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Autocratic Leadership Style: Obstacle to Success in Academic Libraries

Abstract

The literature review is on autocratic leadership style as obstacle to success in academic libraries and other institutions were it is practiced. Leaders in institutions of higher education have been observed to be exhibiting autocratic leadership style. This review is geared towards reminding Chief Librarians that autocratic leadership style, no matter the colour it is painted remains a leadership style that is greatly not wanted by the led in the libraries. Most times, positive work attitude is not exhibited by staff. Leaders have been for the most part ignoring staff by following outmoded set of principles about them for the reason that it adhered to Theory X when actually most staff could be closer to the Theory Y set of principles. In this review, the many definitions put forward by researchers where highlighted and discussed. The pros and cons of using autocratic leadership style were also noted. It was concluded that autocratic leadership style prevents the use of creative ideas to problem solving; therefore leaders should learn to exercise restraint in the use of the style in the running of their institutions.

Introduction

Chief librarians are the pivots around which all major and important academic library functions revolve. This means that the approach they adopt in directing, guiding and controlling the staff under them, could determine the pace of progress in their libraries. As leaders, they place themselves before the group as they facilitate progress and inspire staff to accomplish library goals. Northouse (2015) quoted Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States who once said, "A leader is a man who can persuade people to do what they do not want to do, or do what they are too lazy to do". Leadership process involves influencing of staff and directed towards goal attainment. It is the influencing of the actions, attitude, feelings and goals of a subordinate in a social system by a leader with the willing and ready cooperation of the subordinate being influenced. While influencing staff, certain leadership styles are exhibited. Eze (2011) defined leadership styles as the total pattern of a leader's actions, as perceived by the leader's staff. Adeyemi and Adu (2011) on their part further asserted that leadership style is the characteristic way in which a leader relates with his staff and handles the tasks before the group.

A Theory X leader typically exhibits autocratic leadership style and permits little, if any, staff involvement in decisions (Shahzad, Rehman & Abbas, 2010). They over and over again require staff to discuss in addition to involving them in resolution making when in actual fact, commitment have been made for a line of action. Leaders in this category call for staff meetings with a view to answering questions and making announcements. Under this atmosphere, staff may likely not be committed, resulting to poor motivation, low morale and resistance to set goals. The library, whether public, private, or academic, usually has defined objectives for optimal information delivery. An integral, yet often invisible part of this information delivery, could be the guiding models of leadership. Allner (2008) and Ifidon (2006) noted that leadership in libraries had been bedeviled with the challenge of micromanagement and inadequate use of

delegation of authority. The inability of leaders to effectively delegate responsibility and over indulgence on autocratic leadership style or pattern may lead to organizational failure. This may also be as a result of management's inability to effectively plan, organize and control.

Literature Review

According to Ardichvili and Kuchenke (2010) and Egwunyenga (2010), an autocratic leader never allows staff decisions, and the leader is usually very far from staff. It is a leadership that is imposed on an organization and it is sometimes referred to as coercive leadership (Baughman, 2008). Decision making is done by autocratic leaders; however, inputs from staff may be sought in the process, but hardly taken into consideration. This is because they are benevolent autocrats.

Autocratic leadership style opined Maqsood, Bilal and Baig (2013) is known for individual control over all decisions and little input from staff. Typically autocratic leaderships make choices based on their own ideas and judgments and rarely accept advice from followers. Autocratic leadership employs absolute, authoritarian control over staff. Some features of autocratic leadership as observed by Leadership Styles (2015) include little or no input from group members; leaders make the decisions; group leaders dictate all the work methods; group members are rarely trusted with decisions or important tasks.

Autocratic leadership could be beneficial in some instances, such as when decisions need to be made quickly without consulting with a large group of people. Nothing meaningful can be effectively achieved when a certain type of leadership style is used. However, Maqsood, Bilal and Baig (2013) argued that during military conflicts, group members may actually prefer an autocratic style. This style allows staff to focus on performing specific tasks without worrying about making complex decisions and to become highly skilled at performing certain duties, which can be beneficial to the organization.

Autocratic leadership could be good at times, but there may be many occasions where this leadership style could be a reason for inaction and this is why leaders who abuse the use of autocratic leadership style are often viewed as dictatorial. Innovative ideas may elude organizations as a result of the use of autocratic style and this stems from the inability of staff to contribute because they are not consulted (Northouse, 2015). Some researchers have reported inadequate creative solution to problems in an autocratic environment. Autocratic leadership style is sometimes termed the classical style. It is a situation where the leader has all the power in terms of decision making and exercise of authority. The leader does not consult staff, nor are they allowed to give any input, but are expected to obey orders and instructions without receiving any explanations. This is due to the fact that motivation environment is produced by creating a structured set of rewards and punishments (Cherry, 2018). Autocratic leadership style has been greatly criticized during the past years and some studies informed that organizations with many autocratic leaders have higher turnover and absenteeism than other organizations

(Cherry, 2015). In the literature, there are reported cases that autocratic leaders rely on threats and punishment to influence staff; do not trust staff or allow for their input in decision making.

The autocratic style of leadership according to Gosnos and Gallo (2013) is characterized by staff not participating in decision-making process; all decisions are made without the agreement of the staff and they as well control *"with iron hand''*. In addition, they are uncompromising and most times refuse to explain their behavior. Leaders often disregard previous agreement with staff. They define tasks and methods and do not care about staff's decisions and initiative. This informed Ovarhe's (2016) assertion that leadership position is supposed to be a shared responsibility which no one should lay claim to within an organization. The autocratic style is also characterized by implementing the will of a leader, without taking into consideration the opinion of staff. Autocratic leaders decide alone, give orders to staff and expect them to carry them out, based on unilateral, top-down communication. In order to motivate, leaders use their position to decide on the appropriate remuneration.

The, what, when and how a task should be done are most times clearly stated by autocratic leadership. Leader and staff relationship are also clearly defined. Staff inputs are often not sought in decision making. Researchers have found that decision-making was less creative under autocratic leadership, hence Cherry (2015) indicated that it is more difficult to move from autocratic style to democratic style than vice versa. One of the management principles that is always put to use by an autocratic leader is control.

Autocratic leadership is an exchange process, so it is a matter of contingent reinforcement of staff based on performances. It motivates staff by appealing to their personal desires and on instrumental economic transactions. Autocratic leaders generally could use organizational bureaucracy, policy, power, and authority to maintain control. Previous leadership scholars according to Delong (2009) have identified providing contingent rewards on the fulfillment of contractual obligations as a reason for staff performance. This principal behavior represents autocratic leadership because it captures the exchange notion deep-seated in autocratic leader conduct. The transactions or relations included in contingent reward may include tangible (e.g., pay increases) or intangible (e.g., recognition) commodities.

 Autocratic leaders' noted Cherry (2015) employs coercive tactics to enforce rules and to manipulate people and decision making, and reward loyalty over merit. Douglas McGregor's Theory X becomes the standard, believing that people must be forced to work, closely supervised, and rewarded or punished based on individual productivity. Autocratic leadership's concern is strict compliance with organizational chart and clear definition of processes. Fred Fiedler found that authoritarian leaders can be viewed as successful in certain task situations- allowing for the extremes of consideration and ruthlessness, depending on the situation (Leonard, 2018; Men, 2010).

The autocratic leadership style is determined by the leader's power due to the fact that the leader has absolute power in a group or organization. The leader alone makes decisions and takes responsibility for the conduct, results and achievement of the organization. From co-workers he requires them to exclusively follow his instructions and directives, to respect and implement his decisions and orders and communicates formally and in written form. This leadership style can be applied for tasks that need to be urgently completed, with dependent associates in unstable working groups. In the beginning, this leadership style is effective and gives good results. However, argued Cherry (2015) if this type of leader behavior is applied long-term, without considering the level of human resources and the need for independence of associates, it becomes a limiting factor in the development of the organization. This style of leadership, characterized by one way communication channels, confirms that autocratic leaders are mostly not interested in feedback and staff do not have influence and control over the decision making process. Hence, Hoyle (2012) opined that autocratic leadership style can be illustrated in the structure of a pyramid, whereby on the top of the hierarchy stands the leader, while staff are below.

When faced with the need to provide a decision, an autocratic leader is one who would come up with a solution for the entire group on their own. The autocratic leader would generally solve an issue and make decisions for the group using observations and what they feel is needed or most important for the majority of the group members to benefit at that time (Val & Kemp, 2015).These are the leaders that would decide for the group when they would wake up and depart, and exactly how far they should go for that day. If the group came across any conflicts or barriers within the expedition, these leaders would also make the decisions on their own, inquiring feedback from the three hired instructors to ensure that their decisions were okay. Also, Hernon and Rositer (2007) noted that autocratic leaderships alone determine policy guidelines as well as share out work to library staff without consulting them.

Some people tend to think of this style as a sort of command and control thing, using demeaning language, leading by threats and abusing their influence or authority. This is not the authoritarian style, rather it is an abusive, unprofessional style called "bossing people around Clark (2015)." It has no place in a leader's repertoire. The authoritarian style should normally only be used on rare occasions. Eze (2011) and Maqsood, Bilal and Baig (2013) indicated that if you do not want to gain more commitment and motivation from your staff, then you should use autocratic style. Not a single leader wants it that way!

Authoritarian leadership is best applied to situations where there is little time for group decision-making or where the leader is the most knowledgeable member of the group. An autocratic leader dictates tasks and timelines to staff and imparts a strong focus on an objective hence Leadership for Communities (2015) acknowledged that the style could be especially functional for a team with inexperienced and/or unskilled members.

A satisfied worker shows positive work attitude and an unsatisfied worker arising from the use of autocratic leadership style is an unnecessary addition to his or her institution's problems (Allner,

2008; Azuh, 2015, Egwenyenga, 2010; Long, 2008). Egwenyenga and Long asserted that although autocratic leaders' emphasis is on high productivity, it often breeds counter-forces of antagonism and restriction of output. Frequently, it could result in hostile attitudes, a suppression of conflict, distorted and guarded communications, high labour turnover and absenteeism, low productivity and work quality. This leadership tends to produce dependent and uncreative staff that are afraid to seek responsibility. The reverse is the case when a leader concern and do the accepted thing with respect to staff priority, they completely win staff over. When that happens, according to Godfrey and Uwaje (2016), there is no limit to what the staff can do to ensure the leader's success.

In certain situation, autocratic style could be the best approach but Leadership Styles (2015) asserted that autocratic leadership style should not be used when staff becomes tense, fearful, or resentful; expect to have their opinions heard; there is low staff morale, high turnover and absenteeism and work stoppage. Also, some of the appropriate conditions to use it are when you have all the information to solve the problem, you are short on time, and your staff are well motivated. The situations upon which the style could be used opined Cherry (2018) could include new, untrained staff who don't know which tasks to perform or which procedures to follow and effective supervision can be provided only through detailed instructions. Others are when staff do not respond to any other leadership style, there are high-volume production needs on a daily basis and there is limited time in which to make a decision.

Implication of the Review

This review is based on Douglas McGregor (1957) Theory X and Theory Y reasoning. McGregor (1957) noted that a leader's belief system influences organizational decisions. What leaders do or do not do, either in decision making or in using other management principles, all are linked to the leader's belief system. Theory X according to McGregor states that;
- an average worker does not want to work
- and will avoid work if he can
- so, must be forced to work using threat and punishment.
  While Theory Y on the other hand states that:
- for the most part, staff are not lazy
- staff enjoy working and to seek responsibility
- a good number of staff are creative and imaginative
- the majority of staff not showing interest in their workplace is as a result of managements' inability to provide suitable and enabling working environment.

The relationship of the theory to this review is that Theory Y implies a more human and supportive approach to managing staff. McGregor's argument was that management has been for the most part ignoring staff by sticking to outmoded set of assumptions about them because it adhered to theory X when actually most staff could be closer to the theory Y set of assumptions. A number of staff may have theory Y potential for growth; therefore, management's role is to provide an enabling environment in which the potential of staff could be released at work. With these assumptions, leadership role is to develop the potentials in staff and help them release that potential towards common objectives.

Conclusion

Autocratic leadership style prevents the use of creative ideas to problem solving. Therefore leaders should learn to exercise restraint in the use of the style in the running of their institutions. Autocratic style could sometimes be a good method to achieve success in a workplace situation. It does not completely make institutions to malfunction. The representation of autocratic leadership style just presented has been an extreme one. Actually, the style has its shortcomings and numerous advantages. In short, autocratic leadership could lead to higher productivity but in the long-run, lack of initiative and institutional squabble are common. The increase in productivity experienced in an autocratic situation is as a result of the leader's use of performance recognition and sanction. The utilizing of autocratic leadership style in the workplace according to some scholars was used to construct vast railroad systems, operated giant steel mills as well as produced the vibrant industrial progress that made the United States of America famous.

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