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Some Challenges Leaders Face

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Abstract

This study focused on the challenges a leader faces when empowering his constituents. With a conscientious mark out, the discussion in this study, addressed the issue of leaders, their challenges and empowerment among their followers, using the profile of an organization named "GloryTime Academy." Presently, GloryTime Academy has a management team that comprises the founder and four specialists in the different skills catered for by the school. Currently, the institution has 20 employees. GloryTime runs on systems- the macro- and the micro-systems. In the institute, tasks are communicated accordingly to each employee and everyone works towards effectively accomplishing the goals of the school. Observations and in-depth study of GloryTime revealed that communication is the primary social process through which a meaningful common world is created or constructed in that organization. Inherent in the communication process exists the potential that enables leaders to face and handle challenges relating to the empowerment of their constituents.

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An Overview

GloryTime Academy is an organization founded by a young Nigerian woman, who is both a wife and mother in her mid-forties as well as a budding entrepreneur. The organization, which is located at Calabar, Southern Nigeria, is a private institution where young people are admitted and trained in skills such as Mathematics, English Language Literacy, Social Studies and Science. Presently, GloryTime Academy has a management team that comprises the founder and four specialists in the different skills catered for by the school. Currently, the institution has 20 employees. These comprise the principal, vice-principal, bursar, nurse, legal adviser, an editor, social worker, teachers and service support workers. GloryTime Academy has a population of 200 students.  Its motto is "Beware of the unguarded hours".

Systems in GloryTime Academy

GloryTime runs on the following systems. First, there is the macro-system consisting of the major divisions of the institution. These divisions include; the Administration, the Academics and the Special Duties. Each of these divisions constitutes a microsystem which contains the employees according to their fields of relevance. All the teachers are in the Academic microsystem while all other employees like the bursar, the nurse, the legal adviser and editor are under the Administration. The support service workers are under the Special Duties. The Principal oversees the three microsystems as well as the entire institution and directly supervises the teachers and students.  The Vice Principal is made to supervise the affairs of the Special Duties. The bursar, the nurse, the legal adviser and the editor operate as a quality team. According to Shockley-Zalabak (2015, p.192) the term 'quality team' applies to a group that meets regularly to identify and propose solutions to problems affecting the products of GloryTime Academy. These employees work on a

volunteer basis to respond to quality issues in the Academy. They are supervised by the Founder and Principal who supports them with access to useful information that constitutes problems and also gives genuine management responsiveness to change. Most of the initiatives of this quality team in GloryTime Academy have proved positive. Thus, implementation of the plans of the quality team has increased over the few years of the school's existence. In a meeting held on a monthly basis, the principal interacts with all the employees and disseminates, receives and processes information that address the well-being of GloryTime.

Processes and Principles in GloryTime Academy

Below is the description of those group processes that are observed in GloryTime Academy. First and foremost, GloryTime Academy is challenged by increased competitive pressures because there are so many schools and institutes springing up in Calabar. As a result, GloryTime clearly handles issues concerning change, employees' welfare and students' quality. The school maintains some group norms that have been developed over time. For instance, in GloryTime Academy, every employee is aware of the fact that they need to behave appropriately towards the work and especially in relating with the students. The Principal is seen as more of a facilitator and energetic leader who influences the employees positively. Tasks are communicated accordingly to each employee and everyone works towards effectively accomplishing the goals of the school. Once in a while, conflicts that arise are discussed as a group and differences are reconciled through suggested areas of agreement. Recently, a stalemate occurred between some members of the support service workers. The Principal did not use power position to agree with one and disagree with another. Rather, there was cooperative and open-minded behaviour exhibited by the Principal

that challenged both the warring individuals and the entire employee to avoid self-centred roles, encourage responsibility and focus on effectiveness.

Use of Technology

Computer-mediated interactions are also observed in GloryTime Academy. The Principal supervises her team more through e-mails. Even the parents receive and share information for, from and with the school through e-mails as well.

Motivation

The working conditions and salaries of employees of GloryTime Academy, though will not necessarily produce a high level of satisfaction or motivation at the moment, but is on a large scale of improvement compared to the first few years of the Academy's existence. For instance, presently, employees get a yearly salary raise which keeps them, so far motivated. On the other hand, students are motivated with the yearly-held event known as the Prize-Giving Day. This avenue is used to challenge work, academic growth and development among both the staff and students.

The Leader in "GloryTime Academy"

A simple way of defining who a leader is begins, first and foremost, by attempting to examine the surrounding practices and principles of such a person. Primarily, a leader must have formal authority or a source of influence over a group of people. In addition, a leader is defined by the functions and roles he/she performs. In a simple sense, Locke (1991, p.2) sees a leader as someone whom people follow. Specifically, a leader is someone who has the authority to tell a group of people what to do and gets them to take action towards a common goal. One outstanding notion that is common about leaders, therefore, is the tendency to have preferences, strategies and tactics that command the attention and actions of followers

(Shockley-Zalabak, 2015. p.241-243). In GloryTime Academy, the leadership hierarchic

starts from the Principal, then the management team, some of the employees and students

while others are considered as followers.

There are qualities that can be observed among leaders. These include; competence,

knowledge, responsibility, influence, sensitivity and trust. A useful explanation of these

concepts is examined further in this write-up. First, a competent leader is one who utilises

relevant skills, knowledge and perceptual abilities in leadership. According to

Shockley-Zalabak (2015, p.24) there is need for competence especially in areas such as

organizational communication skills because of the inherent ability to understand ways of

organizing inputs, throughputs and outputs. Competence in these and similar relevant skills

will make a leader effective. In terms of knowledge, a good leader should never be a novice,

but one who is capable of handling necessary and relevant tasks and assignments.

Furthermore, a leader must be responsible. A leader must be willing to take risks and "take

responsibility for group outcomes" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2015, p.209) or decisions made by the

group. A leader must be able to study potential risks and communicate risk messages to the

members he is responsible to and over. More so, a leader must be willing and able to

communicate risk messages that include necessary preventive measures the followers can

adopt.

Influence in leadership is thought of when someone has a high upward influence or

degree of control among the followers as explained by Jokisaari and Nurmi in

Shockley-Zalabak (2015, p.156). Specifically, an influential leader is one who is able to

exercise mentoring qualities and build relationships that can motivate the followers.

Sensitivity is another leadership skill that makes for effective leadership. A sensitive

leader is one who identifies, understands and engages in the principles and practices of

leadership. A sensitive leader is focused on practices that will make his or her leadership effective. A sensitive leader admits and makes adjustments that will keep him relevant in contemporary times. Also, a sensitive leader has the ability to sense and understand the meanings and feelings among the members of his group. He/She is responsive to both the needs and voice of the followers. Sensitivity makes a leader to listen to and accommodate others, reflect and promote good value orientations, make ethical decisions and model the inclusive-participation processes in organizational life. (Shockley-Zalabak, 2015, p. 116-117; 235). A sensitive leader will easily build and increase trust among the subordinates.

The leader of GloryTime Academy is an embodiment of all these and more qualities of an effective leader. She is competent, knowledgeable, responsible, influential and sensitive. With her team management leadership approach, she shows a high level concern for task and goal accomplishment. She upholds an exemplary interpersonal relationship among the people of her team.

Challenges of a Leader when Empowering Constituents

In a study conducted to observe why emotional complexity is functional for leaders, Rothman and Melwani (2017) concluded that leaders who experience emotional complexity are more cognitively flexible and thus make more adaptive decisions. The study further proposed that not all leaders will experience such benefits from emotional complexity; individual differences and openness to experience will moderate the leader's emotional complexity-cognitive flexibility relationship. The practical implications of this perspective for management is that the followers of an emotionally-flexible leader will make positive inferences and be empowered to act proactively (p. 259).

The above-mentioned study reveals the relational factor that exists between leaders and their followers. In some cases, simply by observing their leaders, the followers are empowered to make positive inferences of cognitive flexibility. The proposal expressed through the study of Rothman and Melwani (2017, 259-284) disclosed that the simultaneous and sequential experience of emotional complexity, can be beneficial for leader's ability to lead change.

Having underscored the above-stated relational factor between leaders and followers, it becomes apparent that leaders, most likely, face challenges when in the bid of empowering their constituents. As revealed in the study of Rothman and Melwani (2017), leaders need to experience emotional complexity which easily manifests through cognitive flexibility. In addition, leaders who will empower their constituents should be willing to exert the right influence. As earlier-cited in Shockley-Zalabak (2015, p.156), an influential leader should be such that exercises mentoring qualities and build relationships that can motivate the followers.

## Human and Organizational Communication

The human communication process is, according to Shockley- Zabalak (2015), largely an attempt to construct shared realities and create a shared meaning between participants in a given communication interaction. Principally, Craig (2007) describes communication as being the primary social process through which a meaningful common world is created or constructed. When the attempt to construct such a shared reality occurs in communication between people in an organization, Shockley-Zabalak (2015) believes it is referred to as "organizational communication" (p. 15). However, whether in interpersonal or organizational contexts, the human communication process is acknowledged to attempt to construct shared realities among people in order to generate meaning.

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Interestingly, Shockley-Zabalak (2015) notes that the human communication process, whether among persons in an organization or not, can be characterized by different factors such as manipulation, control, noise and other similar forms of distortion. In an instance where the organizational communication is characterized by message distortion, it is possible that, first, the elements of communication were not adequately utilized. Then, a second possibility must have arisen where participants gave little or no attention to distortions from factors such as noise or a similar interference, communicative competence, field of experience and the communication context.

Distortions could arise from the elements of communication: the source, the receiver, the encoding, the decoding, the message, the channel, the feedback or result. These are evident in instances where, perhaps, the source transmits a message to the receiver with either an ambiguous content or using symbols, words and language which are not a sufficient reflection of the organization's regular activities. When such happens in an organization, message distortion is inevitable. On the other hand, distortions may arise from the use of a message channel that failed to be compliant with the cultural, physical and environmental ethics of the organization. As a result, participants would find it difficult to construct a necessary level of meaning through shared knowledge vital to meaning making in the communication process.

In order to avert a situation of message distortion, participants in an organizational communication, must bring to bear on the communication process, their competence, knowledge, skills, values, sensitivity and relevant field of experience. In GloryTime Academy, a process of communication has been created where the right source of information is only given due recognition to so as to avoid message distortion. However, GloryTime Academy has learned from message distortion in the past where in some cases, employees or

students have been misinformed by unauthorized sources. In addition, the creation and

exchange of messages must target the use of relevant channels understood by all the

participants and devoid of any form of noise. Moreover, message fidelity must be expressed

towards all the participants (Shockley-Zabalak, 2015). Communication intentions that can

contribute to generating meaning must be expressed. Furthermore, participants in an

organizational communication, should, henceforth, attempt to approach an organizational

communication context with a competence and background knowledge that will enable them

to construct a communication context that is open, unambiguous and in line with the ethics

and cultural expectations of both the organization and the immediate environment as

communication settings. Finally, this write-up agrees totally with the position of

Shockley-Zabalak (2015) which affirms that the result of a carefully-constructed

communication interaction will remain effective and create a social reality (p.15).

Ethics and Values

Some issues observed in GloryTime Academy have value and ethical implications.

Some outstanding ones are discussed in this study. First, there is the money issue. To

maintain some form of standards, all fees and charges for services from GloryTime are made

in the bank. Salaries of employees are equally paid through the bank. Moreso, general salary

information are made available to individual employees upon any request. Yet, the same

employees are made to sign confidentiality agreements as touching their relationship with

students and the parents as well as about their service to the Academy. According to

Shockley-Zalabak (2015, p.127) "confidentiality is designed to protect organizational

information necessary for competitive advantage".

Secondly, destructive behaviours such as sexual harassment, aggression, lying and

deception are discouraged among all the staff and students of GloryTime Academy. The

leadership of GloryTime specifically prohibited these behaviours because they inhibit and violate the basic human rights and also attract unethical consequences. Therefore, every staff and student of the institute is regularly kept aware of these destructive behaviours. Such awareness is sometimes organized through special events with experts invited to talk at such occasions.

Organizational Change

Every organization desires change. As cited by Kursunoglu (2006) in Hosguror (2016, p. 2031) in order for a system to sustain and to be effective, it needs to adapt itself to the ever-changing conditions around itself.  However, only the organizations which give due attention to those factors can drive change by either studying change triggers or by examining the impact that complacency might have on change itself. It is only through a strategic management of change that organizations can deliver. As it has been mentioned in this paper, in GloryTime Academy, change has been a continuous practice in the system. It is believed that only when changes happen, that is when successful can be attained. Planning the change and ensuring its sustainability through successfully managing and implementing it is crucial for an organization to improve itself, to respond to demands, and to successfully continue to exist for a longer time (Akyüz, 2006; Özmen & Sönmez, 2007 as cited in Hosguror, 2016, p.2029). Change, in its general meaning, describes a situation where individuals or objects change their places or personal knowledge and skills become advanced over time (Koçel, 2011 as cited in Hosguror, 2016, p. 2030). In other words, change is the transformation of a system, a process or an environment from one status to another in a planned or unplanned manner. According to Kant as cited in Yeniçeri (2002, p.15 -43), change happens when "special characteristics of something undergo change" or when "something is transformed into something else". From an organizational point of view, change describes a process

experienced by an organization in order to provide more products and services in a more

efficient, more productive and more competitive manner (Hosguror, 2016, p.2030). A similar

study conducted by Done, Murphy and Bedford (2016, p.13 -26) highlighted an instance of

managing change becoming a built-in factor that was required from the role of special

education needs co-ordinators. While many organizations may toe the above-stated line in

change management, others may lead on in ways that may make one think that such was not

ready for change.

Foremost consideration for change is determined by examining the internal and

external factors that drive change. Hodges and Gill (2015, p.520 ) suggest that technology

and its impact on communication, Economic related factors such as knowledge of the

economy, market growth and activities and the political drive, such as privatization and

deregulation constitute the external triggers of change. An organization that does not give

sufficient attention to the learning, and monitoring of these factors may appear not ready for

change. According to Hodges and Gill already cited above, the external change agents cause a

globalization of the market and create competition as well as enhance more opportunities of

having bigger markets and fewer barriers. On the other hand, the internal triggers of change

are not gigantic concepts as those of the external category, but constitute these following

actions among others. First, organizations must be willing and ready to embrace innovations

in service and product designs, changes in the management team and structure, recognition of

problems of inadequate skills and reallocation of responsibilities and constant innovative

ideas in the manufacturing processes and service delivery to customers.

Having established the existence of the above-mentioned triggers of change, it is

expected that organizations do not remain complacent in their response to these

overwhelming evidence. Change managers can, therefore, begin to utilize relevant models

such as the Lewin's Force Field Analysis as cited in Hodges and Gill (2015) for driving forces for and against change. With this diagnostic model of analysis, it is easy for the managers to monitor the current state and the forces to drive and equally observe the desired state and the forces that need to be restrained. Also, using the appropriate model, change agents like Managers will consider whether the change is necessary and whether the workforce exhibits any obvious form of readiness. GloryTime Academy has experienced change in diverse ways, which were initiated by the Principal and her team of management. These changes have brought GloryTime Academy to its current successful state. One outstanding change observed is that the academic curriculum has been updated to Montessori standard. Other models exist but are a bit more complex than the Lewin's approach. Finally, Oakland and Tanner (2006, p.69-87) caution work organizations to prepare for change by merging the processes of readiness for change and implementation of change. In essence, change managers in organizations should both be ready to embrace and implement change, without giving place to complacency which is capable of bringing a negative impact on the organization.

Conclusion

GloryTime Academy is a contemporary organization. The account rendered in this study reveals that the above-named institution is run on a team-based organizational structure with fewer managers and network of self-managing teams. For instance, a group such as the Quality team works collaboratively with the Principal to monitor and produce quality students from the Academy.

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