

Examining Ethical Reasoning And Transactional Leadership Style In The Nigerian Public Sector

Chikelu Okey Felix¹, Abd Halim B Ahmad², Rosita Bint Arshad³.

^{1,2,3}. Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 0610, UUM Sintok, Kedah, Darul Aman, Malaysia

Abstract: *The moral depth of transactional leadership is not fully explicated and its linkage to moral behaviour is conflicting. This study examines public leaders' degree of moral judgment and transactional leadership behaviour as perceived by subordinates. The Defining Issues Test (DIT2) and the Multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ X5) was completed by leaders and subordinates respectively (Rest, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 2004). PLS path analysis of the structural model indicates no significant statistical relationship between cognitive, moral development (CMD) and transactional leadership style (TL) ($\beta=0.120, t=1.286, P<0.10$). However, we argue that cognitive, moral development is amiable to the individual qualities of the leader that might necessitate the application of particular leadership style and behaviour. We also found a collaboration evidence that leaders high in cognitive, moral development are perceived more as transformational leaders by their subordinates. Finally, we suggest that the dichotomies between moral reasoning and leadership style are hinged more on individual leadership values and motivational beliefs.*

Keywords: *Ethical reasoning, Transactional leadership, Public Sector.*

I. Introduction

Public leaders' degree of moral development has attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners for decades and credible organizations encourage ethical reasoning and behaviour for efficiency and effectiveness. The increasing nature and momentum of ethical decline and leadership failure elicits academic curiosity, as both the transformational and transactional styles of leadership focus on employee relationship with leaders which constitutes complex methodological and theoretical challenges to scholars. Moreover, the impact of individual value orientation remains under explored, while leadership plays crucial role towards blending man and materials for effective organizational outcome.

One of the most crucial areas of concern among leadership theorists, and practitioners currently is about leaders and their ethical behaviour, or whether leadership constructs are generalizable across cultures (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Zhang et al., 2012). Ethical decline and lapses has no boundary as its effects permeate the daily business decisions of government, including those in the private sector. High profile companies are known to have crumbled due to unethical practices. In Nigeria, publicized and unpublicized ethical scandals involving corruption, deception, fraud and general moral decadence on the part of public officials is increasingly alarming at all levels of government. The impact of these maladies is monumental and glaring in the areas of structural defects and institutional decay (Agbakoba, 2013). Research identifies ethics, integrity and the trust they create as the main fabric of organizational success and reputation.

Research has attributed the leadership crisis and failure in the Nigeria public sector to a lack of ethical practices and behaviour among the leaders. Although most of the values usually linked to ethics in the public sector are always examined independently of the broader issue of leadership (Van Wart, 2003; Abrhiem, 2012), in line with this, we believe that ethics and leadership will be an illusion, if both concepts are not blended. Despite the seemingly crucial role both plays in organizations, only few researches have been documented in the Nigerian context at this time, and in particular no study examined the influence of cognitive, moral development of leaders in Nigeria public sector (Achebe, 1983; Debie 2013).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of cognitive, moral development of transactional leadership style in the Nigerian public sector. Thus, the ability to nurture public organizations of integrity that enhances trust of the subordinates and the entire citizenry through the application of ethical practices and moral leadership behaviour is an imperative, contrary to the existing norms.

II. Transactional Leadership Style

A managerial leadership concept geared towards performance through role supervision, based on exchange, expectation and reciprocity between what leaders and followers give to each other. Transactional leadership triumphs more in crisis and urgent situations, as well as for tailor measured specified projects (Avolio & Bass, 1985; Avolio & Wulumba, 2009). However, unlike transformational leaders, transactional leaders are

not futuristic as they are more concerned with the maintenance of the status-quo. Transactional leadership style is a complex type of leadership that is compliance based, using carrot and stick, it is more of give and take spelt out in the form of punishment or reward. It is unique as it has some features of laissez-faire a non leadership quality by employing management-by-exception both active and passive, contingent reward, Laissez-faire is non leadership as it avoids decision making (Kirbride, 2006).

Moreover, management by exception connotes that leader steps in only when things are deviating from normal, through the application of active or passive management. Both live up to their names as management-by-exception active refers to leaders who actually monitor their staff, correcting mistakes as at when due, looking out for problems before they occur. While management-by-exception passive, refers to leaders who wait and only come in when problems arise. This type of leadership is vital in certain situations due largely to human personality and dynamism, but poor in ethical or moral reasoning. Research shows that both leadership behaviour and styles are related to moral based leadership which balances the impact of both on performance of followers.

2.1 Transactional leadership and Cognitive Moral Development

Contingent reward remains one major link between transactional leadership and moral reasoning (Pescosolido, 2002; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Organizational leadership is about followers' perception of belief and values, it is a clearly defined relationship between leaders and followers whereby cardinal issues of interest are ironed out. Transactional leadership is pragmatic and rational inline with transformational leadership that appeals to individual emotions and zeal (Pescosolido, 2002). Moral reasoning or ethics are more than rules and regulations about what could be regarded as morally correct action or wrong action based on motive of an action and its consequences. It connotes the hallmark or characteristic of a given profession (Frederickson, 2010). Ethics could be regarded as part of the larger society as it is not only concerned with individual behaviour and moral judgement, but with all the enabling institutions and policies of leadership processes.

Ethical judgement is an acceptable solution to an ethical dilemma or between conflicting systems, values, beliefs which requires that a leader must make a decision to follow in achieving a set objective. (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 1991). It is important to note that each decision made by a leader is usually based on one criterion or the other, therefore ethical reasoning and ethical decisions sometimes are based on more than one ethical theory or ethical principle. For example, scholars are of the view that different ethical content will naturally invoke a different ethical reasoning approach as in cases of coercion and control; this normally will invoke the act utilitarianism ethical reasoning (Bass, 1985; Fritzsche & Becker, 1984; Premeaux, 2004; Kimberlin 2012).

Kohlberg (1969) remains a reference point whenever moral judgement level is being considered, his theory of cognition (CMD), buttress the stages or processes of moral reasoning. People develop or move from the lowest to the highest stage, which is the post conventional stage, Moreover, ethical reasoning is based on individual capacity to develop to the highest level. While those, at the pre-conventional stage occupy themselves with what is right due largely to fear of punishment (stage1), or a sort of give and take (stage2), individuals at the conventional stage, do what is right based on expectation of others(stage3), By stage(4) individuals are principle minded and decides what is right due to their cherished values and standards irrespective of divergent views, at stage (5) individuals are concerned with justice, rights and faire play, while at stage (6) which is more of a theory than practicable as at now.

However, Kohlberg's theory has been simplified into a manageable form (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999), while retaining the core elements of the former theory. Leaders with a higher moral reasoning are admired by subordinates (Turner et al, 2002). Based on motivational values, leaders usually rationalize moral decisions on certain beliefs likely to influence the observer's desire to emulate such modelled individual behaviour.

2.3 Public administration and Ethics

Nowadays, public official needs to behave ethically, understand his duties or what is required of him by the organization and the people. In practice, both types of normative ethical theories are used, but people tend to have a propensity for one paradigm over another, what happens is rationalization and justification as one paradigm guides the philosophical purpose, psychology gives more insight into human cognition and behavioural patterns that ultimately affect ethical decision making

Public administration is seen as a channel for delivering services to the public (Ayodele & Bolaji, 2007) and it is equally used as a tool of a value expression (Bourgon, 2007). Scholars argue that public administration is an institution and an instrument through which credible governments provide the needed socioeconomic and human development of the people. Administration on its own is a method of carrying out functional responsibilities of the public officials. A healthy or viable civil service in this study means as earlier conceptualized the capacity to honour obligations and discharge responsibilities or functions transparently in an ethical manner through the application of ethical decision making in work situations (Hope, 2005).

On the other hand, the public's expectations are twofold, one that the government through its officials will manage and utilize public resources for general well being of the citizenry and secondly that the official's behaviour should be above board. Seok-Eun (2005) indicated that citizens are right to expect efficient and effective social services from the government in areas of health-care, education system and general security of life and property as this goes a long way to foster public trust. Research has evidenced that public trust and confidence increases when elected and appointed leaders make ethical decisions and exhibit ethical behaviours that promote the interest and well being of the entire citizenry. Public sector leaders are influential in the formulation and implementation of public policies and programmes of the government (Ayodele & Bolaji, 2007), as a result of the tremendous influence they exert, public leader's decisions and actions carry a lot of weight (Balogun, 2007; Northouse, 2007).

Moral reasoning is pivotal or the heartbeat of legitimate government in achieving and delivering the dividends of democracy to the citizenry. It was argued that ethical conditions for civil servants have been with us for long and actually came with democracy Fournier (2009) The importance of ethics in public administration cannot be overemphasized. Moral reasoning is a fundamental element in a democracy, even the secular and the religious attests to the essence of ethical leadership for effective and efficient administration (Bowman Williams (1997 & Toor & Ofori, 2009).

The proposition is that, if public officials are made up men and women of high morals, integrity, operating at a higher stage of ethical reasoning and behavioural character, the rate of ethical decline and loss of trust in the public sector will be drastically reduced or eradicated, as the public resources will henceforth be properly and judiciously managed for the benefit of the citizenry. Moreover, contingent reward is favourably disposed to ethical leadership (Kanungo, 2001), as it provides both leaders and subordinates morally sound base for mutual aspirations (Cuilla, 2005; Shamir, 1995). Thus, contingent reward prevents self-centredness, it is posited that ethical reasoning relates to transactional leadership behaviour.

Hypothesis 1: Public leaders' degree of cognitive moral development is correlated to transactional leadership style as perceived by the subordinates

III. Methodology

This research is quantitative in nature, carried out to examine the effect of cognitive, moral reasoning on transactional leadership style in the Nigerian public sector. The target population of this study are the employees of the Kebbi State public service and the population frame was obtained from the State's Civil Service Commission Kebbi that controls the various ministries in the state. Kebbi State is in the North- Western part of Nigeria and it was primarily selected for this study because her enviable size as one of the most populated within the geopolitical area in the country, having an estimated population of about 10 million people out of the total estimated Nigerian population of 140 million (NPC, 2006), therefore, Kebbi State represents a viable zone in Nigeria's public sector organization.

The study adopted a stratified random sampling method due to the diversity of ministries mandate and the likely diversity equally in style of leadership and individual belief system. The essence is to gain more insight into the perception of employees on leadership styles (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler 2008, Sekaran, 2009). Four ministries were randomly selected from the ten ministries that were not affected by the recent mergers and equally are the core ministries with the largest population based on statistical report (2013). The total of employees of the four ministries is 14,337. Using the simplified Sampling table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a total sample size of 375 is deemed adequate for the study. However, the researcher decided to even it up to 400, the reason is to enhance a large response rate as Nigeria is characterized by a poor response to survey research. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents to achieve the desired objectives. This is in respect to the nature of the formulated hypotheses in this study. For cognitive, moral development (CMD), the DIT-2 questionnaire, which is in two parts containing the instructions and stories of ethical, social problems, as well as questions on ethical issues raised was used. The transactional leadership style was measured using the MLQ X5 (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The instrument was divided into three sections, namely: Demographic factors, ethical reasoning, and the transactional leadership style. Respondents were required to answer questions on ethical reasoning/value orientation (CMD) using a 5 Likert-type scale adopted from a series of ethical dilemmas/value estimates and scenarios developed by eminent scholars (Schwartz, 1992; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In this study, Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) software (Ringle et al., 2005) was used for the analysis of the collected data in this study. In addition, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the descriptive analyses of the respondents. In order to measure the significance of linear bivariate between the Cognitive Moral Development (CMD) and transactional leadership. A regression analysis was used to meet the objective of the research (Coakes, 2005). The choice of PLS-SEM in this study is based on the fact that PLS suits complexities of models, due largely to its flexibility in development and validation of models (Aker et al., 2011). Therefore, PLS was chosen to establish, construct, measurement and structural models in this study.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated by assessing the convergent validity, which is measured by loading, the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) result. The result revealed good items loading above the recommended threshold (0.5) by Hair et al., (2014). Also, the result of the average variance extracted (AVE) indicates a value of 0.533 for transactional leadership style, but no value for Cognitive Moral Development (CMD), because it was measured by a single item (P-score value of the respondents). Concerning the composite reliability result which measures the internal consistency the measurement instrument, the analysis found a value of 0.888 for transactional leadership style. The values of the composite reliability are greater than the threshold value of 0.7 recommended by Hair et al., (2014), which indicate an internal consistency of the instrument. In addition, the finding revealed an R-square value of 0.2, indicating that 20% variance in transactional leadership style was explained by the cognitive moral reasoning (CMD). The summary of the measurement model in this study is presented in Table 3 below.

Construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	R-Square
CMD	P-Score	1.000	Single item	Single Item	
TSL	TSMBA4	0.577	0.533	0.888	0.20
	TSMBP2	0.709			
	TSMBP3	0.819			
	TSMBP4	0.724			

IV. Findings

The analysis of the demographic profile of the respondents revealed that the largest proportion representing 65% of the respondents is from the ministry of education. The major percentage, 42.7% have between 6 - 10 years working experience, 40.3% have between 1 - 5 years working experience, 14.6% has between 11 - 15 years of working experience, only 2.4% of the respondents have more than 16 years of service experience. On the hand, 67.5% of the respondents are male, while 32.5% are female. More so, the majority of the respondents are Muslims 64.6%, 24.3 are Christians, while 11.2 are in the group of other religions. Concerning the age of the populations, 38.8% range between 30 – 39 years, 29.6% are between 20 – 29 years of age, 21.4% are between 40 – 49 years of age, while 10.2% are more than 50 years of age. Furthermore, 33.% of the respondents are officers in senior executive of their respective organizations, 26.2% made up the chief executive, 20.9%, while supervisors, and the remaining 19.4% are at a non-supervisory officer grade position. In the aspect of the respondents’ educational qualification, 52.4% of the respondents have master degree, 25.2 % have a bachelor degree, 18.4% are doctoral degree holders, while the remaining 3.9 have diploma qualifications. The result of the demographic analysis is presented in Table 1 of this study.

Table:1 Respondents demographic features.

Construct		Frequency	Percentage
Ministry	Ministry of Education	134	65.0
	Ministry of works and housing	43	20.9
	Ministry of health	15	7.3
	Ministry of finance	14	6.8
Work Experience	1-5 years	83	40.3
	6-10 years	88	42.7
	11-15 years	30	14.6
	16 and above	5	2.4
Gender	Male	139	67.5
	Female	67	32.5
Religion	Muslim	133	64.6
	Christian	50	24.3
	Others	23	11.2
Age Group	20-29 years	61	29.6
	30-39 years	80	38.8
	40-49 years	44	21.4
	50 and above	21	10.2
Position and Responsibility	Chief executive officer	54	26.2
	Senior executive officer	69	33.5
	Supervisory grade	43	20.9
	Non supervisory grade	40	19.4
Highest Qualification	Doctoral degree	38	18.4
	Masters degree	108	52.4
	Undergraduate degree	52	25.2
	Diploma level	8	3.9

Descriptive Analysis of the Respondents Cognitive Moral Development

This study used Defining Issues Test (DIT-2) by Rest (1999) which focuses the schema uses by individual in solving ethical issues and which determine the respondent’s stage of moral reasoning. The result shows that the major proportion, 71.8% of the respondents are at the preconventional stage of moral reasoning, 13. % are in the conventional while those at the postcoventional stages of moral reasoning are 14.6%. Table 2 presents the summary of the moral reasoning level of the respondents.

Table 2: Respondents Mean DIT P-Scores by Moral Reasoning Stages/Schemas (N = 206)

Cognitive Moral Development Stages/Schemas	Rest Values	Cutoff	Mean PScore	Frequency	%
Preconventional/Personal Interest	0 – 27		15	148	71.8
Conventional/Maintaining Norms	28 - 41		35.67	28	13.6
Postconventional	> 42		50.56	30	14.6

Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity indicates whether the concept under investigation in a study is unique in a model (Hair et al. 2013). By using the Fornel and Lakers criterion, achieved by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted values with the correlation values of each latent variable in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The result shows that the AVE value of each construct is greater than its highest correlation with any other constructs in the model, which thereby indicates the achievement of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014). Table 4 presents the result of the discriminant validity.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity Result

	CMD	TSL
CMD	Single Item	
TSL	-0.057	0.730

Structural Model

In testing the stated research hypotheses in this study, the structural model was assessed through the PLS path analysis. The result of the standard path coefficients (β), standard error, t-value, and the decision taken on the hypotheses found that there is no statistical significant relationship between cognitive, moral development (CMD) and transactional leadership style (TFL) ($\beta = -0.081$, $t = 0.218$, $P < 0.10$) in the Nigerian public sector.

V. Discussion

This study gave an insight into cognitive, moral development and transactional leadership behaviour and observed no significant statistical relationship. Thus, it contributed to the ethical foundation of transactional leadership as contingent reward is perceived as a moral procedure in leader and subordinate relationship. Most studies investigating transactional leadership, morality and ethics are usually done by assessing only behavioural items (Taylor & Francis, 2010; Shatzer, Caldarella & Hallam, 2014; Avolio & Wulumba, 2009), adopting the application of the (MLQ-5X), which is not an all encompassing of morality measure (Gardner, 2003) Contingent reward is linked to transformational leadership in most empirical studies (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), and provides core management ingredients for mutual benefits.

However, theoretical arguments of moral base of transactional leadership are not supported by the results of the present research which rends credence to empirical evidence that higher moral development is related to better use of ethical leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

VI. Conclusion

Interestingly, cognitive moral development is associated with both transactional and transformational leadership styles (Bass, 198; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), but this study failed to buttress the postulations, while earlier studies indicated a positive relationship at least with transformational leadership. Transactional leadership is both pragmatic and rational for leaders and subordinates thereby complementing transformational leadership that appeals to an individual’s belief and emotions. Research indicates that contingent reward is equally ethical as it is morally based leadership (Kanungo, 2001). Terms are spelt out before a given task and negotiated properly by both parties, it connotes fairness, security to organizations and followers

However, there is the need to further explore the dichotomy puzzles between cognitive, moral development and transactional leadership behaviours. This entails challenging some existing theories and the development of new research designs

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