Conceptual Analysis of Transformational Leadership Approach as a Productive Management Process in Universities

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Abstract

From all indications ranging from literature, observations and experience, the university system is faced with multifaceted challenges. Among these challenges are organisational conflict, student unrest, unethical politicking, and attrition rate. This problem has negatively affected university productivity and calls for attention. This study proposed the transformational leadership approach as an alternative to the university management process for effective productivity to answer the question: how can transformational leadership theory be presented as an alternative to effective management of the university system? This argument is located within the interpretive paradigm to guide the argumentative interpretation of the theory toward providing solutions to the challenges. The study presented transformational leadership theory and adopted conceptual analysis to interpret the approach and its assumptions and how they could affect the operating system of universities. The study concluded that the transformational leadership approach, through its assumptions (inspirational motivation, exemplification of moral standards and unity of purpose), is the best managerial approach to ensure unhindered university operations towards productivity. Hence, the study suggests that inspirational motivation, exemplification of moral standards and unity of purpose should be made a fundamental practice among the leaderships of various university departments.

Keywords: conceptual analysis, leadership, management process, transformational leadership approach, university productivity.

1. Introduction

Universities worldwide are faced with various challenges, among which are an increase in organisational conflicts, student unrest, power differentials, poor or lack of effective communication, and staff attrition, among others (Abiodun, 2014; Fomunyam, 2017; Htun et al., 2016; Odebode, 2019; White et al., 2011; Sadia et al., 2018; Samuel, Chipunza, 2013). According to existing literature, these problems have led to poor university productivity, such as distraction among university staff due to interpersonal conflict and indiscriminate closure of universities from student unrest. Furthermore, it has led to a break of productive relationships between subordinates and superordinates, poor communication flow in the system and loss of human resources as a result of staff migration (Ayatse, Ikyanyon, 2012; Arikewuyo, 2009; Kyaligonza, Kamagara, 2017; Laws, Fiedler, 2012; Rao, Wasserman, 2017). According to this study, all of these have been linked to the lack of effective management styles of various leadership positions in the university system,

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which constitute what is defined as the management process. In this study, university management or management process refers to the leadership's disposition and how the system is run. This is not far from what is defined as an internal mechanism or the ways of doing in the system (Francis, Imiete, 2018). The management process covers universities' administrative, leadership, politicking, and governance systems.

This perpetual monster affecting university operations is not continent or country-specific nor limited to a geographical location. For example, a study conducted in the United States shows organisational conflict exists in its university system (Min, 2017). Also, student unrest, one of the types of disputes in the university system, is a monster that has eaten deep into the fabric of African universities (Fomunyam, 2017; Nyamnjoh et al., 2012; Uleanya, 2019). In the same vein, the issue of staff attraction leaderships styles which could be linked to unethical power relationships also surfaces in a study conducted in Australia (Berman, Pitman, 2010; Marginson, Considine, 2000) while poor communication flow between the management and university staff constitutes one of the major reasons for poor productivity in Nigerian and United Kingdom universities (Fashiku, 2016; Kinman, Jones, 2008). In South Africa, the lack of university transformation and effective decolonisation of the system has become a significant issue leading to a serious conversation on how the university can be transformed and decolonised to ensure the production of employable and productive graduates (Holmberg et al., 2012; Sonalitha et al., 2021). This analysis shows that the ineffective university management process issues are not sectional and need a practical and non-sectional approach. Hence, there is a need for an approach that could solidify the managerial process of the universities towards overall effective and efficient productivity.

This article joins the host of transformational agitators towards ensuring a managerial process that could enhance the holistic development and productivity of the universities. This is expedient because the researcher's experience indicated that many university leadership and management processes are autocratic, inconducive, and demotivating, affecting employees' efficiency and effectiveness. This assertion is supported by Chukwusa (2018) in his argument that university leaders mostly result in autocracy in administrative endeavours, which may not go well with their subordinates, leading to insubordination. Furthermore, Alkhasawneh (2018) and Idiegbeyan-ose (2018) also confirm that adequate motivation is not provided for academic staff, which usually leads to system conflicts. Also, there are ambiguous communication processes in the passage of communication between and among the stakeholders of universities (Fakunle et al., 2021). Based on this, it is not out of place to argue the need for a better management system for universities' management structures such as faculties, units, centres and departments.

Therefore, updating the leadership styles of various units in the system is one way to improve and ensure effective and efficient university management. Since the idea behind broad levels of management is to ensure that all university operations positively affect/reflect on the university goals and objectives. In this perspective, university management includes academic managers, university leadership (represented by the university board), university personnel, and the university's central services (like the university registrar's office). Academic managers include deans, heads of departments (HODs), and all faculty staff. University leadership ideally represents the interests of the entire university community and its governing body – the Senate. For leadership transformation to occur, leaders need to know what happens at their leadership level and its implication for university productivity. Such awareness will enable them to be more effective in their duty dispositions. To address this, implementing a transformational leadership approach is imminent, thereby projected as an alternative to effective management of the university system towards efficient productivity.

2. Materials and methods

The study was grounded on the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivism believes that what people experience and learn from their experiences influences their understanding of the world around them through their subjective views (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). They describe this as a paradigm because it is not just a single theory or method but a way of studying concepts to understand different societal phenomena (Antwi, Hamza, 2015). Interpretivism seeks to explain how humans create meaning by applying personal thoughts to their world (Thanh, Thanh, 2015). The knowledge found by interpretations of concepts would then lead to a more extensive understanding of the phenomenon in different societies, for example, an organisation, a religion or a

political system. Interpretivism has been used to explain culture, language and social interaction within forms of media such as literature and art (Ward Sr et al., 2022). Therefore, it describes how subjective experiences (researcher's views) influence people's learning about the world around them.

Additionally, the interpretive paradigm explains how an effective management process could be achieved from my perspective rather than testing theories with quantitative methods, leading to a broader understanding of these topics. This is consistent with Junjie and Yingxin (2022) argument that the paradigm believes that social reality is interpreted based on individual ideological positions. That is, transformational leadership theory was presented and interpreted based only on ideological views coupled with my experiences and knowledge of management.

Furthermore, to ensure a coherent argument, the study adopted conceptual analysis as a tool to analyse and interpret the theory for meaning-making. This analysis was appropriate because it allowed for clarifying ideas based on deductive reasoning. Concept analysis was appropriate in this case (Kendler, Neale, 2010). It is possible to use concept analysis to figure out the actual meaning of concepts and linguistic expressions (Novaes, 2012). This was accomplished by presenting transformational leadership theory, its ideas, premises, and making sense of the assumptions in light of how they might enhance transformational leadership toward university productivity. This methodological process was implemented below.

Presentation of Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership began with James V. Downton in 1973 and was developed further by James Burns in 1978 (Ladkin, Patrick, 2022; White, 2018). Researcher Bernard M. Bass extended the idea in 1985, adding strategies for assessing transformational leadership's success, and it became one of the most common leadership theories used worldwide (Hassen Yimam, 2022). According to these theorists, transformational leaders motivate others to achieve a goal while enthusiastic about the proposed goal or mission (Pawar, 2016; Stenling, Tafvelin, 2014). This set of leaders possess certain characteristics that make them unique such as being charismatic, intellectual skills, visionary, articulate in speech, humble with empathy, inspirational and motivational skills, integrity, self-confidence, risk-taking abilities, effective communication ability, expertise and knowledge, conflict handling skills or problem-solving abilities and finally, they can contribute ideas or suggestions to organisational goals and objectives (Button, 2003; Baroody, 2021; Fioravante, 2013; Guse, 2021; Reave, 2005). In line with this, Montaudon-Tomás et al. (2021) also argue that transformational leaders seek personal satisfaction from their work and do not expect recognition for their accomplishments. Therefore, transformational leadership theory seeks to understand the transformational leader's character and ability to connect with their subordinates and inspire and motivate them by creating a vision that they will share. Transformational Leadership Theory looks at how leaders influence others through motivation, change, growth, and creativity towards actualising organisational goals.

Transformational leadership is one of the most studied leadership models used in management practices today (Bass, Riggio, 2006). These transformational theories based their argument on the earlier theory called charismatic leadership. Early research on this topic was done by Bass (1985), who defined this form of leadership as the process of arousing employees toward the attainment of organisational objectives. That is, transformational leadership is based on a style where leaders can influence those around them by inspiring them to want to accomplish their goals. One can then argue that transformational leaders do not rely as much on power but instead uses inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and high regard for subordinates' personal growth to promote a group cohesiveness that leads to increased performance. This type of leadership is usually observed in business organisations, and it has been found that good transformational leadership leads to a better corporate climate (Erkutlu, 2008; Strukan et al., 2017). This further confirms that transformational leaders' main goal is motivating others to accomplish tasks while being enthusiastic about the task. This is based on the belief that followers will achieve more when positively committed to a vision or goal.

This theory is relevant in ensuring an effective management process in the university system because it creates an environment where staff members want to take responsibility, and management ensures they have the tools and resources needed. On the other hand, it also helps leaders create a corporate culture shared with common goals and leadership responsibilities outlined clearly to strengthen team spirit. My argument here is consistent with the definition of Bass (1999) and Avolio et al. (2004) that transformational leadership is a process in which managers

and employees work together for mutually beneficial results by creating a vision and empowering individuals to embrace that vision. It is believed that leaders who use this type of power inspire leadership style, and their followers will do better than what would normally be done without the style. Since transformational leadership theory seeks to achieve a goal which is to see the subordinate or employees doing the best they can, it empowers both the leaders and followers (university staff) to be more than what they are capable of and aim for them to reach new heights in their efficiency. This may have informed Hassen Yimam (2022) finding that transformational leadership contributes to organisational success as it increases productivity, fosters commitment, aligns values, inspires creativity, and enables change where necessary. The below forms the assumptions that were deduced from the theoretical presentation.

Theoretical Assumptions of Transformational Leadership Theory

Based on the theoretical presentation above, one can deduce that transformational leadership is based on three major assumptions: inspirational motivation, moral standard, and unity of purpose. This is discussed in the following sub-headings: Inspirational motivation, exemplification of moral standards and unity of purpose.

Inspirational motivation: Deducing from theoretical presentations, leaders' motivation to inspire subordinates is important and constitutes one of its major cardinal points. This agrees with the argument that motivation is a good leader's weapon to ensure productivity (Masi, Cooke, 2000; Ratnaningtyas et al., 2021). In the same vein, findings showed a relationship between organisational performance and motivation (Tarliman et al., 2022; Usmany et al., 2022). That is, when employees are motivated positively, it will reflect on the performance of such a system. This is perhaps the brain behind the formulation of transformational leadership theory because it is premised on the motivation of stakeholders towards productivity, while motivation itself has been severally proven as the engine of productivity and performance of either employee and their organisations. The idea here is that positive motivation in organisation is an inspiration for the receiver to perform beyond expectations.

Exemplification of moral standards: The argument is confident that transformative leadership theory promotes and encourages moral behaviour within organisations. The theory fosters an ethical workplace environment with clear values, priorities, and standards of conduct. This is evident in its quest for good conduct and leadership by example (Timmonsa, 2022). This is considered an essential reason for organisational success because it builds team culture by getting employees to embrace a selfless attitude instead of self-interest. This kind of leadership provides coaching and mentoring while allowing workers/subordinates to take responsibility for their tasks. This kind of attitude promotes innovation and instigates leaders to remain on top of the job.

Unity of purpose: According to the theoretical presentation, it is evident that transformational theory routed unity among the organisational stakeholders. Leaders in this category are mandated to connect with their subordinates by creating a conducive organisational procedure that could make people stick to the organisation's vision. This could also be viewed as establishing productive relationships and collaboration among stakeholders to achieve common goals and objectives. This aligns with Lee and Esteve (2022) that a collaborative management system is good and should be encouraged because it enables people to work together towards actualising the system's set predetermined goals and objectives. In a nutshell, transformative leaderships preach that leaders should be conversant with how people could be made to work together towards a common goal.

The Relevance of the Assumptions to Management Processes in Universities

This section argues the relevance of the assumptions as it applies to the university leadership and followership relationships towards university productivity. This was presented under the following constructs: inspirational motivation and university productivity, exemplification of moral standard and university productivity, and unity of purpose and university productivity.

Inspirational motivation and university productivity

The above exploration has ascertained that the all-around motivation system inspires subordinates to want to do more towards actualising their goals and objectives. Such motivations in the university system include the provision of good working environments, recognition, commensurate remuneration, acknowledgement and respect (Biles et al., 2022; Hanaysha, 2016a; Hanaysha, 2016b; Oludeyi, 2015; Pitaloka, Sofia, 2014; Suleman et al., 2022). When these are adequate among university staff, there are tendencies for staff to be effective and efficient in their

duties which will automatically translate into university performance and productivity. This is consistent with the findings that motivation in the form of rewards, good salary pay, respect and safety in the university system leads to staff commitment to duties and eventually contributes to the overall university goal (Iwu-James, 2011; Malik, 2010; Siregar, Suma, 2022). Furthermore, motivation was also a predictor of a peaceful university system. Therefore, when all subordinates, including the students, are provided with necessary stimuli, it will quench their urge for protest and other agitation. A peaceful university system will give ways to actualise its goals and objectives. Therefore, the transformational leadership approach inspires productivity in the university system through motivation.

Exemplification of moral standards and university productivity

From the above presentation and the assumptions of transformational leadership theory, the place of moral value and ethical disposition of leaders within a university goes a long way in achieving university productivity. This is not far from the popular definition of leadership to influence followers towards organisational commitment (Meng, Neill, 2022; Voon et al., 2011). Being honest and trustworthy could influence and make subordinates trust the leaders. Thist Tigre et al. (2022) that trust among organisational stakeholders predicts the level to which they can work and achieve together. This is also in consonance with the finding that moral and ethical behaviour among university stakeholders promotes dignity and values in the larger society (Rezaee et al., 2001; Tigre et al., 2022). The argument here is that the leadership of various departments in universities should ensure that their activities reflect the true ethical values set by the university. This is because it is likely to influence subordinates through leaders' dispositions of morals. Therefore, the transformational leadership approach, through exemplifying the moral standard, will enhance the actualisation of its goals and objectives.

Unity of purpose and university productivity

Owing to the analysis of transformational leadership theory, the place of unity of purpose is imminent and fundamental to university productivity. This unity is viewed from collaboration, togetherness, connections and relationships between departmental leadership and subordinates. Research has also demonstrated that collaboration among university stakeholders, working together towards actualising university goals and relationships devoid of power differentials, positively correlates to university productivity (Jung, 2012; Ponomariov, Boardman, 2010; Spicer, 2018). This is also in consonance with the recommendations that leaders in universities should influence their subordinates by bringing them together and recognising them by delegating authority and teamwork among them (Sanyal, Hisam, 2018). This will solidify staff commitment toward duty, and everyone will work unanimously. Therefore, one of how transformational leadership could be implemented in universities is to design ways for the unity of purpose among the subordinates.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established various challenges (organisational conflict, student unrest, unethical politicking, attrition rate, among others) that have affected university productivity. Using the interpretive worldview, transformational leadership theory was proposed and analysed as a veritable tool to mitigate possible hindrances to university productivity. Based on the analysis and subsequent arguments, the study concluded that inspirational motivation, exemplification of moral standards and unity of purpose are transformational factors that could transform universities towards actualising university goals and objectives. Based on this, it is recommended that leadership at all levels in universities should look into the beauties of transformational leadership theory and apply them to their management operations. Leaders should motivate and inspire their followers, lead by example and promote the unity of purpose.

4. Declaration of Competing Interest

5. Funding

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