Abstract

Leadership development is a phenomenon that is highly desired by organisations. A sound leadership development programme not only does it increase productivity, but it also orchestrates the achievement of the strategy and vision of the organisations. The leadership development vacuum, however, poses a threat to the growth and success of the organisations since leaders are unable to keep up with the volatile and disruptive changes of the fourth industrial revolution. It is against this background that Botswana Open University (BOU), found it necessary to initiate a needs assessment on leadership development to identify the skills and competence gaps. The research adopts the pragmatic paradigm. This paradigm is commonly associated with the mixed method approach to data collection and analysis. Out of (n) 48 employees in the two divisions under study, (n)28 responded to the survey and (n) 4 declined to participate. Twenty-two (n)22, participated in the focus groups interviews. A survey was conducted online using Google forms and scheduled focus group interviews were conducted through Google meet. The findings revealed that for the University to stay relevant in this era and increase their return on investment it is vital to develop the mindsets of 21st century leadership. Employees are empowered to take up their respective roles to promote the growth of the University and there is a zeal to build high performance teams and nurture talent.

Key words: Leadership Leadership Development Strategy Vision 21st Century Leadership

1.0 Introduction

Challenges posed by the gap between the dynamic needs of the organisation and skills of the workforce in the 4th industrial revolution, calls for leadership development skills that were omitted during the academic training (Lerman & Jameson 2018:1862). Botswana Open University (BOU) is faced with leadership challenges. Some of these challenges among others
are that: appointment to leadership positions is based on qualifications and work experience with minimal consideration of general leadership skills and competencies. No prior grounding on the aspects of leadership in context is considered. It is rather assumed that they already have the competencies required for leadership positions in the University. It is against this background that the leadership development needs assessment was conducted to audit the leadership skills and competences of the Academic Services (AS) and Division of Research Innovation and Partnerships (DRIP) staff, in order to assess the existing gaps as well as to inform the shape, duration, and frequency of the leadership development programme.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Leadership
Leadership has evolved over time and it has been defined differently by researchers over the years. As Bass (2008) cited by Roman, Liu, Wart, Kim, Wang and McCarthy(2018:2) put it, the concept of leadership has been “defined in hundreds of different ways”, “from broad to narrow”(Roman et al., 2018:2). Though leadership can be identified in practice, it is, however, difficult to have a precise definition due to its complexity. There is no specific “widely accepted definition” of leadership and may never exist (Day & Antonakis 2011:5). A significant number of researchers, however, agree about one thing in common: that leadership is defined in context (Roman et al. 2018:1; Anthony & Antony 2017:632; Kaiser, McGinnis, Overfield, 2012:119; Smaltz et al., 2006). Good leaders have the ability to introspect as well as analyse and manage situations affecting the team (O’Sullivan 2009:110). They then develop programmes that support the team. This entails setting clear targets, mentoring, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the programmes.

This paper outlines several definitions of leadership stated by researchers across different years. Katz (1951:140) cited by Janda (1960:359), describes leadership as a relation that involves the influencer and the influenced. He argues that they are inseparable and have to be studied at the same time. According to Bellows (1959), “leadership is a process of arranging a situation so that various members of a group, including the leader, can achieve common goals with maximum economy and a minimum of time and work”. Mintzberg (1979) cited by Roman et al.(2018:2), argues that the majority of the Leadership Scholars use the term narrowly to refer to “the study of the important phenomenon of leading, empowering, and coordinating followers to be as effective as possible.” Whitaker (1993:74) cited in O’Sullivan (2009:106) states that “leadership is concerned with creating the conditions in which all members of the organisation
can give their best in a climate of commitment and challenge. Leadership helps the organisation to work well.” Gold and Evans (1998:26) observed that “leadership has an almost spiritual dimension, paying more attention to beliefs and values…. Leaders build their teams to take the organisation forward through consultation and collaboration. According to Broome and Hughes (2011:27), “leadership is increasingly defined not as what the leader does but rather as a process that engenders and is the result of relationships—relationships that focus on the interactions of both leaders and collaborators instead of focusing on only the competencies of the leaders.” “Psychological theories view leadership as a social influence process in which leaders use interpersonal behaviours to motivate followers to contribute to group goals.” (Kaiser et al. 2012: 119).

The success of an organisation is pivoted on effective leadership (Broome & Hughes, 2011:27). Effective leadership is described by O’Sullivan (2009:109) as the ability to create the organisation vision and sell it at every level of the organisation. Hickman and Akdere, (2018:1), perceive effective leadership as critical for the success of the institution. It increases the commitment of the employees, security and job satisfaction (Top, Akdere, & Tarcan, 2015). An effective leader has the ability to articulate their understanding of leadership (O’Sullivan, 2009:109).

2.2 Why leadership development?

Leadership development is a phenomenon that is highly desired by organisations across different fields of study. Every year organisations spend a considerable amount of money on leadership development (Day 2011:37). The high demand of industry relevant skills, warrants that leadership should be at the centre of organisational planning for the survival of organisations across the globe Moldoveanu & Narayandas (2019:3). Leadership development is believed to create knowledge, skills, and abilities among the leaders (Callahan and Rosser 2007:269) and also postulates one’s ability to work collaboratively with others, that is it improves the leader and team relationship (Gagnon et al. (2012). The leader and team members lead each other or work collaboratively in decision making to achieve the strategic goals of the organisation (Day, Gronn & Salas, 2004). Leader and team relationship has proven to have a positive impact on the team performance (Han, Yoon, Choi & Hong 2020: 601).
The need for a new breed of leadership with the ability to align the strategic goals with other components of the organisation in this dynamic era has become even more paramount (Lerman & Jameson 2018:1862). Schwartz (2011) therefore concurs that for a leadership development programme to be effective, it has to be aligned with the overall strategy of the organisation. A sound leadership development programme not only increases productivity but also orchestrates the achievement of the organisation’s vision by empowering employees to take their respective roles in the growth of their organisation, building high performing teams, nurturing talent and developing the mindset of the 21st-century leaders.

2.3 Leadership development in context

Context is a vital aspect of leadership (O’Sullivan 2009:110). Since leadership is context-bound (Smaltz et al. (2006), leadership development should be assessed in a contextualised setting (Hickman & Akdere, 2018:1). Researchers, therefore, describe this phenomenon from their context. O’Sullivan (2009:110) argues that it is important for leaders to convey their understanding of effective leadership within their own setting. Day (2000:582), describes the term “context” to imply that leadership development occurs in different settings. It may be the setting of the organisation such as health, academics (Lerman & Jameson 2018:1862) or a department within an organisation, for example, IT, Marketing (Hickman & Akdere, 2018:1) or even race and gender (Garcia, Huerta, Ramirez, & Patrón, 2017:2). In other instances, the context may be based on the goals of the organisation. A significant number of researchers attest to that: Kotter (2013), cited by Hickman & Akdere, 2018:1), looks at leadership development from the change management perspective; Top, Akdere and Tarcan (2015) look at it from the context of effective human resources management; and Zhang and Zhou (2014:151) from the employee creativity context.

Botswana Open University (BOU) is faced with leadership challenges. Some of these challenges among others are that: appointment to leadership positions is based on qualifications and work experience with minimal consideration of general leadership skills and competencies. No prior grounding on the aspects of leadership in context is considered. It is rather assumed that they already have the competencies required for leadership positions in the University. It is against this background that leadership development needs assessment was conducted to audit the leadership needs of the AS and DRIP, to assess the existing gaps as well as to inform the shape, duration, and frequency of the leadership development programme.
2.4 Strategies and trends in Leadership Development

At the beginning of the millennium, organisations found themselves amidst complex challenges motivated by rapid technological changes and globalisation (McCauley & Palus 2020:1). Strategy oriented organisations motivate leaders to collaborate with others at all levels of the organisation. Efforts made through leadership development saw a seamless connection of leaders with people at the lower levels of the organisation, working together towards a common goal of reinventing their organisations (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2001; Dotlich & Noel, 1998), while some employed ways of assisting new leaders to take off in their respective positions (Bauer, Erdogan, Liden, & Wayne, 2006).

Broomes and Hughes (2011:27) classified what they termed the “state of leadership development” into three themes. These are what they considered to make up the components of a leadership development program. 1. Leadership development within the context of work; 2. Vital observation on the part played by competencies in leadership development; 3. Reviewing the subject of balancing work and life. Other vital components of the leadership development program suggested by Cannon (2011) are the concept of quality, relationships, staff development and retention as well as the motivation of staff. He further suggests the extension of 360 degrees feedback to 720, with the intention for holistic leadership development that focuses on the physical and mental health of the leader.

Other researchers suggest that the new leadership development techniques and programmes should take a robust approach to effective leadership. Kenneddy et al., (2013) argue that the new leadership development programme needs to drift away from the development of skills and concentrate on the development of mindsets, with a focus on areas such as critical thinking, problem-solving, good communication skills and delegation Hanson (2013). Continuous support from mentors and coaches leads to growth in emotional intelligence, motivates decision-making processes, and promotes good communication and collaboration skills (Lerman & Jameson 2018:1863).

2.5 Who Should be Developed?

O’Sullivan (2009:106) argues that for leadership development to be effective, and add value to the organisation, it has to be implemented across the organisation. For the past decades, the
leadership of the organisations has resided in the hands of the Managers. However, Petrie (2011:7) anticipated a future with collective leadership owned by the team. The duo is supported by Moldoveanu & Narayandas, (2019:3), who purports that increasingly a number of organisations have opened up leadership development to different cadres across the organisation, not only to those in managerial positions.

2.6 Criticism of leadership development

McCaulley and Palus (2020:1), identifies 5 critics of leadership development: 1. Its programs ignore the context and perceive leadership as one size fits all. 2. Leadership development concentrates on behavioural change and ignores the lurking mindsets that are at the root of the problem. 3. The field applauds the leader and ignores the contribution of followers. 4. Leadership effectiveness is assessed based on individual competencies rather than; team performance. 5. Those entrusted with leadership fail to effect vital changes on the organisational system to reinforce individual change. Much of the leadership development is less understood hence does not make the kind of impact expected in the organisation.

3.0 Methodology

The study takes a concurrent mixed-method approach to data collection. According to Cresswell and Cresswell (2018:297), a mixed-method approach exploits the strength of the qualitative and quantitative research and reduces the limitations of the duo. Teddlie and Tashakkor (2009:7), argue that though there are some paradigms that underpins the mixed method approach, pragmatism surpasses them all. The pragmatism paradigm allows for an investigation of multiple realities open to empirical inquiry (Reswell and Plano Clark 2011). It purports that major knowledge is always based on experience.

A survey was conducted using google forms and shared online with all the members of the AS and DRIP. Out of the (n 48) expected respondents 28 participated in the survey, while (n 4) respondents declined to be part of the study. Scheduled focus group interviews of (n 22) participants were also conducted virtually among the following staff categories: Senior Management Team, Head of Departments and Managers, Professionals and Academics, Technicians and Support Staff. Hinkes and Christoph-Schulz (2019:879), suggest two benefits of focus group discussions: they are appropriate for exploratory analysis, and they are useful when the study intends to get the perceptions of various participants.
The quantitative analysis was automated through google forms. The qualitative analysis took a thematic approach to data analysis. The findings of the study were generalised to the two remaining divisions of BOU. Although generalisation is more common in quantitative research, Dzakiria (2012:41) claims that it is more controversial in qualitative research. For decades, more researchers, however, have supported the generalisation of qualitative research (Eisenhart 2009:59; Stake 2010:196; Parker & Northcott 2016:1120; Guenther & Falk 2019:1012). Brown (2005:3 2), also affirms the generalisation of qualitative research and purports that a sound qualitative study can be judged through transferability of the findings from one context to the other. However, he suggests that the reader is free to make their own judgment by looking at the information beforehand provided. 2. The lack of succession planning and talent management policies that support the identification and development of leadership across the university. 3. The two divisions that were not part of the study: the Division of Student Services and the Corporate Services Division, assume similar divisional structures as the divisions under study.

4.0 Integrated Findings

In this study, the qualitative findings were used to support the quantitative findings by providing an in-depth explanation of the findings.

4.1 Leadership Development Needs

Most of the respondents needed to be trained in leadership. In fact, they needed to acquire leadership skills for their current positions. The reasons given by the participants are that: the leadership development vacuum will be closed as the leaders provide mentorships and coaching for their subordinates; the training will allow for smooth transition between the ranks; future leaders will be nurtured, and this will enhance productivity; the program will promote employee engagement and prepare staff for change management and transformation; and training will sharpen their skills and competencies in communication and open and distance learning methodologies.
Figure 1: Training Prior Leadership Appointment

Figure 1 shows that the majority of the respondents did not acquire leadership training prior to their leadership appointment. Half of the respondents have never undergone any training on leadership. However, they indicated that they possess skills that are relevant for the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).

4.2 Knowledge, Skills and Competences to be acquired

According to the respondents, the following competencies and skills are top on the list of the quantitative data: 720-degree feedback, e-learning platforms, collaboration platforms, globalisation and partnerships, consultation and collaboration, project management, leadership integrity and character, coaching, monitoring and evaluation, supervisory skills, risk management and quality assurance/control. The least preferred skills and competencies are Microsoft office and communication skills. On the other hand the focus group discussions cited the following competencies and skills as the preferred list: communication skills, customer care, customer relations, time management, empathy, growth & global mindset, motivation, job enrichment/enlargement, prioritisation of resources and brand protection, leading others, interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, trustworthiness, conflict management, decision making skills, dealing with ambiguity, managing self, people management and basic counseling.

When asked about the preferred duration of training, most of the respondents preferred 12 months, followed by those who preferred long term (more than 1 year), then six month and lastly those who preferred immediate training. Some participants argued that training should
be context based, should keep up with the trends and be motivated by the needs of the staff. Some suggested that training should be ongoing, while some suggested a duration of 5-10 days.

4.3 Who Should be Developed?

The findings of the study support the literature (O’Sullivan, 2009:106; Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019:3), who argued that leadership development training must be accessible to all employees. Participants asserted that all staff must benefit from the program because one can never stop learning. They further acknowledged that everyone, in one way or the other, takes up the role of leadership because the university deals with different stakeholders such as part-time staff, suppliers and students. Additionally, the program could help the employees to grow and learn new skills which in turn would encourage employee engagement and enhance productivity.

4.4 Developing Mindsets for the 21st Century Leaders

The study findings concur with Kennedy et al. (2013), who purport that leadership development needs to shift from considering only the development of skills and competencies but should also focus on the development of the leadership mindsets, focusing in areas such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and delegation. Although these suggested areas are not top on the list of BOU participants they were regarded as essential for leadership development.

The following findings elaborate on the feedback given by the respondents and participants with regards to their leadership development training needs.–

4.4.1 Leadership Development - BOU Context

This section looked at leadership development in three ways; how the participants perceived their individual contribution to leadership development, their engagement of others or teamwork and their contribution to the future of BOU.

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership development needs from the BOU context. Hickman & Akdere (2018:1), asserted that leadership development should be assessed in a contextualised setting. They concur with O’Sullivan (2009:110), who argue that it is important for leaders to convey their understanding of effective leadership within their
own setting. Therefore, the study explored the leadership development needs from the participants and respondents' context.

The respondents were cognisant of the importance of pulling together towards achieving the BOU vision and the critical role played by their job behaviours in the quest to achieve the vision. The majority of the respondents were aware of the departmental as well as institutional goals. The survey findings indicated that respondents' departmental performance was average. The focus group supported these findings indicating that there were a lot of challenges that led to the average performance in the departments such as over delegation, understaffing and high workload.

Some of the job behaviours listed by participants such as work ethic, team spirit, conscientiousness, focus, positivity, effective communication, motivational support, management of complex situations, ability to work under pressure, shared vision, emotional intelligence, self awareness, accountability and being responsible, tally with those listed in Table 9 that illustrate the quantitative findings of the job behaviours and values.

On a Likert scale, the perception of the supervisors towards their subordinates’ job behaviours was more skewed towards neither agree nor disagree while that of subordinates towards their supervisors was more skewed to agree. This shows that subordinates have confidence in their supervisors, even though there is still room for the supervisors to improve. However, on the other hand, the supervisors have less confidence in their subordinates and this calls for training of the latter. In support of the call for training, the respondents argued that training would motivate the supervisors to inspire their subordinates towards the realisation of BOU vision. Additionally, they would be aware of their supervisors’ expectations hence this will minimize the operational risks. On the other hand, subordinates recommended that supervisors must be trained in people management skills.

In teaching and learning, the respondents reported infusion of technology in their work, and that they also promote innovative learning. However, in the area of research, the findings showed that BOU is still lagging. Research is pivotal to the growth of the university; hence, BOU has to focus more on upskilling staff in this area. A fair number of respondents are engaged in community projects as well as the promotion of internal partnerships. With regards to teamwork, most of the respondents cited that they have acquired teamwork skills and they felt confident working with others in a team with the skills they currently possess. However,
the qualitative data findings showed that even though people could work in teams, they lacked the team spirit.

Although the respondents made suggestions of the needed competencies and skills in their context, they were also alive to the fact that competences and skills should be aligned to emerging trends.

4.4.1.1 Leading Self

The starting point of leading self is to be cognisant of one’s own contribution to the vision of the organisation. When asked to introspect, respondents argued that individuals must set short term and long-term goals, be focused and be able to manage their time. In addition, they must commit to the BOU vision and play an active role in the management of their departments and units. They also cited that one has to be aware of the changes that they encounter in their job in order to be focused and be able to carry out the delegated tasks. They felt that customer care training was critical for the promotion and ownership of the BOU brand.

4.4.1.2 Engaging others

The two strategic tools recommended by the respondents to facilitate a healthy environment between the supervisors and the subordinates were feedback and delegation. Supervisors claimed that they had cultivated an environment that allows subordinates to contribute towards achieving the departments/units objectives. This was fostered by communication that is anchored on the value of Botho. They perceived feedback as a vital tool for the growth of individual staff and success of the departments/units, hence they recommended the provision of upward and downward feedback. The importance of feedback is also notable in the quantitative findings, where respondents alluded to the 720-degree feedback as the most preferred skill. Cannon (2011) supports the claim and alluded that the 720 degrees feedback is essential for holistic leadership development as it focuses on the physical and mental health of the leader.

Although delegation is used to empower subordinates, enabling them to work as a team as well as foster leadership competences, some subordinates however, perceive delegation as an extra responsibility hence they resist to carry out the assigned tasks. A leadership development program is therefore essential to bring about a positive attitude towards delegation.
4.4.1.3 Contributing to the Preferred Future of BOU

As a way of making BOU a preferred institution of excellence, respondents felt that the leadership development programme must be anchored on the principle of BOTHO (respect). The transformation processes should be less abrupt and disruptive to avoid compromising quality and productivity. Their view was that new changes must be introduced systematically, and staff must be trained to deliver on the changes. In cases where staff resist change, they must be motivated to see the goodness of change by training them on change management. Increased collaboration of departments, upskilling staff with relevant skills and competences to enhance productivity.

To enhance performance, BOU has to review the performance management tool and standardise it in order to improve its effectiveness as well as close the gaps caused by the irregular use of the same. For increased return on investment, BOU has to introduce other job enhancing elements such as succession planning, job shadowing, formal and informal mentoring, industry attachment/internship, fellowship, and visitation of scholars. Use of robust customer service assessment monitoring and evaluation processes and instruments/tools to enhance customer service.

5.0 Conclusion

A leadership development program is vital for an agile 21st century organisation. For BOU to remain relevant in the ODL arena and become the institution of excellence as envisaged in the strategic framework of 2036, leadership development must be part of the BOU’s thematic areas.

6.0 Recommendations

This study proposes the leadership development programme to be undertaken by all staff across BOU. This recommendation is guided by the following: 1. Substantive research that supports the generalisation of the qualitative and quantitative findings. Quantitative studies are widely known to generalise the research findings (Campbell, 2016: 738; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). BOU to provide a contextualised leadership development program. It further recommends a leadership development framework to guide the institution on the skills and competencies to be offered.
References


