

Leadership Styles of Heads of Departments: Evidences from Nigerian Federal Universities

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Abstract

This study assessed the leadership styles adopted by academic heads of departments in administering their departments in selected federal universities in Nigeria. It also identified the factors that influence their choice of leadership styles. Primary data were generated through the administration of the multifactor leadership questionnaire on 11 randomly selected heads of departments from 5 faculties in 2 purposively selected federal universities in North Central Nigeria. The retrieved data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and means. The results revealed that the democratic ($\bar{x}=3.25$), transformational ($\bar{x}=2.87$), transactional ($\bar{x}=2.75$), and charismatic ($\bar{x}=2.46$), leadership styles were more prominently utilized by the heads of departments. The factors that influenced their choice of leadership styles were found to be: set goals to be attained ($\bar{x}=3.73$) availability of working facilities ($\bar{x}=3.36$), cultural environment ($\bar{x}=3.45$), attitudes of subordinates ($\bar{x}=3.27$), job stress ($\bar{x}=3.09$), leadership pattern of colleagues ($\bar{x}=3.09$), past leadership experiences ($\bar{x}=3.09$), and personal temperament ($\bar{x}=2.91$). Gender and religion were found not to influence them. The study concluded that since the university operates a dynamic system, heads of departments must understand the complex phenomenon of leadership, learn new leadership skills and practice diverse mix of leadership styles that fit each context.

Keywords: Leadership styles, heads of departments, federal universities, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Leadership is a dynamic process of work in a group whereby an individual influences the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group tasks and goals over a period of time. It is a relationship in which one person directs, coordinates, influences and supports others in the performance of a common task. Also, it is the process of organizing and mobilizing human and, material resources for the accomplishment of organizational goals (Riaz and Haider, 2010, Ukaidi, 2016). Leadership style is the framework for accomplishing leadership. It is the typical pattern of behaviour that a leader utilizes to influence his or her subordinates to attain organizational goals. It is basically the underlying need structure of the leader which motivates his behaviour in various leadership situations (Yuki, 2006; and Schroder, 2008). Although leadership is a complex concept, it is a key factor in any institution. It is the key to progress, success and the survival of any group and organization (Dubrin, 2006); the university system is one of such organizations. Universities are dynamic and have variety of goals. They focus on the creation and dissemination of knowledge for advancement. Nigerian universities have experienced varieties of crisis in recent times which are attributed to leadership problems. These include consistent decline in global ranking, paucity of funds, brain drain, deteriorated working facilities, incessant strikes and quality challenges (Daft and Marcic, 2006). Leadership is therefore critical in the university system because it enhances her capacity to effectively perform her teaching and research functions. It also determines her capacity to provide community service that engenders dynamic social, technological and economic development. The success of any organization including the university system is attributed to its leadership (Downey, 2001). Unfortunately most academic leaders are not trained in personnel management and leadership skills; hence they are unable to function effectively (Schroder, 2008; Daramola and Amos, 2016).

The complexity of leading academic departments is particularly daunting because departments are the most important structures in the university. They provide the basis for academic activities which influence the other activities in the university system. Academic heads of departments are the first line of academic leadership who have daily access and interactions with staff and students. They are also the link between the department and the university management (Moore and Rudd, 2004). The leadership of the head of department is the building block

that determines university's administrative success. Ineffective leadership at the departmental level leads to a breakdown of administrative success. Therefore, departments require academic leaders who thrive on the challenge of change and who can foster innovations that encourage teaching and research which would lead the university successfully into the future. Heads of departments must understand the complexity of the job as well as possess the leadership skills required to perform to high standards that would develop the departments into strong entities (Daramola and Amos, 2016). Moving the department forward is therefore a leadership skill that is imperative for the head of department to possess. There is therefore the need to develop the next generation of academic leaders who will coordinate and manage the academic enterprise of the nation by building their managerial competences and leadership capacities. Leaders in universities must have a vision to lead for excellence and not manage for mediocrity. They must take the lead in cultivating an institutional climate where openness, mutual respect and release of creative energies are valued as aspects of leadership in themselves (Downey, 2001).

It is against this background that this study assessed the leadership styles of academic heads of departments and identified the factors that influence the styles they adopt. This is imperative because heads of departments have the responsibility of ensuring that the various departments are functional, since departments are the engine rooms for all academic activities and have the primary responsibility for training of students using a curriculum that is approved by the University Senate.

2. Literature Review

The degree of success of any university is a function of the style of leadership adopted by personnel in leadership positions. Since effectiveness in leadership and success of organizations is a function of leadership style, it is imperative for all success driven leaders to adopt leadership styles that guarantee the successful achievement of their set goals. Lack of training and development of leaders, lead to their inability to lead effectively (Yuki, 2006; Inyang, 2004).

Leadership style is the strategy adopted by leaders to translate their goals and that of their organizations into reality through their conduct and manner of relationship with their followers. It is the approach of providing direction, implementing plans and motivating people to work (Newstrom and Davis, 1993; Dubrin, 2007). Academic heads of departments should be able to lead and manage their departments effectively if they have the requisite knowledge of the leadership styles. Universities are dynamic institutions whose building blocks are academic departments. In view of this, heads of departments must be aware of and understand the complex phenomenon of leadership and the various leadership styles. A variety of leadership styles exists and different styles are required for different organizational situation. A leader must therefore understand the concept of the various styles and learn to combine using them as situation demands.

Transformational leadership style is one of the prominent styles used by leaders to build commitment to organizations' objectives. It is a style that focuses on making change happen (Othman, Mohammed and D'Silva, 2013). In this style, leaders use their personal values, visions, commitment to a mission and passion to energize and move others towards the accomplishment of organizational goals (Choi, 2007). Grifin and Moorhead (2007) posited that transformational leadership is a style which improves employees' ability and performance. It increases knowledge of employees about their work and motivates them to work towards accomplishing set tasks. Jones and George (2007) noted that transformational leaders are attentive to the needs and motives of followers and try to help followers reach their fullest potentials. In the same vein, Avolio and Bass (2000) affirmed that transformational leaders are believed to be more successful at driving organizational change because of followers' heightened emotional levels and their willingness to work toward accomplishment of the leader's vision. Consequently, Bono and Judge (2003) opined that Leaders with transformational behaviour can direct their organization towards effectiveness and productivity. This is because they have that capacity to motivate others toward extra efforts, increase their job satisfaction, improve their performance and cultivate creativity and innovation in organizations. In view of this, Burns (1978) noted that transformational leadership style creates significant change in the life of people and organizations. It is therefore an approach that redesigns perceptions and values and changes expectations and aspiration of employees. The components of this leadership style as posited by Bass (1985) include: intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealized influence and inspirational motivation. This style would secure the trust of faculty members in the university system because it engenders commitment and fosters the development of the Nigerian University System. This is because transformational leaders set high standards for behavior and establish themselves as role models by gaining the trust and confidence of their followers. They state future goals and develop plans to achieve them. Transformational leaders innovate even when the organization they lead is generally successful (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Transformational leadership has communal aspects, especially the theme of

‘individualized consideration’, whereby leaders focus on the mentoring and development of their subordinates and pay attention to their individual needs. Studies (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Merchant, 2012) have shown that females demonstrate more of transformational and democratic leadership styles and they are more interpersonally oriented.

Transactional leadership style emphasizes rewards and punishment as the key motivators for employees by management. It is work oriented and organizationally focused (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). Bass and Riggio (2006) noted that transactional leaders determine and define goals for their subordinates, suggest how to execute tasks and provide feedback. They also provide rewards for satisfactory performance. Northouse (2007) indicated that a major component of transactional leadership is contingent reward which relates to leaders’ behaviour concentrated on explaining role and task necessities as well as providing followers with physical or mental rewards contingent on the fulfillment of contractual obligations. According to Northouse (2007), characteristics of transactional leadership are clear structures and policies where subordinates are briefed on work expectations, accompanied by contingent rewards.

Evans (1994) and Durham-Taylor (2000) posited that the notion of effective leadership is commonly portrayed as transformational or empowering paradigm. They found transformational leadership to be more effective and satisfying than transactional leaders because the individual consideration component of transformational leadership enables leaders to focus on mentoring and development of subordinates. Studies (Bass, 1999; Bass, 1997) have also shown that women leaders tend to be more transformational than their male counterparts because of their greater use of contingent rewards. Othman *et al.* (2013) further revealed that transformational and transactional leadership yield positive relationship with employees.

Democratic leadership style is collegial and allows members of a group to take a more participative role in the decision making process, Ukaidi (2016). Longe (2014) noted that democratic leadership influences people in a manner consistent with the basics of democratic principles and processes such as deliberation, equal participation and inclusiveness. The democratic leader gives ample chance for the followers to develop through their involvement in the decision making process of the organization. Choi (2007), affirmed that this leadership style is characterized by mutual acceptance between the leader and the followed which breeds cooperation, team spirit and high moral within the organization. He noted that organizations with democratic leaders often yield followers with high morale who are more motivated to generate and offer up creative solutions. It also produces an atmosphere of cooperation and team spirit. Ray and Ray (2012) added that democratic leaders actively encourage and stimulate group decisions and discussions and encourage people to share their ideas. Generally, democratic leadership style is people oriented and it is a key predictor for followers’ responsiveness.

Laissez-Faire leadership style is one in which the leader provides little or no direction and gives employees as much freedom as possible. In this type of leadership style power is given to the employees to determine goals, make decisions and resolve problems on their own (Robbins, 2007). Denhardt and Denhardt (2003) noted that a laissez-faire leader defines the goals, policies and programmes and leaves the process of accomplishing them to the subordinates. This implies that the subordinates have the freedom to carryout tasks at their own pace and with little or no supervision. Since leaders have little involvement in the decision making process, problems can erupt. This is because people may not work together and they may not be as hardworking as when they have leaders who supervise them (Robbins, 2010). In view of these Snodgrass and Schachar (2008) noted that Laissez-Faire leadership style is contrary to the thoughts of transformational and transactional leadership styles; because of the lack of control of the followers.

Autocratic leadership style is coercive and entails the leader telling his subordinates what to do, when to do it and the consequences of refusal for the followers (Snodgrass and Schachar, 2008). Ukaidi (2006) indicated that autocratic leadership style is characterized by strict dominance by the leader who takes the major decisions in the organization and determines how actions are carried out. This leadership style leaves no room for contributions, initiative and discretion of the followers. In view of these (Constanta and Constantin, 2013) opined that transactional leadership style is preferable to autocratic style because it helps organization achieve their objectives more effectively by linking job performance to valued rewards and by ensuring that employees have the resources needed to get the job done.

Riaz and Haider (2010) suggested that good leaders use a combination of various leadership styles. For instance, transformational and transactional leadership styles have been found to be positively correlated with organizational outcomes in studies of various types of organizations. Also, both the transactional and transformational leadership styles have positive relationship with employees’ organizational commitment.

Leadership is viewed as one of the key driving forces for improving organizational performance hence effective leadership is critical in achieving this. In this regard, Nehra, Smith and Robertson (2006) argued that when organizations seek efficient ways to enable them outperform others, a long standing approach is to focus on leadership,

The style that a leader adopts is based on a combination of factors which may include their beliefs, ideas, norms and values. It is a permutation of various personal traits, characteristics, attributes and qualities. Snowden and Boone (2007) affirmed that individual's leadership style can depend on their demographic, organizational and managerial characteristics as well as their decision-making situation based on different decision-making variables. In the same vein, Powel and Butterfield (2003) noted that the nature, background, experiences and knowledge of the leader can influence or determine his leadership style. These according to them drives his actions and in actions.

Berdahl (1996) found that gender had an effect on the leadership style adopted by leaders. For instance Eagly and Carl (2003) and Ogbogu (2016) reported a significant gender difference in the use of democratic or participatory styles of leadership. More precisely, they indicated that men were more likely than women to use autocratic or direct controlling style. In this vein, Acker (1992) affirmed that significant difference exists between male and female leaders in task accomplishment and interpersonal styles. Acker (1994) and Ogbogu, (2018) noted that males were found to adopt more of task oriented leadership styles while females utilized more of relation-oriented leadership styles. Furthermore, Powell and Butterfield (2003) found significance difference between male and female decision making skills. The research found women to be democratic, while men were somehow autocratic and directive in their approach. The study identified a concern on the need for male managers to adopt a more cooperative and collaborative approach and servant leadership style.

Specific decision making style and decision making environment influence leadership styles. For instance, Snowden and Boone (2007) found that in situation of unstable and turbulent environments, leadership style would be characterized by a direct top-down communication which is characteristic of an autocratic leadership style. Decision making can easily be delegated and a more democratic leadership style adopted in a stable environment.

Yuki (1989) noted that hierarchy is one of the determinants of leadership style, and Akor (2014) noted that there are distinct patterns of behaviour across different hierarchical levels in organizations. Oshagbemi (2004) found that significant difference exists between the senior and first level managers' leadership styles, but not between senior and middle level managers or middle and first level managers. Personality of a leader can influence his leadership style. Snowden and Boone (2007) opined that aligning an individual's basic nature with a particular method of management is often successful. For example if a manager possesses a charming demeanor that draws people to her, she will likely adopt a charismatic style that develops faithful staff desiring to please their leader. Furthermore, a leader's professional ethics influences his method of leadership. A person who believes in team work often adopts a democratic leadership style. This implies that the manager will have to participate with employees in solving problems together (Berdahl, 1996).

Tucker and Russel (2004) posited that age determines the leadership style adopted by managers. The result of their study revealed that younger managers are more willing to take risks and take new approaches in terms of decision making than the older ones. Older managers were found to be more consultative in decision making than the younger managers. In the same vein Kazan (2000) found that age influences leadership styles. He argued that younger leaders adapt in fast-changing environments, take risks and consider new approaches than older leaders.

It should be noted that a lot of changes have evolved in the Nigerian University System. Universities like other institutions in the public sector have not been immune from the changes in the environment and it has been observed that changes in the external environment are a major contributor to the leadership style adopted by leaders. A period of rapid change in the university has necessitated the need to adopt varieties of leadership styles to be able to cope with the changing situation. Leadership is necessary for the accomplishment of tasks in organizations, particularly in universities, due to their complex nature. Changes in the external environment that impact directly and indirectly on universities include: rapid growth in the number of students, declining resources from the state relative to increased student numbers, the nature of academic work itself which reinforces the tendencies of conflict over posts and resources and the entrepreneurial tendency of the university system. The key strategy in handling all of these features, changes and complexities and to deliver change is the

use of adequate leadership style. This would enhance university performance and provide an understanding of the parameters of the governance process.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design in examining the leadership styles adopted by heads of departments in Nigerian Federal Universities. It also identified the factors that influence the styles they adopt. The study derived its data from both primary and secondary sources. The major instrument used in gathering the primary data was the multifactor leadership questionnaire by Avolio and Bass (2000). The questionnaire contained questions that covered the major components of leadership styles from which the respondents could elicit their leadership style preferences using a rating scale. It also contained questions reflecting the factors that account for the type of leadership styles adopted by the respondents. The random sampling technique was used in administering questionnaires on 16 heads of departments from 5 faculties in 2 purposively selected federal universities from North Central Nigeria. A total of 11 questionnaires were retrieved and analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and means. If the average mean score was 2.5 or above, the respondent was considered to exhibit primarily that specific leadership style.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Leadership styles of heads of departments in selected Nigerian Federal Universities

Leadership Styles	Mean (\bar{X})
Democratic	3.25
Transformational	2.87
Transactional	2.75
Charismatic	2.46
Autocratic	1.43
Laissez-Faire	1.18

Table 1 shows the mean values of the responses of the heads of departments on their leadership styles. Data on the table shows that democratic leadership style was mostly adopted by the heads of departments because it has the highest mean score of 3.25. This was followed by transformational (\bar{x} =2.87), transactional (\bar{x} =2.75) and charismatic (\bar{x} =2.46) leadership styles. The fact that the respondents utilized more of the democratic leadership style is an indication that the heads of departments allow inputs and contributions from their subordinates in the decision making process. This corroborates the findings of Ukaidi (2016) whose studies revealed that democratic leadership style was mostly adopted by managers because it creates an environment where colleagues feel at ease working and participating in the decision making process. This method helps in increasing individual identification with organizational goals and also enhances their performance and output.

Transformational leadership style was the second popularly adopted style as indicated on the table. This is not surprising because studies (Bass, Avolio, Jung and Berson, 2013; Kent, Crotts and Aziz, 2001) have shown that this leadership style contributes significant improvement to subordinates and organizational performance. It also motivates employees to work towards organizational effectiveness because of the mentoring and empowerment that the leader provides. Transactional leadership style was the next style that was reported by the heads of departments. This implies that the heads of departments' clarified subordinates' responsibilities, monitored their work and corrected them for failure to meet objectives. It should be noted that perhaps transformational leadership style had a higher mean value than transactional leadership because, transformational leadership has communal aspects that border on the theme of individualized consideration whereby leaders focus on the mentoring and development of subordinates and pay attention to their individual needs. The autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles were the least utilized styles by the heads of departments. This may be attributed to the fact that the autocratic leadership style has the tendency to breed conflict, yield negative results and dampen the moral of staff as found by Armstrong (2016) in his study.

The laissez-faire leadership style was found to be the least adopted and effective leadership style perhaps because the leader avoids making decisions and withdraws from providing direction or support to subordinates. Sometimes he waits for problems to become severe before attempting to solve them.

Table 2: Factors influencing the leadership styles of heads of departments in selected Nigerian Federal Universities

Factors	Mean (\bar{X})
Attitude of subordinates	3.27
Cultural environment	3.45
Job stress	3.09
Availability of working facilities	3.36
Goals to be attained	3.73
Leadership pattern of colleagues in other units	3.09
Religion	2.18
Personal temperament/personality	2.91
Gender	1.55
Past leadership experiences	3.09

Table 2 shows the heads of departments' opinions on the factors that influence their leadership styles. The prominent factors that determined their leadership style were: goals to be attained, (\bar{x} =3.73) cultural environment, (\bar{x} = 3.45) availability of working facilities, (\bar{x} = 3.56) attitudes of subordinates, (\bar{x} =3.27), leadership styles of colleagues in other units, (\bar{x} =3.09), job stress (\bar{x} =3.09) and past leadership experiences (\bar{x} =3.09). Other factors included personal temperament (\bar{x} =2.91), religion (\bar{x} =2.18) and gender (\bar{x} =1.55) being the least.

Focusing on goals to be attained is a critical factor that influenced the leadership styles of the respondents because it had the highest mean score. This is an indication that universities are dynamic and goal oriented. Cultural environment was the second factor that influenced the leadership styles of the respondents. This implies that a leader must be sensitive to the environment to enable him discern the most appropriate style to adopt; hence he gives priority to what the environment demands. This confirms the result of Ibara's (2010) study who found that the prevailing environmental culture determines the leadership styles adopted by leaders. The attitude of subordinates was the next major factor that determined the leadership styles of the respondents. This result points to the fact that the nature, qualities and peculiarities of employees are critical for leaders in their choice of leadership style. For instance, staffs with cordial attitude are easier to lead, using the democratic and transformational leadership styles, while autocratic and transactional styles are mostly used for staff with uncooperative and difficult attitudes.

Data on the table further shows that job stress, leadership patterns of colleagues and past leadership experiences which had the same mean scores (\bar{x} =3.09) were found to influence the leadership styles utilized by the respondents. Job stress leads to burn out and Kouzes and Posner (2000) supported this finding in their study which revealed that challenging job demands and workload of heads of departments affect their mood and leadership styles. They also noted that experiences garnered from observing the leadership patterns of colleagues as well as those of past experiences greatly determines a leader's leadership style.

The temperament and personality of the respondents impacted on their leadership style. This is not unconnected with the reason why a leader with a bossy and domineering personality tend to adopt the autocratic and transactional leadership styles which do not create an opportunity for subordinates to participate in the decision making process. Gender was found not to influence the leadership styles of the respondents because this variable had a low mean score of 1.55. This finding contradicts that of Constante and Constantin (2013) who found that gender influenced leadership styles. They found that male heads of departments were willing to take risks and adopt new approaches to decision making than the females. Ogbogu (2018) also found that women tended to be more democratic, while the men were more autocratic in their leadership styles. Longman and Madsen (2014) however found that female leaders who dared to act like men in being autocratic were most times negatively received among colleagues. Hence, the women sometimes felt unauthentic when they abandoned their femininity in an attempt to lead like men so that they would fit into the university culture. The attitude from their colleagues is attributed to the masculine dominated culture of the university that defines leadership, as well as the socially constructed behaviours that are acceptably aligned with gender.

5. Conclusion

This study assessed the leadership styles adopted by heads of departments in selected Federal Universities in Nigeria. It also identified the specific factors that influence the leadership styles they utilized. It was found that democratic, transformational, transactional and charismatic, leadership styles were prominently used by the

heads of departments, while the autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles were hardly utilized. Factors that were found to influence their leadership styles were: goals to be attained, availability of working facilities, cultural environment, attitude of subordinates, personal temperament, job stress, leadership patterns of colleagues and past leadership experiences. Gender and religion were however, found not to influence their leadership styles. The study concluded that leadership is an ongoing process and since the university operates a dynamic system consisting of various structures, goals and processes, it requires leaders that are capable and equipped with the requisite skills. Hence, heads of departments must learn new leadership skills, practice them and implement a hybrid form of leadership that integrates effective leadership styles.

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