

“LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION AND UNDERPINNING”

by

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a subject that is relevant and always topical in any human institution or organization and more so in the African context of today.

This issue of leadership is one that usually poses dilemma to the analyst when it comes to its examination. This is particularly so in that it has a plethora of dimensions viz: The Philosophy of leadership, Institutional Leadership, Social/Club Leadership, Religious Leadership, Community/Traditional Leadership, Church Leadership, Managerial Leadership, Political Leadership, etc. And, each of those dimensions is enough for independent analytical consideration. The recognition of this dilemma notwithstanding, the intention of this address is to present a theoretical exposition of leadership generally and particularly within the continent of Africa. To this end, our attention in this address is principally focused on the variables such as:

- ❖ The concept of leadership
- ❖ A preview of some leadership theories
- ❖ Leadership styles
- ❖ Power bases of leadership
- ❖ Leadership attributes, and
- ❖ Leadership inadequacy

THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

The concept of leadership has attracted a lot of scholastic and intellectual attentions particularly in the quest to define its subject-matter. As a matter of fact, even though leadership remains one of the most relevant aspects of any human community, its definition has been challenging and such definitions have varied, depending on the situation (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). This notwithstanding, certain definitions which seem to have gained global acclamation, if not total unanimity, have been provided.

Leadership is the ability to get men and women to do what they want to do and like doing it (Cohen et al 1984).

It is the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. It is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen with ordinary people and normally with ordinary efforts. The issue is that a leader makes things to happen which others may not be able to make to happen.

Leadership is about setting and not just reacting to agendas, identifying problems, and initiating change that makes for sustainable improvement and seeing what is initiated to completion (Wikipedia).

Concretely put, leadership connotes ability to inspire, direct, move, motivate, propel and encourage others positively to targeted end. It is the ability to lead others. And a leader's business is to lead to achieve.

Leadership is, therefore, a concept that is associated with authority, power or influence in human relationship (Eze, 1995, Stogdill, 1974). It is the capacity or the potential to influence people and channel their energies to the accomplishment of goals, objectives or result that are clearly identified.

THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

Each theory of leadership sets up a standard as to the “right” under which leaders command. If one is to follow a leader, there must be a good reason. Some hold to the theory that experience and intelligence provide that right, some cite bureaucratic precedence, and others point to charisma and the ability to motivate. In this section, six theories are considered. These are the great man-woman theory, trait theory, contingency theories, charismatic/transformational theory, authentic leadership theory and Goleman’s political leadership theory.

1. Great Man-Woman Theory:

The great man-woman theory, which is much older than any of the formal social science disciplines, reflects the adage that “great leaders are born, not made.” This theory is a belief that personal qualities and abilities make certain great persons natural leaders. Proponents of the great man-woman theory would state that if important historical leader such as Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great were alive today, they would again rise to positions of leadership because of their natural abilities. Of course, this is mere speculation, and there is little evidence to support the theory, but this does not mean that people do not still believe in it. The fact that in certain countries the relatives of great leaders are also put into positions of power may indicate that there is some general faith in this notion of in-born leadership ability. It cannot be completely ignored. Think about the Ghandis in India; think of Queen Elizabeth of England.

2. Trait Theory:

In the early part of this century, psychologists made many attempts to isolate the specific traits, or consistent and enduring personality attributes, associated with leader’s success (Riggio,1990). The trait theory of leadership refers to several of these investigations. Much of this research involved identifying effective and ineffective leaders, measuring them in terms of certain personality traits, and isolating those that distinguished the effective from the ineffective leaders. Some of the more commonly studied traits were extroversion, dominance, psychological adjustment, and intelligence (Hollander, 1985). It was presumed that those who were more extroverted, dominant, better adjusted, or more intelligent would be more likely to do well as leaders. Unfortunately, the results of these studies have been inconclusive; there is no solid evidence of any single trait or group of traits common to all effective leaders (Hollander, 1985; Stogdill, 1948).

The major criticism of the trait theory is that leadership abilities or personality traits are not important in determining leadership effectiveness. In fact, early “trait” researchers have come up with a long list of individual personality characteristics which have been shown to correlate with effective leadership performance. Among these are self-confidence, intelligence, ambition, perseverance, and will (Schultz, 1979, Robbins 1991). But because these traits have not demonstrated consistent effects in all cases of leadership, one would conclude that the trait approach is not enough in understanding the nature of effective leadership.

Effective leadership represents a strong interaction between the characteristics of the leader himself and the characteristics of the situation.

3. Contingency Theories:

Contingency theories of leadership examine the interaction of characteristics of the leader and the situation, stating that effective leadership depends on the proper match between the two. Leader’s effectiveness, according to the contingency theories, depends or is contingent upon the interaction of leader behaviour and the situation. Leaders evolve out of situations or situations make leaders as much as leaders make situations.

4. **Charismatic/Transformational Leadership Theory:**

Charismatic leadership theory states that followers make attributions of heroic or extraordinary leadership abilities when they observe certain behaviours in their leaders (Conger and Kanungo, 1999).

According to Burns, transformational political leaders include charismatic political leaders who utilize their personal charm to change political systems in societies. Kwame Nkrumah, of blessed memory, is a typical example. I will put Mandela and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt among individuals who can be cited as being charismatic/transformational leaders.

All the aforelisted charismatic/transformational African leaders have four things in common. These are: a vision, they are willing to take personal risks to achieve that vision, they are sensitive to follower needs, and they exhibit behaviours that are out of the ordinary (Conger and Kanungo, 1999).

5. **Authentic Leadership:**

Although charismatic leadership theories and transformational leadership theories have added greatly to our understanding of effective leadership, they do not explicitly deal with the role of ethics and trust. Some scholars have argued that a consideration of ethics and trust is essential to complete the picture of effective leadership.

Authentic leaders know what they believe in and what they value, and act on those values and beliefs openly and candidly. They are frank and trustworthy. Their followers would consider them to be ethical people. The primary quality, therefore, produced by authentic leadership is trust. Authentic leaders share information, encourage open communication and stick to their ideals.

6. **Goleman's Political Leadership Theory:**

This theory was advanced by Daniel Goleman in 1995. The theory focuses on elements that make up the features of a political leader. It also places emphasis on behavioural approaches adopted by various political leaders. Goleman's theory was aimed at determining behavioural conduct by political leaders. The theory leans heavily on emotional intelligence, and among the aspects of emotional intelligence highlighted in Goleman's political leadership theory are self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy and motivation amongst political leaders.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Leadership styles have been theoretically elucidated as predicate of leadership types. They are as varied as the definition of the concept of leadership itself. Each style is usually depended on the person involved, places, times and circumstances in question. A leadership style is of importance as one style may produce a very different outcome from another. It is defined as a general concept that includes a leader's beliefs, decision making methods, and typical ways of dealing with others (Jo-Ansie van Wyk, 2007).

Leadership style is defined as the patterns of behaviour of the leader, as perceived by others. One of the most important elements in Leadership study is the style of the leader. Leaders develop their styles over a period of time from experience, education, training and exposure. In his own contribution, Caprey and Carr (1982) gave a triadic approach to a choice of Leadership Style, viz, forces in the leader; forces in the situation; and forces in the followers. These three factors are usually considered in deciding how to lead:

1. *Forces in the Leader:* The leader's behaviour in any given situation will be influenced greatly by the many forces operating within his own personality which have developed as a result of his background, education, orientation, knowledge and experience. These include (a) his value system and belief system; (b) his confidence in his followers; (c) his own leadership inclinations (his comfort with different leadership styles); (d) his feelings of security in uncertain situations; (e) his assessment of his follower's competence; (f) his level of ethnic group affiliation; and (g) his passion.

2. *Forces in the Followers:* Before deciding how to lead a certain group, the leader must remember that each follower, like himself, is influenced by many personality factors, and has a set of expectations about how the leader should act in relation to him. Other forces in the followers include: (a) their needs for dependence; (b) their readiness to assume responsibility; (c) their interest in the problem; (d) the extent to which they understand and identify with the goals and aspirations of the group; (e) their knowledge and experience; (f) their background and orientation; and (g) their expectations.
3. *Forces in the Situation:* In addition to these stated forces, certain characteristics of the general situation greatly affect the leader's style of leadership. Among the more critical environmental pressures that surround him are those which stem from the type of environment (tradition, climate, size, geographic spread and the pressures of time and danger (Bernard, 1993).

Apart from this theoretical scheme, Quadri (1983) listed different types of Leadership Styles:

- (i) ***Inner-Centered:*** The Inner-Centered Leader arrogates a high opinion to himself. He wants everybody to conform with his directives and order. He is usually possessive and wants everybody to know that he is in-charge.
- (ii) ***Democratic-Leader:*** The basic characteristic of this is that he demonstrates respect for others. Leadership responsibilities are shared and decision-making are based on joint and consultative effort.
- (iii) ***Charismatic Leader:*** He possesses a unique ability to lead. He is loved, adored or respected and his authority is never threatened, his advice is naturally taken as order. Anything he says is usually accepted as correct.
- (iv) ***Transactional Leader:*** This leader is aware of the needs of his subordinates and the organization which he leads. He tries to integrate the two areas of needs. He is flexible, sympathetic, intelligent, resourceful, dynamic, accessible, cooperative, loyal and likeable by his subordinates as well as the employer.
- (v) ***Laissez-faire Leader:*** He is passive and nonchalant. He is usually tolerant to a fault and easily influenced. He buckles easily.
- (vi) ***Coercive Leader:*** He is a forceful leader, often referred to as a dictator or authoritarian.
- (vii) ***Pseudo-Democratic:*** He claims to demonstrate democracy but in reality he is autocratic. He merely seeks the opinion of his group just to test their pulse. He never utilizes other people's ideas unless they agree with his.
- (viii) ***Leader-Mentor:*** He has ability, confidence and knowledge to lead and to impart to followers, training them to be able to assume leadership role.

Having examined all these leadership styles, it is pertinent to say that no leader excels under all conditions. The chances are that anyone who wants to become an effective leader can be, if he carefully analyses the situation he faces, and selects appropriate leadership style. A leader may adopt a leadership style or more than one style consciously, semi-consciously or unconsciously.

POWER BASES OF LEADERSHIP

Since Leadership is the process of attempting to influence the behaviour of others, and power is the means by which the leader actually gains compliance from the followers, the two concepts are inseparable (Ajila and Adegoke, 1998). It is, therefore, necessary to examine leadership power bases that a leader often uses to influence the followers:

Coercive Power Base:

This is a leadership authority that shuts up or restrains the followers by nullifying their will and thereby compelling them to act without choice. It is a fear-inducing strategy. People only respond to the leader's cause, not necessarily his or her values but for fear of punishment, denial or deprivation (all in form of punishment).

Connection Power Base:

This is a leader's strategy of identifying influential people in the society and using them openly or secretly so as to gain support.

Reward Power Base:

This is a patronage strategy used by leaders to induce followership support. Incentives like selective appointments, promotions, public recognition of people with little life achievement but who are seen as influential, and physical cash and monetary values are used to increase level of followership response to the leader's cause.

Legitimate Power Base:

This is the use of authoritative positive strategy. In democratic societies, this power comes through the constitutional process of election by popular will. Such election is an approval for the command of followers.

Referent Power Base:

This is the use of personality traits and virtues. A leader who has virtuous qualities is highly admired by the ruled because of his personality. It is this admiration that enables the leader, more than anything else, to influence others. The followers in turn are prepared to identify themselves with the leader's cause implicitly.

Expert Power Base:

Leadership authority here is based on the expertise, skill and knowledge the leader possesses. He is respected for his expertise and thus accepted as qualified to facilitate not only the commitment of the followers but more significantly the achievement of goals.

Having examined the foregoing bases of leadership, we would assume that their understanding may not only help people to identify the impact of leadership power base, but also to show the significance for the development of an enduring leadership philosophy for Africa, a continent that has gone through series of leadership crises. It is equally our view that it will help policy-making leaders, to study the various processes of possessing political power and how such power is used, the nature of the problem, and the pressures of time. Whatever may be the base, there is need for incremental enhancement.

LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES

Here, we cannot be exhaustive. The following are the major attributes of leadership:

Infinite Courage: No follower will like to be dominated by a leader who lacks self-confidence, courage and wisdom. No intelligent follower will be dominated by such a leader for very long.

Self Control: The person who controls self, rules others. The man who can't control himself cannot easily control others. In fact, a leader that can control himself sets a good example for his followers to emulate.

Sense of Justice: Without a sense of fairness and justice, no leader can command and retain the respect of his followers.

Decision Making: The man who wavers in his decision shows that he is not sure of himself and cannot lead others successfully. Decisiveness is highly prized in leadership. Fear of

making mistakes may lead to indecision but it is better to be decisive and correct mistakes as they occur or as they are discovered.

Planning: The successful leader must plan his work and work his plan. A leader who moves by guesswork, without practical, definite plans, is comparable to a ship without a rudder. Sooner or later, he will land on the rocks. Planning is an important attribute for a leader to succeed.

Doing More: One of the penalties of leadership is the necessity of willingness, on the part of the leader, to do more than he requires of his followers.

Pleasing Personality: Leadership calls for respect. A person without a good and pleasing personality will not be respected by his followers for very long. Of course, respect begets respect.

Sympathy/Empathy: The word sympathy can be best defined as sharing the feelings of others, especially feelings of sorrow or anguish. The successful leader must be in sympathy with his followers. Moreover, he must understand them and their problems, sharing with them and caring for them.

Responsibility: The person who wants to be a leader must develop the quality of taking and accepting responsibility. With responsibility comes power. A leader is assumed to be responsible for the mistakes and the shortcomings of his followers. If he tries to shift the responsibility, he will not remain the leader for too long and if he does, he will end as failure.

Cooperation: Without good co-operation and coordination, no organized plan could be executed. Thus a successful leader must understand and apply the principles of cooperative efforts and be able to induce his followers to do the same. Leadership calls for power, and power calls for cooperation and management.

Knowledge and Understanding: While a leader does not need to have detailed or encyclopaedic knowledge of all subjects, he must have basic and fundamental knowledge and understanding of his subjects and the subject matter. A leader must also be a reader.

Absorbing Capacity: Particularly in politics, there are insults that a leader must be able to absorb. Some remarks and issues are better treated by ignoring them. The leader must be knowledgeable and judicious enough to differentiate between what should be ignored and what must be responded to.

Belief in God and being God-fearing: Without God, no matter how any leader understands and worships Him, little or nothing can be done on human efforts alone. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It must be added that it is also the beginning of success of a leader.

THINGS A LEADER NEEDS TO DO

A leader gets things done through other people. Although people differ from one another physically and psychologically, they are all governed by certain basic needs. The most important need in all individuals is the need to gain recognition and approval. A leader who can satisfy this need will have no difficulty in influencing people, and getting done the job in hand. While attempting to satisfy this great urge, the leader should scrupulously avoid criticizing people particularly in the presence of others. On the positive side, he has to give hearty, generous and sincere appreciation as often as such appreciation is deserved. If one takes the trouble, one can always discover something or the other in an individual for which real appreciation can be expressed. Where necessary, of course, sanction or discipline must be administered.

Next, the leader, in order to get willing cooperation, has to look at things from the other person's point of view. He has to see what the other person wants rather than what he himself is interested in. The two can be married together.

WHO IS AN EFFECTIVE LEADER?

An effective leader is one who:

- 1) remembers that effective leadership is an interaction between the characteristics of the leader himself and the characteristics of the situation in which leadership takes place;
- 2) has the ability to use referent and expert power more regularly and more efficiently than his use of authority;
- 3) is a supportive type of leader;
- 4) is an integrative embodiment of a continuum ranging from leader-centered strategies to group-centered strategies;
- 5) has the ability to combine task-oriented function with group-supportive function in more or less balanced manner;
- 6) follows the four most effective ways of sharing his leadership function with his subordinates - Goal Attainment, Adaptation, Integration and Maintenance;
- 7) modifies his assumptions about people in line with Theory-Y theory by Douglas McGregor which states that some people who see work as natural will be self-directing if they are committed to the objectives. The leader's role with these people is to help them achieve their potential;
- 8) is a patriotic, people's relevant leader; and
- 9) avoids failure by guarding against inability to organize details, unwillingness to render humble services, fear of competition from followers, lack of imagination, selfishness, intemperance, living on rumours and gossips, favoritism and nepotism, emphasis on title and authority, excessive stress and burn-out.

LEADERSHIP INADEQUACY

Let us now dwell at some length here on political leadership specifically. Politics is the master in getting a country move forward.

The leadership problems in Africa have been attributed to many causes, the most significant of which is leadership inadequacies. This is not too difficult to accept because the success or failure of any organisation is a reflection of leadership performance. Within our own life time, we have witnessed series of political leadership characterized by more shortcomings than achievements. When we go further to explore the reasons for the persistence of the leadership problems in Africa, the following short-comings are common to most leaders in all their manifestations:

Acceptance of the Supremacy of Individual Ethnic Identity Over that of the Nation:

This sub-optimization of national interest, they said, has been the incurable source of discrimination, favouritism, nepotism, disrespect for individual human dignity and disloyalty to the nation. The nation is subjugated under ethnic interest or ethnic exploitation by the leader.

Acceptance of Public Position as Poverty Heal-all:

There are some countries where a person, on appointment into the political or governmental leadership position, would boast that he would never be poor again in his life time. Thus, most of our leaders in top policy-making positions have schooled themselves in the leadership philosophy of

make-it-while-you-are-there, and thus they have turned the administration of state into the administration of naked acquisitiveness and monumental corruption.

Acceptance of Leadership Ascendancy under Full Knowledge of Self Inadequacies:

This has made many leaders to become pawns on the chess board of powerful and cunning advisers and so-called patrons.

Acceptance of Dishonesty as the only means of Sustaining Leadership Position:

We have witnessed in some countries leadership dishonesty in many dimensions - in their improper and even non-declaration of assets, fraudulent completion of tax papers, improper management of national resources, improper contract negotiations, and stealing government funds for personal electoral purposes or party electoral purposes.

Over-display of Leadership Arrogance:

Our leaders want to look and be treated as monarchs. The monarchical tendency is usually manifested in four styles: The quest for aristocratic effect, the personalization of authority, the socialization of authority or leadership glorification, and the quest for a royal historical identify.

Disrespect for the Law:

This ranges from simple things like flagrant disobedience of traffic rules to breach of the Constitution.

Disregard of Superior Values and Ideas:

A political leader or any leader for that matter is not an exclusive preserve of wisdom. Many ideas and suggestions that could be useful to the community or the nation are rejected for selfish reasons by some leaders, if it will not enhance their pocket or their ego or those of their kith and kin and their friends and cronies.

Inability To Stay With and Manage Success:

It appears that there is something in the African gene which makes him to forget how he has toiled to reach lofty heights. Once there, he dances and wines with all his fortunes only to crash into the bottomless pit of public disrespect.

Leadership inadequacies, as enumerated here, are humiliating. They are so because of the gradual retrogression of human quality and dignity which these personal weaknesses have caused. Certainly, Africa needs right leadership orientation. It does not matter who rules – let him rule well.

CONCLUSION

Given the pressures of domestic needs and demands, and the global challenges and opportunities confronting Africa, it is imperative that there is an institutionalized transition of leadership from one generation to another. Leadership succession should be a relay race and not an obstacle race. Two types of leaders are needed - functional and political. Functional or operational leaders are those that are responsible for ensuring the efficient and effective performance of the various institutions of governance, and other governance agencies in civil society and the private sector. These are professional people, trained to perform specific functions in the various domains and levels of the governance system – as senior civil servants or in other technical services – supportive of the various institutions and agencies such as health, education, communication, transportation, security, defence, and so on. But leadership entails the ability to identify, mobilize and organise the relevant talents, expertise and experience for the performance of the expected functions of an institution or agency. It entails the creation and maintenance of the appropriate environment, working conditions and incentives. However, although the functional leaders may be professional and technical, for them to be effective in the performance of their leadership functions that require collective efforts – working with other people, and possibly other governance agencies –, they need the art and skills of identifying, mobilising, energizing and synergizing the multitude of people, and blend their various talents and expertise into a series of common actions. They thus need to be appropriately sensitized to the major governance issues and the societal context in which they

function. In the modern governance context, in which knowledge and information are crucial to the effectiveness of a governance system, political leaders also need training. In the past, African political leaders have generally emerged from society in response to the political demands of the moment, without training, experience or prior preparation. However, as Africa is undergoing multiple transformations, it must be prepared to respond effectively to the global challenges and opportunities that are likely to emerge as the 21st century unfolds, in which case, a new breed of leadership is needed. To be efficient and effective players in the various domains and levels of governance, policy-makers need to have the relevant information and knowledge in order to formulate and implement the appropriate policies or decisions. Beyond the abilities to mobilise, organize and inspire people to collective actions, political leaders must also have sound understandings of the fundamental issues – economic, political, cultural, historical or social – with which they are dealing. In the absence of this understanding, political leaders will not be able to perform their functions efficiently and effectively. They will be unable to make informed decisions or fully understand the advice of their senior bureaucrats, or evaluate their performances objectively. Thus, to be efficient and effective in the performance of their respective functions, both types of leaders – the functional and political – would require a reasonable grasp of the issues they are dealing with (economic, social, political, global, regional, diplomatic, etcetera), a sound understanding of the governance systems in which they are working, the principles supportive of good governance and the practices that might create bad governance in their respective societal contexts. As governance is a dynamic and continuous process, responding to needs and demands and changing societal contexts, in an equally rapidly changing global environment, it is a life-long education and training for both types of leaders.

In line with the preceding arguments in this address, we found it appropriate to conclude that African polity needs leaders who will be committed to the value of service and service to community, humanity and God; committed to the value of honesty and integrity; and committed to the rule of law and to upholding fairness, equity, justice and fear of God.

Let me end this address by referring to Plato's 'The Republic', a perfectly just, harmonious, democratic and well-governed state could be realized by philosophers becoming kings, or kings/rulers of any city becoming philosophers.

A philosopher was distinguished as a lover of learning, knowledge and truth. He has the intelligence and intellect to make the distinction between reality as forms that are constant, and particulars that are changeable. Those who only recognize those things that they can see and touch have no knowledge but only belief and superstition. They only know half-truth, that is half-real, and that is imperfect and changing and unstable.

Plato goes on to write, "Then he who is to be a good and noble guardian of our city will be, by nature, philosophical and spirited, quick and strong. It must, therefore, be someone with energy, vision, intelligent and powerful. But beyond that, they had to be people who do not simply prioritise their own self-interest but those of the city. Then from among the guardians, we must select those men who we think, on inquiry, have excelled all their lifelong in doing zealously whatever they thought was for the city's interest and in refusing resolutely to do what they thought was on its harm."

To meet these expectations, a good leader, according to Robert (1972), is one who can be looked up to, whose personal judgement is trusted, who can inspire and warm the hearts of those he leads, gaining their trust and confidence and explaining what is needed in language which can be understood. In addition to being an inspirer who warms the hearts of his followers, a leader must be a visionary, a realistic dreamer who learns from all situations and all circumstances, he must be a reader and a patient listener. A leader must not only lead, he must be seen, accepted and trusted to be decisively leading.