Assessing various leadership styles used at a multinational company specialising in marine services in Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the various leadership styles used at marine services companies in Sub-Saharan Africa. A quantitative structured closed-ended questionnaire was used to gather data from its sample respondent. The target population was 215 employees. However, every second element was selected systematically to produce a sample size of 107. The findings of this study showed that the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that their managers practice transactional leadership styles. On the other hand, most respondents disagreed that their managers practice laissez-faire and transformational leadership styles. Based on the findings, the company's management should teach and train staff to perform their responsibilities efficiently. Furthermore, the management of the marine services company is advised to be proactive, assist staff, build connections, give resources, and avoid a laissez-faire leadership approach.

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Introduction

For many years, debates about leadership styles have raged. According to Belonio (2012), leadership style is a synthesis of two behaviours, namely connection and task, that are utilised to drive people to attain their goals. According to Kesting, Ulhoi, Song and Niu (2015), leadership styles have long been a cause of concern for a substantial number of businesses. The issue is that a company's leadership styles significantly influence employee performance. Ali, Elmi, and Mohamed (2013) believe that employee performance is defined as the successful fulfilment of specified duties while adhering to set acceptable criteria and efficiently and effectively employing available resources. The role of the leader is vital to the success of the firm (Ladzani, Smith and Pretorious, 2010). Staff performance and leadership styles are essential to a company's success and survival. However, executive dysfunction is often blamed for company failure (Matupine, 2017).

According to Nica and Potcovaru (2014), there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all leadership style in business. On the other hand, some leaders fail to modify their leadership techniques. Some CEOs cannot adjust to quickly changing business environments, resulting in inconsistent performance (Obicci, 2014). It remains a challenge to ascertain the ideal leadership style that influences employee performance. However, poor work performance is the most evident consequence of poor leadership styles (Paracha Qamar, Mirza, Inam-ul-Hassan and Waqas, 2012; Jimad and Roslina, 2020). Sundi (2013) reports that research has shown that firm executives' personality and employee performance have long been a subject of concern. According to Ladzani, Smith, and Pretorious (2010), leaders or managers are involved in all aspects of the organisation, while workers do particular duties. Ineffective leaders risk lowering morale, generating resentment, and eroding commitment, all of which are critical components of employee success (Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa and Nwankwere, 2015). In his study, Peters (2012) indicates that Velvet Sky Aviation's leadership styles played a part in the airline's bankruptcy, resulting in the layoff of hundreds of individuals. While Ali, Elmi, and Mohamed (2013) and Gandolli and Stone (2018) admit that several studies on leadership styles have been undertaken, this study analysed the various leadership styles used by the management at the multinational company. The organisation aims to specialise in marine services in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The organisation, multinational, Sub-Saharan Africa. A qualitative structured closed-ended questionnaire was used to gather data from its sample respondent. The target population was 215 employees. However, every second element was selected systematically to produce a sample size of 107. The findings of this study showed that the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that their managers practice transactional leadership styles. On the other hand, most respondents disagreed that their managers practice laissez-faire and transformational leadership styles. Based on the findings, the company's management should teach and train staff to perform their responsibilities efficiently. Furthermore, the management of the marine services company is advised to be proactive, assist staff, build connections, give resources, and avoid a laissez-faire leadership approach.
leadership styles used by a multinational corporation, a market leader in maritime services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, the study sought:

i. To evaluate employees perception of transformational leadership style;

ii. To analyse employees perception of transactional leadership style; and

iii. To explore employees perception of laissez-faire leadership style.

The following section provides a theoretical background of the concept of leadership. Thus, leadership styles viz. Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire leadership styles are discussed in detail. The literature review is followed by a discussion relating to the methodology that guided this study and a discussion of the results supported by existing research. Lastly, this paper discusses the conclusion, which encompasses recommendations.

**Literature Review**

Leadership is a multidimensional concept that has received a great deal of attention in the realm of management (Oladele and Akeke, 2016). As a result of the profusion of definitions that have emerged through time, defining leadership appears to be usually inaccurate. According to Saeed, Anis-ut-Haq and Niazi (2014), leadership is the skill of influencing others. Prasetyo, Siregar and Luturlean (2015) argue that leadership happens when someone motivates others to strive persistently to achieve goals. In addition, leadership is a significant component impacting employee performance in many enterprises (Obicci, 2014). Walumbwa and Hartnell (2011) highlight that while the practice of leadership has changed dramatically through time, the need for leaders and leadership has not. Both traditional and modern leadership concepts recognise that leadership does not exist in a vacuum (Dulebohn, Murray and Stone, 2022). It happens as a result of human contact and the leader's attempt to influence the conduct of others. Leaders are responsible for several tasks, such as goal creation, planning, organisation, leadership, and control (Osabiya, 2015). Specific jobs may suit all leaders, but others may be industry-specific. The effectiveness with which roles are played to influence staff performance determines the leader's effectiveness. According to Ejere and Abasilim (2015), leaders correct flaws while instilling confidence in their followers. Researchers and industrial psychologists have undertaken several studies on leadership and employee behaviour, focusing on the leadership style that best encourages organisational success (Jiang and Probst, 2016). According to Nixon, Harrington and Parker (2012), various new leadership theories have emerged, and their validity and reliability in an organisational environment are dependent on several variables. A leader's conduct is crucial because it sets the leadership style used (Duquesnoy, 2011). Leadership styles relate to leaders' diverse behaviours when leading and influencing their followers (Kesting, Ulhoi, Song and Niu, 2015). According to Khan, Ghazali, and Isha (2014), the leader-follower relationship acts in both ways, influencing both individual and organisational performance. According to Sashkin and Sashkin (2003), the old model is centred on the descending exercise of power and authority, whereas the new approach emphasises the development of subordinate respect and care. A leader's responsibility is to inspire others to work together toward a common goal (Belonio, 2012). Consequently, different leadership styles have varying impacts on employee performance (Griffell-Tatje, Lovell and Sickles, 2018). Greenberg nd LoBianco (2020) state that effective leadership styles include having a clear vision and direction, promoting high productivity levels among workers, maintaining good morale among employees, and developing strong relationships with them. Additional leadership types include transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, authoritarian, charismatic, democratic, and participatory leaders, in addition to visionary and situational leaders.

**Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-Faire leadership style**

Transformational leadership is people-oriented because there are obvious ties between the leader and the followers (Jay, 2014). According to Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, and Nwankwere (2015), transformational leadership is founded on leaders' beliefs and ideas, thus motivating subordinates to do better. Paracha Qamar, Mirza, Inam-ul-Hassan and Waqas (2012) elucidate that developing relationships with subordinates is critical for gaining power. Many transformational leadership characteristics have an impact on the development of relationships. Therefore, transformationative leadership is the ability to inspire, pay attention to individuals, exert idealistic influence, and stimulate the mind (Ladzani, Smith and Pretorious, 2010). According to Obicci (2014), transformational leaders have a compelling vision for the future, intellectually excite their subordinates, identify unique traits and assist subordinates in developing their skills.

The labour productivity and loyalty of followers are evident under a transactional leadership style for expected advantages (Riaz, 2010). Nica and Potcovaru (2014) indicate that a leader's key responsibility is to ensure their subordinates complete the tasks required to achieve their objectives. For example, the transactional leadership style is goal-oriented and may help meet deadlines or deal with emergencies such as a plant malfunction during production. Ali, Elmi, and Mohamed (2013) define transactional leadership as an exchange strategy that leads to employee compliance despite a lack of enthusiasm and focus on the task at hand. Transactional leaders are characterised by exceptional-based management and contingent rewards (Nica and Potcovaru, 2014). Contingent rewards or compensation prioritises task descriptions in return for financial incentives as a tactic for exercising authority (Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa and Nwankwere, 2015). According to Northouse (2018), management by exception is how a person in power establishes standards for acceptable behaviour and defines poor performance. As a result, Baharvand (2015) considers transactional leadership a social transaction in which the leader and follower agree on and specify the terms of job fulfilment and payment.
According to King and Lawley (2016), the laissez-faire leadership style is frequently called a sluggish leadership style because the boss lacks excitement or drive and believes that subordinates can do their jobs independently and should be left alone. Naderi and Jadidi (2014) believe that a laissez-faire style is a type of ineffective leadership in which the leader abdicates responsibilities and does not provide staff with feedback. Because they lack planning and organisation, laissez-faire leaders are likely to be disorganised and ineffectual (Jay, 2014).

**The effect of leadership style on employee motivation and performance**

Effective leadership styles may aid businesses in improving performance when confronted with several hurdles (Naderi and Jadidi, 2014). According to Pawirosumarto, Sarjana and Muchtar (2017), employee performance refers to an employee's productivity in terms of the quantity and quality of work assigned to him or her in a specific task unit. Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, and Nwankwere (2015) assert that organisational leadership styles influence employee performance. On the other hand, Paracha, Qamar, Mirza, Inam-ul-Hassan and Waqas (2012) and Dastane (2020) argue that a leader's style, directly and indirectly, affects employee performance and is a crucial factor in determining an organisation's success. According to Brahim, Ridic and Jukic (2015), transactional leaders help a business's success by associating employee performance with rewards or payments and ensuring that subordinates have the tools necessary to complete given jobs.

Similarly, Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch, and Shamir (2015) argue that leaders may foster an inclusive culture by establishing clear performance expectations and connecting them to company objectives. Kalsoom, Khan and Zubair (2018) assert that leadership style significantly impacts how individuals behave and contribute to performance improvement. According to Baharvand (2015), the emphasis on any leadership style is founded on the premise that managers must perform better for followers to embrace that style. Ladzani, Smith, and Pretorious (2010) highlight that motivation, employee performance, and communication processes are all inextricably tied to a successful leadership style. Moreover, Velu, Manxhari, Demiri and Jahaj (2017) support the view that organisational leadership styles are critical for employee performance.

According to Jay (2014), the critical contrast between transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles is how they approach employee motivation. Sundi (2013) posits that transactional leaders motivate their people by positive and corrective acts. Transactional leaders assist followers in altering their values and fundamental goals, and they motivate employees to reach new heights of achievement (Naderi and Jadidi, 2014). In addition, according to Lazaroiu (2015), a transformative leader motivates employees by stressing the value of work outputs and ensuring that higher-order needs are met. Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, and Nwankwere (2011) note that transformational leaders' activities are motivated by their views and perspectives on how leaders assist employees in accomplishing goals. On the other hand, Belonio (2012) asserts that laissez-faire leaders take no action and that their passivity negatively affects businesses. According to Chaudhry and Javed (2012), a laissez-faire leadership style leads to low employee motivation to accomplish duties due to a lack of supervision. Numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. Riaz (2010) and Dastane (2020) acknowledges that prior research indicates that leadership styles may affect staff happiness and overall performance. Moreover, Baharvand (2015) postulates that most leadership research focuses on the interaction between leaders and their subordinates but ignores several additional duties that leaders perform. Some experts have stated that leaders and their leadership styles impact the performance of their employees and businesses (Sundi, 2013).

Managerial and supervisory leadership styles significantly impact their employees' performance (Lazaroiu, 2015). Emotional intelligence plays just a minor role in the relationship between leadership and performance. Obicci (2014) asserts that effective leadership has a greater chance of enhancing staff productivity. According to Nica and Potcovaru (2014), effective leadership enables people to recognise and expand their roles. Furthermore, Naderi and Jadidi (2014) state that several organisations have failed due to inefficient management and leadership practices. In addition, Naderi and Jadidi (2014) delved deeper into the relationship between leadership style, corporate culture and employee and leadership performance. Even though considerable research assert a link between leadership and performance, Chaudhry and Javed (2012) conclude that the current findings are challenging to account for. While some experts feel that leadership affects individuals' performance, immense gaps and unresolved issues persist.

**Research methodology**

A structured closed-ended questionnaire was used to obtain data from a target population of 215 employees. A systematic sampling approach was adopted to select a sample size of 107 items. According to Mason and Dale (2011), systematic sampling is a probability sampling technique in which sample members are drawn randomly from a larger population but at a preset, periodic interval. To undertake systematic sampling, a random sample of every nth person in the population is taken. A total of 94 questionnaires were collected from the respondents. Four questionnaires (n=90) were deleted due to spoilage. Thus, resulting in an 84 percent response rate. According to Muijs (2011), short and brief surveys have a high response rate. Respondents expressed their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements provided using a 5-point Likert Scale in the survey (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014). The 5-point Likert Scale was chosen for thorough statistical analysis (Mouton, 2011). The information from the survey respondents was imported into Microsoft Excel and analysed using SPSS version 24 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse and derive conclusions from the quantitative data.
Analysis and Findings

Demographic profile of the respondents

The number of males and females who took part in the survey is shown in Table 1. The results show that males (76.7 percent) were more than females (23.3 percent). The frequency distribution and percentage of sample responses for each age group are further shown in Table 1. The results show that 12.2 percent of respondents were between the ages of 20 and 24, 24.4 percent were between 25 and 29, and 34.4 percent were between 30 and 34. The respondents between the ages of 35 and 39 accounted for 18.9 percent. Only 10 percent of the respondents were beyond the age of 40. The results imply that most employees were between 30 and 34. Table 1 further shows the length of respondents’ employment, ranging from less than a year to more than 15 years. The results show that 39.3 percent of the respondents spent one to five years at the company, 33.7 percent for six to nine years and 14.6 percent for ten to fourteen years. The findings further show that 9 percent of the respondents had worked for less than a year, while 3.4 percent had worked for more than 15 years.

Table 1: Analysis of demographic data of the respondents (n=90)

| Description          | Frequency | percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age range            |           |            |
| 20 years to 24 years | 11        | 12.2%      |
| 25 years to 29 years | 22        | 24.4%      |
| 30 years to 34 years | 31        | 34.4%      |
| 35 years to 39 years | 17        | 18.9%      |
| 40 years and above   | 9         | 10%        |
| Gender               |           |            |
| Male                 | 69        | 76.7%      |
| Female               | 21        | 23.3%      |
| Length of service    |           |            |
| Less than a year     | 10        | 9%         |
| Between 1 and 5 years| 44        | 39.3%      |
| Between 6 and 9 years| 37        | 33.7%      |
| Between 10 and 14 years| 16       | 14.6%      |
| More than 15 years   | 3         | 3.4%       |

Analysis of Leadership Styles

This section contains fifteen statements describing three distinct leadership styles: transformational, transactional and laissez-faire. The characteristics examined for transformational leadership were idealised influence behaviour, inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personalised consideration (Qazi, Shafique and Ahmad, 2014). Contingent rewards and active and passive exception management are transactional leadership style examples (Muijs, 2011). Additionally, the questions explored the attributes of a laissez-faire leadership style.

Frequency distribution of transformational leadership style

The employees’ responses to transformational leadership style are shown in Table 2. Over half of those surveyed (51.1 percent) disagreed with the underlying premise that managers dedicate time to teaching and coaching, while 34.4 percent agreed. In addition, 47.8 percent of respondents disagreed with the assertion that their superiors gave them time to voice their views about given duties, while 32.2 percent agreed. Furthermore, 53.3 percent of respondents disagreed that the managers do more than they are normally expected to do, whereas 22.2 percent agreed. Table 2 further shows that the overwhelming majority (82.2 percent) of respondents got performance feedback from their superiors while 12.2 percent disagreed. On the other hand, 51.1 percent of respondents disagreed that their supervisor’s ask for ideas on plans and activities, while 32.2 percent agreed.

Table 2: Frequency distribution the transformational leadership style (n=90)

| Description                                      | Agree count | Neutral count | Disagree count | Row N % |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|---------|
| The managers spend time coaching and teaching.   | 31          | 13            | 46             | 51.1%   |
| The managers give us time to share our views and decisions regarding work to be done. | 29          | 18            | 43             | 47.8%   |
| The manager gets to do more than I am normally expected to do. | 20          | 22            | 48             | 53.3%   |
| My managers gives me feedback on my performance  | 74          | 5             | 11             | 12.2%   |
| My manager asks for ideas and input on upcoming plans and projects | 29          | 15            | 46             | 51.1%   |
Frequency distribution of transactional leadership style

As shown in Table 3, 75.6 percent of respondents agreed that their superiors encouraged their efforts whereas 14.4 percent disagreed. Furthermore, 56.7 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that their superiors tolerated errors and deviations from set norms while 28.9 percent agreed. The majority (81.1 percent) of respondents agreed that their supervisors communicated clearly who was accountable for meeting performance goals, whereas 14.4 percent disagreed. In addition, 75.6 percent of respondents agreed that their supervisors were precise about expectations once objectives are met whereas 13.3 percent disagreed. Table 3 further shows that 40% of respondents disagreed that their supervisors tell them how to do work and when it should be done, whereas 38.9 percent agreed. On the other hand, 58.9 percent of respondents agreed that their supervisors provide clear incentives or punishments for task performance, whereas 30 percent disagreed.

Table 3: frequency distribution of transactional leadership style responses (n=90)

| Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|-------|---------|----------|
| Count | Row %   | Count | Row % | Count | Row % |
| The leaders provide me with assistance in exchange for my efforts. | 68 | 75.6% | 9 | 10% | 13 | 14.4% |
| The manager focuses attention on mistakes and deviations from standards. | 26 | 28.9% | 13 | 14.4% | 51 | 56.7% |
| The supervisor is specific about who is responsible for reaching performance targets. | 73 | 81.1% | 4 | 4.4% | 13 | 14.4% |
| The leader makes clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved. | 68 | 75.6% | 10 | 11.1% | 12 | 13.3% |
| My manager tells me what to do, how to do it and when it should be done. | 35 | 38.9% | 19 | 21.1% | 36 | 40.0% |
| My manager gives us clear rewards and punishments in order to complete tasks and meet goals. | 53 | 58.9% | 10 | 11.1% | 27 | 30.0% |

Frequency distribution of laissez-faire leadership style

As shown in Table 4, 65.6 percent of respondents disagreed that their superiors avoid getting involved in critical issues whereas 21.1 percent agreed to the notion. In addition, 74.4 percent of respondents disagreed that their managers wait until things go wrong before taking action, whereas 16.7 percent agreed. The results also show that 51.1 percent of the respondents agreed that the leadership style is ideal for the type of industry the company is in. As further illustrated in Table 4, 66.7% of respondents disagreed that their supervisors do not follow up on duties carried out by employees and expect them to take full responsibility for their work, whereas 18.9% agreed.

Table 4: Frequency distribution to Laissez-faire leadership style (n=90)

| Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|-------|---------|----------|
| count | Row %   | count | Row % | count | Row % |
| The leaders avoid getting involved when important issues arise. | 19 | 21.1% | 12 | 13.3% | 59 | 65.6% |
| The managers wait for things to go wrong before taking action. | 15 | 16.7% | 8 | 8.9% | 67 | 74.4% |
| The methods of leadership used are conducive to the line of industry the company is in. | 46 | 51.1% | 26 | 28.9% | 18 | 20.0% |
| The manager does not follow up on duties and gives me full responsibility for my work. | 17 | 18.9% | 13 | 14.4% | 60 | 66.7% |

Discussion

This study sought to assess various leadership styles used at a multinational firm specialising in marine services in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings of the study show that most respondents disagreed that the leaders use the various aspects of transformational leadership style at the company except on one item where the respondents agreed that their managers provide feedback. According to Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa and Nwankwere (2011) and Vanderstraeten (2019), transformational leaders pay attention to each employee's needs and offer feedback based on their observations. In order to achieve organisational goals, transformational leaders are courteous, excellent listeners, and invest in their colleagues' progress. Transformational leaders can use coaching and mentoring to help their teams reach their full potential. These leaders are conscious of their employees' differences and work with them to improve their performance. They also aid others in learning and improving, and they are aware of personnel issues (Nguyen, Mia, Winata and Chong, 2016). According to Vanderstraeten (2019), transformational leaders involve their subordinates in decision-
making, regard them as collaborators and create a sense of belonging in their workforce. Atiku (2018) believes that these leaders have a more idealistic view of leadership by putting the interests of others ahead of their own but still taking measured risks and expressing their commitment to ideas.

The findings of this study further illustrate that the analysis of transactional leadership showed that the majority of the respondents agreed that their managers use most of the aspects of transactional leadership. Thus, transactional leaders employ exception-driven management and keep a close eye on their employees, spotting mistakes early and intervening to fix them (Qazi, Shafique and Ahmad, 2014). Furthermore, transactional leaders convey process execution to subordinates, assign them roles, and supervise them (Vanderstraeten, 2019). They motivate people to perform better by rewarding them for completing tasks. They provide incentives to explain the effort required to get rewards and impose sanctions when goals are not met (Ward, 2021).

A further analysis sought to ascertain the respondents' views on the laissez-faire leadership style. The findings of this study showed that the majority of the respondents disagreed that their managers practice a laissez-faire leadership style. Laissez-faire leaders, according to Karamat (2013), are highly laid-back and empower their employees to take whatever actions they deem necessary. In addition, they disregard their employees because they do not provide the necessary assistance for jobs to be completed satisfactorily (Skogstad, Hetland, Glaso and Einarsen, 2014). Such leaders provide their followers with few to no instructions and little to no help in terms of the resources they need. According to Arham (2014), these passive supervisors will only intervene if processes are not followed or completed. However, Naderi and Jadidi (2014) believe that monitoring subordinates' performance and fixing difficulties as they emerge is what "exceptional management" implies. Qazi, Shafique and Ahmad (2014) argue that because of their laissez-faire management approach, managers are thought to be more adaptive decision-makers. Prasetio, Siregar, and Luturlean (2015) posit that a company's leadership style has a significant impact on the motivation and drive of its employees. Therefore, an organisation's leadership style can influence an employee's performance.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate a variety of leadership styles used at a multinational firm specialising in marine services in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, leadership style is one of the most important aspects to consider when a company wants to engage and inspire its employees. The findings of this study provide crucial information to senior management about coping with different leadership styles in different scenarios to improve employee performance. The following recommendations are based on an empirical assessment and can help senior management develop plans and address existing problems. Thus, based on the findings, managers need to adopt a leadership style that will motivate workers to go the extra mile in achieving the company's objective. Thus, such leaders need to be present, get involved, listen, motivate and frequently check workers' progress and provide direction when called to do. In addition, management should avoid a laissez-faire leadership approach when dealing with employees because such a leadership style affects employee motivation and performance. Further research could be conducted with supervisors, managers, top management, and all floor level employees in organisations with similar management architectures using a mixed-method approach to obtain a cross-sectional perception of the preferred leadership style that affects employee performance.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, due to that the research does not deal with vulnerable groups or sensitive issues.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

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