

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR NIGERIA

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Abstract

Exploring the state of Nigerian leadership, there is a clear indication that the nation is in distress and therefore needs a leader who would be able to get the best out of Nigerian followers and lead the nation to stability. This leader must be trustworthy, emotionally intelligent, firm, willing to suffer for the nation, focused on breaking down ethnic divide, and inspiring hope in the people. The leader must be capable of taking in varied information and solving complex problems effectively and efficiently. This paper adopts the concept of leadership as one that involves a social influence process, a leader/leaders and followers. This perspective is impacted by social psychological principles of social influence and clinical psychology socio-emotional intelligence and will therefore discuss leadership for Nigeria from these perspectives.

Keywords: leadership, nation, Nigeria, stability, ethnic

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1. Introduction

Efforts to understand leadership and its components have been on for many years. In the 1980s, the focus of studies was on investigating and comprehending the initiation of leadership structures in varied contexts and the examination of contingency models. During the 1990s, there was a shift to understanding the elements of leadership such as charisma, transformational attributes, vision, ethics of leadership and motivation. The late 1990s saw a movement towards the examination of team, strategic and global leadership and concepts of followership. Now, 20 years later, with numerous studies of leadership, there is better understanding of what makes leadership, its measurement, ethical and unethical behaviour, contextual variables and people's perception of leadership in varied contexts.

Several scholars have expressed varied views about leadership. According to Avolio, Sosik, Jung and Berson (2003), leadership is "a social influence process that can occur at the individual, dyadic, group, or strategic level, where it can be shared within a top management team" (p.277). Katz and Kahn(1978) subscribed to a leadership definition encompassing incremental influence that is over and above that required to be consistent with the normal directive of an organization. Bryman (1996) synthesizing previous descriptions of leadership suggested that the hallmark of leadership is the presence of social influence where a person inspires or motivates other members of a group to attain specific group goals and objectives. Another definition posited that leadership is a concept realized in a process where one or more persons successfully frames or defines the reality of other people (Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

This paper adopts the concept of leadership as one that involves a social influence process, a leader/leaders and followers. This perspective is impacted by social psychological principles of social influence and clinical psychology socio-emotional intelligence. It should be understood that a leader must be capable of exerting power on followers in order to motivate them to achieve the specific goals of the organization.

2. Leadership Issues

Some questions that have continued to be tabled by individuals, groups and organizations in this information and communication technology age include issues surrounding the impact of distance on the articulation and implementation of the vision of the organization. When the workplace is a virtual space (e.g., internet) or when members of

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the organisation are separated by geographical space, is it still possible for the leader or leaders to motivate other members of the organization to achieve the target goals of the organization? Is cohesion of units still an essential part of the establishment and if yes, do technology and virtual space affect the cohesion of the organization?

In this age, the emphasis across organizations such as educational institutions, professional bodies, private and public companies is on global positioning. When an organization goes global, the expected outcome will be an increase in cultural diversity. Diversity is considered an enriching factor but it poses several challenges associated with cultural differences. How should individuals in leadership positions manage the challenges associated with diversity in the workplace?

Perhaps, exploring leadership and the creation of meaning may help us understand how leaders emerge and manage followers to achieve the group goals. It has been suggested that leaders create and use impression management to lead their followers to support their visions. This presupposes that both the individual who leads the small business enterprise, the *fortune 500* organization and the three-man robbery syndicate achieve their goals by influencing their followers to accept their vision and work towards achieving target goals. As it has been noted that contextual variables impact leadership, it is proper to wonder whether cultural diversity affects the creation and management of meaning. It has also been suggested that varied types of leaders (e.g., charismatic and noncharismatic leaders) use different approaches to create and use meaning to guide their followers to support their vision.

Using the framework of Smircich and Morgan (1992), it is easier to comprehend the position of certain researchers suggesting that charismatic leaders often emerge in times of crisis "because they offer a viable alternative interpretation to resolve the crisis while managing an impression of confidence and an ability to inspire followers to pursue a solution" (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). For strategic leaders whose job it is to define the current and future directions of their organization, creation and management of meaning to achieve their strategic plans might be daunting because they sometimes lose their mandate when their framing of vision and goals are incongruent or incomprehensible to their followers or when there is a perception that the strategic plans do not assure success (Ireland & Hitt, 1999; Aviola et al 2003; Howard, 2001).

In terms of the development of ethical or unethical leadership, research has shown that prosocial motives, trustworthiness and morality are essential determinants of effective leader-follower relationship. For example, studies on charismatic leaders have elucidated the difference between leaders who are constructive (ethical) and those that are destructive (unethical). Constructive leaders have been found to subscribe to prosocial behaviours of empathy, trustworthiness, selfless attitude, being considerate and emphasizing collective missions. On the contrary, destructive leaders tend to be self-centered and self-aggrandizing, exploitative, domineering, manipulative and they use fear to promote compliance among followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner & Connelly, 1995).

3. Leadership Models

Goleman (1995), discussing managing with the heart, wrote on the importance of emotional intelligence in the work place. According to Goleman (1995), a study of 250 executive managers showed that most of the managers felt that their job required them to use their head and not their hearts. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) in the book entitled *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* presented six leadership styles, namely, visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter and commanding. Describing the visionary leader, Goleman et al. (2002) posited that the leader formulates a

plan for a new direction for the followers. However, the leader does not provide for the strategies for getting the group to the desired goal. Thus, the followers have the freedom to be innovative, take risks and try new ideas. According to Goleman and colleagues (2002), this leadership style is most appropriate for an organization in need of a new direction and is geared towards getting the followers to focus on a new vision for the organization.

Coaching leadership style focuses more on assisting followers one-on-one to develop their capacity to accomplish tasks. The leader helps the group to find a relationship between their personal goals and that of the organization. This leadership style is most appropriate for leading individuals who already exhibit initiative and are interested in their professional development. However, when the leader is perceived as micro-managing the followers, the self-confidence of the followers may be compromised (Goleman, et al., 2002). In an affiliative style of leadership, team work and harmony among workers is emphasized. According to Goleman, et al., leading with an affiliative strategy is best suited for when team spirit is needed or when trust has been broken and needs to be reconstructed, or there is a need for improved communication or increasing the morale of followers. The challenge with this style of leadership is that individual errors might be overlooked and subsequently lead to a feeling of tolerance for mediocrity among workers which in turn may impact work morale and reduce productivity.

In terms of democratic leadership style, Goleman, et al. (2002) posits that its essence is to tap the knowledge and skills of the followers in such a way that a commitment to group outcome is achieved. However, when matters are urgent or in crisis, democratic leadership may not yield efficient results because of the time required to obtain the opinion of group members and generate group decisions. Commenting on another leadership style, pacesetter, the authors describe a strategy that is characterized by a high standard set by the leader who is committed to doing things well and efficiently and demands the same of followers. This leadership style becomes ineffective when members of the group are not able to meet the standards. Because the followers will feel that they have failed, they may become demoralized and reduce their effort towards achieving the goals of the organization. The last model of leadership described by Goleman, et al., is the commanding leadership, which they term the "military" style. The use of this strategy denotes that the leader demands a certain behaviour from the followers in a commanding way. The challenge is that followers often lose morale and become dissatisfied with their job. In crisis, clear command may be helpful but under other circumstances, followers are not able to give optimal performance. Taken together, all these styles of leadership described by Goleman et al. (2002) appear to be impacted by the context and needs of an organization.

4. Leadership in Nigeria

Reflecting on ethical vs. unethical leadership from studies conducted in western countries indicating that ethical leaders who exhibit empathy, trustworthiness, selfless attitude, and focus on collective mission tend to maintain optimal leader-follower relationships, one wonders whether similar results will be obtained in a country like Nigeria. Considering the attributes of the ethical leader (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner & Connelly, 1995), it is expected that followers of such leader will be more likely to imbibe the vision of the organization as interpreted by the leader and achieve the group goals as a result of intrinsic motivation. Having worked in a Nigerian educational organization for the past three years, I am challenged to believe that the cultural milieu or mindset of the average Nigerian in the workforce seems to be primarily centered on personal rather than group goals. It almost feels as though many followers perceive an empathetic, selfless and considerate attitude as weakness. Imagine working with a follower who seeks permission for a three-day off-duty to take care of

personal health. You grant the request and four hours or a day later, you get a report from other workers that the follower is busy selling goods, commuting people with motorbike, keke, taxi or bus. In the spirit of empathy, you call the follower to order for engaging in such a dubious behaviour but the employee continues to seek and obtain extra work days off duty with fictitious or flimsy excuses. Health matters and death are very serious matters but many followers often do not reflect on the implication of misleading their leaders by lying about such matters in order to obtain some days off.

The most challenging type of work behaviour that takes advantage of the prosocial leader (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) is that which I have observed among individuals who present themselves for employment. These individuals assure the manager that they know their work and are capable of contributing to the organization's goals but as soon as they are offered employment, they begin to demonstrate their incompetence. In some cases, some of the employees "just" sit around from beginning to end of work day doing nothing and yet, at the end of each month, they receive a salary.

Another insulting behaviour of some followers in Nigeria is the attitude of self-aggrandizement. You expect that an empathetic, selfless leader will engender selfless attitude among the followers. However, my experience of Nigeria has shown that regardless of the leader's behaviour, many followers continue to seek ways to "fill their pockets," instead of enriching their organization. In fact, I perceive a situation where many people are struggling to get a share of the "national cake" using any available means such as inflating the prices of goods, selling organizational resources, using organizational resources for personal matters, and extorting money from the less privileged.

Reflecting on my experience thus far, I feel a great concern for the future of Nigeria when I think about how leaders are supposed to exert social influence that should lead followers to embrace organizational or collective goals. I wonder how the types of followers described above will move the nation's development forward. I feel that a charismatic leader is needed in Nigeria. Many have identified that the nation is in distress and has been in the condition for many years. If the literature on the emergence of charismatic leader in time of crisis is effective in the Nigerian context, it would have been the case that the nation should have arisen from her crisis state if there has been a leader with charisma. But given that prosocial behaviour appear to carry minimal valence for the average Nigerian worker, it feels as though a combination of transactional and charismatic leadership may yield a better result for the nation or rather the use of varied types of leadership models posited by Goleman et al. (2002) for specific situations may be more appropriate for Nigeria.

It is important to note here that there have been stories of followers who maintain ethical business behaviour whether or not they have leaders who are ethical themselves in Nigeria. I have had the opportunity to experience individuals who are truly hardworking, accountable and responsible. These individuals attend to their work because they are intrinsically motivated to complete their job tasks well. Sometimes, I have heard people asking these types of workers why they have chosen to be exceptional in carrying out their tasks. These experiences I have had make me more convinced that one style of leadership may not be effective to get Nigeria out of distress. A leader guiding diverse followers, with some task-oriented, some responsible and some self-centered, must be prepared to manage each group with a style of leadership that will get them to deliver for their organization.

In reviewing all the leadership styles posited by Goleman, et al. (2002), it is apparent that none of the strategies is totally positive. Each one has its pros and cons. Some are suitable for crisis times while others are better for stable organizational climate. Connecting back to my reflection on the Nigerian situation, it can be deduced that a dialectical and charismatic leadership approach is relevant to the nation. The leader would be better able to get the best out of Nigerian followers if the leader uses varied styles that

match the ethics of different groups of followers and the context of the organization. Essentially, the ability to master the minds of followers and influence them appropriately would be necessary for the advancement of Nigeria.

Further, the changing nature of the workplace, increased diversity, technological advancements, internet generation people, environmental challenges and global competition will require leaders to demonstrate emotional and cultural intelligence that will help them to be tolerant, empathetic and cooperative. Leaders must be capable of taking in varied information and solving complex problems effectively and efficiently. It is important to have a leader who can propound and implement solutions to Nigeria's many challenges and break the vicious cycle of economic, social and moral distress.

Nigeria needs a leader who is capable of changing the structure and mindset of the people. Maybe someone with the characteristics of Jerry Rawlings of Ghana who was firm, consistent, earned the trust of Ghanaians and changed the landscape of his nation. The leader would also need to possess Ghandi's personality such that he can pray, fast and suffer to bring the nation out of distress. It may also be important for this leader to be a Julius Nyerere to Nigeria and encourage the people to contribute to the welfare of the community rather than personal aggrandizement. The leader would also need to embody the characteristics of Nelson Mandela who refused to accept "an eye for an eye" ideal insisting on holding the country together through promotion of reconciliation between people of European and African descent. Mandela saw and experienced the evil of racism and refused to accept a system of ethnic divide. Nigeria needs this type of leader who will bring the people to a self-consciousness that promotes unity. Martin Luther King Jnr. during his lifetime strove to overcome hatred in all its ramifications and preferred the concept of working together for social justice. His activities and famous speech, "I Have a Dream" were instrumental to dismantling racial segregation and inspiring hope in the people of the United States of America. Nigeria needs a leader who will focus on stabilizing the nation, unsettling ethnic divide and enthusing hope and unity among the people of Nigeria.

The stability of any nation usually passes through a gradual process. The whole history of the world is a history of colonisation, wars and dispossession. For example, Britain was conquered by the Celts who controlled the country for many years. The Romans in turn conquered Britain from the Celts, ruled for about 400 years and also integrated some elements of Celtic life into their lifestyle. In 450 AD, the Romans fell to the Angles, Saxons and Jutes (three Germanic races from Northern parts of Germany). The Anglosaxons during their reign also assimilated some elements of the culture of the people they conquered and introduced a language which is now known as Old English. After 300 years, another group of invaders from northern Germany, the Scandinavians, conquered many parts of Britain, having their influence in the so called Danelaw region of Britain. In 1066, the Normands conquered Britain, integrated some elements of British life into their own and brought the French language into the country. After the 1066 conquest, the nation was never conquered again on its own soil. It became a self-conscious nation and stopped being merely "the conquered." In the cause of time, towards the end of 14th century, the English Language was accepted again as the official language of their parliament (Corbishley, Gillingham, Kelly, Dawson, Mason & Morgan, 1998; Crystal, 1995).

So, nationhood is a gradual process of going through difficult experiences which will give the people a feeling that they belong together and share a common destiny. This must be the road for Nigeria. We are just 50 years. We don't have enough experiences as a nation. We must allow the process of nationhood to run its course. We must be patient with ourselves. Trying to crush the baby, Nigeria, before it is old enough to take its place among the nations of the world will not be the right thing to do. It is only a charismatic leader who will understand that what is needed is the creation of stable structures and a redirection of

the mindset of the people to focus on selflessness that will sustain the growth of the baby. We must pray for such a leader to emerge and lead us.

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