



Proactive Personality and Perceived Social Support as Predictors of Leadership Style among Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study examined whether proactive personality and perceived social support will predict leadership style. One hundred and eighty (180) undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka participated in the study. They include 112 females and 62 males whose ages ranged from 18-42 years with a mean age of 22.77 years and standard deviation of 3.61. Mixed sampling design involving purposive samplings and accidental samplings were used to select the participants. Three instruments (BCE leadership style scale, shortened version of proactive personality scale and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support) were used in the study. The study adopted correlational predictive design and hierarchical multiple regression statistics was used to analyze the data. The result shows that the model for each of the hierarchy were significant, $R^2 = (.04 \text{ and } .08)$ and F value for this two hierarchy are (9.05, and 4.57**) respectively. The β value for the second model shows that only (family support) is significant while friends support and significant others support were not significant, $\beta = (.207, .117, \text{ and } .034)$ respectively. The discussion focused on important and implication of these two significant predictors. Recommendations were based on the findings. It was recommended that input from proactive personality and family support are important variables that can induce leadership style.*

Keywords: Leadership style, proactive personality, perceived social support.

Introduction

Leadership style has a great influence on national/organizational operations and management. So, effective leadership style may contribute to growth and productivity which brings about empowerment, motivates employees/citizens and contribute positively to national/organizational growth (Ukaidi, 2016). Evidence from researches has shown that effective leadership is a key factor of organizational success or failure (Madanchian,

Hussein, Noordin & Taherdoost, 2017). In Nigeria's socio-political setting, it seems that styles of leadership are not working effectively. Evidence from Nigerian prisons and tribunals across the country has shown that some of our former leaders failed while in office (Amadi, 2017; Lawal, 2018; News24, 2018). Even some students that were given opportunity to lead others like Course Representatives, Departmental Executives, Faculty Executive and Student Union Government most of the time, in one way or the other, mismanaged the funds entrusted in their hands (Ademuwagun, 2014; OWL.Campus, 2016; Uduchukwu, 2013). By implication, every other person is struggling or aspiring to be in one of these key positions to collect the so called 'national cake'. Therefore, funds that are meant for infrastructural developments are diverted to private pockets which contribute in under developing the nation. So, Understanding variables that are related to leadership styles will widen the understanding of effective leadership styles and give an insight to those who are interested in curbing ineffective leadership styles. Many factors could possibly stimulate leadership styles; however, no single research can explore them all in a single attempt. Researchers believed that internal and external factors contribute to effective leadership styles (Finch, 2019; Hordos, 2018, & Othman, Lawrence & Kaber, 2012). In the scope of this study, the internal factor is proactive personality while the external factor is social support. Therefore, this present research examined whether internal (proactive personality) and external (social support) factors predict leadership style.

Generally, leadership is act of dedicating one's talent and time to influencing and making subordinates to attend a set objectives in which everybody is working for the good of all, therefore finding best ways to constructively and dynamically collaborate with one another



in addressing the needs of the people and adapting change within each other in addressing the needs of the people and adapting to change within the environment (Lewin, Lippit and White, 1939)

From this definition leadership style is the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people to achieve a desired goal. Lewin, Lippit and White (1939) identified three styles of leadership (autocratic, democratic & laissez-faire). Subsequently, other styles of leadership emerged. Leadership style in this paper focused on Obi-Nwosu (2014) BCE leadership paradigm. The components of BCE leadership paradigm are (B) bridging the communication gap, (C) contingencies and, (E) evocative.

Bridging the communication gap between the leaders and the subordinates implies that the administrator gets direct feedback about situations within the organization as well as getting maximum inputs from the subordinates. This free flow of communication enables members to feel belonged to the system (Obi-Nwosu, 2014). Contingencies imply that the administrator involved followers in decision making and soliciting followers' feedback. Contingencies showed achievement-oriented leadership behaviour through creation of challenging and high standard performance goals and express confidence in workers' abilities to meet such challenges. This contingencies characteristic relates workers efforts to performance and goal achievement and communicate the rewards contingent on performance (Obi-Nwosu, 2014). Evocative orientation implies that the administrator uses his/her special skills to summon, inspire, or educe qualities critically for sustainable team cohesion and productivity in the organization. Evocative leader leads by inspiration and

example and draw forth the best from those they interact with as well as evoke some higher consciousness needed to address the volatile, complex and ambiguous issues faced by the organization (Obi-Nwosu, 2014).

Proactive personality is a construct that identifies differences or behavioural tendencies among people which enable them to enact positive environmental changes (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Wang & Spitzmueller, 2017). Proactive behaviour involves acting in advance of a future situation, rather than just reacting. It means taking control and making things happen rather than just adjusting to a situation or waiting for something to happen. In other words, proactive personality describes people who identify opportunities, show initiative and persevere until meaningful change occurs.

Another variable of interest in this study is perceived social support. Perceived social support is the comfort given to one by the family, friends, coworkers and others who assist or the feeling that one is cared for by others and being part of social network (Duci & Tahsini, 2012; Onyishi, Okongwu & Ugwu, 2012) Social support is the perceived function and quality of social relationship such as availability of help or support actually received from other people. This means also that social support can be emotional (e.g., nurturance), tangible (e.g., financial help), informational (e.g., advice) or companionship (e.g., sense of belonging). The present research considered it necessary to examine the contribution of social support to leadership style, and the level of their contributions in understanding the concept of perceived social support.



Statement of the problem

Leadership is a social problem that cannot be totally eradicated. Evidence has shown that our leaders in Nigeria failed to lead their subjects as expected (Martin, Chene & Kaninda, 2014; Nwachukwu, 2019 & Ogbeidi, 2012). Many methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative) and theoretical assumptions have been used in trying to understand leadership style. One of such theoretical assumptions believed that internal and external factors contributed to effective and ineffective leadership style. Many factors can be grouped as internal or external factors. Thus within the scope of this study internal factor (proactive personality) and external factor (perceived social support) were examined in statistical model which utilizes data to see the extent of their contribution in leadership style either as a risk factor or preventive factor.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational leadership theory unified the variables in this study. Transformational leadership theory in the context of this study is exceptional form of influence from the leader that motivates the followers to accomplish more than expected goals and objectives and in the process develop their own leadership capability to inspire others in order to establish good relationship between leaders and followers (Balogun & Ajayi, 2018; Northhouse, 2016). This style of leadership is believed to be the most effective that can move both the leader and followers to achieve more than they expected. Bunaiyan and McWilliams (2018) are of the view that major factors of transformational leadership are; idealized influence, inspirational, motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized

consideration. Therefore, a proactive person should be transformational in order to achieve the desired goal. Likewise social support should also be transformational in nature for it to be more effective in establishing good relationship between leaders and followers.

Proactive personality has been well linked to leadership in the past researches (Elsaied, 2019). Elsaied (2019) research with Egytian workers revealed that both supportive leadership and proactive personality had a positive and significant effect on voice behaviour. In addition, the result showed also that psychological safety fully mediated the relationship among supportive leadership, proactive personality and employee voice behaviour. Researchers were also able to find that proactive personality has been found to predict creativity and career success (Kim, Hon, & Crant, 2009; Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999). Kim et al (2010) conducted a research on proactive personality and the result revealed that proactive personality associated with employee creativity. In addition, job creativity requirement and supervisor support for creativity jointly influenced the relationship between proactive personality and employee creativity. Specifically, proactive employees exhibited the highest employee creativity when job creativity requirement and supervisor support for creativity were both high. Again, Seibert et al (1999) examined the relationship between proactive personality and career success. The result revealed that proactive personality was positively associated with both self reported objective (salary and promotion) and subjective (career satisfaction) indicators of career success. In the same study, hierarchical regression analysis showed that proactive personality explained additional variance in both objective and subjective career success even after controlling for several relevant variables (demographic, human capital, motivational, organizational, and industry) that have previously been found to be proactive of career outcomes.



Lee, Veasna and Wu (2013) examined the significance of transformational leadership and social support for expatriate adjustment and performance. The result revealed that transformational leadership and social support make significant contribution to expatriate adjustment and performance. Tafvelin, Hyvonen and Westerberg (2012) conducted research on transformational leadership in social work context: the importance of leader continuity and co-worker support. They examined the direct and indirect effect of transformational leadership on two important employee attitudes (commitment and role clarity). The result revealed the contribution of transformational leadership in creating a workplace where employees are committed and know what assignment is. The result showed also that interaction effects of leader continuity and co-worker support indicate the need for some stability in the organization in order to increase the positive influence transformational leaders have on employees

In another study, Tucker and Black (2016) conducted a research on social support and democratic behaviour styles of leadership preferred by athletes in middle school athletic programs. The result revealed that statistically significant difference in behaviour styles of leadership perceived by the athletes existed between social support and training instruction while no significant difference was detected between social support and democratic style of leadership.

The above reviewed literature centered on social support and transformational leadership among workers without considering the undergraduates leadership qualities. Owing to

this, the present research is centered on social support and leadership styles among the undergraduate sample.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine proactive personality and perceived social support as predictors of leadership style among undergraduates. Specifically, the research will seek to:

- i. Find out whether proactive personality will predict leadership style among undergraduates.
- ii. Find out whether perceived social support will predict leadership style among undergraduates.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were postulated in this study.

- i. Proactive personality will significantly predict leadership style among undergraduates.
- ii. Perceived social support will significantly predict leadership style among undergraduates.

Method

Participants

Convenient and accidental sampling methods were used in selecting the participants. One hundred and eighty undergraduates were used for this study. They include 112 females and 62 males from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The participants' age ranged from 18-30 years with mean age of 22.10 and standard deviation of 1.62. This sample was



chosen for this study because some students used to aspire for one elective position or the other, showing their interest in leadership.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in the study. The instruments include; BCE leadership style scale by Obi-Nwosu (2014). This is a 30 item scale which measure leadership style. The 30 items were directly scored. Scoring pattern of BCE leadership style ranges from total disagree (1) to total agree (6) indicating the extent to which the items apply to the participants. Sample items of BCE leadership style include statements such as 'I consider feedback from group members as important guide to success, 'I ensure group members clearly understand what is expected of them', and 'I easily adapt to innovation'. The scale has been found by Agulefo (2017) to have high degrees of validity $r = .24^{**}$ and Cronbach Alpha of .90. The second instrument in this study is the shortened version of proactive personality scale by Seibert et al (1999). This is a 10 item scale that measures proactive personality scale. Scoring pattern of this scale ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) indicating the extent to which the items apply to the participants. Sample items of proactive personality scale include statements such as 'I am consistently on the lookout for new ways to improve my life'; 'If I see something I don't like, I fix it', and 'I can spot a good opportunity long before others can'. The present researcher conducted a pilot test by correlating conscientiousness domain of big five personality by John and Srivastava (1999) and shortened version proactive personality scale and found shortened version proactive personality scale to have concurrent validity; $r = .26^{**}$ and Cronbach Alpha of .78. The third

instrument is multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1998). This is a 12 item scale that measure social support (family, friends and significant others). Scoring pattern of this scale ranges from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (6) indicating the extent to which the items apply to the participants. Sample items of this scale includes 'my family really tries to help me', 'I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows' and 'there is a special person who is around when am in need'. Validity of the scale was obtained by Onyishi et al (2012) by reporting that factor loading of the items were relatively high. Reliability of the scale was obtained by Onyishi et al (2012) by reporting internal consistencies of the subscales (Cronbach Alpha); family .78, friends .76 and significant others .70. Onyishi et al (2012) also reported a predictive validity of $p < .01$ by using MSPSS to predict life satisfaction of prison workers.

Procedure

The data collection for this study was done in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State. Trained research assistants were utilized in the different selected Departments in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The participants that were available and willing to participate in the study were used, after obtaining their informed consent, by teaching them that participation in the study was voluntary; and that only those who are willing and ready to complete the instruments should collect the instruments. Two hundred and sixty (260) instruments were distributed while two hundred and twenty (220) were returned, but only one hundred and eighty were correctly filled by the participants and used for data analysis.



Design/statistics

The study adopted correlational predictive design. Hierarchical multiple regression was used for data analysis.

Result

Table 1: Zero order correlation coefficient matrix showing Leadership style, Proactive personality and Social Support

S/N	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Bridge	1						
2	Contingency	.529**	1					
3	Evocative	.440**	.732**	1				
4	Proactive	.067	.260**	.198**	1			
5	Family	.102	.270**	.112	.041	1		
6	Friends	.079	.038	.050	.116	.259**	1	
7	Sign	.057	.069	.041	.138	.456**	.542**	1

** p<.01, * p<.05

Leadership style (bridge, contingency and evocative), social support (family, friends and significant others) and proactive personality (proactive). Proactive personality significantly and positively correlated with leadership style (contingency and evocative) while social support (family) significantly and positively correlated leadership style (contingency).

Table II: Summary Table of Hierarchical Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Leadership Style, Proactive Personality and Perceived Social Support.

Variable	R2	Df1(df2)	F	SE	B	T
Model I	0.43	1(176)	9.05**	3.90		
Proactive					.221**	-3.01
Model II	.075	4(173)	4.57**	9.04		
Proactive					.204**	.277
Family					.207**	2.53
Friends					.117	1.35
Sign					.034	.359

** p<.01, * p<.05

Dependent variable: Leadership style, Proactive personality (proactive), social support (family, friends and significant others).

From table II above, the first finding revealed that proactive personality significantly and positively predicted leadership style among undergraduates. The second finding of the study also revealed that perceived social support (family,) significantly and positively predicted leadership style among undergraduates; while perceived social support (friends and significant others) did not significantly predicted leadership style.

Discussion

This study investigated proactive personality and perceived social support as predictors of leadership style among undergraduates. Two hypotheses were tested and results of the findings were discussed.

The first finding revealed that proactive personality positively and significantly predicted leadership style. From table one above, the result showed that proactive personality correlated positively with leadership style (contingency and evocative). From table 11 above, the result revealed also that proactive personality positively and significantly predicted leadership style. This means that as leadership style increases proactive personality increases; and as leadership style is decreases proactive personality decreases. Prior studies consistently found that proactive personality significantly associated leadership style. Some of such findings are Crant and Bateman, (2000); Kim, Hon & Lee, (2010); Seibert, et al, 1999).

Crant and Bateman (2000) examined supervisor's independent ratings of charismatic leadership. The finding revealed that self reported proactive personality is positively associated with supervisor's independent ratings of charismatic leadership. Kim, Hon & Lee, (2010) conducted research on proactive personality and the result showed that



proactive personality associated with employee creativity. In addition, job creativity requirement and supervisor support for creativity jointly influenced the relationship between proactive personality and employee creativity. Seibert, et al.(1999) examined the relationship between proactive personality and career success. The result revealed that proactive personality positively associated with both self report objective (salary and promotion) and subjective (career satisfaction) This means that proactive personality is a good predictor of leadership style. This is because proactive personality positively and significantly predicted and associated with leadership style.

The second finding of this study showed also that perceived social support positively and significantly predicted leadership style. From table one above, the result revealed that social support (family) associated positively and significantly with leadership style (contingency) while other social support (family support and friends support) did not associated significantly with leadership style. This means that when social support (family) increases leadership style (Contingency) increases and vice versa. This indicates that social support (family) has a better relationship with leadership style (contingency) compared to other social support (friends and significant others). From table two above the result revealed also that social support (family) positively and significantly predicted leadership style. A possible interpretation of this is that when social support (family) increases leadership style increases and when social support (family) decreases leadership style decreases. This indicates also that social support (family) has more predictive power on leadership style more than social support (friends and significant others). The implication

of this finding is that addition of perceived social support to proactive personality contributed 8% in prediction of leadership style. This shows also that proactive personality and perceived social support (family) have better relationship in prediction of leadership style. . Prior studies consistently found that perceived social support significantly related to leadership style. Some of such findings are Lee, et al (2018) and Tucker and Black (2016).

Lee, et al (2018) examined the significance of transformational leadership and social support. The result revealed that transformational leadership and social support make significant contribution on expatriate adjustment and performance. Again Tucker and Black (2016) examined social support and democratic style of leadership preferred by athletes. The finding revealed that there is statistical significant difference between social support and training instruction while no significant difference was detected between social support and democratic leadership style. Therefore, this means that social support (family) has better relationship with effective leadership style compared to social support (friends and significant others)

Implication of the study

The implication of this study is that proactive personality and social support (family) predicted leadership style significantly. The finding also showed that social support (family) predicted leadership style more than other social support (friends and significant others) and proactive personality.

Recommendations

- Research efforts should focus in depth on the issue of leadership style and find out other factors that are likely to influence effective leadership style.



- Again, disciplinary measures should be implemented on leaders irrespective of who is involved in leadership scandal.
- Finally, proactive personality and perceived social support should be recommended to leaders as one of the factors that influence effective leadership.

Limitations of the study

- The limitations of the study are that the sample size of this study is small due to the time frame for the conduct of this research.
- Another limitation is that the questionnaire was the only means of data collection for this study.

Conclusion

Leadership style has a great influence on the national/organizational operations and management. So, effective leadership style contributes to growth and productivity which bring about empowerment, motivates employees/citizens and contribute positively to nations or organizations growth. This study examined proactive personality and perceived social support as predictors of leadership style. A total of 180 undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka participated in the study. BCE leadership style scale by Obi-Nwosu (2014), shortened version of proactive personality scale by Seibert et al (1999) and multidimensional scale of perceived social support by Zimet et al (1988) were used for data collection. The collected data were analyzed and the first finding revealed that proactive personality positively and significantly predicted leadership style. The second finding revealed also that perceived social support (friends) positively and significantly predicted

leadership style. The implication of this finding is that proactive personality and social support are important factors in leadership style.

Finally, this research finding is hoped to encourage other researchers to explore other likely predictive variables that will have negative or positive effects on leadership style.

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