

## RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP: AN IMPERATIVE FOR SHARED ORGANIZATIONAL REALITIES AND INTEGRATION

Kuroakegha Bio Basuo<sup>1\*</sup>, Marian Lawrence Apoh<sup>2\*\*</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, P.M.B. 071, Amassoma. Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

*\*E-mail of Corresponding author:kuroakeghabasuo@yahoo.com*

### ABSTRACT

*Organizational integration is critical to the survival and effectiveness of organizations. The challenge of integration lies however in the manifestations of functional disparity, lack of communication and disharmony evident in the relationships expressed between the various components, levels, groups and units of the organization. In addressing these issues, this paper identified relational leadership as imperative in the strengthening of workplace social ties, trust and collaboration. This follows the adopted theoretical premise of social reciprocity emphasized by the social exchange theory, highlighting behaviour as a consequence of experience, expectations and treatment from others within a given social context. The paper is designed to be theoretical and its position is based on a review of literature. An assessment of the concept of relational leadership suggests that it aligns with the contingency of current concerns of change, people orientation and the role of relationships in strengthening organizational networks, efficiency and effectiveness. In conclusion, it was affirmed that relational leadership enables a more cooperative, supportive and cohesive workplace that facilitates and positively influences and advances outcomes of organizational integration.*

**Keywords: Organizational integration, relational leadership, organizational realities, social exchange, employee participation.**

### INTRODUCTION

The idea of the organization draws on the process of control, coordination and the channelling of resources towards a particular goal or end (Fairhurst, 2009). The organization is therefore a process and a means to an end. However, these two features are underpinned by the existence of several factors which make "organizing" a reality and a basis for the existence of organizations. These include the various human and non-human (materials, machines, money) resources (Fairhurst, 2009; Adams, 2003; Miller, 2007). Thus, it is expected that through the process of organizing, these stated factors, their functions and applications are synchronized in a manner that serves in the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization, and not any particular unit or distinct function of the organization. Hence, integration is important as it provides the basis for infusing the organization's values into members – designating roles, responsibilities and functional boundaries (Greenspan, 2001).

Organizational integration refers to the process in which organizational components and resources are aligned and structured within the framework of the organization (Greenspan, 2001; Ettl & Reza, 2001). It is the action concerned with defining related elements or specifying their placement or usefulness within the context (internal or external) of the organization (Greenspan, 2001). This also involves intimating them on the dynamics, relationships, systems and values of the organization and clarifying both functional and operational parameters. This is intended to develop members' sense of responsibility and loyalty to the organization – ensuring that their values are submerged and the goals of the organization prioritized (Kosanke, Roland & Bass, 2002). The process of integration is necessary for enriching members' feelings of identification, self-categorization and also transferring the ideologies of the organization to its members. This way, organizational integration involves the various ways or processes through which various

elements or parties are engaged and share in the responsibility of advancing the organization towards its objectives and goals (Greenspan, 2001; Maiga, Nilsson & Ax, 2015).

Studies (Chavez et al, 2015; Pinto & Pinto, 2008; Sagawa & Nagano, 2015) suggest that weak or poor cases of integration are often manifested in organizations with ineffective communication, high power distances, low interconnectedness and functional disparity. Such issues impact negatively on the behaviour of the organization, generally negating its operations and causing disharmony within its systems. Integration goes beyond the assignment of roles or responsibilities. It details not only a physical or behavioural sense of belongingness as well as a mental and emotional sense of placement within the workplace. Bennis et al (2008) in their research, pointed to the importance of the organization's leadership in enabling a more conducive and supportive work environment. According to Bennis et al (2008), the leadership of the organization mirrors the organization's values and in the same vein defines its focus. Extant research indicates that leadership varies on a substantial basis as debates yet continue on the implications of leadership variants for the organization. One of such is relational leadership.

Relational leadership (compared to the transformation and transactional leadership forms) is a recent and yet evolving concept of leadership (Uhl-Bein, 2006; Vine et al, 2008). It describes leadership from the context of participation, collaboration and inclusivity. According to Uhl-Bein (2006), relational leaderships are such that can connect and engage significant others in a more meaningful and effective way. This is important for partnership and a shared sense of responsibility towards the organization. This perspective on leadership as a conditioning factor in the organization is shared by Graen (2006) who argued that the conditions and nature of workplace relations flow from the leadership. Despite these narratives on the criticality of leadership in shaping workplace relationships, scarce attention has been offered in line with examining the role of leadership, particularly relational leadership, in outcomes of organizational integration. This paper is therefore designed to advance a position on relational leadership, building on attributes such as purpose, ethics, inclusivity, empowerment and process orientation, as being essential in enhancing outcomes of organizational integration.

### **1. Social Exchange Theory**

Relationships, particularly, social relationships, embody a variety of expectations and related actions that can be considered as dire to the health and well-being of the parties involved (Bishop, Scott & Burroughs, 2000; Sidle & Warzynski, 2003). Molm (2000) identified the social exchange theory and one predominantly concerned with explaining and predicting the social behaviour from the perspective of social interactions and exchanges. The theory is mostly applied in understanding and explaining workers behaviour in light of leadership styles and actions (Molm, 2000; Pelle, 2007; Tsui & Wang 2002). Thus, in explaining the possible role of relational leadership in the outcomes of organizational integration, the social exchange theory can be said to provide a framework, useful in understanding the extent to which leadership features such as support, inclusivity and empowerment, contribute to stimulating organizational members trust and their sense of membership or belongingness in the organization (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006).

Apart from the workers internal to the organization, the social exchange theory also offers tenets on relationship content, useful in predicting the outcome of the relationship between the organization and its various stakeholders or partners (Molm, 2000). Ladd and Henry (2000) argued that the approach towards stakeholders' relations is critical in determining the nature of their support for the organization. According to Ladd and Henry (2000), actions that reflect recognition and consideration in dealing with stakeholders' concerns are often mirrored in stakeholders' openness and willingness to partner with and support the organization. This reciprocity draws not only from the social actor's decision to return the "good favour" but also their desire to reward and reinforce such using their actions or behaviour. Hence, one could therefore argue, based on the premise of behavioural reciprocity advanced by the social

exchange theory, that members and stakeholders of the organization are expected to have or experience stronger levels of trust, emotional attachments and commitment to the organization where they perceive themselves as recognized and valued by its leadership (Andrews, Witt & Kacmar, 2003).

## **2. Relational Leadership**

The concept of relationship has been applied in two major forms – one emerging as a form of inclusive leadership that is ethical and allows for participation from the workers, and the second reflecting a group position on leadership where decisions are jointly reached and “leading” as an action is featured or emerges from the actions of the group (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Asgari et al, 2008; Campbell et al, 2008). This paper draws on the traditional hierarchical organizational system and as such approaches the concept from the lens of the former. Relationship leadership is therefore a form of leadership that shares in its power, capacities and responsibilities. It is a form of leadership that is empowering and highly inclusive, enabling transparency in its actions and thus also high on ethical values (Uhl-Bein, 2006; Sidle & Warzynski, 2003).

Uhl-Bein (2006) observed that some of the benefits attributed to relational leadership include the depth of creativity obtainable from its pooling of opinions and ideas from various stakeholders or organizational members, it allows for operational robustness given the level of flexibility in roles due to the decentralization of power within the organization, and it also reinforces the synergy and cohesion between organizational elements, units and levels. Van Dam, Oregg and Schyns (2008) stated that the relational leader is, therefore, one who not only understands the intricacies of leading based on the acknowledgement and support of the subordinates but also engages their experiences, expertise and voice in the process of leadership. This echoes Pye (2005) observation that leadership that is follower-based does not depend or require the use of sanctions or fear in driving results; rather, such leaders draw mostly on the confidence and trust bestowed upon them by their followers.

Relational leaders as such create the necessary structuring which draws substantially from their relationships and interaction with their subordinates and other stakeholders of the organization. Shotter (2010) opined that the support that emerges or is attributable to the worker’s acceptance and acknowledgement of leadership is crucial for the effectiveness of the leader. Not only are leaders, based on followers’ support, able to consistently pursue and attain the objectives of the organization; the leader’s success is also shared by the followers. This narrative agrees with those of previous studies (Graen, 2006; Bennis et al, 2008; Shotter, 2010) which identify leadership as primarily a social activity that cannot exist without or outside the social context. This is as Fairhurst (2009) argued that positions of effectiveness when it comes to leadership does not anchor alone on organizational outcomes such as profitability, productivity or market share, but also on processes concerned with leaders’ ability to inspire, motivate and bring out the best in others.

## **3. Organizational Integration**

The process of integration enhances the systemic nature of the organization. Strengthening its internal ties and enriching communication and interpersonal exchanges between individuals and units in the organization (Truman, 2000; Barki & Pinsonneault, 2005). Peyrefitte, Golden and Brice (2002) noted that organizational integration promotes workplace cohesion and functional coherence. Similarly, () argued that organizations are only able to maintain focus and operate efficiently when there is a substantial level of agreement or unity amongst its various levels, units and groups. Research (Barki & Pinsonneault, 2005; Wong, Boonitt & Wong, 2011; Pimenta, da Silva & Tate, 2016) suggests that there are four major components of integration – (a) intellectual integration: addressing the extent to which knowledge and interpretations of the organization’s realities are shared amongst its members (b) social integration: addressing the extent of collectiveness and belongingness experienced and shared by the members of the

organization (c) emotional integration: addressing the attachments and sense of commitment to the organization shared by members of the organization, and (d) operational integration: addressing adherence and appreciation of standards, processes and technological infrastructure. Organizational integration thus encapsulates the dynamicity of the social, cognitive emotional and operational aspects of the organization, shared by the members and thus crystallized as real and concrete (Barki & Pinsonneault, 2005). This is as Adeniji, Osibanjo and Abiodun (2013) noted where the differences between groups, units or individuals are high, then the tendency for alienation and deviance is evident as well. Adeniji, Osibanjo and Abiodun (2013) argued that several advantages accrue to integration, most of which are manifested in the extent of collaboration, communication flow, operational efficiency and of course organizational effectiveness. This agrees with Adams (2003) observation, that where integration is substantial and the bonding between workers and the organization is evident, issues related to grievance, conflict and turnover will be lower in the organization. In the same vein Parry, Ferrin and Gonzalez (2010) posited that most organizations today struggle with enforcing behavioural standards, driving organizational commitment and ensuring compliance despite evident integration issues. The author stressed the need for developing supportive and more conducive work environments – with emphatics placed on interpersonal relations and improved communication lines across units and levels in the organization.

#### **4. Relational Leadership and Organizational Integration**

Existing organizational structures and frameworks are such that are premised and have for long, increasingly relied on classical management philosophies of thought. Such has been noted to be emphatic on power, authority, control as a basis for ensuring productivity and performance within the workplace (Fairhurst, 2009). While these offer a strong position on organizational processes and functions, emerging considerations for the implications of such on social behaviour and the nature of relationships across levels (vertical) in the organization have remained a nagging concern (Fairhurst, 2009; Lawler, 2005; Sidle & Warzynski, 2003). Bishop, Scott and Burroughs (2000) identified the relationship between leaders or managers and their subordinates as central to the trust and commitment outcomes of the worker. Similarly, Tsui and Wang (2002) observed that members access to their leadership, and the shared sense of responsibility, duty and obligation to the organization occasioned through participation in decision-making, enhances their outlook on the organization and their feeling of meaning and purpose – advancing a shift in their perceptions of self, as not just a tool used by others but as one relevant and valued in the organization as well.

The ideologies of relational leadership provide for increased involvement and contributions from the workers; thus, power is distributed and more decentralized. Leadership in this sense builds not only on the support or involvement of others, but also on the process of harnessing the creativity, skills, and knowledge of others (Uhl-Bein, 2006). Pye (2005) posited that organizations are increasingly acknowledging the positive effects of leader relations and interactions with subordinates. Such relations are what enable organizations to maintain their valued workers during tough times or periods of change. Likewise, Vine et al (2008) added that the interaction and involvement of leaders in the lives of their workers; such as through empathic actions, mentoring, empowerment or support; enhance the perceptions and regard followers have for the leader. Moreso, leaders increased regard for workers ideas and opinions through their structuring of platforms and work arrangements that emphasize upward communication, serves in bridging the expectations of both parties' and interpretations of the organization's realities – thereby deepening their sense of commitment to each other, and the organization.

Adeniji et al (2013) noted that times are changing, but most organizations have failed in their correspondence to such change. The author argued that there is a growing imperative for organizations and the relationships therein to be more dynamic, flexible and in tune with the social challenges and gaps that are emerged from the new realities that currently define and

shape societies and economies. In the same vein, Fairhurst (2009) stated that while leadership must provide direction, vision and motivation, it is also essential that members understand and share in the values, beliefs and vision of the organization. Their positions and roles in the organization should be such that assures of their relevance and validity as members; hence enriching their self-esteem, confidence and identification with the organization. Hence, through purpose, inclusivity, empowerment, ethics, process orientation, relational leaders create and can develop work environments that are embracing of people values – thus strengthening the task and social bonds that exist between the leader and follower in the organization.

## **CONCLUSION**

Relationships, between leaders and their subordinates, are essential for the social, cognitive, operational and emotional integration of members of the organization. More and more organizations are realizing the need for improved communication, collaboration, support and knowledge sharing between leaders and their subordinates through mechanisms and platforms that facilitate participation and involvement in decision-making. Moreso, the role of relational leadership provides for a more integrated work framework where workers can connect with their leaders, share ideas and contribute creatively to the organization's objectives. Relational leadership thus enriches members sense of membership, validity and oneness with the organization – thus enhancing their sense of commitment to significant others within the workplace and also to the organization as well. It is therefore the position of this paper, that relational leadership enables a more cooperative, supportive and cohesive workplace that facilitates and positively influences and advances outcomes of organizational integration.

## **REFERENCES**

- Adams, J (2003) Organizational Amelioration through the Development of Positive Workplace Practices. Executive Summary, fall.
- Adeniji, A.A., Osibanjo, O.A., & Abiodun, A.J. (2013) Organizational change and human resource management interventions: An investigation of the Nigerian banking industry. *Serbian Journal of Management* 8 (2), 139 – 154
- Andersen and Chen, 2002 — S. M. Andersen and S. Chen, The relational self: An interpersonal social-cognitive theory, *Psychological Review* 109 (4) (2002), pp. 619–645
- Andrews, M. C., Witt, L. A., & Kacmar, K. M. 2003. The interactive effects of organizational politics and exchange ideology on manager ratings of retention. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 62: 357-369.
- Asgari, A., Silong, A.D., Ahmad, A. and Samah, B.A (2008) The relationship between leader-member exchange, organizational inflexibility, perceived organizational support, interactional justice and organizational citizenship behaviour. *African Journal of Business Management* 2 (8), 138-145
- Barki, H., & Pinsonneault, A. (2005). A Model of Organizational Integration, Implementation Effort, and Performance. *Organization Science*, 16(2), 165–179.
- Bennis, W, Goleman, D, O'Toole, J & Biedeman, PW. 2008. Transparency: how leaders create a culture of candor. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

- Bishop, J. W., Scott, K. D., & Burroughs, S. M. 2000. Support, commitment, and employee outcomes in a team environment. *Journal of Management*, 26: 1113-1132.
- Campbell SM, Ward AJ, Sonnenfeld JA and Agle BR (2008) Relational ties that bind: Leader follower relationship dimensions and charismatic attribution. *Leadership Quarterly* 19(5): 556–568
- Chavez, R., Yu, W., Gimenez, C., Fynes, B., & Wiengarten, F. (2015). Customer integration and operational performance: The mediating role of information quality. *Decision Support Systems*, 80(December), 83–95.
- Ettlie, JE & Reza, EM. 2001. Organisational integration and process innovation. *Academy Management Journal* 35(4):795–827
- Fairhurst GT (2009) Considering context in discursive leadership research. *Human Relations* 62(11): 1607–1633
- Graen G (2006) Post Simon, March, Weick, and Graen: New leadership sharing as a key to understanding organizations. In: Graen G and Graen AJ (eds) *Sharing Network Leadership*, vol. 4. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 269–279
- Greenspan, DS. 2001. Integrating functional specialties to achieve a highly evolved organisation. *Employment Relations Today* 28 (3) Autumn: 1–15.
- Kosanke, K, J, Roland, N, J G, Bas, O A (2002), *Enterprise InterAnd Intra- Organizational Integration, Building International Consensus*, Kluwer Academic
- Ladd, D., & Henry, R. A. 2000. Helping co-workers and helping the organization: The role of support perceptions, exchange ideology, and conscientiousness. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 30: 2028-2049
- Lawler J (2005) The essence of leadership? Existentialism and leadership. *Leadership* 1(2): 215–231.
- Maiga, A.S., Nilsson, A., & Ax, C. (2015). Relationships between internal and external information systems integration, cost and quality performance, and firm profitability. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 169(November), 422–434.
- Miller, Clark A. 2007. "Democratization, International Knowledge Institutions, and Global Governance." *Governance* 20:325-357.
- Molm, L. D. 2000. Theories of social exchange and exchange networks. In G. Ritzer & B. Smart (Eds.), *Handbook of social theory*: 260-272. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Ospina S and Sorenson GLJ (2006) A constructionist lens on leadership: Charting new territory. In: Goethals GR and Sorenson GLJ (eds) *The Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 188–204.
- Parry M E, Ferrín P F, González J A V, et al. PERSPECTIVE: Cross-Functional Integration in Spanish Firms [J]. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 2010, 27(4):606–615.

- Peelle, H. E. (2007) Reciprocating perceived organizational support through citizenship behaviors. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, winter.
- Peyrefitte, J., Golden, P.A., & Brice J. (2002). Vertical integration and economic performance: A managerial capability framework. *Journal of Management Decision*, 40(3), 217-226
- Pimenta, M.L., da Silva, A.L., & Tate, W.L. (2016). Characteristics of cross-functional integration processes: Evidence from Brazilian organizations. *The International Journal of Logistics Management*, 27(2), 570–594.
- Pinto M B, Pinto J K. Project Team Communication and Cross-Functional Cooperation in New Program Development [J]. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 2008, 7(3):200-212.
- Price TL (2005) *Understanding Ethical Failures in Leadership*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pye A (2005) Leadership and organizing: Sensemaking in action. *Leadership* 1(1): 31–49
- Sagawa, J.K., & Nagano, M.S. (2015). Integration, uncertainty, information quality, and performance: A review of empirical research. *International Journal of Advanced Manufacturing Technology*, 79(1), 299–306.
- Shotter J (2010) Perplexity: Preparing for the happenings of change. In: Lowe S (ed.) *Managing in Changing Times: A Guide for the Perplexed Manager*. Los Angeles, CA: Response Books, 135–176.
- Sidle CC and Warzynski CC (2003) A new mission for business schools: The development of actor-network leaders. *Journal of Education for Business* 79(1): 40–45.
- Troy LC, Hirunyawipada T, Paswan A K. Cross-Functional Integration and New Product Success: An Empirical Investigation of the Findings [J]. *Journal of Marketing*, 2008, 72(6):132-146.
- Truman, G. 2000. Integration in electronic exchange environment. *Journal of Management Information Systems* 17 (1):209–244.
- Tsui, A. S., & Wang, D. X. 2002. Employment relationships from the employer’s perspective: Current research and future directions. In C. L. Cooper & I. T. Robertson (Eds.), *International review of industrial and organizational psychology*: 77-114. Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Uhl-Bien M (2006) Relational leadership theory: Exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing. *Leadership Quarterly* 17(6): 654–676
- Van Dam, K., Oreg, S., & Schyns, B. (2008) Daily Work Contexts and Resistance to Organisational Change: The Role of Leader– Member Exchange, Development Climate, and Change Process Characteristics. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 57(2), 313–334
- Vine B, Holmes J, Marra M, Pfiefer D and Jackson B (2008) Exploring co-leadership talk through interactional sociolinguistics. *Leadership* 4(3): 339–350.

Wong, C.Y., Boonitt, S., & Wong, C.W.Y. (2011). The contingency effects of environmental uncertainty on the relationship between supply chain integration and operational performance. *Journal of Operations Management*, 29(6), 604–615.