

Enhancing Organisational Performance Through Effective Leadership In Nigeria's Public Organisations

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of effective Leadership in enhancing organizational performance in Nigeria's Public Organizations. The study was guided by three specific objectives which included the identification of leadership functions necessary to enhance organizational performance. The study was a desk research; hence, secondary source of data was used through the review of theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study. The study adopted Fielder's contingency theory as theoretical framework of analysis. The findings clearly indicate that though leadership plays vital roles in improving organizational performance, many people in leadership positions in public organizations do not readily understand what constitute leadership functions, qualities and the dynamic nature of leadership styles. A major implication of the study is that organizational performance in Nigeria's public organizations will continue to deteriorate if nothing is urgently done to address the leadership challenge. The study therefore, recommends among others that organizational leadership should have a full knowledge of the functions and responsibilities of their positions to enable them perform effectively. It was also recommended that organizations should invest in the development of strategic human resources and leadership skills in situational analysis as such skills will help them find out important contingency factors that influence their leadership style.

Key words: Organization. Leadership. Performance. Effectiveness.

Introduction

The performance of public sector organizations globally, depend largely on their leadership. Leadership is an important function which is concerned with the process of influencing the behaviour of subordinates in the direction of goal attainment. The nature of leadership as a critical element in the attainment of organizational objectives, explains why leadership issues globally are given prime attention in the discussion of modern organizations, be it public or private. The impact of leadership functions, qualities and practices or styles on the success of any organization cannot be over-emphasized.

The prevailing leadership crisis in many Nigerian public organisations constitute a clog in the progress of the organizations. The persistent management problems due to disagreement on expenditure criteria, award of contracts and employment quota are some of the issues that have remained intractable in some of these organisations. This situation has eventually led to the dissolution of the management of some of these organisations.

Emphasizing the critical role of leadership in influencing organizational performance, Nordstron (2006) notes that employees no longer snap to attention when ordered to do so. According to him,

Employees don't passively fall into line and intimidation and threat do not work. The fact that the work force is no longer subservient doesn't mean that leadership is redundant, however, on the contrary, the new world of work requires even more thoughtful and meaningful leadership (Nordstron, 2006: 271).

He posits that leaders must challenge people to depart from the past and to create new ones. This new form of leadership he observes is about stirring the pot instead of putting on the lid. The new leaders are creators of chaos as much as originator of orders. It is the job of great leaders to support the organization in combining order and chaos, he notes.

To this end, leadership has become so pivotal that both success and failure of any organization are attributed to the leadership style of the person or group of persons that pilot the activities of that system. Leadership is the key to the growth or development of any system. The issue of leadership has always been of

great interest and concern to development oriented people and nations. Throughout history, the great nations, institutions and groups have been associated with specific leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Organizational failures in Nigerian public organizations have provoked series of arguments among researchers and scholars like Ewurum (2007) who posits that leadership entails having the mental ability to tackle problems as well as providing the needed direction towards achieving individual and group goals.

The situation in some of the organizations is a good reference point. Despite the appointment of new management teams and institution of boards of enquiry into the affairs of these organisations, the problems still persist. The major problems responsible for this state of affairs have been identified to include lack of understanding of leadership functions necessary for enhanced organizational performance. Others are absence of effective leadership qualities and lack of understanding of appropriate leadership styles required to boost organizational performance. These problems constitute the major factors in virtually all known instances of low performance in public organizations. This situation made Achebe (1983) cited in Njoku (2004: 50) to observe that:

the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of it's leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership.

In some organizations, conscious efforts have been made to enhance the quality and effectiveness of leaders through formal management capacity building programmes. But unfortunately, this has not achieved the expected result. Ineffective leadership still abounds in Nigerian organizations, resulting to poor organizational performance, hence the need for this research on enhancing organizational performance through effective leadership in Nigeria's public organisations.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the role of effective leadership in enhancing organizational performance in Nigeria's public organizations. The specific objectives include:

- i. To identify leadership functions necessary for enhanced organizational performance.
- ii. To examine the qualities of effective leadership required to improve organizational performance.
- iii. To determine the leadership styles needed to boost organizational performance

Theoretical Review

There are different views on what organizational performance means. It has been pointed out by Bates and Holton in Armstrong (2003: 478) that "performance is a multidimensional construct, the measurement of which varies depending on a variety of factors". They also state that it is important to determine whether the measurement objective is to assess performance outcomes or behaviour.

According to Kane (1996) in Armstrong, organizational performance can be regarded simply as the record of outcome achieved by an organization. He argues that performance 'is something that the person leaves behind and that exists part from the purpose'. Bernadin (1995) in Amstrong (2003: 481) is concerned that: "performance should be defined as the outcome of work because they provide the strongest linkage to the strategic goals of the organization, customer satisfaction, and economic contributions". The Oxford English Dictionary defines performance as: "The accomplishment, execution, carrying out, and working out anything ordered or undertaken." This refers to outputs/outcomes (accomplishment) but also states that performance is about doing the work as well as being about the results achieved. Performance could therefore be regarded as behaviour – the way in which organization teams and individuals get work done. Campbell (1990) cited in Armstrong (2003: 481) believes that "performance is behaviour and should be distinguished from the outcomes because they can be contaminated by system factors".

A more comprehensive view of performance is achieved if it is defined as embracing both behaviour and outcomes. This is well put by Brumbach (1988) cited in Armstrong (2003: 483):

Performance means both behaviours and results. Behaviours emanate from the performance and transform performance from abstraction to action. Not just the instruments for results, behaviours are also outcomes in their own right – the product of mental and physical effort applied to tasks – and can be judged apart from results.

This definition of performance leads to the conclusion that in managing the performance of teams and individuals both inputs (behaviour) and outputs (results) need to be considered. Hartle (1995) in Armstrong (2003) notes that this is the so-called 'mixed model' of performance management which covers competency levels and achievements as well as objective setting and review.

Performance measures are agreed when setting objectives. It is necessary to define not only what is to be achieved but how those concerned will know that it has been achieved. Performance measures should provide evidence of whether or not the intended result has been achieved and the extent to which the job holder has produced that result. This will be the basis for generating feedback information for use not only by managers but also by individuals to monitor their own performance (Armstrong 2003).

Kaplan and Norton (1992) cited in Armstrong (2003: 489 – 490) has identified the following as guidelines for defining individual performance measures:

- Measure should relate to results, not effort.
- The result must be within the job holder's control.
- Measure should be objective and observable.
- Data must be available for measurement.
- Existing measures should be used or adapted wherever possible

Measures can be classified under the following headings (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) in Armstrong (2003: 490):

- Finance – income, economic value added, shareholder value; of return, costs;
- Output – units produced or processed, value accounts;
- Impact – attainment of a standard (quality, level of service etc), changes in behaviour (internal and external customers), completion of work/project, level of take-up of a service, innovation;
- Reaction-judgement by others, colleagues, internal and external customers;
- Time-speed of response or turnaround, achievements compared with timetables, amount of backlog, time to market and delivery times.

Concept of Leadership

Leadership is vital for the successful accomplishment of the goals of any organization. Leadership is not an attribute of business alone. In the army, government, universities and anywhere people work in groups, the leadership function emerges. There must be somebody to guide the groups.

In his survey of leadership theories and research, Stogdill cited in Stoner et al (2000) pointed out that there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept. They state that leadership is the process of directing and influencing the task-related activities of group members. They further noted some implications of their description of leadership, one of which is that leadership involves other people-employees or followers who by their willingness to accept directions from the leader, defined the leaders status and make the leadership process possible. Thus without people to lead, all the leadership qualities of a leader would be irrelevant.

Another implication they noted is that leadership involves an unequal distribution of powers between leaders and group members. Group members are not powerless because they can and do shape group activities in a number of ways. Yet another important aspect of leadership is the ability to use the different forms of power to influence followers' behaviours in a number of ways (Stoner et al, 2000).

Kootnz and O. Donnel in Njoku (2008: 193) define leadership as "the art or process of influencing people in positive ways so that they are willing to cooperate with the leader to achieve organizational goals". On his part, Nwachukwu (1988) in Njoku (2008: 193) sees leadership as a social influencing process for the attainment of goals. He observes that a leader is the most influential person in an organization who provides direction, guides group activities and ensures that group objectives are attained. Njoku (2008), Inyang (2004) and Jones et al (2000) agree that effective leadership involves the facilitation of the achievement of group goals through willing and enthusiastic group members. They also agree that when leaders are ineffective, their influence do not contribute to and often detract from goals attainment. They note that a leader may influence employees, but the kind of influence exerted may hinder organization goals attainment. This situation may arise as a result of overly optimistic performance projections, which may lead to poor decision making and bad leadership practice.

Effective leadership is therefore important and indispensable in any organization or group because it is both the adhesive that binds a work group together and the catalyst that triggers employee motivation. Thus, leadership can have a major influence on enterprise performance.

Leadership, then, is something more than just personality or accident or appointment. It is intimately linked with behaviour. It is essentially a human process at work in organizations. Leadership can be described as a dynamic process whereby one individual influences the others to contribute voluntarily to the achievement of group task in a given situation. Several points can be made about this definition. Firstly, leadership is a dynamic process, not a static one. This implies that a range of leadership styles, is preferable to any one best style. Secondly, the role of the leader is to direct the group towards group goals. In an informal, or unofficial group, these roles would have been agreed by the group itself. In a formal group, the goals will have been set mainly, if not exclusively, by senior managers outside the group. Thirdly, the style of leadership and the reactions of the group will be determined considerably by the situation concerned (the task, external pressures etc) (Cole, 2000).

The basic elements of the above definition of leadership are four in number, as illustrated in figure 1 below:

Leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills • Knowledge • Personality 	Tasks/Goals
Subordinates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills • motivation 	Environmental/Situation

Key leadership variables: Cole, G.A. (2000: 51)

The key variables are:

1. The leader
2. Task/goals
3. The group members (subordinates), and
4. Environment/situation

Taken together, these variables form total leadership situation and the art of leadership is to find the best balance between them in the light of the total situation.

Leadership Functions and Organization Performance

The above clarifications of the concept of leadership indicate that effective leadership is very essential in any work organization.

Researchers exploring leadership functions came to the conclusion that to operate effectively, groups need someone to perform two major functions: task related or problem-solving functions and group maintenance or social functions. Group maintenance function include such actions as mediating disputes and ensuring that individuals feel valued by the group (Stoner et al, 2000).

An individual who is able to perform both roles successfully would be an effective leader. In practice, however a leader may have the skill or temperament or time to play only one role. This does not mean that the group is doomed, through. Studies have found that most effective groups have some form of shared leadership: One person (usually the manager or formal leaders) performs the task function, while another member performs the social function.

However, Katz and Kahn in Inyang (2004: 125 – 126) has identified the following leadership functions:

1. Leadership is necessary in co-ordinating and directing behaviour towards goal accomplishment.
2. Leadership functions to maintain the stability of an organization in a turbulent environment by allowing for rapid adjustment and adaptation of changing environmental conditions.
3. Leadership plays a major role in maintaining need satisfaction and personal goal attainment
4. Leadership initiates organizational structure, which forms the framework through which the activities of an organization are carried out. It is contended that if the leadership of an organization fails to initiate adequate structure, there will be faulty allocation of roles and this will impede organization performance.

Njoku (2008) on his part notes that leadership transforms potentials into reality. In the process of transforming the potentials of subordinates, a leader is required to perform many functions which include the following:

- a. **Development of Teamwork:** A leader inculcates a sense of collectivism in the employees and makes them to work as a team.
- b. **Representation of Subordinates:** He serves as the bridge between the subordinates and top management.
- c. **Counseling:** A leader serves as an appropriate counselor to the subordinates in times of need.

- d. **Proper use of Power:** A leader should be able to use his powers properly so as to arouse subordinates compliance and co-operation to his initiatives.
- e. **Time Management:** A leader must be able to manage his time well by proper planning based on information and by arriving at decisions at the moment.
- f. **Achieving Effectiveness:** It is the duty of a leader to provide the enabling environment and adequate reward structure to prove the effectiveness of employees (Njoku, 2008: 193 – 194).

Incorporating almost the points discussed above, House and Mitchel (1971) cited in Chukwuemeka (2007), maintain that for effective organizational performance, the leader should embark upon the following strategic functions:

1. Recognizing and or arousing subordinate's needs for outcomes over which the leader has some control.
2. Increasing personal payoffs to subordinates for work goal attainment.
3. Making the path to those payoffs easier to travel by coaching and direction.
4. Reducing frustration.
5. Helping subordinates to clarify expectations.
6. Increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction contingent on effective performance.

Qualities of Effective Organizational Leadership

Discussing effective organizational leadership qualities is very problematic. This is because many individuals occupying executive or leadership positions have been found to exhibit different traits that are sometimes contradictory (Chukwuemeka, 2007: 282). It is in realization of this fact that Drucker (1967) in Ezeani (2006: 157) contends that:

...among the effective executives I have known and worked with, there are extroverts and aloof, retiring men, some even mobility-shy. Some are eccentrics; others are painfully correct conformists. Some are fat and some are thin. Some are warriors and some are relaxed. Some drink quite heavily and others are total abstainers. Some, men of great charm and warmth, some have no more personality than a frozen mackerel.

From the above, one observes that what constitutes effective leadership under a particular circumstance, may possibly not be adequate in another situation. Because of this, Chukwuemeka (2007) contends that talking of universal characteristics of effective leader becomes problematic. According to him, it is in cognizance of this fact that McGregor (1966) in Ezeani (2006) asserts that "It is more fruitful to consider leadership between a leader and the situation than as a universal pattern of characteristics possessed by certain people". Hence, effectiveness depends on the style appropriate to the situation in which it is used.

Though from the above discussion, the relationship that exists between leadership and the situational variables, makes enumerating qualities some effective leaders should possess difficult, yet, there are still some qualities that appear common to majority of the leaders. Chukwuemeka (2007: 283 – 386) has identified these qualities as follows

- g. Optimism and intelligence
- h. Good communication skills
- i. Reasoned judgment
- j. Emotional stability
- k. Technical proficiency or know-how
- l. Quick-decision-making ability
- m. Requisite Charisma

Other qualities like initiative, independence and inventiveness, which enhance perception of need for action, and the urge to do it, have been identified as inclusive in the qualities a leader should possess. The existence of these qualities does not make them sufficient conditions for effective leadership. In other words, according to Ezeaku (1989) in Chukwuemeka (2007: 286), "... there is no guarantee that when one possesses them, one is bound to be a successful leader, but whoever lacks them completely is very unlikely to succeed as a leader".

Leadership Style and Organizational Performance

According to Koontz (1980) cited in Njoku (2013), the ability to lead and willingness to follow are based on leadership styles. Leadership styles refer to different philosophies adopted by leaders in the piloting of the affairs or activities of an organization. Eclon (1992) cited in Nwankwo (2007), maintains that leadership philosophies find expression in the way the enterprise is organized and in the design of lines of demarcation of authority, accountability and responsibility.

The exercise of authority forms the basis upon which many researchers classify the styles of leadership. Experiences have shown that these leadership philosophies as well as perception of constraints and opportunities have immense influence on organizational performance.

There could be numerous styles of leadership, but for academic convenience, most scholars in the study of corporate management have compressed and categorized them into three major kinds namely, laissez-faire, autocratic/despotic and democratic styles of leadership.

- a) **Laissez-Faire Style of Leadership:** The assumption here is that there is no need to keep people under control, dictate for them, or direct them towards a given action. Rather, the leader should give the subordinates free hand to discharge their functions as they deem fit. Without any sort of control as this style of leadership presupposes, there will be no discipline and where there is lack of caution, people will not know their limits, and anarchy soon sets in.
- b) **Democratic Style of Leadership:** This style of leadership implies participation of both the leader and his subordinates in decision-making. The leader presents an issue and then requests for opinions, suggestions or alternative ideas from his subordinates. He then takes a decision after a careful assessment of all the divergent opinions and facts that are presented to him. The presumption here is that there are personal initiatives in the subordinates which could be beneficial to the leader in the formation of intelligent corporate policies. Instead of assuming that the leader knows all, it rather accepts that two heads are better than one. Consequently, democratic style of leadership maintains that the best decision emerges when many heads are participating.
- c) **Autocratic or Despotism Style of Leadership:** This style of leadership assumes that the consummation of intelligence needed for the formulation of corporate policies lies in the leader. Consequently, the leader does the thinking and takes all decisions while the subordinates are duty-bound to concede and implement his policies without any objection. This style of leadership relies on intimidation and coercion to ensure compliance.

Empirical Review

The development of every system is to a good extent, at the mercy of its leadership; as the system may challenge or reject its leaders or may confirm them in their roles as posited by Okpata and Njoku (2008) in their study on "Leadership recruitment and influence process: the challenge of national development in Nigeria". Their findings indicated that sectoral leadership in Nigeria so far, has no influence or impact on national development and to facilitate national development through effective leadership, Nigeria must imbibe a new culture and orientation in their method of leadership recruitment as well as develop attitudinal change for positive leadership influence. The study which adopted descriptive method of analysis had its conclusion which is in tandem with the findings of a related study carried out by Iweajuna and Njoku (2008). According to them, poverty in Nigeria has become precarious and endemic because of the attitude of the leadership which is far from being good.

In another study titled "The role of leadership in Nigeria's tomorrow", Onyekwere and Onwubiko (2008) concluded that the present predicaments afflicting the populace and which largely, have threatened to shipwreck democratic substance and good governance in Nigeria have been traced to bad/ineffective leadership. The study which adopted historical analysis, made the researcher to note that a group, or private, a state or country, must have leaders whose primary functions would be to control, direct, supervise, and influence so that such a body or country can achieve its goals and set objectives. This is in line with Onyekwere et al (2008) in their study on "The role of leadership in Nigeria's tomorrow" where he fully agreed with Achebe that the problem with us is our leadership who "issue and reissue empty promises with their finger crossed behind their backs".

In another incisive study titled "prioritizing national development agenda: good governance, security and technology imperatives", Okpata (2012) analytically espoused the failure of leadership in Nigeria to prioritize its development programmes. The study which adopted exploratory approach anchored on the Marxist political economy model advised the leadership of public organizations and the government to be determined to lead with transparency, accountability and sincerity of purpose.

Also in a separate study titled "effective leadership as catalyst for sustainable national development", Ufomba and Alozie (2012) posited that effective leadership and good governance are necessary conditions for meaningful national development. The desk research which was historical in approach concluded that the real impediments to sustainable development in Nigeria has more to do with the absence of effective leadership than with any other reasons one may adduce. The study noted that research has confirmed a strong positive relationship between effective leadership and organizational performance.

The findings and conclusions of these studies clearly show that effective leadership is central to the attainment of any defined corporate objectives and development goals. This provides a strong relationship between these studies and the present one on “enhancing organizational performance through effective leadership in public sector organizations”.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base of this study is anchored on the contingency theory of leadership. The key variables in the discussion of this theory are tasks, people and the organizational situation. Cole (2000) notes that the first theorist to use the label “contingency” explicitly was F.E. Fielder (1967). In his view, group performance is contingent upon the leadership adopting an appropriate style in the light of the relative favourableness of the situation. According to Fielder, the three most important variables in determining the relative favourableness of the situation are:

1. Leader – member relations
2. Degree of structure in task and
3. Power and authority of the position

The central theme of the theory is that effective leadership lies in what the leader does to meet the needs of task, group and individuals. Hence, the major concern of the contingency theory is with the “variety of factors – task, people and situation which have a direct bearing on leadership and leadership style” (Cole, 2000: 55)

One important contribution of the contingency perspective may be summed up in the statement that “there is no one best way to lead”. The contingency theorists posit that there are many effective ways to perform various administrative duties. Hence, they stress that the best ways to lead an organization varies with the situation, noting that a particular leadership style may be effective in one situation, and result to improved organizational performance, but may lead to disastrous results in another situation. In some situations, the leader’s best approach to subordinates may be directive and directional while in others, a sympathetic and democratic approach may be appropriate (Njoku, 2008)

Thus, according to the contingency approach, there are no plans, organization structures, leadership styles, or controls that will fit all situations. There are few if any, universal truths, concept, and principles that can be applied under all conditions. Instead, every management situation must be approached with the “it all depends”, situations. They must find different ways that fit different situations. They must continually address themselves with the question: which method will work best here? For example, in order to improve productivity, classical theories may prescribe work simplification and additional incentives; the behavioural scientist may recommend job enrichment and democratic participation of employees in the decision-making process. Instead, a manager trained in the contingency approach, may offer a solution that is respective to the characteristics of the total situation being faced. Organizations characterized by limited resources, unskilled labour force, limited training opportunities, limited products offered to local markets-work simplifications would be the ideal. Job enrichment programme would work better if the organization employs skilled labour force. Managerial action depends upon circumstances within a given situation. No one best approach will work in all situations.

Applying a contingency (situational) approach requires that managers diagnose a given situation and adapt to meet the conditions present. According to Albanses (1987) in Cole (2000), the strength of contingency theory rests on two points: first, it focuses attention on specific situational factors that influence the appropriateness of one managerial strategy over another; second, it highlights the importance to managers of developing skills in situational analysis. Such skills will help managers find out important contingency factors that influence their approach to managing.

Conclusion

In this study, the role of effective leadership in boosting organizational success has been discussed. It was noted that effective leadership is indispensable to organizational performance. The style of leadership at work in a given organization dictates the organizational performance that effective leadership is said to be the bedrock and sine-qua-non for all organizational growth and development.

Ineffective leadership on the other hand breeds poor organizational performance. If the leadership of an organization is incompetent, the activities of its component members will be paralysed. All hands might be on the wheel, but none will be steering it (Chukwuemeka, 2007: 293). The structure will be weak and role allocation faulty.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

1. Organizational leaders should have a full knowledge of the functions and responsibilities of their positions to enable them be effective.
2. People in leadership positions must strive to acquire or develop the qualities that boost performance effectiveness. Such vital skills as human relations, communication, motivation and decision making skills must be cultivated by leaders.
3. It is pertinent for leaders to always understand the unique variables within their organizational environment in order to enable them adopt the style(s) that match them.
4. Education is a competitive weapon for individuals as well as firms. If organizations want to attract and retain effective leaders, they should make training an indispensable tool for leadership equipment.
5. In order to effectively co-ordinate and control the activities of an organization for improved performance, leaders must strive to build teamwork and group harmony.
6. Leaders should equally continually strive to develop effective and best practice leadership qualities that would make their management total quality driven.

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