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Effects of Leadership Style on Employee Performance in Nigerian Universities

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Keywords: *leadership, performance, universities.*

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Effects of Leadership Style on Employee Performance in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract- The Nigerian University system has been plagued with a myriad of challenges which have seen the nation's universities ranked below hundredth worldwide. Despite these challenges, leadership and administrative direction have continuously compounded these challenges and thus this research to investigate the causal relationship between universities' performance as organizations and the leadership style prevalent in the university. The research relies heavily on primary data derived using questionnaires from which information gathered are analyzed using the Scientific Programme for Social Sciences to derive indices to test and ascertain postulated hypothesis. Relevant literature was reviewed to smoothen ideological biases thus giving intellectual references of comparative and contrasted views of the research stance. Deductions are made in consonant with the research problem and thus recommendations.

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I. Introduction and Background

Nigerian organisations generally, and particularly universities, have suffered leadership problems that have come to the fore in recent times. These problems manifest themselves in form of organisational politics, power tussle, insubordination, tribalism, suppression, etc. In some cases however, a lack of conceptual clarity of the term "leadership" magnifies these problems. For instance, a common practice, predominantly in universities and other academic institutions, when the organisation fails to achieve its objectives, the employees will blame the leaders in some cases. In other cases, when an organisation fails, the leader blames the employees. However, the success or failure of an organisation is supposed to be shared by leadership namely: the leader, the followers and the situation/environment. When leadership, comprising these tripartite variables fail, it leads to low productivity, low profitability, high employee turnover, low job satisfaction, etc. The net effect of all these is low institutional performance.

Currently, Nigerian universities are ranked below the first hundred universities in the world and have suffered variously from administrative lapses that continuously retard the growth of the system (UNESCO 2013). Among other factors, poor funding and mismanagement of available funds are dominant problems facing universities. However, failure of management viz-a-viz leadership of these universities as corporate organisations with goals to produce graduates with international reckoning persists and outweighs the funding issues. Most universities are self-styled by the sitting vice chancellors who run these universities based on personal intuitions without recourse to laid down administrative and management practices. This results in unending industrial disputes between management and employees of most universities. In the past decade, a significant number of Nigerian universities have experienced one form of industrial dispute or the other, and leadership is a predominant factor in these disputes. These occurrences retard the system and ultimately affect all stakeholders. Against this backdrop, it is imperative to establish the possibility of achieving world class performance standards in Nigerian universities resulting from effective leadership and management of these institutions.

It is against this background that the researcher has chosen to explore the possible ways of achieving this effectiveness in management of Nigerian Universities while examining the core causes of retarded growth in the system.

a) Statement of the Research Problem

Universities are renowned, worldwide, as embodying knowledge and are thus expected to blaze the trail in application of such knowledge. Theories and policies abound that guide leadership selection processes of universities and the policy directions accordingly. However, a critical problem facing the Nigerian University system could be linked to the inability of administrators to foster conducive, effective, harmonious and productive working relationships in the institutions.

Specifically, the problem leading to this study may be subsumed as arising from the inappropriate application of leadership styles been responsible for poor relational working ties between employees and university management.

b) Research Question

The study sought to provide answers to a core question;

To what extent does leadership style affect the rate of institutional performance of universities?

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c) Hypothesis

H_o Institutional performance in universities is NOT influenced by the application of appropriate leadership styles.

II. Review of Related Literature

a) Conceptual Review

Institutional performance revolves across the cycle of activities that establish an institution's goals; monitor progress towards the goals; and make adjustments to achieve these goals more effectively and efficiently (Robert & Angelo 2001). Those recurring activities are much of what leaders and managers inherently do in their institutions. Some of them do it far better than others. It is useful to think of organisational change in the context of institutional performance, rather than change for the sake of change. When seeking to improve the performance of an institution, it is very helpful to regularly conduct assessments of the current performance of institutions. Assessment might be planned, systematic and explicit (these often are the best kinds of assessments) or unplanned and implicit. Well-done assessments typically use tools, such as comprehensive questionnaires or self-study format SWOT analyses, and diagnostic models (We often use these models without recognizing or referring to them as such), etc., along with comparison of results to various "best practices" or industry standards.

b) Concept of Leadership

Leadership is a social influence process that seeks to elicit cooperation and support of individuals towards actualization of some set goals. The process of leadership is a continuously evolving concept that changes with the context and era of its essence. From the core of human existence, family, leadership plays a vital role in assuring stability and harmonious growth. Filtering into the wider scope of human existence, the society thrives on effective leadership as a pilot for cohesiveness among habitants.

At the helm of leadership processes sits the leader; an individual who influences individuals to win their support and cooperation at achieving some set goals. The quality and effectiveness of leadership processes rely heavily of the systemic embodiment of *leadership* and the strategic fit of the *leader.*

To fully understand contemporary management thought on differences in leadership styles, it is imperative to review, at least briefly, the theories that have helped to shape our thinking about leadership over the past century (Moran, 1992).

c) Concept of Performance in Institutions

Institutional performance comprises the actual output or results of an institution as measured against its intended outputs (or goals and objectives).

Specialists in many fields are concerned with institutional performance including strategic planners, operators, finance, legal and institutional performance.

Performance in different scopes is measured adopting certain set parameters as benchmark to rate a subject (individual, group or organisation). Many studies conducted on institutional performance view it as a process of establishing shared understanding about institutions' outputs.

d) Theoretical Framework

Leadership discourse currently operates as a decentralized body of literature with multiple theories and styles being prevalent. A centralized theoretical construct coupled with a sound methodology for analogy encompasses all current theories and styles (except the Great Man Theory) in an effort to optimize opportunities for leadership success. Significant amount of research, dialogue, writing and communication needs to be conducted to get the parameters of the leadership theories effectively.

This study would focus on the Democratic Leadership Theory as basis of discourse.

These are behavioural leadership styles that thrive on the concept of social equality such that the leader enlists the aid and support of group members, sharing decision making powers thus promoting group involvement and participation. The style is based on the notion that every member of the group *should* play a part in group decision making processes, though guidance and control of the group by a specific leader isn't compromised. Honesty, competence, inspiring, intelligence, humility, broadmindedness, courageousness are some of the essential characteristics of democratic leaders.

e) Empirical Review

Primarily, this research has its core in leadership styles as they impact performance in institutions of academic learning. Leadership style, as a concept has been variously defined in earlier sections of this presentation. It should be noted however, that leadership styles are as many and diverse as there are definitions and concepts of leadership. Different researchers and academicians alike have posited different leadership styles opining that every leader in every organisation performs certain roles/tasks for the smooth operation of the organisation and improvement of organisational performance. The manner in which the leader performs these roles and directs the affairs of the organisation is referred to as his/her leadership style (Oyetunyi, 2006). According to Oyetunyi (2006:31), leadership style therefore is the way a leader leads. Some leaders are more interested in the work to be done than in the people they work with, whilst others pay more attention to their relationship with subordinates than the job. The leader's emphasis on either the task or human relations approach is usually considered central

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to leadership style. Ball (1987) as reported in Linda (1999) identified the following leadership styles that emerged in the course of his research in British universities: the interpersonal, managerial style, adversarial and the political style or authoritarian style. He describes interpersonal vice chancellors as being typically mobile and visible with a preference for consulting with individuals rather than holding meetings. They like to "sound out ideas" and gather opinions. Such vice chancellors will frequently reiterate to teachers the importance of bringing complaints and grievances to them first of all. Ball (1987) pointed out that this type of leadership style is particularly effective at satisfying teacher's individual needs, and that grievances and staff turnover tends to remain low.

On the other hand, he continues, vice chancellors with managerial styles adopt a leadership style that parallels that of a manager in industry: The use of management techniques involves the importation into the school structures, types of relationships and processes of organisational control from the factory. The managerial head is chief executive of the school, normally surrounded by a Senior Management Team (SMT). The vice chancellors relates to the staff through this team and through a formal structure of meetings and committees. Both these responsibilities and structures will be supported and outlined by written documentation, which specifies terms of reference and job descriptions (MoES, 2003).

Ball's (1987) research revealed several deficiencies of a managerial leadership style, including a sense of exclusion from decision-making on the part of those teachers who are not part of the SMT, the creation of a "them and us" hierarchically-based division, and teachers' derision for the management structure and its processes. The adversarial leadership style is typified by confrontational dialogue between the vice chancellors and the teachers. Here headship emphasizes persuasion and commitment. Ball (1987:109) quotes teachers response to this style of leadership during a focus group discussion as follows. Some staff will be unable or unwilling to participate in this form of organisational discourse. Some find it unhelpful; others are unwilling to devote the time and energy necessary to get their points of view across. Ball (1987) depicted authoritarian leadership as being distinct from adversarial leadership by its focus on asserting rather than persuading as quoted here under. Such a head takes no chances by recognizing the possibility of competing views and interests. Opposition is avoided, disabled or simply ignored. No opportunities are provided for the articulation of alternative views or the assertion of alternative interests, other than those defined by the head as legitimate. Indeed the authoritarian may rely, as a matter of course, on conscious deception as a matter of organisational control (Ball, 1987:109).

Paisey (1992:146) asserts that academic institutions that are normally held to be successful are those whose management involve and emphasize consultation, teamwork and participation. According to him, the focus is usually on units, in a situation where some staff members do not agree with the policies and practices which have been accepted by a good percentage of their colleagues, they usually give their support. In other words, consultation, teamwork and participation are the common key characteristics of successful institutions.

House and Mitchell (as reported in Oyetunyi, 2006) suggest that a leader can behave in different ways in different situations.The following are the four kinds of leaders' behavior:

a) Directive leadership style, similar to the task-oriented style. The leader who uses this type of leadership style provides teachers with specific guidelines, rules and regulations with regard to planning, organizing and performing activities. This style is deemed to be appropriate when the subordinates' ability is low and or the task to be performed is complex or ambiguous. Job satisfaction is increased when the leader gives more directives (Hoy & Miskel, 2001:408).
b) Supportive leadership style is more of a relationship-oriented style. It requires the leader to be approachable and friendly. He/she displays concern for the wellbeing and personal needs of the subordinates. He/she creates an emotionally supportive climate. This style is effective when subordinates lack self-confidence; work on dissatisfying or stressful tasks and when work does not provide job satisfaction (Hoy & Miskel, 2001:408).
c) Participative leadership style where the leader who employs this style consults with subordinates for ideas and takes their ideas seriously when making decisions. This style is effective when subordinates are well motivated and competent (Lussier & Achua, 2001:175).
d) Achievement-oriented style which requires the leader to set challenging but achievable goals for the subordinates. He/she pushes work improvement sets high expectations for subordinates and rewards them when the expectations are met. That is, the leader provides both high directive (structure) and high supportive (consideration) behavior. This style works well with achievement-oriented subordinates (Lussier & Achua, 2001:175). Under the Vroom-Yetton-Jago model, Vroom and Jago postulate that there is no leadership style that is appropriate for all situations.

It therefore follows that a leader should develop a series of responses ranging from autocratic to

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consultative and apply the leadership style that is appropriate to the situation.

III. Methodology

The research was mainly exploratory and thus employed an objective case study as basis for intense examination to ascertain the applicable extent to which hypothesis of the research are plausible.

Primary data were sought relative to the case study so as to assemble a pool of information which would be up to date, precise and firsthand. Various means such as questionnaire and personal interviews were used.

Data collected in the course of the research were presented in tabular form using percentages and Pearson Chi Square as an organized platform for analysis, interpretation and deductions, relative to assumptions (hypotheses) made. Data are analyzed using the simple percentages to group respondents' opinions.The Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS) is used to adequately analyze data to address the research problem and test the Hypotheses.

a) Research Population and Sample Definition

The study is supposed to cover the over one hundred and twenty universities in Nigeria. However, for realistic examination of the variables, six universities representing the six geo-political divisions of Nigeria are selected and understudied.

The population for this research shall cover the entire staff of Nigerian universities, a gross of over three hundred thousand.

Population of the Selected Universities

University	Academic Staff	Non-Academic Staff	Total
Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto	535	1,225	1,760
Federal University of Technology, Owerri	653	2,192	2,845
Adamawa State University, Mubi	121	323	444
Federal University of Technology, Akure	742	1,191	1,923
University of Jos	864	2,140	3,004
University of Port Harcourt	806	3,109	3,915

Source: Nigerian Universities Commission, NUC

Simple random sampling technique is adopted for the research which entails drawing samples randomly from the research population (the six selected Universities). Each university would have its sample size defined relative to its population.

In defining the sample size for the research, an error margin of 0.05 level of significance is adopted using the Taro Yamani formula thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n= sample size

N= population

e= margin of error

Given the formula $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

$$= \frac{13,891}{1+13,891(0.05)^2}$$

388

IV. Hypothesis Testing

H_1: The form of relation ties in Nigerian universities is influenced by leadership style.

Table 4.15: Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences			T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Leadership style	2.12942	0.33494	0.02862	74.413	136	0.01

From the table, t-test statistics was used to compare the mean response of the respondents as regards leadership (application) style and an alternative free from the respondents' mean scores on table 4.15. The test has a significant probability 0.01 (p-value) which is remarkably less than the significance level of

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0.05 and hence we reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is leadership style influences relational ties of workers.

V. Major Findings

This research dissertation investigated the extent to which leadership styles affect organizational performance of Nigerian universities.

The research basically revealed a significant impact of interpersonal relationship along organizational hierarchy of universities and performance of employees. There exists a mutual need for affiliation and communal existence among staff of these universities which greatly presupposes the need for effective leadership that breeds the requisite conditions to foster conducive organizational climate for performance to thrive.

Summarily, the following are findings from the research:

i. Primarily, the research established a significant Impact of leadership style on performance of organisations. Responses from the hypothesis reveals employee and the strong need to associate with one another building strong bonds that manifests as teamwork and cooperation.
ii. The research revealed some salient issues which are not completely peculiar to the case study. Among other things, the research discovered that:

a. Nigerian universities suffer a lack of financial and social support from the Government. When funding is made available, mismanagement is another factor that deprives the system of the desired objectives.
b. Internal wrangling and fractionalization are common scenarios in Nigerian universities; management-union and often times intra-union factions. These inhibit growth and development of the system even when leaders seem to pursue noble objectives.
c. Due to the self-styled nature of management practice of administrative heads of the working units of Nigerian universities, it is common to see units and departments towing paths that are completely off the goals or objectives expected of them.

VI. Conclusions

This research primarily set out to investigate the impacts of leadership styles on the performance of Nigerian public universities. The research had among its objectives, an investigation of the possibility of a significant relationship between leadership style and performance in the University.

The research made revelations from which conclusive decisions were drawn.

The hypothesis postulated for the study is accepted. As posited by behavioural theorists such as Mayo (1933), Likert (1962), McGregor (1950) and Argyrus (1959) that leadership styles affect subordinates morale, intrinsic satisfaction, motivation, one should expect a highly significant predictor; he result of this study is consistent to theorists' assertions.

VII. Recommendations

The findings of this study have far reaching effects on existing body of knowledge as regards management/leadership effectiveness in organizations, especially on academic institutions (universities) with particular emphasis on the selected Nigerian universities.

From the research findings, the following recommendations are made;

i. The research reveals a significant positive impact of effective leadership, as per interpersonal relations of superiors and subordinate, in creating an organizational climate that breeds commitment and performance of employees.

Premised upon this, it is recommended that various fora be developed to build cordial bonds among staff to ease hierarchical tension and thus increase leadership effective that assures cooperation of subordinates in the goal achievement course of organizations.

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