

Leadership styles and employee morale in public entities: A case study of Uganda Wildlife Education Centre, Entebbe

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between leadership styles and the morale of employees in public organisations using a case study of Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC). The study was guided by the following objectives: to establish the relationship between the transformational style of leadership and employee morale; to examine the relationship between transactional leadership style and employee morale and to establish the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee morale at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre. The study applied a correlation research design with a methodological triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Data was collected from a total of 40 respondents through questionnaires and 10 informants through the interview method. Both descriptive and inferential statistics analysis were done to establish the relationship between the leadership styles and employee morale. The study findings revealed the existence of: a significant, positive and strong relationship between transformational leadership and employee morale ($r = .702^{**}$); a significant, positive moderate relationship between transactional leadership style and employee morale ($r = .431^{**}$) and a significant, positive and moderate relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee morale ($r = .318^{**}$). The predictor variables were found to explain 43.6% of the variability of the employee morale at UWEC.

Key words: leadership style, employee morale, public entities

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

An essential part of management is coordinating the activities of people and guiding their efforts towards the goals and objectives of the organization. This involves the process of leadership and the choice of an appropriate form of action and behaviour (Avolio, 2011). Leadership is a central feature of organizational performance and it is important that the manager employs the right leadership style that will motivate the performance of employees in the organization. This study investigated the relationship between leadership styles and the morale of employees in public organisations using a case study of Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC). Leadership as a key factor in determining organizational success has been studied extensively in the past century in the management field (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Given its importance, both theorists and practitioners have attempted to understand leadership in its many styles and how it generally influences the performance of the organization. Throughout the 1960s to the late 1980s, the most effective leadership model was based on the contingency theory (Bryan, 2002). This theory suggests that effective leadership is determined by the situation and an effective leader is able to adapt to a variety of situations. Towards the early 1980s the leadership theories introduced by Burns (1978) gained popularity. These were the transaction and

transformation leadership theories. Bass (1985) theorized that both transactional and transformational leadership styles are expected to influence their subordinate's behaviour.

The study was guided by the Contingency Theory developed by Fiedler (1967) which postulates that the leader's ability to lead is contingent upon various factors, including the leaders' preferred style, the capabilities and behaviours of workers that depend heavily on the situational factors. Fiedler's contingency theory explains why managers may be effective leaders in one situation and ineffective in another. Rodd (2012) seem to suggest that most problems in organizations are a result of the managers' failure to apply appropriate leadership styles contingent to appropriate situations.

Leadership is the ability to direct and influence the actions of others towards the attainment of desired organizational goals. Robbins & Judge (2007) define leadership styles as the manner in which a leader conducts his/her activities. This study operationalizes leadership styles into three: transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. Transformational leadership style is measured through its key features of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, and individualised consideration. Transaction leadership is measured by the features of contingent reward and management by exception while laissez-faire leadership style is measured through the practice of delegated authority, employee autonomy and decentralised decision making. Morale is measured in terms of willingness to work. Employee morale is thus defined as the enthusiasm with which employees are self-motivated to perform at the work place.

The mission of UWEC is "promoting and creating an understanding of the conserving of the biodiversity in Uganda among the public with special emphasis on the younger generation through the centre facilities at Entebbe". To achieve this mission, the morale of employees is critical. However, bureaucracy, centre politics and at times the preference of administrative approaches to management to leadership approaches have hindered the integration of appropriate leadership styles into the attainment of desired organizational goals that are situation specific. This has undermined meeting deadlines, team input, executing defined duties and achieving departmental goals that are important for stimulating employee morale (UWEC,

Reports, 2016). The study focused on exploring how the different leadership styles stimulate the execution of defined duties, meeting deadlines and achieving departmental goals from 2012 to 2015. This period was because it is characterized by a number of developments initiated at UWEC aimed at enhancing organisational performance through employee empowerment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Leaders in organisations should have the ability to motivate their subordinates to exert extra efforts to achieve higher organisational performance (Breen, 2006). To achieve this, leaders must adopt such leadership styles that can help boost the morale of the employees (Duncan, 2011). At UWEC, managers employ a variety of leadership styles though some managers are known to be consistent with using only a single leadership style (Human Resource Records, 2015). Like many other public organizations, UWEC is characterized by low morale among the employees manifest in low levels of efficiency and effectiveness of employees as exhibited in the failure to meet departmental objectives and set deadlines (Minute 5 of the meeting held on 5/02/2016). All these negatively affect the productivity of UWEC as an entity. This attracted the study to investigate the type of leadership styles employed at UWEC and probably come with a recommendation as to which leadership styles may be appropriate to boost employee morale at UWEC.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical studies

Muhwezi (2013) examined how the characteristics of transformational leadership influence team creativity in a dynamic environment and how those of transactional leadership influence team performance within a routine environment. The findings revealed that a right mixture of leadership style and motivational constructs increases routine team performance or dynamic team creativity. The study did not however look at the laissez-faire leadership style in organisations nor look at the relationships of these leadership styles on employee morale which is the subject of the current study.

Nakyanzi (2010) conducted a study on the impact of organizational leadership on public relations effectiveness from an internal perspective. The results showed that transformational leadership positively influences employees' perception of organizational

reputation while transactional leadership represented by contingent reward behaviour was found to have a significant negative direct effect on employees' perception of organizational reputation. Nakyanzi, (2010) concluded that transformational leaders are more likely to delegate power to employees and involve them in decision making than transactional leaders. However this study does not specifically address the specific leadership styles and how these leadership styles actually relate to employee morale in an organisation.

2.2 Related literature

2.2.1 Transformational leadership style and employee morale

Many authors have studied the influence of leaders' behavior in enhancing the job commitment and its impact over the organization's performance (Bass & Riggio, 2010; Hickman, 2010; Kelly, 2010; Schein, 2010). Studies by Avolio and Gibbons (1988), House (2004) explain how the engagement of employees which is characteristic of transformational leadership style enhances innovation and creativity boosting organizational performance. The studies above fail to address how transformational leaders relate with the employees. Rawat (2015) contends that several factors affect transformational leadership. Rawat (2015) categorizes these factors into: personal characters of leaders, personal characters of followers, organizational factors and leader follower relationship. Rawat (2015) concludes that transformational leadership has positive impact over Employee morale and motivation.

Munir, Rahman, Malik & Hairunnisa (2012) conducted a study in which they stated that previous studies found that leadership styles are important organizational antecedents especially in influencing employees' job satisfaction. The aim of their study was to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' job satisfaction among the academic staff. The findings indicated the existence of a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and employees' job satisfaction. Studies by Jung (2001), Shin & Zhou (2003) indicate the existence of a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership style and employee creativity. The transformational leader is credited with the ability to promote employees creativity through his ability to motivate, communicate, and create opportunities for the development of the subordinates abilities

2.2.2 Transactional leadership style and employee morale

Transactional leaders identify the expectations of their followers and respond to them by establishing a close link between effort and reward Burns (1978). The transaction leader wants the same procedures in the company to be followed flawlessly every time the job is done and doesn't involve regularly with the workers unless a mistake or deviation occurs (Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders rarely motivate their employees or help them in a career growth (Bass, 1985). Bass et al., (2003) observe that supply and delivery of transactional leadership means that subordinates agree with their leader, accept him, or accompany him in transaction for rewarding or avoiding some special affairs. Rewards and recognition are granted conditionally when the subordinates properly perform their roles and tasks.

Antonakis, Avolio & Sivasubramaniam, (2003), propose three components that a transactional leader possesses: reward dependent leadership, management by exception (active) and management by exception (passive). Reward dependent leadership lays emphasis on clarification of working roles that motivates subordinates through rewards proportionate to their performance. Management by exception (active) means that leaders are at high level of consciousness and readiness to ensure standards. The leader actively supervises performance and provides correct reaction at time of problem (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The subordinates are punished or rewarded according to their achievement of set standards (Bass et al., 2003). Management by exception (passive) frequently occurs where the leader waits until the problems appear before taking measure for them. The leaders pursue a policy of "non-interference policy" or "passive avoidance" and rarely set targets for their subordinates (Antonakis et al., 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

2.2.3 Laissez-faire leadership style and employee morale

Robbins & Judge (2007) defined the laissez-faire style as a style in which the leader abdicates responsibilities and avoids making decisions. The laissez-faire leadership style allows complete freedom to subordinates to do what they like and the leader's role is simply to supply materials. Webb (2007) studied the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee job satisfaction. The results indicated that

employees under laissez-faire leadership style are likely to be less organised, less effective and likely to complete less assignments. To Webb (2007), laissez-faire leadership style ultimately fails employees and result in chaos.

Some scholars attribute the prevalence of chaos in organizations to the laissez-faire leadership style that allows every person to be his own master (Deichmann, & Stam, 2015; Breen, 2006). The laissez-faire leadership style thrives on the assumption that employees clear understand their jobs roles and expectations and can thus perform efficiently without any close supervision. Breen (2006) reports results of an experiment that found out that undergraduate participants who were led by uninvolved leaders were less productive in the quality and quantity of the problems they solved and lower in satisfaction in comparison to participants who were led by involved leaders. Baumgartel (1997) studied authoritarian, laissez-faire, and empowering patterns of leadership behaviour and found that group members under laissez-faire leadership reported more isolation from the leader and less empowerment in decision making than did those under directive leadership. The results suggest that laissez-faire leadership contributed to low cohesiveness of the group.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study applied a correlation research design to describe the relationship that may exist among the study variables. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches aimed at maximizing the benefits of both approaches while minimizing the disadvantages of both. The quantitative approach was adopted to investigate the relationship between Leadership Styles and Employee Morale at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre since it allows for collecting numeric data on observable individual behaviour of samples which can then be subjected to statistical analysis. The qualitative approach was adopted to enable the capture of data that may be left out while using the quantitative approach. The study targeted all the 65 employees of Uganda Wildlife Education Centre in all the departments from whom a sample of 56 respondents was selected. The managers of UWEC that included the executive director, the heads of the different departments, the internal auditor and the human resource manager were purposively selected to enable the researcher collect focused information on the different leadership styles employed at the centre

while stratified random sampling was used in selecting employees from the departments of: finance, accounts and business development; animal and horticulture; education and conservation, estates and administration that participated in the study.

3.2 Sources of Data

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data

3.3 Materials and Methods

The researcher used the questionnaire survey instrument and interview guide to collect the data. The researcher distributed questionnaires to the staff of UWEC and collected them within four days. The interview guide was used to get information from the managers and this was done in a period of two days. The data from employees was collected using a self-administered closed ended questionnaire based on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5).

3.4 Data management and quality control

To ensure reliability of the study instrument, the researcher used the Cronbach alpha co-efficient and the results were all above 0.7 indicating that the instrument was reliable. The validity of the instrument was tested using the Content Validity Index and an index of 0.878 was obtained indicating that the instrument was valid. The raw data from the field was continuously organized, cleaned and edited to eliminate errors. Quantitative data collected and coded was compiled and then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Descriptive analysis was used to generate frequencies, percentages, tables and graphs. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to establish the relationship between the study variables while a multiple regression analysis was used to predict how employee morale is influenced by each of the three leadership styles. Qualitative data obtained through interviews was analysed using Creswell's five recommended steps as follow: first, themes were identified in the data. Secondly, redundant information that deemed to lack a direct or indirect bearing on the themes was eliminated. Thirdly, themes were classified into major categories. The fourth step made sure that major categories are clustered into sub-categories with their correlate meaning being transformed into the language of subscales. Finally, categories and sub-categories from all questions of the interview guide were

integrated into a total description of the relationship between leadership styles and employee morale.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Transformational leadership style and Employee morale at UWEC

The first objective sought to establish the relationship between the transformational leadership style of leadership and employee morale at UWEC. The overall mean of 3.55 indicates respondents' agreement of the existence of transformation leadership at UWEC. The managers were rated as effective communicators with a high concern not only for tasks but also for employees' welfare. In the interviews conducted, it was revealed that leaders at UWEC provide opportunities for customized training for employees which empower employees to be more creative and innovative. One of the respondents explained that:

... I experience my leaders as people oriented towards improving employees' skills and potential in order to work towards achieving organizational goals and objectives. I believe and have confidence that the mentorship I get can help me get situated in my workplace with a lot of certainty that I will be productive by all means because I am helped not only with organizational requirements but also personal concerns are cared for.

In the course of the interviews with the managers, it was revealed that the mentorship program has been largely effective in enhancing the management of the centre as one manager explained:

Before I took over as the manager of my department, I was mentored by my previous boss. My former manager delegated a number of duties to me which gave me experience. I now do the same for some of the staff in this department.

The view expressed by the respondent above was shared by a number of the other managers interviewed. It was also revealed that UWEC has entered into a strategic partnership with a number of zoos in Asia in which a number of its staff are trained and mentored in the new trends of wildlife management. The Pearson correlation coefficient was run to test the relationship between transformational leadership and employee

morale and the results reported the existence of a significant positive relationship ($r=.702, p < .000$).

This implies that transformational leadership style improves employee morale.

4.2 Transactional leadership style and employee morale at UWEC

The second objective sought to examine the relationship between transactional leadership style and employee morale at UWEC. The overall mean of 3.07 indicates a more or less undecided position by the respondents on the existence of transactional leadership style and how it is affecting employee morale at UWEC. It was however clear that there is a reward system to promote performance. One of the respondents remarked:

... ever since I joined UWEC, creativity is one of the most valued aspect of how we get things done. I am entirely motivated to be creative because I am quite sure that creativity leads to positive rewards. Besides getting positive rewards, breaking away from what had been traditionally used makes thing better. For example, the Education and Conservation department educates individuals to respect and conserve the country's biodiversity for today and future generation. This educating is done holistically. . . . As a member of the department I have to be creative in conveying the appropriate message in an appropriate way depending on the age, socio-economic status of my visitors.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was run to test the relationship between transactional leadership and employee morale and the results reported the existence of a significant positive moderate relationship ($r=.431, p < .000$). This implies that transactional leadership style moderately improves employee morale.

4.3 Laissez-faire leadership style and employee morale

The third objective sought to examine the relationship between laissez –faire leadership style and employee morale at UWEC. The overall mean of 3.06 indicates a more or less undecided position by the respondents on the existence of laissez –faire leadership style and how

it is affecting employee morale at UWEC. The analysis of the respondents' responses gives an indication that laissez-faire leadership style is exercised within limits at UWEC. One informant observed that:

We sometimes allow the staff in this department the freedom to accomplish their tasks the way they feel fit. However, this freedom is only available if at the end of the day they have all their tasks accomplished considering the quality of work. Though they have such freedom, some other workers do not have the freedom due to the nature of their work and demands. For instance the employees in the animal and horticulture departments have limited options given the sensitive nature of what they do.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was run to test the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee morale and the results reported the existence of a significant positive moderate relationship ($r=.318, p < .000$). This implies that laissez-faire leadership style moderately improves employee morale.

4.4 Multiple regression tests

The overall relationship of the independent variables to the dependent variable was analysed using the regression analysis (Table 1)

Table 1. Multiple Regression Model

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.	R ²	Df	F	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta						
(Constant)	0.772	0.075		8.498	0	0.436	4 36	12.65	0
Transformational Leadership style	0.521	0.083	0.221	5.577	0				
Transactional Leadership style	0.308	0.084	0.109	3.854	0.021				
Laissez-faire Leadership style	0.212	0.053	0.082	2.385	0.016				
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Morale									
b. Predictors (Constant), Transformational leadership, Transactional Leadership, Laissez-faire leadership									

43.6% of the variance in employee morale can be accounted for by the predictor variables. The most significant predictor of employee morale was found to be transformational leadership style (Beta = .221).

5. DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Transformation leadership style and employee morale

The research findings indicated the existence of a significant strong positive relationship between transformation leadership style and employee morale at UWEC ($r=.702, p < .000$). Transformational

leadership style was found to predict employee morale more than transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. The study findings are in conformity with the findings by Munir, Rahman, Malik and Hairunnisa (2012) in their study on the relationship between transformation leadership style and employee morale among academic staff in Malaysia. The findings are also in line with earlier studies done by Jung (2001) and Shi & Zou (2003). The interviews held with managers revealed that UWEC values and encourages creativity among employees, a key trait of transformative leadership. This finding augurs well

with Wong, Leong & Lee (2014) conclusion that transformational leaders inspire creativity among employees which boosts employee morale.

5.1.2 Transactional leadership style and employee morale

The research findings indicated the existence of a significant moderate positive relationship between transactional leadership style and employee morale at UWEC ($r=.431$, $p < .000$). The rather weak positive correlation between transactional leadership style and employee morale corroborates with the findings of Nikezie, Purie & Purie (2012). Several other studies confirm the existence of a significant positive relationship between transactional leadership and employee morale (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016; Bushra, Usman & Navid, 2011). The findings of the existence of a reward based performance at UWEC is typical of transactional leadership as expounded by several authors like Domagalsk (2005); Bass and Avolia (1997).

5.1.3 Laissez-faire leadership style and employee morale

The research findings indicated the existence of a significant moderate positive relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee morale at UWEC ($r=.318$, $p < .000$). The findings revealed that few managers at UWEC practice laissez-faire leadership style. This may be justified by the nature of work at UWEC that may not allow managers to offer to much freedom to the employees as some activities are bound to follow established procedures. The less practice of laissez-faire leadership style is also supported by authors like Breens (2006) and Baumgartel (1997) caution that it may be less productive in terms of quality and quantity. The positive relationship in support of laissez-faire leadership style resonates with studies by Castillo & Cano (2004) and Wong, Leong & Lee (2014) in support of flexible leadership styles at work.

5.2 Policy implications

The findings revealed the use of different leadership styles by managers at UWEC. This is line with the contingency theory which is in support of various leadership styles dependent on the situation at hand. UWEC as a wildlife and education conservation centre has some traditions to be maintained and promoted which would make the laissez -faire leadership style inappropriate. In other situations, creativity and innovation is needed to promote the activities of centre

which may require the utilisation of both the transformative and transactional leadership styles.

Management of UWEC need to create an enabling environment that empowers employees and allow them flexibility in the execution of their duties where this is feasible, but must set up clear policies and guidelines to guide expected behavior.

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