

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: A TOOL FOR LEADERSHIP RESTRUCTURING IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICS

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Abstract

Good leadership is a function of competencies, character, and the commitment to doing the hard work of leadership. Character has traditionally received the least attention in both research and practices and conversations, yet, when we think about the famous and infamous leaders of recent times, whether in the spheres of education, business, politics, sports and others, it is impossible not to think of their characters. We hold the belief that character supports both the position and disposition to lead. The objective of this paper is to investigate how character development can be used as a tool for leadership development and restructuring in the Nigerian politics. The paper found evidence that an intentional leadership development can change leader identity in the form of movement toward valuing leadership behaviours and skills very differently. Consequently, leaders need to recognize that the choices they make for organizational activities have to fit their own world-view. Pursuing the fit between one's world-view and planned organisational activities ensures that leaders continuously improve their ethical and character development. The paper concludes that reshaping leadership character development is based on the assumption that one can only strive toward truly ethical leadership with the knowledge and ethical qualities that will make a leader excel in the position of authority.

Keywords: Character Development, Leadership, Restructuring.

Introduction

Ibarra, et al (1999) noted that “*People become leaders by internalizing a leadership character and developing a sense of purpose.*” Becoming a leader is a continuous process where each new role or leadership tasks invites the person to re-create themselves. It is indicated that *learning who you are, or could be, is essential to leadership development* Cashman, (2008). The development of a new character is a challenging process since new roles do not automatically lead to change in character. As noted by Schein (1999), any change in character tends to be painful since the establishment of a new character involves the unlearning of prior behaviours and the restructuring of new “thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes.” Changing character, then, often requires a move away from a comfortable equilibrium while also potentially acting against the norms of the organization Schein (1999). The steps involved in developing a new leadership character can be expected to parallel the steps required to develop any new identity.

In studying how professionals developed new identities after they assumed new roles, Ibarra (1999) found that re-creation of character generally occurs over three stages: (1) Observing role models to identify potential identities, (2) Experimenting with provisional selves, and (3) Evaluating experiments against internal standards and external feedback.” The activation of these steps starts when people are faced with situations that require new behavior. As noted by Lewin, new experiences tend to create new behaviours and judgement (Schein, 1999). While change can be obtained within an education environment Petriglieri, et al, (2011), *a new job, appropriately chosen, is often the best setting for identity change.* Hill (2004), noted that the terms “leadership behaviours”, and “leadership skills” are used interchangeably. In the literature cited below, the authors generally use one of these two terms. However, the two terms connote specific actions taken to influence or lead others. Schein (1999) hinted of the need for enough

“psychological safety” for the recipient to accept the need for change without becoming defensive. The guide also makes sure the right things are learned and that the experience is correctly understood (McCall, 2004). It is important to observe that readiness for change is a critical determinant of character change Ibarra, et al, (1999); Avolio and Hannah, (2008). Readiness can be determined by a number of methods including judging reactions to past experiences and careful evaluation of recent behaviour.

Character Development.

The word “character” is derived from a Greek word meaning ‘to mark’. The derivative suggests the visible nature of traits. Visibility is a useful starting point for considering the matter of trend in youth’ character. Character is conduct. Conduct is the essence of character. In essence, conduct is visible, and can often be easily observed. We can only try to form the character of the child if we have an efficient form of feedback. Realistically, the good or bad character becomes overtly reflexive in people’s acts and seen by others when it becomes visible. It is therefore understandable that some people delay judgement about a person until the person’s character is displayed through evident conduct. But despite the traditional and the practical merits of the visible conduct approach, research reports have shown that it should not stand alone in its deployment as a concept for looking at the character of the youth. It is important to note that words themselves constitute a form of conduct. Politeness, telling the truth in the face of temptation, engaging in lying, etc are all verbal acts. Such acts constitute conducts. It is generally recognized that certain responsibilities are tactically generated by words, and acts which create responsibilities have ramifications for character building.

The Goals of Character Development.

Three broad goals have been identified by Lickona as quoted by Omordu and Oranusi (2011) for educating the children for moral and character development. These goals are:

1. To promote children’s development away from egocentrism towards relations or cooperation and mutual respect.
2. To foster the growth of full moral agency, a capacity for moral judgement, feeling, and acting.
3. To develop in the classroom and in the school, a community which is based on values of fairness, caring, and participation.

Classroom and schools dedicated to these broad goals would seek to develop in children the following specific qualities: (a) Self-respect that derives from feelings of worth not only from competence but also from pro-social behaviours towards others: (b) Social perspective, thinking of how do others think and feel? How does my behaviour affect the group? (c) Knowledge of culturally important values, including procedural values such as reasoned arguments, tolerance, differences, and democratic process, and substantive values, such as honesty, compassion, and justice. (d) The skills of cooperating with others towards achieving common goal. (e) Character traits (habitual ways of responding) such as fairness, kindness, truthfulness, and a generalized respect for others. (f) An openness to the positive influence of adults as socializing agent.

The Leadership roles.

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more organized with logical meaning. Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership knowledge and skills. It is known that there are personalities that can effectively influence human actions as such, if a leader has the desire and willpower, he /she can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience. A dedicated leader inspires his workers into higher levels of teamwork. There are certain things that an effective and dedicated leader must know, and do. These do not come naturally, but are acquired through continual work and study. Effective and dedicated leaders are, continually working and studying to improve their leadership skills; meaning they are not resting on their success. While leadership is learned, the skills and knowledge possessed by the leader can be influenced by his or her attributes or traits, such as beliefs, values, ethics and character. Knowledge and skills contribute directly to the process of leadership, while other attributes give the’ leader certain characteristics’ that make him or her unique.

This means that skills, knowledge, and attributes constitute the qualities which make the leader more effective and dedicated.

The Leadership Development.

Leadership development refers to activities that improve the skills, abilities and confidence of leaders. Programmes vary massively in complexity, cost and style of teaching. Coaching and mentoring are two forms of development often used to guide and develop leaders. According to Baldwin and Ford (1988), *the success of leadership development is influenced heavily by the quality of the programme, level of support and acceptance from superiors, and the characteristics/learning style of the person being developed.*

The relationship between Leadership Development and Character Development;

Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who chose to follow. Sometimes the relationship is one-to-one. Sometimes it is one-to-many. But regardless of whether the number is one or one thousand, leadership is a relationship.

Assessing the conducts of researches on this relationship for over two decades. People were asked what they looked for and admired in a leader, whose direction they would be willing to follow. Organizations, participants of different levels and various calibres of personnel came up with their submissions.

The response gotten was and is still that organizations, companies, institutions, leaders of international standard and repute, electorates, people and masses wanted and still confirm that they want leaders who are honest, forward-looking, competent and inspiring. What this adds up to is personal credibility. Credibility is still the foundation of leadership.

People want to have faith and confidence in their leaders. They want to believe that a leader's word can be trusted, that a leader is personally excited and enthusiastic about the direction in which they are headed, and that a leader has the knowledge and skill and required qualities to lead to the desired goals. If people do not believe in the messenger, they would not believe the message he brought.

Why Leadership Character Matters.

The question is not really why character matters - people intuitively understand the importance of character to good leadership and stewardship of organizations. A better question may be why does character not get the attention and respect it warrants. For character to find the spotlight it deserves, it needs to be illuminated. We can see some lights shed on character in organizational statements of values and leadership competencies, but the practice is not widespread. It is believed that organizations should move beyond statements of organizational values to anchor leadership development in profiles that enhance leaders' understanding of their character strengths and development areas. The Leadership Character Insight Assessment is a great place to start making leadership character a priority.

The place of Character in Nigerian Politics Today

The character traits engendered by our social system that is, by our way of living are pathogenic which can weaken the entire constitution on individual personality as well as the society at large. In Nigeria today, there is widespread concern about the moral crises faced by the country. In practically all aspects of our public life, corruption is rampant. For instance, those who work in offices see it as a norm to receive bribe before performing their official work. Due to lack of character development, the Nigerian youth have come to see anti-social behaviours as the only hope of enriching themselves. Thus, stealing, prostitution, political thuggery, militancy, obtaining by tricks, and many other negative behaviours have in recent times become major sources of income for many individuals in Nigeria.

Kayode (2008:38) observes that majority of youth who are currently engaged in militancy, thuggery, gangsterism, cultism and other forms of anti-social behaviours are usually people who are aggrieved with the social system and who are deprived in one way or the other. The provision of access to quality education (character education is our emphasis here) is thus one of the ways of curing the social ills of the society and promoting better regime of human development. Behaviours deemed wrong in the traditional Nigerian society are in recent times tolerated and even praised.

Application of Character Development for Political Leadership Development.

The Traditional African Education Model is a typical reflection on Fafunwa's seven point objectives. The model lays much more emphasis on character and values related education, believing that when this aspect of man is made right, other aspects will be right. Otherwise, if the affective (character and values related) domain is not well moulded, it will be difficult to get other domains right. For instance, of the seven points agenda for traditional education, put forward by Fafunwa (1995). Five laid emphasis on character and values related issues. Even the other two point to development of the child's latent physical skills and the development of intellectual skills, have some bearings on character and values related development. The African traditional education model is carefully drawn by the traditional Africans, Nigeria inclusive, to produce the people oriented man through education.

One way of modernizing, integrating and blending the African traditional education in Nigeria with our current way of life is to apply a 'Rational Reconstruction' of African culture particularly, of African thinking, beliefs and practices. Rational reconstruction as Akinpelu (2005) puts it, is meant, in part to showcase the exhibition of the reasons that logically justify our holding certain beliefs and practices; and in part, the reorganization and systematization of those beliefs and practices, so as to make them coherent with the modern scientific outlook which, for better or for worse, we have irrevocably embraced; and hence make them cognitively acceptable to the 21st century technological and rational mind. If we apply this to the moral domain of African studies, the process will involve analyzing, exhibiting, and emphasizing the general theoretical, and abstract organizing principles that underlie our traditional moral beliefs and practices, most of which we had hitherto received and held on to, on the authority of tradition, the elders or some divine eminence.

It is to articulate the principles which actually guide specific moral judgements that are made, and to expose the reasons that lay at the back of the minds of our ancestors in issuing, "Do not do this", "It is forbidden to do that", "Such is never done", "It is a taboo" and so on. The application of rational reconstruction will help dramatize some of our traditions, and to convince others that we too had a rich culture that we could be proud of. We should uphold the obligation to teach our youth to define themselves as Africans and to determine their essential characteristics as Africans and become conscious of the fact that they are Africans and live and act with that consciousness. Okoh (2005) *observes that "Africa, Nigeria inclusive, is plagued with the problem of "mis-education" caused by an absence of philosophical base"*. The Nigerian educational system should therefore involve a well patterned curriculum based on the African world-view of who man is, the type of society man should live, and the type of things to be valued.

We can only build a solid foundation for our youth by emerging and operating from the crippling disadvantages of colonial culture and a colonized mentality and re-establishing the sovereignty of the Nigerian world-view. The Nigerian education system should be for the development of man and not materials; a man of good character, a man who develops his skills and knowledge to the maximum capacity, so as to provide services to others first and himself last. To produce a man whose wealth is to the advantage of the society in which he lives. To produce a society based on the Nigerian world view through education is to make the Nigerian society a democratic one. It is to produce a society and political leaders and masses that do not lay too much emphasis on wealth acquisition and exploitation. The Nigerian society through its education should frown at any exploitative, greed-oriented values; tendency based on the social status of citizens on personal aggrandizement and the acquisition towards democratic tendencies based on the principle of welfarism; a society where cut-throat competition is replaced with cooperation. All could be achieved if character development and character traits are embedded in our polity.

Conclusion

It is suffice to state from the traditional perspective that the attainment of the good life depends upon good character rather than mere abstract knowledge. Character in this sense, comprises intellectual and moral dispositions which enables the possessor to select and engage in activities of intrinsic worth.

However, as Nigeria confronts reality in her search for intellectual and moral freedom, a critical examination, re-evaluation and application of traditional African values becomes of great relevance in order to make the Nigerian society a better place to live. The only way for leaders to improve their ethical ideals and character is to interact with others in society to help them unravel their hidden agenda over time. Character check list should be prioritized in the Nigerian politics to save the country from total socio-economic and political collapse.

Recommendations:

- School organizations should be made to teach character development.
- Curriculum should be reviewed to emphasize character development.
- Good character should form the bases of choosing leaders in our nation.
- There should be instant reward for manifestation of good character by our children in the public sphere.
- Bad character should be punished and reproached no matter who may be involved in such deeds. The country should have zero tolerance for display of any bad behaviour and there should not be any sacred cow among the leaders and the led in this regards.

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