Transformational Leadership Theory: A Stepping Stone for Effective Administration of Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper discussed the application of the transformational leadership theory as a stepping stone for providing effective leadership in the universities in Nigeria. The quest for effective leadership of the present day university campuses that would serve the prevailing educational needs of the society directed the study. The paper succinctly examined the concepts of leadership, theory, transformational leadership theory and its components and relevance in the effective leadership of the university system. The paper revealed that the transformational leaders are indispensable instruments for effective leadership of university campuses as it is a leadership approach based on professional collaboration, development and growth of subordinates and the university at large. The paper concluded that for the principal officers and their management team (Vice chancellor, Registrar, Bursar, Librarian and Deans of faculties, Heads of departments and Directors of units) to be effective, there should be proper understanding and application of transformational leadership theory. University leaders should be transformational indeed. The paper therefore, suggests amongst others that: University leaders should hold on to the fact that there is no limit to the potential of any organization that recruits people, raises them up as leaders and continually develop them which is the major tenet of transformational leadership theory. University leaders should strive to focus as much as always on promoting staff competence by providing them with the opportunity to lead.

Keywords: Leadership, Theory, Transformational leadership, Effective, Administration.

INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, the society had been led by different people in different forms. This can be seen in the family, church, mosque, school, communities, associations to mention but a few. To some, leaders are born and to many, leaders are made. Good leaders are thus made, not born (Ololube, 2013). Leadership is an important part of every institution that desires appreciable success, growth and development. This is because leadership is key to the achievement or non- achievement

of organizational set goals. This shows that leaders' influence, or relationship with their subordinate has a positive or negative influence on their subordinates' (staff) effectiveness. This is in line with Hackman and Johnson (2004) which posited that whatever the situation, effective leadership in schools flourish teachers. However, when the leader is not competent, the subordinates (staff) suffer. Studies comprising very high degree leadership theories reveal that none of the leadership theories is irrelevant. This is because 'relevance' depends on the context in which a theory is applied. Every university or institution is established to attain set goals and this can be achieved through the people. The set goals of the university cannot be attained if the leaders and their followers are not eager to interact, communicate and harmonize their activities. The university system all over the world and Nigeria in particular is faced with pressure to reform, change, and improve its leadership process. In many situations there are so many 'neutralizers' in the university system that make it difficult for the leaders to succeed; characteristics that block the leaders from acting in specific way or that cancel the results of leaders' actions hence, the need for appropriate leadership theory application. It is on this background that the study strives to examine the relevance of transformational leadership theory as stepping stone in the effective administration of universities in Nigeria

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CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The Concept of Leadership

Leadership is a concept which is often talked about, and which has generated a proliferation of literature. Despite the almost unanimous agreement on how important leadership is for the success of an organization, institution or sector, and the countless works on the concept, the term leadership have not succeeded in articulating a coherent method that both scholars and practitioners can accept and work with. There is no unanimity as to what leadership means. Leadership is defined from different perspectives of different scholars.

Leadership can be defined as the process of leading people in the right direction to achieve a goal. It is a process by which a person influences, inspires, encourages and motivates others to work for better tomorrow or future. This agrees with Agi and Adiele (2015) which posits that leadership is a process by which a person influences others through motivation and direction thereby achieving a group goal and also aiding them to face future challenges that may be encountered in the organization. Amanchukwu (2013) viewed leadership as a technique for influencing the people in an organization. This is in line with Northhouse (2007) who defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leadership is the process of providing a suitable environment and influencing people to strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement or attainment of group or organizational goals (Amah, 2006). This agrees with Nye (2008) who opines that leadership is a process of helping a group create and achieve shared goals. It involves a combination of soft power skills, hard power skills and contextual intelligence (ability to know when to use which combination of the above skills). In the opinion of Ololube (2013), leadership involves a type of responsibility aimed at achieving particular ends by applying the available resources (human and material) and ensuring a cohesive and coherent organization in the process. All of these definitions reveal that leadership does not have an acceptable definition rather it is based on different people's perception.

The Concept of Theory

A theory is a reflective and logical type of philosophical or generalizing or the result of such thinking. A theory can be a body of knowledge, which may or may not be associated with particular

explanatory model (Thomas, 2007). A theory is a set of assumptions, propositions or accepted fact that attempts to provide a plausible or rational explanation of cause-and –affect (causal) relationships among a group of observed phenomenon. This is in line with Merriam Webster (2018) which defined theory as a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena. It is belief, policy or procedure proposed or followed as the basis of action. A theory generally refers to analytical tools for understanding, describing or explaining a subject.

Transformational Leadership Theory
The idea of transformation was introduced into organizational leadership literature by Downton and developed by a renowned leadership expert and presidential biographer – James MacGregor Burnsin (1978). The theory explicitly suggests that transformational leaders can be noticed when "leaders and followers make each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation". Transformational leadership approach creates significant change in the life of people and organizations by redesigning perceptions and values, and changes expectations and aspirations of followers. It is all about changes and commitment of leadership in ensuring the implementation of organizational transformation by transforming individuals in the organization.

Practically, the transformational leadership theory is at work 'where and when' a leader works with teams to identify needed changes, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration and executing the change in agreement with committed members of the group (https://www.businessdictionary.com). This means that, transformational leaders transform their subordinate through their inspirational nature and charismatic personalities. Transformational leader serves to enhance the motivation, morale, and job performance of follower's sense of identity and self to a project and to the collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers in order to inspire them and to raise their interest in the project, challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, allowing the leader to align followers with tasks that enhances their performance. In this theory, rules and regulations are flexible, guided by group norms. These attributes provide a sense of belonging for subordinates as they can easily identify with the leader and its purpose. The transformational leader raises the motivation and morality of both the leader and the subordinate (House & Shamir; Nawaz, Khan & Khan, 2016). Transformational leaders are leaders who touch the lives of their followers and transform them totally. They are charismatic in personality, inspiring in nature and make the workplace very exciting. Transformational leaders support team work to achieve their visions and goals. Transformational leaders are change agents, they defy present situations and know the opportunity for the institution, they have the ability to manage the risk related to change and ensure that all members of the institution are part of the craving change process (Iriquat, 2018). Bunaiyan and McWilliams (2018) opines that transformational leadership is primarily based on human nature and difference which is a foundation for incorporating the theory into schools. The transformational leadership approach aptly considers the very active and important nature of the school system as an environment filled with competing needs and goals. Transformational leaders motivate their followers to do much more than they ever imagined to do, they showcase the attitude of possibility in all they do and also build self confidence in their followers with the aim of achieving set goals.

Northouse (2016) asserts that for leaders to build shared vision and to reach organizational goals, such leaders must be influential, inspirational and motivational, have intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. To this end, transformational leaders drive change and transform institutions to good success, they plea to the lofty deals, moral values and superior order needs of followers

Components of Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership stimulates and inspires followers to both achieve extra-ordinary outcomes and in the process develop their own leadership capacity. The theory involves change. However, since change cannot just take place in the school system rather with people as implementers, so in order to lead change the leader has to be conversant with how to lead people. Money (2017) stated that transformational leaders through the strength of their vision and personality are able to inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions and motivations to work towards common goals. Krishnan (2005) had argued that the major premise of the transformational leadership theory is the leader's ability to motivate the followers to accomplish more than they planned to accomplish.

On this premise, Burns (1985) in Money (2017) identified four major components of transformational leaders thus: Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Dionne et al. (2004) opined that idealized influence and inspirational motivation components of transformational leadership are connected with the leader's ability to formulate and articulate a shared vision. To them, the idealized influence of transformational leader serves as role model for follower who in turn reciprocate trust and respect for the leader; and individually emulate and internalize his (the leader's) ideas. The intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership is showcased through recognition of followers' stimulation, creativity and innovation whereas, the leader under individual consideration, provide a supportive climate in which the individual needs of the followers are carefully attended to.

The Basic Tenets of Transformational Leadership Theory

- Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the task and organizational integrity and this helps focus one's attention to more appropriately defining a task.
- The transformational theory emphasizes cooperation, ethics and community in addition to the higher human values.
- Long-range goals are emphasized which leads to increasing the survivability of a system. It has been showed in studies, such as in gaming theory, that cooperation, as opposed to competition, is more successful in achieving goals.
- Transformational leadership theory is adaptive and can be tailored to support the fulfilment of the most pressing of needs in people.
- Transformational leaders enjoy greater stability of their leadership positions, as there is greater support by those who are being led.
- Transformational leadership theories can bring harmony to a situation that could otherwise be exacerbated by a quarrelsome organization.
- Transformational leadership theory is more likely to work in an organizational space filled with educated population such as the school system.

Effective Administration

Leadership plays a vital role in achieving the goals of an organization. The university as an educational institution requires effective administration to meet up its responsibility (Agi & Adiele, 2015). Effective administration can be said to be accomplishing the set goal of an organization effectively and efficiently. To this end, administrators (leaders) of the university should strive to accomplish the goals of the university. A vice chancellor can be said to be effective if he/she have some certain qualities that will make him succeed. Some qualities have been identified as necessary

for school leaders and administrators. Daft (2003) in Agi & Adiele (2015, p. 26) identified some of such qualities as:

1. **Visionary**: it is the ability to foresee what the future holds for the organization or school and plan to realize it.

2. **Passionate**: Here, the principal shows outright commitment to the development of the school. The principal devotes sufficient time and effort in the total upbringing of the students.

3. **Creative:** the principal should create situations that will benefit the school despite the inherent limitation.

4. **Flexible:** the principal should be able to adjust to challenges of the job requirements as well as the dynamics of social change as it affects the school.

5. **Imaginative and Innovative:** principals are to use their initiative to solve emergency problems threatening the school environment that will hinder goal achievement.

The Relevance of Transformational Leadership Theory in University Goals Attainment in Nigeria

The university just like any other organization needs effective administration to be able to perform its responsibility to the institution. This implies that the vice chancellor who is the leader of the university must be effective and efficient. The relevance of transformational leadership theory towards goal attainment in universities cannot be over emphasized. Just as every parent's major aim is to give their child/ward a good education by paying their tuition fees, buying of books and provision of internet facilities to aid learning, so is the quality of leadership needed to manage a school that will produce future leaders. Transformational leadership and goal attainment have gained attention by institutions because it is the main theme of every institution to achieve goals.

Behery (2008) states that transformational leaders develop goal attainment by way of sound organizational communication by conveying cultural models from an organizational structure to an individual way of life in the organization and by supporting the style of the administration which plays a major role in goal attainment. Leaders who practice transformational leadership theory persuade, motivate and inspire their followers towards goal attainment; this will in turn influence the internal values and motivation of their followers and the modelling of their life in accordance with the mission, vision and values of the school. Studies have shown that transformational leadership theory has envisaged the eagerness of followers to apply extra effort and change their old methods of work to a positive method. It connects transformational leadership with organizational learning, organizational effectiveness and organizational culture (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016). Transformational leaders support their followers towards goal attainment by planning, organizing, directing and integrating the essential demands of the school including the needs of the faculty members in such a way that is somewhat productive and motivating to the individual staff. Thompson and Akudo (2020) asserts that university leaders that operate the transformational leadership theory set goals and visions for their followers to pursue while encouraging team work, trust and enthusiasm among them.

Transformational leaders arouse and boost the morale of their followers by rewarding them for accomplishing challenging and multifaceted task. Transformational leadership creates new system that ensure the implementation of policies, approaches and action plans within some period of time in order to attain goals. This is in agreement with Ololube (2013) which stated that transformational leaders create the best educational policies and approaches that involves the improvement of educational programs and administrative services aimed at building competent

graduates capable of taking up significant positions in the society and in turn, improving educational practices and procedures. Finally, every university leader should strive to be a transformational leader. The leader should have a vision that will bring about change that will transform the university and in turn, the society. A transformational leader understands the weaknesses and strengths of staff. Such leaders serve as role models to staff and students and by so doing, achieve goals without struggle.

CONCLUSION

Transformational leadership theory remains a formidable stepping stone for effective administration of universities in Nigeria. Being of great importance, the transformational leadership theory will improve the university system by looking at things from new perspectives, enhancing quality teaching and learning process by harnessing digital resources and e-learning. Transformational leadership centres on improving the university and represent a form of leadership based on professional collaboration, development and growth of the university. Prior to this time however, studies have posited that no theory is best for the effective organizational leadership but recently, a large spectrum of researches have come to reveal that transformational leadership theory is a better option for quality outcomes in modern day organizational leadership including the university. Therefore, the paper concludes that transformational leadership theory stands to be a potent panacea to curbing the diverse leadership challenges experienced in the universities in Nigeria and should be upheld since transformational leaders are professionally capable of creating the enabling environment and the vision with which subordinates strive to achieve set goals.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on this work, the following suggestions were made:
1. University leaders should hold on to the fact that there is no limit to the potential of any organization that recruit people, raises them up as leaders and continually develop them which is the major tenet of transformational leadership theory.
2. University leaders should strive to focus as much as always on promoting staff competence by providing them with opportunity to lead.
3. University leaders should be optimally willing to spread leadership around to enable the staff contribute individually and collectively towards institutional goals achievement.
4. University leaders should have a positive vision for the prospect during the preparation of plants and setting future goals.
5. University leaders should ensure that certain traits like integrity, humility, moral courage, intelligence, knowledge of the job, self-confidence among others characteristics embedded in the transformational leadership theory are developed in both staff and students.

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