LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE, LEARNING GOAL ORIENTATION AND FORMAL MENTORING AS PANACEA TO THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

There is a consensual agreement among scholars that human resource development is crucial to the overall development of any organization or nation. Thus, organizations and nations, seek to create and sustain conducive environments for human resources to flourish and develop. However, despite her immense human and mineral resources, Nigeria continues to be classified as a developing state and this could mainly be attributed to the fact that Nigeria is yet to find adequate solutions to the problem of human resource development with attendant negative implications for her development. It is the position of this study that if leadership competence, learning goal orientation and formal mentoring are adopted as guiding principles in both the public and private sectors in the Nigerian state, the problem of human resource development will be adequately addressed and that sustainable development, which has eluded Nigeria since her independence, will become a definite reality. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, through the use of secondary data, to show that leadership competence, learning goal orientation and formal mentoring are needed panacea to the problem of human resource development in Nigeria.

Keywords: human resource development, leadership competence, learning goal orientation, formal mentoring.

Introduction

Every country desires development in all its sectors and thus all institutions in the country owe their existence to their abilities to achieve this desire. Much emphasis is however placed on human resource development because without human resources, natural and mineral resources will remain mere potentials for development. As Oluwasanya (2014) avers "the quality and quantum of human resources determine a nation's growth and development. It is the available human resources that mobilize and galvanize other resources for sociological, political, economic scientific and technological development. The development of any society, is therefore, hinged on the development of its human resources" (p. 2).

There are many countries in the world with few natural and mineral resources but who have achieved enviable national development because of the high level of their human resource development while many countries rich in natural/mineral continue to languish in the murky and dark waters of underdevelopment because of their inability to ensure human resource development. Into the latter group falls Nigeria, a country with immense human and mineral

resources but which is still classified as a developing state. To pull Nigeria out of the doldrums of underdevelopment and into the Eldorado of a developed state, leadership competence, learning goal orientation and formal mentoring are being suggested by this study as the needed panacea.

Human Resource Development

Human resources can be succinctly described as the set of individuals who make up the workforce of an organization, business sector or an economy (Adenuga, 2012). Human resource development can thus be seen as the creation of an enabling environment in which all can enjoy long, healthy and creative lives (Adenuga, 2012). The creation of this enabling environment entails the empowerment of individuals' capabilities to live fulfilling lives and it also increases their opportunity to participate in, or endorse, decision-making affecting their lives in the organization or society in which they work or live (Adenuga, 2012).

As stated in the introduction, human resources, more than any other type or form of resources, are of utmost importance to any society or organization as they determine the success or otherwise of the society or organization. Chukwuma (2015) succinctly shows the importance of human resources to any society or organization by stating that:

> Human resources are the life blood stream of an organization. Despite the application of technology in modern business management, human resources are still relevant and most adaptive resource of the organization. The strategic values of human resource management stems from the fact that apart from other resources employed in the course of production (Land, capital, technology etc) which are passive, human resources are endowed with discretionary decision making power and this have competitive advantage over other resources. The challenges of development are to improve the quality of life, which the economist argue that it is the human resources of a nation, not its physical capital or its natural resources that ultimately determine the character and pace of its economic and social development. Not gold but only men, can make a nation great and strong…Human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resource, build social, economic and political organization and carry forward national development…men are the key to all problems, not money. Funds are valuable only when used by trained, experienced, and devoted men and women. Such people on the other hand can work miracles even with small resources and draw wealth out of a barren land. (Pp. 32-33).

Chikwe et al. (2015) in agreement with the stand of Adenuga (2012) also aver that human resource, which they described as human capital, can only be developed through the inculcation of skills and attitudes into the members of the society or organization. They thus aver that:

> Human capital is the stock of competences, knowledge and personality attributes embodied in the ability to perform (labour) so as to produce economic value… Human capital is human resources including knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation belonging to an enterprise or society and engaged in the development of that enterprise or society to fulfill its objectives and to enhance the quality of life of its members. It is human capitality and productivity engendered through

knowledge and skills acquired from education, training and experience; and facilitated by an enabling environment…The value of the human capital asset of a nation is a function of quantity, quality as well as the operating environment…the prevailing environment must be inclusive and stimulating such that everyone can perform optionally and contribute their very best to nation building and development. "It is the process of acquiring and increasing the number of persons who have the skills, education and experience which are critical for economic and political development of a country" (pp. 44-45).

As stated earlier, Nigeria is classified as a developing state and this can be attributed to her low level of human resource development. Abiodun (2016) posits that most Nigerians lack the basic skills and training to help ensure productivity and sustainable development. Adenuga (2012) also avers that development in Nigeria will continue to stagnate as long as viable efforts are not made to improve human resource development in the country.

Learning Goal Orientation

Without the establishment of well-defined goals, achievement becomes impossible. This is because goals help to stimulate motivation and to assess performances and achievements. Goal orientation, according to Brett and VandeWalle (1999), refers to a mental framework guiding the way individuals interpret and respond to achievement situations. Was (2006) avers that the orientation of people determines their approach to the achievement of set goals. Some individuals are oriented to pursue and achieve set goals by developing competence through the acquisition of new skills. Others however seek favourable judgments about their perceived competence while avoiding people who will give them negative judgments, even if the negative judgments are the true assessment of their competence (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

VandeWalle (1996) used Learning Goal Orientation to describe people who seek for new skills and are open to new suggestions and knowledge in achieving their goals. Those who focus their energies on using the ability they possess to achieve set goals without recourse to new knowledge and skills are regarded as having performance goal orientation (Farr et al., 1993) while VandeWalle (1997) points out that the people who consciously seek for positive comments on their abilities to achieve goals whether these judgments are true or not have a performance-avoid goal orientation.

Formal Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship between a mentor and a protégé (Inzer & Crawford, 2005; Santamaria, 2003). Kram (1985) describes mentors as individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and career support to their protégés. The mentor is a knowledgeable person who voluntarily imparts knowledge and skills into another person (the protégé) who has lesser knowledge and skills. Thus, according to Zachary (2002), mentoring refers to the transfer of knowledge of subjects to facilitate personal development and encourage wise choices. Mentoring, for Bell (2000), essentially refers to helping people to learn something that they would have taken a longer time to understand, or not understand at all.

There are basically two types of mentoring, informal and formal mentoring. Informal mentoring involves the cultivation of friendship between the mentor and the protégé with or without the knowledge of the organization while in formal mentoring, the organization initiates the contact between the mentor and the protégé by developing a structured program of interaction between the two. As a result, informal mentoring is usually a long term relationship while formal mentoring is usually short-term (Clutterbuck, 2005; Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Clutterbuck (2005) identified the arguments for informal mentoring to include the fact that it gives more time to build psychosocial and career developmental functions than formal relationships, helps to build the necessary commitment needed for the development of trust and emotional closeness and that its informality increases effective communication between the mentor and the protégé which sharpens the coaching skills of the mentor and increases the capacity of the protégé to learn. On the other hand, organizations prefer formal mentoring because it ensures social inclusion by removing the intrinsic or extrinsic barriers to relationships. Formal mentoring enhances organizational and individual benefits, ensures better career development, increases performance and skill development, and provides opportunities to make the best use of the talents of both the mentor and the protégé.

Since the focus of this study is on formal mentoring, more attention will thus be devoted to it. Laviolette (1997) gives reasons why organizations prefer formal mentoring to informal mentoring to include:

i. It helps to improve the job performance of both the mentor and protégé.

ii. It helps to reduce turnover in early career stages.

iii. It helps to develop sufficient talented managers to replace those about to retire.

iv. It helps to maintain high levels of managerial contribution through middle age and beyond.

v. It prepares individuals for roles of organizational leadership.

To ensure that formal mentoring achieves its goals, Inzer and Crawford (2005) advocated that every organization must have a formal mentoring program. The program must take into considerations the goals of the organization and must use these goals to formulate the overall objectives of the mentoring program. The designers of the program must ensure that the workers in the organization have adequate inputs into the program. Mentors must be carefully selected and their participation must be voluntary. They are to be adequately trained in the art and science of implementing the mentoring program, monitoring and evaluating their protégés. Laviolette (1994) also maintains that a good framework for a formal mentoring program must consist of three main stages including

i. The developmental stage which has to do with laying the groundwork for the implementation of the mentoring program.

ii. The implementation stage which should be devoted to the definition of expectations, administrative issues, information sessions and on-going trainings.

iii. The evaluation stage which ensures the maintenance of a continuous feedback process so that problems can be easily identified and resolved.

Leadership Competence

Much attention is being devoted to leadership competence in literature because of the recognition of the nexus between leadership and level of business successes. Leadership, according to Stefl (2008) is the ability to inspire individual and organizational excellence, to create, and attain a shared vision, and to successfully manage change to attain the organization's strategic ends and successful performance. Lee and Chuang (2009) in Obiwuru et al. (2011) describe leadership as the ability to inspire subordinates' potential to enhance efficiency and also to meet their requirements in the process of achieving organizational goals. For Fry (2003), it is the use of leading strategy to offer inspiring motive and to enhance
the staff's potential for growth and development.

The NCHL (2005-2010) defines leadership competence as the technical and behavioral characteristics that leaders possess to be successfully in positions of leadership. Stelf (2008) sees it as a judicious combination of communication and relationship management (which is the ability to communicate clearly, concisely and constructively); leadership (which is the ability to inspire others); professionalism (the ability to align personal and organizational conduct with ethical and professional standards); and knowledge of the work environment and business skills (financial management, human resource management, organizational dynamics and governance, strategic planning and marketing, information management and quality improvement). For Contino (2004), leadership competence encompasses four categories namely:

i. Organizational management skills which has to do with the ability to manage time, information, human resources, change, revenue and expenses, information technology, and equipment.
ii. Communication skills through which the vision of the organization is effectively disseminated to the employees of the organization.
iii. Analysis / Strategy which has to do with the ability to effectively analyze internal and external data, use effective decision strategies, analyze change, and formulate a business plan.
iv. Creation skills which essentially deals with the ability of leaders to create opportunity, value, relationships, and quality for their employees, customers and organization.

In essence, leadership competence is a central requirement for any organization, to succeed in its endeavors.

Learning Goal Orientation and Formal Mentoring

There is a definite link between learning goal orientation and formal mentoring. Brett and VandeWalle (1999) quoting a host of other scholars including Cropanzona et al. (1993), Frese & Zapft (1994) and Hylard (1988) affirm that motivated behavior can aid the learning of goal orientation. These scholars maintain that higher order traits can create the differences in how one performs his or her expected responsibilities in the organization. In other words, motivation from the upper echelon of the organization can spur middle and lower placed employees to perform better than how they would have otherwise performed.

As stated earlier, learning goal orientation can only be through knowledge and skills acquisition. Of course, the main way of acquiring skills and knowledge in any organization is through formal mentoring and thus a central theme in Kaplan and Maehr (2007)'s theory of goal orientation is that of adequate formal mentoring through the establishment of groups to support learning. Inzer and Crawford (2005) insist that the main role of a mentor is to promote intentional learning through instructing, coaching, modeling and advising.

Learning Goal Orientation and Leadership Competence
It obviously trite to state that effective leadership is central to the attainment of organizational goals. From the earlier discourse on leadership competence, this study showed that a competent leadership ensures that the employees of the organization learn the necessary knowledge and skills required to achieve organizational excellence. When there is a laissez-faire leadership in an organization, it becomes an uphill task to motivate the employees to give their best to the organization but when there is a competent leadership, employees are easily motivated to become more productive. Thus, the Center for Creative Leadership in its white paper of 2011 identified the ability of a leader to motivate employees as the most important element of leadership. Obiwuru et al. (2011) also recognized the fact that the ability to achieve organizational goals largely depends on leadership capability.

From the above it is an imperative for the leadership of any organization to ensure that its employees develop learning goal orientations necessary for the acquisition of skills and knowledge for the achievement of organizational objectives.

Formal Mentoring and Leadership Competence
That formal mentoring is a basic feature of leadership competence is an indisputable fact. Allen et al. (2006) maintain that leaders often use formal mentoring programs to develop their employees. As Laviolette (1997) points out, for any mentoring program to be successful, it must have the involvement of the leadership of the organization. Hung (2003) also affirms that many people became successful as a result of mentoring.

Kram (1985) and Zachary (2002) aver that since a mentor has more advanced skills and knowledge than the protégé, he or she is a leader. According to the Center for Creative Leadership (2005-2010), mentoring employees should be the most important duty of a good leader. The definition of leadership, as provided by Stefl (2008) also revolves around the ability to provide mentoring for employees of the organization.

From aforementioned, formal mentoring becomes a sine qua non for any organization to achieve excellence. In this wise, the leadership of organizations should see the mentoring of their employees as a critical and integral part of their responsibilities.

Conclusion
It is the recommendation of this study that if competent leaders in both the public and private sectors in Nigeria should make it a duty to mentor other employees to develop needed skills and attitudes for productivity enhancement and if these employees should, through learning goal orientations, be ready to imbibe the lessons learnt, the inherent benefits from the nexus between

leadership competence, learning goal orientation and formal mentoring are located in Nigeria's public and private sectors, human resources development, in all of its ramifications, will ensue and the Nigeria of our dreams where development makes life easier and more enjoyable for all will be achieved.

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