



Understanding the Factors that Influence Leadership Effectiveness of Deans in Ghana

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Abstract

The paper describes and examines the factors that influence leadership effectiveness of deans and the concept of competence of deans using the evolution of deanship as a welfare system to a system of accountability in Ghana. The study explores what defines leadership competence in Higher Education in Ghana and how the process of becoming a dean can influence effective performance. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected from 38 respon Three public Universities in Ghana were used for the study. Data was collected from 38 respondents using interviews and survey methods. The respondents include a vice-chancellor, a pro-vice-chancellor, deans, and faculty members. The paper explores the respondents' perception of a competent dean and identifies two categories of competence: *technical competence* and *leadership competence*. Generally, leadership competences are put ahead of technical competences for effective deans' performance. Five core themes for leadership competences were identified and these include *personal competences*, *visionary competences*, *administrative competences*, *people competences* and *networking competences*. Also, three processes of becoming a dean have also emerged in Ghana. These are the *elective*, the *selective* and the *appointive* processes. The study finds that the effectiveness of deans is largely influenced by inadequate leadership competences and grooming, absence of clearly defined and well communicated job descriptions as well as performance management practices that seek accountability of deans in Ghana. The study recommends the

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appointment of deans through standard recruitment practices, rather than election or selection. It also recommends leadership assessment and training for leadership competences before a dean takes office.

Key Words: Leadership, Competence, Deans, Effectiveness

Résumé

Cet article décrit et examine les facteurs qui influent sur l'efficacité du leadership des doyens des facultés et le concept de compétence des doyens des facultés avec l'évolution du décanat comme système de promotion sociale vers un système de reddition de compte au Ghana. L'étude vise à déterminer ce qui définit les compétences de leadership au niveau de l'enseignement supérieur au Ghana et comment le processus de nomination des doyens des facultés peut influencer la performance efficace. À l'aide d'une approche qualitative, trois universités publiques du Ghana ont été ciblées dans l'étude. Les données ont été collectées à partir de 38 personnes interrogées par interviews et à l'aide de méthodes d'enquête. Parmi les personnes interrogées, il y avait un vice-recteur, un pro-vice-recteur, des doyens des facultés et des membres du corps enseignant. L'étude vise à déterminer la perception des personnes interrogées vis-à-vis d'un doyen compétent et identifie deux catégories de compétences: les compétences techniques et les compétences de leadership. En général, les compétences de leadership l'emportent sur les compétences techniques en ce qui concerne la performance efficace de la fonction de doyens de facultés. Cinq thèmes clés relatifs aux compétences de leadership ont été identifiés notamment les compétences personnelles, les compétences visionnaires, les compétences administratives, les compétences des hommes et les compétences de mise en réseau. Tous les trois processus de nomination des doyens des facultés ont aussi vu le jour au Ghana. Il s'agit des processus électif, sélectif et de nomination. L'étude relève que l'efficacité des doyens des facultés est en grande partie influencée par le manque de compétences de leadership et de confiance, l'absence de description de postes clairement définis et bien communiqués ainsi que des pratiques de gestion des performances qui requièrent la reddition des comptes des doyens des facultés au Ghana. L'étude recommande la nomination des doyens de facultés selon les processus de recrutement standards, plutôt que par élection ou sélection. Elle recommande aussi l'évaluation du leadership et la formation en matière de compétences de leadership avant que le doyen ne prenne fonction.

Mots clés: Leadership, Compétence, Doyens des facultés, Efficacité

Introduction

Leadership effectiveness is a topic that continues to stimulate considerable attention in common and scholarly literature (Waldman, Ramirez, House & Puranam, 2001). Contemporary trends and the effects of globalization, massification, commoditization and other challenges in higher education, have made the quest of effective leadership and governance even more relevant in the academia. Developing an understanding of what constitutes effective leadership, however, has been a complex undertaking. Bryman (2009) and Cameron (1986) maintain that the debate has ranged from the belief that leadership is a 'useless concept' particularly in the academia where competence or the professional nature of academics as well as the task structure can substitute for or neutralize the effects of leadership making it a useless concept; to Day and Lord's (1986) assertion that, after controlling for confounding errors, differences in executive leadership explained as much as 45 per cent of an organization's performance. Views on the effects of leadership on performance have generally been divided between 'Individualists and Contextualists'. The Individualists support the position that leaders have a significant and possibly crucial impact on the performance of the organizations they lead. The Contextualist, on the other hand, emphasize that the contributions of individual leaders are limited by situational factors. Ulrich, Zenger and Smallwood (1999) acknowledge the importance of individual leadership attributes; however, they conclude that without a connection to organizational results, these attributes are insufficient in helping to explain leadership effectiveness because they are often based on 360-degree assessments which attempt to establish a link with individual leader effectiveness by focusing upon relationships between these instruments and criteria such as supervisors' assessments of promotability, performance appraisal ratings, actual promotions, and desired organizational outcomes (Fleenor & Bryant, 2002; CCL, 2000). On the other hand, from a phenomenological perspective, the Individualists argue the importance of leadership and, in particular, the leader's role, by citing cases like the seminal contest between the Norwegian and the English in 1910 in which the Norwegians and English engaged in a dramatic and highly publicized race to the South Pole. This contest has been described as an epic contest, and the contrast between the performance of the Norwegian team led by Roald Amundsen and the English team led by Robert Falcon Scott provided a real-life study in leadership and team performance. Scott's leadership incompetence cost him the race, his life, and the lives of three team members (Fleenor & Bryant 2002). The question, however, is whether leadership competence can make such difference in higher education institutions? Does leadership competence affect deanship

effectiveness in Universities in Ghana? What defines leadership competence in Higher Education in Ghana? How does the process of becoming a dean influence effectiveness? Using the experiences in three universities in Accra, the study sought to explore these questions.

Significance of Leadership Competences for Deans

In recent times, concerns over the competences of deans have come to light (Bryman 2009). This has resulted in a number of initiatives to groom deans in leadership competences, which in the past has not been a key consideration for appointing an incumbent. Deans are traditionally chosen using three key approaches, namely, through *appointment*, *selection* or *election*. Oftentimes, deans are chosen based on academic rank and experience in a university, not necessarily as a leader. As a middle to top management position in the faculties or schools, deanship requires leadership competences to be effective. Deans, therefore require more leadership competences (conceptual plus relational skills) than technical competences, according to Katz skills-mix typology. Consequently, a number of initiatives have been introduced in recent years to address this shortcoming of present-day deans. Typical examples of recent leadership initiatives for grooming deans for managerial leadership competences include the Management Development (MEDEV) Programme of the Association of African Universities (AAU), the International Deans Course (IDC) supported by DAAD and the CODESRIA Deans Conference 2012, which are all very different in scope and content. From a heuristic perspective, the differences observed in the content of these leadership training initiatives as well as the differences in the concept of leadership in the presentations made at the CODESRIA Deans Conference at Johannesburg in January 2013 suggest that there is no consensus about the notion of *leadership competence* of deans. Subsequently, the notion of what should constitute the set of leadership skills and competences for deans also seem to be a mixed bag. It appears that the relationship between the process of becoming a dean and the competences required for deanship leadership effectiveness have not received adequate attention from researchers, notably in Africa.

A recent study on the factors affecting the quality of leadership in higher institutions of learning in Ghana suggests that though both the individual and contextual factors have significant influences on quality of leadership, personal factors and situational factors have much stronger and significant influences than organizational factors (Alabi and Alabi, 2010). This can be explained by the fact that man controls all the other organizational factors, so the effects of man may actually transcend that of the organizational structures and systems. Even among the four situational factors that Alabi and Alabi (2010) tested in

the study, the most significant proxy was leader-member-relations, which further explains the importance of people-related skills in quality of leadership in higher institutions in Ghana. While personal and situational factors were both significant at 1 per cent level in the baseline study, organizational factors was significant at 5 per cent, which implies that personal and situational factors have stronger influences on quality of leadership in higher education in Ghana than organizational factors. Notable is the fact that for both personal and situational as well as organizational factors the dominant factors are *competence* and *commitment of leaders*; and for personal and organizational factors, *competence* and *commitment of members*. It was against this background that this paper sought to explore the factors that can influence the effectiveness of deans and to test the influences of the two key factors conceptualized from the base line study and abstraction – *Competence of Deans versus the Process for becoming a Dean*, the former being a personal factor and the latter an organizational factor. Additionally, the study sought to explore what defines the notion of leadership competence for deans and to identify which competences deans require to be effective.

Specifically, the questions the paper seeks to explore are:

- What defines competence of an academic dean?
- Which competences can influence a dean's leadership effectiveness
- Between a dean's competence and the process of his selection, which can have stronger influence on effectiveness?
- How does the process of becoming a dean affect commitment and, consequently, effectiveness?

Leadership in Higher Education

Alabi (2011) reports Bolden's (2008) argument that leadership is a relatively new concept within the higher education sector and is thus harder to define. Bolden also reports that Hefce (2004), in setting out a strategic plan for the UK higher education sector, defined leadership as 'Agreeing strategic direction in discussion with others and communicating this within the organization; ensuring that there is the capability, capacity and resources to deliver planned strategic outcomes; and supporting and monitoring delivery. As such this definition embraces elements of governance and elements of management' (Hefce, 2004: 35). Bolden further argues that such a definition, however, offers little insight into how leadership is actually demonstrated in higher education. Furthermore, it neglects the long and heated debate on the nature of leadership that makes it an 'essentially contested' concept which makes it more difficult to clearly conceptualize in education.

Filan and Seagren (2003: 21) said, 'the context of the higher education leadership mantle is dynamic, complex and multidimensional'. The elusiveness of the leadership notion has enticed researchers to interpret, capture and analyse the essence of leadership in higher education from different perspectives. Although these studies identified leadership as a concrete and observable phenomenon, no consensus has yet been reached on the exact characteristics of a successful leader in higher education (Buller, 2006: 159). The concept of *leadership in higher education* thus presents numerous opportunities for further investigation.

Dimensions of Leadership Effectiveness

In line with Houston and Dockstader (2002), Alabi and Alabi (2010) conceptualize quality of leadership as the ability to achieve a vision and continuously improve the human, economic and social capital of the organization or outfit in a sustainable manner. Every leader who wants to give quality leadership must first have a vision, mobilize resources to achieve that vision and use the resources prudently to achieve and improve upon what is achieved (Zhu, Chew and Spangler, 2005). Leadership in this context is, therefore, not limited to human aspects of influencing or inspiring commitment towards the goal alone. This view suggests that effective management skills should be a requirement for quality of leadership. This is contrary to the views of an empirical work reported by Owen (2005) who suggests that management skills, such as planning and organization, failed to register in a list of leadership qualities mentioned by a group of 700 top leaders and followers interviewed.

In defining quality leadership, Montgomery (2005) stressed visibility of the leader and nine other elements which include need for a *two-way trust, teamwork, clear objectives, equally clear communication, self-belief, back-up with adequate resources, insistence on good performance, humility, and controlled aggression towards the opposition*. From his perspective, an effective leader has to articulate a vision and communicate that vision clearly for members and stakeholders to buy into it. To him, vision, self-belief, results focus, courage, integrity, teamwork, communication, attentiveness, and commitment cannot form a conclusive whole. He says the perfect blend cannot be achieved without visibility, which is defined as how a leader demonstrates his or her possession (competence) and exercise of all the powers required over time. Additionally, Owen (2005), also emphasizes that key behaviours expected of top leaders include ability to motivate others, vision, honesty and integrity, decisiveness and ability to handle crisis and conflicts. Yukl et al. (2000) have identified 14 categories of leader behaviour, including planning and organizing, problem solving, clarifying, informing, monitoring, motiva-

ting, consulting, and recognizing. Others are supporting, managing conflict and team building, networking, delegating, developing and mentoring, and rewarding. Another study by Fleenor and Bryant (2002), used a 360-degree feedback instrument that solicits ratings from several sources (e.g., self, boss, peers, direct reports), to collect effectiveness data for the managers in a study. Fleenor and Bryant used a 22-scale benchmark on six 'derailment' main scales (which was adopted from CCL, 2000: 3) to measure problem areas that can stall a career as indicated below:

1. *Problems with Interpersonal Relationships* – insensitive, cold, aloof, arrogant.
2. *Difficulty in Molding a Staff* – over-manages, unable to staff effectively.
3. *Difficulty in Making Strategic Transitions* – unable to think strategically.
4. *Lack of Follow-Through* – overly ambitious, untrustworthy.
5. *Overdependence* – overdependent on advocate or mentor.
6. *Strategic Differences with Management* – unable to adapt to a boss with different style.

The results of the Fleenor and Bryant (2002) show that, for self-ratings, all of the derailment scales are significantly related to the Denison scores. However, all of the indicators with the exception of 'problems with interpersonal relationships and difficulty moulding a staff' are consistent.

However, these attributes are characteristics of leaders and do not necessarily describe conditions necessary for effective leadership. Leadership effectiveness is seen as ability to move people to achieve results in a consistent manner (CCL 2000).

Deans as Effective Leaders

Research on deans and their leadership effectiveness is sparse. Effective leaders are often described as being visionary, equipped with strategies, a plan and desire to direct their teams and services to a future goal (Mahoney, 2001). Effective leaders are also required to use problem-solving processes, maintain group effectiveness and develop group identification. They should also be dynamic, passionate, have a motivational influence on other people, be solution-focused and seek to inspire others. Bryman (2009) conducted a meta-analysis in 2009 and reports that a US study by Rosser et al. assesses the degree to which deans were viewed as effective among faculty in a university. A research instrument was developed by a committee covering a variety of constituencies, including the researchers. The committee agreed that deans' effectiveness should be assessed through seven domains. Bryman further

opines that these domains are interesting in their own right, because they suggest the kinds of dimensions that are typically viewed as key to leadership effectiveness. They are:

- **Vision** and goal setting (includes emphasizing teaching and research excellence, encouraging faculty development, providing leadership for initiatives) similar to the baseline study used for this study.
- **Management of the unit** (includes managing change, delegating work, problem solving)
- **Interpersonal relationships** (includes awareness of faculty professional and career needs, being accessible)
- **Communication skills** (representing academic unit to administrators, representing administration to heads, clear reports and correspondence)
- **Research, professional and community endeavours** (includes maintaining own research agenda, teaching, personal growth opportunities)
- **Quality of unit's education** (advancing programmes effectively, handling accreditation issues, ensuring fair tenure and promotion procedures)
- **Support for institutional diversity** (includes supporting equal opportunities, and mentoring women and under-represented groups).

Secondly, the domain in which they performed least well was 'research, professional and community endeavours', suggesting either that the press of duties and responsibilities on deans results in them neglecting their own self-leadership, or that their move into a predominantly administrative and political role results in them leaving certain areas of academic activity behind them.

Creswell and Brown are cited by Bryman (2009) to have reported the findings of a qualitative study of 33 US departmental chairs who had been identified as having excelled in their roles as heads. They identified six discrete roles that emerged out of an examination of specific examples that the interviewees gave of helping a member of academic staff to grow professionally:

- **Provider**: Facilitating the scholarly work of staff through arranging resources and informing/enabling/adjusting workloads and schedules to smooth the progress of the scholarly activity of staff.
- **Advocacy**: Championing the cause of staff within and beyond the university.
- **Mentorship**: Acting as models for research activities, sharing knowledge and expertise about publishing and funding, and commenting on others' work.
- **Encouraging**: Identifying what kinds of encouragement are needed for staff.

- **Collaborating:** Collaborating with staff over publications, etc. This occurred least frequently (12 out of 33 chairs) because it is time-consuming.
- **Challenging:** Prodding and inspiring others towards better performance and monitoring progress.

Creswell and Brown also report that the degree to which these roles were employed varied according to the stage of career of a member of academic staff. The roles of providing and enabling are consistent with the finding that initiating structure is important to the head's role; and mentorship, with its emphasis on modelling behaviour, being consistent with idealized influence.

Benoit and Graham are also mentioned to have reported the findings of a similar kind of study in the USA. These findings derive from an examination of the leadership of 13 departmental chairs who had been identified as successful by their peers. They distinguish between four groups of roles: Administrative, Leadership, Interpersonal, and Resource development. The leadership roles are obviously of particular interest in this context. Bryman concludes that the four most *prominent aspects of leadership roles among* these successful leaders were: (i) Being visionary; (ii) Being an internal advocate (promoting the department to internal audiences); (iii) Undertaking external liaison (advancing the department through contacts with external constituencies); (iv) Treating faculty with respect (ability to represent faculty or department to central administration, ability to say 'no' when necessary, enthusiasm for the department, ability to handle difficult people, possessing a strategic vision for department, ability to foster a collegial department, distributing faculty work equitably, and personal carriage, especially the possession of the key attributes of integrity, honesty and fairness.

Definitions

Effective Leadership, in this study, is defined as ability to work with or through people to achieve the mission and vision of the faculty and the university in a manner that brings about continual improvement.

Operationalizing the Competences of Deans

The study perceives two types of competences of deans: *technical competences* and *leadership competences*. Technical competences refer to qualification, rank and professional respect; while leadership competences are measurable patterns of behaviour essential for managing mission and vision, people and results and to be identified and operationalized by *personal or self-competences*, *competences for working with others* and *performance competences*.

Methodology

Study Design

To gain insights into these questions, a qualitative exploratory design was employed based on mixed method approach involving surveys and interviews. The design was largely informed by an action research strategy which aimed at improving institutional systems and effectiveness of deans. The original objective of the institutional process was to develop functional job descriptions to guide deans in their leadership roles and to serve as the basis for accountability of their leadership in the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA). The study used an open-ended survey approach and in-depth interviews (both face-to-face and telephone) to elicit information on what Heads of Department and lecturers believe should be the set of competences that effective deans should possess. Deans were also asked to identify the set of skills they believe they need to be more effective and the key challenges they face in leading their faculties and schools. The view of the Vice-Chancellor was also sought in the process. Survey data was then collected from two other institutions, one additional public university and one private university in Accra, to enhance understanding of what was considered key characteristics and factors for effective deanship leadership of tertiary institutions in Ghana.

The study also explored questions about the process of becoming deans and how this could affect their effectiveness. The information was collated and grouped by common themes to isolate key competences perceived by academics as being most important for enhancing the effectiveness of deans. Qualitative techniques are normally employed for gaining understanding into social phenomenon.

Population and Sample

The sample frame for the study was made up of the Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, all Deans, all HODs, Programme Coordinators and all lecturers who have been in the University for at least two years. In all, data was gathered from 39 participants made up of the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, four Deans from Faculties of Accounting and Finance, Management, Communication and Information Technology (IT), and the School of Graduate Studies, three HODs, two Programme Coordinators and three lecturers from each of the three faculties and the Graduate School making 12 lecturers in all. In addition, there were two Deans each from the two other universities, one Vice-Dean, and five lecturers each and an emeritus professor with more than forty years of experience in the two public universities in the study.

Results

What defines competence of an Academic Dean?

When asked the question ‘Who is a competent Dean?’ a myriad of concepts were thrown up. The following are extracts of some of the responses:

- A competent dean is one who is conscious of the various departments of his institution and who seeks to promote the various units; one who is a team builder and handles conflicts well; one who has networks with various institutions both local and international and one who uses his influence to bring resources to promote teaching and research.
- A competent dean is one who does efficient management of the faculty, ensures collaboration with Heads of the Departments and other Units of the Faculty, encourages faculty members to publish and be promoted and seeks the general welfare of the staff of the faculty
- One who provides academic leadership, cares about the members of the faculty as well as students of the faculty
- A person who is able to marshal resources from internal and external sources within the mandate of the university to manage the faculty effectively
- A competent dean is one who provides good leadership and direction to his /her faculty and liaises well between the Vice-Chancellor and publics.
- A dean who understands the needs of the faculty, and is able to harness the resources needed to lead the faculty effectively.
- A competent dean is one who is able to provide leadership for his faculty as well as combine both material and human resources of the faculty for overall realization of the goals of the faculty and university.
- A competent dean is one who realizes and communicates an understanding that his or her role is most often that of facilitating, the triumphs of the university, colleagues, alumni, students and staff.

Based on the above, the study defines a competent dean as:

One who does efficient and effective management of the faculty, develops and communicates a strong vision for the Faculty, is able to work with others to achieve the goals of the faculty and aspirations of members, ensures team work and collaboration, resolves conflicts within the faculty, has international and local networks, is able to mobilize needed resources to accomplish the goals of the faculty and is able to create visibility for the faculty.

Characteristics of a Competent Dean

In all about 21 characteristics and competences isolated and grouped under the two categories were identified. These are *leadership competences* and *technical competences*. Five core themes for leadership competences were identified, including – *personal competence, visionary competence, administrative competence, people competence and networking competence*). About 84 per cent of the respondents indicated that technical competence, typified by professorial rank, academic qualification and years of experience and is a key requirement for deanship but that alone was not enough. Leadership skills were cited three times more than technical skills. All respondents (100 per cent) mentioned one or more of the four leadership competences as opposed to only 84 per cent of respondents who mentioned technical competences. People competences or competences for working with others received the second highest mention, followed by administrative competences. However, being *visionary* is the single most cited characteristic (cited 18 times in all the questionnaires). This is why, unlike other studies, this study considered visionary a theme on its own. Administrative competence was mentioned 21 times in different forms, and networks appeared four times.

All the respondents underscored the *importance of people competence, or competence for working with others*, as the most important competence and the one with the highest frequency. The analysis revealed that working with people was isolated about 46 times from the 39 questionnaires, because it was repeated in other instances and in other forms. The key factors for working with others include working with superiors (VCs and Pro-VCs), working with peers (deans of other faculties), and working with junior colleagues (HODs and lecturers) as well as relating well with students. Communication, listening, trustworthiness, loyalty, team playing, interpersonal skills, approachability, affability, fairness, firmness, gentleness, humility, democratic, etc, were among the frequently cited, with communication, team skills and conflict resolution and negotiation topping the list.

One most important areas that was mentioned by all respondents including the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, HODs and Lecturers were soft skills to resolve conflicts, solve problems and negotiation skills for managing meetings. Soft skills also topped the list of the working with people of competence).

HODs and Coordinators cited – (the Dean must listen to others, try to understand others, be patient, respect members in the faculty, including students, must know how to address people use communication skills effectively, and be flexible. This represents about 54 per cent of that category). Others included (functioning as role model and change agent, keeping his word, and keeping his promises no matter the challenges).

Administrative Competences

In respect of Administrative Competences the most commonly mentioned were research, curriculum development, skills for programme accreditation, strategic leadership and accounting. Some HODs said it is embarrassing to find at the end of the year that no publications or few publications comes from their faculty in general or to see accreditations documents being taken forth and back many times. In respect of research, others mentioned that the dean must be able to support or organize support for others in the department to publish and, therefore, be promoted. Almost all HODs expressed some concern about the fact that the administrative roles of deans undermine their ability to publish; hence they suggested that the deans should form groups or teams for research and publication purposes or organize some sort of support for research. Administrative roles mentioned included (that deans must have a vision of how they want to see their Faculty or School to develop and the strategies adopted to position the faculty as such, develop annual work plans and budgets that work, source for the funding, attend numerous meetings and make the Faculty visible. Some lecturers said it is so difficult to meet the deans in their offices to discuss anything: they are almost always in meetings. Human resource management is another administrative responsibility of deans. One Dean noted that he had to appear in court for the non-confirmation of a staff's appointment because the Human Resource section of the registry did not prompt the appraisal of that staff on time to discuss the non-performance report of an probationary employee exactly at the end of the year, thus resulting in a lawsuit. From this example, it became obvious that deans must have some knowledge of human resource and legal matters.

Other interesting findings in the area of performance were: course preparation skills and IT skills to be able to use moodle effectively, skills in quality assurance, particularly documentation and records management, resource management, financial management skills, i.e., budgeting, financial statements preparation and sourcing for grants or winning grants). Others skills in the administrative competence category are that the dean must be the Liaison Officer-in-Chief of the faculty, the face of the faculty, and the mouth piece of the faculty. The Vice-Chancellor, on his part, stressed Quality Assurance competences as lacking and cited developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at faculty level, monitoring and follow-through of planned activities, feedback and follow-up actions as well as documentation). Other critical skills for deans that the VC and Pro-VC mentioned are conflict resolution, grievances management, and facilitation of peace, which some lecturers also mentioned). The VC added that when there is no harmony or peace, effectiveness is undermined, teamwork also breaks down and performance suffers.

Personal competences mentioned include the following: that the dean must be visible, confident among his peers, must keep his promise, be credible and trustworthy, know his/her strengths and weakness. Credibility and trustworthiness topped the list in this category.

Summary of the key Competences identified

Two categories of competences were identified. These are Leadership Competences and Technical Competences

Leadership Competences

Administrative, people, visionary, networking, personal competences

Personal Competences

Honesty, trustworthiness, credibility, self-awareness confidence, self-respect.

People Competences

Competences for working with others include: Respect, patience, listening, soft skills - conflict management, negotiations skills, facilitation of peace and harmony, and being a change agent and role model. To support the importance of this competence area, the Vice-Chancellor said ‘ leadership is a symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers in order to achieve the goals of the organisation’. It does not only depend on the leader, it is what both leaders and followers do together to achieve the vision and mission.

Administrative Competences

Planning, organizing human and other resources needed, financial management (budgeting, financial statements, grants or sourcing for funding, HR and legal matters,).

Visionary Competences

Strategic thinking, that is, creatively positioning the Faculty for the future and to be visible, innovation, conceptual skills, providing direction to faculty members, and developing a sense of purpose for members of the faculty.

Networking Competences

This involves ability to establish the requisite social capital, local and international networks, exchanges and collaborations for exchanges. This involves national and international networks. The deans must have networks with various institutions, both local and international and he must use his influence

to bring resources to promote teaching and research and the overall visibility of the faculty.

Technical or Performance Competences

These include research grants skills, research and publication skills, curriculum development, course preparation, use of ICT in teaching and learning, instructional competencies for pedagogy, quality assurance, public relation, marketing, liaison performance competences.

Which Competences influence a Deans Leadership Effectiveness?

The Competences identified in line with studies cited in the literature include the following

- Vision and strategy development
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, performance management and accountability systems
- Effective communication.
- Results- or goal-oriented
- Team skills.
- Follow-through and follow-up
- Decision-making, negotiation, conflict management and problem solving
- Quality assurance, documentation and records management
- Develop and communicate job descriptions, annual work plans and appraise performance of faculty members.
- Management systems and focus on improving teaching, learning, research and community service.
- Competence of members.
- Project management skills. Use goals, milestones, and control mechanisms to measure and manage performance.
- Human resource management skills.

The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the lack of a quality manual or a comprehensive management guide which provides clear job descriptions to all category of staff, standard operating process for key processes and major policies pulled together in a reference working document is a major drawback for governance and accountability of deans. In his words, 'Deans must have job descriptions which can be used as a basis of accountability for their stewardship, otherwise how should we judge their effectiveness?'

How does the process of becoming a dean affect commitment and consequently effectiveness?

How are deans chosen in Ghana and the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA)

Three processes of choosing a dean have emerged in Ghana. These include the *elective, selective and appointive* Deans. For example some public universities like the KNUST, still use the elective process where faculty members vote to elect their deans. The second is the *selective process*, which is what is practised at the University of Professional Studies, Accra. The University of Ghana, Legon, has introduced the appointive system where a search committee advertises for interested faculty members who are qualified to apply. Applicants are screened through an interview process by the search committee. The process of becoming a dean in the University of Ghana has evolved from the elective, to selective and now to appointive deanship system. *Appointive deanship* is an executive position with clear terms of reference. An executive dean has a managerial role and cannot be promoted to a higher academic rank within his/her tenure of office, which is normally three years. The *elective deanship* is normally for two years with a possibility of re-election, while the *selective deanship* is for three years with the possibility of renewal for another term, based on satisfactory performance. Unlike the appointive deanship, both selective and elective deans are academic deans, combining academic work with the managerial and leadership roles. As such, academic deans are expected to teach, research and publish, and can be promoted to the next higher rank, while still in office as deans.

The University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) subscribes to the selective process. To become a Dean in UPSA, one must be an Associate Professor and member of that faculty. In a faculty where there is no Associate Professor, a Senior Lecturer may be considered or a qualified person from a cognate faculty may be considered. Deans are appointed by the Vice-Chancellor in consultation with the Heads of Department for a term of three years, with the possibility of a second term upon satisfactory performance. Although the requirement does not expressly prescribe the years of experience a candidate should have in academics or in an administrative position, but in practice, the candidate should have been a Head of Department (HOD) before or held an equivalent administrative position as an academic. This is a latent but potent working requirement. Deans are then chosen from the University on the basis of technical competence rather than their leadership competence because there is no clearly defined system of critically assessing the leadership ability of candidates. The Vice-Chancellors use their discretion to choose those they believe

would help them achieve their vision for the University in consultation with the Heads of Department. There are no clearly defined requirements for deanship in the Statutes of the University, except for the process of selecting a dean.

Which Deanship Process do Respondents Prefer?

The results indicate that about 57.2 preferred election and 42.8 preferred appointment whether by selection or by advertisement and recruitment provided that the recruitment is done internally. Worthy of note is that all the deans and vice deans preferred appointment, while 82 per cent of lecturers preferred election. Obviously, the preferences seem to be coloured by the self-interest or position of the respondents.

Some respondents posit that appointment of deans should be based on recommendation from the HODs as well as on experience and performance or contribution towards the development of the faculty and university.

Respondents who prefer the selection process believe that it is important for the Management or VCs to have people they can trust or work with to achieve their vision. Arguable, one respondent indicated 'when deans are elected, there is the likelihood that a popular candidate without the requisite skills and competences will be chosen to the detriment of the faculty and the university at large'. Another respondent stated, 'This will promote progress because the management will feel comfortable working with a person they can trust'. Another respondent remarked, 'it enables the president to work comfortably with the team he thinks fit for the faculties'. A Professor Emeritus who had been in a faculty in the University of Ghana for over forty years and the University of Professional Studies for about three remarked, 'The great virtue in the selective process lies in the fact that the Vice Chancellor can really decide on the best team to lead the university with because he knows the professors and their capability. If he selects cronies, then he cannot succeed. It is important to have people a leader can work and relate well with to prevent unnecessary conflicts'. He also cited a case in the University of Ghana in 1976, where a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and full professor contested for the Deanship and the Senior Lecturer was elected. According to him, this created a series of leadership challenges in the faculty. To start with, the faculty was divided right after the elections. Another case he used to support his position for the selective process is a similar situation which occurred in the Economics Department where a lecturer was selected over a full professor, because the lecturers outnumbered the professors in the department. He said the elective process is a popularity contest, but popularity has the test of merit'. The Prof. Emeritus then concludes that Vice-Chancellors should have the free hand to choose those they believe they can work with

to achieve their vision and be held accountable for their performance. Other respondents who prefer the selection process said it would promote progress because the management would feel comfortable working with a person they can trust. The argument against the selective process, however, is that it could breed cronyism or sycophancy. Moreover, even though it can reduce conflicts among senior members of the faculty, it also has the potential to result in the formation of cliques.

On the other hand, those who prefer elections believe that the university should be a democratic environment. Additionally, they argue that elected deans will have the support of their colleagues although they may not have the support of their superiors. They believe that a democratically elected leader will seek the welfare of the faculty members and 'reflect the voice of the faculty'. A respondent said electing the dean means that faculty members have a hand in who becomes their leader, and thus engender cooperation from colleagues as well as prevent dictatorship or autocratic rule.

A respondent who prefers appointment said: 'You face a panel which is impartial and you prove to the panel that you can do the job, and the panel will recommend you based on qualification and merit. This approach is based on competence and merit'. Another respondent who shares the same view said 'The dean will be well scrutinized and grilled to be sure he has all the competences needed'.

Many have described the elective process as a welfare system that is political vis-a-vis the appointive system which is seen as an accountable leadership concept. In the elective process, the dean's first commitment is to the welfare of the constituents who put him in office, particularly in the face of possible re-election after two years. In the selective process, however, is believed to have a potential to induce suffering from autocracy or biases and cronyism. However, the VC argued that selective system is preferable since higher education is more about accountability and it is the leaders' stewardship and leadership that will be put to the test.

What has Stronger Influence on a Dean's Effectiveness: Competence or Selection Process?

In answering this question majority were of the view that an ineffective process or a flawed process is likely to yield a flawed choice no matter the candidate's competence. There is no doubt that with the current process technical competence is weighed above leadership competence. However, others believe that an incompetent dean has too little time to learn and build capacity on the job. Leadership competence should be introduced into the selection

or recruitment process or before deans take office. Clearly defined criteria for deanship including qualification, experience, rank should be defined and communicated widely to the university community. A leadership assessment programme should be introduced into the recruitment process. The assessment of leadership competence should not be limited to a competency based or behavioural interview as is often the case even with the appointive process. Universities in Ghana should have leadership development training for all deans upon appointment and the training should cover key competences identified in this study – leadership, soft skills, strategic leadership, human resource issues, financial management for leaders, project management, performance management, quality assurance, public relations and communication skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study identified two categories of competences of deans, namely, technical competence and leadership competence. Technical competence is defined by qualification, rank and professional respect. Five dimensions of leadership competence were identified, including personal competence, people competence, administrative competence, visionary competence and networking competences. Leaders with a realistic and well communicated vision, good problem-solving skills, and people skills should also have a good personal skill, be resilient and learn how to navigate the situation well enough to achieve desired goals. The study recommends the appointment of deans through standard recruitment practices, rather than election or selection. It also recommends leadership assessment and training for leadership competences before a dean takes office.

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