

LEADERSHIP ETHICS AND THE CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract

The intensity of today's concern about leadership ethics and the challenges of employees' performance have pointed out by recent happenings both in public and private sectors. There are poor applications of leadership ethical values which have created corruptive social cognition, prolong industrial actions, unilateral decision-making in governance, and alienation of workers thereby generating many ethical problems at work place. The observation is that, most corporate organization management have failed to view ethics as an overall human concern and not considering ethical questions as important in all areas of life such as work place, personal, politics and governance. Leadership ethics has become a primary challenge in managing the labour force as well as other resources in such a way that organization objectives of survival, growth and profit making will be met. On the synergy between leadership ethics and employees' performance, the paper will engage in critical appraisal on the use of ethical values in organization management. The necessity on leadership to implement an ethical structure will shape employees' behaviour at work place. The paper discusses how leaders can apply ethical values in a direction suitable for strategies and performance outcomes. Strategies are given in terms of recommendations such as the need for moral approach in organization management, recognition of human relation theory and liberal democratic pattern of management among others.

Keywords: Challenges, Leadership, Ethics, Employees' Performance, Public Sector.

Introduction

It has been known that the difference between success and failure whether in war, in business, a protest movement and or industrial organization management can be attributed to leadership. Organization management in Nigeria has lost its ways adrift in a sea of managerial mediocrity, desperately needing leadership based on ethical values to face economic competition. Failure in management as a result of poor application of leadership ethics is very wide spread. It is the same in state government establishments, public and private sectors.

As a challenge, the onus of this paper is to investigate if the leadership ethics in Nigeria has lived up to the above interpretation and expectations in the area of organization management with regards to employees' performance. Furthermore, the paper seeks to answer the questions on why leadership ethics is not effectively applied taking into consideration the fact that effective leadership ethics will enhance employees' performance? Is it the kind of behavioural orientation the leaders acquired or is it the environment they found themselves in at work place or in Nigeria state that is responsible for this inundating incapacitation? The weakness of the Nigerian state is mainly a derivative of low level of leadership and ethical values which is underpinning governance, production, especially science, technology and industrialization (Anger, 2002).

The employees often suffer insults, inhuman treatment, poor working conditions and poor level of pay. In spite of these, little pressure is brought to bear on organization to improve the quality of leadership ethics on the lives of the employees. The purpose of this study is to draw attention to the importance of leadership ethics in organization management that will favourably accommodate the employer and employees. The study seeks to present an overview of the necessity of good leadership ethical values and its management merits that will complement with the motivation of workers.

The Challenges of Leadership Ethics on Employees' Performance in Nigerian Public Sector

Leadership is a social influence. It means leaving a mark. It is initiating and guiding and the result is change (Meaning/Curtis, 2009). Leadership has been observed to be a critical factor in the production process in the globalized economic organizations. Leadership has shaped and reshaped corporate organizations, countries and the world in various spheres. It has created a world of differences between organization managers. Leadership is a critical factor in organization management that is defined as a combination of ways of direction, leading, attitude, creativity and management of employees' performance.

A critical assumption of this paper is that, leadership is a part of management but not all of it (Donnelly, 1987). It is the human factor which binds a group together and motivates it toward goals. It is also observed that management activities such as planning, organizing and decision making are dormant cocoons until the leader triggers the power of motivation in people and guides them toward goals. Leadership is not a new phenomenon, yet it has become a critical factor of competitive advantage in management economy. The transition to organization growth is about the effectiveness in scale of leadership in relation to other factors of production. As an invaluable entrepreneurial factor, leadership directs and relocates other factors of production. Leadership is at the epicentre of managing performance of employees.

The post independence political economy of Nigeria has been largely characterized by bureaucratic and political corruption, clientelism, looting of national treasury, destabilizations of labour force, political violence and high level of poverty, alienation and derivation. There is very low level of professional ethics and accountability in

governance and administration of affairs in Nigeria as a prerequisite for organization management. This investigation revolves around the above foregoing problems as it explores strategies for a way forward.

The Art of Leadership

In this study, the art of leadership would be used as interpreted by Manning and Curtis (2009:XVII):

Art is skill acquired by experience or study: A system of rules to facilitate performance. The use of skill and imagination in applying such rules- the art of building, the art of persuasion. Leadership is showing the way or direction. The course of action, influencing or causing to follow by words and deeds. Guiding the behaviour of others through ideas, strength or heroic feats. The position or formation of one who leads. The ability to lead.

The art of leadership combines personality trait and behaviour, ethics and values, human relations and empowerment of people. It involves leaders as coach and developer of people managing stress in the work place and adaptive capacity, performance management and organization success. In one form or another, the leadership process has been central to human interaction since the dawn of society.

Leadership is viewed and conceived from different perspective by different people. According to Koontz (1980:16), leadership is defined: "As influence, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the achievement of group goals". This concept can be enlarged to imply not only willingness to work but also willingness to work with zeal and confidence. Furthermore, Kotter (1979:1), explained leadership through the concept of "Power", thus:

Power is an ugly word. It connotes dominance and submission, central and acquiescence, one man's will at the expense of another man's self esteem. Yet it is power, the ability to control and influence others, that provides the basis for direction of organizations and for the attainment of social goals. Leadership is the exercise of power.

In the management sense, any notion of leadership, its attributes and code of conduct are central to any thought system which embodies or articulates a body of principles that would guide the exercise of policy making authority. The question of leadership is always central to any principle of the kind of sectoral alignment being discussed, publicly or privately. Leadership in the practical sense of leading is important in that by leading effectively, the leader can produce results consonant with the shared goals and aims of the team, workgroup or organization.

Leadership is a relational concept. It is relational in the sense that we cannot meaningfully talk about leadership except in the context of character. Leadership and character exist in a dyadic relationship in which one means nothing without the other.

The two categories emerged in that leadership ethics affect the employees' performance. The analysis here reveals the interface between leadership and character as a related dynamic process. It adopts a diachronic and analytical approach. The approach's emphasis is on the historical method in formulating a scientific definition of leadership. It is also part of organizational management perspective, especially as it brings the process of effectiveness and efficiency to bear in the definition. It equally reveals leadership as a sociological phenomenon regardless of its various forms of empirical manifestation.

Conceptualizing Ethics

For the purpose of this study, ethics can be referred to a person's fundamental orientation towards life; that basic orientation towards life. That basic orientation can be called the "inner character". In more recent times, ethics has been viewed as an overall human concern, emphasis shifted from internal character to overt behaviour-acts, habits and customs. In the view of Manning and Curtis (2009:92):

Ethics is the branch of philosophy concerned with the intent, means, and consequences of moral behaviour. It is the study of moral judgments and right and wrong conduct. Moral judgments are judgments about what is right and wrong, good and bad.

In another perspective, Opara (2013: 274) defined ethics as a:

Code or set of principles by which men live. It deals with the morality of human conduct or actions. What a man ought to do. From normative sense, ethics prescribes the rules and regulations regarding the rightness and wrongness of human action. It deals with moral judgment, norms and standards, judgment of moral obligation, goodness and badness of actions and moral values. From non-normative perspective, it deals with the description of ethical concepts, human actions, definition and clarification of human thoughts.

The notion of ultimate ethical standard serves as the regulative principle for the determination of social moral values. Human action is regarded as moral if it yields good results.

From the organizational management perspective, ethics becomes a conventional morality. Here, morality is characterized by group conformity and allegiance to authority. The individual acts in order to meet the expectation of others and to please those in charge. Compliance with authority and upholding social or management order are primary ethical concern of this perspective. Right conduct is doing one's duty either as defined by those in authority positions or as stipulate by the organization's policy. Most organizations view ethical values as a fundamental requirement for success. These ethical values become social glue in their industrial relations practice. The ethical value system is influenced by its task. In every business in the world, the production of goods

and services that please the customer is the ultimate goal. For an organization to perform at its highest level, the leader must believe in that which the organization is doing.

Leadership Ethics

There is need for leadership that is based on honesty, service to others and equipped with moral courage. Leaders must understand the subject of ethics- what it is and why it is important. Management leaders must appreciate the humane use of morality in dealing with their subordinates and in decision-making in the organizations. The concept of "leadership ethics" centers on the basis of how leaders apply their moral capabilities in use of authority. Three leadership factors are very important for the functional effectiveness of any organization and indeed state craft. These factors are the leader, followers and the situation. Of these three factors, the most important is the leader. This is so because the leader can do a lot to influence both followers and the situation.

For a leader to meaningfully influence both factors, he will exhibit a pattern of behaviour that is referred to as "social consciousness" or "what I think of others". In this sense, leadership ethics can be seen as the morally acceptable behavioural pattern of a leader in the process of influencing the subordinates and situation. In the organizational management sense, this behavioural pattern, according to Morrish (1998:188), is that:

The behaviour can be related to position in a social structure. That actual behaviour can be related to the individual's own ideas of what is appropriate (role cognitions) or to other people's ideas about what he will do (expectations) or to other people's ideas about what he should do (norms). In this light, leadership ethics maybe understood as a set of norms and expectations applied by the incumbent of a particular position.

Furthermore, in management perspective the leadership ethical behaviour involves two styles, thus: task-oriented leadership (effectiveness / productivity) and people oriented leadership, that is, leadership orientated toward people and interpersonal relationship (duty role, industrial relations, decision-making, employees' performance, etc). The behaviour determines the ability to lead and willingness to follow. However, leadership ethics are a set of behaviour that evolve overtime based on the leader's personality, orientation, experience, culture, training and development. As a result, it becomes inculcated into the behavioural repertoire.

Leadership Ethics and Employees Performance Management

In building and applying leadership ethics in organizational scale, leaders must believe in certain moral ideas and should see their task as to be imprinting good ideas on how to improve employees' performance. Flexnea (1983:638) defined employee, "as a person or group of persons working for another person or business firm for pay". In order to achieve maximum productivity, an organization must ensure that the right

people are working in the right jobs under the right conditions. The organization must strive to match the skills of the employee with the demands of the job.

Furthermore, according to Flexnea (1983:1439), performance is defined as, "the execution of accomplishment of work, acts, feats, etc". It is the state of competences; the ability to do the assigned job well. Effective performance depends upon the proper match between the individual and the job. Employee performance entails employee with the proper skills and abilities selected to give the desired results. Management in this perspective should make use of the available resources to produce results, reward and development purposes. This is classified as part of formal organizational structure, which is designed to help the organization manage employees' performance management.

An employee in an organization that performs near its total capability has somebody as head who is skilled in the art of leadership ethics. Here, leadership based on ethical morality will consider ethical questions as important in the process of organization management. In the process of management, ethics is rooted in liberal and participative policy with the employees. The leader will consult his subordinates as proposed and encourage participation from them. By being ethical, industrial democracy is practiced in the organization. Every employee performance encouraged should enhance productivity.

The workers as a result of participatory system of decision-making, become more innovative to their assigned jobs. Labour Union is encouraged to operate in relation to stipulated labour laws. The participatory value will enhance productivity. Industrial conflicts will be less which will allow workers to create more inputs to the corporate advantage of both the employees and the employer. To carry out the above functions, leaders will assume some new key leadership roles and responsibilities in competence needed for leadership ethics to enhance employee performance, viz:

1. Problem solving skills
2. Establish relationships and acknowledge leadership skills and abilities.
3. Competence in human resource functional areas.
4. Knowledge of succession/career planning system
5. Strategic and conceptual skills
6. Business knowledge / organizational ability
7. Awareness of the financial impacts in the human resources function as well as the organization particularly in areas such as personal costs, health care, compensation package and functional retirement system.

(Source: Adapted and Modified from Schuler and Huber, (1990) p. 22)

Leadership Performance in Nigerian Public Sector

The logic in assessing the importance of leadership performance is emphasized by Manning and Curtis (2009:366), that:

Performance management is not at the heart of leadership success. It is important to have a vision. It is important to have values. It is important to have leadership qualities such as vitality, persistence and concern for others. It is important to have the power of leadership position.

However, all of these will result in little actual accomplishment without the art of leadership ethics. Effective leadership requires the art of clear communication goals, coaching others to succeed and correcting poor performance. Performance management seems reasonable and fairly simple to do, yet in Nigerian public sector organization, it appears that majority of management leaders fall short when it comes to effective and efficient performance.

In the view of Opara (2013:84):

Public sector is that segment of the country that is owned and controlled by the government of the federation as the agencies. It is the sector which serves all the citizens. In Nigeria, the concept of the public sector could be taken to imply-the civil service bureaucracy exemplified by the federal, state and local government ministries, departments and the parastatals which include public corporations like Nigeria Ports Authority, Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), etc. Employees in these categories of the public sector form the largest number of workers in the country.

The question of leadership ethics is always central to any principle of the kind of sectoral alignment being discussed public or private. A good and ideal leadership inspires through own examples worthy of emulation. Such a leader becomes an asset to an organization for its ability to stimulate the best out of his subordinate, in terms of maximizing and optimizing productivity out of creative use of valuable resources, human or material.

In the process of performance management in the Nigerian public sector, the leader in this regard is a beacon of hope for the hopeless employees, radiating peace and Concorde to neutralize or minimize industrial conflicts. The leader generates and inspires creative confidence that caters for the maximum or optimum productivity of the sector he controls or leads. In this sense, proper use of authority becomes the right to make decisions, direct others, work and give orders. In its relationship to employees' performance, leading (leadership) means getting others to get the job done, maintaining morale and motivating subordinates (employees) to achieve the organizational goals. Such leadership therefore, guarantees recurrent booms rather than bursts both in human spirit and production engineering.

In Nigerian public sector, management staff as leaders will enhance performance when they create or generate positives out of adversities and inspire or motivate the employees to do less in a situation they find themselves or in circumstances they are confronted with. This is what gives greater latitude of meanings to the saying that a

good leadership deserves the followership it gets and vice-versa. There is no greater magic to productivity than such relationship born, bred, nourished and nurtured to sustainable levels over time.

Strategies for Leadership Ethics on the Demands for Employees' Performance Management

This section attempts to proffer strategies that will assist to inculcate ethics to arm management leaders in contributing to the nation's economic and political growth. For organizational leader to effectively compete in the universalized management practice, good leadership must be rooted in ethical practice that will motivate the employees. For effective relationship that can improve employees' performance, three key elements can be used:

1. **Communication:** The transmission of information and understanding with employees and management. It should be a two way (up and down) system in the organization.
2. **Commitment:** A sense of identification, involvement and loyalty expressed by employees toward the organization. To achieve this, success in such commitment should be recognized and regarded.
3. **Continuation:** A schedule that is designed to reinforce behaviour every time the behaviour exhibited is correct. In order to sustain high employee performance, the practice of good ethical leadership management has to be continuous and not avert. In Nigerian public sectors, leadership therefore should make communication and commitment an organizational tradition.

Leadership ethics should be based on human relations theory. The human relations theory talks of creating a situation where the employees are regarded and seen as the most valued factor in the production process. Where the human factor is not seen as a mere working tool in the production process, it can be used and dumped. It is a situation where the workers are seen as the most important asset of the organization. This human relations theory will boost the psychology of workers in their performance.

In liberal and effective team work, leaders and the lead (employees) are the bedrock of any organizational performance. This will always lead to increased working relationship and should be encouraged to keep it up to maintain high standards.

To remain viable, creative and relevant, the employees must engage in the process of industrial democracy. This process is all about participative management in decision making through planning, goal setting and consultative means which have a good effect on leadership management. Such process will not take place by chance; it must be a purposive effort that embodies more than good moral intention.

One kind of moral equilibrium in an organization is the balance of power (exercise of authority) among individuals, employees/ management, management/ trade unions and or departments. Any change by management leaders threatens the autonomy of employees as product group which they may resist because the group perceives a decrease in control over its own affairs.

A critical knowledgeable leadership that has a strong ethical will is advocated for proper co-ordination in Nigerian public sector management structure which will be driven by result oriented, effective human relationship and performance competition. The changing realities of the time demand practical experience and flexibility in the leadership management so as to engender employee dynamism in production processes and improve on their performance.

Conclusion

The leadership ethics function on human resources management is becoming more important than ever. This is because, human resources is now seen as critical to the success of an organization. For Nigerian public/ private sectors to be successful in this era of local and global competition, they need to equip themselves with the most effective human resources management tools that are possible.

For worldwide competitiveness, Nigerian public/ private sectors as organizations need "world class" human resources departments and leaders. On the other hand, leadership management should describe employees' performance as the most valuable resource. When leaders approach human resources management from ethical perspective, the employees' performance management will change in the direction of being more consistent, integrated and improve organizational effectiveness. For those in fields of human resources and leadership management, who want to be strategic leaders and effective in the management of employees' performance, they must assume these ethical roles and acquire additional competences that will enable them to perform these roles effectively.

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