

Innovations

Leadership Techniques in Achieving Improved Performance and Productivity in A Democratic Setting

Majekodunmi Olusesan Ibitoye Ph.D

Department of Political Science and International Diplomacy,
School of Social and Management Sciences,
College of Science,

Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State

Dare, Owolabi

Department of Political Science and International Diplomacy,
School of Social and Management Sciences,
College of Science,

Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State

Corresponding Author: **Majekodunmi Olusesan Ibitoye** ibitoye.majekodunmi@bouesti.edu.ng

Abstract

The success or failure of any organization and/or society, to a large extent, depends on the technique adopted in achieving the set goals and objectives. Therefore, the choice of any of these techniques to be adopted must be wisely done as there are many leadership techniques ranging from autocratic to democratic techniques. Hence, the primary aim of this paper is to look into the best technique that could be used in achieving improved performance and productivity in a democratic setting. This paper is qualitative in nature, therefore, it relies on the use of secondary sources of data as its sources of information. The theoretical framework adopted in this work hinges on Servant-Leadership theory. The findings of the paper reveals that both autocratic and laissez-faire styles of leadership are not the best options while it suggests democratic style of leadership in achieving improved performance and productivity in a democratic setting.

Keywords: 1.Leadership, 2.Autocratic, 3.Laissez-faire, 4.Democratic and Democracy.

Introduction

The problem of leadership has always been a recurring challenge in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria inclusive. While some corporate organizations and countries have taken the challenge seriously without any form of attachment and have directed and re-directed all their human efforts towards confronting the problem of leadership, others seem to attach less importance to it. Hence, the role of leadership in any organization and political system cannot be overlooked as certain characteristics of leadership are most likely to determine their effectiveness in achieving the desired goals and objectives under almost any pattern of policies and/or structure of government. As a matter of fact, leadership is an important aspect of an effective performance and a move towards achieving efficiency and high level of productivity in an organization and the larger society. The growth and the attainment of an

organization's goals and that of the society hinges on the calibre and quality of the leadership that makes up such an organization and society. Thus, the sterling quality of leadership has the capacity to serve as necessary ingredients for development and the sustenance of such development efforts. Judging from this assertion and regardless of the type of political system, that is, whether, an authoritarian or democratic governance, effective leadership is a sine qua non to moving people in a right direction and to make them engage in activities that are in consonance with the organization's and/or nation's goals and objectives. To be specific, most studies merely focus on leadership qualities without necessarily and adequately paying due attention to the technique(s) that could be employed in achieving the set goals and objectives of the organization or society. This paper therefore, takes the inquiry on the technique(s) that a leader should adopt in order to achieve improved performance and high productivity in a democratic setting.

Conceptual Clarification

Leadership

A lot of discourse has been made on the concept of leadership by various scholars with each giving meaning to it in their own perspective and based on their understanding. Some of these definitions shall be examined in order to form the foundation of our discussion. Schultz (2004:251) conceives leadership as "the ability of an individual with power or authority to influence people in work units and to achieve certain organizational goals and objectives". Stodgill (1994) defines leadership as the process of influencing the activities of an organized group towards goal setting and achievement. Newell as cited in Adu and Aladegbola (2004:25) submit that "leadership is a process through which persons or group intentionally influence others in the development and attainment of groups or organizational goals".

The definition of Yukl (1998) as cited in Olaoye (2005:5) was more encompassing when he posits that leadership is a "process wherein an individual member of a group or organization influences the interpretation of events, choice of objectives, the development of skills and confidence by members and enlistment of support and cooperation from the people outside the group or organization". The thrust of this definition rests on the exercise of influence by a leader. Gibbs (2008) further validates the above definition as he describes a leader as a person who exercises influence over others, a person who coordinates the behaviour of others or simply a person who occupies a position. Bakare (1990:13) also aligns with this postulation when he argues that leadership can be seen as "a process of inter-personal influence which aims at making people work voluntarily towards the achievement of national, organizational or group goals". It is therefore glaring from the above assertions that leadership connotes the process and ability of a person to give direction and issue commands, getting them obeyed to help an organization or a nation in the attainment of a common ends or goals.

Democracy

Democracy on its part connotes "the form of government in which the ultimate authority resides in the people" (Omonijo, Ibitoye and Owolabi, 2007:15). In the opinion of Sartori as cited in Owolabi (2006:25) democracy "is a political system in which the influence of the majority is assured by elective and competitive minorities to whom it is entrusted". Abraham Lincoln, former American President (1858) gave self-explanatory definition of democracy. According to him, democracy is the "government of the people, by the people and for the people". The above definition on democracy is a reflection of the fact that democracy is the government through the consent of the governed.

Theoretical Framework: Servant-Leadership Theory

This work hinges on Servant-Leadership theory which was developed by Robert K. Greenleaf in his essay titled "The Servant as Leader" which was published in 1970. According to him, the major attribute of a leader is to serve and not to lead. That is, servant-leader should serve first, make the needs of others their main priority and find success and power in the growth of others. In a similar vein, Gandolfi and Stone (2018) revealed that in a modern context, Greenleaf reinvented the notion of the servant-leader in 1970. Servant-leadership is characterized by

listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people and building community (Gandolfi, Stone, and Deno, 2017:350-361).

The central argument of the servant-leadership theory is the reality by a leader that he/she is elected or appointed to serve the people and not to lead them. In the real sense of it, a leader who is actually enthroned by the followers is expected to serve and act in a manner that justifies that the interests of the people are paramount and are made priorities thereby resulting in the growth and development of the system. In his submission, Greenleaf (1970) states that servant-leadership is a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations and ultimately creates a more just and caring world. A just and caring society is created because the leader is aware that all his/her actions and activities must revolve around the interest of the people.

In relation to this work, servant-leadership theory becomes relevant since this work is basically targeted at the leadership style that is most appropriate in a democratic dispensation. Democracy represents a system of government through the consent of the governed. It is a form of participatory government where citizens become the ultimate focus within the system. A leader in any democracy sets priorities that are tilted in favour of the followers and sets agenda that are in conformity with the yearnings and aspirations of the people. This is exactly what the servant-leadership theory signifies. It is a “kind of leadership model which puts serving others as the number one priority and emphasized increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision-making” (Spears, 1996:33-35).

Servant-leadership theory is deficient in that it relegates the interest of the leader in terms of making inputs within the system. As a matter of fact, the theory remains in its infancy in terms of modern behavioural sciences. Servant-leadership lacks a formal, confirmed framework and has not yet been empirically linked to organizational performance. However, regardless of any short-coming noticeable in the servant-leadership theory, its importance to the survival of a system and the development of the people within the system can never be overlooked. It has become a yardstick for measuring the performance of a good leader.

Historical Perspectives on Leadership Training and Types in Africa

Available records and documents from the colonial archives and reliable recollections from principal actors of the empire building era, especially in Ireland, Wales and Scotland have firmly and conclusively affirmed the speculations of Ade-Ajayi when he asserted that:

“The United Kingdom appears to have intentionally left leadership studies, leadership training and leadership building out of the educational curriculum of all the colonized regions in Africa. This could not have been an innocent mistake. It was deliberate and perhaps designed to stagnate or slow down the pace of socio-economic development of colonial acquisitions. All European nations, after the French Revolution of 1789 came to realize the importance of leadership training and skills at all spheres – political, social, economic, scientific, military, educational and organized union levels” (Ade-Ajayi, 1991).

Excellent leadership strategies, techniques and methods led to the development of different centres of power in Europe and North America. Unlike Africa where political power is the focus of pursuit by politicians, unionists, industrialists, academicians and retired civil servants. North America has created viable and deeply rooted leadership centres in the economic, industrial, cinematographic and educational spheres. And each sphere of leadership requires different techniques and tactics. Speaking frankly and honestly, the methods adopted in the

pursuit of leadership spots in Africa, especially political leadership, vary from person to person, tribe to tribe and regions. More importantly, the ethics and techniques for retaining leadership positions also vary.

To buttress the above point, In Nigeria between 1946 and 1979, the four main routes to political leadership were provided by Ahmadu Bello, of the Fulani North, Aminu Kano of the Hausa talakawas, NnamdiAzikiwe of the Igbos in the South-East and Obafemi Awolowo of the Yorubaland in the South-West. To attain political leadership, the Fulanis perfected the art of cultivating deep friendship bordering on adoption of others into their clan. The original Hausanawa of great Kano empire have also succeeded in using the strategy of complete immersion into the real lives of the talakawas as the means to gain the trust of the most numerous ethnic groups in the North. For the republican Igbos of the South-East, oratorical power and display of bombastic, grandiose and high-sounding language to impress people of limited educational standard became an effective tool and technique of attaining leadership positions. However, the egalitarian Yoruba society of the South-West demonstrated a different approach to leadership political positions: hard and deep analysis of prevailing societal malaise which often required painstaking and serious application of brains, brawns, energy and human talents for solutions and development. Awolowo and his brethren typified this technique.

For the purpose of reinforcement and intellectual clarity, we must state clearly that the techniques for attaining political positions of leadership are different from the techniques of retaining the attained positions of authority or leadership. As poignantly pointed out by Kolade (2013), the tactics for climbing a ladder are significantly different from those needed to maintain balance after climbing. He proceeded to list and explain nine different tactics and techniques of achieving balance and making progress as a leader as follows:

- (i) Use of transparency and open consultation with colleagues;
- (ii) Induction of colleagues into extra privileges/democratization of opportunities;
- (iii) Obvious hardwork, superior display of intelligence;
- (iv) Superior presentation of ideas and proposals/in-depth understanding of issues;
- (v) Bridge building policy/mannerisms;
- (vi) Perceptiveness and incisiveness;
- (vii) Linguistic elegance, accuracy and beauty;
- (viii) Prophetic perception; and
- (ix) Listening ears and silent dignity.

Birai(1990)while supporting the above position,argued that the first three tactics are vital for executive political leadership while those in legislative as leaders should avail themselves of the next three techniques. The judicial leaders are in critical need of the last three techniques to enable them reach desirable ends.

Theories of Leadership

As one theory has proved insufficient to explain the leadership phenomenon, the search for a replacement intensified. The theory of leadership like other administrative concepts has progressed through phases and continues to be under review up till now. Some of these are discussed hereunder:

The Traits Theory or Approach to Leadership

It stands as the earliest known method of studying and analyzing leadership. This approach had its focus on individual leadership since it identified and analyzed the specific attributes or traits showcased by successful leaders. As argued by Olaoye(2005:98) it has to do with “an attempt to discover the personality attributes that were common with great leaders in history. This is the trait approach to leadership which was based on the assumption that effective leadership is a function of a leader’s traits that make him or her preferable to others”.Such personality traits are grouped under the following two sub-headings; personality traits-intelligence, initiative, supervisory ability, self-assurance, affinity and maturity. Motivational traits -needs for occupational achievement, self-actualization, power over others, high financial rewards and job security(Ghishelli,1971).

The Behavioral Approach to Leadership

The inadequacies of the trait theory perhaps culminated in building new researches along different outlooks. The behavioural approach to leadership came as the response to the trait approach in the middle of the twentieth century. The approach focused on the behaviour of the leaders in an organization/society. According to this theory, leaders are not born but they are made. Leadership therefore, emanates through the process of education, training and the experience acquired. The interpersonal behaviour of the leader has a great impact on the group performance and goal attainment. The main weakness of this theory stems on the fact that situational variables were not put into consideration.

Situational Approach to Leadership

The situational approach shifts attention to the environment that a leader operates. It is the situation that determines what effective leadership is. The realization of the impact of situation on the making of leaders led to theorizing with the aim of combining the above with the realities of the situation to provide comprehensive understanding of leadership. The summary of the situational approach to the study of leadership is that the situation produces its own kind of leadership. In other words, leadership is affected by the particular situation of the organization/society (Olaoye, 2005:103). Meanwhile, the situational approach has been criticized for disregarding the part played by individual personality in determining organizational climate, structure and processes.

Contingency Approach to Leadership

The contingency approach is a strategy to understanding the characteristics of an organization with a view to determining which leadership practice will work best under given situation. This theory argues that the style to be used is contingent on factors such as the situation, the people, the task, the organization and other environmental varieties. As explained by Fiedler (1967:8) the situation is defined in terms of three key elements; the leader-member relation, task structure and leadership position. The model provides a theoretical support to the view that there is no one best way of managing organizations thereby opens the way to managers with foresight to develop skills to identify the peculiarities of their organization and ensure the use of appropriate management practices.

Path-Goal Approach to Leadership

The path-goal approach shows that leadership effectiveness is determined by the relationship between subordinates inputs and their outcome. Therefore, the most effective leaders are those who help their subordinates to achieve both the enterprises goals and their personal expectations in terms of money, promotion, opportunity for development e.t.c. Leaders do this by defining positions and task clearly, by removing obstacles to effective performance, enlisting the assistance of group members in setting goals, promoting teamwork, increasing opportunities for personal satisfaction in work performance and by reducing unnecessary stress, making rewards and expectation clear.

Elements of Leadership

The tripartite elements of leadership has been considered by Hollander (1978). These includes; the leader, the followers and the situation. These are explained thus by Olaoye (2005:96-97). The LEADER consists of power characteristics and leader's attributes such as authority and legitimacy, competencies, motivation, personality, assessment of the situation, the supervision style, e.t.c. The FOLLOWERS are made up of the hopes, aspirations, expectations, personalities, characteristics, competencies, drives or motivations. Included in this are the reasons why the individual joined the organization in the first instance, his or her understanding of organizational goals and objectives and his or her roles in achieving these goals. The SITUATION consists of tasks, resources, roles, social and authority, structure, environment [internal and external] and the history of the organization is unique as an element within its environment.

Types of Leadership

Apart from the various theories/approaches to leadership as discussed above, certain leadership styles have been identified in any political system. To this end, the socio-political classification established by Lewin (1994) will form

the basis of our discussion here. He classified leadership styles into autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. The other common variant is the bureaucratic leadership.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is popularly referred to as task-oriented leadership. The leader is an authoritarian one who remains aloof from close and/or personal contact with the group. He dictates all policies, goals, tasks, assignments, procedures and expectations to the subordinates. Such a leadership style is devoid of consultation or participation by members of the work group. The autocratic leader gives command and expects a strict and immediate compliance with his/her instruction. The use of rewards or punishment is applied to get conformity. He/she is an arbitrary leader who rarely delegates authority.

Democratic Leadership

A major characteristic of this style is a high degree of group participation in decision making and an adequate support is received from the subordinates. This is made possible because of the involvement of delegated authority to the subordinates since he/she believes in consultation and joint decision making. Other attributes of this leadership style are welfare, delegation, participatory management, effective management, accommodation, rule of law, due process, accountability, transparency and respect for collective, group and individual rights.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

In this style, the leader serves as a facilitator and is not a dominant figure. The leader identifies and brings problems to the group but the group makes the decisions with minimal or no direction by the group leader. It is a situation where leadership involves in little task direction, giving prominence to group or individual freedom in decision making, making no appraisal or regulation of the performance of subordinates. There is an air of unbridled freedom as the leader abandons his/her responsibility since subordinates are made to set their goals and impetus for production without interruption. It is more or less an absence of leadership.

The Leadership Technique for Improved Performance and Productivity

Having discussed the various approaches and styles to leadership, it is expedient at this juncture to look into the leadership technique that can be best adopted in a democratic setting in order to achieve improved performance and productivity. Democracy as stated above represents the government through the consent of the governed. It is separated from an autocratic style where the leader represents the locus and focuses on everything that takes place in the society. In a democratic setting, the opinion of the people is very germane and must as a matter of necessity be sought for. An effective leader in this respect is expected to bring all organization members together and move them in a consistent and coherent new direction towards the organization's goals and objectives (Lemay,2002).This represents what Schultz referred to as transformational leadership which according to him is:

“to have the ability to motivate others towards the achievement of higher aspirations or goals for the benefit of a community or political cause beyond their own self interest as members of a particular group or organization. Transformational leadership is based on desire and capacity to move individuals in organizations and groups to higher goals by working within the core values or cultures of their organization” [Schultz, 2004:251].

In this sense, a democratic style of leadership will be of benefit in any democratic setting. The argument of Ibukun is more relevant in this respect. According to him, “power may enlist temporary compliance but falls short of persuading workers or eliciting lasting commitment to organizational goals”(Ibukun,1997:111). The use of authority as a basis of leading gives legal backing to leadership action. Yet, the use of rules and regulations appear to suggest an authority-centred leadership model. Since there cannot be leadership without followership, the use of persuasion,

mutual understanding and trust as a basis of leading would appear to be the most effective strategy of leading. The following are important measures that a leader must establish in order to achieve improved performance and productivity:

- ❖ A leader must expand the followers' portfolio of needs, build confidence in the followers, elevate followers' needs for higher level and must elevate followers' subjective probabilities of success.
- ❖ A leader must elevate valence of designated outcome of followers, ensure a change in organizational culture, heightened motivation to attain designated outcome[extra-effort].
- ❖ There must be performance beyond expectations on the part of the followers (Lemay,2002:228).

A paper of this nature may not be adequate without highlighting some of the problems of leadership in Nigeria. These problems as discussed by Olaoye(2005:112-113) includes the following:

- ❖ Lack of basic understanding of what leadership involves;
- ❖ Faulty leadership selection process;
- ❖ Lack of effective followers;
- ❖ Subversion of the rule of law and administrative permissiveness;
- ❖ Incompetence of many leaders; and
- ❖ Geo-political and cultural variations among Nigerians.

Conclusion

This paper has succeeded in examining the leadership techniques in achieving improved performance and productivity in a democratic setting. Various approaches to leadership, elements of leadership and types of leadership were discussed in order to bring out the workability or otherwise of the techniques in an organization or political system while some problems of leadership were also highlighted. This paper argued that in any democratic setting, achieving improved performance and productivity rests on the effective leadership and the style that such a leader adopts. Suffice is to say that an effective leadership culture for a polity like Nigeria must incorporate charisma, sensitivity and dynamism as part of its vital ingredients. It went further to say that a charismatic leader represents the one that transcends the goal attainment, group maintenance, custodial and perennial managerial concerns of common place leadership which attends mainly to physiological, security, social or emotional needs of followers. It involves the creation of a common vision and unity of purpose, leadership by example as well as restoration and strengthening of confidence in the joint destiny of the people.

Having advocated for a democratic style of leadership, however, a leader is prone to the use of power but this must be limited to a legitimate power, the one that is based on the position held by the leader and the extent of legitimacy of such power rests on the height of the position within the hierarchical order. After all, "power is the heart, the essence, the orbit and the conceptual nerve-centre of politics" (Kolawole, 1997:8).

Suggestions

1. A leader must possess the basic and comprehensive understanding of what leadership entails.
2. Leadership selection process and style must be democratic in nature.
3. A leader must be dynamic and committed to the goals/objectives of the organization/society.
4. The notion of the rule of law must be held in high esteem.
5. Administrative permissiveness and incompetence among the so-called leaders should not be allowed to gain prominence.
6. Followers/subordinates must also imbibe the culture of discipline and probably act as watch-dog on the leaders so as to correct them when and where necessary.

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Corresponding Email: ibitoye.majekodunmi@bouesti.edu.ng