DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR SMES IN ZIMBABWE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM BULAWAYO'S CENTRAL BUSINESS AREA

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Abstract

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in the sustainable development of developing countries. However, in Zimbabwe, SMEs suffer from high failure rates. Lack of managerial skills and inappropriate leadership styles have been identified as major reasons for this high rate. This study aims to identify the predominant leadership styles used by SMEs in Zimbabwe, particularly in Bulawayo's Central Business Area. A quantitative research design was used, with a survey strategy conducted through the use of a questionnaire. The study's population comprised all non-managerial employees, supervisors, managers, and owner-managers of SMEs. The findings showed that the majority of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the eleven statements presented to them, indicating inappropriate leadership styles. However, non-managerial and supervisory respondents had differing views from managers and owner-managers when it came to whether leaders were motivating and inspiring employees. The majority of non-managers and supervisory respondents believed that leaders were not motivating and inspiring their employees, while the majority of managers and owner-managers thought otherwise. The study emphasizes the need for appropriate leadership styles in Zimbabwean SMEs to improve their success rates. The use of transformational leadership styles that inspire and motivate employees is recommended.

INTRODUCTION

The growth and success of SMEs is key to the sustainable development of developing countries (Mudavanhu, Bindu, Chigusiwa & Muchabaiwa, 2011). Scholars such as Jalal-Eddeen (2015) and Rahim, Abidin, Mohtar and Ramli (2015) have observed that in many economies around the world, growth is driven by SMEs. Countries such

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as China, South Korea and Malaysia have achieved major economic growth based on a concerted drive of SME establishment and growth (Tinarwo, 2016; Dumbu & Chadamoyo, 2012). This is the reason why most African governments have shifted their focus towards SMEs as the panacea to challenges that have bedevilled their economies (Tinarwo, 2016).

However, despite SMEs being more important to developing countries such as Zimbabwe where deplorable unemployment rates and gigantic gaps between the rich and the poor are widespread, they suffer from high failure rates. Research has found that only 15% of Zimbabwean SMEs are likely to survive beyond three years (Mudavanhu et al., 2011). Although a number of reasons have been put forward as likely causes of the high failure rates, the most outstanding ones include lack of managerial skills (Tinarwo, 2016; Karedza, Sikwila, Mpofu & Makurumidze, 2014; Bomani, Fields & Derera, 2015; Chipangura & Kaseke, 2012; Mudavanhu et al., 2011) and inappropriate leadership style (Saasongu, 2015; Jalal-Eddeen, 2015).

If SMEs in Zimbabwe are failing because of leadership challenges, there is a need for a concerted effort from all stakeholders to remedy that. The first port of call should be to identify the leadership styles that are used in the SMEs before their effectiveness or applicability can be assessed. As such, the objective of the study was to identify the predominant leadership styles used by SMEs in Zimbabwe.

Problem Statement

Although SMEs are important to the economy of Zimbabwe, many of them collapse before they make any meaningful impact on society. The failure has been blamed on managerial deficiencies and inappropriate leadership style. There exist no specific leadership styles that have been developed for SMEs in general or SMEs in Zimbabwe to be specific. As such, managers of SMEs just use any of the many leadership styles that are available whether they are applicable to SMEs or not. Hence, it is not clear which leadership styles are predominantly used by SMEs in Zimbabwe. It is imperative that leadership styles used in SMEs be understood so that researchers may determine whether they are applicable or not, and in instances where they are not applicable, recommend the appropriate leadership style.

LITERATURE The Concept of Leadership

Scholars have failed to agree on a universal definition of leadership (Silva, 2016; Peretomode, 2012) resulting in countless definitions and explanations (McCleskey, 2014; Vroom & Jago, 2007). Northouse (2015, p. 3) has defined leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." Leadership encompasses persuading people to set aside for a time their selfish quests and work in support of the collective interest (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Effective leadership should be a two-way process between leaders and followers (Mwangi, 2014; Youssef, 2013; Uchendu, Okpoko & Anugwom, 2010; Killian, 2007).

Leadership Styles

Leadership style has been defined as a pattern of behaviour which is relatively consistent and which characterises a leader (Dubrin, 2001, cited in Asiimwe, Kavoo-Linge & Sikalieh, 2016). They are the tactics that leaders utilize in order to motivate their followers (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Since there are no pure leadership styles (Franco & Matos, 2013) that can be categorised as universal (Amanchukwu et al., 2015), researchers have proposed many different styles over a period of time.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership involves inspiring and motivating followers through the use of personal vision and energy (Indermun, 2013). The leader articulates a vision that stimulates the followers' imagination, redirects their actions and motivates them for greater efforts (Nikezic, Doljanica & Bataveljic, 2013). A transformational leader stimulates and inspires followers to achieve extraordinary results (Robbins & Coulter, 2012) and encourages them

to act beyond expectation (Akbar, Sadegh & Chehrazi, 2015). True transformational leadership results in leaders focusing on the interests of their followers rather than on their own self-interests (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, cited in Mwenje, 2015).

Transactional Leadership

Rather than managers using either legitimate power or coercive power to get employees to do what they want, most managers engage in a transaction with their subordinates (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership also known as managerial leadership involves the exchange of tangible rewards (Indermun, 2013), praises and promises (Fasola et al., 2013) for the work and loyalty of followers. Nikezic et al. (2013) posited that followers are rewarded for meeting predefined standards and performance. It is worth noting that the rewards are not limited to financial and may be either positive or negative (Asiimwe et al., 2016).

Laissez-Faire Leadership

With laissez-faire leadership, employees are given complete freedom to make decisions (Indermun, 2013) and determine their own deadlines (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Khan et al. (2017) and Mwenje (2015) categorised laissez-faire leadership as the absence or the avoidance of leadership. This is because the leaders lack confidence in their capacity to manage and supervise the employees (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Rauf (2014) categorised the laissez-faire leadership style as a fairly modern approach because it affords employees a free rein to accomplish their work as they think best.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leaders make decisions without consulting followers (Dyczkowska & Dyczkowski, 2018; Indermun, 2013). They do not allow employees to participate in the decision-making process (Khan et al., 2017). In most instances, they are strict and they supervise employees meticulously, ensuring that procedures are strictly followed (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). They have been found to be confident and comfortable about the decision-making responsibility (Iqbal, Anwar & Haider, 2015). On the positive side, autocratic leadership style is efficient (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Decisions are quick and soon after the decision has been made, implementation can begin.

Democratic Leadership

Although democratic leaders make the final decision, they incorporate employees in the decision-making process (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). They view feedback as a mechanism they can use to coach employees (Robbins & Coulter, 2012). Democratic leadership allows employees to be creative and innovative, in the process benefiting the organisation (Mwenje, 2015). Employees are also allowed to freely speak their mind and offer suggestions (Khan et al., 2017). In situations where the problem is complex and requires different perspectives, democratic leadership becomes ideal (Mwenje, 2015).

Leadership in SMEs

Most SMEs have traditionally followed the heroic leadership notion which is typically individualistic (Cope, Kempster & Parry, 2011). This notion is mostly fuelled by the employees who romanticise the SME owner as a hero who took considerable risk to start the enterprise and steers it through different crises (ibid). Nyamwanza and Mavhiki (2014) observed that most owners of Zimbabwean SMEs preferred a directional leadership style that left little discretion for the employees. These findings were corroborated by Dumbu and Chadamoyo (2012) who found that owners of SMEs in the craft industry at Great Zimbabwe were unwilling to share critical business information with employees because they feared that employees might copy their business ideas. As a result of this pervasive fear of losing control of the business, Okwachi et al. (2013) found leadership in most SMEs to be deficient.

Comparing the autocratic and democratic styles of leadership, Idowu (2012) found that the autocratic style of leadership was more popular in SMEs than the democratic leadership style. However, in Adamawa State, Nigeria, Jalal-Eddeen (2015) found participative democracy as the dominant leadership style employed by SMEs. Akoma et al. (2014) discovered that high productivity, good communication and camaraderie among employees were enhanced when the democratic style of leadership was used while conflicts were the order of the day when the autocratic style was employed. Chege et al. (2015) recommended that SMEs should use an autocratic leadership style when their focus is on the task while the democratic style is suitable for complex decisions that require the involvement of both managers and employees. Laissezfaire leadership style is only recommended for circumstances where employees are skilled and able to work on their own.

Based on a mixed methodology study to understand the leadership styles prevalent in Portuguese SMEs, Franco and Matos (2013) found no specific leadership style being religiously followed by the SMEs. However, the best leadership result was achieved in instances where the transactional leadership style was used. In Malaysian SMEs both transformational and transactional leadership styles were used, although the transformational style was the predominant one (Paladan, 2015; Arham et al., 2013). In separate studies, Mkheimer (2018) and Chandrakumara, De Zoysa and Manawaduge (2009) found that at least two leadership styles were used in SMEs.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was used in order to quantify opinions, attitudes and behaviours (Mohajan, 2020). The study employed a survey strategy which was conducted through the use of a questionnaire which resulted in numerical data being collected and analysed quantitatively (Apuke, 2017). The study's population comprised all non-managerial employees, supervisors, managers and owner-managers of SMEs operating in Bulawayo's Central Business Area. The sample of the study was 300 and was selected using proportional stratified sampling technique where the population was first divided into relevant and significant strata based on the sector in which the SME operated. The technique was chosen so as to reduce human bias in the selection of cases to be included in the sample (Sharma, 2017). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, in particular frequency distributions, were used to show the frequency of occurrence of each possible outcome.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Out of 300 questionnaires that were distributed, 241 were returned, giving a response rate of 80.3%. The returns were deemed sufficient for statistical analysis of data to proceed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016; Cohen et al., 2007).

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The highest (62.2%) number of respondents were non-managerial employees, followed by 26.1% who were supervisory employees. 6.6% of the respondents were owner-managers while the remaining 5% were managers as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Position	Non-managerial	150	62.2
	Supervisor	63	26.1
	Manager	12	5.0
	Owner-manager	16	6.6
	Total	241	100

Level of education	Below Ordinary level	8	3.3
	Ordinary level	13	5.4
	Advanced level	5	2.1
	Certificate level	16	6.6
	Diploma level	73	30.3
	Degree level	108	44.8
	Post Graduate level	18	7.5
	Total	241	100

Source: Fieldwork

The fact that the majority of the respondents were non-managerial employees followed by supervisory employees was consistent with how most organisations are structured. Ownermanagers were slightly more than managers because SMEs owners were actively involved in the management of their businesses. The majority of the respondents (44.8%) had attained degree level education, followed by 30.3% who had attained diploma level education. The fact that at least 75.1% of the respondents had either a diploma or a degree showed that SMEs were resourced by relatively educated people who could be expected to contribute meaningfully to their respective organizations.

Leadership Style

In order to understand the predominant leadership styles that were followed by the different SMEs, eleven statements were presented to respondents for them to rate the extent to which they agreed with those statements and the results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Responses on Leadership Style

Dimension	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Our leader motivates and inspires us.	19.1	64.7	3.7	10.8	1.7
Leaders in this organisation show concern for employees.	5.4	75.1	6.6	11.2	1.7
Leaders in this organisation are approachable.	2.1	75.9	7.1	12.0	2.9
Employees are rewarded when they do what is expected of them.	63.1	20.3	10.4	5.0	1.2
Leaders are responsive to the needs of employees.	14.5	69.3	11.2	4.6	0.4
In our organisation, leaders listen to their employees.	7.5	72.6	16.2	2.9	0.8
Our leader pays special attention to our individual needs.	22.8	63.9	8.3	4.1	0.8
Employees are given authority to carry out specific tasks.	2.9	75.1	13.7	7.5	0.8

Employees receive clear and precise instructions from their superiors.	0.8	67.6	12.4	17.4	1.7
Our leader works with us in an inclusive manner.	3.7	72.6	20.3	2.1	1.2
Leadership in this organisation is shared with educated employees.		69.3	12.4	17.4	0.8

Source: *Fieldwork*

Results from Table 6.2 above showed that the majority of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with all the eleven statements that were presented to them. Between 68.4% and 86.7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements. An analysis of research findings showed that non-managerial and supervisory respondents had differing views from managers and owner-managers when it came to whether leaders were motivating and inspiring employees. The majority of non-managers (94%) and supervisory respondents (96.8%) were of the view that leaders were not motivating and inspiring their employees while the majority of managers (83.3%) and owner-managers (81.3%) believed that leaders were indeed motivating and inspiring their employees.

This showed that the majority of managers and owner-managers were of the view that they were following the transformational leadership style while the majority of non-managerial and supervisory respondents were of the view that leaders were not following the transformational leadership style. We can therefore deduce from the findings that leaders did not understand how they should motivate and inspire employees. This is the reason why managers and ownermanagers believed they were motivating and inspiring followers while the followers disputed that. Since it is the followers who experience the leadership style, we can infer from the findings that the leaders were not following the transformational leadership style. With transformational leadership, leaders are expected to motivate and inspire followers into novel ways of doing things and opportunities (Albloshi & Nawar, 2015; Saasongu, 2015; Indermun, 2013). When that happens, followers will be fully aware of such developments.

Research findings revealed that although the majority of non-managerial respondents (94%) and supervisory respondents (84.1%) were of the opinion that leaders in their respective organisations were not showing concern for employees, the majority of managers (66.7%) and owner-managers (87.6%) believed that they showed concern for employees. These findings demonstrated that managers and owner-managers did not fully understand what it means to show concern for employees. This is the reason why although the majority of the leaders were of the view that they were showing concern towards followers, the followers were of a different view. Leaders who show concern for employees exhibit a supportive leadership style (Mourao, 2018). We can infer from the findings that leaders were not supportive. Findings also exhibited that the majority of managers (75%) and owner-managers (87.5%) were of the view that leaders were approachable. This was in contrast to the view of the majority of non-managerial respondents (92%) and supervisory respondents (79.4%) who believed that the leaders in their respective organisations were not approachable, as shown by Table 3 below.

Table 3: Leaders Being Approachable in Relation to Organisational Position

Dimension	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Non-managerial	3.3	88.7	3.3	2.7	2.0
Supervisor		79.4	11.1	6.3	1.6
Manager			25.0	75.0	

Owner-manager			12.5	75.0	12.5

Source: Fieldwork (chi-square = 122.781, df = 12, p<0.01)

From these findings, we can deduce that leaders did not understand what it is they were expected to do for them to be seen as approachable. It also showed that leaders were not selfaware hence they thought that they were approachable while followers believed they were not approachable. An analysis of the study findings revealed that although the majority of nonmanagerial respondents (95.3%) and supervisory respondents (92.1%) were of the opinion that employees were not rewarded when they did what was expected of them, the majority of managers (83.3%) and owner-managers (62.5%) were neutral.

16.7% of managers and 37.5% of owner-managers agreed that employees were rewarded when they did what was expected of them. These findings demonstrated that the majority of managers and owner-managers were not sure whether employees were rewarded or not. As a result, we can deduce that although the reward might have been there, it was not consistent. Transactional leadership style involves managers exchanging tangible rewards for the work and loyalty of employees (Indermun, 2013). As a result, we can infer from the findings that leaders were not following the transactional leadership style.

Research findings showed that non-managerial and supervisory respondents on one end and managers and owner-managers on the other end had differing perceptions on whether employees were given authority to carry out specific tasks. The majority of non-managerial respondents (90%) and supervisory respondents (84.1%) were of the view that employees were not given authority to carry out specific tasks while the majority of managers (83.3%) and owner-managers (68.8%) were neutral. However, a minority of managers (16.7%) and ownermanagers (31.3%) agreed that authority was given to employees to carry out specific tasks. These findings demonstrated that there were managers and owner-managers, though in the minority, who believed in participative leadership. The fact that the majority of managers and owner-managers were not sure whether authority was given to employees may be interpreted to mean that the majority of leaders in the different SMEs did not understand what participative leadership entails. We can therefore deduce from the findings that leaders lacked skills in delegating authority to subordinates.

An analysis of the results also showed that the majority of managers (66.7%) and ownermanagers (81.3%) agreed that leadership was shared with educated employees while the majority of non-managerial respondents (78.7%) and supervisory respondents (71.4%) were of the view that leadership was not shared with educated employees, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Leadership Is Shared with Educated Employees in Relation to Organisational Position

Dimension	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Non-managerial		78.7	12.0	8.7	0.7
Supervisor		71.4	14.3	12.7	1.6
Manager		25.0	8.3	66.7	
Owner-manager		6.3	12.5	81.3	

Source: Fieldwork (chi-square = 61,236 df = 9, p<0.01)

Findings also revealed that 50% of respondents who had attained post graduate level of education agreed that leadership was shared with educated employees. 8.2% of those who had attained diploma level education and 18.5% of those who had attained degree level education also agreed. 50% of those who had attained postgraduate level of education were either nonmanagerial or supervisory respondents. The findings revealed that there was selective participation of educated employees. However, the same findings also showed that not all educated

employees were involved in leadership activities since 76.7% of those who had attained diploma level, 69.4% of those who had attained degree level and 38.9% of those who had attained postgraduate level of education disagreed that leadership was shared with educated employees. As a result, we can deduce that in addition to level of education, leaders had other factors they considered before including employees in leadership activities. As such we may infer that selective participatory leadership style was followed in the different SMEs.

Findings revealed that 83.3% of managers and 75% of owner-managers agreed that employees were given clear and precise instructions, as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Employees Receiving Clear and Precise Instructions in Relation to Position

Dimension	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly agree %
Non-managerial	0.7	76.0	11.3	11.3	0.7
Supervisor	1.6	77.8	11.1	7.9	1.6
Manager			16.7	83.3	
Owner-manager			25.0	62.5	12.5

Source: Fieldwork (chi-square = 83,611 df = 12, p<0.01)

Although this is contrary to what the majority of non-managerial (76.7%) and supervisory (79.4%) respondents believed, it showed that managers and owner-managers preferred directional leadership style, although they did not take time to understand whether the instructions were clear and understood from the perspective of the subordinates. Findings also revealed that the majority of non-managerial (98%) and supervisory (100%) respondents were of the view that employees were not participating in decision making. 50% of managers and 25% of owner-managers were of the same view while 41.7% of managers and 31.3% of ownermanagers were neutral. 95.3% of non-managerial and 66.7% of supervisory respondents were of the view that employees did not also participate in key activities such as planning. The majority of managers (66.7%) and 50% of the owner-managers were also of the same view.

Findings also showed that 96.7% of all the respondents were of the view that leaders did not give freedom to employees to decide what, how, when and where to do tasks. Analysed in the context of organisational position, 98% of non-managerial respondents, 93.6% of supervisory respondents, 100% of managers and 93.8% of owner-managers believed that employees were told what, how, when and where to do tasks. These findings buttress the view that leaders in SMEs preferred the directional leadership style. Directional leadership entails employees being allocated tasks with little discretion while they are also minimally involved in organisational activities (Nyamwanza & Mavhiki, 2014).

An analysis of research findings showed that the majority of non-managerial (93.3%) and supervisory respondents (84.1%) believed that leaders in their respective organisations did not listen to their employees while the majority of managers (91.7%) and owner-managers (75%) were neutral. However, 8.3% of managers and 25% of owner-managers were of the opinion that leaders listened to their employees. Only 2% of non-managerial respondents and 1.6% of supervisory respondents agreed that leaders listened to their employees. The fact that the majority of the managers and owner-managers were neutral may be interpreted as showing that leaders in SMEs were not democratic, and this is consistent with selective participatory leadership involving more of the educated.

Analysing research findings showed that the majority of non-managerial respondents (94%) and supervisory respondents (68.3%) were of the view that leaders were not working with employees in an inclusive manner while the majority of managers (91.7%) and ownermanagers (93.8%) were neutral. However, 8.3% of managers and 6.3% of owner-managers agreed that leaders worked with employees in an inclusive manner although they were

in the minority. On the other hand, 2.6% of non-managerial respondents and 3.2% of supervisory respondents were also of the same view. The fact that the majority of managers and ownermanagers did not want to commit themselves to a clear position of whether leaders were inclusive may be interpreted as demonstrating that leaders were not inclusive. These findings may also be consistent with the selective participation of a few employees especially the educated ones in leadership activities.

Research findings to identify the predominant leadership styles used by SMEs in Zimbabwe identified two leadership styles used namely selective participation style and directional leadership style. These findings are consistent with the findings of Mkheimer (2018) and Chandrakumara et al. (2009) who also found that at least two leadership styles were used in SMEs. Findings also showed that of the two styles, the directional style was the predominant leadership style. This finding supports the findings of Nyamwanza and Mavhiki (2014) and Dumbu and Chadamoyo (2012).

Implication to Research and Practice

Out of many leadership styles available, two leadership styles namely selective participation style and directional leadership style are used in Zimbabwean SMEs. This finding will inspire research towards understanding the relevance and effectiveness of these styles in the context of Zimbabwean SMEs. Research findings will encourage SMEs leaders to understand the different leadership styles that are at their disposal and how they can be effectively used in Zimbabwean SMEs so that they can choose the most effective style for a particular situation.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to identify the predominant leadership styles used by SMEs in Zimbabwe. The study concluded that the predominant leadership style that was used by SMEs in Zimbabwe was the directional style although there were isolated cases of selective participation. This is evidenced by employees being told what, how, when and where to do tasks and being given clear and precise instructions on what to do. In addition, employees were not participating in decision making or key activities such as planning. As such, SMEs leaders are encouraged to identify the leadership style that is the most appropriate to the situation they will be facing rather than to concentrate on one leadership style irrespective of the situation.

Future Research

Future studies should be directed towards assessing the applicability and effectiveness of the directional leadership style and the selective participation style in the context of Zimbabwean SMEs.

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