



International Journal of Institutional Leadership, Policy and Management  
Volume 2, Issue 1, pp. 27-35. 2020

ISSN: 2735-9220

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## LEADERSHIP CHARACTER AS A DETERMINANT OF STAFF COMMITMENT TO DUTY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to establish the importance of leadership character as a major determinant for improving Staff (Teachers) commitment to duty. Leadership character are ethical, moral and professional traits, values and virtues such as courage, integrity, respect, competence, humility and drive that endears subordinates to support and commit to the ideals of an organization propelled by the leader. The theoretical foundations that explained the basis of this study were the personal and professional leadership perspective, expectancy theory of motivation and affective events theory. These theories provided the theoretical linkages that depict how leadership character influences teachers' commitment to duty. Empirical studies reviewed provided evidence that the influence of leadership character on teachers' commitment were significantly positive and comparatively has a greater capacity to improve school performance than most of the factors that influence the quality of education. The elements of leadership character were classified into universalism, transformational and benevolence. The channels through which leadership character influences teachers' commitment to duty include motivation, mentorship, supervision, delegation and recognition. The study concluded that, instilling leadership character into the Nigerian educational system will enhance organizational character, teachers' character development, commitment to duty and performance. Thus, the study suggested that, there is need to carryout empirical studies so as to provide evidence that will verify the position of this paper, that leadership character is a major determinant of teacher's commitment to work roles.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Leadership Character, Staff Commitment

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Arisa, C. M. (2020). Leadership Character as a Determinant of Staff Commitment to Duty. *International Journal of Institutional Leadership, Policy and Management*, 2(1), 27-35.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Educational leaders such as principals, supervisors and other administrative officers through total quality management techniques are saddled with the responsibility of maintaining quality standards integrating human resources (teaching and non-teaching staff) and non-human resources to provide quality education. Thus, leaders are primary heads for achieving set organizational goals and objective by providing quality leadership system. Quality leadership system is determined by the leadership character of the individual. Quality leadership involves the provision of guidance, empowering and supporting the constant pursuit of excellence by staff (Feigenbaum, 2007). Leadership character are those positive traits, virtues and values possessed by a leader that determines their leadership behaviour and styles.

Leadership character to a very great extent determines the effectiveness of the leadership provided by a leader. It is important to note that through leadership character, leader leverages on staff in order to get the job done, hence the extent which a leader can leverage on staff with efforts, skill and time to a task, which is linked to leadership character. Staff commitment to duty is a prerequisite for organizational performance. In other words, school performance is directly linked to teacher's commitment to duty bearing in mind that school performance is the aggregate of students', teachers' and leaders' performance.

A committed educator is focused consistently in using all available educational resources in providing and maintaining quality education. Thus educator's commitment to duty improves educational institutions commitment to provide quality education. Hence, the important of educator's commitment to the overall development of the Nigerian educational sector in providing quality education for millions of Nigerians cannot be over emphasized.

Presently, the Nigerian educational system is at crossroads because so many innovations and changes have been implemented in order to improve the quality of education with very little or no significant success recorded. Huge funds have been committed to provide infrastructural development necessary to facilitate and improve quality but evidences of the quality of product from Nigerian educational institution continue to show that there is much that still needs to be done. A major trend easily observed in Nigerian educational institutions is a lack of educators' commitment to the herculean task of improving the quality of education in Nigeria. There is a lack of urgency to commit more efforts, resources and time to meeting set objectives at all levels of education in Nigeria. This phenomenon mostly observed in public schools led to the proliferation of private schools in the country, which over the years has added more salt to injury and is presently suffering from the same issue of educator's commitment to duty.

Thus, in order to improve the situation, this paper x-rays the relationship between leadership character and staff commitment to duty in an educational setting and discusses the channels through which leadership character improves educators' commitment to duty in order to achieve quality education.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

Leadership is a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals (Omolayo, 2000). Thus, effective leadership is the extent to which a leader continually and progressively leads and directs his subordinates to achieve set objectives. Basically, the extent to which a leader provides any form of leadership is based n his leadership character. Leadership character refers to personality traits

such as courage, respect, integrity and perseverance that determine a person's leadership style and competency. Leadership character thus demonstrates the maturity of a leader and the capacity of the leader to influence others to commit effort, skill and time voluntarily to achieving set organizational goals. Commitment is simply defined as the loyalty and attachment of an individual or group to an organization.

Staff commitment can be described as the willingness of an employee to persist in a course of action and reluctance to change plans often owing to a sense of obligation to stay on course of action. Similarly, Akanbi and Itiola (2013) viewed staff commitment as the degree to which an employee identifies with their organization, and the amount of enthusiasm displayed in meeting up job roles in order to accomplish the set goals and objectives of their organization. Thus, educators' commitment, mostly teachers, can be seen in their punctuality, class room management, attention to other duties, teaching effectiveness and their dedication to completing various tasks assigned to them on time.

Three types of staff commitment have been identified and they are affective commitment, continuance and normative commitment. Ibrahim and Perez (2014) explained that affective commitment is the emotional commitment a staff attaches to his or her job and workplace, continuance commitment is borne out of organizational pressure and an intrinsic social obligation to support organizational objectives while normative commitment refers to the commitment of an employee due to a choice to stay with an organization or change job with the chance to incur a loss.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Personal and Professional Leadership Perspective Theory***

One of the many leadership theories that place emphasis on leadership character and its influence on staff engagement is the personal and professional leadership perspective (PiPL). This theory was proposed by D. Smith in 2004. Smith (2004) explained that becoming a personal leader requires that a person should be self-principled, character-based and should be able to lead from his internal consciousness. According to Verrier (2004), personal leadership forms the foundation of interaction with people (interpersonal leadership) and also for professional leadership that is based on team work, motivation, relationship building (character development) and empathic listening. Thus, this kind of leadership portrays leadership character that genuinely supports, motivates and inspires staff to be committed to both personal and professional obligations. Furthermore, it has the capacity to generate all forms of staff commitment because both personal and professional needs are constantly in the purview of the leader as he provides leadership within the organization.

### ***Expectancy Theory of Motivation***

The theories that adequately explain the position of this paper as regards the fundamental principles relating to factors that influence staff commitment to duty are the expectancy theory of motivation and the affective events theory. Ferris (2007) noted that perception plays an important role in this theory because it emphasized the cognitive ability to anticipate likely consequences of behaviour. In clear terms, this theory explains that a staff's commitment to duty is motivated by a perceived expectation (outcome) that can result from his or her behaviour in

carrying out assigned tasks and duties. Muogbo (2013) explained that, the theory has two assumptions. The first assumption deals with an employee's perception about the consequences that result from among those outcomes. The second assumption is that an employee has effective reactions to certain outcomes. Thus, an employee's commitment or dedication to achieving organizational objectives is motivated by the value placed on the perceived outcome resulting from his or her behaviour.

Similarly, Zinko, Ferris, Blass, & Laird (2007) explained that according to his theory, individuals will be motivated to perform by two expectancies. The first expectancy is the probability that the effort put forth will lead to certain preferred outcomes. Thus, when there is certainty that an employee's effort will not be rewarded or recognized, his or her commitment to duty will be greatly reduced. While it is important to identify that employee's may possess intrinsic motivators that enables them to be committed to their job tasks, such commitment is likely to wither away after a while if the leadership and organizational character do not feed such intrinsic motivators. For example, a certain teacher who naturally loves teaching will be motivated to teach effectively to a point when it seems it is irrelevant to continue to perform that task at a certain level of professionalism, when he or she perceives the organization and the leadership character is not concerned with such efforts. Truly, this has become the case in the Nigerian educational system.

### ***Affective Events Theory***

The affective events theory was propounded in 1974 by Howard Weiss and Russell Cropanzano. The theory describes how employee's emotions and mood influence theory organizational commitment, performance and job satisfaction. It posits that employee's natural responses to activities and incidents in the work environment significantly affect their job performance, commitment and job satisfaction. Aginah, Ahiuzu, & Bipeledei (2017) noted that the affective event theory stresses that affective work behaviour are the explanatory factors that influence employees' commitment to duty while cognitive based behaviours predicts job satisfaction.

Furthermore, Aginah et al. (2017) explained that the affective events theory maintains that positive-inducing as well as negative-inducing emotional incidents have a significant impact on staff commitment to duty. At this point, it is important to note that the significance of the effect of these emotional incidents on staff's commitment is dependent on the leadership character available. A strong leadership character would possess the capacity to prevent, mitigate the effects of negative inducing incidents as well as transform such incidents for opportunities to motivate staff through personal involvement.

### **Empirical Review**

Abubakar, Inuwa, & Hamma (2018) examined the effect of transformational leadership style on teacher's motivation. The study noted that no matter what leadership style is applied, it is important that the type of motivation exhibited by a teacher be identified and exploited to improve the teacher's commitment to providing quality teaching and other required services.

Ling and Ibrahim (2013) investigated the relationship between commitment and transformational leadership in secondary schools in Malaysia. Using quantitative survey method, a sample of 1014 teachers from twenty-seven (27) secondary schools in Miri, Sarwak was drawn.

The study recommended for additional leadership training for school leaders to enable them to provide leadership that increases the teacher's commitment to their responsibilities.

Ngamubi (2018) examined the contribution of school head's leadership style to teacher's organizational commitment in Tanzania. The study retrieved relevant data for the study using focus group discussions. The study revealed that leadership character among head of schools was a significant determinant in maintaining teacher's commitment to their schools. Also, that school administrative support extended to teachers through care for their personal and professional needs formed a prime base in augmenting teacher's commitment to their work. The study also revealed that teachers' attachment to their jobs and school was increased when they were allowed to be involved in both school and other professional activities because of their belief that they will be able to shape the context for the school's growth and meet their own needs.

Veeriah (2017) examined the relationship between principal transformational leadership practices and teacher organizational commitment in Primary schools. The findings of the study affirmed the key role of principals in enhancing teacher's organizational commitment in creating and managing the school culture. However, the study noted that it doesn't matter how committed teachers are to their responsibilities, it is greatly unwise to burden them with excessive workload as this has the capacity to reduce their commitment to work.

Chirchir, Kemboi, Kirui, & Ngeno (2014) which sought to establish the leadership style of head teachers in public primary schools as well as investigate its influence on teachers' commitment revealed that most teachers perceived their head teachers utilized transformational leadership more than transactional leadership approach. The study also revealed that teachers' normative commitment were significant while their affective commitment was very low. This was attributed to poor working environment and lack of teaching aids.

Peremotode and Bello (2014) investigated the level of teachers' overall commitment and the level of commitment in each of the three dimensions of organizational commitment which are affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. The findings revealed that the overall level of teachers' commitment to official duties is very high and also high across each of the three dimensions of organizational commitment. The study recommended that government should provide funds for training and retraining of teachers so as to meet the challenges of the on-going economic and social reforms in this time of dwindling State and national resources in order to sustain and possibly improve upon this high level of commitment among the teachers to their duties and to the schools.

## **Elements of Leadership Character**

Character gives depth to leadership as no leadership style is effective overtime except it is rooted in character that inspires trust and commitment. Thus elements of leadership character are those moral, ethical and professional values, traits and virtues that inspire trust and commitment from teachers and other educators. The elements of leadership character can be classified into universalism, transformation and benevolence.

**Universalism:** According to Cooper, Sarros, & Santora (2007), this is the outward expression of leadership character such as humility, respectfulness, compassion, temperance, cooperativeness. Respect is a mutual concept, thus when a principal or an educational administrator genuinely respects his staff, the staff in turn respect him or her and develops an affective commitment to his or her responsibilities.

Humility has long been regarded as an essential quality for leaders; without humility, it is difficult to learn from others especially subordinates. This embraces a degree of self-awareness, the capacity for reflection and a sense of gratitude toward teacher's effort to carry out assigned tasks and responsibilities. Thus, gratitude borne out of sincere humility is an expected outcome (in line with the theoretical foundations already reviewed) that improves teachers' dedication to duty (Gandz, Crossan, Seijts, & Reno, 2013). The ability of principals to work with their staff as a team is strategic to improving their commitment to work. Teachers' involvement in planning activities for school growth has been found to improve their dedication to the job most especially when their efforts are recognized and gratitude is shown.

**Transformation:** Generally, transformation in leadership refers to how leaders achieve universal and benevolent outcomes. Transformational leadership character includes courage, drive, self-discipline and competence. Courage is a strong character which can endear subordinates to their leader. Thus, a courageous principal will provide coverage for his teachers and other staff in the face of risks. This act generates or induces organizational pressure that leads to improved commitment from the teachers. Drive is essential in leaders so that they will establish stretching goals and the plans to achieve them. Thus, principals who demonstrated initiative, a passion to achieve results, the vigour to motivate other and a desire to excel usually instil commitment and/or inspire commitment from his or her teachers and other staff to achieve the set goals of the school. However, as earlier explained, it is important that the principal does not set unrealistic goals that makes his staff to be overstretched as this is counterproductive and will adversely affect their commitment level.

Leaders who are self-discipline exercise appropriate personal control over their thoughts and actions and are able to manage and express in constructive ways (cooper et al., 2007). Through self-discipline, principals engender confidence in their teachers that they can be relied upon to make rational and logical decisions. This confidence leads to improved commitment to follow the direction provided by the principal. It is important to note that self-discipline provides a balance between professional and personal leadership approaches of leadership character. The effect of competence is similar to that of self-discipline as the competence of the leader instils confidence into his or her subordinates. In reality, it can breed both affective and continuance forms of commitment from staff.

**Benevolence:** This is the element of leadership character that is associated with integrity and loyalty. Integrity is essentially about wholeness, completeness and soundness of leadership character. It is most readily apparent in principles such as honesty, authenticity, transparency and consistency. Thus, principals with integrity are respected by his or her teachers and other staff. This respect often leads to affective and continuance forms of commitment from them.

Organizational loyalty refers to commitment to the idea and ideals of an institution. Thus, it is important for a principal to show organizational loyalty as it has the capacity to induce same organizational loyalty in the teachers as well as other staff. It is important to note that the level of organizational loyalty (continuance commitment) of teachers and other staff cannot be greater than that of the principal, so it is necessary that leadership character portrayed by a principal should always reflect the strength of his loyalty.

## **Channels for Achieving Teachers commitment**

It is clear that the strength of leadership character is a strong determinant for achieving staff commitment; the following are channels through which leadership character influences teachers' commitment.

***Motivation:*** leadership character such as drive, courage, gratitude and competence engenders trust and inspires teachers to be fully committed to their job roles. Thus, principals who lack these leadership characteristics often have teachers who are poorly motivated, demoralized and hence are poorly committed to their task. This adversely affects organizational character and organizational performance.

***Mentorship:*** personal leadership character integrated with professional leadership character enables principals to mentor teachers for both specific and other assigned roles through show of character such as self-discipline, respect, gratitude, drive and competence. Teachers who are personally mentored by principals would develop both affirmative and continuance forms of commitment to their duty usually due to the confidence reposed on them by the principal and the accompanying organizational pressure that results from such associations.

***Supervision:*** teachers who are supervised by principals develop trust for their principal and improve their competence levels. These factors improve their commitment to work as they know that they can count on the principals for direction and assistance when in need. This creates a form of enthusiasm that motivates them to take up different challenges and tasks no matter their level of experience.

***Delegation:*** Delegation of responsibilities by principals to teachers' shows them respect, instil confidence and builds trust. Respect, confidence and trust are affective behaviours that can also serve as expected outcomes from the effort or commitment put by teacher in their job roles. So, basically, they see delegation of responsibilities as an expected outcome from their commitment to work.

***Recognition:*** Basically, recognition fits in an expected outcome in the expectancy theory of motivation. Thus, teachers generally want to be recognized for their commitment to work as well as for their performance levels. Thus, principals with the leadership character to recognize, praise and reward teachers for their performance and their commitment would improve organizational commitment and ensure consistency in job performance for longer period of time.

## **CONCLUSION**

The focus in the Nigerian educational system has been on leadership style and the provision of adequate educational infrastructure, faculties and resources as a panacea to achieving inclusive and quality education. Hence, the fact that leadership style that is not engrave in leadership character overtime will become ineffective buttressing why the Nigerian education system continues to perform below expectation irrespective of the innovations and changes implemented. Thus, it is the position of this paper that a lack of leadership and organizational character is a major problem hindering the Nigerian educational system from providing quality

education required for sustainable development. Instilling leadership character into the Nigerian education system will enhance organizational character, staff character development, staff commitment to duty and staff performance as well. The gains as enumerated are pivotal in lifting the educational system to where it designed to be; complementing the overall efforts of other spheres of the Nigerian society.

## Suggestions

Based on the conclusion of this paper, the following were the suggestions made by the researcher:

- There is a need for empirical studies on leadership character and teacher's commitment to duty to be carried out owing to the capacity of effective leadership to be a valuable tool for educational development in Nigeria.
- The Ministry of Education can develop a character Assessment Test that would aid her to appoint heads of educational institutions with strong leadership character.
- Principals, head teachers and other leaders in educational institutions should be selected mainly on their leadership character and not on the basis of their associations.
- The ministry of education should organize workshops, retreats, seminars and specialized trainings that seeks to deepen the leadership character of education leaders.
- Educational leaders such as principals, head teachers and other with poor leadership character should be disciplined to main good organizational character in educational institutions in Nigeria.

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