

Coping with the Challenges of Leadership in the Work Environment: The Nigerian Experience

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria as a country is blessed abundantly with both human and natural resources but after more than fifty years of independence is still backward as far as development is concerned. This hardship has caused organizations/individuals struggles to gain and maintain alignment with core values, ethics and principles. Sometimes, our organizational/individual values are tampered with by restraining forces, opposition, and challenges that cause us to do things that are in opposite direction with our stated missions, intentions, and resolutions. In Nigeria, there are a number of environmental changes that have not only increased the need for leadership, but have brought about dramatic transformation of what we call leadership. For instance, the combined factors of 'Globalization' and 'Deregulation' have increased and will continue to increase the level of competition in all sectors of the global economy with the increased ripple effects and implications on the management of organizations in the domestic economy. It is on the strength of this that the paper adopts a conceptual style in looking at the coping strategies in a work environment that is challenged in respect of leadership. The paper adopts a conceptual framework, which defines core concepts, the challenges of leadership in work environment analyzed, the determinants of business success highlighted and qualities of leadership also examined. The paper further demonstrates the responsibilities of leadership, and dwells extensively on how winning teams are built. It finally draws some conclusions.

Keywords: Coping, Challenges, Leadership, Work Environment, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in the most challenging times for business and economics that we have experienced in our lifetimes. This hardship has caused organizations/individuals struggles to gain and maintain alignment with core values, ethics and principles. Sometimes, our organizational/individual values are tampered with by restraining forces, opposition, and challenges that cause us to do things that are in opposite direction with our stated missions, intentions, and resolutions.

Some time ago precisely in 1952, Harvard University made three predictions that apply to the current economic situation, (Tracy, 2010a:3-6). First, they said, there will be more changes in

our businesses in the years ahead than ever before. Second, there will be more competition in business than ever before. And third, there will be more opportunities in business than before. But these opportunities will be different from what we have known today, and one must move quickly to take advantage of them, if you are to survive and thrive against competitors. As time progresses, a fourth prediction were made: it states that, those individuals/organizations that do not quickly adapt to the inevitable and unavoidable changes of today will be in different fields or out of business within the shortest possible time. But it should be realized that the key to managing and succeeding in times of crisis and rapid change is applying the right leadership principles and styles. Right leadership principles are like compasses: they are always pointing the way. If you know how to read them, you won't get lost, confused, or fooled by conflicting signs and voices (Horgan and Horton, 2002:84-85).

From the foregoing therefore, it will be right to say, leadership is the most important factor in the success or failure of any organization, be it private or public. Leaders are primarily self-made, self developed. They work on themselves continually, learning, growing, and becoming more capable and competent over the years.

It is on the strength of the foregoing assertion that the paper adopts a conceptual approach in unraveling leadership style used by managers in the work environment to achieve the objectives of their organizations.

The presentation is therefore structured as:

- (i) Conceptual clarification
- (ii) Challenges of leadership in work environment
- (iii) Determinants of business success
- (iv) Qualities of leadership
- (v) Responsibilities of leadership
- (vi) Building winning teams

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Leadership Defined

Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (2000) defines leadership as a “process of directing and influencing the task of related activities of group members”. Leadership is simply the ability of the manager to influence subordinates to strive willingly toward realizing group goals (Onodugo, 2000). Seen in this context, one is tempted to think that leadership is an exclusive preserve of managers as they perform their organizational roles. This is why Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (1998) see leadership as the “process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in effort towards goal achievement in a given situation”. The above definition brings out certain important points. First, the activity cuts across all organizations whether formal or informal, business or socio-political, etc; wherever anybody is trying to influence another person or group of persons, then leadership is taking place (Haiman and Hilgert, 1987). It is clearly evident that without effective leadership, organizational activities would be un-coordinated and devoid of unity and direction. Second, leadership is a process, which comprises an ever-changing interplay of relationship amongst the leader, the led/follower and the situation. This simply implies that leadership is a dynamic process which must be adapted to the changing needs of supervisor, the work group and the varying situations in the environment for it to be successful. For instance, what makes for successful leadership during the war may fail woefully during the time of peace and vice versa.

To succeed therefore, leaders must adapt their style to the situation rather than expect the situation to adapt to their style. Under this model, the leader must continually scan the environment to know what traits and skills that is required in a given environmental context to influence the subordinates and adopt them. This is what is generally called *the law of the situation*. It requires the delicate balance amongst the leader's skills, the led and the context or the situation.

CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP TOWARDS ORGANIZATION GROWTH

Growth is not an easy thing to come by. Everyone, every organization, desires to grow. However, growth comes along with its challenges which leadership must face and surmount if it must grow. Below are some of these challenges: (Onodugo and Ewurum, 2004)

1. **Challenge of Managing Competition:** Business organisation naturally co-exists with others as they pursue their mission in an industrial setting. Each player is locked in competition with the others in seeking to get and retain the attention of the market. Except where the market is not fully reached with the products, for a firm to grow it would almost always have to diminish the market size of the other competitors. This is not an easy task and a tall order for leadership of organisation to cope with. Further, certain environmental factors have made this challenge more daunting. They are:

- ✓ Globalization
- ✓ Deregulation of most sectors of the Nigerian economy.
- ✓ Advancement in information technology.

2. **The Challenge of Management of Change and Uncertainty:** Human beings by nature operate better in an atmosphere of certainty, predictability and stability. Paradoxically, the environment in which businesses operate is anything but stable. The rule is change. This variableness has been there but has assumed a turbulent profile lately. The premise for projection and planning quickly changes soon after the planning. Demands and expectations of the stakeholders – government, society, employees, market, etc – are more than ever before, very volatile. So a major challenge that faces leadership across organizations is to acquire the skill of maintaining focus amidst change and direction in the face of chaos.

3. **The Challenge of Innovation:** The twin forces of globalization and advancement in Information Technology have made innovation the rule of competition across various industries. To survive, let alone growing, leadership has the onerous task of creating and introducing new products. For organisations, which desire leadership in the market, this is a must. In the face of increase in the expectation of customers and the high technology driven society, anything short of new products and new methods of delivering them will not suffice. This challenge requires huge amount of money set aside for research and development activities.

4. **Challenge of Maintaining Industrial Harmony among Organisation Members:** Growth comes with increase in complexity. It also makes the work environment take in more people with diverse backgrounds, opinions and proclivities. All these will lead to conflict of interests. Growth inevitably comes with control problems. The tendency for cliques and sectional groups with diverse interest to emerge becomes very high. All of this will thrust the leadership with the challenge of attaining industrial harmony. That is why; the larger the organisation the more the leadership requires integrative and industrial relations skills.

5. **The Challenge of Building Capacity for Growth:** Growth comes with demands for increased capacities in various areas. Diverse skills and expertise are required as organisations grow from small to big organisations. Capital needs grow tremendously as well. Ask the managements of banks in Nigeria, what it is like to move from N2b to N25

capitalization and you will discover that it is not fun. At certain level, consultants were required to do certain level of accounting, auditing, training and recruitment. All these provide one form of challenge or the other to the leadership.

6. **The Challenge of Meeting the Demand of the various stakeholders:** As organisations grow, their activities start impacting on a wider spectrum of people. Growing organisations attract the attention of government and the communities where they operate more than smaller ones. Diverse persons and group who finance the organisation take greater interest in the welfare of the organisation than they should have ordinarily. All these stakeholders make claim on the organisation in one way or the other. Governments ask for more tax revenue, the community demands that the organisation be more socially responsible, and yet workers and shareholders ask for increment in salaries and dividends. These conflicting demands of the various stakeholders become a major source of challenge to the leadership of such organisations.

DETERMINANTS OF BUSINESS SUCCESS

Alabar (2011: 78-83), Tracy (2010a: 99-110), LeBoeuf (1987:45-48) and Tracy (2010b:34-42) identified key factors that are relevant to every business and organization success. A failure of one can lead to the collapse of the enterprise.

- (i) *Productivity* – the ultimate goal of business activity is profits, and to maximize this, is having distinctive advantage over your competitors. The key to achieving higher levels of productivity from invested assets is to do more with less, to continually find ways to deliver the same quality and quantity of goods/services at lower costs.
- (ii) *Customer satisfaction* – is the key to long term business success. Businesses succeed by creating and keeping customers in sufficient quantities and in a cost-effective way. The key measure of customer satisfaction is repeat business. This means that the customers are so happy with their experience with the product or service they purchased, and are likely to make a return.
- (iii) *Profitability* – this is the true measure of leadership- it reflects the way and efficiency in which money, materials and men are used in a business. Every leader should know the true profitability of every product or service in his or her organization.
- (iv) *Quality* – in every market, the company with the highest quality rating is usually the most profitable. What is the rating of your company compared to other competitors? In the minds of your customers, quality composed of two factors: the product or service itself and the way it is sold, delivered, and serviced.
- (v) *Innovation* – with rapid increase in information, continuous breakthroughs in technology, and fierce competition world-wide, your ability to innovate quickly will earn you a cutting edge over your competitors. Be open to new ideas and suggestions. Be open to trial and errors. Reward initiative.
- (vi) *Organizational development* – continually seek ways to get better results by reorganizing people and resources, moving them where they produce best results for your business. This can be done through: (a) *restructuring*-process of moving people and resources to higher profit areas. (b) *Reengineering*-looking at the entire work process, how work processes could be reduced so that goods and services are produced faster and customer satisfaction. (c) *reinventing*-having a second look and thought at what you are doing. If you are to start over again, what are those things that you will not do, and what are those things you would of love to do? When you reinvent, you find yourself doing more and more of those things that represent the highest levels of profitability, and letting the rest go.

(vii) *People- Building* – almost all companies say, “Our people are our most important asset”. But only a few companies treat their employees as if they really believe it. How people think and feel about their companies, their jobs, their managers, and their coworkers determine the quality and quantity of their work.

EXPECTED QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP IN A WORK ENVIRONMENT

There have been several studies conducted to identify the qualities of successful leaders. Over 50 qualities have been identified to be important to leadership, but seven of these seem to stand out as being more important than the others (Maxwell & Dornan, 1997: 18-30; Maxwell, 2012: 138-147; Tracy, 2010a:15-29 & Covey, 1992: 61-65). These include:

1. *Vision* – this is the important single quality of leadership. Leaders have vision to see into the future. A successful leader should have a clear, exciting idea of where they are going and what they are trying to accomplish. The vision a leader has, determine the level of success he or she achieve. The difference between leaders and average people is that, leaders have clear beliefs that they will not compromise under any circumstances. Average people have fuzzy or unclear values that can be compromised for short-term advantage.
2. *Courage* – the ability to take risks in the achievements of your goals with no assurances of success. As a leader, there is no certainty in life or business, every commitment you make and every action you take entails a risk of some kind. This is why courage is the most identifiable outward quality of a great and successful leadership. The fact is that the future belongs to the risk-takers, not the security-seekers.
3. *Integrity* – it is the most respected and admired quality that bothers on the importance of complete honesty in everything that is done. Integrity is the value that guarantees all the other values. It is hard to form, but easy to live with. It takes tremendous self-discipline to become a person of integrity. Better still, it takes considerable willpower to always do the right thing in every situation. The lack of truthfulness can destroy any business. It blocks smart ideas, fast action, and good people contributing all the stuff they have got. It is a killer. Two principles determine the value of integrity in any organization: (a) the reality principle-it requires dealing in a straightforward way with the reality of the situation, based on facts rather than hopes, wishes, or assumptions. In a nutshell, seeing the world as it is, not as you wish it would be. (b) accepting responsibility-leaders with integrity accept responsibility for themselves and for getting the results that they have been hired and appointed to achieve. They do not blame other people for mistakes.
4. *Humility* – leaders have the security and self-confidence to recognize the value of others. it means that you are willing to admit you could be wrong, that you recognize you may not have all the answers. It allows you acknowledge your mistakes. It is not a question of thinking less of you; it is a question of thinking of yourself less. When selected for a position of leadership, do not believe you were selected by God. That is exactly when humility should be applied. What are my weaknesses? How can I balance them?
5. *Foresight* – leaders have the ability to look into the future and anticipate what might occur. Successful leaders are good strategic thinkers. They have the ability to look ahead, to anticipate with some high level of accuracy where the industry is and how the market is going. It is only leaders with foresight that can gain the “first mover advantage” in business. Excellent leaders think about what might happen, what they are trying to do today, and what might happen to interfere with their plans for tomorrow. One of the best tools to help leaders anticipate both crises and opportunities is called scenario planning. It gets you thinking about what could go wrong so you prepare for the future today. It is reasonably argued that,

foresight breeds thought, thought begets action, action generates habit, habit produces character, and character in turn results to destiny.

6. *Focus* – the ability to focus organizational assets and skills in the most important areas is essential for leadership success. Leaders are expected to focus on the needs of the company and the situation around the organization. Leadership must be result-oriented by focusing on themselves, others, company and the general environment. They should be able to conduct SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the entire company and mobilize resources to tasks areas that generate positive results for the business. Your ability as a leader to call the shots and make sure that everyone is focused and concentrated on the most valuable use of time is essential to the great performance of the enterprise. As Tracy (2010a: 28) says, the things that matter most must never be at the mercy of the things that matter least. A focused leader may not be caught off guard in this saying.

7. *Cooperation* – the ability to work well with others is most essential for effective leadership. An excellent leader gets everyone working and pulling together for the success of the organization. Leaders should gain the cooperation of others by making a commitment to get along well with each key person the company depends much upon.

8. *Listenership* – leaders are excellent listeners. As much as 50 to 60 percent of a leader's time is spent listening. The key to being an excellent listener is listening with three ears. Listening with three ears implies; listening to what the subordinates are saying, listen to what they are trying to say but lack the symbol or words to express it, and listening to what they are not saying. The more you listen and are receptive to other people's views and ideas, the more powerful decisions you take as relate the success of the organization.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEADERSHIP

The responsibilities of leadership in coping with the work environment could be classified as follows:

(i) *Set and achieve business goals*: Each and every organization has some goals that it wants to achieve. Such goals embrace every part of strategic and market planning, including products, services, people, productivity, promotion, finances, and competitive responses. Any leader that fails to achieve such goals of the company may find itself in the business graveyard. However, in setting business goals, leadership should ensure that such goals are clear, specific, measurable and time-bound so as attainability.

(ii) *Innovate and market*: As Drucker (2003: 22) said, the purpose of any business is to create and keep a customer. To realize this saying as asserted by Drucker, LeBeouf (1987: 25-28) proposed a continuous innovation of products, services, processes, and promotion that create awareness and retain customers. Any leadership that fails to innovate will really find it difficult navigating the turbulent tides of our time. As asserted by Tracy (2003: 206-209) that which takes you where you are not enough to sustain you there. A good leader gives up growing up.

(iii) *Solve problems and make decisions*: leaders in whatever position they are are meant to solve problems. Where leadership fails to provide solution to an occurring situation in and around the environment that impact on the activities of the organization spell doom for it survival. It should be realized that a goal unachieved is a problem unsolved. However, in trying to solve some of these societal problems, there are obstacles that stand between you and the business success you desire as problems, difficulties, hindrances, and barriers. It is only when you are able to go over, under, or around these problems that success is anticipated. Leaders do not react to problems with anger or frustration: they look upon problems as the essential defining skill area of their work.

(iv) *Set priorities and focus on key tasks:* A leader must be able to deploy limited resources into those areas where they can make the greatest contribution to the success of the enterprise. Alabar (2008 : 8-10) emphasized that time is the scarcest resources is limited, perishable, irretrievable, and irreplaceable, the way you manage your time can be critical determinant of everything you achieve-or fail to achieve.

(v) *Be a role model to others:* You must teach men at the school of example, for they will learn at no other. So far I have not seen any successful person who has not learned from more experienced people. All great leaders were one time good followers. Good leaders conduct themselves as though everyone is watching, even when no one is watching, inspire, and motivate others to follow you: Tom Peters said that the best leaders do not create followers, they create leaders. In today’s work environment, it takes more than command and control to woo the attention of others to follow you. You have to earn their trust, respect, and confidence.

(vi) *Perform and get results:* In the final analysis, your ability to get results that are expected of you is central to the survival and sustainability of the company. But it should be noted that, an average person in the workplace operates at less than 50 percent of capacity. For you to get the expected results, you need to develop the ability to draw that 30, 40, or 50 percent of additional capacity out of the average person and get them to perform far beyond their previous levels of performance.

BUILDING WINNING TEAMS IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Today, all works are done by teams. Your ability to assemble and manage a high performance team of committed individuals is one of the keys to your value and effectiveness as a leader. Today, most organizations cherish the idea of team work as far greater results are possibly imagined. A team, according to Adair (1986), is more than just a group with a common aim. It is a group in which the contributions of individuals are seen as complementary. Collaboration, working together, is the keynote of a team activity.

Unless you run a shoe shine stand, you are dependent upon many other people for the quality and quantity of your work, and many other people are depending upon you. The manager’s output is the output of the team, and the output of the team is the manager’s output.

Measuring and Analyzing Team Members

There are two basic dimensions of measuring individual employee in a team work: competence and commitment.

These two dimensions allow you to categorize your staff into four quadrants.

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Competent & committed | Competent but not committed |
| Committed but not competent | Not competent nor committed |

The upper-left-hand square comprises of those who are both competent and committed. They accomplish 80 percent of your results. They are the 20 percent of people you build your business around. They are your most valuable assets that should be aggressively encouraged.

The upper-right contains people who are competent but not committed to you. They turn out to be the major source of internal and external problems. They play politics, resist your authority, and often demoralize other workers your strategy is to sell them to become good team players in another company.

The lower left represents the people who are committed but not competent. They are nice people, but not excellent at their work. Your decision here is to train and help them acquire the experience necessary to move up to the competent and committed quadrant.

The lower-right-hand quadrant represents the worst level of employees who are neither competent nor committed. This group of employees must be dismissed as quickly as possible before they drag down the organization.

Motivational Factors for Teams

To make people become happy, productive, you must understand their motivations. Teams are mostly motivated by these factors:

Challenging and interesting work – most people want to be busy and happy at work, doing things that keep them active and force them to stretch out of their comfort zone, to continually learn and grow.

Working in a high trust environment – this is created by keeping people in the know. When people feel that they are aware of everything that affects their work and position, they have higher levels of trust and motivation to perform than when they are kept in darkness. The only way to keep employees in the know is hold regular staff meetings, where people could express and ask relevant questions that affect them.

Personally responsible for results – this is another powerful way of building competence and confidence in people. The more responsibility a person takes on, the more he/she grows as a decision maker, and leader and the more valuable he/she will be to the company.

Personal growth and promotion – many people will stay on a job that pays less than they can earn elsewhere if they feel that they are becoming better skilled as a result of the job they do. For they know that, the additional skills and experience will make them more valuable in the future.

CONCLUSION

It has become apparent from this paper that, if organisations should have souls as humans does then the leadership of organisations will constitute the soul of organisations. Leadership is the wheel which drives organisations to their destinations and creates a sense of enthusiasm, optimism and motivation among organisation members towards the realization of organizational goals and objectives in the most effective and efficient manner. Therefore, organisations that wish to survive and succeed continually must work tirelessly to avoid the consequences of poor leadership which are too fatal for any organisation, nation or group to bear, by putting in place a good leadership that have all the potentialities of handling the complexities in the work environment.

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