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Influence of Professional Development on Academic Leadership at the University of Lagos, Nigeria

Dr. Morenike Adebayo-Ige¹, Dr. Solomon Bello², Dr. Simeon Oladipo², Dr. Funmilayo²
Ajetunmobi² & Dr. Benedicta Lusk³

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to enhance the soft skills and leadership effectiveness of academic leaders and staff at the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Nigeria. Training topics included weekly, three-hour virtual, interactive sessions conducted by expert faculty and practitioners in the areas of motivation, leadership mindset, team building, time management, human relations management, and performance evaluation. Anonymous surveys were conducted pre- and post-training delivery over six weeks. Survey results were categorized thematically using qualitative analysis. Results indicated 92% of attendees were positively influenced and highly motivated to work on self-improvement and team building in their leadership roles. Findings show participants felt highly motivated and encouraged to use newly acquired tools to enhance self-awareness, develop positive and growth mindsets, and improve teamwork. Although shared leadership was perceived as an interesting topic, future studies should explore cultural barriers to shared leadership and tailor LDP's for better outcomes based on cultural values.

Keywords: Leadership development, academic leadership effectiveness, leadership mindset, motivation, time management, performance evaluation, human relations management, teamwork.

Data Access Statement: Research data supporting this publication are available from the educational leadership department repository located at the Educational Leadership Department, College of Education, CSUF.

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¹ Antelope Valley College, Lancaster, CA. USA

² University of Lagos, Akoka-Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria. Email: Communicationunit@unilag.edu.ng

³ California State University, 800 n. State College Blvd., SGMH 5383, Fullerton, Ca. 92831, USA. Email: Blusk@fullerton.edu

1.Influence of Professional Development on Academic Leadership at the University of Lagos, Nigeria

In a technology-driven world, leadership development programs (LDPs) can have a significantly positive effect on management and staff. LDPs are critical for self-reflection and personal and professional growth to enhance human capital (Westfall, 2019). According to Avolio et al. (2009), LDPs can impact leadership effectiveness positively by providing new skills and knowledge. Global investment in LDPs is a \$365 billion industry; however, few studies have examined the results of such programs (Day et al., 2014; Gurdjian et al., 2014). Employees tend to become sedentary in their roles and feel lost and unmotivated without concerted efforts by management to revive and rejuvenate skillsets and provide motivational direction and tools to improve desired outcomes. The cost of traditional training and LDPs can be a major constraint prohibiting institutions from seeking professional training for employees. Among the major factors of consideration are travel costs, logistics of hiring professional trainers, and coordination of experts from around the world to provide such training. This study examined the effectiveness of post pandemic professional LDPs using technology to reach international borders and cultures to provide result-oriented outcomes for leadership development. Technology has shrunk the globe and opened the possibility for collaboration among leaders to enhance the contribution of human capital to achieve organizational goals and sustain competitive advantage (Douglas et al., 2021).

The LDP of study was designed to improve the leadership skills of the academic faculty, management, staff, administrators, and research students. Leadership training topics were selected based on UNILAG's self-assessment of training needs in collaboration with the LDP team. The topics covered included leadership mindset, team building, time management, performance evaluation, motivation, and leadership development. Leadership and management experts from California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) were selected to deliver weekly three-hour sessions via live Zoom sessions over six weeks.

The uniqueness of this study rests in its focus on LDP across cultural boundaries and the application of leadership theory and practices outside Western culture. Technology has enabled the collaboration and sharing of information and training programs worldwide, mitigating the time and cost factors of providing LDP training to a larger audience.

The following research question guided this study:

To what extent does professional development in leadership mindset, team building, time management, motivation, performance evaluation, and human resource management impact administrative effectiveness?

The above research question captures the essence of the LDP training and provides a means to evaluate the immediate effectiveness of the training as well as capture the timeline for future progress reviews.

2. Methods

2.1 Design and Setting

The LDP designed and conducted virtually with three-hour weekly Zoom sessions over a period of six weeks. The program schedule was announced at the University of Lagos (UNILAG) four weeks in advance, 200 invitations were sent, and an RSVP was requested from all interested parties. A total of 120 RSVPs were collected, showing tremendous interest in the program. Attendance in the program was voluntary; however, participants earned a program certificate from CSUF if they attended five of the six sessions. CSUF faculty delivered the training sessions via Zoom, with breakout rooms, chats, polls, Q&A, and open discussions incorporated throughout the three-hour session. Survey data were collected before the session to identify perceived challenges on the topic and after the session presentation to capture learning highlights. Open-ended questions were included to allow participants to share the need for additional training opportunities. This case study involved a detailed analysis of the survey responses collected from

participants before and after each training session to understand the challenges faced by participants before the training and to capture the effectiveness of the training session immediately after completion.

2.2 Leadership Program Description

The LDP was designed and tailored in accordance with the requirements identified by UNILAG, and the Director of the LIFT program at CSUF. Six management and leadership topics were identified to benefit UNILAG participants. A team of CSUF professors and administrative experts were selected to present these topics. Each session was designed to provide attendees with state-of-the-art theories, research, and best practices in the form of lectures, group discussions, and interactive materials to engage them in learning. The virtual training was synchronous and tailored to provide participants with ample opportunities to engage with the presenter and their cohort in Q&A sessions, breakout rooms, polls, and chats. Participants were sent presession surveys one week before the training, and upon completion of the session, participants were asked to complete the post-session survey. Survey participation was optional for each individual, not mandatory. CSUF provided survey links; responses were collected directly from attendees and stored safely in a password-protected system by the CSUF College of Education. Participants provided survey data anonymously for this research paper, without names, departments, positions, or identifying personal data.

3. Literature Review

Literature review presented below provides a better understanding of the topics covered during the LPD process.

3.1 Leadership Mindset

According to Kouzes and Posner (2019), leaders with a growth mindset operate on the assumption that behavior is learned and can be changed through learning and practice. In comparison, managers with a fixed mindset approach subordinates' abilities as static and unchangeable, subsequently engaging in nonproductive behaviors that demotivate and limit performance outcomes. Managers with a fixed mindset behave differently from those who embrace a growth mindset; for instance, managers with a growth mindset can influence and empower employees to achieve higher performance. Gottfredson and Reina (2021) suggested mindset is a critical component of leadership behavior: when leaders have the tools to create a positive mindset, they are able to synthesize the situation and behavior to greater effectiveness in the organization. This mindset can also be applied to academic and sports teams, where teachers and coaches can use a growth mindset to influence and motivate higher student performance (Atwood, 2010; Canning et al., 2019).

3.2 Team Building & Motivation

Achievement of set goals and objectives in any organization or higher institution of inclusive learning can be ensured when staff members (i.e., academic and nonacademic) operate as a unified team. Working as a team in an organization can also bring about staff efficiency, improvement in service delivery, overall progressive output, and organizational growth and development. The oldest form of social organization, in which humans are involved in managing available resources to achieve set goals and objectives, is a team. Complex assignments could be carried out successfully by a team that is mutually in need of each other with corresponding roles and tasks (Jacobsson et al., 2017).

Team building is also an indispensable tool for ensuring endless advancement and effective, uncluttered, and progressive communication, thereby ascertaining increased trust and leadership potential of organization members (Mobolade & Akinade, 2021). Shuffler et al. (2018) defined teams as two or more individuals who relate enthusiastically, interdependently, and adaptively toward a common goal, where each member plays a specific role in filling within the boundary of the team. The output of an individual working alone on a given project cannot be compared to the deliverables of a synergized team assigned to the same task. Stewart and Barrick cited in (Shuffler et al., 2018) opined that teams have been regarded as the basic building of organizations, and their findings imply that team building could facilitate effective

teamwork among all team members, thereby creating a productive atmosphere free from all forms of distractions.

3.3 Time Organization and Management

Time management is one of the most crucial activities in the modern era. The capacity required by people to use time successfully has an impact on their output, levels of stress, work—life balance, and general well-being. Time management has evolved into a significant subject in any educational organizational structure, whether private or public, across the globe. As a result, every educational organization requires time management to ensure the desired operational flow and achievement of organizational goals and objectives become efficient and seamless (Kordestani & Azadi, 2016).

Effective and productive use of time has become an inevitable necessity for the advancement of an individual's professional and personal lives. According to Grissom et al. (2015), organizational efficiency tends to improve when effective time management measures are in place, reducing costs and bolstering efficiency by increasing the time allocated to highly important tasks. Globally, modern changes in the various levels of education—with greater challenges, expectations, and the need to thrive to attain success—have made the responsibilities of educational administrators more onerous and convoluted, underscoring the need for time management, particularly in the area of timely problem-solving strategies (Tekin & Akil, 2020).

Time management and organization involves the act of planning, assigning, and using one's time to attain specified goals and objectives (Tekin & Akil, 2020). Making deliberate decisions about how to spend time, ensuring that activities correspond with priorities, and maximizing productivity while maintaining a good work—life balance are inclusive of time management strategies. Time management and organization may be applied to different aspects of life, including private, professional, educational, and social pursuits.

Time management aims to improve efficiency by avoiding time wastage, thereby controlling the work schedule to a given timetable. Boutot and Hume (2012) opined that time management is the art of arranging business and personal affairs in such a way that outlined programs show up when, where, and how they have been intended, as frequently and effortlessly as possible, and to facilitate completing tasks done as quickly as possible with fewer resources (e.g., time, energy, money, and people) necessary. Time management is about making changes to the way one spends their time (Susan et al., 2012). Claessens et al. (2009) defined time management as a type of behavior that differentiates people who operate on time, stick to deadlines, and spend little time on their activities from those who are often late, pass deadlines, spend much time on their activities, and waste time on unimportant matters.

Academia can concentrate on high-impact tasks using prioritization strategies, such as the matrix developed by Eisenhower (Nd). Nonacademic staff in universities frequently perform various tasks (e.g., administrative duties, services for students, property maintenance) that require balancing these obligations, necessitating time management solutions suited to their specific work settings. Therefore, time management and organization are considered indispensable tools for effective job performance by academic and nonacademic staff in higher learning institutions. University management could enable their employees to grow professionally and personally by providing platforms that could expose them to efficient time management practices, thereby providing the organization with support to foster work–life balance.

3.4 Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation is a structured procedure in which workers obtain feedback on how they perform and get recognized and sometimes promoted for a well-done job. Performance evaluation activities allow for the determination of whether workers' performance is in line with specified objectives and are based largely on the evaluation of employees' job outcomes and activity (i.e., behavior), along with competence (i.e., skills, talents, and qualities). Performance assessment is considered from a larger perspective of performance management in modern management, where the precision of measurement and accuracy of ratings are supplemented by the social and motivational components of the appraisal process (Fletcher, 2001).

Along with task performance, which includes job-specific behaviors and fundamental tasks, increased emphasis has been placed on the assessment process of non-job-specific behaviors such as collaboration, devotion, enthusiasm, and persistence. These components of contextual performance become increasingly relevant as organizational and task complexity increases (Boyd, 2004). Performance evaluation is a systematic method used to assess employees' performance and to recognize their abilities for further growth and progression in the institutional career chain. The key objective of a performance evaluation system is to keep track of employee performance and boost enthusiasm among workers, which will enhance corporate morale and be a valuable tool for evaluating and analyzing employee skills. Generally, supervisors are the primary source of judging and evaluating their subordinates' performance; however, in some recent methods of performance appraisal (e.g., 360 feedback), an employee's performance is evaluated by everyone who meets them, whether it is a supervisor, coworkers, customers, peers, subordinate managers, team members, suppliers, or vendors (Turk, 2007).

The process of assessing, summarizing, and developing personnel's work performance is known as performance appraisal. Every year, academic staff receive a written performance review that offers feedback on performance and validates staff choices such as promotion and earnings (Okafor, 2023). This official form contains a self-assessment page for the lecturer to complete, which is then forwarded to the individual department heads who declare their opinion. The completed form is subsequently given to the appointment and promotion committee, which reviews and recommends actions (e.g., promotion, system continuity, termination, or warning). The conduct standards that constitute the heart of the performance evaluation required of university workers are outlined in the staff handbook and pertain to duties that define academic quality and expected outcomes. Academic peers apply these criteria through a collaborative examination of course syllabi, research techniques, and professional publications. Teaching and research evaluation are methods used to improve quality.

There are numerous criteria for measuring the performance of the educational process. According to Turk (2007) these criteria have been introduced in various studies (e.g., Griffith, 2004; Mulford et al., 2004) and can be divided into three groups: teaching, research, and community services. Quality of performance in teaching requires that higher educational institutions prepare students for their first position and provide the basis for performance in future positions. Part of the quality of performance is to maintain awareness of students' (i.e., customers') needs. Teachers are service providers, whereas students are consumers of their services. The purposes of performance appraisal in higher institutions are (a) administrative (i.e., promotion, dismissal, organizational planning), (b) motivational (i.e., self-appraisal; acts as an incentive for hard work), and (c) developmental (i.e., identify training needs; performance improvement through participative goal setting, and other work-planning processes).

Performance review is crucial for improving work input, encouraging people, and boosting engagement. It also provides a foundation for organizational development enhancements, pay increments, training needs assessment and employee succession planning.

Performance evaluation can take place at the individual and organizational levels. The act of examining an employee's work output and efficiency in accordance with organizational objectives to enhance the attainment of these goals is known as evaluating an individual's personnel, and judgmental evaluation performance. Performance evaluations can be used as a strategic tool to enhance organizational efficiency by using a holistic approach that evaluates performance at the individual, group and organizational level s (Sahoo & Mishra 2012).

4. Data Collection

Data used for this case study were provided anonymously after removing the identifying characteristics of all survey participants. Data were void of any participants' personal information such as name, title, organization, department, age, tenure, or gender; as such, analysis results could not be traced back to any individual or subgroup. Data were sorted, identified, and saved by LDP session topics with pre and post-attendance survey outputs. These secondary data were acquired with permission and after completion of

the Institutional Review Board application process. Qualitative analysis methods were employed on the anonymized survey responses to assign codes, develop themes, and perform thematic analyses (Saldana, 2018).

4.1 Participants

Program participants were administrative leaders, academic deans, faculty members, staff members, and research students from the UNILAG, Nigeria. In total, 120 participants were registered in the program. Attendance at each event varied based on availability. Average weekly event attendance was 80, with 85 certificates presented to participants who attended at least five of the six sessions. Expert faculty and staff conducted the training and delivery. These experts were invited to present each topic based on their teaching backgrounds, work experiences, and expertise.

4.2 Training Program Description

The training program was designed by the Leadership Institute for Tomorrow (LIFT) at CSUF in the United States to develop and teach leaders who are passionate about catalyzing positive change that impacts equity, justice, and inclusion. This program was created and tailored to support diverse and emerging leaders who are people-centered and find their strength in humility and community wealth. The training program consisted of six sessions:

- Leadership mindset
- Team building and team effectiveness
- Time organization and management
- Performance evaluation
- Leadership development
- Human relations management

5. Results

5.1 Perceived Challenges

Participants' survey responses before the program presentation identified several challenges. These challenges can be divided into three distinct groups: individual, group/team, and organizational factors. Major challenges at the personal level were identified as the need to improve self-awareness and self-reflection to improve individual leadership skills and leadership mindset. From a team/group perspective, participants identified barriers to teamwork, improving team cohesiveness, motivation to work within teams, team efficiency, and accountability. In an organizational setting, participants identified leading by example, motivation, rewards, managing difficult people, building commitment, fairness, and transparency in performance evaluation. Participants identified cultural inequities, such as gender, age, seniority, and power distance, as major barriers to teamwork.

Concerns voiced by most participants included passive, unmotivated team members confronted by multiple work demands and cultural nuances such as seniority, gender, and tenure of team members. Participants further identified organizational barriers to include (a) a nurturing leadership style, (b) providing transparency in rewards and work allocation, and (c) performance evaluation and promotions. Participants noted a lack of currency in the software and reliability of the network as main areas of concern. Upgrading software, tools, and information technology, including availability and access to stable Wi-Fi, would enhance productivity for participants.

5.2 Perceived Learning

Post presentation survey comments showed high levels of excitement and validation of the sentiments voiced in the presentation survey. Over 92% of participants found the program very useful and applicable to their daily work environment, motivating them to develop self-reflection and self-awareness while increasing their desire to work as a team. Comments suggested participants felt highly motivated and encouraged to use new tools to enhance individual awareness, develop positive and growth mindsets, and

improve teamwork using nominal group techniques and the Xerox dissemination process. The Xerox corporation developed a learning process to improve their competitive advantage against competitors by implementing a 4 steps process (1) Learning core principles, values and skills, (2) successfully applying the concepts and skills learned (3) teaching the next group what they had learned (4) Inspecting the performance and providing feedback.

Although shared leadership was perceived as an interesting topic, cultural barriers to shared leadership need to be explored and tailored for better outcomes based on cultural values. Participants received Western ideas and concepts presented during the sessions with excitement; however, implementation of these theories and concepts may require additional dialogue and evaluation of the current structure, hierarchy, policies, and prevailing cultural norms. Participants were unanimous about the need for practicing self-awareness, developing a positive mindset, and clarifying roles and processes in teams. Comments such as "I cannot do it alone;" "Leadership is more effective when everyone is carried along;" "I must not see people as objects;" and "I should not pick team members who are my friends, rather neutral individuals can be effective as team members" provided insight into the efficacy of the participants and their desire for self-improvement.

Communicating a clear vision and purpose was seen as a cornerstone of cohesiveness and teamwork. Mentoring was also lauded as a basic need for more personalized help from seniors and more accomplished members to support newer members in navigating the complexities and nuances of their work and careers. The need for autonomy was noted repeatedly throughout the surveys, suggesting the need for participative goal setting and decision making. The use of SMART goals, Eisenhower Matrix, digital tools such as AI and ChatGPT, and time management strategies were welcomed.

5.3 Future Needs

Participants were asked to identify whether they had suggestions for additional and future professional development topics. Respondents were interested in hands-on training on leadership mindset, team building, methodology to improve performance evaluation, culture of shared leadership, and tools to improve accountability and mentoring at all levels of the organization. In addition, participants were interested in understanding and updating digital tools and providing more information on the latest technology trends. Overall findings suggested culture may play a role in how Western theories of leadership and management are implemented in collective, masculine, high-power distance cultures. Participants' requests for more autonomy, trust, shared leadership, gender equality, wages, and promotion transparency indicated a desire to move toward Western methodologies; however, the implementation of these may require greater institutional commitment.

6. Discussion

The LDP is an effective way to build consensus, motivate, and allow collegial conversations to flow. The post presentation survey outcomes showed participants were enthusiastic and ready to build upon and use the tools and methodologies proposed during the training sessions to mitigate some of the challenges they faced. Breakout sessions allowed enhanced communication with colleagues who would otherwise not come together to discuss these issues. Participants felt empowered to contribute toward the long-term sustainability of the institution. Program structure and the selection of relevant topics helped enhance communication, collaboration, teamwork, self-assessment, time management, and leadership skills. It must also be noted that follow-up surveys for six months to one year were used to gauge long-term effects of the LDP programs. Additional conversations on how some tools and methodologies can be further implemented require further collaboration and understanding of the cultural differences and institutional policies that can support long-term outcomes.

6.1 Limitations

One study limitation was that data were gathered immediately before and after each session without any time for the implementation or practical application of learning. Surveys conducted immediately after the conclusion of the training session does not provide attendees time for implementation of knowledge, while the perception of training may be positive, actual implementation and long-term outcomes should be measured at set intervals to gage effectiveness. Another limitation was the lack of consideration of the cultural differences between Lagos, Nigeria, and southern California, United States. Management and leadership theories tend to be biased toward Western culture and ignore the complexities and nuances of cultural sensitivities to power distance, collectivism, age, and gender, among other cultural values (Goh, 2009) The lack of consideration for West African cultural within the proposed theories could impact the overall generalizability and application of some of the training.

6.2 Implication for Practice

Results of this study validate the need for professional LDPs to revive, rejuvenate, and enhance organizational effectiveness. Through the infusion of new ideas and the recalibration of key concepts and leadership theories, individual efficacy can be renewed, creating the motivation and desire to advance institutional goals collectively. Several

6. 3 Future Research

Researchers should explore the impact and effectiveness of LDPs over a selected period to capture progress over specific time after implementing theories and concepts. This will provide a better understanding of the frequency of refresher courses required to keep participants motivated as well as allow institutions to identify additional training needs. Participants identified shared leadership was an area that should be further explored, however cultural barriers to shared leadership were a major concern. Cultural differences between Lagos, Nigeria, and southern California were not considered in this study; future studies should include national and regional cultures to address how geographic cultures and academic status complicate the implementation of Western management and leadership theories. Future studies should include focus groups, along with a set of questions that address the barriers to the implementation of learning from professional development. Using Hofstede's (2009) cultural dimensions, understanding how Western theories may be applied to cultures that are collective, high in power distance, masculinity-driven, and with high uncertainty avoidance would be highly beneficial. This would require participants to collaborate on how cultural values can be equalized through institutional core values, socialization process, human resources policies administered to ensure fairness and equality.

7. Conclusion

This study provides clear evidence that professional development can improve employee motivation, bring people together, stimulate collaboration on ideas, find common grounds, and mitigate perceived challenges through communication and cooperation. Gleaning from the post training survey comments, the results indicated 92% of attendees were positively influenced and highly motivated to work on self-improvement and team building in their leadership roles. Findings show participants felt highly motivated and encouraged to use newly acquired tools and knowledge to enhance self-awareness, develop positive and growth mindsets, improve teamwork and efficiency by utilizing the better time management and communication. Although shared leadership was perceived as an interesting topic, future studies should explore cultural barriers to shared leadership and tailor LDP's for better outcomes based on cultural values.

The design and delivery of this LDP were highly cost-effective, mitigating many barriers to traditional inperson training sessions that can limit accessibility to only those who can afford it. The virtual sessions provided exceptional value and could be replicated for organizations and institutions globally.

LDPs should be part of a continuous improvement program in a constantly evolving field. The advancement of technology post pandemic has made virtual and online training cost effective and easily accessible to any institution, anywhere in the world. Leadership development training needs to be tailored to the specific

needs of organizations to maximize their effectiveness by defining clear objective within a specific timeline and measuring the effectiveness of past training as well as identifying the need for refreshers and new topics.

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