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## **Leadership Competencies Desired by Employers of Business Education Graduates for Effective Job Performance in Business Organizations**

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### **Abstract**

*One hundred and sixty top management and senior administrative staff of selected business organizations in Anambra State, Nigeria were surveyed to ascertain the leadership competencies they desire of business education graduates for effective job performance. The survey made use of a 15 item structured questionnaire and had 84/4% response rate. Data collected and analysed led to the view that the possession of honesty and integrity helps leaders behave ethically and earn the trust and confidence of subordinates. It was recommended that the business education programme need to be broadened to encompass the desired leadership performance competencies.*

### **Introduction**

It is generally accepted that the quality of leadership in an organization, be it religious, social, business, e.t.c. affect to a large extent, the success or failure of that organization (Ukeje, 1992). This has lead to a continued interest in the

study of leadership. Leadership may thus be viewed as the process by which a person exerts influence over other people and inspires, motivates and directs their organizational activities to help achieve group or original goals. The person who exerts such influence is a leader. Where leaders are effective, the influence they exert over others helps a group or organization to achieve its performance goals. When leaders are ineffective, their influences often detract from goal attainment, (Jones and George, 2003). Leadership is the process of influencing others to achieve organizational goals. It is considered the foundation of the management function known as leading. It is the process of directing and influencing the task – related activities of group members.

Employees in organizations obey organizational leaders because leaders have power. There are four implications of this perception. First, leadership involves other people i.e. employees. Secondly, leadership involves unequal distribution of power, between the leader and the led (i.e. employees or group members). Group members are not powerless; they can and do shape group activities in a number of ways. Still, the leader will usually have more power. Thirdly, leadership involves the ability or competence to use different forms of powers to influence followers' behaviour in a number of ways. The fourth aspect combines or binds the first three and acknowledges that leadership is all about value (Stoner, Freeman and Culbert 2001).

Ukeje (1992) noted that one in an executive or management position cannot lead his group without performing specified administrative tasks. With this perception, however, leadership may be conceived as the process of influencing group activities towards goal achievement. In fact, leadership is an input into an organization and involves interpersonal influences as one initiates structures and takes action that results in a consistent pattern of group interaction aimed at productivity and individual fulfilment. The five specific functions of leadership include: advancing the purpose of the group; administering (i.e., determining activities and ensuring that they are performed); inspiring activity or setting the pace for the group; establishing a feeling of security and acting without regard for his own self interest (Ukeje, 1992).

Leadership competence therefore, has special empowerment to influence others and direct the activities of a group or organization. This study focuses on traits and behavioural approaches to leadership. The study focused on determining personal characteristics that make up an effective leader. The

trait and behavioural approaches to leadership therefore is interested in identifying those personal competences, abilities and states that cause or make up effective leadership.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) noted that competency in business education is a job related performance of an individual. Job performance competence can be accumulated within an individual and represent a capacity to perform at some future point. Essentially, these views relate to the characteristics (ability) possessed by an individual that, under normal conditions, should result in an acceptable or superior job performance. This notion is based on the premise that competencies in business education are linked to individual performance (Spencer and Spencer, 1993). It follows that competency in business education could be perceived as a fundamental knowledge, ability or expertise in a specific discipline or subject area or skill set. Competence is a standardized requirement for individuals to properly perform a specific job. It encompasses a combination of knowledge, skills and behaviours that could be utilized to improve performance (Ericson, 2001).

A business education graduate possesses competences as long as the skills, abilities and knowledge that constitute that competence are part of him or her, enabling the person to perform effectively within a certain workplace environment in organization (Fawler, 2002). All competence is action based (i.e., utilization). In business education, competence is better demonstrated through action in a work environment. Thus, to be competent, graduates need to be able to demonstrate and manifest their knowledge, skills and abilities in a given task. Their performance will be accompanied with a modest behaviour that portrays proficiency in the performance of the activities involved in the task. Competency grows through experience and the ability of an individual to learn and adapt. Competencies therefore, are abilities which drive outstanding performance in a given job, role or function. This implies that competence embodies knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) including behavioural characteristics that are associated with superior performance (Fawler, 2002).

Leadership competency in business education must be observable, measurable and linked to job performance and be based on a strong and outstanding ability to influence others. In addition, leadership competence-based performance is a current concept in business education. It identifies with a cluster of related office knowledge, skills and personal characteristics and abilities to direct, influence and channel the activities of others to goal

achievement. Such performance therefore, must be measured against well accepted standards (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). In a workplace context, leadership competence is a combination of technical knowledge, expertise or abilities including behavioural, traits to direct and control others. If business education graduates with the right leadership competencies are recruited in organizations and given leadership opportunities, they will be able to cope with their jobs on entry and will continue to help the organization to achieve their corporate objectives by directing and controlling the activities of others in a work group.

Leadership is an instrument that takes organizations to focus. Obviously, no organization can exist or thrive without leadership. Organizational leadership is tasty. Organizations often face varied problems resulting from employees; operations activities, including raw materials and resources procurement. Many organizations have collapsed as a result of poor leadership. Furthermore, many more are threatened by competition and poor performance equally as a result of poor leadership. Organizational leadership is an enormous responsibility that demands expertise competencies, thus not everyone can serve as a leader. Most organizational leaders do not possess the requisite competence to pilot the affairs and general operations of an organization. This is the reason for the ugly experiences and un-timely extinction of most firms. Coupled with this incessant collapse is the fact that the performance level of most existing organizations is not equally encouraging. All these experiences are most often attributed to the poor quality or incompetence of the leadership. In view of these experiences, the problem of this study is: what are the leadership competencies needed by business education graduates for effective job performance in organizations. In this regard the main purpose of this study is to identify the leadership competencies desired of business education graduates for effective performance in organizations by employers.

### **Research questions**

This study was guided by one research question thus: What leadership competencies are required of business education graduates by employers of labour for effective job performance in business organizations?.

### **Scope of the study**

The subject of the study constituted of 160 top management and senior administrative staff of selected business organizations in Anambra state of

Nigeria. All the identified top management and senior administrative staff of selected business organizations were all used as subjects in this study.

### **Method**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. It involved a onetime observation of independent and non manipulative variables (Asika, 1991). In this type of research, data are usually in their natural setting without interference (Uzoagulu, 1998). Thus, a descriptive survey was best suitable for this study because it enabled the researchers to gather information from the identified population and analyze same as they exist in their natural setting to identify the leadership competencies required of business education graduates by employers of labour for effective job performance in business organizations.

The instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers after a careful determination of the focus of this study. The data collection instrument contained 15 items to elicit information on the leadership competencies required of business education graduates by employers of labour for effective job performance in business organizations. The instrument was carefully face validated by five experts in the field of business education. A total of 160 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. A total of 135 out of the 160 copies of the instrument distributed were retrieved and used for analysis in this study. The mean and the standard deviation were used to analyze the research question. Any item with a mean score of 2.5 and above was accepted and considered as one of the leadership competencies required by employers of labour of business education graduates for effective job performance in business organizations. Items rating below 2.5 were discarded and were not required of business education graduates. The standard deviation was used to check the dispersion of each of the means from the grand mean.

### **Results**

Table 1 indicates that most of the leadership competences itemized had mean scores above 2.5. This is an indication that employers of labour required business education graduates to possess leadership competences for effective performance in organization. Specifically the table indicates with a mean score of 3.48 that business education graduates should possess the ability to intelligently use power as leaders. Power is perceived here as the ability of the leader to influence and direct others to achieve optimum performance needed for organizational goal. The exercise of power is a very crucial one

for a leader. The use of power in an organization therefore, is a very significant role. Jones and George (2002) noted that in using power, leaders should recognize the various types and dimensions of power. Thus, there are legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, expert power and referent power. Legitimate power defines the authority the leader has by virtue of his or her position in an organizational hierarchy. The nature and structure of organizations therefore help to determine the legitimate powers of leaders. For example, in some organizations, leaders have the legitimate powers to hire or employ new employees; induct, train and assign responsibilities to them as well as monitor or supervise their work. Leaders need also to possess reward powers. This is the ability of the leader to give or withhold tangible reward (e.g, salaries) and intangible rewards (e.g, praise). A good leader should know when to effectively use the reward measures to stimulate or control employee on his or her performance. Jones and George (2002) noted that one of the fundamental skills or competences to be possessed by organizational leaders is the ability to use coercive power. The authors perceived coercive powers as the competence of the leader to punish erring employees. Bristol (2008) noted that the use of coercive power is quite a strategic one. Leaders who are knowledgeable and vast in the use of coercive power can produce high performance while those who are not knowledgeable and vast enough can use such powers to rob workers of their dignity and cause them both physical and mental stress. Nonetheless, leaders should be vast in the use of coercive power. Bristol (2008) again stressed on the use of expert power as a very significant competence a leader should possess. Expert power defines the specialized technical knowledge, skills and expertise that a leader possesses. Expert power varies and again depends on the type of organization. Expert powers possessed by leaders gives them considerable influence over subordinates. Effective leaders take time to ensure that they acquire adequate technical or expatriate knowledge in their field.

To be a good leader, one must possess the competence to intelligently influence others using his initiative. The possessions of high initiative had a mean score of 3.43. Initiative is the ability of subordinates to act on their own without direction from a superior Davis, (2001). Employers of labour indicated that they desire business education graduates to possess the initiative competence. Thus, Weterman, (2001) noted that employee initiative can be a major source of strength for an organization because it leads to creativity and innovation. Because subordinates strive to achieve specific

work objectives, they must certainly work with people. Their leadership style therefore, should be both employee and task-oriented. The possession of task-oriented ability and employee oriented ability raked in a mean scores of 3.32 and 3.23 respectively. This implies that their primary concern should always be to develop good relationships with employees and at the same time ensuring that employees are spurred to perform at high level. Employers of labour have special desire for business education graduates who posses these qualities. Thus, employee oriented subordinates focus on having high quality interpersonal relationship with employees. This they must use to blend with their task oriented competence to equally focus on task accomplishment as well as goal achievements. The exercise of these competencies demands that the subordinates should be flexible. Thus the possession of reasonable level of flexibility had a mean score of 3.30. Business education graduates should also possess the ability to make quick and intelligent changes in their plans and actions to redirect employee activities to respond to the prevailing circumstances. Thus, the possession of reasonable level of intelligence raked in a mean score of 3.45 They need not be rigid but flexible enough such that plans can be intelligently altered and changed if situation changes. Again, employers of labour indicated that business education graduates should possess good emotional stability and intelligence to blend with other behavioural traits. Emotional intelligence here implies the ability to understand, manage and control one's own emotions including the moods and emotions of other people. Emotional intelligence can assist graduates of business education to understand how their subordinate feels, and to handle employee behaviour in a working place. Thus, the possession of good emotional stability achieved mean score of 3.41

Results equally revealed that business education graduates should be steadfast, persistent and courageous as they handle organizational tasks. They need not be discouraged in the face of challenges in the workplace. They need not be biased either, but should be disciplined, just and fair in all issues. They should possess good moral conduct that distributes benefits or harms without being partial among impartial way. Above all, employers of labour desire that business education graduates should have the competence to plan. Thus, the possession of the ability to objectively plan within a given time frame achieved a mean score of 3.50. While the possession of inability to be fair and just indicated a negative mean score of 1.69. this is an indication that leaders should possess the ability to be just and fair in issues. Planning therefore, is a process that organizations use to identify and select appropriate

goals and courses of action. Three major things involved in planning are: forecasting, deciding which goals the organization will pursue; deciding what course of action to adopt to attain goals and deciding how to allocate organizational resources to attain those goals (Henderson, 2000). Thus, forecasting ability achieved a mean score of 3.31 to underscore its relevance for leaders to possess. To be competent to plan, business education graduates need to be able to forecast, forecasting involves an intelligent process of making prediction about changing conditions and future events that may specifically affect the business of an organization. Thus, prospective business education graduate employees need to have clear knowledge of what the objectives of the organization are and of the means for their attainment. They need to have intensive professional training to boost their initiative and ambition.

In a nut shell, the possession of intelligence will help leaders (ie managers) understand complex situations, issues and solve problems. The ability to make good decisions and discover alternative ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness also anchors on the managers intelligent. Leaders also need to be self-confident. The possession of confidence had a mean score of 3.41. Self confidence contributes to a leaders' effectiveness in influencing others and persisting when faced with obstacles and difficulties. Persistence in this regard depicts perseverance. Thus, the possession of the spirit of perseverance had a mean score of 3.32 to underscore the relevance of the possession of the competency by business education graduates. Leaders need high energy and dominant influence to get on with their responsibilities. These dual qualities achieved a mean score of 3.52 and 3.26 respectively. The possession of high energy will assist leaders deal with the many demands they face, while the possession of the powers of dominance will enable them influence their subordinates to achieve organizational goals. Both dominance and high energy competencies will help leaders deal with uncertainty and make difficult decisions thus, ensuring tolerance in handling issues. Again, the possession of honesty and integrity helps leaders behave ethically and earn the trust and confidence of subordinates. Respondents' indication showed a mean rating of 3.18 to underscore the relevance of the possessions of integrity by business education graduates.

### **Conclusion**

Leadership positions in business organizations are usually occupied by managers. The specific way in which the leader (the manager) chooses to influence other people shapes the way he handles his functions of planning,

organizing, coordinating, directing and controlling and other principal tasks of managing. Nonetheless, despite the approach, a key component of effective leadership is found in the power the leader (manager) has to affect the other people's behaviour and get them to act in certain ways. The performance competence of the manager (leader) in this direction is therefore, the prime engine for handling all these responsibilities.

### **Recommendations**

Business education instruction need to be broadened to encompass the desired leadership performance competencies discussed above. Instructors in the programme therefore, should be conscious of content especially in office management and administration to ensure that recipients are properly prepared for the leadership tasks in the world of work.

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**Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Leadership Competencies**

S/N	ITEMS	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DECISION
1.	Ability to intelligently use power	155	3.43	0.62	Accepted
2.	Ability to objective plan within given time frame	155	3.50	0.57	Accepted
3.	Possession of reasonable level of intelligences	155	3.45	0.68	Accepted
4.	Should be self confident	155	3.41	0.68	Accepted
5.	Possession of dominant ability	155	3.26	0.79	Accepted
6.	Possession of high level of energy	155	3.52	0.60	Accepted
7.	Possession of integrity	155	3.18	0.89	Accepted
8.	Possession of task oriented ability	155	3.32	0.78	Accepted
9.	Employee oriented competences	155	3.23	0.84	Accepted
10.	Possession of reasonable level of flexibility	155	3.30	0.77	Accepted
11.	Good emotional stability	155	3.41	0.62	Accepted
12.	Possession of high initiative	155	3.48	0.62	Accepted
13.	Possession of high level of perseverance	155	3.32	0.76	Accepted
14.	Ability to forecast	155	3.31	0.80	Accepted
15.	Inability to be just and fair	155	1.69	0.74	Rejected