

CHARACTER AS A FACTOR FOR CAPACITY BUILDING IN RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This study is about character as a factor for capacity building in research leadership. Personality of researchers has been seen to have a great effect in research to predict attitudes, cognitions, and behaviours, and has been largely ignored in the research field. This study therefore, reveals the potential usefulness of integrating character as a foundation for research leadership. This will be relevant to the inclusion of personality features in the framework of capacity building for research leadership. This study suggests a dispositional perspective to aid the understanding of research leadership, research-user attitudes and beliefs for the examination of effective researchers and users personality on both the perceived usefulness of and subjective norms toward the acceptance and use of research. Good research leadership contributes vision to the fast changing research environment, motivates and guides faculty through these changes, while stimulating innovation and creativity in research. This study therefore recommends the development of positive appropriate character, attitudes and beliefs for capacity building in research leadership as predictors of research leadership.

Keywords: Character, Capacity Building, Research, Leadership.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Nwokocha, J. (2019). Character as a Factor for Capacity Building in Research Leadership. *International Journal of Institutional Leadership, Policy and Management*, 1(2), 220-232.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a broad and generally used word by people. Many think have a good idea about what it means to be a good leader. However, relation to the definition of the concept, the expression is not very clear. People see leadership as motivation, for others, it about results and for some it can also corresponds to inspiration. Suffice us to say that the aforementioned expressions of what leadership are and what it constitutes includes applies.

In the development of leadership, there is an emerging agreement for development of the community that capacity development is the social apparatus for human development. This is in line with Ball (2007), who posited that current economic, education, climate, food crises, development of the state, societal capacities to design and implement policy that minimize the impact posed by these crises are critical to the sustaining progress towards achieving world developmental objectives. Capacity development begins from the presumption that people are best empowered to realize their full potential when the means of development are largely sustainable (Gallos, 2002).

Research leadership, appears then to be a justifiable, crucial and specialized form of higher education leadership. The recognition of this value is inherent in higher institutions of higher learning for formal leadership and management structures Nwokocha (2019a), Gronn (2008) opines that major research leadership roles is evident at all levels of the institutional hierarchy, trickling down from senior management level to faculty and departmental levels. Yet in some ways, such leaders are inadequately equipped, for the foundational knowledge base available to them is extremely limited (Evans, 2011b). This paper therefore, represents a contribution towards filling this gap. Based on the fact that effective leadership is dependent upon knowing how research is perceived and effected, and by extension, how people develop as or into researchers, it draws upon research findings in order to examine the perspectives of those with first-hand experience – as its recipients - of research leadership in the higher education sector.

BACKGROUND

The origin of character is from the Greek word “charassein”. The meaning implies to scratch or engrave. This refers to a person’s character in a way of recognizing that person’s idiosyncratic attributes or features. This means that without character, actions can become routine characterized by circumstances. This would therefore mean that the good character will prevail only when the circumstances only allows and promotes it. This is meaningless because in a multifaceted society made of divers characters, an environment promoting the appropriate good character for research leadership is not always promoted (Bolden, 2007)). Macfarlane (2011) affirms that just as our characters helps us to identify who we are, it also helps us simulate the personality of others behaviour. In higher institution, this is reflected in research and research process (Deem, & Lucas, 2007). Character identify who we are on the inside therefore, the integrity of our research is a core aspect of character as a factor for capacity building in research leadership. Research leadership reflects the research integrity of researchers, and the researches of the researcher cannot be isolated from his or her fundamental beliefs and attitudes, presenting those values to everyone (Debowski & Blake, 2004; Heather & Morgan 2008). It is the strength and strong conviction to stand one’s ground and make the morally right decision even when it is difficult that will inform integrity research leadership.

The research leader that is confident does not display their abilities by working harder or longer than the team, he or she is not also the person who takes on the biggest challenges. Pelletier (2010); Hailey, John, James, Rick, Wrigley, and Rebecca (2005) opines that confident research leader recognises that there are strategic issues that only she or he can take responsibility for, however, there are many tasks that can be undertaken just by members of the research team - and there may even be members of the research team who have specialist skills that the research leader do not have (Ramsden, 1998). This is the reason adequate leadership skills are needful in research leadership in higher institutions of learning and this may be just why they are part of the team. Members of the research team do not, have to do things better than the research leader, they are responsible for doing things to an acceptable standard. In research, time is especially a valuable asset for effective research leadership. It is critical to the success of any research team.

According to Evans (2011a), scholars that are new to research team leadership role need develop the dynamic, necessary and practical skills combined with the requirements of meeting research delivery objectives. This can be particularly challenging as different research programmes differ and addresses the unique issues caused by the conflicting demands of teaching and administration within a research team function (Abudi, 2010; Schön, 1983).

Research team leadership develops the skills of research for the research team by providing a pragmatic framework to equip them with the skills and confidence to participate with confidence in an increasingly challenging research context. Research leaders offers a variety of solutions and approaches to team building and gaining co-operation from colleagues, using techniques to enhance team equality, diversity, depth and clarity in the research and research process.

CONJECTURAL CONTEXT

What constitutes a research team in one department or institution might be described elsewhere as a research group, research centre, and research unit or research institute. Regardless of the terminology used, the key characteristic of a research team is that it comprises a group of people working together in a committed way towards a common research goal (Jones, 1973),

There are many differences in the configurations of research teams in academia and boundaries can be vague. They may consist of co-investigators, fractional or pooled staff, technical and clerical staff and postgraduate research students. There may also be inter- and intra-institutional dimensions and increasingly international ones; some team members' research contributions may well be largely virtual via email, phone or videoconference. Also, team members may have different disciplinary backgrounds, different motivations and aspirations, and different cultural backgrounds (Juntrasook, Nairn, Bond, & Sproken-Smith, 2013). Over time, team members' roles may change from being fully dedicated to the research goal to working in one or more other research teams and still committed to this research goal, and vice-versa.

The balance and composition of the research team in terms of skills, expertise and other contributions plays a vital role in achieving the research team's objectives (Macfarlane, 2012). In the academia, research team leaders needs to develop confidence that team members have, or will be able to develop the necessary skills and knowledge for the research in hand and this will also inform the recruitment process and decisions.

Accordingly, Akerlind (2008) posits that another perspective to capacity building in research leadership is effectiveness. To bring about effectiveness of research leadership, needs to acknowledge the knowledge, experience and skills of research team individuals which have different behavioural traits or characteristics they bring to the research process as they carry out their work. These can be utilized to particular roles in the research team. Some individual are very good at seeing the bigger picture, others very good at detailed work. Some are very action oriented, that is being good at just getting things done; others are natural communicators and networkers (Tuckman, 1965). The need for these different roles can emerge at different times and it is worth considering during the composition of the research team to ensure balance of strengths.

According to Adair (2006) these are the responsibilities identified in action-centred leadership model. See Figure 1.



Figure 1: Adapted from John Adair's three-circle model

To lead a research project successfully requires the research leader to take on some very different types of responsibility. This is by of understanding the following key areas of responsibility for the research leader (Adair, 2006).

- Establish, agree and communicate standards of performance and behaviour.
- Establish style, culture, approach of the group - soft skill elements.
- Monitor and maintain discipline, ethics, integrity and focus on objectives
- Anticipate and resolve group conflict, struggles or disagreements.
- Assess and change as necessary the balance and composition of the group
- Develop team-working, cooperation, morale and team-spirit.
- Develop the collective maturity and capability of the group - progressively increase group freedom and authority.
- Encourage the team towards objectives and aims - motivate the group and provide a collective sense of purpose.
- Identify, develop and agree team- and project-leadership roles within group
- Enable, facilitate and ensure effective internal and external group communications
- Identify and meet group training needs.
- Give feedback to the group on overall progress; consult with, and seek feedback and input from the group.

Substance of research Capacity Building in Research Leadership

For universities with effective research leadership, there is likely to be features that yield the maximum results which are measured by research funding, excellent academic productivity and also promises increased incomes, advantages and performance for the university (Evans, Homer & Rayner, 2013). People charged with the responsibility of promoting and developing research must endeavour to explore research leadership as indistinguishable from the researcher development thus, both have elements of professional development and academic development. Gosling, Bolden and Petrov (2009) have defined research leadership as ‘the

process whereby people’s capacity and willingness to carry out the research components of their work or studies may be considered to be enhanced, with a degree of permanence that exceeds benchmark.

Team Roles and Development for Capacity Building in Research Leadership

Research team consists of persons working together in committed ways towards a common research goal. These teams, through a maturational process like individuals and organisations become mature and develop and have clearly defined objectives having passed through a developmental cycle Spiller, (2010) explains this cycle as helpful to reflect on the team's current stage of development in order to identify relevant approaches to leadership and management.

Research leaders should be familiar with how their teams develop over time. The stages of development was advanced by Tuckman (1965). Initially, Tuckman identified four stages of group development, which included the stages of forming, storming, norming and performing. A fifth stage was later added by Tuckman about ten years later, which is called adjourning. It is believed that these stages are universal to all teams despite the group's members, purpose, goal, culture, location, demographics and so on. See Figure 2.

Stages of Research Leadership

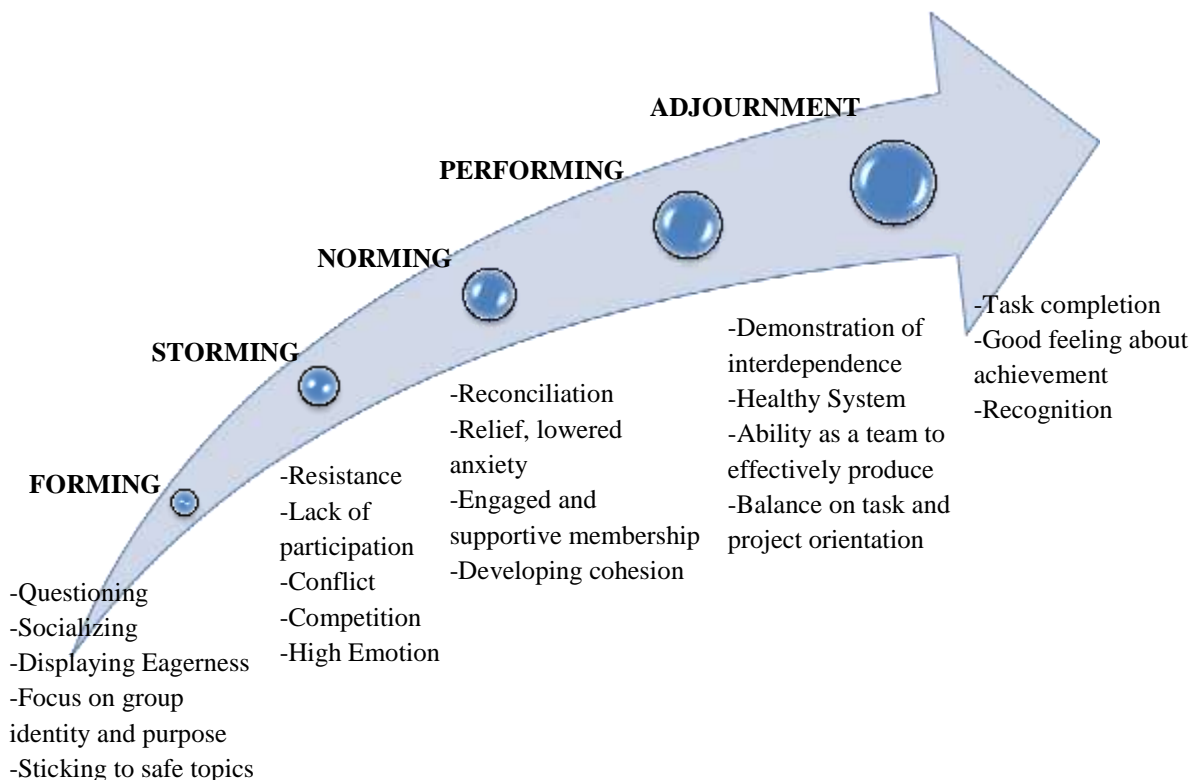


Figure 2: Adapted from Tuckman ‘Stages of small group development revisited’, Group and Organization Studies

The forming stage: This is the first stage of research group development, it is known as the forming stage. This stage represents a time where the research group members are just starting to come together. This stage is characterized by anxiety and uncertainty. Therefore,

members are cautious with their behavior, which is a drive by the desire to be accepted by all members of the team. As a result, conflict, controversy and personal opinions are avoided even though members are beginning to form perceptions of each other and develop an understanding of what the group should do together. Gornall and Salisbury (2012) believe this cautious behaviour of team members prevents the group from getting any real work done. However, the focus for group members during the forming stage is to become familiar with each other and their purpose, not on the work.

The typical outcomes of the forming stage include but not limited to things like gaining an understanding of the group's purpose. This will determine how the team will be organized and who will be responsible for what, discussion of major milestones or phases of the group's goal which will include a rough project schedule, outlining institutionalization of the general group rules and the discovery of what resources will be available to the group for the execution of the groups' task.

The Storming stage: The second stage of research group development is known as the storming stage. The storming stage is where diver's forms of conflict and competition are at its peak. This is because now that group members have an understanding of the task and a general feeling for who they are as a group and who group members are. They feel confident and begin to address some of the more important issues surrounding the group. Such issues can relate to things like the group's tasks, individual roles and responsibilities or even with the group members themselves.

This stage is where the more dominant of the group members emerge, and others become less confrontational team members stay in the comfort and security of suppressing their expressions just as they did in the previous stage. Even though these persons stay quiet, issues may still arise. All members have an increased need for clarification of groups' objectives. Questions surrounding leadership, authority, rules, responsibilities, structure, evaluation criteria and reward systems tend to arise during the storming stage. At this point, such questions must be answered in order that the group can move on to the next stage. Consequently, not all groups are able to move past the storming stage (Bolman & Gallos 2011; Forsyth, 1990, 1998).

The Norming stage: At the where members understand the clarity of the research group, that it so desperately needs, it then moves on to the third stage of research group development, known as the norming stage. This stage is the point where the research group becomes cohesion to achieve research set goals. Morale is high as research group members actively admit the talents, skills and experience that each member possesses for the benefit of the group. A sense of community is established and the research group is focused on the research purpose and goal. From this stage, members are flexible, interdependent and trusting in each other. Research leadership is shared, and members are willing to adapt to the needs of the group. There is then the seamless flow of information and it is uninhibited due to the sense of security members feel in the norming stage of research group membership (Gaventa, 2004).

The Performing: At this peak, the group moves into the fourth stage of a research group development, known as the performing stage. This performing stage is marked by high level of productivity. Group members are unified, loyal and supportive of each other and for the common goal achievement of the research group. Competence in all members is observed, allowing for a high level of independence in decision making. Problem solving, experimentation and testing possible solutions becomes high as group members are fully focused on task completion and achievement. The overall objective of the research group during the performing stage is to complete their mission and fulfil their purpose through goal achievement (Smith, 2005).

The Adjourning: When all tasks are accomplished and completed, it is important to celebrate the research group's positive achievements. Letting go of the group structure after long periods of intensive team work can also generate uncertainty for individual team members (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997). In addition to understanding the development of the research team over time, having an understanding of the individual choice roles, characteristics, expected group behaviour, of research team members, including the research leader, will help ensure that the research team performs at optimum for highest effectiveness together.

Setting Expectations for Research Teams in Research Leadership

Managing a research team is easier if everyone in the group is clear on the groups' expectations of how people are expected approach their work; thus who, what, when and how rightly put in perspective by every group member. There are areas of research projects where research leaders should provide clear leadership and set expectations for the team Herman, (Renz, & David, 2008). Abundant research evidence presents that team members are involved in decision-making, a sense of participation and commitment built thereby providing for the attainment of organizational set goal; this is not different in capacity building in research leadership.

Setting expectations for research team

When setting expectations for research teams, ensure you:

- *Communicate early, clearly and often:* As a research leader, you must ensure that from the onset of a project everyone involved has a clear picture of what the team are trying to achieve and how they are expected to approach the task. Assumptions should be avoided especially on the knowledge needed for the execution of the project and the assumption that people will work the way you expect them to work; by doing so misunderstandings will be cleared (Birnbaum, 1992).
- *Maintain two-way communication:* Instituting potential expectations works best as a dialogue (face-to-face). By this way you can ensure your sub-ordinate researchers or research team members accept and understand what required of them and help them and the help they need to develop a sense of ownership over the research project (Blagescu, Monica & John, 2006). As lead researcher of a project, you will also need to understand what your team members expect you.
- *Are realistic:* The cost of the unexpected can be very costly. Few things can be more damaging to a research and researcher's performance that being burdened with unrealistic expectations. Whether it is the complexity of the task assigned or the time-frame available for it to be finished. Ensure you have a lucid idea and picture of the capabilities of yourself and that of the team members before setting expectations to prevent failures (Hailey, John, James, Rick Wrigley, & Rebecca, 2005). The management of the expectations of others outside the research and that of your research team is required as a research leader. This is essential so the lead researcher can intervene if there challenges of requests from elsewhere in your institution or outside burdening your team with too many research responsibilities.
- *Are prepared to be flexible:* Change is constant; people and things change. This is either through experience, a change in circumstances or expectations that were reasonable at the start of a project which may no longer be reasonable later on. The job of the lead researcher is to realise this and adapt accordingly (Evans, 2011c). If

expectations change, ensure you communicate the change to everyone involved and ways it could be managed.

Supervised Progress of the Research Team

When expectations are been outlined within a team, it is critical that the work of the research team is supervised. According to Bolden, Gosling, O'Brien, Peters, Ryan, and Haslam, (2012) this is in two ways which includes formal reporting requirements and informal supervision.

Formal Reporting

Clarity in formal reporting system will make the job of research leader to be easier. When it is established that team members are clear as to when and how progress is reported, Tuckman and Jensen (1977), it will then provide confidence to allow the entire team to get on with the work. When establishing reporting process, the following should be kept in mind:

- *Consistency in reporting helps:* Just focusing on the finished product is not all that is to it. Even if you think a task has monotony and not requiring dynamism or relatively straight forward, regular updates on progress made at regular times like in weekly meetings or at specified stage of the task can be extremely helpful in keeping a project on track.
- *Clarify what is being measured:* If a target is measurable ensure that all involved are aware of what will constitute success. When research activities are measured, the research team will not only have a defined target aimed at working towards the same goals but the lead researcher is provided with the relevant information to make an appropriate judgement (Brown, 1999).
- *Define clear lines of responsibilities:* The importance of research team members knowing who is responsible for reporting on a task and to whom they should report are essential. According to Bedein (2002), this is vital for specialization, ease of specialization and prevention of disorderliness when the lead away for any length of time. The reporting mechanisms in the absence of the lead researcher should also be maintained.
- *Reporting mechanisms should be kept active:* Sometimes research team can be very busy and that can easily make reporting slip. Ensure team member know the importance placed on regular reporting and that the reporting mechanisms are adhered to strictly.

Informal Supervision

Just as formal reporting is important for research development as the mechanisms, so is the informal supervision that occurs on a daily basis also important. How these are managed are essential for adequate research reporting and this way will depend on the complexity of the task and the experience of the researchers involved (Edgar, & Geare, 2011). These approaches might also change for the delegation of specific tasks and responsibilities. Considerations will also be given to how individual researchers fit into their team and work with others. Whether or not you choose to supervision is routinely done on the research team, it is vital to:

- Encourage your team members to communicate regularly with research leader and with each other
- Make it clear that it is fine to ask for help and admit mistakes when in need
- Commend work done well and keep criticism constructive.

Endeavour to Treat Team Members Fairly

The performance of research team members are affected by their life outside the research project. While work and personal life are to be isolated, both are interrelated and complementary (Kellerman, 2004). The effects they can have on each other can affect work performance. Thus, adequate management for effective research performance is part of the role of capacity building in research leadership. In many cases, performance standards can be sustained regardless of the challenges a researcher's life simply by having a mind-set of understanding and anticipating. As a leader of the research team, a fair treatment of members of the research team, taking a closer on their work than normal and offering support with their tasks when feel necessary will boost productivity (Manz & Sims Jr., 1993). These are factors to take into account when assigning new responsibilities or setting deadlines. People react to circumstances differently so understanding them and anticipating events will make for team work.

Maintaining Researchers' Motivation

Enthusiasm and commitment maintenance for team members during a research project can be challenging. Some factors that have impact on a researcher's motivation are institutional salary levels or the wider job market. They may be out of individual control but there are important factors that you can influenced at the research team level (Alexander, 2007). Furthermore, efforts to attract funding to engage in capital intensive research could prove abortive considering the meagre resources made available to institutions of higher learning. This means that research team leadership need both individual team members and the team as a whole to be well-motivated. Motivation is one of the challenges that is frequently raised by research leaders (Adair, 2006). Here are three broad strategies for maintaining the motivation of team members in the research leadership. Each of them is complementary to each other. See Figure 3.



Figure 3: Motivation of Team Members in Research Team

- *Commend and recognise:* Commend and recognising the work research team members do, both in the quality of the work and the effort they put into it. This is frequently forgotten, especially in busy periods (Evans, 2012). Researchers opine that this is because of high expectations of the standard of work required by researchers. But explicitly recognising when they meet those expectations is essential to building capacity in research leadership among team members.
- *Create challenges and responsibility:* When people are challenged, they are more likely to give their best attention and effort when they feel they are being challenged. Constantly repeating tasks and working within a comfort zone will test the motivation of even the most conscientious erudite researchers. Confronted with new challenges and invited to take on further responsibilities can motivate and give a sense of achievement for researchers.
- *Develop team members:* Giving your team members the sense that they are developing their skills and moving forwards in their career can be very motivating.

CONCLUSION

Research environment and the expectations for researchers are changing. They reflect a clear shift toward more large collaborative and challenge-orientated projects that reach across disciplinary and professional limits and are often dynamic in scope and process. The most effective research systems facilitate the flow of skills, ideas and people in all directions between the different sectors, research disciplines, and various parts of the research endeavour. As a result, this study calls for researchers and research leadership capacity building attained through sound research leadership and more interdisciplinary research which exist alongside a related emphasis on the benefits of inter-sectoral mobility, in which various sources of expertise are recognised and researchers are encouraged to work with knowledge team members have to co-design, co-produce, and co-implement new knowledge, new priorities and mutual learning processes.

This will create specific challenge for research leadership which includes designing, leading and delivering, and simply working within large, complex ‘team-science’ projects which will demand skills that have often not been required or incentivised in research. These include skills in relation to steering multiple research groups, talent management, promoting cultural understanding, navigating the challenges of co-operation and co-production, managing expectations, balancing flexibility with a clear vision, managing risk, financial planning and intellectual entrepreneurship, and pursuing unexpected opportunities.

Research leadership has implications for how researchers think about research development and more generally, how it nurtures and sustains intellectual curiosity and creativity throughout the full career journey, how it cultivates and rewards research advocates for the researches and how it could combine a fresh approach to research set-skills management and building research leadership capacity within the research community in relation to inclusion, diversity and equality.

Recommendations

From the study above, the following recommendation is put forth.

- To develop positive appropriate character for capacity building in research leadership, effective researcher development should ensure the existence of a healthy channel of future research leaders.
- Emphasise the need for greater inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility of the academia to enhance capacity building in research leadership

- Funding has to be made available for a sufficient period to produce good and adequate results.
- Research development and leadership needs to be aligned with changing framework of support prevalent in inter-disciplinary and scientific horizon.
- There should be increased viewpoint on diversity by utilising multiple sources of expertise and
- A sharper focus on knowledge utilisation through close engagement with potential researchers and research-users

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Character: This is the Complex ethical and mental traits distinctive to an individual

Capacity Building: This is the cultivation of Individual and group capabilities of training, learning, or specific skills to achieve specific goal and objective

Research Leadership: Research leadership is the influence of one or more people on the research-related behaviour, attitudes or intellectual capacity of others.

Research: Research is a careful and detailed study into a specific problem, concern, or issue using the scientific method. It's the adult form of the science fair projects back in elementary school, where you try and learn something by performing an experiment.

Leadership: Leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal.