LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS AND EMERGENCIES TIMES IN AFRICA: A COMPELLING NEED FOR STRATEGIC AND ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Africa and indeed Nigeria have a long and chequered history of crises and emergencies: ranging from diseases outbreaks, economic and political crisis to terrorism, arm conflicts, insurgency to banditry and kidnapping, ecological disaster and the perennial failures and unpreparedness in handling the crises and emergencies by African leaders. This paper examined the roles of African leaders in times of crisis and emergencies and highlight leadership competencies needed by Africa leaders to be effective in a global world of the 21st century characterised by rapid changes. To achieve these objectives, extensive literature review of leadership theories and case studies of experiences of international organisation across Africa – World Health Organisation in collaboration with Centre for diseases control in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Guinea, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Rwanda were X-rayed. Findings from the literature reviewed and case studies confirmed the importance of strategic/adaptive leadership in times of crises and emergencies in Africa. Dearth of strategic/ adaptive leadership skills in managing change, crises and emergencies were reported as major challenges militating against crisis and disaster management among African leaders. Based on findings of this study, it is recommended that African leaders' must as a matter of urgency builds capacity in the area of adaptive and strategic leadership for themselves and their policy formulators and implementers in government across at all levels of government.

Keywords: Adaptive leadership, Strategic leadership, Crisis, Emergencies.

Introduction

Crisis leadership is a very crucial part of leading in today's world. Nations, organisations, societies and people pass through some form of crisis on a fairly regular basis. With the rapid fluctuation in political and economic situation around the world, weather and climatic uncertainties and global health

pandemics, the need for effective leadership in Africa cannot be over-emphasised. Africa and indeed Nigeria have a long and chequered history of crises and emergencies management- ranging from diseases outbreaks (Ebola, Cholera, Covid -19, Guinea-worm, Polio, Lassa Fever); economic and political crisis to terrorism and arm conflicts, ecological disaster and the perennial failures and unpreparedness in handling the crises and emergencies by African leaders. Change and crisis are short and simple six- letter words that are pervasive in the world today. Both words are simple to spell and yet difficult to define. Prewitt and Weil (2014) assert that a leader, who is able to read the signals of looming crisis and understands how to harness the exigency brought on by the situation, can diminish the potential dangers and take full advantage of the resulting opportunities. For instance, in the face of grave dangers in the world today –global health pandemic (COVID-19), wars, terrorism, natural disasters, some world leaders and nations seem to have been managing COVID-19 crisis successfully and others do not? Some countries like Germany, Taiwan, New Zealand, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Denmark are recognised as having managed the crisis best. However, most African countries- South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Algeria- and some advanced economies of the world United State of America, Britain, France, Italy, Brazil etc in spite of their huge human and natural resources are still grappling in curtailing the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. The answers to these questions may well be in the way the leadership of these countries have been perceived to have handled the COVID-19 pandemic, wars, insurgency and humanitarian crises.

Statement of the problem

Africa nations in recent times have been experiencing increased rate of self inflicted crises: like the Rwanda genocide of East and Central Africa; Xenophobic attacks on other Africans in South Africa; Boko- haram insurgency in North East , Nigeria, terrorist attacks and armed banditry, cattle rustling in North West Nigeria, kidnapping and ritual killings in most part of Nigeria; Ebola virus epidemic diseases in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra –Leone and recently the COVID- 19 pandemic that brought the whole world to its kneels from late 2019 till date. These crisis and emergencies have huge impact on the human and economic mainstay of the affected African nations. Most African leaders appears to lack the proactive knowledge of leadership needed to prevent avoidable tragic incidents and crises/emergencies.

 Francis (2015) studied Crisis Preparedness of Leadership Behaviours among Elected Leaders during Hurricanes (hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (2005) in United State of America. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study

was to explore what leadership behaviours an elected leader uses in crisis preparedness. The result of this study highlighted five emerging themes named as the five Cs of crisis preparedness: compassion, continuity, communication, common sense, and confidence. Although this study contributed to social change by identifying key leadership traits that governor and other elected leaders should use in crisis preparedness, which may contribute to the safety, health, and wellbeing of constituents during a natural disaster he suggests that more studies must be carried out to investigate which leadership style is more effective during crisis and disasters, and urges researchers to conduct more research relevant to leadership traits and behaviours after a disasters and crisis and how community and business will get back to normal situation.

Mbandlwa (2020) and Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012) in their research on the challenges facing Africa argue that Africa has many challenges but the centre of all challenges after independence is corruption. They opine that African leaders provoke self inflicted crisis through nepotism, tribalism, favouritism and insincerity. Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012) further point out that Africa's failures have come about largely as a result of frequent leadership change, lack of ideology, policy reversal and weak institutional patterns. They also argue that the leadership selection process in Africa takes the imposition pattern and that African leaders have frequently come to their position with limited experience in leadership.

Fahid, Hamaeel &Abdallal (2020) studied the impact of strategic leadership on crisis management at OOREDOO Q.S.C. (Ooredoo) company, Qatar, United Arab Emirate, they found that there is a statistically significant effect of strategic leadership practices on all dimensions of crisis management and reducing their impacts and its negative repercussions.

Most of the studies on leadership and crisis and emergency handling have been carried out in corporate settings and outside Africa, while little empirical studies on African leaders' crisis and emergency handling and competencies are very few and far apart. This paper, therefore, conducts an all in one literature review with the objective of organising previous researches on strategic/ adaptive leadership, crisis and emergencies handling in Africa.

Objectives of the study

 The broad objective of this paper is to investigate the role of leadership in times of crisis and emergencies in Africa, in a rapidly changing global world of the 21st century. The specific objectives are to:

i.   explore the extent to which strategic/adaptive leadership help to ameliorate the effect of crisis in Africa.
ii.   investigate the influence of strategic/adaptive   leadership   on emergencies handling in Africa

Research Hypotheses

Based on case studies and literature reviewed, two research hypotheses were raised to explore the link between strategic leadership and crises and emergencies management in Africa in a changing world of the 21st century.

1.   There is no significant impact of strategic/adaptive leadership on crises management
2.   There is no significant impact of strategic/ adaptive leadership on emergencies handling

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

The term leadership, like many other concepts in social sciences has many meanings and definitions. Leadership is generally described as a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation in a way that makes it more organised and logical. Leadership is defined as the leader's ability to influence, motivate and empower others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of institutions (Lee & Welliver, 2018). According to (Kargas, & Varoutas, 2015), leadership refers to capabilities of a person that could influence the rest of the group of people to achieve a goal or set of goals. Waite (2014) defines leadership as a group-based process that involves encouragement to achieve certain goal(s). According to Yukl (2013) leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done, and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. Oladele and Akeke (2016) defined strategic leadership as the ability to engage, inspire and motivate others toward accomplishing shared visions

and goals. It requires knowing when and how to delegate authority to others to change course. It often involves making difficult decisions that may be unpopular but which are best for the entire team in the long run. Hiefetz and Linsky (2009) see adaptive leadership as a practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. It is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.

Concept of Crisis

 A crisis is generally described as a situation that develops quickly and requires a response from a person or an organisation in order to mitigate the consequences. According to Lighthouse readiness group (2015), a crisis is a time of difficulty, trouble or danger and can be personal, or confined to a small population, a state, a nation, a continent and the whole world, like in the case of Covid-19 where the whole world is grappling with Covid- 19 virus pandemic. Alexander (2005b) describes crisis as an abnormal situation which presents a high risks to business and may trigger rapid public policy changes, since it draws public and media attention and threaten public trust. Crisis are characterised by an excessive amount of incomplete and conflicting information. Crisis often have past origins, and diagnosing their origin or source can help to understand and manage a particular crises or lead to an alternate state or condition (Farazmand, 2001). Crisis, like the COVID -19 pandemic, more often than not occur without warning, are often complex in nature and are heralded with profound persistence and uncertainties.

Emergencies

 AL-Dahash et-al (2016) define emergency as ''an imminent or actual event that threatens people, property or environment and which requires a co-ordinate and rapid response''. According to WHO (2002) emergency is a state in which normal procedures are suspended and extra –ordinary measures are taken to save lives, protect people, limit damage and return conditions to normal. Jorgustin (2012) sees emergency as an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for immediate action, an urgent need for assistance or relief.

Theoretical Framework

Adaptive Leadership theory:

Adaptive leadership theory was popularised by two professors of leadership- Linsky and Heifetz- at Harvard. They aver that the world, nations, businesses and technology are constantly changing and are frequently confronted with challenges, crises, emergencies and must be navigated accordingly. Leaders who apply adaptive leadership theory go beyond simply addressing challenges and crises and find way to solve them; they also anticipate challenges and are able to identify their root causes. In times of constant change adaptive leadership is critical. Hiefetz and Linsky (2009) see adaptive leadership as a practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. Leadership, when seen from this perspective, requires a learning strategy. According to Heifeitz and Laurie (2011), the adaptive demands of our time require leaders who take responsibility without waiting for revelation or request and prepare their followers to take on the process of change

Diemeier Trust Radar Theory

Diermeier (2020) developed a theory called "Trust Radar" which can be used to tackle challenges during period of rapid changes and crisis situation, like that of COVID-19 pandemic. Deirmeier (2020) points out that strategic and adaptive leader must continue to build trust both internally and externally. Even though the desirability of trust is widely acknowledged, most leaders often struggle with building and maintaining it, especially during high-stake crisis, like the Spanish flu of 1919 and Covid-19 pandemic. He listed four key competencies required during crisis and period of rapid change: empathy, transparency, expertise and commitment. Showing empathy is not the same thing as apologizing. Empathy in times of rapid change and crisis means when you communicate with people, you communicate clearly their pains and suffering, and express a sense of feeling with their situation. Transparency is reached when in the mind of the citizenry all relevant questions thrown up by the challenges on ground have been fully addressed by the leader. The key criteria here are for leaders to be fully understood, in their sincerity, openness and honesty, while communicating with their teams. A perceived lack of expertise in leaders can undermine trust quickly. Where such expertise is lacking in leadership commitment, particularly where the situation is highly dynamic, fluid and easy solutions are not available. Commitment involves leaders in defining and instituting a process, communicating promptly with the people and making the communication personal. Video is better than email and personal address is better than video clips. In coping with organisational change, which is novel, fluid and where there is no easy solution in sight, leadership must demonstrate openness and transparency about learning.

While leaders must set their eyes on the big pictures, focus must be placed on country and regional specifics.

Africa and Covid -19

Corona virus (Covid-19) is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of corona- virus the severe acute respiratory syndrome- the SARS-CoV-2 virus- that has not been previously identified in humans. The current COVID-19 global health crisis is unprecedented. It is considered as one of the turning points in history where it is shuffling social and economic norms as we know them and is triggering a new human era. It was first reported to World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 31st of December, 2019 in Wuhan, China and on March11, 2020, it was declared a pandemic. The virus is an evasive, invasive, elusive, and currently invincible virus. This slippery and shifty virus has learnt to masquerade as variants escaping whatever immunity and protection thrown at it (Tomori ,2020). As of September 30, 2021 confirmed cases of Covid-19 from 55 African countries reached 8,274,914. Reported deaths in Africa reached 210,042 and 7,582,740 people have recovered. South Africa has the most reported cases 2,900,994 and 87,417 people died, Tunisia, 706,314, Ethiopia 344,322, Libya 339,269, Egypt, 303783 and Kenya, 249,014. Nigeria has so far 205,484 cases, 2,701 deaths, while 193,483 Nigerians have been discharged nationwide.

The Ebola virus disease (EVD)

The Ebola virus disease epidemic that raged through West Africa in 2014–2015 was one of the most dramatic and important public health crises in the 21st century. It was an existential threat to three countries—Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone—and challenged governments around the world. It severely threatened international public health systems in ways they have never been challenged before. Leadership at several levels was critical in eventually controlling the epidemic. However, 11,308 people died among the 28,610 Ebola cases by the time the World Health Organization (WHO) made the declaration that the Public Health Emergency of International Concern was over on March 29, 2016. Nyenswah, Engineer & Peters (2016) using the experience of Liberia's epidemic control efforts, highlight the critical role that leadership played during four phases of the epidemic response: (1) crisis recognition and early mobilization; (2) the emergency phase; (3) the declining epidemic; and (4) the long tail. They examined how the decisions and actions taken in each phase of the epidemic and address key crisis leadership tasks, including sense-making, decision making, meaning-making, crisis termination,

and learning, and assess how leadership approaches evolved during the different epidemic phases to accomplish these tasks.

Africa and Wars

Boko Haram Crisis in North Eastern, Nigeria.

The Boko Haram insurgency began in July 2009, when the jihadist group Boko Haram started an armed rebellion against the government of Nigeria. The violent rise and resilience of the jihadist group in the Lake Chad basin since 2009 has posed enormous security, humanitarian and governance challenges. Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency and the government's military response have killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced million across the Lake Chad region, which straddles Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Closely related to the menace of Boko Haram in recent times is the issue of banditry, cattle rustling, kidnapping and arm trafficking in the Northern western part of Nigeria.

Rwanda Genocide in Central and East Africa

The Rwandan genocide occurred between 7 April and 15 July, 1994 during the Rwandan Civil war. During this period of around 100 days, members of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, as well as some moderate Hutu and Twa, were slaughtered by armed Hutu militias. The United Nations estimated that more than one million people were killed and estimated 150,000 to 250,000 women were also raped. Ethnic tension in Rwanda is nothing new. There have always been disagreements between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsi, but the genocide was sparked by the death of the Rwandan President Jevenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, when his plane was shot down above Kigali airport on 6pril,1994.

South Africa Xenophobic Violence

Xenophobic harassment and violence against Africans and Asians foreigners living in South Africa are routine and sometimes lethal (Human Right watch, 2020). Foreigners are scape goated and blamed for economic, insecurity, crimes, and government failure to deliver services and have been targets of nationwide protests and shutdowns characterised by violence, looting, and touching of their businesses. In early September 2019, mob wielding weapons and chanting anti-foreigner slogans attacked and forcibly displaced non-nationals, destroying thousands of their business and homes.

Socio-Political Crisis

Mbandlwa (2020) argues that Africa has many challenges but the centre of all challenges after independence is corruption. All leaders that are elected in African countries after the independence are rich and their families and friends are also rich. Africa is not united and cannot be united unless corruption is properly addressed. Leaders in Africa do not want to see a united Africa because they will lose a lot of money that they receive through corrupt activities hence most African leaders provoke crisis through nepotism, tribalism, favouritism and insincerity.

Globalisation

On the global scene, Canton (2015) predicts that game –changing trends are coming in business, technology, workforce, economy, security and environment. Climate change, energy demand, and population growth will redefine global risk and power. Exponential new technologies will emerge in digital money, mobile commerce, and big data. To thrive in this future calls for strategic leadership that is predictive, adaptive and agile. Leadership is required to identify the most fruitful challenges or problem definitions from the key facts. Basadur (2001) posits that effective individuals, groups and strategic leaders are adaptable. They anticipate problems and opportunities and develop timely solutions. They search for changing circumstances that they can turn to advantages rather than wait for change, they make change.

Empirical Review

A number of empirical studies have been carried out aimed at understanding the role of leadership in handling and resolving crisis and emergencies in Africa. The research shows that leader's strategic and adaptive or interactive leadership style substantially contributes to the amelioration of crisis and emergencies.

Fahid, Hamaeel &Abdallal (2020) in their study of the impact of strategic leadership on crisis management found that there is a statistically significant effect of strategic leadership practices on all dimensions of crisis management and reducing their impacts and its negative repercussions.

Mbandlwa (2020) carried out a review of challenges of African Leadership after independence. He argues that Africa has many challenges but the centre

of all challenges after independence is corruption. He points out Africa is not united and cannot be united unless corruption is properly addressed.

Francis (2015) studied "Crisis Preparedness of Leadership Behaviours among Elected Leaders during Hurricanes in United State of America". The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what leadership behaviours an elected leader uses in crisis preparedness. The result of this study highlighted five emerging themes named as the five Cs of crisis preparedness: compassion, continuity, communication, common sense, and confidence. Although this study contributed to social change by identifying key leadership traits that governor and other elected leaders should use in crisis preparedness, which may contribute to the safety, health, and wellbeing of constituents during a natural disaster he suggests that more studies must be carried out to investigate which leadership style is more effective during crisis and disasters, and urges researchers to conduct more research relevant to leadership traits and behaviours after a disasters and crisis and how community and business will get back to normal situation.

Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012) carried out a critical analysis of leadership and governance crises in Africa. It was pointed out Africa's failures have come about largely as a result of frequent leadership change, lack of ideology, policy reversal and weak institutional patterns. They also argued that the leadership selection process in Africa takes the imposition pattern and that African leaders have frequently come to their position with limited experience; hence, the decline in moral and discipline caused by bad policies, eroded professional standards and ethics that weakened the system of governance.

Boin et-al in Couto (2010) in their decade-long collaborative and cross-national case research on the politics of crisis management, studied how leaders dealt with strategic challenges, the political risks and opportunities they faced, mistakes they made, pitfalls they avoided, and paths they took to manage crisis. They formulated five core tasks of crisis leadership, including sense-making, decision making, meaning-making, terminating, and learning, and of which fall within the framework of strategic and adaptive leadership.

Compelling Need for Strategic and Adaptive Leadership:

In times of increasingly rapid change, growing complexity and critical uncertainty, strategic/adaptive leadership and foresight is required. Strategic foresight is a structured and systematic way of using ideas about the future to anticipate and better prepare for change. It is about exploring different plausible futures that could arise, and the opportunities and challenges they could present (OECD, 2018). While the future cannot be predicted with certainty, today's leaders must act proactively in the face of uncertainty and unpredictable external forces. Many times as leaders, the tip of the iceberg becomes the perceived reality and the limit of our horizons. Strategic foresight enables us to see beyond the tip of the iceberg. Armed with strategic foresight today's national and global leaders are able to savour and digest the full dimensions, depths and contours of what lies beneath the tip of the iceberg. The challenge for most African nation today is what are the limits of their leader's horizon? (Oladokun,2009). In the new normal world of the COVID -19 there is an overriding need to re-think what is required for African leaders to collaborate and form strategic alliances to find solutions to this global health crisis. It is only then that African business leaders will be able to create a paradigm shift for understanding what it takes to innovate, develop new strategies and new products and services in a global market that will position African countries, most importantly, Nigeria among the comity of developed economy.

Methodology

This study adopted the ex-post-facto descriptive research design. Secondary data were obtained by keying these key terms – strategic and adaptive leadership, crisis and emergencies management into on-line databases. The terms were searched in the titles, abstracts and the bodies of the articles. Preference was given to articles from indexed journals with high impact factors. Additional information was also gathered from on line magazines, websites and government reports and white papers. These sources were also supported with the opinions of focused group discussions with senior government officials in some African nations. Case study analysis was based on a systematic and retrospective review of documents, minutes, and key leadership processes used in decision making during crisis and emergencies periods. Documents from the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW), United Nations (UN), Nigerian Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (NCDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, International Federation of the Red Cross, United States Agency for International

Development, and various local and international news media, as part of an effort to document the timeline of interventions and the epidemic.

Results and Discussion

The findings from this article reject the null hypotheses which state that there is no significant link between strategic and adaptive leadership and effective management of crises and emergencies in Africa. This finding is corroborated by Fahid, Hamel & Abdallal (2020) study on the impact of strategic leadership on crisis management that found that there is a statistically significant effect of strategic leadership practices on all dimensions on crisis management. This finding is also supported by the work of John-Eke& Eke (2020) that revealed that strategic leadership/ planning enhances management of crisis and that any crisis management style applied at a given catastrophe will determine if the destruction will be minor or major disaster. They submit that organization and nations that employs strategic approach to crisis management style will be pro-active in managing crisis. This result was consistent with the result of a study of Baghdadi (2014) which concluded that leadership is necessary in organizations that seek stability, continuity and growth, and that the complexity and frequency of crises impose the need to always search for the best methods and the latest methods that provide a degree of preparedness and protection for organizations in face of Crises or get them out with minimal losses. Arifa et al. (2019) emphasise that leadership is crucial in disease outbreak management to ensure successfulness of control and prevention program. This position supports the 2016 Flagship Report by WHO, which emphasises the importance of leadership in combating and control of diseases.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that strategic leadership is inextricably linked to effectiveness in crisis and emergency management among African leaders. To thrive in the ever changing, crisis prone world of the 21st century calls for strategic /adaptive leadership that is predictive, strategic, adaptive and agile. Strategic leadership is required by African leaders to identify the most fruitful challenges or problem definitions from the key facts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were made:

1)   During period of crises and emergencies, like that of Ebola virus disease, COVID-19 pandemic, terrorist attacks ,banditry, kidnapping, African leaders must build trust both internally and externally and forge strategic alliance with all stakeholders and other leaders to find solutions to the crises.

2)   To ameliorate the pains and suffering of the citizenry during crises and emergency, African leaders should show and demonstrate commitment to the people by communicating clearly their pains and suffering, and express a sense of feeling with their situation.

3)   In coping with national crises, emergency and disaster, which is novel, fluid and where there is no easy solution in sight like that of Covid-19, leadership must demonstrate openness and transparency about learning.

4)   That learning and capacity building in strategic leadership should as a matter of urgency be given to African leaders and their key policy formulators, at all levels of government- local, state, regional and federal government- and on-the-job experiences that prepare executives to lead crises be provided for leaders.

5)   For African leaders to scale through crisis with minimal loss, they should incorporate strategic approach to crisis management and also put in place strategic/crisis management team that will be able to manage crisis within the shortest period of time.

6)   That strategic and adaptive leadership thinking courses should be incorporated into the curriculum of all tertiary institutions in African countries.

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