

# Chapter 24

## Leadership Styles and Performance of Academic Staff in Public Universities in Uganda

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**Abstract** Leaders are perceived as persons who can single handedly create order out of chaos, navigate organizations through unthinkable environmental turbulence, bring mightiness out of mediocrity, and thrive where lesser mortals will quickly fade away. Education systems all over the world are undergoing constant changes under the effects of globalization, and the attendant rapid developments in information and communication technology. These forces demand changes within school systems across the world. These changes inevitably demand for good leadership and leadership styles for educational institutions to remain in business. This paper thus undertook to explore the relationship between various leadership styles and performance of academic staff with a bias on Public universities. The expressions made thereof are considered a light in the dark of knowledge in view of complexity engulfing both the education and leadership fields today.

### 24.1 Introduction

Leadership has been defined by a host of authors [10, 17, 31, 37]. In all their views, the expectations of any leader as well as key duties are fully explored. Leadership according to Yukl [38] is, “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives”. Peter Northouse [31] on the other hand defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. These definitions suggest several components central to the phenomenon of leadership. Some of them are as follows: (a) Leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influencing others, (c) leadership happens within the context of a group, (d) leadership involves goal attainment, and (e) these goals are shared by leaders and their followers. The very act of defining leadership as a process suggests that leadership is not a characteristic or trait with which only a few certain people are endowed at birth. Defining leadership

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as a process means that leadership is a transactional event that happens between leaders and their followers.

Leaders are perceived as persons who can single handedly create order out of chaos, navigate organizations through unthinkable environmental turbulence, bring mightiness out of mediocrity, and thrive where lesser mortals will quickly fade away [17]. Education systems all over the world are undergoing constant changes under the effects of globalization, and the attendant rapid developments in information and communication technology. These forces demand changes within school systems across the world [10]. These changes inevitably demand for good leadership and leadership styles for educational institutions to remain in business.

Educational institutions are now born of complexity as reflected in the following aspects:

- Teaching and learning
- Assessment and evaluation
- Research programs
- Outreach activities
- Communication systems
- Decision making
- Delegation of authority
- Curriculum design
- Staff relations
- Organizational goals and vision

Generally therefore, a number of aspects render the education system rather complex and a summary of some is drawn from a multiplicity of researchers to the following effect [13, 24, 29, 35]:

- Integrating the commonly polarized goals of education, that is the goals that focus on transmitting knowledge with the goals that emphasize the development of an individual in the system.
- Catering for individual student needs. Running a classroom which recognizes and respects difference is first in the hands of a teacher who acknowledges that there are differences in the classroom.
- Assessment feedback and learning approach. We might consider the role of high-stakes standardized testing and assessment schemes in the present educational system as imposing an artificial fitness landscape that pulls the system toward behaviors that maximize test results rather than deep conceptual understanding.
- The dynamic nature of education system, the teaching and learning system that exists within the education system is subject to change with the changing world. Innovations and inventions must be incorporated into the system with the aim of maximizing student performance.

- The existing educational system of schooling isolates students and teachers from the wider community.
- Integrating the curriculum by developing interdisciplinary curriculum units that enable students to acquire knowledge from disciplines through unifying them while having the opportunity to contribute in different and special ways to the objectives of the integrated units.
- Dealing with misbehavior is a complex undertaking. Student misbehavior in the classroom is a tough and unavoidable task to the teachers and it takes up teachers' considerable time to deal with, which in turn affects the quality of the student's learning experiences.

Education systems are now characterized by multi-level governance where the links between multiple actors operating at different levels are to a certain extent fluid and open to negotiation [8].

Such complexities call for effective leadership and leaders since it is the said leaders who have been found to influence followers in many ways, including coordinating, communicating, training, motivating, and rewarding [39]. It is argued that effective leadership has a positive sway on the performance of organizations [4, 9] and the success of an organization depends on its people and on the leader's ability to optimize human resources [2]. A good leader understands that motivating the employees is of paramount importance in achieving organizational goals. Furthermore, it is generally accepted that the effectiveness of any set of people is largely dependent on the quality of its leadership [23].

Armstrong [1] contends that performance refers to both behaviors and results, and adjusting organizational behaviors and actions of work to achieve results or outcomes. Maicibi [27] contends that, without a proper leadership style, effective performance cannot be realized in schools. Performance appraisals are therefore an important means by which employees can discuss key work issues in a systematic manner in an effort to monitor and evaluate progress for appropriate interventions [26].

Many studies that have been conducted to show the correlation between leadership style and employee performance in wide variety of fields and in equally wide variety of settings, few studies however have focused on this relationship in the context of higher education, for example [22] in Nigeria, Hamidifar, 2010 in Iran and others in North America and Europe. Studies investigating the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance in Uganda have been limited to secondary schools [32]. In a departure from this focalization, this study will examine the Leadership styles of top university leaderships in selected universities in Uganda and explore the relationship between leadership styles and staff performance in those universities. Specifically it will concern itself with full-time academic staff in these universities and explore the effects of leadership style on the six academic staff performance indicators mentioned in Sect. 24.1.

## 24.2 Leadership and Leadership Styles

Although leadership has long been of interest to historians and philosophers, scientific studies only began in the early 1900s. Still, the body of knowledge has since been fast growing as attested by the more than 350 definitions of the term which scholars have come up with. Giving one specific definition of leadership is a thus very complex task [3].

Broadly speaking, leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers to perform in such a way to reach a defined goal or goals [7]. Whereas managers are concerned with short-term problems within an organization, leaders adopt a much broader perspective. While early leadership theories concentrated on the characteristics of successful leaders, their traits, behavior, power, influence and situational approaches (e.g.) [25] recent ones have focused on the role of followers and the correlated nature of leadership.

It is also important to note that organizations and their environments have changed rapidly over the past years and as a result a new style of leadership, one that is less bureaucratic and more democratic, is needed in order to ensure the survival of organizations [4]. Consequently, a new style of leadership has emerged in order to ensure the survival of organizations and to overcome limitations of the trait, behavioral and contingency theories of the past. This new leadership approach suggests that there are two views of leadership – transactional leadership and transformational leadership [4].

Within the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, transactional leadership works at the basic levels of need satisfaction, where transactional leaders focus on the lower levels of the hierarchy (Deanne N. et al. . . . 1997). Transactional leaders use an exchange model, with rewards being given for good work or positive outcomes. Conversely, people with this leadership style also can punish poor work or negative outcomes, until the problem is corrected. One way that transactional leadership focuses on lower level needs is by stressing specific task performance [18]. Transactional leaders are effective in getting specific tasks completed by managing each portion individually.

Transactional leaders are concerned with processes rather than forward-thinking ideas. These types of leaders focus on contingent reward (also known as contingent positive reinforcement) or contingent penalization (also known as contingent negative reinforcement). Contingent rewards (such as praise) are given when the set goals are accomplished on-time, ahead of time, or to keep subordinates working at a good pace at different times throughout completion. Contingent punishments (such as suspensions) are given when performance quality or quantity falls below production standards or goals and tasks are not met at all. Often, contingent punishments are handed down on a management-by-exception basis, in which the exception is something going wrong.

Burns [7] argues that transactional leadership entails an exchange between leader and follower. Followers receive certain valued outcomes (e.g. wages, prestige) when they act according to their leader's wishes. Taking Burns as his starting point

Bass [3] notes that leadership in research has generally been conceptualized as a transactional or cost-benefit exchange process. In many universities in Uganda, the academic staff has had a face-off with their administrations as a result of the perceived low wages. For instance, Makerere University, the largest and oldest university in Uganda, has in the past 10 (ten) years experienced over five staff strikes over wages. And as a result, the University has always suspended classes for at least 3 days, thus, affecting the staff output.

Deanne N. et al. (1997), argues that, the transformational leader on the other hand, motivates subordinates to perform as expected. The transformational leader typically inspires followers to do more than originally expected. Transformational leadership theories predict followers' emotional attachment to the leader and emotional and motivational arousal of followers as a consequence of the leader's behavior [20]. Hater and Bass [19] state that "the dynamics of transformational leadership involve strong personal identification with the leader, joining in a shared vision of the future, or going beyond the self-interest exchange of rewards for compliance".

A transformational leader is a person who stimulates and inspires (transform) followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes [37]. He pays attention to the concern and developmental needs of individual followers; changes followers' awareness of issues by helping them to look at old problems in a new way, and he is able to arouse, excite and inspire followers to put out extra effort to achieve group goals. Transformational leadership theory is all about leadership that creates positive change in the followers whereby they take care of each other's interests and act in the interests of the group as a whole (Warrilow 2012). The concept of transformational leadership was introduced by James Macgregor Burns in 1978 in his descriptive research on political leaders, but its usage has spread into organizational psychology and management with further modifications by B.M Bass and J.B Avalio [23].

### 24.3 Performance of Organisations

Performance is often identified or equated with effectiveness and efficiency [30]. Employee performance has been shown to have a significant positive effect on organizational performance [11]. The function that human resources can play in gaining a competitive advantage for an organization is empirically well documented [6]. One of the performance indicators of academic staff is the ability of the leader to enable staff to acquire higher degrees and to conduct research. Promoting a research culture is thus one fundamental role of academic leadership in universities. The role of research can be compared to a pivot around which the other cardinal purposes that define the essence of a university.

Research and publication form the top most criteria for academic staff promotions in universities. Therefore the onus is on the leaders to promote a culture of research by providing the necessary drive, facilities and incentives. Secondly,

universities are challenged to take a lead in transforming society for the better, because they are obliged by the doctrine of corporate social responsibility. This will require that they reach out to the community to be part of the solutions to community problems. To enhance performance of staff therefore, the institutions policies on these aspects has to be very sound.

Research and publication in most Ugandan universities is at its lowest, with academic staff taking on extra teaching load, in various universities. It is very common to find a lecturer teaching in more than one university. In each university, this lecturer may have over 15 (fifteen) h per week. This leaves him with barely any time for other activities. Given the economic situation in Uganda, it would take a very good leader to convince such academic staff to focus on other activities, such as research and publication without additional monetary incentives.

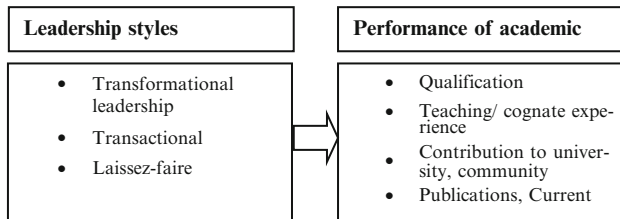
Both transformational and transactional leaders are active leaders. They actively intervene and try to prevent problems. However, in this complex situation one leadership style alone may not be appropriate, as the reason why the staff are doing this is to increase on their income. This situation can become worse, if there is passive *laissez-faire* leadership, where a leader avoids decision making and supervisory responsibility. This type of leader is inactive, rather than reactive or proactive, which creates no difference between the presence and absence of leadership. Bass [4] reports *laissez-faire* leadership usually correlates negatively ( $-.3$  to  $-.6$ ) with other, more active leadership styles.

## 24.4 Leadership Style and Performance

It has been widely accepted that effective organizations require effective leadership and that organizational performance will suffer in direct proportion to the neglect of this [15]. Furthermore, it is generally accepted that the effectiveness of any set of people is largely dependent on the quality of its leadership. Effective leader behavior facilitates the attainment of the follower's desires, which then results in effective performance [15, 16, 33, 36]. Leadership is perhaps the most investigated organizational variable that has a potential impact on employee performance [12].

It is evident from the exiting body of literature that studies investigating the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance are limited in the Ugandan context, except for a few (see [32]). Recent leadership studies have also continued to affirm the positive relationship between transformational and transaction leadership and performance at various levels (e.g. [22, 30] and the negative relationship between *Laissez-faire* leadership and performance [17, 32, 34]. The relationship between leadership styles and academic staff performance is illustrated in the Fig. 24.1 below.

Figure 24.1 reflects the fact that academic staff performance, as measured in terms of: qualification, teaching/cognate experience, contribution to university and community, publications, current research/extension and administrative experience



**Fig. 24.1** The relationship between leadership styles and staff performance (Source: Adopted from Hamidifar [25] and modified by the author)

can be influenced by either one of the three different leadership styles considered in this article: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Leadership styles as measured the Multifactor Leadership and modified by [17] gives five factors (sub-variables) as characteristics of transformational leadership: idealized influence attributed to behavior, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. The model also gives three factors (sub-variables) as characteristic of transactional leadership namely: contingent reward, management by exception-active, and Management by exception-passive).

Intellectuals are very difficult people to lead. Academic staff needs independent thinking in whatever they do. The leader needs to justify any decisions he chooses to make, without which, it will face a lot of resistance. For example, the Makerere University Academic Staff Association (MUASA) is a very powerful body in the management of the University, yet it is not provided for in any structures of the Makerere. On many occasions has found itself on the other side of the university administration's position, which has in most cases ended into strikes. This makes it a complex constituency to manage. Since Universities have multiple constituencies, their leadership is essentially collegial in nature where all members in the community are considered equal and make decisions in committees and consensus among colleagues [5].

Kyambogo University is one of the higher institutions of learning in Uganda, which was created in 2001, under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001. This was through the merger of three institutions namely The Institute for Teacher Education Kyambogo (ITEK), Uganda Polytechnic Kyambogo (UPK) and the Uganda National Institute for Special Needs Education (UNISE). The merged institutions had different and unique missions, values, visions and cultures prompting different aspirations. Since its creation, Kyambogo University has faced a number of challenges punctuated with unrest and a series of strikes (Weekly Observer 23rd–29th November 2006 and New Vision March 6 2008). This led to indefinite closure of the institution (Monitor 1st April 2008).

The founding Vice Chancellor was retired and his position advertised twice with no applicants (New Vision 12th Jan 2008). The other key people in the top management including the University Secretary and Bursar were sent on suspension. The University Council was dissolved and a new one appointed (New Vision 13th

April 2008) and there was a cabinet committee set up to advise on the way forward (Monitor March 26th 2008). Amidst these events, there is less productivity of staff as classes are suspended in most cases, no research can be conducted under such situations, thus a manifestation of the leadership challenges in the institution, which requires the leader to adopt an appropriate leadership style.

Universities in Uganda tend to have a dual system of structure, the formal bureaucracy and the informal collegial. The collegial committee system cuts across the University with the University Council, Senate, Faculty Boards, Deans, and Departmental committees, where the administration is taken care of by the University Secretary (finances) and the Registrar (Admissions and records). However, the collegial way of doing things undermines bureaucracy which also exists in University leadership (Dear Love 1995). All this an indication of how complex it is to lead academic staff. Therefore, it is very crucial to be mindful of the leadership style under such circumstances.

## 24.5 Future Trends in Leadership Styles

There has been a paradigm shift in organization settings. Yet leadership has to obtain within the existing paradigm at all times. Short of this, relevance is lost and the ability to deal with prevalent issues becomes doubtful. Given the changing nature of settings within the educational institutions to date especially those of Higher learning, it is imperative to re-examine leadership styles that ought to be adopted by leaders in the said institutions.

The first step in the right direction in this case should be consideration of leadership from more specific and action laden angles than the conceptual. Such leadership styles can be viewed from the following perspective:

- People leadership
- Service leadership
- Outreach-based leadership
- Curriculum leadership
- Research leadership

Not only that but future leaders ought to understand the levels of complexity that prevail in educational leadership such as;

- Structural complexity relating to systems in the organization
- Process complexity relating to the way things are done
- Product Complexity relating to the nature of output in an organization
- Managerial Complexity relating to the way people are led

These would help in adopting and adapting to coping mechanisms of leadership in the wake of complexity within the educational institutions. That way, leadership can serve its sacred purpose of transforming school performance through proper and appropriate influence of academic staff; highly held by proponents of education.



## 24.6 Conclusion

The key themes of this article are performance and leadership styles, mainly focusing on the new approaches of leadership styles that were developed after the traditional ones received a lot of criticisms. This is because we are in the twenty-first century where the environment in which organizations including universities operate is so fluid, therefore the leadership styles have also evolved to take care of this kind of environment.

Although leaders are perceived to be the goal setters, and lead their followers towards achieving those goals, the way they chose to do so matters. When it comes to leading universities, the leaders have to be extremely very careful in selecting a certain leadership style. This is because, universities globally, have the highest concentration of intellectual, who cannot a no for an answer. Universities are the only places where leaders would be challenged and concede defeat. Under such circumstances, leaders could probably define situations in which highly active/inactive leadership is not necessary and maybe not even desirable. For instance, in their substitutes for leadership theory Kerr and Jermier (1978) propose several subordinate, task, and, organization characteristics that could reduce the importance of leadership. A less active role of leaders could also lead to 'empowerment' of followers which could even make for a useful component of transformational leadership.

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