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Desired or deserving leadership? A reflection on the leadership exercised in local governments of Uganda¹

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Abstract

The article presents survey findings of the leadership styles exercised in local governments and examines whether leadership influences organisational performance in Uganda's local governments. Based on survey findings from Bushenyi District, both transactional and transformational leadership styles are evidently exercised in Uganda's local governments. The study findings further reveal that leadership behaviours in Bushenyi District are often characterised by idealised influence (behaviour), inspirational motivation, high laissez-faire leadership and high management-by-exception (passive). As a result, there is increasing job insecurity among subordinates, which undermines the internal organisational ability to perform. Four sub-counties in Bushenyi District were selected for the purpose of this research. Using Multifactor Leadership Questionnaires (MLQs), data were derived from 123 respondents (36 leaders and 87 raters).

Keywords: Bushenyi district; local governance; leadership styles;² organisational performance;⁶ transactional leadership;³ transformational leadership;⁴ charismatic leadership;⁵ Uganda

Introduction

The challenge of realising the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Uganda still remains elusive.⁷ According to the World Bank report (2003), Uganda adopted a system of decentralisation to improve systems of governance and foster economic growth – especially in rural areas. However, while powers have been devolved to local governments, good government intentions have not translated into service delivery at the grassroots. The delivery of public services like health, education, works and agricultural extension services, among others, does not match public expectations and interest. Also, according to the Inspector General of Government's (IGG) (2008) National Integrity Survey,⁸ local government tender boards (LGTBs) are the second most corrupt institutions in Uganda.

While scholars are united in advocating leadership as a means of improving organisational results (see Moore 1995; Rainey 1997), as yet there have been no comprehensive empirical analyses of the effect of leadership on the service performance of public organisations in Uganda. Leadership⁹ is vital to the extent that it creates a vision, communicates it and can influence (positively or negatively) the provision of the local community's development needs.

Power in Uganda's local governments is concentrated under district leadership. However, over the years the concentration of power and resources in local governments seems to have come along with declining levels of service delivery. Also, there are reported cases of district leadership being engaged in a scramble for power at the expense of service delivery.¹⁰ Furthermore, there is disorder among competing district executive leadership authorities – the ruling political party, National Resistance Movement (NRM) has presidential representatives: the Resident District Commissioner(s) (RDCs); Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs); the District Chairpersons (LCV); district councilors and district departmental heads, among others. Brian (2008) observes that the direction of local government reform is shaped by the prevailing leadership style. Therefore, it is possible to relate accumulating disappointments in local governments with organisational leadership and decision making.

Bob (2001) states that values shape the way organisations make decisions. A leader chooses the values that are most important in his/her situation. These values, in turn, define his/her character. A leader then lives identified values visibly, every day, at work. Living these values is one of the most powerful tools available in the process of leading and influencing others.

Interestingly, in Uganda's local governments there are multiple reporting structures which compromise the potential to have unified leadership values. According to Bob (2001), the following values define the character of a leader and hence his/her leadership style: ambition, competency, individuality, equality, integrity, service, responsibility, accuracy, respect, dedication, diversity, improvement, enjoyment/fun, loyalty, credibility, honesty, innovativeness, teamwork, excellence, accountability, empowerment, quality, efficiency, dignity, collaboration, stewardship, empathy, accomplishment, courage, wisdom, independence, security, challenge, influence, learning, compassion, friendliness, discipline/order, generosity, persistency, optimism, dependability and flexibility.

Izama (2008) concludes that 'while Ugandan government boardrooms are brimming with ideas and policies which may be the envy of other countries there is no energy to implement them. New innovations to breathe life into a lethargic civil service stop at the press conferences where they are announced.' The testimony by Izama (ibid.) suggests a leadership gap which undermines the realisation of MDGs at the local community level.

The study sought to establish the kind of leadership exercised and whether leadership influences performance in local governments. Bushenyi District was taken as a case study. The study objectives were to establish

- the kind of leadership exercised in local governments;
- whether leadership influences performance of local governments in Uganda.

Study context

The study was carried out in Bushenyi District, south-western Uganda, which basically is a rural area, yet is it also a model district in Uganda. The district had a projected population of 864 000 in 2009 (2002 national census projections), with an annual population growth rate of 2.8 per cent. Administratively, the district at the time of the study was divided into five counties: Sheema, Bunyaruguru, Igara, Ruhinda and Buhweju. The district has 27 sub-counties, two town councils, 162 parishes and 2 034 villages. For the purpose of this study, leaders at the district and those in Kyeizooba, Bitereko, Nyabubaare sub-counties and the Ishaka-Bushenyi town council formed the sampling framework. The four sub-counties in Bushenyi District were selected because of their relative physical proximity and cultural homogeneity within which the results of the study are contextualised.

The research focused on the leadership styles (independent variable) and their effect on performance (dependent variable). In the study, organisational climate and personal characteristics were assumed to be underlying factors in the choice of leadership style on the part of each leader. As suggested by Bass (1985) and Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), the assessment of organisational performance was restricted to employee task execution behaviours. The research considered downtime, interpersonal behaviour and destructive behaviours as the analysis proxy parameters of employee motivation.

This article outlines the leadership styles found in Bushenyi District and discusses recommendations within the context of the study results. In order to discover the leadership styles exercised in this district, the study was guided by Bass' (1998) theoretical orientation. The findings were based on transformational leadership values as advanced by Bass (1985). The transformational leadership values are the following:

1. *Idealised influence*: this describes managers who are exemplary role models for their associates. Managers with idealised influence can be trusted and respected by their associates to make good decisions for the organisation;
2. *Inspirational motivation*: these managers motivate associates to commit to the vision of the organisation. Managers with inspirational motivation build team spirit, in order to reach the goals of increased revenue and market growth for the organisation;

3. *Intellectual stimulation*: this describes managers who encourage innovation and creativity through challenging the normal beliefs or views of a group. Managers who provide intellectual stimulation promote critical thinking and problem solving to make the organisation better;
4. *Individual consideration*: this describes managers who act as coaches and advisors to their associates. Managers with individual consideration encourage associates to reach goals that help both the associates and the organisation.

The concept of transformational leadership was initially introduced by Burns (1978), who argues that transformational leadership becomes evident when leaders and followers encourage each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation. Through the strength of their vision and personality, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to change their expectations, perceptions and motivations, and to work towards common goals.

Study design and instruments

A descriptive cross-sectional survey study design was employed. Using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaires (MLQ),¹¹ 36 leaders and 87 raters/subordinates were selected. The respondents were selected at district level – LC 3 and LC 1 levels respectively. Of the 36 leaders in the sample, 28 completed the questionnaires (78%) while of the 87 raters in the sample, 52 completed the questionnaires (60%). Thus, the overall response – including leaders and the raters – was 123 public servants (65%).

The MLQ consisted of 45 questions, and every question was scored between 0 and 4 points, zero (0) for the alternative ‘not at all’ and four (4) points for the alternative ‘frequently, if not always’. The questionnaire measured 12 different scales: nine related to leadership styles and three related to subordinates’ behaviour (employee effectiveness, extra effort and satisfaction). The score for each scale was obtained by summing up all corresponding items and then dividing that score by the number of items comprising the scale. The mean and the standard deviation for each scale were calculated for all subjects, to obtain the average measurement of the organisation (Bass 1985).

$$\text{Score for each scale} = \frac{\text{Summation of (number of respondents x points)}}{\text{Number of items comprising the score}}$$

High scores on a leadership style scale show that the leader frequently implements this style and the corresponding behaviour. High scores on effectiveness, extra effort and satisfaction show the high motivation and pleasure of the subordinates.

The study adopted Bass’ (1998) proposed means for optimal leadership as a reference of the research findings. Bass (ibid.) proposes the components of a so-called ‘optimal leadership’. Measured with the MLQ, optimal leadership is shown through specific values in the different components. The data of this survey were compared with the recommended values (Bass 1998) to detect deviations and conformities. The means of the transformational factors should be around 3.0; the values for the transactional

components of contingent reward and management-by-exception (active) should reach 2.5; whereas the means for management-by-exception (passive) and laissez-faire leadership should not be higher than 1.0 (ibid.). These kinds of leadership results lead to high motivation, high effectiveness and the pleasure of the subordinates.

Bass (1998) denotes that the leadership styles should correlate with the organisational performance outcome measures, namely employee extra effort, effectiveness and satisfaction. He proposes that the correlations between transformational leadership and the outcome measures should be fairly high, because transformational leaders motivate their followers to work more than expected, while experiencing pleasure and fulfillment in their work.

Leadership exercised in local governments of Uganda

All five transformational scales averages in the study ranged between 1.76 and 2.23, and were below the optimal values of 3.0. Similarly, the transactional items of contingent reward and management-by-exceptions (active) did not achieve the recommended average value of 2.5. However, the transactional items management-by-exceptions (passive) (1.37) and laissez-faire leadership (1.57) were noticeably above the favourable average of 1.0.

On computing the transformational and transactional index¹² respectively, the transformational index score was 1.97¹³ while the transactional index score was 1.60.¹⁴ The study considered only these two components to obtain the transactional scale, since Bass (1998) denotes that they have positive impacts on the followers' motivation, whereas management-by-exceptions (passive) is seen as a negative leadership style. In general, the standard deviations of all components are quite high.

Interpretation

Although the recommended average values (Bass 1998) could not be achieved, a positive trend was established. The study established that all transformational scales reached the highest values and were followed by the transactional component of contingent reward, while management-by-exceptions (passive) attained the lowest value.

The conclusion is that there is no common perception about leadership style in Uganda's local governments. One possible explanation for the variations in leadership style perception is that all departments (sectors) have their own technical leaders, yet subordinates from selected departments were asked to take part in the survey. Thus the survey evaluated different leaders and not only one leader. There is no congruence of leadership behaviours and values in Uganda's local governments – something which resulted in variations in the assessments results. The observed high standard deviation results further confirm the conclusion that there is no general leadership style, but there are individual differences in leadership behaviours.

Second, the study results do not reach the values proposed by Bass (1998). Both transformational and transactional leadership scores were below the optimal levels of

3.0 and 2.5 respectively; yet the values for management-by-exception (passive) and laissez-faire leadership were above 1.0. The reasons for these deviations were examined as follows:

1. The individualised consideration (mean: 1.76) component had the lowest value, although Bass (1985) observed that individualised consideration is key to motivating followers to achieve better than expected, irrespective of constraints at the workplace. The weak form of individualised consideration in the local governments of Uganda could suggest lower effectiveness, routine work and stagnation.
2. Idealised influence (attributed 1.91 and behaviour 2.01) had the second lowest average. Idealised influence is practised randomly in some departments of Bushenyi District. Leaders who use idealised influence¹⁵ demonstrate conviction, emphasise trust, take a stand on difficult issues, and present their most important values openly (Bass 1985; Bryman 1992). As a positive consequence, subordinates are able to identify with the leaders and their articulated visions, and leadership results in committed organisational growth (Bass 1985).
3. The intellectual stimulation component had the third lowest score (mean: 1.96). This leadership behaviour is associated with leaders who convince their followers to think differently, to question and to try new perspectives. On the other hand, subordinates are encouraged to express innovative ideas and reasoning (Bass 1985). This type of behaviour is essential to prevent stagnation and frustration in Uganda's local government institutions.
4. Inspirational motivation had the highest value (mean: 2.23), but was still noticeably below Bass' recommended mean value of 3.0. With this style, leaders articulate an appealing vision of the future and challenge followers with their high standards. Subordinates are encouraged to fulfil organisational goals and to believe in them (Bass 1985; Bryman 1992). Local governments in Uganda, in order to be effective, need highly motivated co-workers. This implies that inspirational motivation leadership behaviour should be nurtured.

This detailed explanation of all transformational components and effects underscores their importance and their positive influence on employees in local government in Uganda. Therefore, given Bass' (1985) recommendations, leadership behaviour gaps are evident in Uganda's local governments, and this needs to be addressed in order to achieve higher work motivation and concomitant higher organisational effectiveness. A detailed analysis follows of the strengths and weaknesses which explain the generally low values.

Recommendations

According to Bass (1998), an item-by-item evaluation can provide insight into the weaknesses and strengths of leadership in a given context. In the study, raters ranked inspirational motivation (2.39), intellectual stimulation (2.36) and individualised consideration (2.45) behaviours highest. The presence of these behaviours suggests that

local governments in Uganda can be a spring-board for fostering other transformational behaviours, namely individualised influence (behaviour) and individualised influence (attributed).

With these behaviours, a starting-point can be set since the leaders of Bushenyi District local government know which specific behaviours they should use more regularly. Through leadership capacity-building programmes, leaders in local governments will acquire leadership techniques that are characteristic of transformational leadership (such as visionary leadership and leadership by example, among others). It is important to support these behaviours to ensure that they are implemented and to create an atmosphere in which leaders feel motivated to use these ways of leading more often.

Second, individualised consideration received a very low value, on the whole. This casts doubts over the leadership credibility of local governments. Although the study did not address leadership credibility concerns, future research should consider this area. Also, leaders should start to evaluate the moral and ethical consequences of their decisions, and spend time teaching and supervising subordinates. Leaders in local government need to work as teachers and coaches; they should consider individual abilities and react to individual needs.

Third, the results of contingent reward and management-by-exceptions (active) were far below the recommended average (3.0). This suggests that subordinates who rated their respective leaders do not observe these behaviours at the workplace, despite their importance for positive transformational leadership. Of concern is the value for management-by-exceptions (active), which is very low (mean: $1.47 < 2.5$). Active management-by-exceptions means that leaders focus on task execution, and that they correct problems immediately to maintain their current performance levels. Future research should examine this observation in order to reveal the implications this has for local governance.

Fourth, study findings show that contingent reward behaviours are below the expected average mark in Uganda's local governments (mean: $1.76 < 2.5$). According to Bryman (1992), contingent reward can lead to positive outcomes such as higher effectiveness and motivation. Therefore, local government leaders need to work with subordinates while putting in place goals and reward mechanisms for local governance.

Fifth (and unfortunately), the study revealed that the means for two scales, namely management-by-exception (1.94) and laissez-faire leadership (1.87 and 1.63) were above the Bass (1985) recommended values of 1.0. Subordinates have the feeling that their leaders do not react before problems arise, but only act when task execution has become seriously affected. Co-workers would prefer a situation in which they have the assurance of knowing that their leaders will correct mistakes and errors, in order to prevent a serious problem from arising. The two styles should not appear regularly, due to their negative impact on the leader–follower relationship (*ibid.*). Laissez-faire leaders tend to react only after problems have become serious, and often avoid making any decisions at all (*ibid.*). Sometimes subordinates get the impression that their leaders do not want to make any decisions at all, nor do they want to answer important questions. To them it seems as if the leaders sometimes try to avoid taking responsibility, and shirk the duty to be decisive.

Conclusion

Through a detailed descriptive analysis of the items in the MLQ questionnaire for Bushenyi District, a basis for changes and developments in the leadership of local governments in Uganda has been provided. All the survey values for transformational leadership were under the recommended mean (3.0), while the transactional leadership components were above the recommended mean (1.0). It would, therefore, be interesting to do research on how these results affect local government performance outcome measures in Uganda.

With a value of extra effort (1.88) being slightly under the general mean of 2.0, and effectiveness (2.30) and satisfaction (2.33) being above the general mean, this kind of leadership does not affect the outcomes in local governments in Uganda. However, since the values of transformational leadership all lie under the recommended means, it is reasonable to conclude that the values of the outcome measures are positively affected by the leadership. As the study reveals, local government administration in Uganda is characterised by laissez-faire leadership. This can affect the motivation challenges, and lead to frustration and discomfort amongst subordinates. The motivation to work more than expected is quite low, therefore no extra effort is made. The lack of rewarding behaviours in the district can be supposed because of the low values of contingent reward. Since performances are not praised and are rewarded frequently, the impression of being effective can suffer. Still, the values for effectiveness and satisfaction lay significantly above the general mean, which points to a situation in which co-workers experience pleasure and fulfilment in their jobs.

As depicted in Tables 1 and 2, the correlations between the leadership indices and the outcome measures were significant.

Table 1: Correlation between transformational leadership and the outcome measures of organisational performance

Correlation	Extra effort	Effectiveness	Satisfaction
Transformational leadership	0.86	0.85	0.87
r ²	0.74**	0.72**	0.76**

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2: Correlation between transactional leadership and outcome measures of organisational performance

Correlation	Extra effort	Effectiveness	Satisfaction
Transactional leadership	0.56	0.49	0.46
r ²	0.31**	0.24**	0.21**

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Bass (1998) stated that transformational leadership and the transactional components contingent reward and management-by-exceptions (active) lead to higher satisfaction and effectiveness amongst subordinates. This observation was supported by the study results. Leaders in organisations, who exhibit transformational leadership and contingent reward and management-by-exceptions (active), have employees who are satisfied with their work situation and perceive themselves to be effective. They perform above expectations. The study results also reveal that the correlation values for the relationship between transformational leadership and the outcome measures are higher than between the transactional components and the outcome measures. The research results underscore once more the importance and positive influence of transformational and transactional leadership on local government performance in Uganda.

Notes

1. This article's research findings were presented during the 5th Annual Research Conference at MUST; 26–27 November 2009.
2. The qualities/characteristics/behaviours that describe a leader's character as controlling and ruling, motivating or supporting.
3. The transactional leadership style developed by Bass is based on the hypothesis that followers are motivated through a system of rewards and punishment. If the follower does something good, then they will be rewarded. If the follower does something wrong, then they will be punished.
4. This is a leadership style that creates a vision and communicates it to subordinates, stimulating them to develop their abilities while accepting feedback and suggestions.
5. This is a leadership style characterised by a self-promoting personality, a high energy level, and willingness to take risks.
6. This is the subordinates' effectiveness, extra effort and satisfaction which point to organisational outcomes.
7. According to the MDG report for Uganda (2010), while access to primary education has improved especially after the introduction of universal primary education, the rates of completion of a full course of primary education have stagnated in recent years. Moreover, attaining several of the health targets, including those related to child and maternal mortality, access to reproductive health, and the incidence of malaria and other diseases, has been a slow process. The same is true of environmental management and curbing biodiversity loss.
8. The Inspector General of Government (IGG): 2008; the third national integrity survey, Uganda Government.
9. Leadership concerns inspiring followers to do what must be done to achieve organisational goals. Leaders are expected to be simultaneously decisive and reflective, offer a vision and attend to detail, make bold moves, make incremental adjustments, and have a performance-based people orientation (Bass 1981).
10. Examples of these tensions include the following: Kabale and Pallisa Districts wrongfully interdicted their CAOs, refused to reinstate them even after court ruling, and ended up with huge compensation bills. See: *The New Vision* (Kampala), 3 September 2000: 13.
11. After an extensive review of the literature on transformational and transactional leadership, an appropriate instrument was identified, called the MLQ (Bass and Avolio 1997). The questionnaire contains 36 statements that identify and measure the key aspects of leadership

behaviour, and each statement in the questionnaire relates to transactional, transformational or non-transactional leadership factors.

12. The transformational index is the mean of all five transformational components (the average means of individualised influence – attributed and behaviour, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration) were added together and then divided by 5 to obtain the general value for transformational leadership.
13. Transformational index = $(1.91 + 2.01 + 2.23 + 1.96 + 1.76)/5 = 1.97$
14. Transactional index = $(1.72 + 1.47)/2 = 1.60$
15. In his earlier work Bass named this component as charismatic leadership, since such leaders are admired as role models: they generate pride, loyalty and confidence.

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