Leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' performance: A case in Nigeria's public healthcare sector

Adebukola Esther Oyewunmi (Corresponding author)

Department of Business Management, College of Business and Social Sciences,

Covenant University, Nigeria

Email: adebukola.oyewunmi@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Olabode Adeleke Oyewunmi, Ibiyinka Stella Ojo, Olumuyiwa Akinrole Oludayo

Department of Business Management, College of Business and Social Sciences,

Covenant University, Nigeria

Abstract

Undoubtedly, multiple competencies are essential for effective leadership and identifying specific competencies that will foster employees' performance, is a veritable venture. This study explores the impact of leaders' emotional intelligence on employees' performance within Nigeria's public healthcare sector and also provides perspective on the contextual underpinnings. It adopts the survey method and randomly samples leaders and employees within the sector. Data analyses using the t-test and hierarchical regression analytical tool, reveals a significant correlation between the emotional intelligence of leaders and the performance of employees. The study finds that the task of leadership, coupled with the multiple challenges within Nigeria's public healthcare sector, requires a reasonable measure of emotional intelligence in order to facilitate employees' performance.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, leadership, employee, performance, Nigeria, public healthcare

1. Introduction

A substantial amount of research on leadership is available in the academic arena. However, there is still some level of uncertainty on what is required to be a leader that will stimulate performance outcomes. There are still questions about why leaders that are perceived as intelligent and experienced are not successful in dealing with environmental demands, particularly in the organizational context. Perhaps, the essential factor that leaders need to ensure performance outcomes is emotional intelligence rather than just cognitive intelligence or specific personality traits (Rosete and Ciarrochi, 2005).

In light of the increasing spate of globalization, intense competition and opportunities in the corporate world, organizations are awakened to the reality that to succeed in the business environment, they need leaders that have the innate ability to increase group solidarity and morale by creating shared emotional experiences (Pescosolido, 2002). This ability may be regarded as being based on emotional intelligence (Yildrim, 2007).

The public healthcare sector of many countries is usually subject to a level of criticism or assessment by the citizenry, particularly in terms of performance or service delivery. The Nigerian context is no exception as the public healthcare sector is plagued by several criticisms ranging from low access to basic healthcare services, policy inconsistencies, inadequate funding, the attendant infrastructural deficit, brain drain, battle for supremacy amongst health workers and the consistent breach of collective bargaining agreements; all of which have prompted the argument for an inclusive approach (Oyewunmi and Oyewunmi, 2014). Leaders within this sector have the task of ensuring employee performance inspite of the issues within the context.

The position of many studies is that the deployment of motivational tools is essential to employee performance. This study progresses beyond the usual approach to ascertain the possibility that emotional intelligence in leaders may impact on the performance of employees. The basis for this investigation is valid as the prevailing peculiarities in any sector will to a reasonable degree define the various competencies that may impact performance levels. Specifically, this study attempts to ascertain if the leaders within this sector are emotionally intelligent, if the employees believe their leaders are emotionally intelligent and the impact of emotional intelligence in leaders on the performance of their employees, particularly in light of the Nigerian context.

2. Leadership in Nigeria's Public Healthcare Sector

The issues militating against optimal performance in Nigeria's public healthcare sector attests that the sustainability of the sector depends to a considerable extent on the success of leaders in motivating and engaging employees towards the actualization of the sector's goals. Hence, the effective optimization of human (and material) resources within the healthcare sector significantly depends on the character of leadership. It is therefore pertinent for leaders within Nigeria's public healthcare sector to acquire and leverage on multiple competencies to maintain standards in their institutions because of the complicated influences of Nigeria's wider socio-economic context.

In view of the multiple challenges earlier mentioned, leaders and indeed major stakeholders within Nigeria's public healthcare sector must appreciate the regulatory dynamics of the sector whilst aggregating specific fundamentals that will ensure workplace harmony and performance, particularly as the sector represents the main healthcare provider for majority of Nigerians. The endemic tussle for supremacy amongst various healthcare professionals which has resulted in the creation of unhealthy factions, disintegrated bargaining units and distorted the focus of stakeholders, makes it sacrosanct for leadership to embody competencies that will ensure the integration of human resources and promote performance in the workplace (Oyewunmi and Oyewunmi, 2014).

In these modern times, leadership is perceived as being a function of core competencies and a sense of direction. This is not to downplay the role of experience but to draw consciousness to the importance of possessing multiple competencies. The principal qualification for leadership roles should be based on the quality of deliverables attributable to persons, as well as the capacity to deliver set objectives. In effect, the governance structure of public health institutions should be re-appraised to make allowance for this trend. In all estimation, there must be a paradigm shift in terms of the nature of leadership, policies and practices within the sector as well as an appreciation and acceptance of multiple competencies, of which emotional intelligence is part.

3. A Case from Nigeria's Public Healthcare Sector

The research focus is the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital, Lagos- Nigeria, which was established 1907. The hospital is a tertiary health care delivery centre and one of the eight (8) federally funded specialist hospitals for mental health. In addition to offering specialized psychiatric services and imparting the knowledge of mental health to medical students and student nurses, it provides opportunities for research activities and serves as a resource centre for community-based activities. The organization currently employs over a thousand (1000) staff across board, attending to the needs of a sizable number of in and out patients.

4. Emotional Intelligence, Leadership and Employees' Performance

Emotions are characteristic of all humans and to be devoid of emotions, is to be non-human. The primacy of emotions with respect to human nature and existence, necessitates the acknowledgment and management of emotions as they constitute a driving force behind human behavior. This implies that the actions and inactions of humans are motivated to a considerable extent by emotions. In relation to organizational life, it signifies that employee performance could be influenced by emotions. This outlook captures the essence of emotional intelligence as developed by Payne (1985), Mayer and Salovey (1993) and Goleman (1995), who popularized the concept.

Management scholars have established the fact that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and effective leadership (Sosik and Megerian, 1999; Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2000; Alston, Dastor and Sosa-Fey, 2010). The conventional roles of leaders as espoused in the era of Taylor's scientific management are being de-emphasized, as the nature of work and the roles of leaders now span beyond the traditional functions of controlling, planning and

inspecting the overall running of organizations. In recent times, leadership roles have evolved and are now inclusive of motivating, inspiring, fostering positive attitudes at work and creating a sense of importance amongst employees (Hogan, Curphy and Hogan, 1994; Rolfe, 2011).

Contemporary organizations around the world are fast embracing the emotional intelligence concept, given the competitive and dynamic business environment in which they operate. New demands are being placed on leadership training programs to identify and develop emotional intelligence skills because effective leadership has been re-defined to depend in part, on the understanding of emotions and the abilities associated with emotional intelligence (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1998). Hence, a potential underlying attribute of effective leadership is the construct of emotional intelligence (Sosik and Megerian, 1999; Dulewicz, Young and Dulewicz, 2005).

Leadership has been described as an attribute that is highly prized in most organizations (Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerrich, 1987) and it is said to determine if an organization will be successful or not. A leader is defined as someone who occupies a role which involves conforming to a set of behavioral norms and expectations, in return for which followers confer a degree of power that allows the leader to influence their actions (Burns, 1978; Rollinson, 2005). Armstrong (2009) suggests that leadership is the process of inspiring and persuading followers towards the achievement of desired goals. Leadership is about encouraging individuals and teams to give their best in order to achieve a desired result. Barron and Greenberg (1990) also define leadership as 'the process whereby one individual influences other group members towards the attainment of defined group or organizational goals'. It can be inferred from these definitions that leadership is not only about occupying a position; it is more about interacting, mobilizing followers and contributing positively towards a shared vision. Task accomplishment is the primary function of leadership (Bass, 1985).

According to Humphrey (2002), leadership is intrinsically an emotional process whereby leaders recognize followers' emotional states, attempt to evoke emotions in followers and then seek to manage followers' emotional states accordingly. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000) opine that emotional intelligence is a key determinant of effective leadership and emotionally intelligent leaders have the capability to promote effectiveness at all levels in organizations.

Amidst the variety of leadership styles, the transformational style of leadership unarguably embraces contemporary leadership skills. It is said that positive results emerge from it because it enhances subordinates' commitment, satisfaction and trust in leadership (Hater and Bass, 1988; Bass and Avolio, 1994; Leban and Zaulaf, 2004). It also seeks new ways of working (Senge, 1990), new opportunities and advocates effectiveness in the workplace (Lowe and Kroeck, 1996). These features imply a relationship between the transformational leadership style and emotional intelligence.

Carulli (2003) conducted a study of emotional intelligence and organizational leadership in Asia, using a sample of one hundred and sixty (160) managers in a multinational organization.

They found that there is a positive and significant correlation between emotional intelligence factors, transformational leadership style and effective leadership outcomes. Barling, Slater and Kelloway (2000) comment that a factor that might pre-dispose leaders to use transformational behaviors is emotional intelligence. They assert that leaders high in emotional intelligence are predisposed to transformational behaviors. Leaders who know and can manage their emotions can serve as role models for followers, a hallmark of inspiration, enhancing followers' trust and respect for their leaders. Understanding the emotions of others would help leaders to comprehend the expectations of their followers, empathize with employees and manage relationships effectively. Emotional intelligence is viewed in the leadership literature as an important determinant of effective leadership (Ashkanasy and Tse, 2000; George, 2000). George (2000) argues that emotionally intelligent leaders can promote effectiveness at all levels in the organization. The emotional intelligence of a leader also plays a dominant role in the quality and effectiveness of social interactions with others (House and Aditya, 1996; Alston, Dastor and Sosa-Fey, 2010; Batool, 2013).

The corporate world has embraced the emotional intelligence construct as being relevant to organizational effectiveness and as a tool for competitive advantage (Sparrow, Brewster, Harris, 1994). Many organizations are coming to the realization that technical and intellectual skills are only part of the equation to success. They are also convinced that the abilities of people to understand and manage their emotions improves their performance, collaboration with colleagues and interaction with customers.

There is growing evidence that there is indeed a relationship between emotional intelligence and work performance and several studies lend credence to this assertion. Nel (2001) conducted a study to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance of call center agents, working at a major life insurance company in Western Cape, South Africa. He found several emotional intelligence competencies correlated with performance, particularly in client service and administration. Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall and Salovey (2006) surveyed forty-four (44) analysts and administrators who worked for a Fortune 400 insurance company and found that, when measured by a set of abilities, emotional intelligence positively affects work performance. Bachman (1988) states that the most effective leaders in the United States Navy are warmer, more outgoing, emotionally expressive and sociable. Higgs (2004) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance in United Kingdom call centers and obtained data from two hundred and nine (209) respondents from three (3) organizations; the study showed a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and individual performance. Kumar (2014) also maintains that emotional intelligence plays a prominent role in achieving workplace performance.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are thought to perform better in the workplace (Goleman, 1998), are happier and demonstrate more commitment to their employing organization (Abraham, 2000) record greater success (Miller, 1999), use positive emotions to envision improvements in the organization's functioning and instill a sense of belonging, enthusiasm, trust and cooperation in employees through interpersonal relations (George, 2000). The ability of a leader to influence the emotional climate can propel employee performance (Humphrey, 2002). The possession of these rear qualities and the ability to stimulate

followers towards task execution will ultimately lead to organizational growth and performance. Sy and Cote (2004) opine that emotional intelligence is a key ability to succeed in a matrix organization, whilst Sheehan (1999) holds the view that emotional intelligence is useful in putting an end to workplace bullying. Tischler, Biberman and McKeage (2002) also state that there is indeed a link between emotional intelligence and performance at work.

Emotional intelligence helps leaders to connect and relate with people in the organization on an intellectual and emotional platform. An emotionally intelligent leader is able to address many strong feelings that may be expressed during times of organizational change in an appropriate manner (Viewpoint, 2004). It also plays an important role in functions such as decision-making, conflict resolution and negotiation (Leban and Zaulauf, 2004). Attention to one's emotions and the emotions of others saves time, expands opportunities and channels energy towards performance (Johnson and Indvik, 1999).

However, not all management scholars agree that emotional intelligence is a factor that can engender effectiveness in organizations. Antonakis (2003) questions the need for emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness. He opines that emotional intelligence is not a particularly unique construct but is more a part of normal psychological functioning. He cautions the premature excitement on the use of emotional intelligence in the workplace. Woodruffe (2001) also states that emotional intelligence is an unproven concept that adds nothing to the understanding of individual differences beyond already existing psychological dimensions.

Research relating to emotional intelligence in the Nigerian context is limited in comparison to other climes. Adeyemo and Ogunyemi (2005) investigated the impact of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on occupational stress of university academic staff. Results show that emotional intelligence contributes to the prediction of work stress in participants. Nwokah and Ahiazu (2009) state that emotional intelligence leads to marketing effectiveness in corporate organizations. Oyesoji (2008) assessed the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance in the Nigerian police force and observed that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and performance. Akintayo (2010) studied the effect of emotional intelligence and work-family conflict in Nigerian organizations and found that emotional intelligence has a moderating role on work-family conflict. Other studies on the subject of emotional intelligence have been conducted by Tella (2011), Animashaun (2008), Ofole (2012), amongst others.

The gap which this study hopes to fill is to explore and amplify the impact of emotional intelligence in light of contextual issues. Specifically, the effect of leaders' emotional intelligence on employee performance in light of the challenges associated with Nigeria's public healthcare context.

5. Hypotheses

To study the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employee performance, the following hypotheses are tested:

H_1: There is a significant difference between how leaders and employees perceive leaders'

emotional intelligence.

H$_2$: Leadership style moderates the effect of leaders' emotional intelligence on employees' performance.

6. Method

The population was 1000 (staff of the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital). Two hundred questionnaires was distributed amongst fifty (50) leaders, who are professionals in supervisory positions, and one hundred and fifty (150) employees (subordinates). The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 1997) was adapted to test leaders' emotional intelligence competencies in five (5) dimensions: Inter-personal, Intra-personal, General mood, Adaptability and Stress management.

7. Data Analysis

H$_1$: There is significant difference between how leaders and employees perceived leaders' emotional intelligence.

Table 1:   T-test results showing the difference between leaders and employees' perception of leaders' emotional intelligence

ITEMS	Leaders (Mean)	Employees (Mean)	t	Sig.	Interpretation
Interpersonal	4.6531	3.0067	5.143	0.0001	*H$_1$ supported*
Intrapersonal	3.9184	3.9933	1.948	0.054	*H$_1$ supported*
General mood	4.0000	3.3800	3.943	0.0001	*H$_1$ supported*
Adaptability	3.2041	2.1867	2.219	0.028	*H$_1$ supported*
Stress management	4.6250	3.9800	6.063	0.0001	*H$_1$ supported*

The table above indicates that leaders and employees' perception of leaders' emotional intelligence are statistically different from each other. Leaders' emotional intelligence as it relates to interpersonal, intrapersonal, general mood, adaptability and stress management was subjected to the t-test. The result revealed that there were disparities in the views of the leaders and employees as regards the leaders' emotional intelligence indicators. Inspite of the statistical difference, the results signify that the leaders report themselves to possess emotional intelligence competencies and the employees also report their leaders to be emotionally intelligent but to a lesser extent compared to the leaders' self-report.

H$_2$: Leadership style moderates the effect of leaders' emotional intelligence on employees' performance.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Table 2a;   Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.109[a]	.012	.005	1.28997	.012	1.793	1	148	.183
2	.217[b]	.047	.034	1.27115	.035	5.417	1	147	.021

a. Predictors: (Constant), leadership style

b. Predictors: (Constant), leadership style, leaders emotional intelligence

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.983	1	2.983	1.793	.183[b]
	Residual	246.277	148	1.664		
	Total	249.260	149			
2	Regression	11.735	2	5.868	3.631	.029[c]
	Residual	237.525	147	1.616		
	Total	249.260	149			

Table 2b;   ANOVA

a. Dependent Variable: Employees' performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), leadership style

c. Predictors: (Constant), leadership style, leaders emotional intelligence

Table 2c;   Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.784	.574		4.847	.000
	leadership style	.406	.304	.109	1.339	.183
2	(Constant)	2.108	.636		3.314	.001
	leadership style	.257	.306	.069	.840	.402
	Leaders emotional intelligence	.251	.108	.192	2.327	.021

a. Dependent Variable: Employees' Performance

Table 2a, b and c show the model summary, ANOVA and the coefficients of the two models (model 1 and model 2). The model was the result of the effect of leadership style on employees' performance but its effect could not be statistically established to be significant (f = 1.793 @.183 sig. level). However, the R square change and the F change significant level of model 2 (F change = 5.417 @ 0.021 sig. level) show that there is moderation influence on the effect of leaders' emotional intelligence on employees' performance. It can be concluded that leadership style has a moderating effect on the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and employees' performance.

8. Discussion of findings

The data analysis presented shows in various respects that the leaders report themselves to be emotionally intelligent. Employees also report that their leaders are emotionally intelligent and that such impacts on their performance. The consequences of prevailing challenges within the Nigerian public healthcare sector may potentially lead to decreased employee performance. However, for leaders within this context, it is fundamental that the system continues to run smoothly inspite of recurring challenges. As a result of the nature of the sector within which they work, leaders ensure a reasonable level of employee performance by displaying emotional intelligence competencies. This practice subsists whether or not they possess an all-round appreciation of the emotional intelligence concept.

Leaders in Nigeria's public healthcare sector are confronted with issues of inadequate funding, policy inconsistencies, infrastructural deficit, and breach of collective agreements, amongst other issues. It is instructive to note that the leaders have no control over such matters, as the employer (government) has the primary responsibility of resolving such issues. Thus, leaders in this sector carry the burden of ensuring a reasonable level of performance because of the pivotal need to preserve human life and mental state. In order to achieve this goal, emotional intelligence competencies will come to the fore. The findings also validate the view that leaders can only exhibit competencies relevant to the issues that exist within a context. This does not suggest that emotional intelligence competencies are only relevant in settings dealing with fundamental challenges. It rather advances the view that every context will benefit from the application of emotional intelligence irrespective of the dynamics of its operations. Also, the infectious nature of emotions demands a responsibility to manage them accordingly.

9. Recommendations

This study recommends active awareness and deployment of training for employees in the Nigerian public healthcare sector on the concept of emotional intelligence. It may be impossible for employees to consistently detach themselves from their emotions and this inability to manage emotions within the workplace may continuously undermine performance. Even though emotional intelligence competencies are exhibited, there is room for fuller comprehension and appreciation of the concept. Such human capacity investment will enable the sector to leverage on emotional intelligence competencies on multiple levels.

It will also be beneficial if a customized emotional intelligence development program is designed for leaders within the sector, so that areas where behavioral changes are required will be identified. This mode of intervention is necessary because leaders have the task of managing diverse emotions within the workplace. However, these recommendations will only be possible if the employer (government) focuses on resolving the specific challenges within the sector and commits to enhancing service delivery.

10. Further Studies

Further studies may be conducted to explore the variance in awareness and levels of emotional intelligence across different industries in Nigeria's public sector. Broader studies may involve a comparison of emotional intelligence awareness and levels, relative to emerging and matured climes. This will highlight the dynamics of different contexts and the implications that emotional intelligence may have in varying settings.

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