

THE POSTULATION OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS AMONG HEADS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION IN OGUN STATE-OWNED UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The paper looks at how leadership skills can be improved among the heads of Business Education in the Ogun-state owned Universities. It was noted that Business Education in the study area is a sub-component unit of departments thereby discouraging intimate and direct relationship between the leader and subordinates in the Institutions. The paper identifies five possible leadership styles of Business Education heads and discusses how leaders can improve on their skills in the universities. It is recommended that the leader should make the subordinates feel important and gain their willingness to work. The paper concludes that a quality leader makes both the task and the experience better. Not only does everyone start somewhere, but no one ever stops learning and expanding in experience and knowledge. The paper also concludes that a good leader must be proactive.

Keywords: Leadership skills, Business Education, Vocational and Technical Education, Department, Unit, Motivation

Introduction

Leadership is defined by Stoner and Freeman (1995) as the process of directing and influencing the task-related activities of group members. From the definition, it would be noted that Leadership involves other people who are willing to accept directions from the leader in order to make the leadership process possible. Without people, leadership qualities of a manager would be irrelevant. Another point to be noted from the definition is the fact that leadership involves an unequal distribution of power between leaders and group members. In this case, the leader has more power than the group members. The third aspect that should be noted is the ability to use the different forms of power to influence followers' behaviours in a number of ways. The source of influence may be formal such as that provided by the possession of managerial rank in an organisation or informal, outside the organisational structure. Leaders have a special obligation to consider the ethics of their decisions. The importance of leadership in management is based on the fact that organisational success is largely based on the quality of leadership. Thus, the quality of an organisation's leadership determines the quality of the organisation itself.

Contemporary educational reform places a great premium on the effective leadership and management of schools. The logic of this position is that an orderly school environment that is efficiently and well managed provides the precondition to enhanced peace and tranquillity (Ijaduola, 2011). The leader works through a group or groups of people to achieve organizational goals, the leader adopts one leadership style or another. Whatever the leadership style will determine the sort of cooperation and relationship that exists between the

leader and his subordinates. As opined by Alabi (2009), Ayeni (2003) and Ijaduola (2009) skill in human resources management is very important in determining the effectiveness of leadership. This is because in all the resources that organization has, human resources are the most important. According to Sergiovammi (2010), Ijaduola and Odunaike (2012) human being make things happen efficiently.

Business Education is an aspect of vocational education which prepares individuals for gainful self employment through the acquisition of skills and knowledge that affect the business world. The mission of Business Education in Nigeria is to prepare all individuals to live and work as productive citizens in a changing global society by providing essential business experiences, education and training. The programme's objective as articulated in the curriculum at the tertiary levels of education were directed at equipping graduates with the right skills that will enable them to engage in a life of work in the office as well as self-employment.

Ulinfun (1996) defined Business education as consisting of the total activity that is planned, organized and developed in form of the preparation of youths for responsible economic participation in the community. It is a subset of the entire vocational and technical education often referred to as technology or technical education. National Policy on Education (1981) perceives technical education as that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills. The curriculum of business education offers knowledge and skills which enables one to seek career in business (Ndinechi, 2000). Business education is concerned with the teaching of skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for a successful business career (Anao, 1986). It is designed to develop special emphasis in marketable business skills and techniques in the field of accounting, secretarial, clerical, stereographic, sales or distributive the occupations.

There are two State-owned Universities in Ogun State which are OlabisiOnabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education. In the two Universities, Business Education does not stand as a department on its own. While Business Education at OlabisiOnabanjo is under the department of Educational Foundation and Management, Vocational and Technical Education accommodates Business Education at Tai Solarin University of Education.

This paper postulates on leadership skills among the heads of Business Education in the two Universities.

Structure of Business Education in the Study Area

OlabisiOnabanjo University is the first State University in Ogun State which was established in 1982 while Academic activities commenced in January 1983. Business Education in the University is in the Faculty of Education. The Faculty which is headed by the Dean has three Departments. Business Education is a unit in the Department of Educational Foundations which is one of the Departments in the Faculty of Education. The Head supervises the Lecturers in Educational Foundation, Business Education, Administrative staff attached to the Head of Department's office and finally the students in the two units.

The second University of study is the Tai Solarin University of Education. The University is a specialised University that trained Teachers. Business Education is housed in the College of Applied Education and Vocational Technology. The College has five departments out of which the Vocational and Technical Education is a Department in the College. The Department of Vocational and Technical Education has a head who is in charge of four units which are; Business Education, Technical Education, Secretarial Administration and Home and Hotel Management. In addition to the four units, the Head also controls the Administrative staff attached to the department and the students in the four units.

Leadership in Business Education as a unit

It would be noted that in the two Universities of study, the Heads do not deal only with the members of staff of Business Education but also other units attached to the Department. Business Education stands as a unit and not as a Department. This has hindered the smooth and direct relationship between the Heads of Department and the Business Education lecturers.

At Olabisi Onabanjo University, the head supervises the two units in the Department directly.

The same applies to Tai Solarin University of Education where Business Education is one of the four units being supervised by the Head of Department. It should also be noted that, Business Education has the largest number of students in the study area.

As a result of this, there is no intimate supervision for the Business Education Lecturers from the Head. This consequently have effect on the Business Education students because of the division of interest from the Head of Department. Decision making is not as easy as when the Business Education stays as a Department. A leader is supposed to be a strong facilitator that is providing support necessary for the team to achieve their goals. By listening to the members of staff, a leader can often learn about the barriers preventing a goal from being achieved and, through facilitation, find a way to an appropriate solution. This is a problem in the study area because of lack of direct supervision of subordinates.

A leader's biggest asset is information as the more information a leader possesses about how to achieve the vision or individual goals along the way, the more the leader learns about the direction needed to get there. Problems provide information and therefore good problem solving is a very powerful skill for the leader. This is lacking in the study area because of lack of first hand information of the problems in the department.

The current system of leadership in the area of study does not give room for adequate planning which invariably have negative effect on the achievement of the goals and objectives of the department.

It is necessary to look at how the leadership skills can be improved in the study area. In order to achieve this, it is important to first look at the various leadership styles that the leader can use.

Leadership styles

In order for a leader to effectively perform, he/she has to choose a style that is most appropriate for any given situation. In order to do this, the leader must understand the subordinates well and strive hard to fulfil their expectations for a stress free ambience at the university.

A leader is responsible for managing a group of subordinates, as a result of this, it is important for him/her to find an effective style so as to ensure maximum staff productivity as well as high academic performance. There are different ways to lead, and each style comes with its own set of pros and cons. In order to find the best leadership style to use, it is important to take into consideration the associated circumstances. Therefore, identifying which style is most appropriate in a task requires some deliberations.

Every leader has a unique style of handling the employees. The various ways of dealing with the members of staff in the university is the leadership style by the head. Find below few of the styles.

Different Leadership styles

Autocratic Style of Working

- In this case, the leaders do not take into consideration the ideas and suggestions of the subordinates.

- Decisions are solely taken by the head without carrying along the subordinates
- Subordinates are totally dependent on their heads and cannot take decisions on their own.
- Guidelines and policies are formulated by the heads which would be strictly adhered to by the members of staff.
- Whatever the leader says is the final.
- There is lack of motivation on the part of the members of staff.

Paternalistic Style of working

- The leader decides on the best situation for the staff and the department
- Policies are formulated to benefit both the members of staff and the department
- The feedback from subordinates are taken into consideration before decisions are taken.
- Members of staff have sense of belonging and therefore become loyal to the leader.
- Members of staff are motivated and therefore enjoy their work.

Democratic Style of working

- In this style, leader welcomes the feedback from students
- Members of staff are given the opportunity to give their own suggestions
- There is encouragement of effective and healthy communication between the leader and the subordinates.
- The leader listens to subordinates before taking final decision
- There is high academic exposure on the part of the subordinates

Laissez-Faire Style of working

- In this type of style, leaders do not have much contribution to the department
- Subordinates are allowed to take decisions and manage work on their own
- Hardworking and innovative workers are easily noticed.
- Subordinates do not depend on the leaders for directives.

Management by Walking Around Style of Working

- Leaders in this type of style are efficient listeners
- The leaders interact with subordinates more often to find out their problems and possible ways of solving them.
- The leader guides the workers and as a result, the subordinates look at him/her as their mentor.
- The leaders work around to find out what is happening around them.

Improving the Leadership skills

No matter the Leadership style used by the leader, the leadership qualities are very important for the achievement of Organisational goals. There are several ways by which leadership skills can be improved in the Business Education in particular and the University in general.

Establishment of Business Education Department

The first step in improving leadership skills in Business Education is to create a Business Education Department. Business Education usually has a large number of students. The Business Education is big enough to stand as a department and have a separate head. This is the first way to improve the leadership skills in the Area of study. This step would make the leader closer to the workers. It would enhance easy access to information which would make the leader solve the problems in the department.

Self Esteem

The head should make the members of staff feel important and gain their willingness to work. The self esteem can be improved by letting the workers find solution to a problem that you feel can motivate them, remember the name of the person you are dealing with, and use it often in your conversation as the most important thing to a person is the name. The leader should discuss subjects; but should not argue about them as arguing will infer that the other person is wrong which may invariably bring the person down and hurt his/her self esteem. The members of staff should be complimented occasionally, and the leader should be more willing to listen than talk and show respect the other party's knowledge.

Become a good listener

Most leaders are not good listeners, as a result, they do not remember about half of the information they are told. The head can become good listener when he/she is sincerely ready to listen, he/she should try as much as possible to avoid self distraction or distraction from workers. The head should also eliminate bias in his/her thoughts about a person so as to be able to comprehend what is being said. The leader should look for keywords in what the person is saying in order to make the conversation easier.

Planning

Adequate planning makes the head to achieve the expected goals and objectives through the laid down procedure. Planning ensures performance preparation for an action. In planning, the facts and data are gathered, objectives are reviewed when a planning process is implemented, change is accepted easily when the plans are known, planning also brings attention to dangers, decision making skills of the staff can be strengthened through proper planning.

Motivating

The leader should show to the subordinates that they are needed by motivating them. Motivation can be done when the subordinates are kept informed of necessary decisions, allowing the members of staff to grow by giving them necessary direction, make the workers feel proud in course they are doing, give praises where necessary, make mention of a worker's achievement and give credit to the staff where necessary. A leader should inspire and motivate as well as ensure team works, but if the leader has no strengths in keeping to a deadline, or being able to follow through and act on problems, then leadership quality fails on the inability to act and resolves issues.

Disciplining

This is the art of dealing with people when they fail to do their job or when they behave abnormally. With some people, you need to be firm, or even demanding, while for others you only need to advise and give suggestions for change. In doing this, you should try to have the workers see the seriousness of the situation, and why they should change their attitude or performance. The leader should try to get a commitment from them to do better in the future. The leader should also understand a few key unwritten rules that can make or break a good leader and evaluate himself and the environment in relation to them and what good leadership is to him.

Delegating

Delegating is a skill that requires disciplining the leader that will in turn allow him to supervise better. It is essential to get the job done, but delegation in a leadership context is a sign of trust and faith in the team members abilities. Delegation is sharing skills and

experience to be able to allow people to grow, but it must be done wisely. The leader should not fall into the pitfalls of being fearful of delegation as unwillingness to delegate may be a psychological problem involving fear.

Analysing your own strengths and weaknesses

The strengths, weakness, Opportunities and Threats is known as the SWOT analysis. This method is simply to write down what you feel are your strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats and then allow another person of integrity to do the same of their opinions of yourself. This allows a flow of ideas and allow you to see problems you may not be aware of.

Lead by Example

It is always best to lead by example. This could be done by ensuring that the leader is always available when necessary, assist where necessary and ensure that the work is clearly understood by the subordinates.

Be Organised

A leader that is disorganised would automatically make the workers to be irresponsible. A leader is expected to be organised and have self confidence.

Know your People

It is important for the leader to know about his team including their lives after work. This may not be easy when there are many units in a Department.

Take ownership and Responsibility

The leader should always be ready to take ownership and responsibility at all times. No matter the situation, the staff should be aware that you are always there for them in both good and bad times.

Conclusion

Leadership and management in a reductionists sense ultimately is about one thing; satisfactory completion of a task. Leadership can be used to make the task completed quicker, but that limits the quality of the experience as few people can learn anything from it. A quality leader makes both the task and the experience better. Not only does everyone start somewhere, but no one ever stops learning and expanding in experience and knowledge. It is a mark of a good leader to be proactive. This means that the leader should be aware and act against possible problems and also to make possible opportunities into real opportunities. A good leader needs to be able to make decisions, he should have a vision of where to be and make decisions to get closer to achieving the vision. It is also important for a good leader to have strong people skills since a leader needs to be able to communicate the vision and motivate the team to follow.

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