
Leadership Competencies and Organizational Performance: A Conceptual and Empirical Review

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Abstract. This paper reviews extant conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature of the influence of leadership competencies and organizational performance which has raised a number of concerns that present a case for a new theoretical model suitable for the expansion of current understanding of how leadership competencies influence performance.

Key words: leadership competencies, environmental turbulence, organization performance

Introduction

Corporate management play a critical role in initiating change requirements in line with desired or ideal performance level, and in implementing and evaluating the change process. According to Tizard (2018), the successful managers ensure that right leadership role and leadership competencies are put in place to involve and transform individuals through the different change stages as part of normal business. Connolly and Connolly (2017) observed effective leadership as a prerequisite for organizations to sustain business in the face of problems caused by the rapid growth of the economic environment. In this regard, top management are responsible for managing change process and steering the operation of the company, influencing and motivating employees by cultivating a positive organizational culture.

Corporate leadership and leadership competencies are current issues affecting organization's performance across the globe. Tizard (2010) observes that organization's performance is a function of its corporate leadership competencies. However on the contrary, inadequate leadership competencies have been reported by many researchers over the last decades as the critical challenge affecting organization's performance majorly in developing nations. Some of the notable scholars that have raised concern over the lack of leadership competence to deal with organization's performance and change are Van de Ven and Poole (2005), Greenwood and Hinings (2016), Gersick (2014).

World Competitiveness Report of 2018 ranked low most of Africa states in terms of human resources skill parameter for assessing competencies. For instance, the report indicated that; labor relations generally hostile, customer satisfaction not emphasized, managers generally lacking a sense of entrepreneurship among others. Fontyn (2016) study reported inadequacy of competencies and talents at corporate management of most organizations in developing nations. Principally, not only is the lack of change management leadership a universal problem, but also a particular issue for as many business leaders run their companies purely on profit maximization, through old models of leadership like autocracy in which authority comes with the position rather than through leadership (Cornell, 2016). Consequently, most organizations lag behind in terms of technological paradigm shift in quest for innovation majorly in public sector.

Leadership competencies have become a mandatory for survival in the current environment of global communication, rapid change and instant access to information. Organizations have increasingly become adaptive work environment which equally requires the adaptive leader to control direction, protection, conflict and norms within the organization's systems. This requires ability to influence, a common goal and employees that are willing to work toward the vision. Critical elements of leadership have inadequately characterized most

organizations at a struggle towards their sustainability. In addition, the topics of corporate leadership competencies and organizational performance has attracted interest from academics and practitioners and mixed findings have been reported on the same. However, little critical research has been done to present the empirical explanation of the nexus between top leadership competencies and organizational performance.

Conceptual Review

Conceptualization of Leadership Competencies

The competency movement has its origins in the changing economic and political context of the late 1960s, with the concept of managerial competency largely arising from the work of McClelland (1973) and the McBer consultancy group in the 1970s (Horton, 2002). A study by American Management Association in the early 1980s grounded the concept in behavioral and performance terms, with a job competency being defined as an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to effective performance in a job (Boyatzis, 1982). According to Boyatzis (1982), 19 generic behavior competencies associated with above-average managerial performance, grouped into five clusters of goal and action management, leadership, human resource management, focus on others and directing subordinates, were identified. Sparrow (1997) further developed the concept of leadership competency by distinguishing three main categories of approach namely the management competence (technical or functional) approach which determine expected standards of workplace behavior; the behavioral competencies of effective and superior managers which promotes the behavior that lead to enhanced performance; and the organizational competency or strategic core competence approach that shifted attention from the individual to the organization and the business processes leading to enhanced innovation, learning and performance.

Leadership Competency Constructs and Models

Several models of leadership competencies developed primarily focused on behavioral and performance terms of effective management. These models are:

Boyatzis Leadership Competency Model

This is one of the earliest models developed by Boyatzis (1982) and identified 19 competencies that aligned with effective leadership as clustered in five categories. The categories, according to Boyatzis (1982), are goal and action management, leadership, human resource management, focus on others, and directing subordinates.

Sparrow's Leadership Competency Model

This model was developed by Sparrow (1997) and identified management competence and behavioral competencies of effective managers. This model combines both competencies at the individual level and the organizational competency or strategic competency with a focus on practices that lead to organizational innovation. According to Sparrow (1997) organizational competency are characteristic that evolved from the behaviors of the individuals within the organizational context.

Contemporary Leadership Competency Models

Contemporary leadership competency models are principally grounded on the complexity of organizational life and how both situational and individual differences can attenuate or increase the effectiveness of leadership competencies. This model generally moved away from the simplistic notion of contemporary competencies of knowledge, skills and ability (KSAs) and focus on today's organization complexity.

Leadership Competencies Based on Self-Determination Theory

The model posits that leaders need to nurture their subordinates' basic psychological needs including autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2002). According to

the model, leaders show competence in autonomy when they encourage their subordinates to realize that they have choices and their behavior is under their own control. Leaders who allow autonomy are less likely to demand accountability or apply pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Accordingly, when leaders show relatedness, they show their subordinates that they care about their contribution to the team and sustain connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Finally, the model emphasizes on effective leaders to make employees feel competent through encouraging them to demonstrate their skills and allowing them to grow and flourish (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Leadership Strataplex model

The Leadership Strataplex model is a multi-level model and includes skill requirements that are layered (strata) and segmented (plex), leading to the name of Strataplex (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). The model consists of the following leadership skill requirements: cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, business skills, and strategic skills. Accordingly, cognitive skills include the ability to communicate well both verbally and in writing, and the ability to learn and adapt; interpersonal skills involve effective social interactions and the ability to influence others; business skills involved operations analysis and the management of material resources (Mumford et al., 2007). Further to that, the model posits that leadership positions at higher levels of the organization required strategic skills that are most important for organizational effectiveness and to understand complexity and deal with ambiguity to foster change and innovation.

Definitions of Leadership and Leadership Competency

Leadership is defined as the pursuit that involves organizing or leading a group of people whether in an organization or country for the common purpose. It involves different set ups from leading the groups by establishing clear vision and motive, providing clear information, knowledge and balancing the conflicts of different views in order to address the interest of all members. Leadership can be reflected in various parts of lives even from personal-family to politics, religion, corporate organizations, government services, sports, military's that has been the integral part of societies since the human civilization

According to Bass and Stogdill (1990), leadership is the art of leading people to do right things with their consistent vision aiming to involve everyone for the common objective. John Gardner (1990) stressed the fact that leaders inspire people, step outside for change or share the common objectives held by their leader. Northouse (2014) avers that leadership is the aspect to inspire and influence groups access their skills, traits and focus on building relationship and businesses. Just like definitions of leadership, the concept of leadership also varies upon different types of leaders and where it is acted upon. According to Garrow (2015), religious leaders has distinct way of leading people quite distinct from political leaders or corporate business leaders, all who also has other own ways to lead their people. Jean-Paul (2016) stressed that different leaders have their unique way to lead people and establish the leadership quality to accomplish the mission with the common view of their followers.

Hollenbeck, McCall and Silzer (2006) defined leadership competencies to represent a combined set of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) that constitute effective leadership within an organization. The idea of a leadership competency model originated from McClelland's work in the 1960s on what constituted an effective manager. Since then, efforts to identify and measure leadership competencies have become part of a broader trend towards a competency-based management approach as many organizations are developing competency models they use for selection, assessment and development activities.

Nature of Leadership Competency

Leadership competencies being viewed as skills and behaviors that foster superior performance, organizations are on a higher alert to remain competent in order to maintain the

competitive market and be relevant in the business world. Through the leadership competency, organizations have been able to manage constructive changes, solve problems and make decisions, set the right strategies and structures that can help realize the vision and mission of the organization and most importantly enhance business skills and knowledge through trainings and workshops in order to empower its employees for the competitive market advantage.

Leadership competencies have also been a key contributing factor for increased self-awareness, developing adaptability to the market field and work out possible ways to find solutions to the ever growing economy for a better future. Organizational performance has also been attributed to leadership competency in the sense that the competency in leadership is a function of integrity and ethical leadership that is a condition that influences quality and constructive relationships which is key in the productivity of any organization (Northouse, 2016). This will motivate higher productivity and thus improved performance.

Constructs of Leadership Competencies

Environmental Turbulence

According to Ansoff and McDonnell (1990), environmental turbulence is the combined measurement of changeability, instability and predictability which is reflected in the complexity of change in the environment. Kipley, Lewis and Jewe (2012), environmental turbulence is the amount of change and complexity in the environment. The turbulence in the environment can also be referred as the dynamism, complexity and predictability in the environment (Khandwalla, 1977). This is believed to have a negative effect on performance and therefore, organizations are forced to change their formalities and adopt new systems and strategies to fit the changing environment (Draft, 2016).

Organizations exist in an environment where they have to work out the way in which to survive. Different organizations are faced by different conditions which are beyond their control forcing them to make paradigm shift for the better future of the organizations. The management need to be aware of these factors in order to take advantage of the opportunities and turn them into possibilities for the betterment of the organization's future. In this regard it is the opportunity of the management to formulate strategies that seek to address the impact of the threats in the organization so that a fit can be attained between the internal capabilities and external possibilities (Mintzeberg, Ahlstrand & Lempel, 2009).

Organizations operating in turbulent environments has to forecast and predict future changes by developing systems, structures and strategies to cope in the environment besides monitoring the changing environmental conditions (Karake, 1997). The management therefore, have an obligation to gather information about their environments in order to address issues of uncertainty and dynamism for the organizations to enjoy the competitive advantage.

Organizational Transformation

Organizations need to change their traditional ways of working and adopt new modernized ways of working in order to meet the competitive market place. Organizations that have embraced the new methodologies and techniques are enjoying the market completion while those that have not, they are still struggling to meet their goals. The need for organizational transformation starts when organizational management feels dissatisfaction from the current situation. Organizational changes may be planned or unplanned but in both cases the organization's transformations are very important and sometimes become crucial to handle the changes. Leadership planning and vision is most important.

The planned transformations are more related to the management in which management put deliberate effort to make something happen. Strong commitment and systematic approach is required in planned changes and the most important thing in planned changes are based on the vision of leader and stated objectives.

Change is crucial for organizations in growing, highly competitive business environments. The organizational life has been made inevitable feature by global, technological and economic pace. This calls for organizations to modify their strategies, processes, and structures and adopt different models according to the state of the organization so that relevant change procedures are established. These models include; action research model, the positive model, and Lewin's change model which involves unfreezing, movement, and refreezing (Burke, 2008). Organizational need to move from the current state to the desired future state because the future is uncertain and may concern the people's worth, coping abilities and competency. This is not a welcoming note to most organizations as most employees do not support change unless they are convinced against the status quo.

The change resistance from employees is an important aspect as far as leadership is concerned. This therefore, will call for employee involvement as the most effective strategy in formulating the planning and implementing change. This will lead high quality change and prevail over the resistance in implementing stage (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). By doing this a variety of information and ideas may be generated, which may contribute the innovations effective and suitable in the situation, raise likelihood, create member commitment in implementing change, and employee motivation leading change effort in work (Cummings & Molloy, 1977). After getting out of the status quo, the leaders are required to support employee's involvement for accelerating the change in organization

There are different kinds of changes according to the nature of organization and its environment, some organizations adopts small changes (incremental changes) while others may go deep towards the organizational transformation which requires the changes in broader scale though very difficult to handle (Draft, 2016). There are further three phases of organizational transformations which organizations usually adopt. These are unfreezing, moving and refreezing (Senior & Fleming, 2006). Unfreezing is about changing the attitudes and behavior of the employees and working environment. This is very important type of change because while going through any type of change it is important to create a need for transformation among all the participants.

The leader's role is also very important in unfreezing because it requires a well - structured way of implementing the change by managing the behavior and attitudes of people working together. It also requires strong commitment of all the people to work together for a stated common vision. Moving is the next phase in which organizational top management identifies, plan, and implement the appropriate strategies. In this phase it is also decided that either organization has to go for incremental or radical changes. The vision of the leader is also very important for planning and implementing the strategies. All the strategies are shaped in the moving phase. The next step is to refreeze the change situation in which leaders assist in stabilizing the changes so that it becomes integrated into status quo. This is most important to understand for the leaders that how to refreeze the changes because if refreezing is incomplete or not managed properly the change will be ineffective and the pre-change behaviors will be resumed. Refreezing always encourages the possibilities of the further changes.

Organizational Performance

These are results of an organization. They show the output of the organization (Luthans, 2010). For an organization to perform well against the present standards, they must be certain that everyone poses the right expertise, skills and competencies to perform to the best of their ability and deliver significant value to the organization (Drath, 2009). Scholars observes that quality leadership competencies directly influence organizational performance (Avery, 2008).

The working environment of leaders has changed a lot during the last twenty years. Twenty years ago, to be a leader was a position and nowadays it is a task, a very difficult and challenging task. The global world of the twenty-first century is requiring new leaders with a unique combination of competencies. A modern approach to organizational management

emphasizes the need not only for managers with leadership potential. Increasingly, focus is on educating leaders at all levels of the organization, with a strong emphasis on the effective use of human resources - the source of the main competitive advantage of organizations. Authors point out that one of the most significant claims of the Human Relations Movement was that leadership was the single most important factor in motivating employees and improving productivity.

Empirical Review

Leadership Competencies

Leadership competencies being viewed as skills, attributes and knowledge, there are specific competencies that are needed for effective leadership. These are; human, conceptual, technical, emotional intelligence, and industry skills. In an organization therefore, the following competencies are key: Cognitive Competency, Functional competency social competency and interpersonal competency.

Cognitive Competencies

Cognitive leadership competencies relate to leader's reasoning or rational power and ability. Different cognitive competencies have variable outcomes under different circumstances and should be adapted to particular demands of the situation that is the particular requirements of the people involved and the particular challenges facing the organization (Thisera, 2013). Medves (2006) views this dimension as a competency that includes general principle, laws, theories and concepts. Under this competency, critical thinking, strategic thinking and problem solving is well addressed.

Interpersonal Competencies

Interpersonal competencies relate to abilities that influence people by promoting higher levels of intrinsic value associated with goal accomplishment, and creating a higher of personal commitment on the part of the leader and followers to a common vision, mission and organizational goals (Eisenbach, Watson & Pillar, 2009). These competencies are composed of four dimensions; ideals of influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Social Competencies

Social competencies relate to the abilities that enable an individual to establish and maintain quality relationships with others. These competencies are required for teamwork and creating a collective responsibility for all individuals who work in an organization. Wang, Tsui and Xin (2011) points that social competency has two dimensions. That is making decisions and leading. Ethical leaders must not only act and make decisions ethically, but also lead ethically in the ways they treat people in everyday interactions, in their attitudes, in their ways of encouragement, and in the direction in which they steer their organizations (Wang, Tsui & Xin, 2011). In an organization fellowship and leadership is intertwined. Working environment should be conducive and favorable to each other. Effective leaders have to portray quality relationships which is an influencing factor that creates confidence, trust and commitment.

Functional Competencies

These relate to methodological knowledge about the organization. Medves (2006) relates these competencies to qualifications and skills that an individual requires for everyday problem solving, working and efficacy in their places of work or positions. These competencies include, communication skills, intellectual skills, emotional intelligence and managerial skills.

Achoch, Gakure and Waititu (2014) conducted a study on the influence of self-awareness and leadership competencies on the transformation of public service reform initiatives. They used exploratory research design with a sample size of 178 respondents drawn from civil service deployed in Nairobi using questionnaires as data collection tool. The study found that a leadership competency is important in terms of both perceptions of leader effectiveness and follower satisfaction. The findings further noted effective public sector management reforms always depended to some degree on leadership competency behavior. In addition, leaders who exhibit transformation qualities had a positive effect on employee commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. This study was not conducted in a lower management level, thus the need for the study.

A study by Khan et al. (2012) investigated the relationship of leadership competencies, organization commitment and organization performance using quantitative research design. The study focused on call centers of telecom sector operating in Islamabad and used 245 questionnaires. The findings indicated that employee's organization commitment strongly mediated the process of the impact of functional leadership competencies on the organization performance. That is, though performance leadership competencies positively impacted on organization performance, the presence of the organization's commitment boosted the relationship. This study was not conducted in a lower management level and did not look into personal related competencies too.

Similarly, Moore and Rudd (2011) attempted to identify the major leadership competencies in skilled areas and specific leadership competencies within each skill area needed by Extension leaders. Using purposive sampling techniques and sample size of 7 administrative heads of departments. The findings identified six major Leadership competency skill are needed by extension leaders: human conceptual, technical, communication, emotional intelligence, and industry knowledge skills. This study did not look at the social and interpersonal leadership competencies.

Spendlove (2007) conducted a study on competencies and academic leadership in higher learning intuitions in the United Kingdom. Taking descriptive research design, qualitative and quantitative approach and 207 sample size, the study reported that leadership competencies enable universities and colleges to survive and continually develop. In addition, the study worked on competencies such as communication skills, persuasive skills, and professional skills. This study did not look at the social and personal leadership competencies. This study will therefore, fill the gap to ascertain whether social and personal competencies are key to an organization's change process.

Gonzalez (2004) studied leadership competencies of Mexican senior administrators of International Higher Learning Institutions (IHLI). Taking cross-sectional research design, 308 sampled size and primary data collected through questionnaire. The study found that social forces and trends inside and outside of Mexican higher education institutions are driving the need for a senior administrator with a broad understanding of the national situation, with the resources to support the national initiative, and with the ability to make appropriate responses in their own institutions. The study further reported that the senior administrators possess the following competencies: personal characteristics and skills, administrative competencies, competencies of social responsibility and institutional competencies. This study did not look at the social and personal leadership competencies.

The study by Bwoma (2011) titled 'Influence of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of Youth Group Projects in Kisii Central District' analyzed leadership competencies required for managing youth group projects. Adopting a descriptive survey research design, primary data collected through questionnaires from 21 youth groups and 302 respondents selected using simple random and analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. The major findings indicated that youth's group members need to be encouraged to train in financial management skills;

leadership competencies, marketing and business management skills to help them to earn higher profit margins in their groups hence improved performance. This study did not look at the social and personal leadership competencies.

Sabir et al. (2012) conducted a study on the impact of corporate ethical values on leadership competencies and employee performance in Pakistan. The study used three variables namely: corporate ethical values, social awareness leadership competencies and employee performance. The study found that social leadership competencies having no ethical manners are harmful, vicious and even poisonous. Results also revealed that a corporate ethical value is the most important factor for social leadership competencies and employee's motivation. This study did not look at the social and personal leadership competences that will help create relationships that will foster conducive working environment that is relevant to any change processes in the organization.

Environmental Turbulence

According to Ansoff and McDonnell (1990), environmental turbulence is the combined measurement of changeability, instability and predictability which is reflected in the complexity of change in the environment. Kipley, Lewis and Jewe (2012) aver that environmental turbulence is the amount of change and complexity in the environment. The turbulence in the environment can also be referred as the dynamism, complexity and predictability in the environment (Khandwalla, 1977). This is believed to have a negative effect on performance and therefore, organizations are forced to change their formalities and adopt new systems and strategies to fit the changing environment (Boyne, 2003).

The main agenda of any organization is its growth and sustainability. In some cases, this might not be the case due to some forces either internal or external that affect the entire organizational process. For organizations to survive in such a turbulent environment, organizational leadership need to understand all the dimensions or components that may come along as a result of the turbulent conditions. The critical forces that need to be understood are; environmental dynamism, complexity, predictability, uncertainty, changeability and munificence.

Environmental Dynamism

Environmental dynamism is the level of environmental predictability which is being manifested by the degree of variance in levels of an organization and the market change plus the uncertainty about internal and external forces that are beyond man's control (Baum & Walm, 2003). Luxmore et al. (2012) view dynamism as the degree of instability and stability of change in the environment. To better understand the degree of environmental dynamism, it is crucial to analyze it from different perspectives. For example, changeability, predictability and munificence.

Munificence

Not all organizations are at a position to meet all its requirements. In some cases, there might be a lack of some important resources which may lead to an organization's stagnation and on the other hand, organizations may be at a position to enjoy the availability of resources thus increased performance. Munificence therefore, is believed to be the potential for organizational growth and development which is interpreted as the available economic resources. Organizations operating in regions where resources are plenty enjoy a munificent environment. On the contrary, organizations located in poor regions, faces hostile environments. Boyne (2003) concludes that abundant resources lead to better performance.

Environmental Complexity

According to Child (1972), environmental complexity is heterogeneity and a range in the activities that are highly relevant to an organization's operations. Narayanan and Nath (1993) on the other hand explained that environmental complexity is a set of important environmental factors that affect the organization. Complexity is a function of the number of environmental components which the firm must include within it.

Environmental Predictability

Environmental Predictability as reflected by Thompson (1967) represents the extent to which cause and effect relationships concerning environmental elements are incomplete. Child (1972) describes predictability as the degree of irregularity in the overall pattern of change.

Many authors have found empirical support arguing that turbulent environments affect performance. Hashim et al. (2001) examined relationship between environmental complexity, strategy and performance through practice of 100 SMEs in manufacturing sector in Malaysia. The findings indicate that relationship between business strategy and performance of SME's is moderated by environmental complexity.

McNamara et al. (2002) through using hierarchical regression to (76) top management teams from banks in three U.S found a significant relationship between the complexity of cognitive strategic groups and subsequent firm performance. Nadkarni & Narayanan (2007) argued that turbulent and unpredictable environments affected firm's performance. Cannon & John (2007) indicating that increased complexity was associated with decreased performance through evaluating the complexity-performance link from two perspectives that is; the first in which association with performance was assumed to be constant across all sub dimensions of complexity, the second in which that assumption was relaxed.

Awang et al. (2008) confirms that hotel performance in Malaysia is closely associated with the environment volatility rate. Akgün et al. (2008) discovered that the relationship between emotional capability and firm performance was influenced by the environmental dynamism including changes in industry, competition and consumer. Boyne and Meier (2009) found that turbulence has a negative effect on performance, and that this is compounded by internal organizational change. Muglia (2010) findings support the previous studies that emphasize organizational environmental turbulence as a driving variable for management support and overall medical processes.

Gül (2011) found that environmental dynamism has a positive effect on firm performance. Tang et al. (2007) based on a sample of (166) firms in Northern China found that there is a positive influence of environmental turbulence on performance. Wang (2008) Using data from (213) medium-to-large UK firms found there is a relationship between environmental complexity and Performance. Jalali (2012) through using data from (183) decision makers in charge of exports in Iranian SME's in food industry found that innovativeness, as one of the EO dimensions, is the most effective strategy for organizations that can help them to deal with the turbulent environmental condition and improve their export performance. A majority of these studies support the proposition that turbulence has a negative effect on performance (Anderson & Tushman, 2001).

Hashim et al. (2001) examined the relationship between environmental complexity, strategy and performance through practice of 100 SMES, in a manufacturing sector in Malaysia and the findings indicate that a relationship between business strategy and performance is moderated by environmental complexity. Davies et al. (1991) from a survey involving personal interviews with managers in 93 companies representing six industries found that turbulence has a significant causal impact on organizational performance.

For organizations to survive in these turbulent conditions, organizational leadership need to understand and acknowledge the role the environment plays in organization's management

and administration and most importantly be conversant with the nature and impacts of environmental forces in both internal and external environments. The actions and intentions of organizations are therefore shaped by influences emanating from the environment that is continually experiencing one form of change or another. To successfully manage organizations and their interaction with the environment, leadership needs to pay attention to both resources and the nature and velocity of change in the operating environment.

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