

Role Of Transformative Leadership In Dealing With Challenges Faced By The Kenyan Public Service

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ABSTRACT

Leadership on the African continent has been a focus of scholars as African nations have incredible human and natural resources but seem to be bereft of the leaders necessary to capitalize on its opportunities. Researchers acknowledge that the barrier to progress in the developing world is not the deficiency of money or natural resources, but suggested it to be the lack of leadership. Researchers have demonstrated reasons for this deficiency including the effects of the colonial system upon people and civil service systems, but have not yet been able to establish a promising path to economic and social progress. Leaders in Kenya provided promising solutions in the national strategic plan, *Kenya Vision 2030*, to move it to a first world economy within 25 years. One of the foundations of the plan was public service reform with a flagship project to establish the Kenya School of Government to develop transformative leadership training and fill the leadership gap. The purpose of this workplace individual assignment was to investigate, understand, and describe the role of transformative leadership in dealing with challenges faced by the Kenyan public service. The transformational leadership theory approach of Burns (1978) was used as the locus point for the study. Using a qualitative case study method, secondary data was gathered from relevant literature at the state department of interior – the literature was then reviewed through desk literature review. The result of the analysis was that development of training for transformative leadership was an intentional goal which was seen as critical strategy in dealing with challenges faced by the Kenya public service for national success. The discussion concludes by making recommendations on how to develop a transformative leadership mind-set among public officers. Kenya and other developing countries may benefit from the results of this study as it provides an insight on how leadership is about stepping into the gap, solving problems and unlocking people's potential for dealing with challenges in the public service.

INTRODUCTION

The African continent in general (and Kenya in particular) is at a crossroads. It has incredible resources both human and natural, but it seems to be bereft of leadership to capitalize on its opportunities (Costantinos, 2012; Dartey-Baah, 2014). On the one hand, it is striding forward, while

on the other hand, it is stuck in the past. Young and old alike have lost faith in the government and see no path forward to a better life for themselves.

There is an almost universal normative view of the government as being corrupt and without transformative leaders, which in turn fosters cynicism and hopelessness in its citizens (Ayithey, 2011). The political culture and action reinforces this view (Diamond, 1994a). This post-independence malady of muddled progress, cynicism, and hopelessness continues unabated.

This workplace individual assignment therefore set out to investigate Kenya's attempt to address this malady and lack of progress through its national strategic plan—*Kenya Vision 2030*—by discussing the role of Transformative Leadership in dealing with challenges faced by the Kenyan public service. The study was informed by the view that leadership is about stepping into the gap, solving problems and unlocking people's potential. This paper therefore sought to respond to the begging question on how to develop a Transformative Leadership Mind-set among public officers.

Background To The Study

Some scholars have placed the blame for the continued lack of progress in Africa on a perpetuation of segments of traditional African culture and mind-set that are rooted deeply in the African psyche. Chatteris (2002) wrote about the continuance in Africa of this traditional mind-set of *Africanism*. Africanism searches for the African way of doing things, and in many cases consciously questions and opposes Western ideas and proposals not out of substantive reason but simply because it is coming from the West (Chatteris, 2002).

This Africanism mind-set has been fostered by the experience of colonialism whereby the African people were subjugated and looked upon as intellectual inferiors so that ability to act and think for oneself was affected (Chatteris, 2002). It is a mind-set that accepts autocratic leaders as worthy to lead since they have demonstrated the power of the traditional chieftain, and therefore can, and even should lead as long as they have the power to continue doing so (Chatteris, 2002). This mind-set has led to self-degradation and a fatalistic view that when conquered it is because of not being worthy, a mind-set that is deadly for democratic governance (Chatteris, 2002). Kuada agreed and stated that "some aspects of African culture may constrain effective leadership" (as cited in Fourie, *et al* 2015: 18).

However not all scholars agree, Ayithey (2010) agreed that colonialism has altered the thinking of Africa's leaders, but he argued that the traditional African mind-set historically held leaders accountable for despotic actions but was never brought forward into post-independence governments. In contrast, Simiyu (1988) stated that traditional African society did not contain democratic principles but in fact was hierarchical and centralized.

Problem Statement

The problem in Africa and particularly in Kenya is lack of leadership. Governance in Kenya has continued to exhibit the character of its historical colonial system rooted in self-interest. This legacy inhibits the nation from economic and social progress due to the lack of leaders who demonstrate statesmanship (Costantinos, 2016). Ayithey (2010) stated this in the strongest terms: "To many Africans, independence was in name only. One set of masters (white colonialists) was replaced by

another set (black neo-colonialists), with the oppression and exploitation of the African people continuing unabated” (Ayittey, 2010: 1203).

This new set of masters either lived under or were influenced by a colonial system before independence more than 50 years ago, leading to the replication of the old system (Ayittey, 2010; Chweya, 2003) and governing in like manner of greed (Ayittey, 2010; Chatteris, 2002; Costantinos, 2012). This continued dilemma of destructive governance cannot be rectified without leaders who act ethically and take decisive action for the good of the nation, as contrasted with leaders who continue to bask in the on-going glorifying of position alone (Cetin, 2012).

Consensus has emerged in the research that a new approach is needed. For governance to flourish and be considered good governance, it is of absolute necessity that leadership be visionary and transformative (Cetin, 2012). Dartey-Baah (2014) suggested that the antidote is development of effective transformative leadership if sustainable development is ever to be achieved. It is against this background that this workplace individual assignment set out to discuss the role of transformative leadership in dealing with challenges faced by the Kenyan public service, and; make recommendations on how to develop a transformative leadership mindset among public officers.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

A situation analysis of the Kenyan public service gives a reflection of what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial”. The American civil rights icon’s quote describes a situation that is not far from what the Kenyan public service is currently engulfed in.

One case scenario is how Salaries and Remuneration Commission is locked in a legal tussle with Members of Parliament (MPs) over the latter’s self-allocated Kshs. 250,000 house allowance on top of a Kshs.20 Million mortgage. So hell-bent are the law makers on retaining the house allowance – condemned by its critics as illegal – which they have sworn to use whatever means, including reducing the SRC’s perks and budgetary allocation, to maintain the status quo. Although there is something equally wrong with the commissioners’ Ksh.1 Million monthly allowance for part-time services, the problem with MP’s approach to the issue is its motive – a display of lack of leadership. The begging question is whether the MPs know that public servants’ salaries – specifically those of top civil servants – make a mockery of the word ‘service’? An internet search of the meaning of ‘service’ brings up “an act of serving, occupation of an attendant servant”, a term dating back to around 1200AD that defines “assistance, help; a helpful act” like the “provision of food”. Going by the obnoxious salaries and other perks of top civil servants and employees of constitutional institutions, the Kenyan public service is devoid of leadership – a concept that is concerned about stepping into the gap, solving problems and unlocking people’s potential.

FINDING

The study found out that a stable and ethical public service is indispensable to the implementation of good governance; and a positive legacy of the colonial system was a strong civil service institution. But the on-going scarcity of skilled public service workers led to a full-blown decline by

the late 1970s. Thus, a public service system that was initially effective soon fell victim to patrimonialism that required obedience to the ruler rather than the rules (Erdmann & Engel, 2006). This new colonialism or patrimonial-administrative approach has little regard for public service processes in public administration because it allows leaders to function without accountability through a system of tribal and ethnic patronage including monetary reward to consolidate and maintain power for personal gain as opposed to societal gain (Kofele-Kale, 1978 as cited in Fourie *et al.*, 2015). This personal gain mind-set of government officials has led to a continued scourge of corruption through unreasonable salaries of cabinet secretaries and members of parliament, the diversion of resources needed for economic and social development, and the lack of integrity in public service (Nasong'o, 2007).

This model of governance and government leadership has been ineffective and in disrepute for the six decades of independence (Nyong'o, 2012). Scholars have thus suggested transformative leadership as a path out of this conundrum and into government effectiveness, and have shown it as a path to improved worker motivation and sustained high performance, institutional goal clarity, overall improved outcomes, economic and social progress; and facilitation of a learning organization culture whereby performance is improved through shared vision and goals (Dartey-Baah, 2014).

RECOMMENDATION

This paper's recommendation on how to develop a transformative leadership mind-set among public officers can be summarized as: Create an inspiring vision of the future; Motivate people to buy into and deliver the vision; Manage delivery of the vision, and; Build ever-stronger, trust-based relationships with your people. With regard to these recommendations, it is worth noting that at the Kenya School of Government, a number of course participants have written on transformative leadership examples in Kenya.

Other papers have been written as part of the transformational leadership curriculum. Some of the papers have addressed key persons in Kenyan leadership as to their style of leadership and whether it has transformative characteristics; other students have used real life examples from their own workplaces in the public service to illustrate where transformative leadership is taking place and its impact, and; others could have even used leaders from across Africa. The first recommendation therefore is that these papers need to be read and analyzed relative to the transformative leadership goals of *Kenya Vision 2030*. They could provide a ready resource for further investigation and research.

Further research should be conducted concerning the impact of the transformative leadership training, and; whether or not public service leaders who have attended the training have become transformational leaders – that was beyond the scope of this study. This is left for future researchers to interview alumni, survey a broad sample of public service personnel, or survey alumni of the program.

This could provide a next step in documenting the impact of *Kenya Vision 2030* on the broader goal of public service reform. *Kenya Vision 2030* should also be researched as to its impact on a broader scale than just public service reform. It has already had a huge impact on the Kenyan society in

terms of completed implemented projects such as roads, airports, and services (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2013b, 2014). However, this has not been researched.

An effective leadership strategy makes the difference between an organization that flourishes and one that fails. A lot of effort goes into identifying which approach a leader should take in order to make the biggest impact. This paper proceeds to recommend how public officers should develop transformative leadership mind-set by suggesting tips the officers should use to explore transformational leadership and learn the ways they can apply its methods to their workplace.

First, Work on Yourself as a Leader: Before you can start making changes to your team and your organization, it's important to look at how you function as a leader. Successful transformational leaders are empathetic, charismatic, and inspirational. Empathize—Take the time to sit down and get to know the people you work with on an individual level and in a context that's broader than just their role in your organization. Be charismatic—tactics of charisma include being present in every situation, neutralizing negative thoughts, dressing to impress, body language, and more. Inspiration—at the centre of all this advice is simply the idea that you must approach every situation with the greater good of the organization in mind. Leaders who truly conquer this skill naturally create a level of trust and accountability among their team, which allows those being led to feel safe and secure in choosing to follow.

Secondly, Create the Proper Culture in Your Workplace: Company culture is an increasingly important aspect of an employee's overall work experience. For that reason, employers tend to put a lot of time and energy into establishing a work environment that their employees can enjoy, incorporating perks, events, and benefits in an effort to make each individual feel appreciated by the organization and thus motivated to work harder. Collaboration—Transformational leadership is based on the idea that all employees should be working together towards a singular, common goal within an organization. Innovation—More often than not, the most creative ideas will come from employees within your organization who are spending the most time with your product or services every day. Communication—Ensure that every member of your team not only feels comfortable enough to voice their opinions and share their innovative ideas, but that they know what they have to say will be heard and valued.

Finally, Practice Identifying and Facilitating Core Values: The first (and often most significantly) impact a transformational leader can make occurs by defining and clarifying an organization's values. This may come in the form of cleaning or updating its mission and vision statements or simply ensuring there is a clear difference between the two. Transformational leaders can step into a new organization, identify what isn't working, and come up with a strategy and set of recommendations to solve it.

POLICY IMPLICATION

The strategic and visionary plan detailed in *Kenya Vision 2030* has the potential to bring positive social change for the nation and its citizens. The potential impact for social change is that the training of transformative leaders in Kenya can lead to improved services for the citizens of Kenya, can mitigate and eliminate corruption from the public service through building leaders of integrity, and can improve the economy of Kenya as suggested in the literature.

It can also model a process and progress for other African developing countries. Kenya has been looked to as a leader in Africa in terms of the growth of its economy that moved from an almost negative gross domestic product in 2002 to 7% growth by 2007 (Majeed, 2012). This study can potentially add to the mystique of Kenya so that other developing countries will come and study its strategic plan and its development process in the same manner that Kenyans went to Malaysia and Singapore. Discussions in this Workplace Individual Assignment have contributed to this possible scenario through the case study of the Kenyan public service.

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