

# Autocratic Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment of Academic Staff of Uganda Christian University and Kyambogo University

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## Abstract

The study established the extent to which autocratic leadership style influences organizational commitment of academic staff in Kyambogo University (KYU) and Uganda Christian University (UCU). It was guided by three specific objectives that were aimed at establishing; 1) the level of autocratic leadership style, 2) the level of employee commitment of academic staff and 3) the influence of autocratic leadership style on the employee commitment in the two universities. The study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional survey design hinged on Plato's deductive reasoning philosophy. The population involved mainly academic staff of the two universities and administrative staff. These were sampled using simple and purposive random sampling. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and interview guide. The first and second objectives were analysed using descriptive statistics means and standard deviations. The study hypothesis was analysed using Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient index and Simple Linear Regression. Findings of the study revealed that, the level of application of autocratic leadership style was moderate and the level of employees' commitment was high. Findings revealed that there was a positive significant relationship between autocratic leadership style on commitment of academic staff in two universities. The current study concludes that autocratic leadership styles had a positive significant influence on the commitment of academic staff in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. To enhance the commitment of employees/ academic staff in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian University Mukono, the university council in the two universities, faculty administrative boards, deans, departmental heads should do emphasize more use of autocratic leadership style. This can be done through establishing a mechanism that ensures constant academic staff supervision, remind of duties and work, offer deadlines, warnings and routine approaches to non-compliance

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## 1. Background

### 1.1.1 Introduction

According to Kiplangat et al. (2016), beyond the problem of wanting leadership styles, staff welfare and discipline were also established as key challenges in Universities, globally. Because organizational success is usually dependent on employees' loyalty and hard work as well, dedicated managers are highly desired (Bushra, Usman & Naveed, 2011). Heads of higher education, such as academic leaders and Deans, need to be aware of and understand the fact that relevant leadership styles are substantial according to the changing circumstances in the effort to achieve organizational and institutional goals (Hijazi, Kasim & Yaakob, 2016). According to Khajeh (2018), there is great demand for leaders to be more accountable to staff, students and society due to the growing complexity and increasing challenges of the university; internally and otherwise. Regrettably, one cannot give what one does not have! If the state of affairs remains un-attended too, it is more probable for these universities to lose track of their goals and objectives and fail to fulfill the intentions contained in the higher education policy in Uganda. Leg et al. (2014) investigated the impact of leadership styles on employee commitment in retail industry. Results acquired revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between leadership styles and employee commitment in the retail industry. It was palatable to establish whether, the same results were true in the context of universities and academic staff commitment as was targeted in the current compendium.

The study was guided by the Contingency Theory of leadership developed by Fred Fiedler in 1958. This theory states that; there is no one better way to leadership. It also states that different situations require leaders to apply different ways of leadership (Arenas, Connelly, & Williams, 2017). The third assumption of this theory was that the leader should be able to identify the best leadership style amongst a list of many to achieve the organizations goals in each situation (Shala, Prebraza & Ramosaj, 2021). Basing on this contingency theory, leaders and managers in the University should be aware that there is no one unified way of leadership. Different situations require different style of leadership for instance, a situation which is not favorable, coercive means

might be employed to enlist the commitment of academic staff. In the context of Universities in Uganda, it was probable that if the alleged wanting leadership styles (activities) are a reality in these institutions, then this is likely to impact on organizational commitment of staff members. This argument, nonetheless, is yet to be ratified with empirical scrutiny.

According to Abdulkadir et al. (2018) and Abasilim, Gbrevbie & Osibanjo (2019), employee organizational commitment is the degree to which employees identify with their organization and add value to accomplish the set goals and objectives. Other organizational researchers and scholars on organisational commitment have even gone further to develop precise designations of organizational commitment and scales to measure them. Meyer and Allen (1997) for example, in their theoretical and conceptual model on commitment, advanced to embrace more descriptive commitment elements (Solinger, Van Olffen & Roe, 2008). This was described accordingly: Accordingly, Meyer and Allen designedly inferred that an employee who is affectively committed to the organisation strongly identifies with the vision and goals of the organization. Continuance commitment is the 'gains versus losses' of working in an organization. The worker may constrain to stay in the organization because he/she perceives a high cost of losing organizational membership (Velickovic et al., 2014). In the third type of commitment (Normative commitment), according to Meyer, Srinivas, Lal and Topolnystky (2007), one (employee) commits to and remains with an organization because of feelings of obligation. Leadership styles, was defined by Al- Daibat (2017) as a set of acts that the leader displays within the organization because of internal or external pressure and exerts direct or indirect effects on organizational employees' behavior -positively or negatively.

#### *1.1.2 Problem Statement*

High organizational commitment is essential in the realization of quality University education provision (NCHE, 2018). This is possible, in part, when university lecturers have a high sense of organizational commitment. However, a report on Kyambogo University revealed that lecturers were not willing to work in difficult times, did not respect the values of their University and at times engaged in academic malpractices and some have decided to leave for other opportunities (IGG, 2015) which are issues reminiscent of low organizational commitment. A similar scenario was also reported in private universities in Uganda where commitment of academic staff was alleged to be low (Mugizi, Nuwatuhaire & Tiryamureeba, 2019). These scholars contended that declining motivation and commitment by academic staff in private Universities manifested itself in threats of strikes, absenteeism from work, delay to mark examinations and shockingly, instead faking marks for students. Although several factors might have been considered in various research to be responsible for the low organizational commitment of academic staff in Ugandan universities, these efforts appear to have remained far-fetched, as autocratic leadership style appears to have been snubbed, yet they are also alleged to impact on staff organizational commitment in these institutions. It was feared that if this trend continues unabated, the anticipated contribution of universities to sustainable socio-economic development shall remain, but beyond the periphery. This research therefore intended to come up with strategies in which university leadership should act to ensure staff commitment.

#### *1.1.3 Main Objective*

To establish the extent to which autocratic leadership style influence organizational commitment of academic staff of Kyambogo and Uganda Christian Universities.

#### *1.1.4 Specific objectives*

The study was guided by the following specific objectives.

- i. To establish the level autocratic leadership style among academic staffs of KYU and UCU.
- ii. To establish the level of organizational commitment of academic staffs of KYU and UCU.
- iii. To establish the extent to which autocratic leadership style influences organizational commitment of academic staff in KYU and UCU.

## **2. Literature Review**

Al-Khasawneh (2012) stated that, in autocratic leadership style, the leader dictates work methods, makes unilateral decisions and limits participation of employees. This leadership style place more emphasis on performance and low on emphasis on people (Fiaz et al., 2017). This leadership style presents a leader as less creative in determining permanent state of tension and discontent, resistance and decreases interest of subordinates. Nonetheless, Takrouni and Alsharqi (2020) investigated the impact of leadership style on employee commitment in King Abdullah medical city. Descriptive results acquired showed that the autocratic leadership style was the most frequently used type of leadership style. Results also revealed that leaders feel more secure giving directions. This type of leadership style was greatly responsible for enlisting a high sense of employee commitment on the job. However, this study was carried out from the medical field while this current study was in the field of academia.

Igbal, Abid, Ashfad, Arshad and Athar (2021) investigated the impact of authoritative and laissez-faire leadership on thriving at work. Regression analysis results revealed that authoritative leadership style (autocratic)

significantly affects thriving work. This presumes that authoritative/ autocratic leadership styles always reminds employees about their work ethics and leads to a high sense of job commitment. Okello (2018) in an empirical study about the effect of leadership styles on employee commitment in private universities in United States International University using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation and linear regression. Findings revealed that there was a statistically strong and positive correlation between directive leadership style (autocratic) and employee commitment. However, this study was on autocratic and democratic leadership style and commitment whereas this current study added laissez faire leadership as a third component of leadership style.

More still, Abdulle (2011) analysed leadership styles and employee commitment of Somali institute management aid administration. With use of correlation analysis technique results revealed that autocratic leadership style of an organization is negatively correlated to employee commitment. However, this study did not add regression analysis as was the case with this completed study.

In more less the same direction with the previous findings, Mboya, Were and Otieno (2018) in an investigation about the effect of autocratic leadership style on quality assurance in institutions of higher learning in Kenya, revealed that there was a positive significant relationship between autocratic leadership style and quality assurance in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. Thus, with this autocratic leadership all concerned stakeholders would be committed on the job leading to achievement of quality assurance ends.

Kijjambu (2022) studied the relationship between leadership styles, decision making and employee engagement among academic staff in Makerere University. Results revealed that there was no relationship between autocratic leadership style and employee engagement as a sign of affective commitment in the university. However, engagement is one component of continuous commitment whereas this study related autocratic leadership style on all aspects of commitment. Empirically, Pehi et al. (2022) investigated leadership style and employees' commitment to service quality via knowledge sharing. Findings revealed the directive/ authoritative leadership style had a negative and insignificant correlation with the degree at which employees were committed on the job. In this study it was revealed that through excessive use of force, employees synergies are affected creating a sense of low morale to continue on the job. However, this reviewed study was not anchored on the theories like theory X and Y which guided this current study.

More still, Razak et al. (2015) studied leadership styles of lecturer's technical and vocational in teaching and learning. Findings revealed that autocratic leadership style was fair and highly practiced by lecturers. Its practice allowed to create a sense of high job commitment through constant reminding of their work roles and obligations. Nonetheless, this study did not directly relate employee commitment as was the case with this current study.

Meanwhile, Igbal (2021) investigated the impact of authoritative and laissez faire leadership on thriving at work, taking conscientiousness as a moderating variable. Results showed that authoritative leadership significantly and positively impacted on thriving work. This was in the sense that the authoritative leadership was perceived as always been used to make employees aware of their work roles. This in turn made these employees dedicated and highly committed to work tasks. However, this study was qualitatively done while this current study was quantitatively done using simple and multiple linear regression analysis missing in the previous studies.

### 3. Methodology

The study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey design hinged on Plato's deductive reasoning philosophy. The population involved mainly academic staff of KYU and UCU, head of departments and deans. These were sampled using simple and purposive random sampling. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. This data was analysed at Univariate level using descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations. The study hypothesis was analysed using Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on Autocratic Leadership Style

Indicators of Autocratic Leadership style	Mean	Std.Dev
Employees need to be supervised closely or else they are likely not to do their work	3.336	1.241
It is fair to say that most employees in general population are lazy	2.659	1.328
As a rule employees must be given rewards or punishments in order to motivate them achieve organizational objectives	3.553	1.158
Most employees feel insecure about their work and need direction	3.276	1.084
The leader is the chief judge of achievements of all members of the group	3.229	1.236
Effective leaders give orders and clarify procedures	3.514	1.192

Table 2. Pearson's correlation coefficient between Autocratic Leadership style and organizational commitment of employees in UCU and Kyambogo Universities

		Commitment	Autocratic leadership
Commitment	Pearson correlation	1	0.280**
	Sig (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	234	234
Autocratic leadership	Pearson correlation	0.280**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	234	235

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2-tailed

Table 2 shows Pearson's correlation coefficient index between Autocratic Leadership Style and organizational commitment of employees  $r = 0.280^{**}$ ,  $sig = 0.000$  less than 0.05. This implied that there was a positive significant relationship between Autocratic Leadership and academic staff commitment in these two universities. As one practices coercive use of deadlines, close supervision, reminders, and the level of organization commitment enhances and the reverse is true.

#### 4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Results revealed that autocratic leadership had a positive significant relationship on the commitment of academic staff in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. This revealed that, academic staff close supervision, setting deadlines, reminders and punishments as indicators of autocratic leadership can easily contribute to commitment of academic staff employee on their jobs. These results were in tandem with earlier findings such as those of Leng, Xvan, Leng and Yan (2014) who revealed that, autocratic leadership style had a positive significant relationship employee organisational commitment of employees.

The study findings which showed that there was a positive significant relationship between autocratic leadership style and commitment of employees in Kyambogo and were in tandem with Takrouni and Alsharqi (2020) who showed that the autocratic leadership style was the most frequently used type of leadership style. These results also revealed that leaders feel more secure giving directions. This type of leadership style was greatly responsible for enlisting a high sense of employee commitment on the job. Such a finding was in agreement with the contingency theory which supported the use of authoritative styles of leadership where necessary for instance when employees show noncompliance in a bid to influence their job commitment in the positive direction.

The findings about autocratic leadership concur with the power position domain of contingency theory. The power position is a consideration of legitimate authority and the degree to which positive or negative sanctions are available to the leaders. Puni et al. (2014) adds that, power, control, authority and manipulation are necessary to get the job done. It assumes existence of an institution surrounding the group and a hierarchic means of conveying the power. In UCU and Kyambogo universities, HoDs and deans are surrounded by academic staff and their positions are not free from the directives from the authorities above them including the University Council, Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic, Deputy Vice Chancellor Finance and Academic Registrars and other in the university hierarchy. Therefore, the position and authority of HoDs and deans is restricted by operational chain of command, which could force them to adopt a rigid style hence autocratic leadership.

In UCU and Kyambogo universities, tasks for staff are clearly identified and stated, goals are clearly stated and understood, different avenues have been designed to achieve these goals and correct answers or solution that exist have been tried and tested for effectiveness. In such a highly structured situation, leading is easy because structured tasks are enforceable (Miner, 2015). The contingency theory adopted for this study had such rich considerations that, the existing situation and goals to be achieved determine the leadership style applied (Anwar, 2015; Adoli & Kilika, 2020; Lartey, 2020). Considering the two universities studied, tasks are well explained in individual contracts, university policies, regulation and rules and these are made available to academic staff. The head of department and deans exist to enforce such achievement of goals through these clearly stated tasks. This is in line with what Shala et al. (2021) noted about contingency management that, in organizations where the task is described in detail, the leader has more influence over employees.

In addition, findings from this study concurred with Igbal, Abid, Ashfad, Arshad and Athar (2021) who investigated the impact of authoritative and laissez-faire leadership on thriving at work and revealed that authoritative leadership style (autocratic) significantly affects thriving work. This presumes that authoritative/autocratic leadership styles always reminds employees about their work ethics and leads to a high sense of job commitment. This is supported by Fiaz et al. (2017) who noted that, autocratic leaders enforces clearly defined processes, procedures and mechanism to ensure that subordinates do their jobs efficiently within the rules.

The findings of this current study were in agreement with Okello (2018) in an empirical study about the effect of leadership styles on employee commitment in private universities in United States International University whose findings revealed that there was a statistically strong and positive correlation between directive

leadership style (autocratic) and employee commitment. In the studied universities, everything is made prior to the start of the academic year and semester. Sometimes, with time lines either borrowed from the Ministry of Education and Sports or designed by the university itself. For example, semester start dates and end dates, teaching times and examination periods. This is followed by circulars and procedures to follow that require observance with total submission and obedience. Therefore, participation of academic staff is less and agreement is not necessary for successful outcome. The head of departments and deans are operating in such a framework and academic staff have to abide. These leaders responsibility is to involve lecturers in discussions, to motivate them build team work performances, to guide and direct them.

In more less the same direction with the previous findings, Mboya, Were and Otieno (2018) in an investigation about the effect of autocratic leadership style on quality assurance in institutions of higher learning in Kenya, revealed that there was a positive significant relationship between autocratic leadership style and quality assurance in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. Thus, with this autocratic leadership all concerned stakeholders would be committed on the job leading to achievement of quality assurance ends.

The study findings which revealed a positive significant relationship between autocratic management style and commitment of academic staff was negatively related with, Sakiru, Ismail, Samah and Temitope (2018) who established that autocratic or authoritative leadership style had no close association with organisational commitment of employees. In consonance with the study findings, Razak et al. (2015) studied leadership styles of lecturer's technical and vocational in teaching and learning. Findings revealed that autocratic leadership style was fair and highly practiced by lecturers. Its practice allowed to create a sense of high job commitment through constant reminding of their work roles and obligations.

The findings which revealed a positive significant relationship between autocratic leadership style and commitment of academic staff were similar with those of Igbal (2021) who investigated the impact of authoritative and laissez faire leadership on thriving at work, taking conscientiousness as a moderating variable. Results showed that authoritative leadership significantly and positively impacted on thriving work. This was in the sense that the authoritative leadership was perceived as always been used to make employees aware of their work roles. This in turn made these employees dedicated and highly committed to work tasks. This study therefore recommends that, there must be mechanisms put in place to ensure that employees are reminded of their work, offered deadlines, warnings for non-compliance. Leaders are advised to keep in mind the nature of work tasks, university culture, values and ethical perspectives This should be done in line with the desire to promote independency, innovativeness, competence and professionalism.

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