

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE IN THE NIGERIAN ACADEMIA

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Abstract

Education is the bedrock of every society and a tool for nation building (Adegbesan, 2011). The development of any nation is therefore engendered by the effectiveness of the various institutions that make up its educational sector. The university (also referred to as the academia) is the highest institution in the educational sector in any nation of the world. Oxford advanced learner dictionary (2011) defined the university as the highest level of education where students study for a degree or conduct researches. The successful functioning of the university system is a function of effective administration and leadership style. Various leadership styles have existed in time past, however the five most common leadership styles include charismatic, transformational, visionary, transactional, and servant leadership styles. The Nigerian academia may be considered as structurally bureaucratic and transactional in administration. The objective of this paper is to examine the current state of the Nigerian academia, and to present transformational leadership style as the requisite for change in the Nigerian university system. Specifically, this paper examined current issues in the Nigerian universities, identifying effective leadership as a solution. It also explored modern leadership styles in today's changing world, and concluded that the adoption of Transformational leadership style will provoke the necessary changes needed in Nigerian universities and ultimately provide a pathway to being enlisted in the global rating of world universities.

Key Words: Academia, change, leadership style, Nigeria, transformational

Introduction

The development of any nation is engendered by the effectiveness of its various institutions. An institution or society for the advancement of literature, art, or science is called an academy (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). The term academia is used to describe institutions of higher learning. Universities are institutions at the highest level of education where students study for a degree or conduct research (Oxford advanced learner dictionary, 2011). Adegbesan (2011) described education as the bedrock of every society and a tool for nation building. Although the importance of quality education in nation building cannot be over emphasized, it is dependent on effective administration and leadership style in the educational institutions.

Saal & Knight (1988) viewed leadership as social influence in organizational setting, the effects of which are relevant to, or have an impact upon the achievement of organizational goals. Leadership is all about unleashing human potentials, optimizing performance and the achievement of set goals. Udegbe (1999) defined leadership as a process of creating subordinates' identification with the group mission and creating their desire to achieve the group's goals. Leadership involves the enhancement of a person's vision,

performance, and potentials beyond its normal limitations. The weakest and dullest set of people can be transformed into the most efficient workforce through effective leadership.

Leadership is a function ingrained in management. These two concepts are closely related especially within organizational setting. Leadership is a characteristic of management that is not exhibited by all managers. Drucker (1987) defined management as the specific practice that converts a mob into an effective, purposeful and productive group. The extent to which a manager can influence group members to behave in desired manner and express commitment to group goals is a reflection of his leadership characteristics. According to Mintzberg (1980), leadership is one of the roles of a manager which is not necessarily carried out by all managers on a daily basis. Managers perform leadership roles as part of their daily routine depending on the functions of their units and whether they are lower, middle or upper level managers. Middlehurst (1995) opined that leadership is the domain of those in certain positions of power in the academia such as Vice-chancellors, Deans, Professors, Heads of Department and Heads of Functional as such as Registry.

Management of university education can be looked at from two dimensions: the external and the internal levels. At the external level, the federal government control the university system through the National Universities Commission (NUC), a body charged with the coordination of university management in the country. At the internal level, the Governing Council which is chaired by the Pro-Chancellor is the apex of the management structure within each university. The management of the Nigerian academia will only be as effective as the leadership style adopted. It is expedient at this juncture to explore the different leadership styles. Traditionally, leaders can be autocratic, democratic, Laissez-faire, bureaucratic etc. Researchers have identified various leadership styles in the past. However, the five contemporary leadership styles in organizations include charismatic, transformational, visionary, transactional, and servant leadership styles. The administrative system in Nigerian universities may be considered as both bureaucratic and transactional. It is characterised by strict adherence to rules, hierarchy of authority, division of labour and a contract-based leadership style. Nwafor (2012) found that the essential leadership style of the principal officers to be bureaucratic style, characterised by strict adherence to rules. Similar to transactional leadership, the major goal is to stay clear of trouble by avoiding risk and to meet only minimum requirements for both results and relationships (Nwafor, 2012). The main objective of this paper is to examine the current challenges in the Nigerian academia, and to present transformational leadership style as the requisite for change in the Nigerian university system. Specifically, this paper will examine the current issues in the Nigerian universities, identify effective leadership as a solution, explore contemporary leadership styles and present transformational leadership style as the most suitable for Nigerian universities.

Current issues in the Nigerian Academia

University governance in Nigeria today is nothing but crises management (Ibukun, 1997) characterised by brain drain, financial crises, deteriorated infrastructure for teaching, research and learning. The major challenge facing the management of university system in Nigeria is inadequate funding (Adegbite, 2007). Aina (2007) posited that government priority to education is still very low. World Bank (1994) stated the equipment for teaching, research and learning are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry out the basic functions of academics. Lecture halls, laboratories, students' hostels, library space, books and journals, office spaces are all seriously inadequate (Ochuba 2001). Institutional deterioration and salary erosion during the past decade have prompted substantial "brain-drain" of academic staff and impeded new staff recruitment (Ajayi & Haastrup, 2008). Consequent upon the knowledge expansion and rapid changes in the knowledge economy all over the world, universities must constantly adapt and keep pace with these changes to maintain global relevance in this industry. One major management challenge in the Nigerian academia is the challenge of effective leadership.

The Nigerian academia has experienced several challenges regarding effectiveness and global relevance. A recent survey of universities across the globe indicated that no Nigerian University is ranked among the top 400 universities in the world as published by the Times Higher Education University ranking 2012. The major ranking tools were teaching methods, research and use of research findings. Darma (2011) stated that more than 58 years after the first university was founded in Nigeria, not much of the researches conducted in Nigerian universities have been found credible enough for incubation and use by the industry and only very few publications by university lecturers and professors were considered worthy enough for international assessment and replication annually. He said that academicians who conducted research and published papers do this not with the intention of expanding the frontiers of knowledge, but rather to enhance their prospects of promotion which is the reason why internationally acclaimed journals hardly published the so called academic papers of Nigerian university Lecturers and professors as such papers hardly met the required academic standards.

The problems in Nigeria's ivory towers include lack of interest in teaching and research as well as poor remuneration and infrastructural deficiencies (Darma, 2011). Research grants, though available, are not sought, since nothing new is being baked in most of our academic ovens (Chiemeké, Longe, Longe & Shaib, 2008). This research sub-sector that is grossly neglected in Nigeria and play upon indiscriminately is the basis for the socio economic, political, scientific and technological advancement of the most admired developed nations of the world today (Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007). Some faculty members in Nigerian universities see research a means to ascend the academic ladder rather than a lifeline to nation building. They are mainly interested in research for the sake of promotion and consequently higher pay. The goal of any research should be to add value and improve the living condition of people in the society. The quality of research is a function of inventive and innovative thinking, such that is void of all forms of worries and concerns. Maslow (1970) posited that human needs are in hierarchy and that the basic lower order needs must be satisfied before the individual can move up to the higher order needs. As a result of the poverty situation in the country, many of the Nigerian workforce, faculty members inclusive are still struggling with the basic survival needs hence their inability to think beyond subsistence and be creative. Table one below illustrates the hierarchy of human needs in the order of importance:



Source: antonvandenberg.wordpress.com

Pay is an important motivator in the Nigerian academia and there had been situations where the pay levels of faculty members have been protested by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which led to many strike actions. Fatunde (2008) recounted that in May 2008, the ASUU held two one-week 'warning strikes' to press a range of demands, including an improved salary scheme and reinstatement of 49 lecturers who were dismissed many years ago According to Fatunde (2009), in June 2009 ASUU ordered its members in universities nationwide to proceed on an indefinite strike over disagreements with the Federal Government on an agreement it reached with the union about two and a half years before then. These incessant strike actions if not curtailed will frustrate every effort towards the global recognition of Nigerian universities.

Modern Leadership Styles in the Changing World

There are five most embraced leadership styles in today's changing world, all of which involve leaders enticing their followers' commitment to fulfil difficult missions mandated by a dynamic and fluid environment marked with fast changes (Nayab & Scheid, 2011). According to Douglas (n.d), the five modern leadership styles in the changing world include: charismatic, transformational, visionary, transactional, and servant leadership styles.

Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leadership is characterised by leaders' natural ability to attract people and inspire their commitment to a cause. It is an attempt to fulfil organizational goals by instilling devotion in group members through a charming personality. Charismatic leaders involve in self-sacrifice and take personal risks based on their beliefs. According to Congers & Kanungo (1988), some of the characteristics of charismatic leadership include high level of self-confidence, possession of an idealised goal that proposes a better future than the status quo (vision), strong convictions about the vision, extra ordinary behaviours, a change agent and the ability to make realistic assessments of the environmental constraints and resources needed to change things. Udegbe (1999) reported that research has shown that charismatic leaders have dramatic effects on

the behaviours of their followers; and that there is significantly high correlation between charismatic leadership and subordinates' performance and satisfaction. The downside to charismatic leaders is that they can believe more in themselves than in their teams. This can create the risk that a project or even an entire organization might collapse if the leader leaves.

Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership is a situation in which the leader and followers move together towards a desired future as a result of the leader being inspiring in vision, and helping others to see how they can contribute to this vision. Nayab & Scheid (2011) opined that a visionary leader dreams about the future and translates such dreams into specific, achievable goals and is able to articulate them with great inspiration to instil the commitment of others. Visionary leadership involves the ability to forecast the future, anticipate change and take initiatives towards the attainment of group goals. McLaughlin (2001) posited that a visionary leader may dream wonderful visions of the future and articulate them with great inspiration, but it requires leadership and heartfelt commitment for a vision to take form in today's world.

Transactional Leadership

Burns (1978) coined the concepts of "transforming leadership" and "transactional leadership". Transactional leadership is based on the assumption that rewards and punishment are key motivators in employee management, ensuring work performance through a clear chain of command. Characteristic of transactional leadership are clear structures and policies where subordinates are explicitly briefed on work expectations and contingent rewards. The consequences of non-performance or non-compliance with organizational policies are also clear to subordinates. Transactional Leadership is a contractual relationship in which the subordinates or employees trade their time and liberty for salaries and other benefits. Based on these contracts, transactional leaders allocate jobs to subordinates and expect prompt delivery of results. They are primarily concerned with task accomplishment as contracted and not the amount of effort or technical know-how.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership may be described as a situation in which the leader of a group is not readily noticeable but leads from the background with the primary goal of meeting the needs of the team. This striking characteristic of servant leaders allows their team take credit for their efficiency and hard work. Servant Leadership is founded on the assumption that leaders are first of all servants and then leaders. These leaders lead by example and uphold the "do as I do" principle. Servant leadership possess democratic features that encourages participative decision making among group members which is a departure from the traditional leadership style of dominating subordinates and telling them what to do.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is the leadership style is characterised by vision, creativity, and positive changes in the environment. It promotes high performance, motivation and morale among followers. Transformational leaders act as role models to their followers; this serves as an inspiration and engenders their commitment to the group goals. Transformational leadership style is the crux of this paper and is being proposed as the most effective in the Nigerian academia.

Transformational leadership style as a catalyst for change in the Nigerian academia

Burns (1978) defined transforming leadership as a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation". It is an approach that redesigns perceptions and values, changes expectations and aspirations of employees, and creates significant change in the life of people and organizations (Burns, 1978). The transforming approach is based on the leader's personality, traits and ability to make a change through example, articulation of an energizing vision and challenging goals. Transforming leaders are idealized in the sense that they are a moral exemplar of working towards the benefit of the team, organization and/or community. Bass (1985) introduced the term "transformational" in place of "transforming." The behavioural characteristics of a transformational leader are defined in table 2 below:

Table II
Definitions of transformational leadership behaviours

Behaviour	
Visioning	The leader clearly communicates a vision of the future, broadly shared by the members of the organization. This vision describes the ultimate outcomes which people need to achieve, and the leader expresses optimism about the future with clarity, expressions of personal confidence and enthusiasm. Transformational leaders lead by example, serve as role models and themselves behave in ways consistent with their vision.
Inspiring	The leader generates excitement at work and heightens expectations of others through symbols and images. In communicating about their vision, they express their dreams in highly motivational language. They give pep talks with high energy, optimism and passion, which in turn builds confidence in their vision and self-confidence in their followers.
Stimulating	The leader arouses interest in new ideas and approaches and enables employees to think about problems in new ways. This transformational leader encourages rethinking of ideas and questioning of old ways of doing things. He or she actively considers "wild ideas" and encourages divergent thinking. Intelligence and clear reasoning are encouraged to select from among the creative ideas and to solve problems.
Coaching	The leader coaches, advises and provides "hands-on" help for others to improve their performance. They listen attentively and express encouragement, support and confidence in others' abilities to achieve the high expectations inherent in the vision. They give positive feedback for strong performance and effort and provide opportunities for development by giving challenging and interesting tasks to their followers (as distinct from keeping all these kinds of jobs for themselves).
Team-building	The leader builds effective teams by selecting team members with complementary skills. They increase trust and self-confidence in the team by sharing information, giving positive feedback, utilizing individual members' skills and removing obstacles to team performance.

Source: www.emeraldinsight.com

These five behaviours of a transformational leader are embedded in the four components of transformational leadership as posited by Bass (1985). These components include intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealised influence and inspirational motivation. Idealized Influence is the ability of leader to serves as a role model for followers. Because followers trust and respect the leader, they emulate this individual and internalize his or her ideals. The importance of mentoring cannot be underestimated; senior academics should serve as role models to junior academics. The Government and University administrators should settle all integrity issues and secure the trust of faculty members in order to engender commitment and foster the development of the Nigerian academia.

In the case of individualized consideration, transformational leadership involves offering support and encouragement to individual followers. Udegbe (1999) described individualised consideration as giving personal attention, coaching, advice, and treating each employee individually. Faculty members should be given a one on one attention in order to solve issues peculiar to each of them. This can be made possible through effective mentoring and coaching of junior faculty members by senior academics. Every faculty will have the opportunity to develop at his or her pace and have all issues effectively clarified.

Inspirational motivation involves leaders having a clear vision and being able to articulate this to followers. These leaders are also able to help followers experience the same passion and motivation to fulfil these goals by clearly communicating high expectations, the importance of the company's mission, and using symbols such as slogans and pins to focus subordinates 'efforts. University administrators can clearly communicate the high expectations and goals to faculty members and focus their efforts through inspirational motivation. This may involve organizing training workshops and encouraging research clusters in order to ensure capacity building and commitment to high quality research.

Intellectual stimulation is characterised by a value for creativity and innovation. It suggests a situation in which transformational leaders challenge the status quo and promote ingenuity among followers. The leader encourages followers to explore new ways of doing things and new opportunities to learn. This is necessary in the Nigerian academia if faculty are to turn out quality researches required to make the world university ranking list. The reason Nigerian universities have not met the criteria for world ranking of universities is not because faculty members are not intelligent enough to turnout high impact research. But, they need to be intellectually stimulated and adequately motivated to unleash the potentials embedded in them. Government, university administrators and management should ensure the availability of modernized research facilities and encourage mentoring and brainstorming among faculty members. The summation of intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealised influence and inspirational motivation may be theorized to result in outstanding performances. This assertion is depicted in Table 3 below:



Source: www.theleadershipcollege.com

Transformational leadership may be considered as an improvement on the other contemporary leadership styles. It is built on vision, charisma and clarity of responsibilities and rewards. Udegbe (1999) asserted that transformational leaders are charismatic leaders who provide subordinates with intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation. However, transformational leadership emphasizes characteristics that go beyond charisma. Apart from providing a strong vision and a sense of reason for the group, a leader must provide intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990). Such leadership behaviours are necessary to effectively change or transform organizations.

Conclusion

The university system set specific goals which can only be achieved through effective management. The goal attainment may be viewed as a destination, where management represents the vehicle, leadership style represents the fuel and people (government and university administrators) are the drivers. Although other contributory factors are not ruled out, the role of leadership cannot be underestimated. It is important to deliberately and adequately motivate faculty member for optimal performance. Studies have indicated that transformational leadership is more strongly correlated with turnover rates, productivity and employee satisfaction (Udegbe, 1999). Transformational leadership style if employed will provoke the necessary changes needed in the Nigerian academia and ultimately provide a pathway to being enlisted in the global rating of world universities.

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