are not given the opportunity to participate or contribute in any decision making. It will result to low productivity and inefficiency; there are no feelings of sense of belonging in their work place. This therefore will make the employee not to put in their best for the achievement of the organisational goals.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

In conclusion, we come to terms with the fact that the primary aim of an effective leader especially in the Nigerian public sector is to transform organisations to a better or higher position. This type of goal requires a long-term commitment, and the entire organisation and its environment must be considered when changes are to be made.

Leadership is a critical function of administrators or managers at all management levels of the Nigerian public sector. Leadership failure triggers the collapse of the society as a result missing priority. In exercising their leadership roles, managers or administrators especially in the Nigerian public organisations often demonstrate different leadership styles, namely autocratic, democratic and laissez-

faire in order to obtain predetermined organisational objectives. Each of the leadership styles yields different results at different times and in different situations.

Recommendations

Based on the leadership challenges and conclusion, the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. The leaders at all levels of the Nigerian public sector should have the political-will to lead their respective organisations in accomplishing the predetermine goals and objectives. They have to be committed and dedicated by putting aside all personal interest to carry out the overall mandates entrusted to them. The leader has to be committed and dedicated to be at the forefront of leading the organisation, hence, he has to lead by examples.
- ii. The leaders at all levels of the Nigerian public sector should be genuinely responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of their citizenry. Thus, the leaders at federal, state and local government levels have to be accountable and transparent by following due process in carrying out their daily responsibilities. The government at all levels as well as the occupants of various leadership positions in the public service are deemed to be accountable when they are genuinely responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of their citizenry. Thus, the leaders have to be above board in their dealings especially when it comes to incurring entrusted finances while taking decisions.
- iii. Since corruption has permeated the Nigerian public service, in the first place, the leaders have to be corrupt free and secondly, anyone who is found wanted should be judiciously punished by the anti-graft agencies-EFCC and ICPC. The Acts have to be reviewed in putting stringent measures or penalties against any corrupt person and corruption related cases have to be decided without delay, hence, our judicial system has to be reformed and if possible, special court has to be established to handle corruption cases.
- iv. Leaders have to be neutral and impartial in their dealings. Merit should be the major yardstick in terms of recruitment, promotion among others. Also, there should be emphasis on fairness and equity in taking decisions. The citizens should be enlightened more on the negative effects of corruption and the need to stop pressuring those in leadership positions with all sort of personal demands.
- v. Also, becoming an effective leader is a herculean task because there must be the will to take a risk for the personal desire to transform the work place into safe-haven with compassion and driven passion. Thus, financial and non-financial incentives should be adequately provided to motivate staff especially the hardworking ones, towards improved sustainable performance to fast track the attainment of the overall organisational objectives and goal.
- vi. Furthermore, efforts should be intensified in making sure that employees are fully involved in terms of decision making, hence the need to emphasise more on democratic style of leadership. The leaders or administrators in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and other levels must be able to understand the complex relationships among performance determinants and recognise what can be done to influence them in a beneficial way.

Therefore, there is need for formulation and implementation of scheme of reward for good services rendered to motivate officers who uphold good or better performance. Finally, efforts should be made to instil culture of change on the basis of patriotism, subordination of individual interest to the general one and national interest among Nigerian public service employees so as to enhance performance.

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