Factors Constraining The Relationship Between Academic Leadership And Individual Academic Staff Performance Through Knowledge Sharing

Usman Madugu

Department of Public Administration, University of Abuja, Nigeria

Abstract: This study explored the constraints confronting the model, 'mediating influence of knowledge sharing on the relationship between academic leadership and individual academic staff performance' in the Nigerian public universities. A qualitative investigation was carried out on 13 academics at public universities sited in north-central geo-political zone, Nigeria. Data for the study were collected via in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the perceptual responses was conducted through a thematic content analysis (thematic analysis of transcripts) technique. The findings divulge that, eight (8) themes emerged as the inhibiting factors to the mediating influence of knowledge sharing on the relationship between academic leadership and individual academic staff performance, namely: 1.) inadequate funding; 2.) inadequacy of manpower and quality of academic staff; 3.) inadequate power supply or epileptic provision of electricity; 4.) poor and inadequate facilities; 5.) poor reward system; 6.) breakdown in mentorship system; 7.) politicization of academic leadership positions; 8.) lack of trust in academics and their research and host of others. Thus, the practical recommendations were offered and discussed.

Keywords: Academic Leadership, Individual Performance, Knowledge Sharing, Nigeria Public Universities

I. INTRODUCTION

Basically, leadership is the process of exertion of influence on subordinates by the superior; that is, the capacity to exercise authority over others (Abasilim, Odukoya, Wogu, & Nchekwube, 2016; Afonja & Ojeomogha, 2014; Kok & McDonald, 2017). The term Leadership is equally conceived to be the principal driving force underpinning the constant acknowledgement of performance, that is, leadership theory submits that the behavior of individuals in organizations can influence substantially the behavior of others. In addition, Mclaurin and Al Amri (2008) perceived leadership as a dynamic relationship which is based on collective influence between leaders and followers which culminates into a higher level of motivation and performance. Thus, effective leadership entails collaborative efforts between the leaders and their followers to accomplish targets (Nahavandi, 2009).

Many studies have made several efforts to investigate the leadership influence on work outcomes such as performance

(Porr & Field, 2006; Kivipold & Vadi, 2010); employee commitment (Huey Yiing, & Zaman Bin Ahmad, 2009); planning (Wilson & Eilertsen, 2010); job satisfaction (Duffield, Roche, O'Brien-Pallas, & Catling- Paull, 2009; Huey Yiing, & Zaman Bin Ahmad, 2009); personal development (Mannion, cited in Asaari, Dwivedi, Lawton, & Desa, 2016); turnover intention (Ansari, Hung & Aafaqi, 2007); and attitudes (Martin & Bush, 2003), but this list is not exhaustive. Over the past three decades many studies have investigated the direct influence of leadership on work outcomes; for instance, individual/job performance, Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) and creativity (Zhu, Newman, Miao, & Hooke, 2013). The period witnessed shift in leadership studies outlook from transactional (i.e. where the leaders offer compensations or rewards in exchange for the followers' performance) to transformational (i.e. where the leaders influence the led via motivations to perform well above expectations). On the other hand, in the recent past decade, studies about leadership have witnessed a remarkable

upsurge, culminating in the building of varied leadership theories or models (Dinh et al., 2014). In the same vein, it is also of recent origin that surveys began to consider the role of other constructs in mediating the relationship between leadership and performance (Zhu, Newman, Miao, & Hooke, 2013). Some of the considered mechanisms so far are: followers' trust in leadership (Jung & Avolio, 2000; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003); organizational justice and trust (Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999; Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002).

However, several empirical surveys have investigated justice and trust, though the relationship between the constructs has not been duly and exhaustively expanded as mediator tools in the 'leadership – performance' relationship (Frazier et al., 2010; Lewicki, Wiethoff, & Tomlinson, 2005). In this connection, previous empirical surveys disclosed that trust strongly mediates the influence of transformational leadership on employee attitudes and behaviour (Jung & Avolio, 2000; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999), while similar studies revealed that cognitive trust (the followers' perceptive assessment of the attributes of the leaders) and affective trust (the social ties between followers and leaders) mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and performance (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2011). Although, these surveys have basically conceptualized most variables as uni-dimensional measures and relegated the possibility that they may contain more than one dimension, for example, bi- or multi- dimensional (Zhu, Newman, Miao, & Hooke, 2013).

Given the above analysis, the broad objective of this research is to explore the factors that constrain the model of knowledge sharing mediating the relationship between academic leadership and individual performance of academic staff. Drawing on the social exchange theory, defined as "the voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others" (Blau, 1964: 91); the aim here, is to unearth the challenges that hinder existing "leadership - knowledge sharing - performance models". Given the reviews so far, it is contended that scarcely any study/research has been carried out to explore factors restricting the mediating effect of knowledge sharing on the relationship between academic leadership and individual performance.

II. METHODOLOGY/ MATERIALS

This research is a cross-sectional study deploying qualitative approach to unearth, describe and interpret the challenges or hurdles to the mediating effect of knowledge sharing on the relationship between academic leadership and individual performance of academic staff. A qualitative investigation entails a strategy through which the investigator finds out the essence of human experiences about a given phenomenon as described by participants. The qualitative method involved interviewing academic staff of public universities in north-central geo-political zone in Nigeria.

The participants were drawn from thirteen (13) public universities in the north-central, Nigeria. In addition, the purposive sampling technique was deployed to identify the participants. Data for the study were collected via in-depth and semi-structured interviews, using an interview guide. The interview is basically anchored on the following questions: (a) what are the factors inhibiting academic leadership, knowledge sharing practices and ultimately the performance of academic staff in Nigerian public universities? and (b) How do solve, manage or overcome the constraints? The interviews were tape recorded and fully transcribed. The transcripts were iteratively analysed using open, axial and selective coding techniques.

In terms of validity, a process called respondent validation was employed, whereby participants were asked to validate the transcripts of their interviews (Sandwell, 2011). In other words, an 'audit trail' was used to route transcripts of interviews among participants for cross-checking (validating articulations). The audit trail is a detailed way of ensuring that the transcripts are true representations of the perceptions of the participants, hence the data are confirmed and validated (Carcary, 2009; Malterud, 2001). In sum, data were analysed via familiarization and arrangement, coding and recoding, summarization, and interpretation; in other words, a thematic content analysis was deployed (Nowell, et al., 2017).

III. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This research held interviews with thirteen (13) academic staff of public universities located in the north central geopolitical zone, Nigeria, who were purposively selected from the pool of willingness elicited; hence it examines the perceptions of 13 academics on the subject matter. In attempts to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, the research deployed the use of Pseudonyms all through the analysis and beyond. In other words, the real names and other forms of identification were kept anonymous (i.e not made public). Thus, the interviewees were designated as "participants" accompanied with roman numerals to distinguish one interviewee from the others. This is to uphold the commitment made to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents to the letter. Thus, the 13 interviewees were designated as "participant I to XIII". In addition, the research made use of italics for lengthy views while brief ones were enclosed in quotation marks during analysis (APA, 2013).

In this survey, thirteen (13) academics participated in the interviews across the public universities in the north central geopolitical zone, Nigeria. Descriptively, eleven (11) participants (85%) out of thirteen (13) were interviewed via face-to-face basis, while the remaining two (2) representing 15% were interviewed via telephone medium. The time allotted for the interviews ranged between 30 to 60 minutes. Gender wise, twelve (12) participants were males representing 92% and one (1) was female representing 8%. All the participants were married (100%). The distribution of academic ranks of the participants are – five (5) participants were reported as Professors (38.5%), three (3) participants were related as Associate Professors (23%) and five (5) participants also were reported as Senior Lecturers (38.5%). Accordingly, all the participants were academics with PhD certificate.

In relation to working experience, the participants were grouped into three classes. In the first category, five (5) participants representing 38% were reported to have spent above twenty (20) years in the academia. In the second category, seven (7) participants representing 54% spent between 5-20 years in the academes. The third category reported one (1) participant representing 8% as having spent almost a year in his current university. All the participants have held academic positions (leadership positions) at one time or the other across the various academic levels, of which some are currently occupying academic leadership positions. Broken down, six (6) participants (46%) are currently holding academic leadership positions in their various universities while seven (7) participants (54%) were reported to have held leadership positions in the past. Therefore, the table below reveals a vivid synopsis of the demographic distribution of the participants.

Categories	Frequency	Percent (%)
Interview media		
Face-to-face means	11	85
Telephone means	2	15
Gender		
Male	12	92
Female	1	8
Highest Qualification		
Ph.D.	13	100
Present Rank		
Professor	5	38.5
Associate Professor	3	23
Senior Lecturer	5	38.5
Working Experience		
Less than 1year	1	8
5-20 years	7	54
Above 20 years	5	38
Academic Leadership Positions Held		
Currently occupying	6	46
Held in the past	7	54
Marital Status		
Married	13	100

Table 1: Demographics of the Participants

Results in this study explored the constraints confronting the discharge of academic leadership, knowledge sharing practices and ultimately individual performance of academic staff in Nigerian public universities. Based on participants' responses, eight interesting themes emerged as constraining factors to the tripartite (academic leadership, knowledge sharing and individual performance). The themes include: 1.) inadequate funding; 2.) inadequacy of manpower and quality of academic staff; 3.) inadequate power supply or epileptic provision of electricity; 4.) poor and inadequate facilities; 5.) poor reward system; 6.) breakdown in mentorship system; 7.) politicization of academic leadership positions; 8.) lack of trust in academics and their research and host of others.

THEME 1. INADEQUATE FUNDING

In the first premise, funding entails the financial provision that fortifies the existence of any given organization irrespective of its status (public or private driven). The participants were unanimous that inadequate funding has constituted a major constraint to the discharge of academic leadership, knowledge sharing practices and consequently individual performance of academics. Against this backdrop, participant XII submitted that "… the funding of the university system is not adequate because in the area of research grant, the government's concern and releases for research grant are not good enough …" In the same connection, participant VI maintained that: "budgetary allocation for education is abysmally low, in other words, he emphasizes that the government has not been able to meet the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) benchmark of 26% for adequate educational funding." This is consistent with the findings of Kamoh's study (2013).

In addition, participant X also submitted that: "funding for research is limited, although some improvements are coming up with the emergence of TETfund and other sources of funding. Reflectively, the way you could easily access sponsorship in the past, is not applicable now, so the challenge of funding has implications in terms of what you generate and subsequently determines what you share." Thus, poor funding in the public universities basically affects the discharge of academic leadership, level of knowledge sharing and consequently, influences the performance of academic staff.

THEME 2. INADEQUACY OF MANPOWER AND QUALITY OF ACADEMIC STAFF

One of the constraints inhibiting Nigerian public universities is overstretched ratio of academic staff to students. Accordingly, Participant X contended that, "adequate in terms of quantity and quality of teaching staff are the nucleus of educational system in that they translate educational policies into realities." The role of teachers in our educational system is indispensable. Conversely, academics in Nigerian public universities are in short supply to sufficiently undertake the tasks of teaching/learning; this in turn affects their performance (lecturers' performance) because they are being overloaded and overworked (Participants XII; I; IV). This is one of the direct consequences of inadequate funding, that is, the inability to bring onboard the requisite academic staff strength to train the teeming population. Some participants contended that achieving improved performance of the academic staff in university education presupposes the presence of adequate academic staff in terms of quantity vis-s-vis quality, (Participants XI; IX & V). In a nutshell, inadequacy of academic staff poses a constraint to discharge of academic leadership, knowledge sharing practices and consequently, it affects the individual performance of academic staff. Correspondingly, Participant X succinctly contended that:

"… academic staff are much saddled with conventional teaching responsibilities, because the numbers of academics are not enough. The staff may end up dwelling more on teaching than on research; and these two responsibilities go

hand in hand. You are supposed to do research, so that you update your knowledge, generate knowledge that would be critical for the society." Participant X.

Corroboratively, Participant III also submitted that: "when you are so overwhelmed with teaching responsibilities, you find out that research takes a back seat, hence you concentrate more on routine lecturing, marking, grading results and so on." Therefore, this is a constraint to the discharge of academic leadership, knowledge sharing activities and individual performance of lecturers.

THEME 3. INADEQUATE POWER SUPPLY OR EPILEPTIC PROVISION OF ELECTRICITY

The participants were unanimous that inadequate power supply or rather epileptic electricity constitutes a big threat to the performance of academic staff in Nigerian public universities. In addition, Participant XIII submitted that: "the power supply is not steady, and the national grid is almost unreliable; hence the alternative is contingent on availability of generators, whether the staff are on strike, or they are working and so on." Therefore, the working atmosphere is unconducive particularly in a hot season. Succinctly, the academics could hardly do anything if the power is unavailable, hence this has constrained the discharge of academic leadership, level of knowledge sharing and above all, it has inhibited the performance of academic staff.

THEME 4. POOR AND INADEQUATE FACILITIES

As largely observed and submitted by the participants, the state of facilities' availability and currency is grossly inadequate, dilapidated and outdated. Facilities are inadequate as well as poor to support knowledge production, generation and sharing, and effective academic leadership; thereby inhibiting the performance of academic staff. Facilities that would in the first place make teaching and research much easier, are either absent or grossly obsolete. Thus, absence or inadequate facilities/infrastructures like ICTs gadgets, cutting edge equipment, 'state of the art' science laboratories, libraries, conducive office accommodations, structural grants etc serve as one of the constraints to effective academic leadership, knowledge sharing practices and consequently individual academic staff performance in public universities. For instance, if structural grants are not available and the department does not have the facilities to support their activities, hence it becomes a problem or rather threat to performance of academics. Along these lines, Participant XII contended that:

"... the environment with which people operate is not also conducive to a better output that we were presently given, the internet facilities are not too okay, in some places they are not even there and even the internet facilities available are partial – individuals had to subscribe for internet facilities for themselves from their meagre salaries; as a university environment we are supposed to have some free internet service which is not there in most of the Nigerian public universities ..."

THEME 5. POOR REWARD SYSTEM

It is largely reported by almost all the participants that the academics in Nigerian public universities are grossly under-remunerated. Along this line, Participant X asserted that, "this is one of the causes of incessant industrial unrest in Nigerian public universities superintended by the union (Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU))." This state of affair also results in brain drain from Nigerian public universities, in other words, there is a massive outflow of academics from Nigerian public universities to corporate entities, private enterprises or abroad for greener pasture (where they can get better reward). In addition, some participants submitted that there is inadequate "staff development program" for developing the academic workforce in terms of training and re-training" (Participants I; IV; VI & III).

THEME 6. BREAKDOWN IN THE MENTORSHIP SYSTEM

Most of the participants also submitted that the breakdown in the mentorship system is one of the constraints to performance of academics in Nigerian public universities. Participant I submitted that:

The university system is such a system that is largely predicated on the need for academic leadership on mentorship, as you get into the faculty and department, there are people you are supposed to look up to them, that are supposed to guide you, lead you in the work of an academic -- research, teaching, learning and so on etc., but you find out that over the years, this system has usually collapsed. Once you are recruited, you are on your own, and you are being saddled with all kinds of responsibilities, to the point that you even lose track of the essence of the university, and the need for you to be mentored to appreciate what the university is all about. We have seen situations, where graduate assistants as soon as they come in, they are given lecturing responsibilities so much so that they take the next five, six or seven years, without turning in their masters. The inability to turn in their MSc renders them not to be proper academics. Therefore, the opportunity for them to be academics are not there, because they are overburdened, hence the mentorship system has collapsed over time.

Thus, breakdown in the mentorship system may be likened to erosion of academic culture which in addition, includes gradual erosion of collegiality and intellectual autonomy.

THEME 7. POLITICIZATION OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

On this aspect, Participant X asserted that, "the positions of academic leaders in Nigerian public universities have largely been politicized which culminates in the emergence of leaders that are not so qualified or do not possess the requisite qualifications at the expense of seniority and other merit criteria." In other words, emergence of leaders in academes is largely driven by sentiments: sectionalism, ethnicity, religion, political affiliations to 'the powers that be', nepotism etc. Therefore, the emergence of mediocre at the expense of astute

academics in the mantle of leadership would certainly affect leadership effectiveness, knowledge sharing practices and ultimately the performance of individual academics.

THEME 8. LACK OF TRUST IN ACADEMICS AND THEIR RESEARCH

It is common knowledge that, the general impression the Nigerian public has, is that what the academics have in ivory tower is idealistic. In other words, Participant X asserted that "the ideal is not something that can be operated, so the government or rather public feel that academics are only supposed to be concerned with the theoretical and conceptual research not really one that is bordered on solving problems, guiding policies and so on." In addition, Participant I also maintained that "even if you did research that would impact on policy, the encouragement is not there; you tend to find out that government agencies and private organizations prefer to patronize foreign consultants to local consultants around, and that really creates lack of synergy between the university system and the government." Therefore, this discourages as well as hinders issues of research, knowledge generation and knowledge sharing which ultimately affects the performance of academic staff.

In a nutshell, the above themes are congruent with the findings of the Mushemeza's (2016) study which revealed that funding deficit, infrastructural deficits, inadequate staff remuneration, high student enrolment with low staff-student ratio, and governance/management deficits, among others are challenges confronting the ivory towers in Africa.

IV. CONCLUSION

The model 'mediating influence of knowledge sharing on the relationship between academic leadership and individual academic staff performance' in previous research has accounted for 64% of the total variance in knowledge sharing and 34% of the total variance in individual performance, which implies that there are other constructs or constraints that would account for the remaining variance in individual performance (Madugu, 2018). Specifically, the remaining 36% and 66% of the variance for knowledge sharing and individual performance respectively would be probably explained by other factors or challenges. The participants through the quality survey revealed that the discharge of academic leadership, knowledge sharing practices, and consequently the individual performance of academics have been hampered by inadequate funding, breakdown in mentorship system, outdated teaching and research facilities, inadequate ICTs facilities, poor reward system, politicization of academic leadership positions, erosion of academic culture, inadequacy of manpower and quality of academic staff, inadequate power supply/ epileptic provision of electricity, lack of trust in academics and their research, weak or absence of synergy between public and private organizations – weak framework for public-private partnership (PPP). In other words, there is absence of private intervention (grant(s)) etc.

Sequel to the above-mentioned challenges militating against effective academic leadership, knowledge sharing

practices and individual performance of academic staff; the participants were asked to suggest ways of enhancing individual performance of academic staff, academic leadership and knowledge sharing practices. The participants offered the following measures as ways of boosting individual performance of academic staff in Nigerian public universities, academic leadership and knowledge sharing practices: (1) the government is advised to raise the funding of public universities via ensuring that budgetary allocation from annual budget to education meets up with the minimum standard of 26% as recommended by UNESCO, (2) the academic environment should be enabled and conducive via favourable conditions of service, provision of basic facilities, virtual libraries, ICTs, internet connectivity, accessibility to various reputable online databases, (3) the governing councils of public universities should be duly constituted, (4) war should be waged against unethical conducts, (5) public universities should undergo overhauling in a bid to completely revitalize them, (6) public- private partnership should be encouraged to get the private sector fully engaged in the provision of university education – alternative or augmentative source of funding, grants and bilateral agreements; in other words, this will boost the re-inventing of the Nigerian public universities for qualitative delivery in terms of teaching, research and community services, and (7) both appointment of academics and ascendency to academic leadership positions should be driven by merit criteria.

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