Analyzing the Leadership Capacity Challenges  
Towards Potential Intervention Strategies for Open and Distance  
Learning Academic Administrators in Zimbabwe  

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Abstract  
This paper will explore the leadership capacity challenges faced by Programme Coordinators at the  
Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). ZOU has a National Centre in Harare where there is central  
administration including departments and faculties. There are ten regional centres geographically spread in  
the political provinces. This paper will also suggest intervention strategies. To collect data ten programme  
coordinators were selected and the purposive sampling technique was used from Mashonaland Central  
Region of the Zimbabwe Open University. An open ended questionnaire was used to collect data. Data  
was qualitatively analysed. The main questions were to find out what leadership related qualifications  
they held and the leadership roles they were involved in. The research sought to find out the leadership  
challenges Programme Coordinators faced and how they solved these challenges and they were asked about  
their preferred leadership style and why they preferred it. The research found out that most programme  
coordinators did not hold leadership related qualifications although they carried out leadership tasks. We  
recommend that workshops should be organised to staff develop Programme Coordinators on leadership  
knowledge and skills relevant to programme management in ODL.

Key Terms  
Academic administrators: These are Programme Coordinators who manage Academic programmes  
in Regional Centres  
Leadership: A process which involves two or more people in which one attempts to influence  
the other  
Potential strategy: Possible approach or tactic

Introduction  
In any organisation, you will find various types of leaders. The leader’s behaviour influences subordinates or followers. According to Haldar (2010) each style impacts followers’ response and determines their performance. Leadership is a critical element in the effective implementation of policy and objectives of educational institutions.

Review of literature  
What is Leadership?  
The concept leadership has been the object of extensive study. According to Kasambira (1998) more  
than 3000 empirical investigations have examined leadership. What is evident is that, leadership is one of  
the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth. This means that the concept leadership  
provides an opportunity for further research. A number of definitions have been thrown around.  
McCaffery in Koen and Butzer (200) explained that the term ‘leader’ is derived from ‘laed’ an Italian word  
meaning path, road, course of a ship at sea or journey. Furthermore, the words ‘lead or leader’ usually refer  
to the social influence of authority figures and can be defined as someone who accompanies, rules guides  
or inspires others on their journey and steers them in the right direction. Lunenburg (1991) defined
leadership as use of power to influence the thoughts and actions of people. Kasambira (1998) summarises it all by defining leadership as influencing, guiding in direction, course, action and opinion of subordinates. Brughardt (1998) believes that leadership in higher education goes beyond a single authority figure but revolves around the needs, aspirations and expectations of both the leader and those who follow. In other words Koen and Butzer (2010) see leadership in higher education involving establishing of a relationship. As such, the role and functions of leadership in ODL today requires that the academic leaders, lead, motivate and direct their units to embrace transformation and change collaboratively. The revolution in leadership themes has occurred over centuries. However, Morrill (2007) observes that the shift in focus is from one of what leaders can do for others to one of how leaders can engage with others.

According to McCaffery(2004) and Middlehurst (1993), there two contrasting perspectives on leadership, these are leader-oriented and process-oriented paradigms. The leadership oriented theories include the trait theory, behavioural theories, cognitive, power and influence theories as well as the cultural and symbolic theories while the other group of process oriented approaches include leaders collective endeavour with followers. Academic leaders should be aware of various approaches to leadership including transactional and transformational leadership. Burns’ transactional leadership theory (1978) offers a negotiated process in which the power bases of the leaders and the followers’ balance each other. Consequently, the success of this leadership depends on the conviction that an individual can make a difference.

Transformational Leadership
Transformation leadership is about change, innovation and entrepreneurship. Burns defined transformational leadership as a process in which leaders and followers engage in the mutual process of motivation. Bass (1985, 1997) defined transformational leadership in terms of how leaders transform followers by increasing their awareness of task importance and value, getting them to focus on the team or organisational goals and activating higher order needs. Pareeck (2010) identified the major characteristics of transformational leaders as:

(i) empowering
(ii) risk taking
(iii) clarity of mission
(iv) team building
(v) equanimity
(iv) evolving trust

This leadership process is systematic, comprising purposeful and organised search for change, methodological analysis and has the capacity to utilise resources to enhance productivity. In this paper the focus is on transformational leadership because this leadership style acts as a bridge between old and new insights of leadership and it also focuses on interactions between leaders and followers, an emerging idea significant in the university context.

Transformational leaders are self-confident and inspire or display what Goleman (1998) terms ‘limited value of you do things right while not knowing where you want to go’. Transformation and change are conceptualised as a natural part of development of educational institutions. Leaders need to inspire, direct and guide people by replacing the obstacles of change with opportunities of change thus to embrace quality. They want to improve the quality of their academic output. Learning (2007) student body is diverse and manifests its uniqueness in different ways, cultural, ability, use of part-time, full-time, plan of study individually, disability, atmosphere of foreseeing and cultural diversity. Successful leaders do no think ‘I’ but ‘we’, they think ‘team’ and understand their job to make the team function. Morrill (2007) believes transformational leaders must have the potential to motivate the academic community to respond effectively to change and should be a source of inspiration to staff, administrators and students. In Zimbabwe higher education is facing a lot of challenges including reduced government funding and increase in student numbers as well as loss of experienced lecturers due to brain drain; there is low morale among staff. A unique type of leader is required to ensure universities survive. This paper will focus on leadership capacity challenges faced in Open and Distance Learning in Zimbabwe in general and Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in particular and suggest possible intervention strategies.

Leadership Roles Characteristics for Effective Leadership in Higher Education
Effective leaders have a vision with direction. They need critical thinking, analytical and problem solving skills and this implies strategic thinking, where vision and mission are well outlined. As such, leaders need to model the way and be knowledgeable and are experts who possess self-confidence. They need to be accountable, trustworthy and have excellent interpersonal and intra personal skills. They need to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. They have to plan, budget and generate income and they should possess good managerial skills as well as technological skills in order to access information in the society of knowledge and global competitive environment.

Statement of the Problem
Programme Coordinators running programmes on behalf of departments and faculties are recruited on the basis of their academic qualifications in most cases; they do not possess administrative qualifications. Without this theoretical knowledge, this research would like to find out the leadership capacity challenges the coordinators face and the intervention strategies ZOU can employ to ensure Programme Coordinators are effective leaders.
Research Questions
The research addressed the following research questions:
• What leadership related qualifications do you hold?
• What are your leadership roles as Programme Coordinator?
• What leadership challenges do you face as programme coordinators and how do you solve them?
• What is your preferred leadership style and why?

Methodology
This study was a case study of Mashonaland Central Regional Centre of the Zimbabwe Open University. The case study was preferred because it allowed the researchers to gather experiential data leadership capacity challenges faced by Programme Coordinators in Regional Centres of the Zimbabwe Open University.

Data Collection
Data was collected through systematic open-ended questionnaires. Ten programme coordinators purposively sampled to participate in this study answered the questionnaires. Data were qualitatively analysed. Qualitative content analysis was employed to make sense of the data and its contextualisation.

An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was preferred because it enabled coordinators to give their personal views and experiences at their own pace without fear or discomfort. The open-ended questionnaire was also preferred because it allowed programme coordinators to give diverse views on their leadership practices and beliefs without influence from other colleagues and these provided information that the researchers thought was vital for the study.

Results and Discussion

Presentation of Results
The qualifications for Programme Coordinators included:
• Master of Business Administration, M. Ed Administration, BSc. Physical Education, MPC, MBC, Masters in Public Administration, Master of Arts, MSc. Environmental and Policy Planning, BSc, Sports Degree, MSC. Counselling, MSc. Psychology, MSc. Special Education. The identified qualifications were based areas of specialisation such as Sport, Agriculture, Education, English, Special Education, Counselling, Geography and Physical Education and Development Studies.

What are your roles as Programme Coordinators?
These included:
• Motivating and influencing students
• Leading part-time tutors to facilitate efficient learning
• To organise, budget, delegate and supervise
• To plan, motivate, organise, control and evaluate

• To coordinate and manage administrative and academic functions of the department
• Making decisions on how the programme region must run

What are the leadership challenges faced by Programme Coordinators?
• Working far away from the department and faculty at the National Centre
• How to motivate part-time tutors
• Lack of financial technical and material resources
• Attending to student hardships
• Low student turnout for tutorials
• Limited skills in emergency roles
• Create personal rapport with tutors
• Being resourceful
• Improvisation and assistance from individuals and other institutions
• Motivating tutors and students

What are the Coordinators' preferred leadership style?
The following styles of leadership were identified:
• Participative, democratic, Human Relations and clinical supervision
• The democratic leadership style was the most preferred leadership style

The Programme Coordinators were asked to identify challenges they faced as they executed their duties. They posted the following responses:
• Working far way from the department and faculty. Most of the work is conducted on the phone
• How to motivate part-time lecturers who felt they were not being adequately remunerated
• Lack of financial technical and material resources to facilitate Aggressive marketing of programmes and implement plans
• Attending to students hardships mainly based on economic problems they are facing
• Low student turnout for tutorials
• Getting cooperation from some stakeholders

Discussion
Most lecturers did not have the relevant qualifications to equip them with leadership skills required for their job. Although some lecturers had relevant qualifications related to leadership, they did not show knowledge of their leadership roles, for example, the people under them, as well as students or part-time lecturers and how these are led at the Region. There was evidence of knowledge of administrative roles as opposed to leadership roles. The Coordinators highlighted mostly administrative challenges as opposed to leadership challenges. They tended to be familiar with leader-oriented approaches to leadership than process-oriented approaches to leadership. This study though limited in perspective since data was collected from programme coordinators in one Regional Centre, revealed a lot on academic leadership in Open and Distance Learning in Zimbabwe, specifically ZOU although the data...
cannot be generalised. The roles of academic leaders are diverse. However, the challenges are compounded by limited resources, separation of subordinates and leaders geographically and reduced government support, and lack of use of new technologies to support administration. Leadership is expected to promote excellence in all spheres including academic and research work. The challenge though is how to motivate subordinates towards scholarly productivity while all of the tutors are part-time staff.

The results of the data collected also show that most Programme Coordinators focused on management roles as opposed to leadership roles. According to Macaffery (2004) in higher education the concepts leadership and management, pose challenges, requiring a complement set of competencies. The symbolic nature of the management and leadership relationship is highlighted by the fact that there is limited value if you do things right, while not knowing where you want to go. Leaders must not regard themselves as policy implements but as policy formulators. Leadership is required to ensure, direct, guide people under them replacing obstacles of change with opportunities of change. This means academic leaders need to ensure enhanced academic output for their departments by ensuring they are dynamic and ever changing to accommodate technological change. The results of the data collected reflect limited scope on the leadership role by Programme Coordinators. This means they did not place themselves in the position of leading and setting the tone of change and innovation related to the departmental functions in ODL.

The challenges highlighted were mainly administrative and managerial related challenges. Leaders need to develop a strategic planning process, think strategically or apply self-directed leadership. But academic leaders need to work, collaboratively with their subordinates through regular communication and consultation with proposals tabled for consideration. This seems not too be evident in as far as problem solving of the challenges are concerned. Leaders need to understand themselves and the open and distance learning environment in which they operate and the followers need to be equally aware of the expectations of leaders. They need to know their strengths and weaknesses, to build own confidence.

**Recommendations**

- There is need to staff develop academic leaders on what leadership is all about and how these are applicable in open and distance learning.
- A more comprehensive research needs to be done to develop a context specific training programme that will link leadership roles to the ODL context.
- There is need of use of the transformational leadership style relevant to open and distance learning and higher education in general.

**Conclusion**

Leadership in open and distance learning in multifaceted and multidimensional but as a concept it is differently understood by academic leaders in open and distance learning universities. There is need to ensure leaders promote the survival of ODL institutions as well as promote development of academic inclined leadership style that will ensure departments are more effective and productive.

**References**


