The Impact of Leadership Principles on Worker Engagement: A Qualitative Study on Local Government Administration of Yobe State

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Abstract

This qualitative study focused on Yobe State local government administration and investigated how leadership principles affect staff engagement. It was discovered through observations and interviews that the majority of the local government adhered to the authoritarian leadership principle. This had a detrimental effect on the ability of local government workers to encourage motivation and a sense of participation among themselves. According to the qualitative survey, a lack of clear direction, poor communication, and few possibilities for professional development contributed to employees' feelings of disconnection and demotivation. Disengaged, micromanaging, or dictatorial leadership styles were especially harmful since they discouraged trust and involvement. These results led to recommendations for leaders to embrace more inclusive, empowered, and supportive leadership techniques that put goal alignment, communication, and employee well-being first. Local government councils may effectively meet their objectives, increase productivity, and promote employee engagement by putting these improvements into practice.

Keywords: Impact, Leadership, Employee Engagement, Local Government, Yobe State

Introduction

Being an essential aspect of life, leadership is acknowledged in providing the ability to guide, inspire, and influence others towards a common goal or vision. Effective leadership can positively impact individuals, teams, organizations, and even society as a whole. Likewise, leadership can negatively impact individuals, teams, organizations and societies (Wendt, 2009). As contextual as the concept of leadership may appear, it denotes different things depending on the context upon which it is used. To Russel (2005), the use of one's own or several people's personal influence through communication to achieve the organization's objectives is known as leadership. In a different manner, Hassan (2021) viewed leadership as the capacity to persuade others to heed advice or respect one's judgment.

One of the many responsibilities of leadership is to engage the workforce. Employee engagement refers to the degree of emotional attachment, value, and dedication to an organization (Schuler, 2008). Employee engagement gauges how much a worker is psychologically, emotionally, and physically bonded to an organization. Numerous advantages of employee engagement include higher motivation, improved work habits, productivity, lower employee turnover, higher employee involvement, and an overall improvement in the organization's performance (Ruganzi, 2017) According to Markos (2010), given consideration to the crucial nature of employee engagement, an organization might not succeed in its goals without the engagement of its employees, and employees might not get the results they want.

Several studies have been conducted on different leadership principles. Different scholars have attempted to elucidate which leadership principle is most effective in eliciting employee engagement. For instance, Barling and Cooper (2008) noted that a democratic leadership principle almost always increases employees' sense of belonging by allowing them to participate in free decision-making processes and by listening to their points of view. This, in turn, increases employee engagement in an organization because employees are more committed to organizations where they are valued for their contributions. To Robert (2015), authoritative leadership principle was more effective in fostering employee engagement because workers were more likely to follow a firm, assertive, and dedicated leader who sets high standards and looks for innovative methods to inspire staff to meet them. From a different point of view, transformational leadership principle as noted by Bass and Avolio (1994), motivates and enables followers to achieve their full potential and create positive change in their organization or community. Transformational leaders foster creativity and innovation, forging strong bonds with their followers. Also contributing to the debate on leadership principle that foster employee engagement, Odumeru and Ogbonna (2013). Opined that transactional leadership focuses on maintaining the status quo and efficiently completing tasks within an organization, unlike transformational leadership which inspires and empowers followers.

Despite verifiable assertions of all the aforementioned experts, there remains a significant vacuum because no academic study has yet been conducted on the ideal leadership style for increasing employee engagement with a focus on local government administration. Local governments administration has a capacity to comprehend the particular requirements and preferences of their communities and adjust policies and services appropriately. However, numerous studies have reported on the increasing leadership challenges across local governments in Nigeria. Empirical evidences suggested that local government leadership in Nigeria is faced with issues of corruption, lack of accountability, and widespread poverty that hinder effective governance (Seteolu, 2004). In addition, political interference, lack of autonomy, corruption, inadequate funding, and poor

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capacity building was noted by Alao (2015) affecting the effectiveness of local government authorities. Furthermore, while exploring the relationship between leadership style and job performance of employees in local government councils of Delta State, Nigeria. Omaghomi (2023) found a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership style and employee job performance. The study also revealed that employees in local government councils of Delta State perceived their supervisors as adopting a more transformational leadership style than transactional leadership style. Despite availability of the impact of leadership philosophy on worker engagement in literature, a contextual gap exists, necessitating further studies to understand the impact of leadership principles on worker engagement from different perspectives. It is on the basis of the literature discussed above; this study aimed at exploring the link existing between leadership principle and local government employee's engagement in local government administration of Yobe state, Nigeria.

A study on the impact of leadership principles on local government employee engagement is significant for several reasons. It is expected that a study on the impact of leadership principle on local government employee engagement can help local governments improve productivity, reduce turnover, enhance employee satisfaction and well-being, shape organizational culture and values, and ultimately enhance citizen satisfaction.

Conceptual clarifications

Concept of leadership: The concept of leadership is highly contextual denoting different things to different people depending on the orientations within which the concept is being put to use. Despite lacking universal definition, attempts have been made in defining the concept. Due to the difficulty in universal definition, the concept of leadership has been described in terms of the various traits that leaders display. Thus, theories of leadership including transformational, transactional, democratic, authoritative, and situational leadership arose, providing a more behavioural and trait-cantered understanding of leadership. In a more demanding definition, Underdal (1991) defines leadership as "an asymmetrical relationship of influence, where one actor guides or directs the behaviour of others towards a certain goal over a certain period of time". Peculiar to this definition is that of a relationship between the leader and followers and a platform for shared values, interests, and beliefs, rather than using force for the achievement of common goal. To Young (1991) leadership is simply "the actions of individuals who endeavour to solve or circumvent the collective action problems that plague the efforts of parties seeking to reap joint gains in processes of institutional bargaining." Furthermore, Cole (2005), defined leadership as a dynamic process whereby an individual influences other to voluntarily contribute towards the realisation and attainment of common goals". Arising from these few definitions, it is evident that the definitions vary according to contexts. Hence, different types of leadership principles as presented below.

Transformational leadership: is the process by which a leader inspires and directs a group of people to achieve a goal. Barling and Cooper (2008) claim that a transformational leadership style is predicated on the actions, intentions, goals, and willingness for change exhibited by the leader. "When leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group," is what Bass (1990) defines as transformational leadership. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformative leadership happens when leaders pique or arouse employees' interests. It is transformative leaders who inspire their teams to put the needs of the organization ahead of their own. There are

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several reasons why transformational leaders are successful, including their ability to inspire and address the emotional needs of their members, as well as their capacity to spark intellectual curiosity in them.

These attributes serve to motivate and inspire followers to exceed their own expectations. Therefore, transformational leadership has the power to motivate staff members in an organization to produce unforeseen and noteworthy outcomes.

Autocratic leadership: An autocrat is a leader who takes decisions alone, without seeking input from subordinates. This leadership style is characterized by the leader having complete control over all matters and an emphasis on attaining personal objectives above those of the group or organization. When hasty decisions are required, such as during a crisis, this leadership approach may work well. It may, however, also impede invention and creativity and result in low employee morale. According to study by Iqbal (2015), Autocratic leaders encourage just one-sided dialogue and are less innovative. This has a negative impact on the workers' motivation and degree of satisfaction

Democratic leadership: Democratic leadership is characterized by decentralized decision-making that is shared by all subordinates, according to Tannenbanum and Schmidt (2012). The democratic leadership approach carries a greater risk of ineffective decision-making and inadequate implementation. Democratic team leaders like soliciting input from all workers and including them in decision-making. They ask for and share information with staff members and are primarily concerned with how they feel about a certain course of action. This style of leadership is best suited for encouraging collaboration and teamwork among employees and is linked to participatory decision-making. Additionally, it promotes peace, creativity, and the personal development of staff members (Barling and Cooper, 2008).

Transactional leadership: If a leader consistently offers something in exchange, they are considered transactional leaders (Uchenwamgbe, 2013). This might involve a variety of things, such as a wage increase, promotion, performance evaluations, more duties, etc. The expectation is the main issue with this style of leadership. Since employees may always attain both physical and intangible benefits, the transactional leadership style aids in the creation and maintenance of an environment that maximizes organizational and human potential. In particular, this leadership style boosts the total performance of the organization by articulating a compelling vision and fostering an atmosphere that is ideal for performance (Longe, 2014). Employee performance falls short of the organization's goals since this leadership style does not foster innovation and originality among the workforce.

Bureaucratic leadership: Individuals under the control of bureaucratic leadership is detrimental to the effectiveness of organization. They contend that ineffective bureaucratic leaders prevent their workforce from performing as intended, which might result in increased organizational effectiveness (Ojokuku, et al., 2012). Similar findings were also reported by Sougui et al. (2015), who claimed that the bureaucratic leadership style had no appreciable effect on employee or organizational performance. Accordingly, this approach becomes advantageous just in situations where the activities need a longer execution periods. According to Ojukuku et al. (2012), bureaucratic leadership is detrimental to the effectiveness of organization. They contend that ineffective bureaucratic leaders prevent their workforce from performing as intended, which might result in increased organizational ineffectiveness.

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The concept of employee engagement

To date, there is no single and generally accepted definition for the term employee engagement (Markos, 2010). However, to Robinson et al. (2004) employee engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value. An engaged employee is aware of organizational context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.". in another attempt at definition of employee engagement, Perrin's Global Workforce Study (2003) referred to employee engagement as the "willingness and ability of employees to help their organization succeed, largely by providing discretionary effort on a sustainable basis." Numerous factors, including both intellectual and emotional ones related to work and the work experience as a whole, have an impact on involvement, the study finds.

The effectiveness of an organization depends on its ability to engage its workforce, which may be increased through good HRM techniques (Albrecht et al, 2015). Elevated levels of involvement are positively correlated with enhanced organizational satisfaction, innovation, and financial performance. Organizations that increase employee engagement through development, performance management, incentive programs, and training are more likely to gain a competitive edge. Several employee engagement models have been developed to illustrate the theoretical explanations of the concept. The following are some examples of the models.

PENNA Model of Employee Engagement:

The PENNA model of employee engagement was developed by Dr. William Schiemann and is based on the idea that there are five key drivers of employee engagement: Purpose, Enabling, Nurturing, Nourishing, and Appreciating. Accordingly, Employee engagement is crucial for an organization's success and can be boosted by effective human resource management practices. High engagement levels lead to increased employee satisfaction, innovation, and improved financial performance. Organizations that foster engagement through training, development, performance management, and reward systems are more likely to achieve competitive advantage.

Schmidt Model of Employee Engagement:

The Schmidt Model of Employee Engagement was developed by Dr. Frederick H. Schmidt and focuses on the three key factors that influence employee engagement:

- Psychological states: Psychological states refer to employees' thoughts and feelings about their job, which influence their sense of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, thereby increasing engagement.
- Job Resources: Job resources encompass physical, social, and organizational factors that aid employees in performing their jobs effectively, including tools, training, support from colleagues, and growth opportunities.
- Job Demands: Job demands encompass physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that demand sustained effort, and excessive demands without adequate resources can lead to burnout and disengagement.

The Schmidt Model places a strong emphasis on the necessity of striking a balance between work resources and responsibilities in order to promote employee engagement. Organizations may establish a work environment that fosters engagement, productivity, and general well-being by making sure that workers have the resources, freedom, and growth opportunities necessary to excel in their positions.

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Research design

As noted by Mustafa (2010) that phenomena such as welfare, leadership, motivation and reward systems are unquantifiable, readily informs the methodological choice of descriptive research design in this study to understand the impact of leadership principles on employee engagement, which is entirely an unquantifiable phenomenon. Although, descriptive survey method is often used in quantitative studies, it is equally used in qualitative studies to understand social phenomena, explain impacts and effects (McNabb, 2010). As such, this study used qualitative survey method in collecting data for the study.

The nine (9) study informants that volunteered in providing information for the study are entirely employees of the 17 local government council since the study's population are either directly or indirectly impacted by the phenomenon being studied in order to guarantee that they have firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon Creswell (2014). Thus, 9 local government employees comprising 3 informants each from the 3 senatorial zones of the state, representing the 17 local government participated in the study.

Thematic analysis is the primary method used to analyse qualitative data; it entails organizing study data into themes that correspond to research questions and objectives. Although the process of thematic analysis is complex, it facilitates quick and simple understanding of research discussions and conclusions. As noted by Ihemeje (2006) that the process of thematic analysis includes interview transcription, interview response collection, interview screening, coding, and theme generation; the data collected through interviews was transcribed, coded and emergent themes were identified by their relevance as answers to the research question. Consequently, three themes having direct relationship on the impact of leadership principles with employee engagement emerged from the data collected and analysed. These themes are deadline compliance, employee output, and reaching goals for the Organization.

Findings and discussions

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of leadership principles on engagement of local government employees in Yobe state local government administration. It is noteworthy to mentioned that the data for the study was collected from 9 purposely selected informants who are actively engaged in local government and have served for upwards of 10 years in the service. To ensure utmost confidentiality of the study informants, their real names were substituted and simply tagged as inf. 1, inf. 2, inf. 3…..., etc as will be presented throughout in the findings and discussions section. Three themes; deadline compliance, employee output, and reaching goals for the organization that emerged from the data collected and analysed are presented as follows;

Compliance to deadlines: How well employees are able to finish their work and projects within the allotted time limits or deadlines is known as employee deadline compliance. Employees' compliance with deadlines is essential for the overall success and growth of an organization. It promotes accountability, professionalism, and ensures that organizational operations run smoothly. However, findings from this study revealed varying opinions as to why most employees in the local government administration are finding it difficult to perform tasks according to schedule. The challenges of failure to meet deadlines according to informants include inadequate resources or support to carry out tasks, poor time management skills, procrastination on the part of employees and unforeseen circumstances.

while informant inf.7 during an interview stated that "*my inability to meet most deadlines has to do with lack of resources. When assignment is*

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given, sometimes is difficult to access the resources needed to carry out such tasks", inf.5 simply stated that "*most of the times we only report for the sake of attendance. The work is hardly assigned, talk less of meeting deadlines".* Also contributing in this regard, inf.1 asserted that *"my work schedule has been assigned to someone. How can I talk about meeting deadlines when my work is being carried out by my junior officer".* While commenting on the failure of most employees to meet deadlines on assigned tasks, inf. 3 stated that "*I am an agricultural extension worker and my work entails frequent field visits. In most cases, the logistic requirements to embark on such tasks are simply not available".*

From the above statements captured during interviews with informants, it is evident that leaders who are not task-inclined, seldomly provide necessary resources for the achievement of organizational goals. The resultant effect is the inability of employee to carry out schedules as at when due. Contrary to transformational leaders that provide employee with necessary resources to meet deadlines, bureaucratic leadership focuses on their policies without due consideration to overall achievement of such policies. This finding support previous findings by (Ojokuku, et al., 2012; Sougui, et al. 2015) who claimed that bureaucratic leadership results in increased organizational ineffectiveness and had no appreciable effect on employee or organizational performance. Bureaucratic leadership principle is detrimental to organizational responsiveness, it is only advantageous where policies require longer implementation periods. This finding also corroborated Schmidt model of employee engagement that excessive organizational demands without adequate resources can lead to burnout and disengagement.

Employee output: The quantity of labour and outcomes that an employee produces in a given length of time is referred to as employee output. It is a crucial indicator of a worker's output and

effectiveness in advancing the aims and objectives of any given organization. Autocratic leadership is one type of leadership that is believed to encourage low worker productivity. When employee feels disengaged, unmotivated, and demoralized, it is because the leader takes choices without consulting them or soliciting their opinions. Lack of autonomy and participation in decision-making can stifle innovation, lower work satisfaction, and eventually lower productivity levels among employees.

Findings on the impact of leadership principles on employee engagement in local government administration in Yobe state exhibited autocratic characteristics. This is manifested in form of unilateral decision-making process, lack of training and poor delegation of responsibility which negatively, affected employee productivity. Emerging from the data collected and analysed in this study, it is evident that employee output was below expectation and was directly related to the leadership principles inherent in most local government administrations across the state. While answering researchers' question in this regard, inf. 2 stated that "*staff training is no longer frequent and where the opportunity exists, political preference is placed on who should benefit on the training above all other considerations*" to inf. 4 "*our leaders are more concerned with their personal development at the expense of statutory responsibilities. Staff welfare is neglected issue and resource provision is now something else. I think it's extremely difficult under such circumstances to expect higher employee productivity*". While lending his voice on the deterioration of local government employee performance, inf. 9 stated that "*I think the low productivity among local government workers has a direct relationship with leadership. Politics had significantly permeated into administrative processes of local governments, leaders in the first place are appointed based on political allegiance rather than democratic considerations. If people are allowed to elect*

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competent leaders, their attention will be towards productivity"

Based on the experiences of informants on employee output, it is safe to conclude that local governments are experiencing low employee output. Informant mostly attributed this to the inherent leadership challenges in the local government administration.

Reaching organizational goals: In Nigeria, local government administration seeks to enhance the standard of living for its citizens, foster growth, and augment the general welfare of the areas it serves. However, findings in this study revealed that local government administrations in the state are far from achieving the goals of their creation and existence. The inability to achieve developmental requirements of these local governments have been largely attributed to leadership challenges as unanimously stated by the study informants.

According to inf. 8, "*our leaders at the grassroots level have not done much to provide the administrative capacity towards uplifting the living standard of most areas under their jurisdiction. While essential services are inadequate in most areas, efforts at addressing such challenges are far from realization*". In his contribution to the failure of local government to realize their goals of creation, inf. 5 blamed lack of autonomy of the local government leaders as responsible. He stated that "*Most local government leaders exist as mere figure heads, they don't have the financial authority to execute developmental projects, everything is controlled by the state*". In agreement to inf. 5 assertion in this respect, inf. 2 also stated that "*Until such a time when leadership of the local government is democratized and people are allowed to elect what they deemed suitable, the issue of achieving goals will continue to be a mirage. What we usually have as leaders are care-taker committees appointed by the Governor*".

From the foregoing expressions by informants, it is indicative that most employees of the local

governments have shown resentment to the leadership principle inherent in the local government administration in Yobe state. Autocratic leadership principles employed by their leaders in the administration of these councils, significantly contributed to the inability to achieve the primary responsibility of the general welfare of the areas it serves. This finding goes to confirm earlier study by Iqbal (2015), who reported that while Autocratic leadership had negative impact on employee motivation and degree of satisfaction, it encourages one-sided dialogue and are less innovative.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study on the impact of leadership principles on local government employee engagement, it is evident that autocratic leadership, as the dominant principle, has significant drawbacks. The study revealed that under autocratic leadership, employees experienced lower output levels, missed deadlines, and failed to reach the goals for which local governments were created effectively. These outcomes suggest that autocratic leadership style in local government settings may hinder employee engagement and overall performance, ultimately impeding the achievement of their goals. Consequently, there is a clear need for local government agencies to reevaluate their leadership approaches and consider more inclusive and empowering styles to enhance employee engagement and productivity.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve employee engagement in local government councils:

1. Put Leadership Development Programs into Practice: To provide managers and supervisors the tools they need to encourage and inspire staff members, local government councils should make investments in leadership development programs. Facilitating

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training sessions on feedback mechanisms, empowerment tactics, and effective communication may improve leadership qualities and cultivate an engaged culture.

2. Establish Clear objectives and Performance Metrics: Setting clear objectives, deadlines, and performance metrics may assist workers understand their roles and responsibilities within the councils. By giving employees with a path for success and regular feedback on their performance, leaders may boost responsibility and incentive to reach desired results.

3. Acknowledge and Reward Employee Contributions: Giving credit for accomplishments and contributions made by staff members may raise spirits and increase drive. A culture of gratitude and engagement among employees should be reinforced by leaders by recognizing and celebrating milestones, successes, and efforts.

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