Team Leadership: The Engine for Quality Performance and Output in Open and Distance Learning Programmes

Tichaona Mapolisa (Mr) and Alfred C Ncube (Dr)

ABSTRACT

The study examined the degree to which team leadership is an engine for quality performance and output in the management of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). It was a qualitative case study. Twenty four out of twenty nine members drawn from the four faculties of the university took part in the study. In-depth questionnaires were used to gather data. The study found out that team leadership is about involvement of all team members in pursuit of quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes. It also found out that team leadership is characterized, chiefly, by transparency, open-mindedness, attention to detail and consultation. Team leadership was found to enhance quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes because of its promotion of shared vision, shared planning, collaborative commitment and shared evaluation and ownership of programme results. The study concluded that of lack of resources undermine the effectiveness of quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes. The study recommended the need for the ZOU’s Faculties to employ team leadership at all levels in its pursuit of quality performance and output in ODL programme management.

Key words: Team leadership, quality, quality performance, ODL Programme Management

Introduction

Geese love flying in “V” formation. You may ask: Why do they do this? As each bird flaps its wings, it creates uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in “V” formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 percent flying range than if each bird flew on its own. Team leadership creates a similar situation. The present study intends to explore the degree to which team leadership enhances quality performance and work output in Open and Distance Learning Programmes at the Zimbabwe Open University.

The Background

Leadership in organisational groups or work teams has become one of the most popular and rapidly growing areas of leadership theory and research (Hill in Northouse: 2010:241). In the 1960s and 1970s, the era of organisational development focused on developing team and leadership effectiveness through interventions in ongoing work teams (Northouse: 2010:241-2). As a result of team leadership, organisations have faster response capability because of their flatter organisational structure, which relies on teams and new technology to enable communication across time and space (Porter and Beyerlein: 2000:3-19). Mankind et al (1996:217) referred to this new organisation as being “team-based, technology-enabled.” It would seem, therefore, that the organisational team-based structure is an important way to remain competitive by responding quickly and adapting to constant, rapid changes.

Much research has focused on the problems confronting organisational work teams and also on ways to make them more effective (Ilgen et al: 1993). In this regard, these researchers contend that research on the effectiveness of organisational teams has suggested that the use of teams has led to greater productivity, a more effective use of resources, better decisions and problem-solving, better quality products and services, and greater motivation and creativity.

In a recent review of team research Ilgen et al (2005) suggested that studies since 1996 have become more complex on more team variables, and no longer focusing exclusively on the outcome of team performance. In addition, the role and impact of mediating processes such as trusting, bonding, planning, adapting, structuring, and learning are also being studied in terms of team performance and viability.

Other studies, as already alluded to, also suggest that it is essential to understand the role of team leadership within teams to ensure team success and avoid team failure. Not surprisingly, the totality of research evidence supports the assertion that team leadership is critical to achieving both effective and behaviorally based team outcomes (Stagl et al: 2007:172). Other researchers such as Northouse (2010) have claimed that effective team leadership process is the most critical factor in team success.

Conversely, ineffective leadership often is seen as a primary reason teams fail (Stewart and Manz: 1995). More specifically, the import of the postulation is that team leadership is often identified as a primary reason why teams fail to develop and yield improvements in productivity. Rather than focusing on ineffective teams, Larson and LaFasto (1989) looked in the opposite direction by interviewing excellent teams to gain insights as to what enables them to function at a high degree. They came up with a number of conclusions, the following of which were some of the most notable:
To ensure team success, Day et al. (2004) talk about share or distributed leadership as team leadership capacity, encompassing the leadership replication of the entire team. Recent research indicates that teams with shared leadership have certain advantages over single leader teams (Solansky: 2004). The above observations seem to have one deficiency in common: They lack context specificity, as they do not indicate the degree to which team leadership could apply to Open and Distance Learning situations. It is common cause that team leadership ensures that quality performance and output are achieved through teamwork processes of transition, action and interdependence. Although, the studies hinted on how team leadership increases productivity, they were however silent on the issue of how they enhance quality performance and work output in ODL settings. It is against the backdrop of this position that the present study focuses on the interrogation of the extent to which team leadership could be an engine for quality performance and output in ODL programmes with particular reference to the Zimbabwe Open University.

Statement of the Problem
A transformation is taking place in ODL regarding technology, the internet and education in general. The worlds of work and education are changing, and leaders in today’s educational institutions need to determine how to effectively lead in the acquisition, development, and dissemination of information to tomorrow’s workers. Team leadership is necessary to bring cohesion to ODL arena within higher education. It is in this context that the research question for this study is:

“How to what extent is team leadership the engine for quality performance and output in Open and Distance Learning Programmes at the Zimbabwe Open University?”

Research Sub-questions
In a bid to get the understanding of the research participants of how team leadership could be the engine for quality performance and output in ODL programmes, the study attempted to respond to the following research sub-questions:

1. How is team leadership viewed in ODL?
2. Which characteristics of team leadership obtain most in ODL institutions?
3. How does team leadership contribute to quality performance and output in ODL programmes?
4. How is team leadership a drawback to quality performance and output in ODL programmes?
5. How can ODL programmes capitalize on the benefits of team leadership in search quality performance and output?

Review of Related Literature
In definition, Northouse (2010) sees team leadership as the leadership practices and values exhibited by leaders, governing a specific group of individuals who are working towards achieving a particular goal or objective. A team would not be able to function as a whole without the governance, authority, and effective interaction with a good team leader. In this regard, team leadership is a function more than a role, and can refer to both the process of leading and to those entities that do the leading. In team leadership, the role of the team leader becomes crucial, as he or she is one who facilitates the processes, the tasks, the working relationships, and the goals, priorities, needs, and achievements of the whole team. In this context, as Northouse (2010) correctly points out, team leadership is an important element in maintaining a good team, for it enables the group or team to effectively and efficiently work with one another, in its aim to achieve its common goals and objectives.

In the mid 1980s, Bass (1985: 159), who refined transformational leadership theory to its present perspective, observed that modern universities tend to “represent organisations in which transformational leadership is less likely to be seen” However, a model of transformational team leadership is needed in the area of ODL within higher education. The issue has become that of ensuring that team leadership triggers enhanced performance and productivity institutions of higher learning.

As Lucas (2000:78) explains, much has been written about higher education changing from a “faculty-and-teaching model to a student-and learning-centered model”. Further, new technologies are leading to major structural changes in the management and organisation of teaching in the arena of ODL. For people to remain knowledgeable and employable, learning is evolving from a discrete activity to a continual activity. In this vein, Drucker (1998) described the knowledge worker as the replacement for the blue-collar worker. Knowledge workers need to be more highly educated, interact with a wide variety of people and situations, and require educational updating on a regular basis and team leadership is appropriately positioned to discharge this role. Such team leadership ought to challenge traditional ODL degree-granting institutions to think in new ways, and transform their current teaching/learning processes in order to meet the needs and demands of new types of learners.

Rowley et al (1998) claims that higher education is facing a shift in leadership. Whereas in the past, higher education institutions tended to lead societal development, and serve as centers for study and development, this role is being changed by technology and the information age. Higher education needs to rethink issues of student access and the learning environment. These authors argue that institutions are now experiencing a radical shift, converting from institutions that provide strictly a “timeout for learning” model, to a model premised on “perpetual learning”. In the future, higher education will be challenged to offer both models of convocation and convergence.
Bates (2000) refers to Daryl Le Grew, an international distance education advocate from Deakin University, Australia, who described “a paradigm shift” that is currently taking place in higher education. In this regard, Team leadership in an ODL setting would not be effective and efficient without the support and the exceptional skills of the team leader. Because the team leader is responsible in planning, organising, and controlling the activities involved in the team, he or she must have a number of excellent skills. The skills of an excellent team leader include strong leadership ability, the ability to develop people, excellent communication skills, good interpersonal skills, and the ability to handle stress, good problem-solving skills, and time management skills. Strong leadership ability means inspiring the people assigned to the tasks, and requires the involvement and empowerment of the whole team. As such, the team leader must exhibit a participative and consultative leadership style, thus, providing guidance and coaching to the team (Gido and Clements: 2005).

Several studies have investigated the results of ODL by comparing distance education with traditional education (Boling and Robinson: 1999). However, limited attention was given to administrative aspects of distance learning programmes (Chang: 1998; Irlbeck: 2001; Lape and Hart: 1997). Whether distance education is more or less effective than traditional education is no longer a question requiring investigation. In this regard, Web-based Education Commission (2000) in the United States of America listed the following action points related to effective team leadership:

- Make powerful new Internet resources, especially broadband access, widely and equitably available and affordable for all learners
- Provide continuous and relevant training and support for educators and administrators at all levels
- Build a new research framework of how people learn in the Internet age
- Develop high quality online educational content that meets the highest standards of educational excellence
- Revise outdated regulations that impede innovation and replace them with approaches that embrace anytime, anywhere, any place learning
- Protect online learners and ensure their privacy
- Sustain funding – via traditional and new sources – that is adequate to the challenge at hand. Technology is expensive, and web-based learning is no exception. (Web-based Education Commission: 2000: iii-iv).

While there are several team leadership models, Hill’s Team model is perhaps one of the better known ones as it provides the leader or a designated team member with a mental road map to help diagnose team problems, and then take appropriate action to correct these problems (Northouse: 2007). This team leadership model shown in figure 1.1 is built on a number of research projects.

Hill proposes a team leadership model that places leadership in the driver’s seat of team effectiveness. The model provides a mental road map to help the leader (or any team member who is providing leadership) diagnose team problems and take action to correct these problems (Northouse: 2010). Team leadership model (figure 1.1) attempts to integrate mediation and monitoring concepts with team effectiveness (Hughes et al; Ginnet and Curphey: 1993, Larson and LaFasto: 1989; Nacler: 1998). In addition, the model attempts to provide specific actions that leaders can perform to improve team effectiveness (LaFasto and Larson: 2000). In part, the purpose of this investigation is to establish the degree to which the aspects of Hill’s team leadership model could be part of the engine for quality performance and output in ODL programmes at the ZOU.

Criticisms of Team Leadership

One of the weaknesses of the present approach is that this model is not completely supported or tested (Northouse: 2010). Perhaps, the applied focus on team effectiveness and organisational work groups is as LaFasto and Larson (2001) suggest a new approach to studying teams. Also many questions remain to be answered regarding team patterns over time, self-regarding team patterns over time, self-fulfilling group cycles, authority issues, and content issues (Hackman: 1990). It was in the interests of this study to investigate the extent to which the preceding criticism of team leadership could hamper quality performance and output in ODL programmes at ZOU.

Methodology

The data used for this study were collected from 29 purposively selected full-time tutors in the faculties of Science and Technology, Applied Social Sciences, Commerce and Law and Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University. The study itself was premised in the qualitative paradigm using a case study approach. The main reason for employing a qualitative paradigm was that it enabled us to investigate how the faculties’ 29 full time tutors perceived team leadership as a driver for quality performance and output in a natural setting.

Figure 1.1: Hill’s Team Leadership Model (Adopted and adapted from Northouse: 2010: 244)
A qualitative case study was used to design this study because of its ability to produce worthwhile knowledge as it is highly interactive (Kumar: 2008). Also, a case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life event. The study gathered data using in depth interviews and questionnaires. As Gill and Johnson (2002) perceptively observe, in depth interviews/questionnaires have the capacity to tap thick descriptions of phenomena from the research participants.

Results and Discussions

Twenty four (24) out of twenty nine (29) participants responded to the in-depth questionnaire, representing a return rate of eighty-three percent. Results and data discussions that ensue are guided by the following five research questions:

* How is team leadership viewed in ODL?
* Which characteristics of team leadership obtain most in ODL institutions?
* How does team leadership contribute to quality performance and output in ODL Programmes?
* How is team leadership a drawback to quality performance and output in ODL Programmes?
* How can ODL Programmes capitalise on the benefits of team leadership in search of quality performance and output?

Demographic Data of the Research Participants

Table 1: Distribution of research participants by gender (N=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% Frequency</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows research participants by gender. Nineteen (79%) of the research participants were male tutors, while five (21%) of the research participants were female. As can be seen from this information, the distribution of participants by gender is tilted in favour of male participants. This gender insensitive distribution might undermine team leadership in regard to quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes.

Table 2: Distribution of research participants by age (N=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Age in years)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% Frequency</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents distribution of research participants by age. Seventy-five percent of the participants, as table 2 indicates, were aged between 40 and 49, while the rest were over the age of 50 years. This data imply that research participants were experienced and mature enough to understand the dynamics of leadership in general and team leadership in particular as they relate to the quest for quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes.

Table 3: Distribution of research participants by professional qualification (N=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% Frequency</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3 shows, seventy nine percent of the research participants were holders of Masters Degrees, while twenty one percent of them were holders of Doctoral Degrees. By implication, the research participants possessed enough education to enable them to value the role of team leadership in search of quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes.

Table 4: Distribution of research participants by experience (N=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Experience)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% Frequency</th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+ years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scenario in Table 4 indicates that forty-two percent of the research participants had an ODL working experience ranging from 0 to 5 years, forty-six percent had a working experience of 6 to 10 years and twelve percent had a working experience of at least 11 years. Cumulatively, fifty eight percent of the research participants had a sufficient working experience of 6 to 10 years and twelve percent had a working experience of at least 11 years. This data imply that research participants were experienced and mature enough to understand and appreciate the need for team leadership in enhancing quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU).

How Team Leadership is Viewed in ODL

An opinion diversity of what constitutes team leadership in the pursuit of quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes was advanced by the members of the participants. They came up with some of the following views of team leadership in ODL:

* It is co-option of members of the Department in decision making, goal setting, programme implementation and evaluation.
* Team leadership in the context of quality in my Department entails leading by sharing experiences that market the Department’s programmes.
The preceding characteristics of team leadership that were generated by the participants are an indication of how they view team leadership should obtain in their respective departments. The characteristics seem to compare favourably with those advanced by Northouse (2010), Hackman (2002) and Zaccaro et al (2001) who postulate that characteristics of team leadership comprise:

* keeping the team focused on the goal;
* maintaining a collaborative climate;
* building confidence among members;
* demonstrating technical competence;
* setting priorities; and
* managing performance.

It would seem, therefore, that team leadership has innumerable characteristics which could be reflective of how team leadership could be an engine for quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes in their respective departments at the ZOU. Issues of having well-defined roles, documentation of procedures and processes, exercising transparency, ethical standards and accountability to one’s actions, fairness, independence and interdependence seem to be critical in the characteristics of team leadership that are capable of triggering quality management of ODL programmes. A few participants had strong views about the inclusion of such characteristics as leadership skills, communication, insight, academicism, rationality, and empathy as equally desirable characteristics of team leadership. All in all, it would seem from the participants’ summative comments that the characteristics of team leadership are situation specific. That is to say, they are contingent upon the mix and built of teams based on what they intend to accomplish together as a collectivity.

The Contribution of Team Leadership to Quality Performance and Output

It is common knowledge that effective team leadership puts leadership at the centre of an organisation that entertains serious commitment to goal accomplishment. The present study managed to bring to the fore some of the plausible contributions of team leadership that could be particular to effective programme management in ODL settings with specific reference to the various departments at the ZOU. Some of the critical points that the research participants raised about how team leadership enhances quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes include that it:

* ensures that requirements of a programme are effectively addressed;
* sets goals.
* It is working together as a unit/team in order to influence goals and tasks.
* It is also about motivating subordinates and providing direction.

Most of the above views of team leadership appear to attempt to define team leadership well. They seem to be in sync with Northouse’s (2010:241) approach which aptly defines team leadership as a,” concept in which organisational groups composed of members who are interdependent, who share common goals, and who must co-ordinate their activities to accomplish these goals. The aspect of quality performance and output is implicit in the above points of view. To an extent, therefore, the participants did not zero in on the quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes in their respective departments.

While the research participants lacked context specificity in their definition of team leadership, their definition of team leadership was impressive to the extent that all their definitions touched on the practice of team leadership. Also of great significance is the fact that most of the participants’ definitions of team leadership that the research participants raised are largely indicative of the degree to which team leadership could be an engine for quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes. Put differently, most of the participants stressed the importance of team leadership in the management of ODL programmes.

Characteristics of Team Leadership that Enhance Quality Programme Management in ODL

The research participants put forward a plethora of characteristics of team leadership that try to show how team leadership could be an engine for quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes. Chief among such characteristics include:

* consulting other team players in programme management;
* taking note of stakeholders’ concerns;
* periodic review of teaching and learning;
* researching to improve content delivery;
* team players;
* making decisions based on facts;
* using common sense and simplicity to deal with complex tasks;
* highly driven and intrinsically motivated;
* having a strong sense of shared vision;
* listening to subordinates;
* unity, clear roles and responsibilities;
* strong organisational culture;
* patience;
* possession of good social skills;
* inspiration;
* attention to relevant detail;
* co-operation, honesty and sharing responsibility;
* exercising wide consultation; and
* active involvement of all members.

The preceding characteristics of team leadership that were generated by the participants are an indication of how they view team leadership should obtain in their respective departments. The characteristics seem to compare favourably with those advanced by Northouse (2010), Hackman (2002) and Zaccaro et al (2001) who postulate that characteristics of team leadership comprise:

* keeping the team focused on the goal;
* maintaining a collaborative climate;
* building confidence among members;
* demonstrating technical competence;
* setting priorities; and
* managing performance.

It would seem, therefore, that team leadership has innumerable characteristics which could be reflective of how team leadership could be an engine for quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes in their respective departments at the ZOU. Issues of having well-defined roles, documentation of procedures and processes, exercising transparency, ethical standards and accountability to one’s actions, fairness, independence and interdependence seem to be critical in the characteristics of team leadership that are capable of triggering quality management of ODL programmes. A few participants had strong views about the inclusion of such characteristics as leadership skills, communication, insight, academicism, rationality, and empathy as equally desirable characteristics of team leadership. All in all, it would seem from the participants’ summative comments that the characteristics of team leadership are situation specific. That is to say, they are contingent upon the mix and built of teams based on what they intend to accomplish together as a collectivity.
helps the organisation to create successful ODL culture and increase competence of staff;
* provides proper direction and focus;
* makes sure that there are people knowledge and experience in the relevant area such that quality is not compromised;
* aligns colleagues into set objectives;
* banks on collaborative research to ensure that programme procedures are in line with best current trends and practices;
* creates a unity of purpose as the leaders (Deans and Department Chairpersons) and tutors act as team players;
* enables colleagues and their leaders in the Department to share ideas and different viewpoints so as to improve inputs, processes, outputs and products;
* provides an opportunity to every member of the Department to have a responsibility to own up decisions that will have been taken to improve the programmes at any given time;
* has shared ownership indicators;
* improves effectiveness and efficiency in sharing duties for example, setting and proof reading examination and assignment items as a team;
* employs collaborative sound planning for programme implementation and evaluation; and
* promotes collective commitment and involvement in the total quality management of the programmes.

Research participants advanced an array of views on how team leadership could contribute to quality performance and output in the management of ODL at the ZOU. Their opinions seem to add credence to earlier research findings by Northouse (2010) and Fisher (1985) who noted four strengths of team leadership. Although early research findings are particular to the use of team leadership in organisations in general they can assist current research to show how team leadership could drive quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes. First, team leadership places ongoing work group or team in an environmental context within the organisation. As researchers, we feel that the real –life focus on team performance and work output in regard to team effectiveness enables leaders and subordinates to put right departmental problems. Also by learning what makes up excellent teams applying these criteria to team performance, leaders can learn how to better lead teams to the capstone of excellence.

A second strength that previous research advances concerns that team leadership provides a cognitive guide that helps leaders to design and maintain effective teams, especially when performance is below standards. In this regard, we are content that through team leadership, the studied departments could make use of collaborative research to scale up below performance standards in programme management by searching for best advice and practices from empirically tried and tested ideas. Another strength that is consistent with the research participants’ observations is that team leadership takes into account changing role of leaders and followers in organisations. In respect of this strength, it is more rewarding to permit any team member to play critical leadership functions to assess the current effectiveness of the team with regards to quality performance and output in programme management prior to taking appropriate action.

Lastly, previous research is echoed by the present one in that team leadership can help in the selection of leaders. In the context of this study, we hold the point of view that the departments at the ZOU, by and large, select team leaders who are perceptive, open, objective, analytical, and good listeners with effective diagnostic skills manage ODL programmes. All things being equal, both the previous and present findings largely underline the view that team leadership could be one of the most effective engines for quality performance and output in the management of programmes by the Department of Education at the ZOU.

Challenges to Team Leadership in the Pursuit of Quality Performance and Output in ODL Programme Management

While team leadership has some benefits it offers to the pursuit quality performance and output in ODL programme management at ZOU, it is also susceptible to some challenges. The research participants penned the following as among some of the challenges to team leadership in the pursuit of quality performance and output in ODL programme management:

* Members frequently complain that they have too much in their hands as a result a dual academic and administrative role.
* Sometimes team leadership does not deliver the desired results.
* At times teams have too few members to function meaningfully given the wide range of programmes offered by the university.
* Team leadership is also let down by lack scheduled planned activities.
* If there is no transparency, the pursuance of quality performance and output in programme management gets to be challenged in the departments.
* A team is sometimes difficult to co-ordinate and control if some team members are non-performers.
* Team leadership is undermined by lack of consultation.
* When top administration centralise authority and power, team leadership ceases to function effectively.
* When colleagues fail to work according plan, team leadership becomes a liability.
* One of the problems is that the National Centre tends to benefit more than the Regional Centres in terms of module writing and examination marking in the era they were paid.
* If communication is one way, it can compromise team leadership and quality management.
* Handling of marks from Regional Centres is a teething challenge.
* Processing of examination remains largely chaotic and team leadership seems powerless to influence change.

Of particular interest to the concerns of this study are observations that Salas, Burke and Stagl (2004), Hackman (2000) and Mankin et al (1996) made about the criticisms of team leadership in general. First, many questions remain to be answered regarding the team patterns over time, self-fulfilling group cycles, authority issues, and content issues. On the
Leadership in the Management of ODL Programmes

Management of ODL programmes remains an area of concern in the academic sector. This is due to the complexity of the task and the need for effective leadership to ensure quality performance and output. In practice, when such a scenario prevails, team leadership ceases to be the engine for quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes.

Overcoming Challenges to the Application of Team Leadership in the Management of ODL Programmes

In view of the afore-stated challenges to the application of team leadership in the management of ODL programmes, research participants advanced a host of solutions. Critical among them are that:

- Regional Programme Co-ordinators should send coursework marks online to the National Centre where the Dean as a Chief Examiner is housed.
- Faculty/Department should have a greater say than currently is the case in the processing of examination results.
- Academic Registry should duly publish results forwarded from the Faculty.
- Regular meetings should be held by team leaders and their members for the purpose of mapping out more effective and efficient strategies.
- More resources need to be provided to the teams.
- Teams need rewards if they are to perform.

These findings tend to lend credence to work by LaFasto and Larson (2001) who found out that one of the greatest ways of achieving team effectiveness is to know one’s exact job description. In the context of this study, such knowledge enables teams to avoid role conflict, role ambiguity and role imposition at the expense of quality performance and output.

Other Issues that Emerged from this Study

Two issues that emerged from this study are the extent to which effective team leadership applies at ZOU in general and in particular, who to involve effecting team leadership in search of quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes.

Four scenarios associated with the first issue came up with justifiable reasons. Thirteen percent of the research participants revealed that team leadership exists to a lesser extent. They professed that no consultations were held between the leader and the team. These opinions could be coming from a section of colleagues who feel isolated from reasons best known to themselves. Forty-two percent of the research participants held the view that team leadership is being employed to a large extent. Reasons given for this position include use of committees and task forces, involving Regional Programme Co-ordinators in most of the programme activities, taking note of tutor evaluator outcomes, consultations on course allocation, and collaborative research. Thus, the majority of the research participants could be exposed to and are aware of the value of team leadership as an engine for quality performance and output.

The second issue that came out as a result of the conduct of the present study is about who to involve in team leadership. The findings of team leadership in this regard unearthed some interesting findings. Different permutations were suggested. These included greater use subject specialists in order to fully provide academic leadership. All members of the Faculty/Department, the Dean, Chairperson, Pro Vice Chancellor – Academic Affairs and the Vice Chancellor should be actively involved in teams as team members for the purpose of promoting a shared vision, thus, making team leadership an engine for quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes.

Summary and Conclusions

In the light of the above findings, the following summary and conclusions emerge.

- Team leadership in the pursuit of quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes is all about shared vision, collective decision making, collaborative commitment, shared implementation, evaluation and ownership of the programmes.
- Team leadership that is inherent of quality performance and output in the management of ODL programmes is characterised by the exercise of good corporate governance which manifests itself through virtues of open-mindedness, transparency, observing and practising ethical standards, responsibility, accountability, integrity, trustworthiness and straightforwardness just to name a few.
- All staff members ranging from the Vice Chancellor to the typist constitute a symbiotic team which is assumed to be practising team leadership as a gateway to quality performance and output in ODL programme management.
- The contribution of team leadership to quality performance and output in ODL programme management is best realised through its strengths such as collective and communal involvement of all members of staff and stakeholders, creation of a successful organisational culture and behaviour, as well as enhancement of programme ownership and involvement.
- Team leadership is assumed to be challenged by lack of resources, overloading academics clerical and administrative work, lack of planned programme of events, poor performance by some team members, and top-down communication.

Thirty percent of the research participants revealed that team leadership exists to a lesser extent. They professed that no consultations were held between the leader and the team. These opinions could be coming from a section of colleagues who feel isolated from reasons best known to themselves. Forty-two percent of the research participants held the view that team leadership is being employed to a large extent. Reasons given for this position include use of committees and task forces, involving Regional Programme Co-ordinators in most of the programme activities, taking note of tutor evaluator outcomes, consultations on course allocation, and collaborative research. Thus, the majority of the research participants could be exposed to and are aware of the value of team leadership as an engine for quality performance and output.
Lack of training also hinders the effectiveness of team leadership in enhancing quality performance and output in ODL programme management.

In the light of the preceding summary and conclusions, Table 5 below highlights what the present researchers had this to say about the findings of the study.

**Table 5: What the researchers say about the present study’s findings:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr Alfred Ncube’s Sayings about the Study</th>
<th>Tichaona Mapolisa’s Sayings about the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Mediocre leaders instruct their subordinates. They feel that subordinates are like tools or implements.</td>
<td>* Mediocre subordinates comply out of timidity. They lack confidence and they are fearful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Average leaders direct subordinates on what to do.</td>
<td>* Average subordinates are loyal. They try to please their leaders at the expense of performance and work output.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Good leaders demonstrate the best practices of doing things.</td>
<td>* Good subordinates are cooperative. They support each other and their leaders as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Superior leaders lead by example.</td>
<td>* Superior subordinates question situations. They attempt to understand operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Great leaders inspire their followers to perform to the best of their abilities</td>
<td>* Great subordinates are analytical, self-reliant, innovative, inventive, self-directive and empowered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 demonstrates that teams comprise different kinds of leaders and members who respond to different situations differently. In brief, weak and inept leaders and team members largely destroy the organisation, and the converse is true for great leaders and team members.

Two diagrams below show further underscore our conclusions regarding the significance of team leadership as an engine for enhancing team performance and work output in ODL Programme Management that might be of particular interest to ZOU.

We also conclude that team leadership is reflected of a scenario that is given in Figure 2 above. The leader and the team carry each other. They share ideas and enrich each other in pursuit of quality performance and work output. Committees are not an option in that regard, thus, in a team every member has a role to play. Leaders can become team members and be led by subordinates in performing quality work. The little best that each one gets from each other goes a long way in demonstrating how team leadership could be an engine for team performance in search of quality performance and work output. The leader and team members are open-minded, focused, intrinsically motivated, responsible and accountable. They are trustworthy, honest, dependable and reliable enough in the manner they conduct their duties. They are also cooperative in their ways of programme management. They are loyal, committed and dedicated to their work. Furthermore, they are prepared to willingly and voluntarily contribute to the best of their ability in programme management. All team members inclusive of team leaders are prepared to learn from each other through staff development workshops and quality circles, all for the good of the organisation. The success of an individual team member is the success of every team member, let alone, the organisation. Every member becomes different qualitatively in terms of programme management at the ZOU. In that regard, team leadership could be largely an engine for enhancing quality team performance and work output put in ODL programme management in institutions like the ZOU.

**Figure 2: A Leader and Team Carrying each other**

Our other exciting conclusion from the conduct of the study is demonstrated by Figure 3. Team leadership does not work well when a leader is carried by the members. In that scenario, the leader is a burden to the team. He/she shows the team where to go. If he/she gets lost, the whole team is lost for good and is forced to start all over again in programme management and output. His/her ideas prevail over those of the team. The team members are passive to the extent that they are like tools or implements. They are like wheel barrows that go no further than they are pushed. They are cultured not to think beyond their leader’s line of thought. They are myopic, pedantic,
performance and work output.

...campaign for collaborative effort by all team members in search of quality opposed to this kind of regressive philosophy as it advocates to dizzy heights. Also team members with progressive ideas are competences that if well utilised they could soar an organisation are sometimes viewed as inept and unproductive in spite of their because of lack of team leadership in practice. Team members blinkered and indecisive not because they are incapable, but because of lack of team leadership in practice. Team members are sometimes viewed as inept and unproductive in spite of their competences that if well utilised they could soar an organisation to dizzy heights. Also team members with progressive ideas are not given room to excel for the fear that they would steal the glamour and limelight from the leader. Team leadership is opposed to this kind of regressive philosophy as it advocates for collaborative effort by all team members in search of quality performance and work output.

**Recommendations**

The study recommends the need for:

* the departments to buttress team leadership by involving all members of staff to contribute a part in goal attainment to ensure quality performance and output in ODL programme management,

* the departments to employ team leadership at all levels in its pursuit of quality performance and output in ODL programme management,

* the provision of adequate resources to the teams so that quality performance and output in ODL programme management is enhanced,

* training all members of staff in team leadership and quality concepts, processes and practices for the purposes of facilitating quality performance and output in ODL programme management, and this could be done by conducting workshops, seminars, for the Faculties and Departments,

* the Departments to exercise good corporate governance so that the Department can create character and brand in terms of exhibiting quality performance and output in ODL programme management,

* the Departments streamline tasks of its team members in line with job descriptions so as to avoid role confusion, role ambiguity and role shambles, and

* carrying out a similar study at a greater institutional level using positivist paradigm and quantitative research design in a bid to give the findings an institution-wide character.

**References**


Bio-data for Authors

Mr. Tichaona Mapolisa is a Senior Lecturer and National Programme Leader for the Bachelor of Education in Educational Management in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University. To date, he has published seventeen research articles in six international peer reviewed journals. He has presented twenty two papers at international conferences and five papers at local conferences. He has published one book with Lambert Academic Publishing House (LAP). He can be contacted by business address: Zimbabwe Open University P.O.Box MP1119 Mount Pleasant Harare, Zimbabwe OR by Cell phone: +263 733 608 577 or +263 775 987 351 or by E-mail: tichmap@gmail.com / tichmapolisa@yahoo.co.uk

Alfred, C. Ncube (Dr) is a senior lecturer and National Programme Leader for the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Development and Bachelor of Education in Educational Foundations in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University. He has published 7 research articles in different peer reviewed international journals. He can be contacted by e-mail (ncubac@gmail.com)