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Effect of leadership paradigms on customer service delivery in the local public sector in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of transactional and transformational leadership paradigms on customer service delivery in local authorities in the Western region of Kenya. This was based on the recognition of the role played by local authorities namely county, municipal and town councils in offering essential services to citizens at the grass root level of governance. Using a co-relational research design, data was collected from 322 employees of these entities using questionnaires. It was analysed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation test. The study found that both transformational and transactional leadership approaches had a positive and significant influence on customer service delivery. However, the transformational leadership approach had a greater effect on customer service delivery than the transactional leadership approach. The study recommends that the successors of the local authorities, that is county governments, should utilize these approaches in managing their operations in order for them to for accrue benefits to themselves and the citizens in their jurisdiction.

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Introduction

With global competitiveness, sound corporate governance and enhanced sensitivity to corporate social responsibility taking the centre stage in the modern organizational scenario, only those organizations that know how to navigate around these realities will survive. In the public sector, strategic management has been embraced as an approach of driving Government Ministries and agencies towards citizens' service delivery.

In Kenya just as in other developed and developing countries, the concept of performance contracting has been implemented in a bid to enable government agencies' managers to set targets and work towards their attainment within defined contractual terms (Obong'o, 2009; Kobia and Mohammed, 2006). The success of such endeavours however is dependent on the use of an appropriate leadership model to enhance service delivery and organizational performance (Pretorious and Schurink, 2007). Identification and deployment of talented and informed managers who focus on setting and attainment of targets as well as incorporating their subordinates in all aspects of task planning and accomplishment is a critical success factor in modern organizations. According to Yukl (2010), this has resulted in the growing interest in the emotional aspects of leadership where the influence of the leader on the followers in relation to their performance has been explored.

From the 1980's, researchers have been at cross roads in their choice of the most appropriate leadership approach to utilize in ensuring organizational success. Although various paradigms have been explored in studying leadership in recent times, transformational and transactional leadership approaches remain the most studied and discussed paradigms. Several studies have advocated for the transformational leadership paradigm in ensuring superior employee performance (Bass, 1999; Bass and Riggio, 2006; Bass and Avolio, 1994).

Such studies argue that this paradigm has promoted employee performance as well as enhanced job satisfaction by encouraging followers to seek new challenges, motivating them to get more involved in their work, involving them in decision making processes and inspiring loyalty (Wambulwa and Lawler; 2003; Bass and Avolio, 1994). Other scholars however point out the salient positive influences of the transactional leadership paradigm and its determining effect on employee and organizational performance. To them, this leadership paradigm motivates employees, helps them to set work goals, defines rewards they should expect for giving desired effort and provides feedback which ensures that the followers are focused on task attainment (Howell and Hall-Merenda, 2002). Both these paradigms are being practiced in the public and private sector in Kenya. The emphasis of a given leadership paradigm is however dependent on the unique characteristics of a given sector.

Statement of the Research Problem

Local authorities as established under the repealed Local Government Act, Cap 265 of the Laws of Kenya were bodies set up to provide community, social and economic services to citizens such as market stalls, garbage collection, water and sanitation and road construction among others. These bodies included Municipal, County and Town councils. They received funding from the Central Government in the form of Local Authorities Transfer Fund and also collected revenues through charging fees allowed by their By-Laws, which they used to provide services to citizens. To do so, these entities formulated and implemented strategic plans.

Although strategic planning and implementation had been adopted by these entities, the precursor to the current County Governments in Kenya since 2004, many complaints from the citizens were reported on the quality of their service delivery. This scenario begged for answers, given that with steady

financial and human resources, an organization is expected to provide the requisite services to its customers. This paradoxical situation where strategic plans exist, funds for their implementation are provided yet the organization fails to implement the chosen strategies resulting in customer dissatisfaction called for a thorough analysis.

Studies on similar public sector organizations have been done to establish determinants of service delivery where leadership, organizational culture and structure as well as staffing have been identified (Poister and Streib, 2005; Plant, 2009) as drivers of service delivery. However the extent to which transformational and transactional leadership paradigms determine customer service delivery in local public sector organizations, specifically, local authorities has not been examined, especially in Kenya. This study sought to fill that empirical gap by establishing the effect of leadership paradigms on customer service delivery in the local public sector in Kenya.

Objectives

- i) Establish the relationship between transformational leadership paradigm and customer service delivery in the public sector.
- ii) Establish the relationship between transactional leadership paradigm and customer service delivery in the public sector.

Hypothesis

- i) There is no relationship between transformational leadership paradigm and customer service delivery in the public sector.
- ii) There is no relationship between transactional leadership paradigm and customer service delivery in the public sector.

Literature review

The concept of leadership has been studied for a long period of time. This has led it to receive various definitions and perspectives from different schools. This study utilized the definition of Yukl (2010) who saw leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. This definition captures the salient duties of a leader as well as expectations the followers have of the leader.

The study of leadership has been through various phases where in the 1930's and 1940's, researchers in the University of Michigan and Ohio State University identified two broad categories of leadership behavior namely behavior focused on task accomplishment as well as focusing on developing relationships with followers (Nelson and Quick 2009). In the 1960's and 1970's focus of studies on leadership shifted to leaders decision making processes and how leaders delegated duties to followers as well as allowed them to take part in those processes (Moorhead and Griffin, 2000). Situational aspects of leadership featured prominently during this period.

In the 1980's the focus of studies in leadership shifted to emotional and symbolic aspects (Yukl, 2010). Transformational and transactional leadership paradigms began to be explored (Bass and Avolio, 1994; Bass 1990). The debate on the merits and demerits of each paradigm has been on going since then with research focusing on the applicability of each paradigm to different sectors of the economy such as public hospitals (Avolio, Zhu, Koh and Bhatia, 2004) private schools (Paracha, Qamai, Mizra, Hassan and Waqas, 2012), manufacturing firms (Udo and Agu, 2012) and commercial banks (Walumbwa, Lawler and Avolio, 2007) among others.

Transformational leadership paradigm holds the leader should transform and inspire followers to perform beyond

expectations, transcending self interest for the good of the organization (Bass, 1999). Such leaders are visionary, creative and promote participatory decision making (Magutt, 2011). They combine charisma, inspirational leadership and intellectual stimulation in helping people to make positive changes in the way they act. Transactional leadership on the other hand is characterized by the leader guiding and motivating followers towards attainment of goals by clarifying task and role requirements, appealing to their self interest, intervening when standards are not met and sometimes perpetuating patronage (Magutt, 2011; Zhu, Sosik, Riggio and Yang, 2012).

Each of these paradigms has been studied and noted for its contribution to organizational performance. The transformational leadership paradigm emanates from the works of Burns (1978) who felt that such a leadership approach raised the leaders and followers to higher levels of motivation and morality. It focuses on exchanges between leaders and followers in an organizational context where efforts are directed towards human and economic pursuits. The leadership approach influences the development of organizational culture where the desired behavior is embraced, practiced and sustained. Such a culture builds acceptance for the mission of the organization and directs everyone's behavior towards willingly working towards its attainment (Magutt, 2011; Bass, 1999)

Bass (1990) identified four components of the transformational leadership paradigm namely charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. Charisma is characterized by the leader having a vision, mission and ability to motivate followers to go beyond self interest in pursuit of organizational goals. This usually emanates from the ability to win the trust and confidence of the followers as well as being their role model. Inspirational motivation on its part entails a leader setting higher standards to be pursued to the extent that they become the points of reference and pursuit for the followers. He/she builds a vision of an attractive future state that appeals to the followers hence motivates them to go out of their way to pursue such a vision (De Groot, Kiker and Cross 2000).

Intellectual stimulation is another facet of transformational leadership. Here the leader provides followers with new models of thinking that make them break from old ways (Johnson, 2009). The followers find themselves critically analyzing situations, logically engage in thought and undertake careful problem solving processes. As a result, innovation and creativity is built in them as they come up with novel ways of solving problems (Magutt, 2011; De Groot *et al* 2000). Lastly individual consideration focuses on the leader paying close attention, coaching and mentoring the followers (Bass and Avolio, 1994). He teaches and helps them to develop their strengths, individually addresses their concerns and enhances their effectiveness in pursuit of goals and overcoming challenges. In general, when well executed, transformational leadership paradigm has enabled organizations to attain superior performance (Jung and Avolio, 1999; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Howell *et al*, 2002; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

In contrast research on transactional leadership paradigm highlights an exchange process where emphasis is placed on the followers' compliance with the leaders request for pursuit of organizational goals. This may be adhered to by the followers out of fear of reprisals hence they may not enthusiastically pursue task accomplishment. According to Boehanke, Bontis, Distefano and Distefano (2013), the leader under this paradigm focuses on ensuring a path-goal formation in pursuit of

organizational goals. The followers clearly understand what is expected of them, are motivated to achieve these pre-determined goals and the leader strives to eliminate any barriers that may hinder goal attainment. It uses formal rewards and punishment to engage in deal making and meeting contractual obligations in pursuit of organizational goals. This leadership paradigm is therefore built on the reciprocity principle. The leaders will be expected to clarify, provide needed resources and communicate tasks to be accomplished. They will rely on their position, organizational rules and regulations to get employees to co-operate and pursue organizational goals.

Transactional leadership paradigm therefore ensures goals are attained according to a predetermined schedule with followers benefitting from such successful pursuits through contingent rewards. The leader here has to closely monitor the followers in their task performance to ensure minimal deviations and timely correction of mistakes (Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa and Nwakere, 2011). This leadership paradigm was found to be appropriate and preferable in the small scale enterprise sector in Nigeria (Obiwuru *et al.*, 2011) as well as the manufacturing sector (Udoh and Agu, 2012).

With both leadership paradigms appearing to lead to positive outcomes for organizations, researchers are divided on the best leadership paradigm to use to attain superior organizational performance. Findings of various studies highlight the paradoxical nature of utilizing the different leadership approaches. Whereas one may result in superior performance in a given situation, it may bring contrary results in another. Yukl (2010) posits that the same leader may use both leadership paradigms at different times and in different situations. To him therefore, transformational and transactional leadership paradigms are distinct but not mutually exclusive processes.

Another study by Jung and Avolio (1999) showed that employees with a collectivist mindset generated more ideas in brainstorming sessions with a transformational leader whereas those with an individualistic one generated more ideas with a transactional leader under similar circumstances. This pointed to a paradoxical situation requiring further investigation to determine which leadership paradigm was suitable in ensuring superior customer service delivery especially in the local public sector in Kenya. This was based on recognition of the important role played by local authorities, namely county, municipal and town councils in offering essential services to citizens at the grass root level of governance hence the motivation for the study.

Service delivery was looked at from the perspective of the respondents' perception of their level of satisfaction with the extent to which the local authorities provided services as stipulated in the Local Government Act in terms of adequacy, timeliness, relevance and equitably.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlation survey design. Data was collected from 322 respondents who were employees of selected local authorities in the Western region of Kenya. Thirteen out of twenty three local authorities in the area were selected; four county councils, six municipalities and three town councils. Data was collected using questionnaires with items adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire which measured presence of both transactional and transformational leadership paradigms. Data was coded and analyzed at 95% confidence level using both descriptive and Pearson's product moment

correlation coefficient test with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science computer programme (SPSS version 15).

Findings

The study found out that most of the local authorities had male employees, 176 (54.7%), many were aged between 35 and 44 years and had a secondary school education 84(26.1%) and certificate level, 72 (22.4%) as their highest level of education as shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Dimensions	Frequency(%)
Gender	Male	176 (54.7)
	Female	146 (45.3)
Age	Below 25 years	16 (0.5)
	25 - 34 years	97 (30.1)
	35 - 44 years	138 (42.9)
	45 - 54 years	67 (20.8)
	55 years and above	4 (1.2)
Highest level of education	Primary	15 (4.7)
	Secondary	84 (26.1)
	Certificate	72 (22.4)
	Diploma /CPA	121 (37.6)
	Bachelors degree	28 (8.7)
	Masters	2(0.6)
Duration of employment	Below 5 years	112 (24.8)
	6 - 10 years	66 (20.5)
	11 - 14 years	55 (17.1)
	15 years and above	89 (27.6)

Source: Research study 2012

The study further revealed that employees of local authorities acknowledged the practice of both transactional and transformation leadership paradigms in their entities shown on Table 2:

The study found out that the managers of local authorities utilized both transactional and transformational leadership paradigms in pursuit of service delivery to citizens. They told the employees what was expected of them as was confirmed by 122 (37.9%) respondents who agreed and 39(12.1%) respondents who strongly agreed with the statement on the issue. They related these expectations with rewards although the rewards were not forthcoming to the expectations of the respondents. The managers were also concerned with employees doing only what was absolutely essential as was confirmed by 125(38.8%) respondents who agreed and 52(16.1%) respondents who strongly agreed with the statement on the issue. This pointed to a scenario where transactional leadership was emphasized.

The study further revealed that with adoption of strategic planning and implementation in the local public sector, managers were beginning to make employees rethink how things were to be done differently from before as was confirmed by 183(56.8%) of the respondents. They made employees tackle old problems in new ways, helped employees to be intrinsically motivated by finding meaning in what they did as acknowledged by 158(49.1%) respondents. This made the respondents to feel confident and appreciated. As a result the employees were proud to be associated with the managers, especially when given personal attention by the managers. In general the study found that both transformational leadership constructs and the transactional leadership paradigm were being practiced in the local authorities. This could be attributed to the adoption of strategic planning by these entities that calls for transformational leadership as well as the bureaucratic manner in which public organizations are run.

Table 2: Respondents' perception of the leadership paradigms in use in their organizations

Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	FA f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
Transformational leadership My supervisor makes me feel good around him/her.	16(5)	80(24.8)	28(8.7)	169(52.7)	29(9)
I have complete faith in my supervisor.	15(4.7)	82(25.5)	18(5.6)	185(57.5)	22(6.8)
I am proud to associate with my supervisor.	16(5)	45(14)	21(6.5)	172(53.4)	68(21.1)
My supervisor provides appealing images of what I can accomplish.	58(18)	34(10.6)	30(9.3)	190(59)	10(3.1)
My supervisor helps me find meaning in what I do.	28(8.7)	62(19.3)	23(7.1)	158(49.1)	51(15.8)
My supervisor expresses in simple words what I can and should do.	18(5.6)	47(14.6)	30(9.3)	174(54)	53(16.5)
My supervisor helps us think about problems in new ways.	10(3.1)	23(7.1)	72(22.4)	183(56.8)	34(10.6)
My supervisor provides us with new ways of looking at puzzling issues.	16(5.0)	65(20.2)	16(5.0)	157(48.8)	68(21.1)
My supervisor gets us rethinking ideas that we had never questioned before.	32(9.9)	108(33.5)	36(11.2)	121(37.6)	25(7.8)
My supervisor lets us develop ourselves.	26(8.1)	157(48.8)	30(9.3)	98(30.4)	11(3.4)
My supervisor lets us know how he/she thinks we are doing.	41(12.7)	82(25.5)	22(6.8)	126(39.1)	51(15.8)
My supervisor gives personal attention to those who feel or seem rejected.	63(19.6)	68(21.1)	10(3.1)	109(33.9)	72(22.4)
Transactional Leadership					
My supervisor tells us what to do if we want to be rewarded.	33(10.2)	27(8.4)	101(31.4)	122(37.9)	39(12.1)
My supervisor rewards us when we meet our goals.	60(18.6)	126(39.1)	33(10.2)	77(23.9)	26(8.1)
My leader is satisfied when we meet set standards.	50(15.5)	117(36.3)	56(17.4)	77(23.9)	22(6.8)
My supervisor does not change the way we work as long as things are working.	46(14.3)	27(8.4)	50(15.5)	85(26.4)	114(35.4)
My supervisor informs us about the expected standards for our work.	33(10.2)	49(15.2)	21(6.5)	183(56.8)	36(11.2)
My supervisor is content to let us continue working in the same way as always.	64(19.9)	18(5.6)	44(13.7)	78(24.2)	118(36.6)
Whatever we do is okay with our supervisor.	33(10.2)	62(19.3)	47(14.6)	152(47.2)	28(8.7)
My supervisor does not ask us to do more than what is absolutely essential.	47(14.6)	82(25.5)	16(5)	125(38.8)	52(16.1)

Key: : SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, FA=Fairly Agree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

Source: Research study, 2012.

The two null hypotheses of the study were tested in relation to customer service delivery in local authorities using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation test. The findings are presented on Table 3:

Table 3: Relationship between Transactional and Transformational leadership and customer service delivery

		Customer service delivery
Transactional and leadership	Pearson's correlation (r) Sig(2-tailed) N	.613 0.000 322
Transformational leadership	Pearson's correlation (r) Sig (2-tailed) N	.689 0.000 322

Source: Research study 2012

The findings of Table 3 show that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership paradigm and customer service delivery at 0.05 level of significance ($r = 0.689$ $p < 0.05$). It further shows that there is also a strong positive and significant relationship between transactional leadership paradigm and customer service delivery ($r = 0.613$; $p < 0.05$). This led the study to reject both null hypotheses and affirm the alternative hypotheses. The study therefore concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between both transactional leadership and customer service delivery and transformational leadership and customer service delivery in the local public sector. However,

transformational leadership paradigm has a greater effect than transactional leadership paradigm on customer service delivery.

These findings differ with those of earlier studies done on the two paradigms by Obiwuru *et al*(2011) who found out that transactional leadership paradigm had a stronger positive and significant effect on employees' performance than transformational leadership paradigm in the Small and Medium enterprise sector in Nigeria. The current study findings are however similar to those of Udo and Agu (2012) who found that transformational leadership paradigm has a stronger and positive effect on employee and organizational performance than the transactional paradigm in the manufacturing sector in Nigeria. Similar findings on the effect of transformational and transactional leadership paradigms have been reported in the private school sector in Pakistan (Paracha *et al*, 2012).

Conclusions and Implications

From the results, the study concluded that both transactional and transformational leadership paradigms are critical in determining the quality of public service delivery by the local public sector. However, since the adoption of Vision 2030 and the emphasis on strategic planning by government entities to align their activities to the Vision, leaders are expected to display transformational leadership skills so that they can be able to change cultural mindsets that hamper expected service delivery.

With County Governments taking over most of the functions of the former local authorities and getting additional ones as outlined in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 and the County Governments Act of 2012, there are high expectations

among citizens with regard to service delivery. Managers of these entities are therefore expected to utilize the transactional leadership paradigm to get their employees to perform duties as per the rules, regulations and by-laws of these entities. They are further expected to use the transformational leadership constructs to provide selfless, visionary and charismatic leadership that will enable them to motivate employees to perform duties and serve the public to extents that are beyond the bare minimum or what is normally expected of them. This will guarantee superior public service delivery.

Recommendations

- i. Leadership training on both transactional and transformational leadership paradigms should be prioritized by the county governments for enhanced service delivery to the citizens.
- ii. Managers of the local public sector should be encouraged to be proactive and utilize the appropriate leadership paradigm for each situation that will enable them to maximize the benefits from the available resources so as to achieve societal and organizational goals.

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