Leadership Styles and Effectiveness of Principals of Vocational Technical Institutions in Ghana

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Abstract

Effective leaders are needed to manage vocational technical educational institutions in Ghana as government plans to raise the skill level of its workforce. Leadership development programs need to be designed for the preparation and in-service training of vocational technical leaders. This study aims at assessing the leadership styles and effectiveness of principals of vocational technical institutions in Ghana in order to identify their strengths and leadership development needs. The principals were perceived to be effective in the overall performance of their leadership roles using a combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles in the execution of their duties. However, they were perceived to be more transactional than transformational in most cases. In terms of the specific leadership tasks, exerting influence outside the institutions was one task that they performed effectively. On the other hand, they were perceived not to be doing enough when it came to exercising their power and empowering others to act. It is therefore recommended that principals must capitalise on their influence outside of the institutions to build partnerships, mobilise ideas, resources and support for the programs and products of the polytechnics; thus, furthering the objective of vocational technical education in the country. Since transformational leadership style leads to more effective leadership performance, principals need to improve upon their ability to be more transformational in style. Ghana therefore needs leadership development programs that will provide the necessary learning experiences that can induce transformational leadership behaviour. Training and development programs for vocational technical institutional leaders should therefore focus on getting principals to show personalized interest in individual staff members and pay attention to their needs for growth and improvement.

Key Words: Leadership; Effective leadership; Leadership styles; Transformational leadership; Transactional leadership; Laissez-faire leadership; Vocational technical education.

Introduction

The concept of leadership carries many different connotations and is often viewed as synonymous with other equally complex concepts such as power, authority, management, administration, and supervision. Northouse (2001) defined leadership as a process whereby one individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Placing this definition in the context of school management, it is possible to see its application to the principals of vocational technical institutions. These individuals would influence the activities of organized groups, such as the staff, student, policy makers and employers, towards the goals of success and economic viability, all within the unique atmosphere of academia. Many leadership theorists have found that ineffective leadership in any organization seems to be the major cause of diminishing organizational productivity (Yukl, 1994). Effective leadership therefore becomes an asset if any organization including the school wants to achieve productivity.

As leadership and leadership development became an important and long-standing concern in many disciplines and fields of practice, vocational and technical education was not an exception (Wonacott, 1998). The issue of leadership and leadership development in vocational technical education arise from the fact that there are series of changes that are rapidly and significantly altering the educational and economic environment in which vocational technical education exists. The nature of work is changing; technology keeps changing rapidly; there is increased public demand on vocational technical education system to produce individuals with more opportunities for present and future prospects in multiple industries, and offer the individuals with enough skills for personal development and success in the changing society (Moss & Liang, 1990).

Based on findings of studies done in other fields that leadership is critical to organizations in unstable situations where changes in the environment makes the usual ways of conducting the affairs of the organization unsuitable and irrelevant, Moss, Finch, Lambrecht, and Jensrud (1994) suggested that vocational technical education must begin its own transformation if it is to remain a viable form of education in the new environment. They argued that, as the context in which it is practised changes, vocational technical education needs leaders who can chart new directions and influence others to believe and follow.

Vocational technical education in Ghana is changing in terms of structures, programs, processes, and practices in order to be effective in improving the quality of learning outcomes, making it more accessible and attractive to all, and ensuring it is relevant and connected to the world of work. This new direction requires principals of vocational technical training institutions to function in new and different ways. Effective leadership therefore becomes a vital issue if vocational and technical education is to adapt constructively to the challenges now presented. As Moss, Finch, and Johansen (1991) stated, it is the effective leader in organizations experiencing change who initiate a vision and motivate followers to collectively develop and personally adopt the vision. It is the effective leader who empowers others to translate intentions into reality and then sustain it. The purpose of this study is to assess the leadership effectiveness of the principals of vocational technical institutions by identifying their leadership styles as perceived by their staff or faculty; and by determining how effectively they perform their roles as leaders in their institutions.

Leadership Styles and Effectiveness

Burns in 1978, introduced the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership. Transformational leadership was considered to be more complex than transactional leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978). It involved raising leaders and followers to higher levels of motivation and values (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994) ; and it converted followers into leaders (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Fairholm, 1994). The transformational leader was an agent of change (Avolio, 1994; Leithwood, 1994). Bass and Avolio (1994) viewed transformational leadership as a process that changed the organization by transforming followers to leaders and leaders to agents of change. This leader had an inspiring vision of how the organization should look like (Bass, 1985; Leithwood, 1994) . Kouzes and Posner (1989) conducted a study to identify how leaders get extraordinary things done. They identified five exemplary leadership practices: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the heart, that leaders utilized during times of best performance.

Bass (1985) proposed that transformational leadership was characterized by four factors. These factors included; charisma that involved the followers respect and trust for the visionary leader; inspirational motivation which involved using symbols or emotional appeals to gain support for the vision; intellectual stimulation which dealt with encouraging followers to think about old problems in new ways; and individual consideration which reflected the personal concern expressed by the leader for the follower.

The transactional leadership theory was founded upon the idea that leader- follower relations were based on negotiation, exchange and contractual dimensions (Bass, 1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998). Therefore, transactional leadership satisfied, generally, only the followers' lower level or extrinsic needs (Sergiovanni, 1990). Moreover, leaders and followers did not share common objectives in the organization (Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978; Deluga, 1988). Transactional leaders, therefore, were forced to utilize the reward and penalty aspects of contractual leadership. Bass and Avolio (2000) identified these factors as contingent reward, management-by-exception-active, and management-by-exception-passive. Contingent reward leaders clarified the expectations of followers and the compensation they would receive if they met their performance expectations. Management-by-exception-active leaders attended to followers' mistakes and failures to meet standards but management-by-exception-passive leadership waited until problems became severe before intervening (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transactional leadership is also equated to managing (Bennis, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Management determines the best way to accomplish tasks and is concern with quantitatively measuring and controlling activities (Fairholm, 1994). In organizations, management and leadership are sometimes seen as different (Fairholm, 1994) . However, most researchers have asserted that both leadership and management are necessary (Bass, 1985; Fairholm, 1994; Kotter, 1990). And that leaders use a combination of transactional and transformational leadership behaviours (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transactional and transformational leaders are both active leaders says Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Avolio, 2000; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998. However, laissez-faire leaders are extremely passive.

Laissez-faire leadership indicates a complete abdication of leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Avolio, 2000; Hater and Bass, 1988). In an early study of laissez-faire leadership, Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) found that laissez-faire leadership led to lower productivity and satisfaction among followers when compared with autocratic and democratic leadership styles. Although subordinates desired the autonomy that laissez-faire leadership provided, subsequent research has substantiated followers' dissatisfaction with this leadership style (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Transformational leadership could be taught and measured (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Avolio, 2000). The most widely used transformational leadership assessment instrument has been the behaviourally based Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Deluga, 1988). The instrument examines the factors: idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behaviour), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration to measure transformational leadership. Contingent reward, management-by-exception-active, and management-by exception-passive were used to measure transactional leadership. Laissez-faire leadership was measured by the factor, non-transactional. (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Vocational Technical Education in Ghana

Vocational technical education had been emphasised in Ghana's education system since the colonial era. It is organised at all the three levels of education in the country: Basic or primary level, secondary level, and tertiary level. At the basic school level the focus is on exposing pupils to a range of practical activities in the vocational field in order to make them familiar with, and stimulate their interest in vocational subjects as well as provide equal opportunity for pupils to choose their future careers in either the vocational technical or general field.

At the secondary level, training is vocational in nature and aims at equipping young men and women with relevant productive skills training that will enable them fulfil the country's manpower needs in the field of technology, industry, commerce, agriculture, and business. Vocational technical education at the tertiary level is technical in nature and focuses on providing personnel with the technical knowledge and vocational skills to match the demand of skilled labour necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial, scientific, technological, and economic development; while at the same time, paying attention to environmental issues. It occurs in the Universities, Polytechnics, and other post-secondary pre-service training institutions in the country.

The government of Ghana recognises vocational technical education as crucial to the economic and social development of the country. In view of this, the government has identified numerous strategies to be undertaken to ensure the viability of vocational technical education in the country. Notable among these strategies are:

- making a major shift in its state education policy in favour of the vocational technical education, in order to build the nation's stock of human capital and give employable skills to the numerous youth all over the country
- reviewing and updating programs to bring them in line with modern trends and practices in industry to make vocational technical education demand-driven and relevant to the needs of Ghanaian industries
- establishing a National Apprentice-Training Board with membership from various sectors of the economy, to regulate apprentice-training in terms of registration of apprenticeship providers, content, duration of training programs, and certification
- establishing a National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training to co-ordinate pre-tertiary vocational technical education in the country
- improving the linkage that exists between vocational technical institutions and industries in order to bring training more in line with the requirements of national industry and commerce
- strengthening leadership and management capacity at both national and institutional levels. (Government of Ghana, 2007).

From the above, one can infer that leadership should be Ghana's main priority to developing and revitalizing vocational technical education. With effective and efficient leadership, the right policies could be formulated, relevant goals could be set, strategic programs could be implemented, and effective measure could be put in place to monitor and evaluate programs to ensure that expected goals achieved.

Methodology

The population for the study consisted of all administrative and academic staff from all the ten polytechnics, which are vocational technical institutions, in Ghana. A total of 284 individuals were sampled using the stratified sampling procedure from a population of 516 to allow the two major domains of staff – academic and administrative staff- to be appropriately represented in the sample. The simple random technique was then used to select individual members from the two subgroups. A survey instrument was mailed out to the respondents . The instrument collected information on the perception of staff on how frequent their principals exercised the behavioural factors of the three types of leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. These questions were based on the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5X designed by Bass (1985) and revised in 1997. Transformational leadership consisted of five factors, which are charisma, idealised influence individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. Transactional leadership consisted of three factors, which are; contingent reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception. Laissez-faire had just one factor, which is avoiding leadership. Each of the nine questionnaire items had five possible response options indicating the extent to which the principals exhibit specific leadership behaviour. The response options were: not at all (0); sometimes (1); often times (2); most of the time (3); and (4) frequently.

The instrument also collected information on how respondents perceive the performance of the leadership task of their principals on a scale of 0 to 6: (0) meaning not at all ; (1) not effective; (2) lightly effective; (3) somewhat;(4) effective; (5) very effective; and(6) extremely effective. These questions were also based on the Leadership Effectiveness Index (LEI) designed by Moss and Qetler (1995) to measure the performance effectiveness of vocational technical educators. There were seven items in the leadership performance section. The first six items measure the extent to which the six broad leadership tasks of inspiring a vision, exerting external vision, establishing a conducive learning environment, satisfying job related needs, exercising power and fostering unity, are performed. The seventh item measures the overall effectiveness of the principals.

Result and Discussion

In order to determine the extent to which Ghana's polytechnic principals use transformational, transactional or laissez-faire leadership styles , the mean score and standard deviation were calculated for each of the nine behavioural factors of the three leadership styles: transformational, transactional and laissez-faire. Additionally, mean and standard deviation for transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles were also calculated. These were compared with the overall mean of all the nine factors and a conclusion drawn as to whether the principals use any of the styles dominantly or use a combination of leadership styles. If any of the leadership styles had a mean score above the overall mean, that style was declared dominant. If more than one of the leadership styles had a mean score above the overall mean, the conclusion is drawn that the principals use a combination of styles.

Table 1 depicts the mean score and standard deviations of the responses on the various components of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. As seen in the table the result of the study showed that the principals exhibited all the behavioural components of transformational and transactional leadership styles. Of the five components of transformational leadership, the principals exhibited "Intellectual stimulation" the most (M= 2.68, SD= .743). Individual consideration is least exhibited (M= 1.97, SD= .362). Overall, transformational leadership had a mean score of (M= 2.29). This means that often times, the principals exhibited transformational leadership style. With the overall mean score of 2.72 for transactional leadership style, the respondents agreed that the principals often times exhibited transactional leadership as well. The component 'contingent reward' was exhibited frequently if not always (M=3.6, SD= .198) and 'passive management' was exhibited sometimes (M=1.90, SD= .362). However, the results revealed that principals do not use laissez-faire leadership style. The only behavioural component of this style–avoiding leadership had a mean score of 0.89.

Table 1 Mean Score and Standard Deviation of The Extent to Which Principals Use Different Leadership Styles.

	Leadership Style	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Transformational		
1.1	Charisma	2.15	.860
1.2	Inspirational motivation	2.22	.743
1.3	Intellectual stimulation	2.68	.844
1.4	Individual consideration	1.97	.362
1.5	Idealised Influenced	2.45	.291
	Overall Transformational	2.29	.620
2	Transactional		
2.1	Contingent reward	3.60	.256
2.2	Active management	2.66	.362
2.3	Passive management	1.90	.140
	Overall Transactional	2.72	.253
3	Laissez-faire	0.89	.467

The relationship between leadership styles and performance had also been observed in many studies. To explore this relation in this study, the mean score and standard deviation were again computed to find out how the staff rated the performance of the six leadership tasks of the principals and is shown in table 2. The result indicated that on the task of exerting influence outside the institutions, the respondents rated their principals as effective (M=4.21, SD=1.07). This was the highest rating of all the six leadership tasks. This means that the staff perceived their principals to have effective external influence. The task of exercising power effectively and empowering others to act was rated the lowest (M= 2.00, SD= 1.06). This means that staff perceived their principals to perform this task slightly effective. The four other tasks of inspiring a shared vision; fostering unity, collaboration and ownership; establishing an environment conducive for learning; and satisfying the job-related needs of staff were rated somewhat effective.

Table 2 Respondents' Views on How Principals Performed Their Leadership Role

	Leadership Task	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Inspired a shared vision	2.67	1.38
2	Fosters unity, collaboration and ownership	3.31	1.16
3	Exercises power effectively, empowers others to act.	2.00	1.06
4	Exert influence outside of the institution.	4.21	1.07
5	Establishes an environment conducive for learning	3.15	1.44
6	Satisfies the job-related needs of staff.	2.88	0.84
	Average of the six items of leadership	3.04	1.25
	Overall leadership performance of the principal	3.90	0.82

The mean of all the six tasks of leadership was also calculated to find out how the staff viewed their principals' broad task of leadership. The result showed that polytechnic staff viewed the leadership performance of their principals to be somewhat effective (M=3.04, SD= 1.25). The respondents' view of the overall leadership performance of the principals was found to be effective (M=3.90, SD = 0.82). When the mean of all the six tasks of leadership (M= 3.04) was compared with the respondents' view of the overall leadership performance (M=3.90), there was a variance 0.86 .

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is evident from the study that Ghana's polytechnic principals use a combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles in the execution of their duties. Even though the principals were found to use both transformational and transactional leadership styles, it was also evident that they were more transactional than transformational. The overall means for transformational and transactional leadership styles were M=2.29 and M=2.72 respectively.

This is consistent with Bass and Avolio (1990); Bass and Sleidlmeier (1998) who found in their studies that it is possible for a person to exhibit characteristics that include both transformational and transactional leadership styles. This is very significant in view of the present challenges facing vocational technical education in Ghana. This is because of the argument by Waldman, Bass, and Yammarino (1990) that both transformational and transactional leadership behaviour are needed to accomplish the broad task of leadership in an organization such as the school, since both leadership styles augment each other.

Also the respondents perceived principals to be effective in the overall performance of their leadership roles. In terms of the six specific tasks that make up the broad task of leadership, exerting influence outside the institutions was one tasked that the principals did effectively. By effectively exerting influence outside the institution, principals can secure resources; promote the programs and products of the institutions; and monitor the labour market to make sure that programs delivered by the institutions are meeting the needs of the labour market. They can also build partnerships with industries, the community, other educational institutions and agencies to ensure that the institutions achieve their set goals and objectives.

On the other hand, principals were found not to be doing enough when it came to exercising their power and empowering others to act. Considering an earlier finding that principals are more transactional than transformational in style, it is not surprising that they perform the task of empowering others to act, only slightly effectively. This confirms the findings of Daughtry and Finch (1997) that it is leaders who are more transformational who promote a culture of follower empowerment and collaboration among the group for its good.

Based on the conclusions above , it is recommended that principals of the polytechnics must capitalise on their influence outside of the institutions to build partnerships , mobilise ideas, resources and support for the programs and products of the polytechnics; thus, furthering the objective of vocational technical education in the country. Since transformational leadership style leads to more effective leadership performance, principals need to improve upon their ability to be more transformational in style. Ghana therefore needs leadership development programmes that will provide the necessary learning experiences that can induce transformational leadership behaviour.   One behavioural factor of transformational leadership style needs paying attention to is individual consideration. Training and development programme for vocational leaders should therefore focus on getting principals to show personalized interest in individual staff members and pay attention to their needs for growth and improvement. Training programmes for vocational leaders should therefore focus on enabling principals to develop their abilities to be able to recognise, organise, and rally others towards the realisation of the visions of the institutions.

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