

SUSTAINING NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY THROUGH SERVANT - LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This paper takes a critical look at how Nigerian leaders, military and civilian, have actually fared over the years. The study reveals that the country's leaders have not performed well and so, have not succeeded in meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens. The paper therefore, calls for entrenchment of a better, humane and selfless type of leadership (servant-leadership) in the democratic structure of the country. This presentation reviews literatures on leadership styles and characteristics of servant-leadership. It also establishes a relationship between servant-leadership and democracy and as well makes necessary recommendations.

Introduction

Adeyemi (2008) observed that Africa has 40 per cent of the world's mineral resources and only 10 per cent of its population but, is still the poorest continent. The major reason for this ironical situation is leadership problem. African leaders, including those of Nigeria, have all along been self-centred and inconsiderate. In most cases, they misuse available resources and blindly embezzle public funds. The public outcry against this leadership wrecklessness has been alarming. Little wonder then that President Musa Yar'Adua of Nigeria, while being sworn in on May 29, 2007, anchored his presidency on servant-leadership.

Davis (1967) defined leadership as the ability to persuade others to achieve defined objectives enthusiastically. Robbins (2005) defined it as the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals. In their own contribution, Kreitner and Kinicki (2004, p. 595), construed the concept as "a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals".

Servant-leadership is a philosophy of managing which focuses on increased service to others rather than to oneself (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004). In other words, a servant-leader acts as a steward; he puts the needs of others as his first priority. By 'others' we mean customers, community, followers or employees.

Robert Greenleaf was the one who originated the term "servant-leadership" in 1970 (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004). It was his opinion that genuine and great leaders characteristically have great love and compassion for their followers and so are ever ready to sacrifice their own pleasure on the altar of followers' comfort.

Esele (2007) supported the viewpoint of Greenleaf above. To him, a servant-leader is a leader who is able to bury his own self-interests for the common good of others. Agada (2007, p. 25), while explaining the concept of servant-leadership stated that: "A servant-leader would never be a ruler, and neither will he be a boss. He would most likely be a team player who operates an open-door policy. This would in turn endear him to the people and they would help him to succeed in his assignment as a leader".

This paper seeks to uncover the leadership profile of Nigerian leaders during the military and civilian regimes. It also intends to recommend and justify servant-leadership as a reliable tool for keeping democracy alive in the country.

Leadership Styles

Different authors and management theorists categorize leadership styles in different ways. For the purpose of this paper, we shall consider classification of leadership styles on the basis of how leaders use their authority or power. To this end, leaders are seen as applying three major styles namely, autocratic, participative and free-rein leadership.

Autocratic Leadership

Davis (1967) posited that autocracy is a situation where leaders centralize power and decision making in themselves, as indicated in figure 1. McGregor (1960) laid the foundation of his Theory X on this leadership style.

McGregor's (1960) Theory X preaches autocracy against the background that human beings are naturally lazy, lack foresight and that until they are coerced by the leader they will not achieve desired results. Hence, autocratic leaders believe in threat, force and sanctions in an effort to achieve organizational goals.

Participative Leadership

Participative or democratic leadership is the direct opposite of autocracy. It focuses on decentralization of authority and team work. According to Davis (1967), the leader and group are acting as a social unit. Vroom (1977) saw participative decision making as an ideal, or at least as the democratic style at which organisation should aim in order to achieve effectiveness. McGregor's (1960) Theory Y is built on the premise of democratic or participative leadership. The theory has a positive, humanistic message about people's sense of responsibility. It states that human beings are not naturally lazy and that they are willing to work purposefully toward common ends if conducive working atmosphere is provided (Appleby, 1994). In essence, participative leadership is people-oriented. However, for a democratic leader to succeed, he needs to have vision, relevant experience, integrity and skill (Heller, 1992; Poole and Warner, 1998; Zaccaro et al, 1991; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991).

Free-rein Leadership

Leaders who practise this leadership style use their power very little, if at all, giving subordinates a high degree of independence in their operations, as shown in figure 1. The leaders depend, to a large extent, on subordinates to set their own goals and the means of achieving them. According to Davis (1967), free-rein leadership fails to give the workgroup the advantages of leader-inspired motivation.

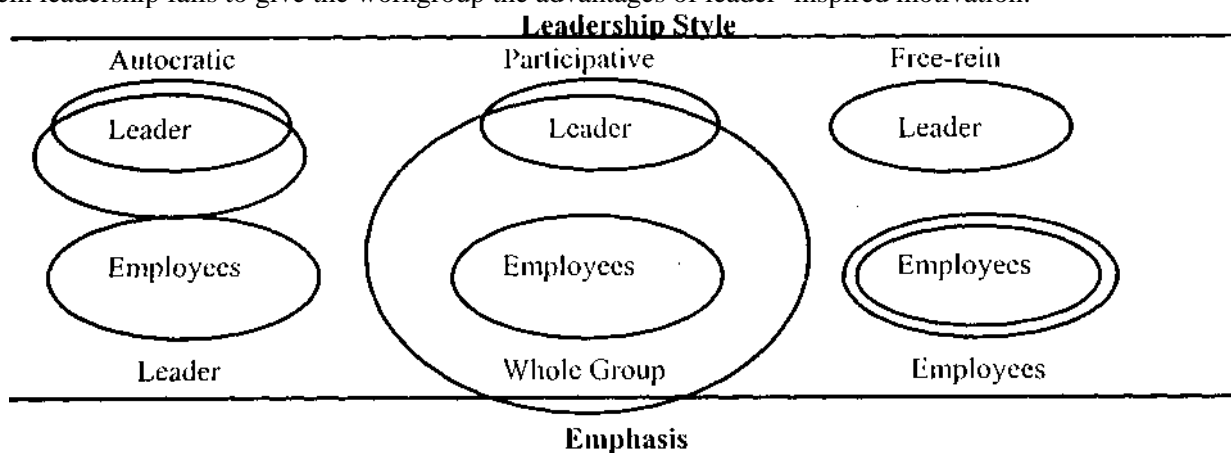


Figure 1: Nature of authority-oriented leadership styles

Source: Davis, Keith (1967) *Human Behaviour at Work: Organizational Behaviour*, New Delhi, Tata McGraw-Hill, p. 114.

A question that is bound to agitate one's mind at this juncture is: How do we classify servant-leadership? The answer is that servant-leadership is an extension of participative leadership. It possesses all the characteristics of participative leadership and in addition, has some unique attributes which are discussed later in this paper.

Characteristics of Servant-Leaders

Servant-leaders are a unique set of leaders. Their uniqueness derives from the humane characteristics that they possess. Such characteristics, explained below, are hardly present in ordinary leaders.

Stewardship: Servant-leaders have the underlying assumption that they are stewards of the people. They believe that for their subjects or subordinates to be reasonably satisfied, they (the servant-leaders) must put in the best of their efforts and as well sacrifice their own time, energy and comfort. In essence, an ideal servant-leader makes personal sacrifice for the good of all.

Compassion: Compassion is the identification one feels with his fellow men and women, especially those less privileged than oneself. Servant leaders are compassionate. Wilmot in Tolufashe (2007, p.25) noted, among other things, that "without compassion for the people, no leader can succeed and a great leader must treat his people with more compassion than his own child".

Listening: Servant-leaders focus on listening to identify and clarify the needs of their subjects. Agada (2007) identified the benefits that a leader derives when he listens to his followers. Hear him: "By listening, you get to know what your followers feel about you. This helps you to adjust where and when necessary" (p.25). A good leader must have a listening ear so as to be able to assess the problems and

complaints of his followers.

Honesty: According to Esele (2007), an ideal leader must be somebody who is ready to live above board. A servant-leader leads by example; he is honest with respect to his handling of the resources entrusted to his care. He does not embezzle funds.

Courtesy: Servant leaders are polite in the way they deal with people and issues. They are not arrogant and they do not make explosive statements. They tame their tongue. In addition, they are not rigid and so, are always ready to accept their mistakes and make necessary corrections.

Sincerity: There is no difference between what a servant-leader says and what he does. That is, he is not somebody who says something but does another thing (Gemade, 2008). He is not a liar.

Accountability: Servant leaders are accountable to the people they are serving. Periodically, they render account of their stewardship in a clear and understandable way through the radio, television, newspapers or magazines.

Persuasion: Servant leaders rely more on Douglas McGregor's Theory Y than Theory X when making decisions and trying to influence others. That is, persuasion is preferred to positional authority or force in the process of making managerial decisions. Furthermore, the spirit of team work typifies the managerial profile of servant leaders (Torrington et al, 2005).

Foresight: Wehrich and Koontz (2005, p.398) posited thus: "Leaders envision the future, and chart the course of the organisation". Servant leaders have the capability of foreseeing future implications of their present actions. They are strategists who envisage, identify, prepare for and adapt to changes in their organizational environment (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). They are able to identify the threats and opportunities in their environment and are able to fashion out enduring strategies for coping with emerging challenges.

Servant-Leadership vis-a-vis Nigerian Democracy

Sambawa (2007), opined that a good leader is one who does the heart desires of his followers by doing all he can to actualize the vision he has towards bettering their lots. Wehrich and Koontz (2005), Moore (1970) and Robbins and Coulter (2005), maintained that followers are supposed to reap the dividends of leadership.

A question that arises now is: Have leaders in the three tiers of government in Nigeria been doing the heart desires of their followers? Ibrahim (2008), had an indirect answer to this. According to him, "Many factors are responsible for the precarious state of Nigeria but, the most critical one is the problem of dearth of leadership" (p. 12).

The degree of frustration associated with leadership in the country will be better understood by considering the contents of table 1.

Table 1: Leadership trend in Nigeria between October 1960 and IV

Period	No. of Years	Type of Regime	Leadership Style
1960- 1965	5	Civilian	Democratic
1966- 1979	13	Military	Autocratic
1979- 1983	4	Civilian	Democratic
1984-May 28, 1999	16	Military	Autocratic
May 29, 1999-May, 2008	9	Civilian	Democratic

Source: Compiled by the author

Note: There was a six-month Interim Government headed by Chief Earnest Sonekan, a civilian, sometime in 1993. That government was more or less a military one because it was closely monitored and doctored by the military.

In analyzing the data above, it is conspicuous that out of forty seven years of independence, the military ruled the country for twenty nine years. The twenty nine years of military rule were characterized by coups and counter-coups. Indeed, Nigerians have given the following reasons for the high frequency of coups; greed, self-centredness and high capacity of the military to enslave the "gunless" citizens.

A Nigerian Army Officer in *The News* (February, 2008, p.24) had this to say concerning

selfcentredness in the military: “We realize that the same thieving Generals that have misled us in the past to illegally acquire power do so only to benefit themselves and their immediate families. A large majority of the military suffered hell during military rule”. If military people could suffer hell during military regimes, it becomes clear that the civilians were in serious trouble.

Since the military leaders did not come in through elections and so did not beg for people’s votes, their handling of the country’s resources and human rights issues was anything but good. What the foregoing boils down to is that autocratic leadership style is, most of the times, 'anti-people and anti-progress. Nigerians, in the twenty first century, do not deserve this style of leadership.

Investigation has revealed that the civilian regimes which have so far, spanned a period of eighteen years are also characteristic of poor performance. The scenario has been that of politicians making fake campaign promises, getting involved in political killings and embezzling public funds at will. The populace, rather than enjoy dividends of democracy, are rewarded with decaying infrastructure, epileptic power supply, collapsing educational system, deteriorating health facilities, declining agricultural fortunes and a crawling economy.

Between May 29, 1999 and May 28, 2007, over \$10 billion was allegedly spent on power supply but, there was nothing to show for it. The costs of production of business organizations are increasing at an alarming rate because they spend a substantial part of their incomes on purchase and fuelling of generators. A recent World Bank survey of 2,200 enterprises in Anambra, Kano, Bauchi, Cross River, Enugu, Lagos, Sokoto and Ogun States, and Abuja attributed the high cost of investment in Nigeria to electricity crisis (Ayorinde, 2008).

In the same vein, between May 29, 1999 and May 28, 2007, about J41 trillion was said to have been expended on road construction and maintenance. But, in reality, majority of the Nigerian roads are bad and not passable. The Benin-Ore road and most of the eastern roads are, for example, death traps. Of course, democratic governance has failed to translate into the type of messiah that Nigerians are expecting. The question then is: Where do we go from here?

If the on-going democratic dispensation must be sustained and strengthened, there is need to entrench the concept of genuine servant-leadership into the nation’s democracy. The justification for the foregoing suggestion is anchored on the reasons below.

- (i) Most of the past Nigerian leaders have disappointed the country through bad and self-centred leadership.
- (ii) Corruption has been elevated to a ridiculous extent.

- (iii) There has been misuse of the country’s resources.
- (iv) There is disenchantment and discouragement on the part of the populace.
- (v) To prevent the military from seizing power again or from truncating democracy.
- (vi) To lay good example for future generations of Nigerians.
- (vii) To give room for proper allocation and use of available resources.
- (viii) To make infrastructural facilities function properly.
- (ix) To evolve a responsible leadership that will genuinely fight and discourage corruption.'
- (x) To restore the hope of Nigerians.
- (xi) To brighten the international image of the country.

Recommendations

The flaws associated with the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria notwithstanding, democracy is better than military rule. One way of protecting democracy is to embrace servant- leadership and, as well, see to implementation of the following recommendations.

1. The Federal Government should establish a commission to audit stewardship of leaders at Federal, State and Local Government levels. The commission, which can be named “National Stewardship Audit Commission (NSAC), is to assess the performance of political leaders annually by comparing the total received subventions and generated incomes with the services the leaders rendered to the society. The commission’s findings should be made public from time-to-time. Also, the commission should be given greater autonomy than the Code of Conduct Bureau.
2. There should be a constitutional provision that will limit the participation of former military men and women in politics to a secondary level. In other words, ex-members of the armed forces should be excluded from vying for the posts of President, State Governor and Local Government Chairman. The reason being that military people, whether serving or retired, are by their training, diehard adherents of autocracy. The habit of dictatorship never dies in a military man. Ironically,

dictatorship and servant-leadership move in opposite directions. This is saying that an ex-military person can never be a genuine servant-leader.

3. As the watchdog of democracy, the press should be encouraged and assisted by the government and well-to-do members of the society. Maximum security should be accorded magazine and newspaper houses in the country. They should be provided financial assistance to procure modern communication equipment. Also, journalists should be given national recognition and awards from time-to-time. One is not comfortable that the 2008 national award did not contain the name of a single journalist. The government should see journalists as partners in progress rather than as enemies.
4. There should be true separation of powers in the country. Each of the executive, legislative and judiciary must be allowed to exist autonomously. The executive should not interfere in the affairs of the legislature and judiciary. The practice, in the past, whereby the executive witchhunts political rivals or enemies by pressurizing the legislature to carry out unlawful impeachments should be discouraged.
5. The Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill which was thrown out in the House of Representatives in 2008 should not be allowed to die a natural death. The Bill should be revisited and passed into law by the House so as to give journalists the opportunity to scout for news easily. By so doing, accountability can be enforced among political leaders and managers of organizations.
6. The rule of law should be faithfully and indiscriminately adhered to, even in situations where its application does not favour the government.
7. Nigerian leaders should lead by example. They must change their orientation and be ready to give more to the people rather than serving their own parochial interests.

Conclusion

It should be noted, at this juncture, that the concept of servant-leadership is not restricted to political governance. It extends to management activities in both profit making and non-profit-oriented organizations. Managers of such organizations are expected to exhibit the characteristics of a servant-leader.

Against the background of the discourse so far in this paper, it is worth stating that for democracy to continue uninterrupted in Nigeria, servant-leadership should be the watchword at the local, state and federal levels of governance. Aflerall, the most potent weapon against military coup is good governance which servant-leadership represents. Ibrahim (2008, p. 12) has said it all: "The painful reality is that unless Nigeria resolves to encourage a paradigm shift in the management of its affairs by sowing a credible style of leadership, it would continue to contend with stunted growth".

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