

LEADERSHIP FOR QUALITY DECISION MAKING IN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY

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ABSTRACT

Excellent management is an integral part of the university system. The university system is a formal organization with consciously coordinated activities to meet activities to meet academic and administrative goals and objectives. It has a formal structure of authority, communication, responsibility, purpose etc. The university system is a service organization and is seen as role models of innovation and change. It is expected to assist in individual social mobility and betterment of quality of life. The advancement of any university depends on the quality of its leaders and the decisions they make to meet the university goals and objectives. No organization can excel above the quality of its leaders. Therefore the need for good leadership and quality decision making cannot be over-emphasized. Against this background, this paper highlights the role of leadership and decision making within the university system as the need to decide is the everyday preoccupation of a good leader. The paper concludes that without good leadership and quality decisions, the university system cannot function effectively.

KEYWORDS: Leadership; Decision making; University system; Organization; Quality leader; Participatory concept.

INTRODUCTION

Universities the world over are established for the propagation, dissemination and the application of knowledge. It is an intellectual organization composed essentially of devotees of knowledge, some investigating, some acquiring but all dedicated to intellectual life. The American Association of Universities Professors (AAUP) in Ikenwe (1998), states that the basic function of a college or university are to preserve, augment, criticize, transform knowledge and to foster creative capabilities. These functions are performed by a community of scholars, who must be free to exercise independent judgments in the planning and execution of their responsibility. Ede (2000), describes universities as international communities engaged in the daily business of the search for knowledge and the truth. He further affirms that universities in Nigeria are organized for teaching, research, community service as well as dissemination of necessary information. The multi purpose nature of the functions of universities namely teaching, research and service to the society, necessitates the reflection of the diversity of the function of its method of governance and the choice of management techniques. Various activity decision levels which exist in the university structure require delegation of appropriate decision making process at the appropriate level and time. Thus, due to its diversity in structure and functions, its officers make it imperative for their managers to seek broad opinion of members of its community before arriving at crucial decisions. Various committees are therefore set up by the council, the senate and the vice-chancellor to handle various issues that are relevant to the effective management of the university system. Even at faculties and departments, various committees abound to assist in the management of both academic and administrative functions of such faculties and departments.

THE UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE

The Senate is the highest academic body in the university system with the Vice-Chancellor as its chairman.

Its authority covers all academic matters although some, such as appointments, are shared with council. It is Senate that has the formal authority under the university's charter and status to make academic policy. Therefore, for it to take meaningful decisions it has to create certain committees. Council is the governing body of the university and is the formal employer of all university staff. It is charged with the general control and superintendent of the policy, finance and property of the university. University employees are required under the leadership of the Vice-Chancellor to carry out councils policies. To that extent the Vice-Chancellor may be seen as "Chief Executive" and "Academic officer" of the university. Under the Vice-Chancellor's office are the office of the Deputy Vice-chancellor administration and academic. He is supported by the Registrar who is the chief administrative officer of the university and is responsible to the Vice-chancellor for the day to day administrative work of the university. By virtue of his office, he is secretary to the council, senate, congregation and convocation. He is therefore responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the university's academic and administrative supportive services. Other principal officers include the bursar, who is the chief financial officer of the university and is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the day to day administration and control of financial affairs of the university The Librarian is responsible to the Vice-chancellor for the administration of the university library and the coordination of the library services in the university.

The above organizational structure in the university is incomplete without a study of the operation of the executive arm, which is responsible for the planning execution of the decisions made by committees

LEADERSHIP ROLE

The concept of leadership in education connotes many things to so many people. Some view leadership as a holder of an office in an organization, while others see it as every act of influence on a matter relevant to organizational survival. In the university system, the Vice-Chancellor is both a leader and an administrator. Leadership cannot be considered outside a group or organization. Nwachukwu (1987), defines leadership as a social influencing process for the attainment of goals. According to Donnell and Koontz (1980), leadership is an act of influence that stimulates and motivates subordinates to accomplish assigned tasks. Thus in the university system, the successful leader must strive to achieve the university goals and objectives, influence members of staff positively and provide direction for his team. If one therefore helps a group to define and achieve goals, influences others to execute policies, reconcile conflicts and make people happy to belong to that organization, such a person is a leader. Leadership therefore involves followers and subordinates. The use of different forms of leadership acts decreases, as one move down the power hierarchy. According to Ocho (1997), personality traits related to leadership in one situation may not be appropriate in another and different situation. Therefore, a good performance dean of a faculty may not necessarily make a good and successful Vice-Chancellor. The two positions require different leadership styles, knowledge and skills. The role of leadership in the university system could be summarized as thus:- Change in certain directions of goals or policies. This could mean the introduction of new and different equipments, retraining of personnel and recruitment of personnel with relevant skills and training, creation of new faculties and departments. To achieve success, requires courage, foresight, planning and determination on the part of leaders.

One important role of leadership is his human relations skills. These skills are employed to motivate staff, improve morale, and give a feeling of satisfaction and self-fulfillment. To succeed, such qualities such as sympathy, regard for the individual as a person, empathy, fairness, justice, democratic leadership are required of the leaders. Ocho (1997), maintains that Leadership demands perception, understanding and actions over and above the formal requirements of an organization because:-

- (i) The organization rules, regulations and charts cannot foresee all kinds of situations:-
- (ii) The environment of an organization is in constant change and the Organization ought to change with it if it is to survive.
- (iii) Imbalances in the operation of an organization arising from its need to maintain equilibrium, grow and meet the needs of the individual and subsystems within it.
- (iv) The nature of human membership in the organization which cannot be constant.

Owens (1981), classified leaders as either (i) exploitive authoritative; (ii) benevolent authoritative; (iii) consultative and participative. For example, the exploitive authoritative leaders discourage team work as policy formulation and decision making take place at the top. The benevolent authoritative according to Owens, formulates policy at the top just like the exploitive authoritative leader but some implementation decisions are made at lower levels based on moderately accurate and adequate information. The consultative leader makes only broad policies at the top while more specific decisions are made at lower levels. While in the case of the participative leader, decision making is done throughout the organization linked by overlapping groups and based upon full and accurate information. Decision strategy employed here is decision largely made on group basis encouraging team work. All leaders in organizations fall within one of the above mentioned types of leadership. Uwazurike (1997), stated that whatever leadership style a leader adopts in decision making will depend on the situation a leader finds himself. In decision making therefore, it is important for a leader to take full responsibility for any decision made. The need for good leadership in our universities system is therefore very crucial. Educational Managers should therefore rise to the occasion and provide the type of leadership needed to take quality policy decisions in order to ensure the survival of the system.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD LEADER

Leaders according to Bennis (1998), “manage the dream” in an organization. They have the capacity to create a compelling vision and then translate that vision into reality. Drunker (1967), defines the task of a leader as defining the mission. Some of the key qualities of a good leader include:

Passion -- The leader loves what he does and enjoys doing

Curiosity and daring -- The leader wonders about everything and wants to learn as much as he can, and is willing to take risks. He embraces errors knowing that he learns from them.

Guiding Vision -- The leader has a clear idea of what he wants to do professionally and personally, and the strength to persist in the face of setbacks and even failures.

Integrity -- He is honest, matured and has strong moral principles: he is also firm and fair to subordinates.

DECISION MAKING WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Various activity decision levels which exist in the university structure require delegation of appropriate authority to relevant officers and the use of appropriate decision making process.

In his contribution to decision making in business, Nwachukwu (1988), observed that decision making is the selection of the course of action believed by the decision maker to yield the best result under certain circumstances. Uwazurike (1997), in his study on leadership and decision making found out that decision making theory are pivoted on decision making as a process. He further asserts that decision making process is conceptualized as an action circle and sequential step to problem solving. An experienced executive arm of a university could exert a lot of influence on the decisions of a committee through mature and seasoned guidance. Gwary (1993), viewed the university system as a miniature political system. There exists interest groups competing and cooperating for power. Daudu (1986), observed that the management of such complex organization requires participation through the committee system because of the bureaucratic, collegial and political models that are applicable in them. The bureaucratic model is a relatively authoritarian model based upon hierarchies and specific procedures, rules and regulations. The collegial model is based upon the motion of collegiums or utopian community of scholars which favours full participation in decision making. Corson (1973), compared the organization of universities with that of other organizations and noted that for too long, colleges and universities borrowed their governance models from business and public administration. He stated that the university must be recognized as being made up of groups of people that are relatively independent of the institution and of each other and that they are simultaneously more capable of exercising power over the institution than they are staff to than a corporation or a government. The governance of such a community requires structures and processes that

will facilitate the engineering of consensus. Such a community cannot be governed with the structures that rely on authoritative command.

THE PARTICIPATORY CONCEPT OF THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

Participatory decision making predicates that decisions are made and clearly understood by all members of the group. When all members participate in decision making they are committed to the implementation of such decisions. It is therefore worthy of note that the university system is made up of people with investigative and critical minds with the function of teaching, research and public service dedicated to intellectual life and hence the need for a democratic system and consequently the introduction of the committee system. Ibanga (2005), defines committee as when a group of people are assigned a specific responsibility to tackle a situation. Committees are therefore described as a group of people assembled together to take action on all administrative task. Ndu (1993) observed that tertiary institutions like other formal organizations need human beings to execute their programmes and achieve set goals. The university system as a complex organization requires participation through the committee system. Universities conduct large amount of business through channels of communication and power is not only decentralized in university governance but also reconciliation of differences and divergences among individuals and different power group is often managed by committees. The committee system as an administrative tool has contributed to the effectiveness of the university system through promoting all the four elements of management process:- planning, control, motivation and coordination. Moodie and Eustance (1974), identified the uses of committees as (i) exchanging views and information; (ii) recommending action; (iii) generating ideas; (iv) making policy decisions.

Macgregor's Y theory stipulates that

- (i) The expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest.
- (ii) External control is not the only means of obtaining effort. Man will exercise self – direction and self control in the realization of objectives to which it is committed.
- (iii) The most significant reward that can be offered in order to obtain commitment, is the satisfaction of the individuals self – actualization needs.
- (iv) The Average human being learns under proper condition not only to accept but also to seek responsibility.
- (v) Many more people are able to contribute effectively to the solution of organizational problems.
- (vi) At present, the potentialities of the average person are not being fully used.

The major point in Macgregor's theory Y is that the integration of people around organizational objectives would create opportunities for members to participate in decision-making. Despite arguments by some members of staff that participative decision making might not after all be the best decision method, clearly it does improve the quality of decision by incorporating the ideas and experience of staff in decision making. What should therefore be worked on is not just for university leaders to carry their staff along by allowing group discussions and participation in decisions regarding policies, but also to strive to implement decisions made by committees so that trust will exist between leadership and subordinates.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper identifies the need for Leadership to take quality decisions in university management in order to meet its educational goals and objectives. Leadership must plan, take decisions, communicate, organize and coordinate activities, and evaluate his work from time to time. A good leader therefore demands perception, understanding and actions over and above the formal requirements of an organization. The paper traces the different types of leadership. That leadership is either Exploitative authoritative; Benevolent authoritative; Consultative or Participative. Educational Leaders are encouraged to be participative because the decision strategy employed here is decision largely made on group basis encouraging team work. They should also ensure that recommendations made from group participation are strictly carried out so that there will exist trust and confidence in the system. University leaders that adopt the participatory style of decision making share information as well as influence with subordinates. They must however take responsibility for any final decision.

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