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# LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWERSHIP: PERSPECTIVES AND APPLICATION

BY

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper is an analysis of leadership and followership in all organizations. It is an attempt to provide an answer to the recurring problem of isolating followership from leadership in a total and definite manner by certain scholars and commentators particularly in turbulent times. Leadership and followership are two sides of the same coin and is one of the basic needs of every human organization. Leadership effectiveness is a necessary condition for group, organizational and national success/development. It is widely held or acknowledged that "everything rises and falls on leadership". However, the role and place of followership in any organization cannot be overemphasized, in view of the fact that it constitutes a large chunk of the whole. The emphasis therefore is that leadership is a subset of followership. This realization makes the role of followership very obvious in leadership success. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this paper to uncover the synergy produced from the symbiosis of the two in practice via analysis. Consequently, the togetherness of the two has been established beyond doubt in this work.*

## INTRODUCTION

Public analysts, commentators and scholars argue that the underlying challenge in the effectiveness of most public and private organizations is leadership. This is also consistent with the school of thought which posits that the problem with managing businesses or enterprises in Nigeria relates more

to power points (i. e individuals as leaders) who occupy positions in organizations.

However, as it would be found in this discourse, leadership impinges on organizations, but the effectiveness or otherwise of most leaders in organizations is to a large extent, a function of the followership, workers or citizens, as the case may be.

This paper, therefore, attempts to examine the conceptual issues, types of leadership, the nature of leadership and followership with a view to identifying the effects that both concepts exert on a group, organization or nation. Thereafter, the paper is concluded.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data used in this work are collected mainly from many secondary sources such as text books from libraries, journal papers, magazines, pamphlets, Dictionaries, the Holy Bible, and Newspapers etc. The data from here were extracted through readings. All these data were collected and analyzed to the point of drawing all the conclusions therein. Therefore, an analytical method is central to the approach utilized in treating all the facts and opinions obtained from the said sources and the same method has been used in composing this article.

## **WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?**

Leadership connotes different things to different people. Definition or perception of leadership by academics and practitioners tend to diverge. Leadership is defined as influence, that is, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of group goals. **Wehrich and Koontz (1993:490)**.

Leaders act as facilitating and inspiring agents in a group in order to accomplish organizational goals. **Wehrich and Kootz** affirm that optimum performance or capacity utilization is directly linked to good leadership skills.

Another way of defining leadership which has been aptly qualified as 'managerial leadership' sees it "as the process of directing and influencing the task related activities of group members". Stoner, Freeman & Gilbert (2000:470).

These authors go ahead to establish that, there are four important implications of their definition of leadership which are as follows: people (employees or followers); Power; influence and values.

Explaining the implications, the trio goes further to say that, people (employees or followers) underline the very essence of leadership. By employees willing to accept directions from their leader, the group members/employees help define the leader's status and make the leadership process possible. Without people or followers to lead, the best of leadership qualities remain useless and largely irrelevant and unproductive.

Leadership involves unequal distribution of power between leaders and the led. Although, people or employees can and do shape group activities in a number of ways, the leader nonetheless wields more power than the group. The group however legitimizes the leader's power base. Power is defined as "the ability to exert influence that is, to change the attitudes or behavior of individuals or group". Influence however is any actions or examples of behavior that cause a change in attitude or behavior of another person or group". **Stoner et. al** (2000:470).

Leadership entails the use of influence to achieve or direct group behavior in a number of ways. This includes getting employees or followers to make sacrifices that will be beneficial to group/corporate interest.

Leadership has to do with values and also requires that followers be given adequate knowledge of alternatives so that they can make intelligent choices between different courses of action.

The above explanations of the implications inherent in the definition of leadership by these scholars have been corroborated by **Wehrich & Koontz (1993)** refer to the same issues as ingredient of leadership such as, the ability to use power effectively and responsibly; the ability to comprehend that human beings have different motivational forces at different times and in different situations; the ability to inspire and the ability to create/develop a conducive environment and to arouse motivation.

**Cole (1997:49)**. Conceptualizes leadership as "a dynamic process at work in a group whereby one individual over a particular period of time and in a particular organizational context influences the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group tasks or goal".

From the above definition, it is deduced that leadership is a dynamic process, it entails the use of influence and motivation, it is also directed at accomplishing organizational/group goals. It can also be safely inferred that leadership usually and mostly is a management role. It is also plausible to say that a leader leads, and at the same time the leader also follows. Leadership is therefore a subset of followership. For example, the head of an insect is part

of its body. This implies that leadership and followership are inseparable.

### **WHAT IS FOLLOWERSHIP?**

Followership can connote a body of followers or supporters. The Chambers English Dictionary (1988:551) further defines a follower as “one who comes after”, “a copier”, “a disciple”. However, the **Oxford Dictionary of Current English (2001:349)** defines follower as “a person who follows” “a Supporter, fan or disciple”. Whereas to follow imply means moving behind, going after (someone) so as to observe him.

From the viewpoint of an organization, group and country, Followership can denote employees/workers, people or citizens and a body of members to whom certain rights, privileges, duties, responsibilities, obligations, rewards and expectations are due or expected, as the case may be. It is in this light that followership can be typologies along political, social, economic and moral lines.

The above affirms the complimentarity between followership and leadership functions. It therefore behooves every intelligent leader to appreciate the setting in which he functions as well as the cultural diversities in the leadership/followership interaction.

### **TYPES OF LEADERSHIP**

Leadership can be practiced in various ways. There are as many different leadership styles as there are leaders in the theories of leadership. Individuals (as leaders) bring to leadership positions unique combinations of background, values, perception, experience and many other traits.

However, studies into leadership have concluded that the style depends on the interplay, of three factors which are: the leader’s personal characteristics, the individual followers (subordinates) characteristics; as well as the characteristics of the group – the situation.

These studies have identified three broad styles of leadership as the most common which are authoritative/autocratic, Participative/Democratic and Free-Rein/Laissez-faire. There are however adaptations to these which could assume the form of exploitative type where the leader employs fear, threat and punishment to motivate workers, Benevolent/authoritative type where the leader adopts reward and positive reinforcement as motivators; consultative type in which occasional rewards or punishment are used to motivate workers and participative type wherein the leader adopts complete participation and group involvement in arriving at high performance goals.



For the purpose of this paper, we shall consider the first three styles or type of leadership in their pure forms and not the adaptations.

### **AUTHORITATIVE/AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP**

The autocratic leader commands and expects compliance. This style is dogmatic and it depends on the ability of the leader to withhold or give rewards and punishment. This style employs the assumptions of Mcgregor's theory X, Rensis Likert's system one, Tannenbaum and Schmidt's use of authority by the manager (on the leadership continuum). This approach inhibits the use of initiative, encourages "plastic loyalty" and it can be counter-productive to the organization.

### **DEMOCRATIC OR PARTICIPATIVE STYLE OF LEADERSHIP**

It employs consultation with subordinates on proposed actions/decisions. The leader encourages team work (participation). This style relies heavily on the assumptions of Douglas Mcgregor theory Y, Likert's System three and four which are consultative and participatory in nature. This style also draws inspirations from Tannenbaum and Schmidt's provisions which "are of freedom for subordinates" on the continuum of leadership styles. The democratic or participative style fosters group cohesion, use of initiative by the employees, increased output/performance and the achievement of organizational goals/objectives. The individual employee achieves his personal goals and at the same time, the corporate goals are also realized.

### **FREE-REIN OR LAISSEZ-FAIRE STYLE OF LEADERSHIP**

This style or type of leadership allows subordinates a high degree of independence in their operations. Leaders allow subordinates to set their own goals and the means of achieving the goals. The leader sees his role as merely providing vital/necessary information and facilitating operations. This style has been seriously criticized and labeled "abdicated leadership". Whatever is said or not said about this style, the advantage lies in the fact that, it is mostly suited for the academia and research institutions.

The three styles discussed above usually may not be practiced in their purest forms, hence, there are modifications/adaptations giving rise to such additional term as "paternalistic autocracy" which is largely fatherly in approach but retains much of the authoritarian/autocratic contents of leadership style, and the 'supportive' style which is a variant of the

participative-democratic approach.

### **WHAT IS GOOD LEADERSHIP?**

Leadership may entail the leader's ability to satisfactorily meet promises, tasks and targets set by the leader or followers or both. Leadership can be said to be good or bad only in comparison to the set tasks and targets (i.e. manifesto, constitution, program) or any other thing that is regarded as a common expectation.

Good leadership is a perception of the followership in the leader's ability to satisfactorily meet tasks and targets. Therefore, if followership believes that leaders have successfully, fairly and equitably met their promises, tasks and targets, then, they generally think or perceive that such leadership is good.

However, what determines how good or bad a leader is, can also be a function of the people's culture, norms traditions and beliefs. For example, in an utopian society, nothing is good until it is perfect. On the contrary, in some docile societies where people hardly react to issues or vices of the leaders, for whatever reasons, a minimal level of performance might be regarded as excellent.

To our culture in Nigeria and in other countries of the world it is agreed that once promises are made, then they must be fulfilled. Hence to determine if a leadership is good or bad, we begin by asking what promises have been made to the people and what are the expectations of the offices of such leaders? This poser may serve as the subject of a further research or academic excursion, it is therefore needless belaboring it here. It will be a useful guide in our debate on what bad or good leadership entails.

Maxwell (2001:7-9) posits that good leaders must possess the following attributes: let go of your ego; become a good follower first; build positive relationships; work with excellence; rely on discipline not emotion; make adding value your goal and give your power away.

The following qualities were also identified by Maxwell (1999) as being "indispensable" for good leaders: Character; charisma; commitment; communication; competence; courage; Discernment; focus; Generosity; initiative; Listening Ear; Passion; Positive attitude; Problem solving; relationships; Responsibility; security; self-discipline; servant-hood or service; teaching ability and vision.

In addition to the above, the right type of leadership must think globally; anticipate opportunity; create shared vision; develop and empower people; appreciate cultural diversity; build team work/spirit and partnership; embrace changes; apply technological savvy; encourage constructive challenge; ensure customer satisfaction; achieve competitive advantage; demonstrate personal mastery; share leadership and values (**The Guardian, 22 January 2002:35**).

A leader must remember always that to succeed and be a good leader, he must be a good follower. A good leader must be humble enough to work for the common good of the people by harnessing resources and using people effectively to achieve ends.

Le Boeuf (1989) sums up with an assertion that good and effective leaders get results and that is the greatest management principle in the world. Le Boeuf argues further that the keys/strategies which good leaders apply anchor on positive reward and reinforcement which are as follows: award solid solution instead of quick fixes; risk taking instead of risk avoiding; Applied creativity instead of conformity; decisive action instead of paralysis by analysis; Smart work instead of busywork; simplification instead of needless complication; Quiet effective behavior instead of Squeaking joints; quality work instead of fast work; Loyalty instead of turnover; and working together instead of working against.

### **WHAT IS BAD LEADERSHIP?**

The basis for tackling this debate has been laid in an earlier portion of this paper where we quipped that in order to determine if a leader is good or bad, we ask what promises have been made to the people/followers and the expectations of the offices of such leaders. It may be consistent with reason to argue that any leader that abuses the common will and expectations of the people, to that extent, such a leader is deemed bad. The objective reality on ground has shown that the determining yardstick by the people of the goodness or otherwise of their leadership is the performance of the economy (with respect to public governance) and the ability to maintain safety, security and social order, among others.

Bad leadership manifests in several forms including low morals; poor remuneration and poor personnel practices; poor transportation systems and harsh living conditions; willful abandonment of participatory styles of management, and half hearted attempts at installing modern management techniques and philosophies. Bad leaders equally exhibit conspicuous

consumption and waste etc. They degenerate to varying degrees of pathological greed and under proper examination have become psychologically sick.

Bad leadership can also manifest in unnecessary dependence on and application of political patronage, ethnicity and other sundry diversions in place of the exercise of merit. In such Circumstances, the concept (and practice) of “national cake and sharing” becomes common place. In a study on leadership by Finzel (2000), organizations fail because (bad) leaders make certain mistakes which are; the top-down attitude; putting paperwork before people work, the absence of affirmation which implies a better pay package; no room for mavericks who can link enterprises to the future; dictatorship in decision making; dirty delegation (refusing to relax and let go); communication chaos/problem; missing the clues of corporate culture, success without successors (planning your exit the day you assume office) and failure to focus on the future.

The manifestations of bad leadership take the forms of anger, general outrage, cynicism, apathy and withdrawal on the part of followers. It is to such an extent that the bad leader is disconnected from the followers.

### **WHAT IS GOOD FOLLOWERSHIP?**

Followership connotes the body and it is not always that followers support the leader. Good followership therefore follows and supports the leaders at all times but with eyes widely open. Why? Both followership and leadership are complete loop system, hence the capacity for balancing.

In cases where leadership is perceived to be irredeemably bad, then it behooves on good followership to replace them. This it cannot do if it blindly follows leadership.

Good followership is supportive of the leadership to work for the common good. This it does by playing its roles effectively. Which roles? The roles are also found in the following attributes of good followership; Obedience to the laws of the country; paying taxes; constructive dialogue/criticisms; allegiance to civic obligations/responsibilities; patriotic and supporting your leaders morally, spiritually and physically. A good follower should in addition follow effectively. Good followers make it difficult for leaders to misrule and mismanage them and their resources.

## **WHAT IS BAD FOLLOWERSHIP?**

Naturally, bad followership is the exact opposite or antithesis of good followership. It implies that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Also meaning that a good followership is not bad and a bad followership is not good. It may be escapist to end this discourse this way. A bad followership therefore is one that either not supportive of leadership or supports its wrongdoings. This is reinforced in societies where values have diminished or have been perverted.

One the whole, bad followership makes the task of governance or managing a very herculean and arduous one. At the very extreme, bad followership can be found in the jungle-a state of anomie and anarchy.

## **EFFECTS OF GOOD LEADERSHIP**

We have stated what good leadership entails in an earlier section of this paper. Therefore, the effects of leadership on followership can be likened to the aftermath of cool breeze at the seaside on a man's body. The Holy Bible makes this clear by saying that "when the righteous rule, the people rejoice". (Proverbs 29:2).

The above statement implies that there is utmost peace in the polity and enabling environment for development. This is the central thesis of this discourse and the whole essence of governance and leadership.

It can therefore be added that one other effect of good leadership is the adoption of enduring standards of development and existence and these must be standards inspired by love and guided by knowledge.

## **EFFECTS OF BAD LEADERSHIP**

The effects of bad leadership include the followings; chaos, anarchy violence, homelessness, despondency, poverty, insecurity, insatiable urge for blood letting, genocide, infanticide and all forms of man-made self induced/inflictions. The list is endless. Above all, it encourages gradual and total withdrawal of the followers from the leader.

Jacques Rousseau opines that "a leader in power is never strong enough" Rousseaus opinion may be more apt on bad leadership. This is justified by the fact that how often a leader wins elections in democratic setting is a measure of his strength.

Quite often, the effects of bad leadership translates to disconnection of the leader from the follower. A bad leader seldom realizes this, but the signposts are lack of communication, apathy and distrust on the part of followership.

## **EFFECTS OF GOOD FOLLOWERSHIP**

As earlier stated, the relationship between leadership and followership is affirmed to be mutually reinforcing, and to such an extent ought to facilitate good governance. This is corroborated by the arguments of the “functionalists” that the question of how an organism such as the human body works entails the biologist identifying different parts of the body such as the brain, lung, liver, heart and kidney etc.

If a part or an organ is examined singularly or in isolation, it would be difficult to explain how life is maintained, since all parts work to maintain the body. The analysis of the different parts of the body and the relationship between them allows for better appreciation of the importance of a healthy human body system. This analogy is not only symbolic but representative of the effect of good followership on leadership, group/organization or country. In this light good followership may sufficiently make for good governance.

The maxim, “a people get the type of leader they deserves”, readily holds in this context. Good followership begets good leadership. However, good leadership may not get good followership but it deserves one. A followership must therefore embark on self appraisal of its contribution to the system, which is a cardinal issue in leadership effectiveness.

## **EFFECTS OF BAD FOLLOWERSHIP**

Iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). It therefore means that if followership is bad Lunt, dull, corrupt, incapable etc, there will be no one to correct, constructively criticize, advise and reinforce good leadership.

We may even ask the following questions: Does the average citizen realize his/her role as a follower? Do you need to fall over yourself in order to get your leaders to perform? Answers to these questions are not far fetched. No matter how good leadership is, if the followership is bad, there is a great tendency for such leadership to become lax, insensitive, unfocused, and unproductive and ultimately loses control of governance as a result of bad followership.

It becomes obvious that a recur to normlessness will be inevitable, and such society becomes perverse and permissive. We may even be right to conclude that perverse values, beliefs and culture are at the very base of bad followership.

## CONCLUSION

The pivot of any group organization or country is leadership. Leadership is the critical element which harnesses other resources for organizational and national success or effectiveness. However, this type of leadership must be qualitative, possess cognitive and connative intelligence, focus on responsibilities, emphasize value based service, understand the needs of the people and the key stakeholders that ought to be served – thus reconciling power with service.

To a very large extent also, this paper has demonstrated that followership has a major role to play in organizational and national growth or success, therefore good followership is a necessary condition for leadership effectiveness.

A combination of good leadership and followership, and deliberate symbiosis between them will undoubtedly facilitate the development efforts of any country. In other words, leadership and followership significantly influence one another thereby making the result of one a reflection of the other.

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