

# Executive Leadership Case Study

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Perhaps hundreds if not thousands of books have been written about leadership. People to this day still argue about what style of leadership is the best and whether leaders are born or made. In this case study it is very clear there are two distinct styles of leadership between Professor Afolabi and Dr. Aluko. In this case study Professor Afolabi is described as a paternalistic autocrat in that his leadership style is to not to invite participation from his subordinates in the decision making process, but instead to make assignments and give the marching orders as to how things will be done. In contrast Dr. Aluko believes in a more democratic process and invites feedback and participation from his staff. In this paper I will identify the problems that exist at Babcock University, critically analyze the situation both before and after the change in leadership, and make recommendations on how the problems can be addressed.

## **PROBLEMS:**

Before I identify the problems in this case study it is important to define leadership or at least shed a little light on the two contrasting styles mentioned in this case study. In the book titled Leadership in Organizations; Yukl (2010) states “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept”.

However, in one of several definitions he lists, I find one interesting explanation; “Leadership is exercised when persons... mobilize... institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers”. I will return to this definition later as I speak about Professor Afolabi. Perhaps an easier definition to understand is one mentioned in class by Dr. Dibia. During his lecture time Dr. Dibia described leadership as

“The process of influencing organizational members to use their energies willingly and to appropriately facilitate the achievement of the organization’s goals”. Now one may ask what the proper style of leadership is when trying to accomplish this goal -- it depends.

In reality there are many different styles of leadership, from the autocratic leader who needs to have complete control over every situation. He or she is the type of person who makes a decision alone without asking for input from other people in the organization. Farther down the scale is the participative style that allows for input from others in the organization. This style is more democratic with the leader giving up some of his/her power in the decision making process. Neither style is necessarily completely right or wrong. The important issue is identifying which style is appropriate for the organization.

There are many problems listed in this case study; however I have identified four which I believe have caused the most havoc and disruption in the organization.

1. Contrasting leadership styles
2. Too much change too soon
3. Choosing the correct leadership style
4. Communication

## **CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS:**

### **1. Contrasting Leadership Styles**

The employees in this organization are clearly comfortable with an authoritarian style of leadership. Professor Afolabi controlled every aspect of the organization. He formulated all the rules and regulations that were not already decided by the Dean or Provost. He assigned

secretarial duties and decided who would have what office space. In reality no decisions were made unless he made them. He didn't advocate creativity among the staff, instead they waited for him to make the decision and they would implement it. His style of leadership is described as a paternalist autocrat in that, just as parent would not seek advice from the child before making a decision, he did not seek advice from his staff. This style of leadership simply would not work in every organization and in particular with some of the employees in today's generation, but it seems to have worked well in this department.

In this case study he held the support of most of his staff. Earlier I gave a description of leadership in action. Professor Afolabi embodied this description in that he was able to identify the motives of his staff and satisfy them. He knew the goal of the organization was to maintain high enrollment and produce well educated students and he was successful in producing results.

In his book Leadership in Organizations; Yukl (2010) states, "influence is the essence of leadership". He goes on to explain to be an effective leader, it is necessary to influence people to carry out requests, support proposals, and implement decisions. Furthermore, in Dr. Dible's course pack for this class; Hughes, Ginnett, Curphy state in their book Leadership; Enhancing the Lessons of Experience (2009) that power is defined as the capacity to produce effects on others, or the potential to influence others.

It is clear that Professor Afolabi possessed the power to produce effects on others. This is apparent in his success rate at the University and his decision making ability with both the staff and his manager. It is further explained in the course pack that there are different sources of leader power. If you take into account the example given in the case study you can see that Professor Afolabi had both expert power and referent power. Expert power is described as the

power of knowledge and referent power refers to the potential influence one has due to the strength of the relationship between the leader and the followers. In the statement from one of Professor Afolabi staff he claims, “there were times when I wanted to strangle the old crank, but he always knew what he was talking about. I didn’t mind being told what to do, when to do it and how to do it because I always knew where I stood”.

Professor Afolabi’s leadership may have been autocratic but his staff knew he would back them as long as they followed the rules. They knew where they stood with him and they knew he would tell them how he expected things to be done. In some sense he removed much of the responsibility from them because he created the rules, told them how to implement them, and took responsibility should something go wrong. Finally, although he was autocratic at work and maintained a professional working relationship, he also showed he cared for his people by attending social events away from work. In the end he had built that influence needed to be a successful leader and produce results. Simply put no matter how autocratic he was at work his people respected him.

Dr. Aluko represents another extreme in leadership style. In the book titled Public Administration; Clerkin, Kravchuk, & Rosenbloom (2009) explain an analysis done by Robert Tannenbaum and Warren Schmidt where they describe a continuum from boss to subordinate centered leadership styles. In the boss centered style the boss makes a decision and announces it, where on the other end of the scale the manager permits the subordinates to make decisions within broad limits defined by the manager. In between the two extremes are five other management levels. Professor Afolabi tends to fall in the boss-centered range where Dr. Aluko falls more in the middle of the scale allowing for subordinate input. He is a participative style of

leader who prefers input from his subordinates, which is a stark difference from Professor Afolabi.

In his efforts to create a more democratic working environment, Dr. Aluko needed to delegate some of the responsibilities once performed by Professor Afolabi. He suggested meetings in which they could identify problems and work on solutions together. He wanted more input and representation from students on administrative issues. Some of the staff viewed this simply as him wanting to pass off his duties to them with them receiving nothing in exchange. They had become comfortable with Professor Afolabi doing the work and telling them what they needed to do.

For several years the staff was used to Professor Afolabi's leadership style of telling them what to do and now Dr. Aluko was bringing a total different leadership style to the table. He had not yet established the power and influence needed to make some of the changes he wanted to implement.

## **2. Too Much Change too Soon**

This problem continues with Dr. Aluko's leadership style. Change is not necessarily bad and in many cases is needed. However, there should be a need for change such as; keeping up with technology or industry standards, improving poor performance or not meeting the organizational goals. When changes need to be made it is critical that a leader knows what changes are good for the organization and he/she knows when to make those changes. Dr. Aluko came into this organization and began making changes right away without taking time to understand the organization or to build relationships with his subordinates and boss.

I would compare this to a mother bird kicking the baby bird out of the nest for the first time. For most of her life the baby bird is attended to by the mother. She feeds her, bathes her, and shows her how to perform most of the things she needs to know. Then one day suddenly she pushes her from the nest and teaches her how to fly and do things for herself. For many years the staff of Professor Afolabi relied on him for everything. He gave them the rules, tended to the everyday tasks such as budgets and assigning office space, and decided who was teaching certain courses. With Dr. Aluko they were being kicked from the nest and asked to participate more and become involved in administrative decisions. They simply felt more comfortable being in the nest with Professor Afolabi doing the everyday task or telling them how he wanted them done.

This case study seems to imply that everything was running smoothly; most employees were happy; the goals were being met; and the Dean and Provost were well informed with what was happening within the department. So the question is whether such drastic changes needed to be made or should Dr. Aluko have taken the time to learn more about the organization and the people who work there. His desire to have input and develop a cooperative working environment is commendable, but perhaps too much too soon for employees who were used to the authoritative leadership style of Professor Afolabi.

### **3. Choosing the Correct Leadership Style**

In Dr. Dibie's course pack for this class; Hughes, Ginnett, Curphy state in their book Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience (2009) "a leader's legitimacy also may be affected by the extent to which followers participated in the leader's selection". The book goes on to explain that when followers have had a say in the selection process, they tend to have a heightened sense of psychological identification with the new leader.

There is little information about how Dr. Aluko was chosen for this position. The case study does indicate that a search committee was used for the hiring process, but there is also an indication that for at least most of the staff their first introduction to Dr. Aluko was at the first department meeting at the beginning of the semester.

The search committee should, at the very least, have contained representation from the employees who will be working with the new leader of the department. By including them in the process they have established some ownership in the decision and can voice their opinion about the leadership style they are comfortable with.

It is clear the department was running smoothly under the leadership style of Professor Afolabi. The selection committee chose a man who clearly had a leadership style much different than his predecessor. This selection was made with perhaps little or no input from the people who would be working with him every day. So naturally at the first meeting they were completely unprepared for the changes that he wanted to institute.

#### **4. Communication**

According to Jerald Greenberg (2005) in his book titled Managing Behavior in Organizations there are three means of formal communication: downward, upward, and horizontal. It is clear that under Professor Afolabi that not all of these forms of communication existed. It can be divided into two parts – communication with his superiors and communication with his staff. The communication with his superiors was good, with the Dean and Provost feeling as though they were well informed on what was going on within the department. Professor Afolabi frequently lunched with senior administrators, and occasionally invited a

junior faculty member to come along. The president and the trustees were on the department's mailing list to receive a quarterly newsletter and advance notice of important speakers.

As for the communication with his staff, it was more one-sided with Professor Afolabi doing most of the communicating. However, most of his staff did not have an issue with this style of communication and had become accustomed to his leadership and communication style.

Dr. Aluko on the other hand attempted to formulate communication with his subordinates early on but when this failed he assumed staff members would continue to attend meetings, be on time to classes and be available to students for advising. However, just the opposite occurred. It appears he lost that communication channel with both his subordinates and his superiors who no longer felt informed. When his staff began to lose interest, they allowed this to affect their performance which ultimately affected the goal of the University.

Finally, with his cooperative and hands-off approach Dr. Aluko lost control of his department and failed to communicate the consequences to his staff of not showing up for meetings and attending to student needs. Ultimately student frustrations lead them to complain to their state representatives.

His failure to keep the Dean and Provost informed along with an apparent loss of control in his department is a cause for them losing confidence in his ability to lead.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **1. Contrasting Leadership Styles**

As previously mentioned there are different leadership styles and each has its given place and time. The critical task for a leader is to identify what leadership style best fits the

organization he/she is leading and knowing when to change their style to adapt to the people who they are working with and environment they are in. Professor Afolabi's leadership style was successful because his co-workers knew the rules, knew his style, and were comfortable in his ability to get the job done. In other words he had gained their trust and built a relationship of professionalism at work mixed with the right amount of socializing after work.

To be successful in this organization Dr. Aluko needed to arrive on the scene with little or no plans of changing the organization until he had an opportunity to analyze the department and build trust amongst his staff and supervisors. At this point he has lost control of the department and the confidence of the Dean and Provost. It would have been much easier for him to come in with an authoritarian leadership style and change if needed than to switch from his participative style to an authoritarian. It is my recommendation that the Dean begin looking for another leader with a style which more closely matches that of Professor Afolabi.

## **2. Too Much Change Too Soon**

There was no indication that change was needed in this department. Given the information in the case study if it had not been for the untimely death of Professor Afolabi this department would have continued to be successful and the majority of the workers would be happy. My recommendation is that the next leader come into this department and looks at the success that existed under Professor Afolabi. This does not mean that change will not need to occur at some point. However, the leader needs to carefully analyze why they believe this is the case and then before implementing change make sure it is best for allowing the department to meet the goals that have been identified. Furthermore, any anticipated change should create an environment where the employees will be productive and have confidence in their leader.

The task facing the next leader will be different from the one facing Dr. Aluko since he/she will need to first fix the current problems which exist. The next leader will almost certainly need to at least begin with an authoritarian leadership style in order to regain control of the department and instill trust again in the staff and Dean.

### **3. Choosing the Correct Leadership Style**

One of the most critical aspects of finding a new leader is putting together a search committee that includes staff members who will work with the new leader. If this search committee is to be successful, it will need to find a leader who is a good match for the department and, the people he will be working with and who shares the same goals as the University. This time the committee should require input from the staff on what type of leadership style they prefer and seek input on what this new leader needs to do to fix the problems that currently exist in the department. Once the search committee has identified a set number of candidates then it should take an opportunity to allow the staff to meet the candidates and not wait until the person has been hired and shows up for the first department meeting.

The next leader will need to be a strong organizer, able to make decisions on his own, be able to build relationships among his staff and the Dean, and be able to communicate what the goals of the department are and have a clear vision for meeting those goals. It will take time for the staff, administrators, and students to trust and respect this new leader so he/she will need to have patience.

### **4. Communication**

The new leader will need to begin right away to build trust and improve the relationship with the staff, students and the leaders of the University. According to Jack Enter (2006) in his

book Challenging the Law Enforcement Organization; Proactive Leadership Strategies, “leaders pursue communication opportunities with others, they invade the lives of others to know them, and they become known to the men and women they supervise”. I recommend the new leader reach out to his employees and communicate with them. At first this will mean gaining control of the department and putting back into place the rules that were effective in making the department successful, updating the Dean and Provost by using methods like Professor Afolabi’s mailing list and frequent lunch meetings.

Finally, Professor Afolabi may not have invited upward communication during the business hours; however he used after hour social events as an opportunity to get to know his staff. The next leader should not discount the benefits in attending such events and should invite that upward communication as a way of keeping his/her hand on the pulse of the organization. The new leader will have the task of gaining the trust and respect of his staff and supervisors by pursuing those communication opportunities at every possible occasion.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Leadership is difficult to define and the right type of leadership is even more difficult to identify. In every organization there are people who prefer to work for different types of leaders, so choosing just one style of leader is often impossible. In this case study it is clear Professor Afolabi’s style was working; however if you put him in a different organization with different people then his style may not have been as successful. The same can be said for Dr. Aluko who obviously had a completely different leadership style that may have been successful at his previous job.

There are several lessons to learn in this case study. First of all not every leadership style will work in every occasion. Second, when searching for a new leader the search committee should have some representation from the workers who the new leader will work with. Finally, a leader must learn to adapt his/her style to the people and the organization they are leading.

Perhaps the complexity of leadership and the differing opinions on what makes a successful leader is why there is so much research and documentation on this topic. In the end it is my opinion the most important aspect of leadership is the ability to adapt and change.

## References

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