

| CHAPTER TWENTY |

A PHILOSOPHICAL MEDITATION ON THE DEMANDS OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Academic leadership is a subject that is often ignored in research activities. Many think that by mere being a teacher qualifies one as an academic leader. But, the truth is far from this. Academic leadership goes beyond classroom management to embrace diverse efforts in achieving the desired overall educational goal of a particular academic establishment. It includes not only the professional side, but also business, management and accounting sides of the educational institution. Hence, like leadership in general, it involves organizational behavior and human resource management as they bear on educational and allied interests of the school. Needless to say, that an academic leader must not be a stranger to the business of teaching and learning. However, he or she is supposed to have some other special qualities that predispose him or her to perform the functions and tasks the person is charged to perform as an academic leader.

In this paper, attention is focused on such virtues that an academic leader should embody in order that his or her leadership efforts may yield the desired fruits. Education is a value enterprise, just like culture and politics. This explains why, especially at the university levels, graduates are awarded certificates on the condition of having fulfilled the requirements of character formation and cognitive training. Therefore, academic leadership is a special context in leadership that demands a special attention.

In this short essay, some questions/issues will be raised around our subject matter such as what is leadership and who is a leader? Who is an academic leader? The paper will also examine qualities of good leadership in general and the special qualities of an academic leader in particular. A special attention will be paid to the African experience of academic leadership and the university environment. The paper will conclude with some reflections on the future of universities in Africa and the critical way forward.

The methods adopted in this study are those of philosophical analysis and evaluation. As a philosophical meditation, reasoned insights on the subject matter of academic leadership are pursued throughout. The aim is to reflect the enormous need for leveraging on our tertiary education system in Nigeria (Africa) to launch a culture change that will bolster our quest for development in the 21st century. No doubt, Nigeria is a giant in Africa. Her successes in this area can contribute immensely to contemporary African development. I mean, the tertiary institutions in the country are veritable breeding grounds for a break-through in connection to the contemporary global issues such as climate change and clean energy challenge, disease and disease control, social and economic security, migration, democratization and good governance. Hence, the subject matter of academic leadership occupies an important place in our overall societal development. With this background let's explore the issue more.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP AND WHO IS A LEADER?

Leadership entails forward movement, order or command or control, supply of energy/inspiration/money, authority/representative of higher authority. When you put all these together, you get an idea of leadership as the act or state of a person or group of persons doing or associated with doing these things. This person(s) is (are) called a leader (leaders). He or she shows direction, determines the goal and the means thereof. In this effort, he or she commands the obedience and respect of his or her followers. In general, the person officially influences the

followers significantly in achieving the relevant goal of the group.

The leader is often drawn from within the system he or she is assigned to lead. As a person that stands out of the group, he or she receives the shocks and the pressures of whatever anomaly or negativities that arise in the system but keeps on striving, in the midst of all that, to reach the goal by carrying his or her subjects along. From this essentialist-existentialist conception of leadership and leader, we get the terms like charisma, charismatic and charity. These terms are all from the root word 'charge', meaning to move forward quickly or violently especially towards something which has caused difficulty or anger, of course with a good intention, namely to realize a set goal. Hence, we often hear of charismatic leader - a leader with special natural power (charisma) which makes him or her to influence other people and attract their attention and admiration. Again, from the idea of 'supply' associated with leadership, one meets the word charity, which means to give (supply), especially to those in critical situations of need. Thus, we derive a sense of a leader as one who supplies what is needed in an establishment which could be in the form of capacity, inspiration or even money. In this construal, a leader is the one who donates not only things but also himself to others, without reservations, that their overall individual and collective aspirations might be achieved. In other words, a person who is candid about his or her foibles and fears without sacrificing his or her effectiveness is a leader. A leader, though not perfect, strives for perfection. How then does the above description dovetail to an understanding of academic leadership?

WHO IS AN ACADEMIC LEADER?

An Academic leader is a person who motivates academics in university by providing challenging opportunities as well as creating appropriate academic environments for academics to improve themselves (Esen, 2021). The person can be the vice-chancellor, the dean or sub-dean of the faculty or the head of an academic department or unit. Thus, academic leadership is a

leadership that includes such roles as creating vision and mission based on science and research data for the organization, setting up creative ideas, doing and providing teamwork (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). In other words, one can say that academic leadership is the leadership by an academic in an academic institution for academic purposes. But, one may ask: what makes a person an academic”? An academic usually holds an advanced degree or a terminal degree, such as a master's degree or a doctorate (PhD) and often works inside of the academy. There may be independent scholars and public intellectuals, though; these persons work outside of the academy yet may publish in academic journals and participate in scholarly public discussion (Wikipedia, 2023). This second category is also included among the scope of the term “academic”. However, in this paper, I employ strictly the first sense of the word above.

In other words, an academic leader is basically a teacher. Hence, academic leadership is when a teacher, professor, or other members of faculty at academic institution lead students to success. They may help students develop the skills and knowledge they need in their future careers and provide challenging opportunities to test and improve this knowledge. Academic leaders also set goals with their students and help them create an action plan to achieve them. Here are some examples of responsibilities an academic leader may have:

- teaching one class or multiple classes a day
- developing curriculum for programs or individual courses
- writing detailed lesson plans
- conducting research to stay up-to-date with industry trends
- participating in extracurricular activities with students
- assessing students' progress and creating detailed reports for students, parents, or faculty to evaluate

- choosing a teaching style or approach that meets students' learning needs
- following the academic institution's policies and encouraging students to do the same (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).

While the above description fits perfectly well into the scope and meaning of academic leadership, this paper restricts its application only to those select few academics who engage in administrative leadership as enunciated earlier. In this manner, one should understand that not all teachers or professors are academic leaders. One should therefore wonder what makes academic leaders stand out as an instant of leaders generally conceived. But, before we consider this, let us a few words on theories of academic leadership. There are four traditional theories of leadership applied in higher education developed under the positivist research paradigm: trait, behavioral, power and influence, and contingency. On this, Kezar (2017) explains that “in trait and behavioral theories, leadership is synonymous with leader. Studies often focus on certain types of leaders such as presidents, deans, or provosts. Later theories of contingency and power/influence examine leadership as a process, and leader is no longer synonymous with leadership”. The author adopts the theories of trait and behavior in this chapter throughout.

QUALITIES OF GOOD LEADERSHIP IN GENERAL AND THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF AN ACADEMIC LEADER

Leaders refer to persons who hold authority and power and who, by virtue of their positions, shape and influence our nations, communities and organizations. In general, a good leader should have integrity, self-awareness, courage, respect, empathy, and gratitude. They should be learning agile and flex their influence while communicating and delegating effectively (Centre for Creative Leadership, 2023). Leaders are those who guide others and, in the process, make the essential large-scale decisions that

keep things moving for all. Leaders can be divided according to their type (instrumental and expressive) and their decision-making styles (authoritarian, democratic, and *laisser-faire*) (Erin, 2013). Instrumental leader is task-oriented while expressive leader is emotion-oriented. In the former case, the leader wants the group members to perform tasks and get things done chiefly; in the latter case, the leader wants them to provide companionship, love and security.

Beyond dominant leadership types and abilities, leaders also vary in their decision-making styles. There are three basic styles of leadership decision-making: authoritarian, democratic, and *laisser-faire*. The authoritarian leader makes no provision for inputs from the subjects. He makes all the major decisions and merely demands compliance from the members of the group. Authoritarian leadership can be beneficial when a decision needs to be made quickly or when a project or situation is particularly stressful. The democratic decision-making style involves leaders who encourage the members to participate in the process reaching decisions through consensus. He adopts the majority opinion. This approach promotes inclusion, teamwork and creativity. In the *laisser-faire* style, the leader leaves the group to make the decision. He makes minimal inputs only allowing the group to run alone. This is usually the least effective style of leadership decision-making.

But, an academic leader does not operate in the above fashion. The environment in which he finds himself, demands a radically different approach. He must rely on totally different traits in order to realize the goals of his institution. Note that the skills needed in an academic leader as a teacher is slightly different from those needed from an academic leader as an administrator and manager of academic institutions and personnel. In the former case, the skills come in the form of qualities or traits of character resident in the teacher such as patience, communications skills, problem solving skills, creativity, flexibility, and organizational skills.

But, in the latter case, the skills come mainly in the form of core values that will enable the smoothest realization of set goals. My attention is to be focused here on the later. Some of these skills may include:

➤ **Excellent communication skills:** This is the requirement that ideas should be communicated effectively in the acceptable manner while using the proper channel and protocol. This requirement is useful to both the academic leader and other members of his academic group/community. It presupposes paying attention, listening and engagement with one another's ideas. It means that the communication must be good and more frequent; it involves delegation and intermittent checking in throughout the process of working towards achieving a determinate goal. It demands occasional evaluation and assessment/appraisal of the progress so far. The entire process is maintained and motivated by the mechanism of feedback and criticism.

➤ **Proactivity:** An academic leader is very much aware that, given the environment of his service, he should not wait for a miracle to happen in order to concretize his leadership objectives. He is equally aware that he must put in the work so as to get the desired result. In fact, Proactivity entails planning ahead and anticipating problems.

It means always having a Plan B in place so that you're not scrambling when something unexpected happens. Proactivity means having the ability to recognize which tasks are the most essential, and creating a prioritized list of what needs to be accomplished first. Above all, it's about being prepared for the worst while still hoping, planning, and staying positive about getting the best results (Murtagh, 2018).

➤ **Knowing when to take risks:** A good academic leader must realize that academic leadership demands getting out of one's comfort zone. There is simply no room to always play it safe here. He must study the options before him and determine quickly which risks are worth taking and which are not. No room for reckless decision-taking. Knowing when to take risks requires acting in a collegiate manner so that the academic leader will rally round his leadership a determined team of people who will cooperate to minimize the chances of erroneous decisions and/or to lessen his chances of failure.

➤ **Resilience:** This is a value, a mindset that allows the academic leader to obstinately focus on the positive outcomes even when he has been knocked down by failure or attacks of critics. A good academic leader should not allow the feeling of 'failure' or pressure of criticism scare him off from trying again. He considers every misdirected step he takes as an opportunity for growth. So, resilience is an attitude that must be reflected in both the academic leader and other players in his domain (academic institution). In a word, academic leader must be positive minded even in the midst of rejection and failure. Morgan (2023) used the metaphors of thick skin and armor to drive home the point here. As he explained:

Thick skin and armor are not the same thing; one slows you down, but the other one keeps you safe when you're taking hits on the field... One of the things I talk about in my new book, *Leading with Vulnerability* is the importance of having thick skin, especially if you are or want

to be in a position of [academic] leadership... There's an assumption that armoring up means not showing emotion but that's not entirely true. Armoring up also means avoiding situations and circumstances that would require you to show any emotion or be human to begin with. Some leaders do this by shutting down difficult conversations, avoiding certain topics, or using their power and authority to get others to bend to their will without questioning authority.

➤ **Passion for what to do:** As stated earlier, an academic leader is not a stranger to the world of academics; he loves it and gives his life to it. He is passionate about the academy. Therefore, he always thinks of what to do to help him to feed that passion and improve his skill set. He goes ahead to share his love with others so they can be inspired by his passion. 'The passion for what to do' says "If you love what you do, you won't think twice about staying up late to get things done" (Murtagh, 2018).

Having examined the above core values necessary for the academic leaders to excel in their career globally, we need to interrogate the state of affairs of academic leadership relative to the African experience.

THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

Tshishonga (2020) opines that academic leadership in Africa has been counter-productive due to non-application of emotional intelligence by African academic leaders. According to him, "above managerial and professionalism skills and competencies, the higher education sector needs emotional intelligence leadership and competencies among its administrative and academic leaders" (p. 246). In the same vein, I make bold to say that the African experience of academic leadership also fails due to

the near-total absence of social intelligence. The African university work environment is all too hierarchical and egocentric that there is little or no room to practice social intelligence. Even though our emotions are located within the framework of our interactions, yet social intelligence should not be confused with emotional intelligence. Goleman (2006) argues for the subtle difference that obtains between the two thus:

But as I've come to see, simply lumping social intelligence within the emotional sort stunts fresh thinking about the human aptitude for relationship, ignoring what transpires as we interact. This myopia leaves the 'social' part out of intelligence. The ingredients of social intelligence I propose here can be organized into two broad categories: social awareness, what we sense about others, and social facility - what we then do with that awareness (pp. 83-84).

Goleman says that human relationships suffer when too much emphasis is placed on the cognitive approach which underscores high-road talents like social knowledge and mastery of the norms of appropriate social behaviors. This, according to him, is because “a focus on cognition about relationships neglects essential non-cognitive abilities like primal empathy and synchrony, and it ignores capacity like concern” (p. 100). If you review the qualities of a good academic leader in the previous section, you will agree with me that the underpinning social situation of the university environment demands “capacities for getting in synch, for attuned listening, and for empathic concern” (Goleman, 2006, p. 101). This is in line with the understanding that those qualities are more of human values than human skills. And, it is the emphasis on the human values that distinguishes the non-cognitive from the cognitive approaches to social intelligence as indicated above.

Minding social intelligence in academic leadership will, no doubt, help the African academic leader to adopt human-centered policy actions in his or her administration. Such human-centered policy actions may include actions like to “(1) build vision and set direction, (2) develop staff capacity, (3) redesign the school organization to match the vision, and (4) manage the teaching and learning program”. As hinted on earlier, academic leadership will produce little or no result unless there is an overarching institutional culture that informs and helps to interpret every leadership policy action taken within the environment. It is just the duty of the academic leader to ensure the entrenchment of such a culture in the academic institution. Rashid (2023) harped on this when he remarked that:

Effective leadership also creates a positive school culture that fosters learning, collaboration, and innovation. School leaders are responsible for creating an environment that encourages teachers to work together to improve student outcomes, and they are also responsible for ensuring that the school has the necessary resources to support student achievement.

The universities in the global north, unlike those in the global south (including African universities), have long established culture that guarantee enabling environment for collaboration, innovation, and learning. The African academic leaders struggle because they have to contend with many things including the end-users' aversion to/reception of the core values of the institution as manifested in the above qualities. That is to say that the environment of Africa has not fully internalized and imbibed the culture of academic leadership as a function of the university culture. This is a great challenge!

Another area that poses serious challenge in this connection is that of accountability. Most African academic leaders see themselves as sole administrators, as monarchs. They may set high

expectations, but they will fail to lend themselves to be held accountable, especially in financial and administrative matters. Consequently, they trivialize and frustrate the mechanisms of feedback and criticism. In short, they neglect transparency in accountability. But without transparency, there is no accountability. In a word, the tone of their leadership is rarely determined by the above five qualities as manifestations and the spirit of academic leadership.

Again, many African academic leaders are poor in resource management and maintenance culture. In short, lack of efficient and effective management of resources is the bane of tertiary education in most African countries like Nigeria. The burden of university funding is left to the government alone. Even when the funding is provided, it is not adequate. Yet there is still no strategic investment of the meager resources in key areas like technology and personnel. You often hear of ghost workers' syndrome in Nigerian universities. That is a sign of mismanagement of resources meant for personnel cost. Some African leaders shy away from collaboration with potential partners for fear of disclosing the shoddy practices that go on in ivory towers under their leadership. They brush away occasions for effective communication with the stakeholders lest they be held accountable. Result: staff, students, and parents suffer from neglect and inequity in resource management. In one word, corruption in the academy foils every other effort and prevents them from bearing the needed fruits. The onus lies on the African academic leader to create the enabling environment that will remove corruption. Indeed, it is a great mistake for an African academic leader to conceive academic leadership after the model of political leadership of say a nation, state, or local government.

Lastly, it must be emphasized that in pursuing the vision and mission of the academic institution, the African academic leader should not neglect instructional leadership which is more or less the chief reason for establishing the institution. This can be done

“by setting high expectations for teaching and learning, promoting professional development, and providing feedback and support to teachers. Instructional leadership involves creating a culture of continuous improvement, where teachers are encouraged to try new strategies and techniques to improve student learning”, Rashid (2023). *The hallmark of an academic institution is striving always for excellence. Following the foregoing, let us end our meditation on the demands of academic leadership by turning our attention to the future of academic leadership and, by extension, the universities in Africa. We shall cap it up with some recommendations on the critical way forward.*

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: THE FUTURE OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP/UNIVERSITIES IN AFRICA

The future is uncertain given the reluctance of many African academic leaders to adapt to changes. Today, students, staff, parents and other stakeholders have become wiser than before, and they have evolved to recognize the need to demand for their rights by way of asking for accountability from the academic leaders. In addition, accountability in the contemporary time has become more formalized. Therefore, African academic leaders must change their views and attitudes to leadership in higher education or face serious challenges from within their very own system. If they continue with the mindset that was obtainable 50 years ago, namely, 'the Vice-chancellor has spoken and everybody must fall in line in obedience', then they are doomed to fail. Today's African academic leaders must practice humility, without losing their strength and confidence for a sustained success in academic leadership. That is the central message of Fiorina (2023) who explains that:

It is strength that pushes us forward in the face of difficulty. It is humility that keeps us open to course-correction when required. It is strength that allows us to tackle the difficult problems. It is humility that reminds us others can help find solutions. It is strength that pushes us to ask the

necessary, tough questions everyone fears. It is humility that allows us to hear the answers.

Leaders who are confident can add real value. Humility reminds leaders that others can also add value. A leader must be confident enough to speak their mind. Humility invites others to do the same. It is confidence that allows a leader to make a decision in a timely manner, even when much is still unknown. It is humility that allows a leader to say, "I don't know" or "I need more information to decide." A confident leader understands their own capacities and interests and leans on them. A humble leader understands equally well where they are less capable or interested and leans on others who bring different, complementary capabilities.

Humility is not weakness, just as leading with vulnerability is not just tantamount to being vulnerable. In the book mentioned above, *Leading With Vulnerability*, Morgan (2023) outlines the eight attributes of vulnerable leaders to include: (i) competence (be good at your job), (ii) self-confidence (believe in yourself and that you have the ability to grow and succeed), (iii) motivation (have the drive to take action and improve), (iv) integrity (be a moral and honest person with a clear set of personal values that guide how you behave), (v) authenticity (be a single genuine version of yourself), (vi) empathy (see things from other people's perspectives), (vii) self-compassion (be kind to yourself), (viii) self-awareness (understand your thoughts, behaviors and emotions and how they impact you and those around you). I make bold to say that all these qualities and human values are universal and are urgently needed in every African academic leader who must succeed in his or her mission and vision of academic leadership.

This situation provokes the question of the criteria to adopt in appointment of academic leaders. Is it competence, seniority, academic qualification, discipline, gender, religion, institutional affiliation or what? Ngowi (2018) observed that “universities, particularly in developing countries, have traditionally appointed academic leaders based on seniority in the academic rank regardless of whether or not the candidates have proven leadership competencies” (p. i). Moreover, the appointment to academic leadership in African universities is known to be skewed against women generally. But, this should not be so. Stakeholders in African universities should encourage gender inclusivity in appointment to leadership positions. While I am not against recruiting academic leaders for African universities from outside the university or country, it is critical to consider the culture of the institution while appointing her academic leaders. In this showing, it is preferable to select from within the institution's cultural embrace. Hence, conscious effort must be made to ensure availability of future generation of African academic leaders by floating requisite internal and external trainings and formations to prepare such future leaders. It does not mean that some persons will be pre-selected for leadership positions in African universities. It means, rather, that a mechanism should be put in place to tap into the leadership qualities of African academics by continuous training and retraining of academics in African universities prior to their appointment to leadership positions. The system itself will do the selection without bias; then, appointment will be made from among those so selected while considering both general and specific competencies the particular African institution requires from her academic leaders. It is, therefore, myopic to base the selection of African academic leaders solely on seniority. In fact, the onus is on African academic leaders of today to institutionalize leadership education as a means of ensuring uninterrupted supply of future academic leaders in Africa. To this end, Akomas (2023) submits that

The unique challenges and opportunities of Africa necessitate a distinct breed of

leaders – leaders who understand the rhythm of Africa, its people, its markets, its culture, and its potential. Developing such leaders calls for a major transformation in our approach to leadership education on the continent. A curriculum that understands, appreciates, and reflects Africa is what will truly empower our future [academic] leaders and, by extension, our continent.

If we consider appointment to academic leadership positions as a criterion for promotion to higher ranks in the academy (which is currently the practice in many Nigerian universities), then African academics are bound to see these leadership positions, particularly the middle level such as the Head of Departments and Sub-deans, no longer as solely administrative and managerial but as strategic status booster, empowering tool for higher academic leadership positions. This is the argument of Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, (2008) who condemn such an arrangement as functioning to remove the attention of African academic leaders from the core roles of a leader and the requisite competences for proper operations denying the institution the chance for effective leadership capable of shaping institutional reform and transformation. Hence, the future of academic will continue to remain bleak until and unless the necessary stakeholders look into this phenomenon seriously with goal of resolving the inherent contradictions.

Now, considering that Africa is a continent in transition and recognizing the fact that the universities are globally the centers for breeding societal change, one has no doubt that African university cannot be exception to this global trend. African universities need competent, well informed and well-motivated academic leaders; academic leaders who will lead change not just institutions. Makoe and Oclott (2021) observe that

Leading change in higher education has been a major challenge in countries of limited resources, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most African universities have struggled with this transition mainly due to lack of the requisite information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, inadequate expertise for online pedagogies and inability to provide computers to their students and staff. When faced with the recent changes, caused mainly by the COVID-19 pandemic that forced every person to work and learn remotely, many academic leaders were completely ill-prepared to deal with changes of this magnitude (p. 487).

Therefore, the African academic leaders required for a better future in African are those who view academic leadership as opportunity for working together for the common good of all concerned. They are those who must realize that positive social transformation relies on the universities to brood, drive and sustain the change. Of this change, digital infrastructure is critical for several reasons: mass education, internationalization, workforce development, entrepreneurship development, etc. It is critical not only for the wider society, but also for the academic leaders and leadership as in capacity building for academic programme leaders (Shawa, 2019).

Connected to the point above is the need for African governments to increase their support for university education and for academic leaders to take government to task on this. African governments can support higher education in diverse ways namely policy making, funding allocation and accountability, quality, and employment generation (Makoe and Oclott, 2021). African governments should consider the centers for higher education as

veritable channels for distributing the public goods available to the majority of society. In this way, African academic leaders will be seen as partners with the government and business organizations for societal development. This partnership will be most effectively realized through research; and African academic leaders must emphasize this, for that is their specific constituency.

African politicians should know their boundaries and not interfere ruthlessly recklessly in the academic leadership of African universities. This is important so that the policies and other academic leadership efforts will yield their expected fruits. They should limit their involvements to the registration, evaluation and accreditation of programmes without neglecting infrastructure development, monitoring, rehabilitation and upgrade. For many African universities suffer from infrastructure deficit and decay. They should also take vetting the qualification of personnel and personnel cost, as well as tertiary education policy formation and development very seriously. Once they mind their job with regard to higher education, there will be a greater future for academic leadership in Africa (MacGregor, 2015).

Nevertheless, the vision and mission of universities in general are always such that governments alone cannot carry them. Therefore, I see African academic leaders of the future as those who must either venture full measure into business enterprises leveraging on the business schools of the universities and the host communities or fail. In this sense, African academic leadership of the future is full of opportunities with infinite potential. A medieval philosophical dictum says in Latin *primum vivere deinde philosophari*. This literally means that one must eat (get well fed) before he or she ventures into lofty intellectual enterprise of philosophizing. This was not merely a dictum, but indeed the societal structural setting in the ancient Greece believed to be the cradle of western philosophy. Hence, only those from affluent and noble families or those who have achieved such a high level of economic comfort, dared to venture into the philosophic

enterprise in the ancient Greece. In our time today, the universities represent that philosophic enterprise of the ancient. So, the institutions of higher learning must shield their projects from unnecessary assault or collapse or abuse by building a strong financial bulwark around them through thriving business enterprises. They must also de-emphasize the idea that the ability to pay money alone is sufficient to give a prospective student a place in the universities. Proper motivation is equally important.

At the philosophical level, the African academic leaders of the future should build their leadership on values and persons. Such human values like respect for persons, justice and fairness, inclusion, consistency, accountability, monitoring and evaluation, team-spirit, innovation, self-confidence, vision, humility, purposefulness, integrity and the like are genuinely needed. Values and people are the backbone of academic institutions (Council on Higher Education, 2016). Philosophy has been popularly defined as the love of wisdom. Wisdom here is taken as a holistic outlook to life issues and problems. Bringing this idea home to knowledge production, dissemination and consumption, it translates to interdisciplinarity.

Indeed, interdisciplinarity is one of the priorities for turning the vision 2030 of European Universities Association (EUA) into reality. In her white paper titled “Universities without walls: A vision for 2030”, EUA (2021) stated clearly that

Interdisciplinary approaches must be better used for meeting societal challenges across university missions. While disciplines must remain important in order to organize and expand the knowledge production at universities, interdisciplinary approaches must be promoted by: (i) recognizing interdisciplinary engagement in academic assessment and reward schemes; (ii) implementing institutional accreditation to

complement discipline-based programme accreditation and facilitate interdisciplinary learning; (iii) making interdisciplinary teaching part of the professional development of academic staff and supporting academic staff from different disciplines in working together (p. 12).

Contemporary and future African academic leaders should also borrow this philosophical insight of supporting interdisciplinarity and embed it in their leadership mission and vision in the different African universities. Ultimately, this will amount to promoting the study of philosophy across African universities more than ever before. This and other considerations will function to revolutionalise African academic leadership in the 21st century. Hence, all hope is not lost; as long as the future academic leaders think and act differently in the light of the foregoing knowledge about the peculiar challenges of African universities environment and the specific demands of academic leadership, they will know and be creative about the way forward.

THE CRITICAL WAY FORWARD

African academic leaders must take student and staff exchange programmes very seriously such that each year a few students and staff are facilitated to travel abroad to study and work in another university for a stipulated period of time. In return, such oversea partner institutions will send some of their students and staff for the same purpose. If this happens, it will not only widen the horizon of teaching and learning of the concerned institutions, but also help to entrench the culture of continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Moreover, the African academic leaders are saddled with the responsibility of encouraging the staff and students to secure grants, endowment funds and scholarship from different sources across the globe. This will help improve the image of the university and prepare it to go international by having an appreciable number of students and staff from outside the

country in which the university is located – universities are collegial, and so international by definition.

The mission and vision of African academic leadership should be properly aligned with the institutions' overall goals and objectives, not allowing them to be in discordance. When this is done, it will make the core values examined above as the qualities of a good academic leader to fall into place and be in synch with one another. In this connection, it is highly recommended that African academic leaders should undergo leadership development programme prior and during their leadership tenures at the educational institutions. Recent research on this concluded that

The programme had an impact on how participants started reflecting on leadership styles beyond the usual description of leadership styles. Additionally, participants used the opportunity for introspection of their own role as a leader and how they need to adapt. Higher education institutions are encouraged to implement leadership development programmes that will encourage stakeholders to engage in introspective activities that could influence behavioral change (Frantz, Lawack, & Rhoda, 2020).

The governments of different African states can play very important roles here by reviewing their policies on higher education in order to make these tertiary institutions more independent and to have their leadership regularly assessed by an independent African Consulting firm. African academic leaders should cooperate with such as one of the ways of responding to national needs. In short, African academic leaders and government leaders should consider themselves as partner in progress.

On the whole, the skills for attentive listening, being people-oriented, patience to consult widely before taking decision, having strategic planning, and maintaining greater transparency in the administrative/managerial affairs of the university are by far the most important leadership qualities needed in the African academic leaders of today. Managing growth and sustainability including environmental sustainability and taking gender issues seriously must, in addition, form the priority of contemporary African academic leaders. They must encourage diversity, especially diversity of ideas and nurture the culture of debate to create an ambience of truth, honesty, transparency, conviviality, freedom, humanity and the like. Above all, recognizing and promoting African culture is non-negotiable for African leaders of today and those of tomorrow.

The challenge here is that African academic leaders may be split between transformation leadership and servant leadership styles both of which may be argued to be supported by African culture in one way or the other. However, the short answer is that “participation and collaboration are key to the success of both these leadership styles and should therefore be reflected” (Hyde-Clarke, 2023). Mathooko (2013), speaking on the three dimensional African perspectives in leadership and organizational ethics, made it clear that a smart African (academic) leader should optimally utilize the three categories of persons that exist in every organization (from African philosophical perspective) to advance his or her (academic) leadership mission and vision. According to him, the three categories of persons include (1) those that focus on the past at the expense of the present, (2) those that focus on the present at the expense of the future and (3) those that focus on the future at the expense of the present. He went further to explain and argue that

It is presumed that these categories will manifest different ethical behaviors. With the existence and acknowledgment of these categories, it is therefore expected that

leaders would harness their synergy for the organization to forge forward with its vision. Our ethical and leadership knowledge of the past should be used to live the present and to shape the future. As we use our history to shape our future, we should endeavor to nurture more visionaries than missionaries. Only those leaders with a three-dimensional perspective live inspiring lives and live with a cause, which are some of the attributes of true [academic] leaders (p.5).

The point being advanced here is simple: that African (academic) leader should make maximum use of insights, ideas, and philosophies available from his or her cultural resources to push forward his or her leadership pragmatics. The author is perfectly in support of this view. The only addition I make is that African academic leaders must go beyond the African perspective on academic leadership to equally embrace universally valid leadership qualities (core-values) such as respect, resilience, integrity, empathy, accountability, transparency, humility and purposefulness. Again, African academic leaders should be and/or support research leaders for research is at the root of development, especially for regions in the global south like Africa. Indeed, academic leadership and research leadership are not to be separated.

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