

Effect of Leadership Styles on Performance of Local Governments in Uganda. A Case of Mbale District

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Abstract

Leadership is one of the critical approaches used to manage employee performance within organizations. How a leader directs and guides subordinates depends greatly on leadership style(s). Local governments need effective leadership style(s) to operate efficiently. Mbale local government leadership is persistently facing friction between managers and their subordinates in areas of responsibility and decision making. There was need to establish the leadership style(s) employed by managers of Mbale Local government. Study objectives; to find out how autocratic, laissez-faire styles of leadership affected employee performance, establish the relationship between democratic leadership and employee performance. Descriptive research design was used. Study Population included; district executive council, councilors, Heads of departments and technical staff. Qualitative approach was employed in data analysis. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect data. The key findings; autocratic and laissez-fair leadership styles dominated Mbale local government leadership, the study revealed positive relationship between democratic style of leadership and employee performance. Ignorance about leadership styles was found critical. In conclusion, leaders use the right leadership styles to influence subordinates in organizations for effective performance. The study recommends among others, capacity building of leaders on leadership styles.

Keywords: *Leadership styles, Local government performance*

Introduction

Leadership has been one of the critical approaches used to manage employees within an organization. It has been in existence since the creation of mankind and is being applied up to the present time. Globally, leadership has attracted much interest. We are constantly reminded that groups hardly function without effective leadership performance. Stuart and Crom (1994), assert that leadership is about listening to people, supporting and encouraging them and involving them in the decision-making and problem-solving processing. It is about building teams and developing their ability to make skillful decisions." A leader is a person who takes the central roles in interactions and who influences the behavior of other members of the group. He is an individual who has authority over others and is responsible for guiding their actions. He/she is a person engaged in the traditional management practices, such as planning, organizing, decision-making, and controlling, and whose performance is almost often measured by their ability to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization.

Smircich and Morgan (1982) state that leadership is by nature dialectical, it is socially constructed for the interactions of both leaders and the followers. McNeil (1990) suggests that leadership is not a role or position, but the ability to initiate action and move others to shared goals. For them leadership is the foundation stone upon which other vital components of organizational high performance-management systems and technology rest. Gannon (1979) says that without effective leadership, it is difficult for an organization to function effectively. The leader defines the goal of an organization, develop the planning and control systems that guide and monitor the organizations destiny. Organizations on the other hand function effectively when there are persons to communicate with each other, who are willing to contribute action, to accomplish a common purpose. Integration of leadership styles into management of the human capital resources is necessary. How a leader directs and guides subordinates in an organization depends greatly on his or her leadership style(s). Three basic leadership styles can be defined as follows:

Autocratic- a style characterized by authoritarian behavior, unilateral decision making, one way communication and the denial of conflict. In short, the leader acts as an absolute monarch with unlimited authority (Kern (2004).

Amstrong (2002) asserts that an autocratic leader has absolute power over his/her staff. Team work force has little opportunity for making suggestions, even when these would be in the team or organization's interest. The autocratic leader believes that his leadership is based upon authority conferred upon him by some source, such as his position, knowledge, strength or the power to punish and reward. Autocratic leadership is often best used in crisis, when decision must be made quickly and without dissent. For instance, the military often uses autocratic leadership style; top commanders are responsible for quick making complex decisions which allow troops focus their attention and energy of performing their allotted tasks and missions (Chandan 1987).

Democratic-Participative- which involves shared decision making, open communication and realization that conflict is inevitable and must be managed. Although the leader maintains final authority, subordinates input and consultation is highly valued. Democratic leaders make the final decisions but they include team members in the decision making process. They encourage creativity, and team members are often highly engaged in projects and decisions. There are other benefits of democratic leadership. Team members tend to have high job satisfaction and productive because they are more involved in decisions. Team members feel in control of their destiny, so they are motivated to work hard by more than just a financial reward.

Free-Rain or laissez-faire: this style allows subordinates maximum autonomy in their job. Individual decision making, free exchange of information, interpersonal conflict resolution and minimal leadership controls are standard.

Chandan (1987) says, this type of a leader is just a figure head and does not give any direction. This type of leadership is evident in research laboratories where the scientists are freely to conduct their research and take their decisions.

Kern (2004) discussed the relationship of values to organizational leadership and his study was highly in support of the laissez-faire style in bridging the gap between the employer and the employee where his concern was solely on the fact that laissez-faire would create positive environment through which employees and employers felt like a family regardless of their positions.

Pearson (2011) asserts that local council leadership style(s) have affected employee performance in most of the local governments due to lack of proper direction. Effective leadership generates increased motivation and effort. Greater motivation and effort are factors that lead to high organizational performance. Maslow (1970) identified five need categories which can serve as motivations and arranged them in hierarchical order, with physiological needs being the most basic. Although an individual can be manager without leading and an individual can be a leader without being a manager (for example, an informal group leader or elected trade union leader). A balance of management and leadership style(s) is necessary for a work organization to operate effectively.

Statement of the Problem

Performance in Mbale local government has been deteriorating especially in the department of health and education. The duty of meeting deadlines, being efficient in actual work situation, and achieving performance has been a point of public concern. Several studies have been carried out on issues of management, accountability and service delivery (Kharono, 2012; Musamali, 2014, Kayendeke, 2013) in Mbale district. However, none of them focused on leadership and performance. For Mbale local government to operate efficiently

needs an effective leadership style(s). It is upon this background that the researcher needed to establish the type of leadership style(s) used in Mbale Municipal local government and how it affects performance.

Objectives

The study aimed at fulfilling the following objectives; find out how autocratic leadership affects employee performance in Mbale local government; assess the extent to which laissez-faire leadership affects employee performance in Mbale local government; and establish the relationship between democratic leadership and employee performance in Mbale local government.

Methodology

The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research approaches with a descriptive design. This design was chosen because the researcher sought to obtain views from a relatively large sample of respondents on the influence of leadership styles on employee performance in Mbale district.

Study Population

The study population included; local executive council, councilors, heads of departments, technical staff. The categories under study were thought to be involved in the decision making, leadership management level within the Mbale local government structure. The total population was 200 comprising of all categories.

Sample size

The sample size of the study used was determined using the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sampling frame as adopted by Amin (2005); which recommends the appropriate sample for any given population. Given the population above and in accordance with the Krejcie and Morgan formula, the sample size for the study was **Table 1: Table for Determination of population and Sample Size**

Category of Respondents	Population	Sample size	Sampling technique
Executive council members	10	10	Purposive sampling
Heads of department	12	12	Purposive sampling
Technical staff	120	90	Simple random sampling
Councilors	58	52	Simple random sampling
Total	200	164	

Source: Mbale District Registry, 2014

Sampling Technique

The researcher used both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to sample and select the respondents. Under non-probability sampling, the researcher employed purposive sampling to sample executive local councils and technical heads of departments since they were few and key informants in the study, who had the information that this study needed.

Local councils and technical staff were selected using simple random sampling technique. This technique helped the researcher to have all the samples have equal chance of being selected.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection instruments used included closed ended questionnaires and structured interviews. The questionnaires and an interview guide were administered to all categories of respondents.

Validity of instruments

To ensure that the items in the instrument are valid, the researcher designed them in consultation with an expert. She requested the expert to rate the items as very relevant (VR) Relevant (R),

$$\text{CVI} = \frac{\text{VR/R}}{\text{No. of Items in instrument}}$$

The value of CVI computed was 0.76, and according to George & Mallery (2003), 0.76 is considered acceptable validity and the instrument was used for data collection

Data Analysis

Data collected was descriptively analyzed using frequencies and percentages under each objective.

Findings

Objective one aimed at establishing how autocratic leadership affects performance in Mbale local government.

Views of respondent members on whether leaders in Mbale local government make organizational decisions alone or involve staff

Table 1 Leaders make organizational decisions alone

Responses	Frequency	percentage
disagree	27	16.7
Strongly disagree	13	7.9
Not sure	28	17.1
agree	34	20.7
Strongly agree	62	37.8
Total	164	100

Source: Mbale District Local Government (2014)

From the table above, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that leaders in Mbale local government make organizational decisions alone by 38.7%, 20.7% agreed, and 17.1 are not sure. This indicates that decision making process in Mbale municipal local government is not carried out by majority of employees.

Their level of participation in decision making process is very low as indicated by 16.6%. This is in agreement with Amstrong who contends that an autocratic leader has absolute power over his/her staff. Team work force has little opportunity for making suggestions, even when these would be in the team or organization's interest.

Findings on whether staff is involved in implementing the decisions already made.

Table 2. Staff is involved in implementing organizational decisions already made

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	72	43.9%
Agree	43	26.2%
Disagree	24	14.6%
Strongly disagree	15	9.1%
Not sure	10	6.1%
Total	164	100%

Source: Mbale District Local Government (2014)

From the table above, findings indicate that majority of the employees (43.9%) are involved in implementing the decisions already made by their leaders. 9.1% disagreed that they were involved and 10% were not sure. This implies that leaders in Mbale local government make organizational decisions alone, and then during the process of implementation, they involve employees. This

contradicts with views of Stuart and Michael Crom (1994), who asserted that leadership is about listening to people, supporting and encouraging them and involving them in the decision-making and problem-solving processing; about building teams and developing their ability to make skillful decisions.

The second objective aimed at assessing the extent to which laissez-faire leadership affects performance in Mbale Municipal local government.

Table3. Views of respondent members on whether leaders in Mbale local government give direction to staff, monitor performance of staff

Responses	Frequency	Percentage s
Strongly agree	32	19.5%
Agree	19	11.6%
Strongly disagree	78	47.6%
Disagree	22	13.4%
Not sure	13	7.9%
Total	164	100%

Source: Mbale District Local Government (2014)

The findings reveal that 47.6% strongly disagreed and 13.4% disagreed that leaders monitor performance of employees and give them direction in their work. 19.5% strongly agreed, 11.6% agreed and 7.9 are not sure as reflected in the low percentages on the fact that employees are guided by their leaders. This implies that performance in Mbale local government is not monitored, guided hence laissez-faire style of leadership being employed. Although Kern (2004) discussed the relationship of values to organizational leadership and his study was highly in support of the laissez-faire style in bridging the gap between the employer and the employee where his concern is solely on the fact that laissez-faire would create positive environment through which employees and employers felt like a family regardless of their positions, it is necessary to establish how this kind of relationship affects performance.

Table 4. Views of respondents showing whether performance of employees in Mbale government has been increased over years

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly agree	32	19.5%
Agree	40	24.4%
Strongly disagree	55	33.5%
Disagree	37	22.6%
Total	164	100%

Source: Mbale District Local Government (2014)

The findings show that employee performance has not been improved over years. This is reflected in the percentages as follows; 22.6% disagreed and 33.5% strongly disagreed that there have been an improvement of employee performance Mbale local government. Although some respondents agreed that there have been some improvement as indicated by 24.4% and 19.5%, this is very low hence, low performance. This is in agreement with Pearson (2011) who asserted that local council leadership style(s) have affected employee performance in most of the local governments due to lack of proper direction. Effective leadership generates increased motivation and effort. Greater motivation and effort are factors that lead to high organizational performance. According to the findings, this is lacking in Mbale local government council.

Objective three aimed at establishing the relationship between democratic leadership and employee performance in Mbale Municipal local government.

Table 5 Views of respondents on whether leaders relate well with employees

Items	Very often	Percentage	Often	percentage	Occasionally	Percentage
Interactions at leisure time	74	45.1%	54	32.9%	36	21.9%
Frequency of staff socialization	67	40.8%	59	36%	38	23.2%
Positive response to personal needs	81	49.4%	43	26.2%	40	24.4%
Positive response to official needs	77	47%	54	33%	33	20.1%

Source: Mbale District Local Government (2014)

The above table shows the distribution of respondents based on work / interpersonal relationship between leaders and subordinates. 47% of the respondents asserted that positive response to official need is very often, while 40.8% indicate that frequency of staff socialization is often. From the result, it is obvious that response to both official and frequency of staff socialization is of appreciable values, hence, testify to the level of relationship between the leaders and the subordinates is very high. This kind of relationship creates harmony and promotes democracy in an organization hence, improving performance and work towards achieving the goals and objectives of the organization, towards achieving the goals and objectives of the organization.

Table 6: Channels of Effective Communication

Items	Very Frequent	Frequent	Not Frequent	Not at all
Hold general meeting	14 (19.4)	3 (45.8) 3	1 (23.6) 7	8(11.1)
Hold sectional meeting	16 (22.2)	3 (50) 6	1 (25) 8	2(2.8)
Use of internal memorandum	14 (19.4)	3 (45.8) 3	1 (25) 8	7(9.9)
Use of telephone	17 (23.6)	1 (20.8) 5	3 (45.8) 3	17 (23.6)
Use of computer (e-mail)	6 (11.1)	8 (11.1)	1 (20.8) 5	42 (59.7)
Meet one-on-one	32 (44.4)	2 (34.7) 5	7 (9.7)	8(11.1)

Mbale local government registry (2014)

The above table shows the distribution of respondents on channels of effective communication in Mbale local government council. 50% of the respondents asserted that holding of sectional meeting is frequent while 44.4% indicate that meet one-on-one is very frequent. From the results, it is obvious that there is cordial relationship in the mode of communication in the organization. This was found to be in agreement with Woods (2010) who found out that this style of leadership encompasses discussion, debate and sharing of ideas and encouragement of people to feel good about their involvement.

It was also found to be in agreement with Martindale (2011) who noted that this leadership style is one of the most effective and creates higher productivity, better contributions from group members and increased group morale. Democratic leadership can lead to better ideas and more creative solutions to problems because group members are encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas. This testifies to the fact that where there is harmony and peace within the leaders and subordinates in an organization, it can strive to achieve its objective. The implication of this is that when works are done in peaceful atmosphere, all will want to work towards achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. The findings therefore indicate that to some extent, democratic leadership style in Mbale local government is evident through channels of effective communication.

Summary/Conclusions

The study was conducted on the basis of three major objectives.

How autocratic leadership affects performance, how laissez-faire leadership style affects performance and to establish how democratic leadership influence employee performance in Mbale local government.

The findings revealed that Mbale local government leaders use autocratic style of leadership to influence employees to perform their duties, laissez-fair style of leadership dominated Mbale local leadership which could have caused delay in meeting deadlines. The findings also revealed that the local government has realised some performance in terms of increased work forces, high speed of accomplishment of work, effectiveness and timeliness due to democratic leadership. It is therefore concluded that Mbale local government tries to integrate the three leadership styles though autocratic and laissez faire dominate.

The study concludes that there is a moderate high positive and significant relationship between the three leadership styles (autocratic, lassies-faire, democratic), and performance in Mbale local government.

Recommendations

Training is essential for the development of Mbale local government leaders on leadership styles. They need to understand the type of leadership style(s) used and how they affect employee performance in Mbale local government. This training can be done through refresher courses and workshops.

Leaders in Mbale municipal local government council need to employ and balance the three leadership styles in order to achieve organizational objectives.

Managers should ensure the sustenance of effective channels of communication for effective and efficient work. They should involve their subordinates in decision making process for effective performance.

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