Leadership Theories and the Desired Competencies of the 21st Century Organization Leader

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to review existing literature on leadership theories and the desired competencies of the 21st Century Organization Leader, collect and summarize empirical evidence that fits within the context of this study. The modern organization is operating in a context of complex problems that are non-predictable, dynamic and do not have definite solutions. This is coupled with the global sustainability issues of pandemics, global terrorism and environmental pollution, among others. The 21st Century leader needs to have competencies that are sustainable for the present, the future and have capabilities for survival in this digital era. The world is not static and as it evolves, so has leadership evolved and leaders require competencies that will help run the 21st century organization successfully. There are constant changes in the speed of communication, expansive networks that are needed to run organizations and the upsurge in trade volumes. All these have altered the ways that a leader can achieve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. From the literature review findings, leaders need to be intelligent, manage change, lead teams, manage performance and communicate effectively. These competencies enable them to understand and adapt relevant leadership theories that have practical value and can help them to better understand, predict and control the highly dynamic contemporary organization.

Key words: Leadership, Competencies, Theories and 21st Century organization

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1. Introduction

Northouse (2016) defines leadership as an interactive process in which a leader influences his or her followers towards the attainment of goals. It is a multidirectional influence relationship within which mutual purposes are developed and the leader works with the followers to create real change. Kovac et al (2015) defines a leader as a member of a group who has an additional role of ensuring that group tasks are being done well. In addition to this, the leader has a sense of responsibility and is sensitive to the needs of the group members. However Knies et al (2016) differ with this and assert that an individual can be a leader without necessarily being a member of a group. This is because an individual with demonstrated ability to make personal change is a leader in his or her private capacity. Northouse (2016) adds that individuals believe that leadership can enhance one’s professional, personal and social life. This is why
organizations are continuously seeking individuals with leadership ability as they bring unique skills and ability to the organization that ultimately improve organizational performance.

Lussier and Achua (2016) define leadership theory as “an explanation of some aspect of leadership; theories have practical value because they are used to better understand, predict and control successful leadership” (p. 16). Allen (2018) adds that the main purpose of a leadership theory is to inform the practice of leadership. These theories are classified into behavioural, integrative, contingency and trait. Uzohue et al (2016) state that many espoused leadership theories view leadership as being based on process, traits, personality, behaviours and certain skills. Tiftik and Kilic (2015) contend that servant leadership theory views the leader as the vision holder of the organization who sets forth the short and long term objectives of the organization and gives direction to the followers. Yu et al (2018) opine that that leader-member exchange theory is a useful approach for understanding how workplace dynamics are influenced by the prevailing leader-follower relationships. Nelson and Squires (2017) assert that adaptive leadership theory can be applied by leaders in solving the complex and multifaceted problems in contemporary organizations. Zakeer et al (2016) advise that the internal and external environment of organizations keep on changing and this requires the leader to adapt to the emerging complexities by using contingency leadership theory.

Over time, leadership theories have evolved from being focused on traits to contingency as scholarly interest in leadership increased significantly during the early part of the last century. According to Dike et al (2016) the role of leaders in the 21st century is becoming more cumbersome and those who occupy leadership positions are expected to become conversant with leadership theories as these are key components of the social and economic development processes of contemporary organizations. Khan and Nawaz (2016) confirm this and add that leadership theories when appropriately applied in leading organizations can guide leaders in the running of organizations. Mullins (2016) states that the dynamic nature of contemporary organizations is mandating leaders to move away from the culture of command and control to get work done. Sayed and Edgar (2019) report that what is working in the 21st Century organization is the use of coaching, support and empowerment. This means that the leader-follower relationship has to thrive on the inspiration of people to realize their potential, creating an environment that enhances productive interpersonal behaviour and motivation. Tiftik and Kilic (2015) assert that the 21st Century leader is faced with the daunting task of leadership that cannot be compared to leadership in the 20th Century. Interestingly, the 20th Century leader wielded a lot of power and could change organizations and even assert their personal values as per their wishes. However, the 21st Century leader plays key proactive roles and must ensure that organizations sustain competitive advantage and stay viable in their operating contexts (Uzohue et al, 2016).

Dike et al (2016) opine that the key components of leadership is problem solving, decision-making and taking responsibility. Based on this, leaders of the 21st century are expected to be competent and capable of designing the most appropriate interventions of managing the complexities of contemporary organizations. De Smet et al (2018) assert that the 21st century employees are affected by many challenges and the leader should have the social intelligence to connect and build rapport with the employees and make the workplace conducive. Northouse (2016) sets forth some of the key competencies of a contemporary leader; motivating followers intrinsically, creating room for creative thinking, facilitating the planning and implementation of an organization’s strategic objectives, tolerance of follower ambiguity and the ability to read followers so as to change their view of what they think is possible. According to Dike et al (2016) the modern organizations are becoming complex because of the dynamics of a knowledge-driven global economy and the prevalence of borderless
organizations. Other emerging complexities are powers of emerging technologies, social media and global politics that is connected by the internet. The contemporary organization has to survive in this dynamic environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership Theories

Kovac et al (2015) opine that there are several leadership theories that do not contradict but complement each other. Zakeer et al (2016) contend that “leadership theories have been refined and modified with the passage of time and none of the theories is completely relevant” (p.1). It is interesting to note that interpersonal relationships, psycho-social support, information sharing, organization rules and regulations have a significant impact on the applicability of leadership theories. Khan and Nawaz (2016) confirm that the applicability of any leadership theory depends on the ever-changing modern organization dynamics. According to Teahen et al (2019) several leadership theories inform organization work. Each theory has components that are very valuable to the contextualization and actualization of organization leadership. Khan and Nawaz (2016) observe that leadership authors have espoused theories with proponents that focus on the roles of followers and the mind set of their leaders in shaping organization change. Most 21st century leaders embrace the theories and fulfill their roles with the most applicable theory.

Wooi et al (2017) assert that the leadership competency theory is a relevant guiding framework for the practice of leadership. Zhang et al (2018) on the other hand attest that transformational leadership theory can be applied in an organization where there is a need to enhance employee creativity and innovativeness because a transformational leader motivates employee innovative behaviour. Uzohue et al (2016) assert that the application of participative leadership theory whereby employees are involved in decision-making improves employee commitment and enhances collaboration. However, there are some unique leadership theories that inform practice in the modern organizations. These are contingency theory, adaptive leadership theory, servant leadership theory and leader-member exchange theory (Northouse, 2016). Amanchukwu et al (2015) assert that these particular theories are relevant to contemporary organizations because the context of leadership is very fluid and keeps on changing.

2.1.1 Contingency Leadership Theory

Lussier and Achua (2016) state that the proponent of this theory was Fred Edward Fiedler in 1951. Fiedler was the first author to opine on how the situational variables, a leader’s behaviour and personality interact. According to this theory, leader effectiveness depends to a large extent on the fit between his or her style and the job context. Wooi et al (2017) assert that organization performance depends on the leader using a suitable leadership theory that is in tandem with the prevailing situation in the organization. Fassinger and Shullman (2017) on the other hand assert that the evolving contingency theories of leadership focus on the relationship that the leader has with his or her followers and their characteristics. There is an additional emphasis on the needs, values and worldviews of the followers. Northouse (2016) adds that these should be reflected on the integrity and ethical behaviour of the 21st Century leader. Zhang et al (2018) assert that for a leader to be effective, there has to be a match between the approach used and the situation. Contingency theory explains leader effectiveness in the different scenarios in the organization and the impact of the leader’s behaviour in these scenarios. To be effective, a leader has to adapt, anticipate and accommodate the unique situations while at the same time comprehend the potential of his or her followers to deal with the situation (Khan & Nawaz, 2016).
Northouse (2016) on the other hand affirms that contingency leadership theory espouses that the interacting effects of the leader’s behaviour together with the organization context influence employee performance. Zhang et al (2018) adds that there are contextual variables that support the application of this theory in the work place. These are strategic objectives, workflow processes and organization culture. However, Vidal et al (2017) observe that some scholars cite ambiguities surrounding the contingency leadership theory. Omar (2016) confirms this by stating that this theory does not take into consideration leadership in highly volatile contexts such as firefighting, emergency medicine and law enforcement organizations. These contexts are dangerous and change very fast. Tiftic and Kilic (2015) agree with this and state that the theory focuses on more stable and predictable contexts. However, this theory is very applicable to leadership in the 21st century organization because it suggests that there is no particular approach to leadership that can work for every situation. This is because contemporary organizations operate in highly competitive contexts that keep on changing and a leadership style that is used to solve a problem today may not solve the same problem in the near future (Zakeer et al, 2016).

2.1.2 Adaptive Leadership Theory

The proponent of this theory was Heifetz and his associates from 1994 to 2009. This unique theory is a shift from leadership personality focused theories to “making progress by going beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the new capacity to drive anew” (Bellamy, 2016, p. 229). Northouse (2016) defines adaptive leadership as the practice of mobilizing followers to tackle the emerging challenges in an organization and overcome them. Salicru (2017) adds that leading adaptively entails mobilizing followers to solve a problem while organizing and focusing their attention on the problem. The leader behaviour and action is focused on encouraging employees to resolve key changes in their lives. According to Northouse (2016) adaptive leadership is a “framework designed to explain leadership for organizations of the 21st Century that concentrate on knowledge or information as a core commodity rather than the production of goods and services that was prevalent in the industrial era” (p. 260).

Haworth et al (2018) state that adaptive leadership theory conceptualizes leadership through the daily interactions between a leader and his or her followers. This theory focuses on leadership behaviour that are in tandem with adaptation, innovation and learning. This theory recognises the 21st century workplace complexity and espouses that an adaptive leader should support rather than take control of complex processes and problem solving. Teahen et al (2019) contend that the future of the contemporary organization depends on adaptive leadership. There is a myriad of complex challenges and ever-changing client demands that are impacting contemporary organizations. This mandates organizations to build institutional leadership capacity to adaptively manage these complexities. However, Teahan et al (2019) cautions that adaptive leadership cannot be successful if the leader is not willing to “listen, process, and empathize with other people’s opinion as adaptive leadership focuses on the team and not the power of one’s leadership position” (p.2). Dugan (2017) on the other hand observes that this theory reinforces the competing power dynamics in contemporary organizations as employees may develop the unhealthy dependence on the leader’s direction while other non-versatile employees may choose to resist this direction. This means that conflict may occur at the expense of collaboration towards solving the emerging issues in the organization. These authors underscore the importance of the interaction between the leader, followers and how they handle the presenting complexities in the modern organization through the application of adaptive leadership theory. Northouse (2016) asserts that adaptive leadership is a useful
framework that leaders of the 21st century organization can use to conceptualize and address the complex challenges that face these organizations.

2.1.3 Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Northouse (2016) opines that the proponents of the Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) were Dansereau, Graen and Haga in 1972. The earliest studies espoused that the LMX theory viewed leadership as a vertical dyad that entailed the leader’s relationship to the work unit. Lussier and Achua (2016) define a dyad as “the individualised relationship between a leader and each follower in a work unit” (p. 232). These vertical dyads show two unique characteristics of relationships that are based on negotiated roles (in-group) and those that are based on the formal employment contract (out-group). Lussier and Achua (2016) add that the in-group followers have strong social relationships with their leader that is characterised by respect, loyalty and influence. The out-group followers on the other hand have a strictly task-centred relationship with the leader. This leadership theory is very unique in the sense that it thrives on the dyadic relationship between the employee and the leader. The exchange currency of this reciprocal relationship is employee contribution, affection and respect (Lopez-Ibort et al, 2019). Bauer and Erdogan (2015) define LMX theory as “the unique relationship-based social exchange between leaders and members” (p. 157). In the organization context, high LMX relationships exude mutual trust and reciprocity while low LMX relationships are limited to what is outlined in the formal employment contract. Lopez-Ibort et al (2019) have set forth the components of a high quality LMX relationship. Employees that report this relationship receive more challenging tasks and obtain leadership support in carrying out these tasks. These in-group employees also enjoy close contact with the leaders, get more feedback and are trusted. They also receive formal and informal benefits to reciprocate their dedication to the organization (Northouse, 2016).

However, Furunes et al (2015) cautions that LMX theory focuses on the quality of the dyad relationship between the leader and his or her subordinates at the expense of the organization context and the characteristics of the subordinate. Laksita (2018) affirms this by stating that there is bound to be inequity because the leader has the autonomy to give tangible rewards and autonomous support among other benefits to the members of the in-group while the members of the out-group are left out. Furunes et al (2015) adds that subordinates with low quality relationships with their leader experience bullying, job-related stress and discrimination. Interestingly, Mansueti et al (2016) contend that the application of LMX theory enhances the understanding of the effects of leadership on organizational behaviour as the quality of the reciprocal relationships solicits positive employee behaviour in the work context. Bauer and Erdogan (2015) confirm that the 21st century leader can apply this theory in the organization and enhance high quality relationships with employees leading to a motivation to reciprocate, loyalty and higher levels of voluntary behaviour by the in-group employees.

2.1.4 Servant Leadership Theory

The proponent of this theory was Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. Sendjaya (2015) defines servant leadership as “a holistic approach to leadership that engages both leaders and followers through service orientation, authenticity focus, relational emphasis, moral courage, spiritual motivation and transforming influence” (p. 1). Northouse (2016) observes that servant leadership theory is distinct from other leadership theories as it espouses that a leader should deliberately put the needs and aspirations of other people first as it is a follower-centred approach to leadership. Blanchard and Broadwell (2018) assert that most contemporary organizations are being led by self-serving leaders with employees who assume that they are working for the leader and are fixated with blindly adhering to the laid down rules and regulations. Tanno and Banner (2018)
caution that this is a risk because the synergy of the organization is focused on moving up the hierarchy and away from the organization’s customers and stakeholders. This underscores the importance of the servant leadership theory as it espouses that servant leaders turn the hierarchical pyramid upside down so that the customers are at the top with the leader working for the people, the employees become responsible and the leader is responsive to the people (Laub, 2018).

However, Smith (2016) states that servant leadership is a very difficult theory to apply in the 21st century organisation because a servant leader has to deal with organization politics, resolve conflicts, manage expectations of stakeholders, make decisions that leave some people unhappy and deal with a backlog of work due to the leader’s adherence to serving others before the self. In addition to this, leaders who embrace servant leadership risk appearing as wise fools because “they model deep listening, collaboration, persuasion, community building and concern for the common good rather than advocating actions that manipulate, coerce, cower, diminish and control as first options” (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2018, p.23). Davis (2017) differs with this notion and states that the true power of a servant leader must come from the followers’ confidence and trust. This is reinforced by the humble role that a servant leader embodies as he or she places emphasis on the needs of the followers than his or her desires. Blanchard and Broadwell (2018) underscore the applicability of servant leadership theory in the contemporary organization as the servant leader is expected to embrace broader conceptual thinking and have the foresight to understand lessons from past challenges, realities of the prevailing context and the likely consequences of the uncertain future. A leader’s conceptualization and foresight are very important in leading the contemporary organization.

2.2 The 21st Century Organization

Dike et al (2015) asserts that the 21st century is abound with unprecedented social crisis, religious extremists, terrorism and global financial crisis. This makes it an era of excess baggage in terms of the complexities that organizations and their leaders are facing. Vidal et al (2017) contend that the complexity of this century makes leadership very difficult because organizations are made up of people with the ability to create and selfishly impose their greatness in the work context. The 21st century leader is supposed to sustain organizations by aligning the interests of such individuals with the organizational objectives. Dike et al (2015) observe that the modern organization is operating in the context of the complex and new global economy that is knowledge-driven. Hassanzadeh et al (2015) add that due to the highly competitive nature of the global economy, the leaders must create a work context that enhances employee productivity. The 21st century organization has to deal with global business practices, serve customers who are more aware of their consumer rights and strive to survive in societies that know their social and economic objectives. Grigolopoulos, (2019) asserts that the contemporary organization must be ethically viable. It is the responsibility of the leader to put into place an inclusive process that highlights the organization’s ethical values, create an environment that sustains ethical behaviour and instil a sense of shared responsibility in upholding ethical behaviour. Child (2015) affirms this by stating that the contemporary organization must always guard against ethical lapses by enforcing home and host country ethical standards. This is done by ensuring that these standards are part and parcel of the organization’s practices and are incorporated into the implementation of decisions made.

Boe and Bang (2017) contend that the modern organization needs employees who have individual character strengths that can help them to cope with the challenges of the organization. Some of these are; agreeableness, persistence and extroversion. The contemporary organization is also composed of the baby boomers, generation X and Y.
Stanimir (2015) highlights the benefits of generation Y in the contemporary organization; they adapt easily, manage new technologies and social network very well while the baby boomers appreciate hard work and career advancement. The Generation X on the other hand look for development in work and are career-oriented. Dike et al (2015) state that the modern organization must be sustainable. This can be done by giving the employees the tools to become resilient and adaptive to stress and adversity. At the same time, the leaders must understand the emerging technologies, the needs of employees and delegate meaningful responsibilities that empower employee capabilities to deliver and enhance the organization’s sustainability. The contemporary organization leader must therefore have the appropriate competencies that will help him or her to enhance organizational prosperity, motivate employees to perform efficiently and empower them to use their talents to enhance the organization’s competitive advantage (Hawi et al, 2015).

2.3 Leadership Competencies

Hassanzadeh et al (2015) define competency as behaviour patterns that influence employee performance in the workplace. Sayed and Edgar (2019) define leadership competencies as the combination of skills that enable a leader to perform his or her job effectively. A competent leader displays high levels of performance. Heath et al (2017) opine that the world is not static and as it evolves, so has leadership evolved and leaders require competencies that will help run the 21st century organization successfully. There are constant changes in the speed of communication, expansive networks that are needed to run organizations and the upsurge in trade volumes. All these have altered the ways that a leader can achieve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Clegg et al (2016) opine that the activities that are associated with leadership exist independently of the people who use them. Leadership competencies are subject to constant scrutiny against the rigours of leading dynamic organizations. The adage that leaders are born is no longer applicable as effective leadership inheres in the behaviour, knowledge, ability and skills of the leader (Tiftik & Kilic, 2015).

Lussier and Achua (2016) state that the 21st century leader has to be highly competent as this is what makes up for his or her ability and impacts on organizational effectiveness. Allen (2018) observes that before the industrial revolution, a leader was perceived as a superior being who was above reproach. His or her role was to ensure that employees performed their tasks based on a hierarchical organization structure and guided by strict rules and regulations. However, Tiftik and Kilic (2015) assert that the 21st century leader’s source of power is from the unique abilities and behaviour. Amanchukwu et al (2015) adds that the 21st century leaders is supposed to bring out the best in the followers, empowers them and ensure that the organizational goals are achieved by using the distinctive characteristics of employees. Bellamy (2016) opines that contemporary businesses mandate leaders to have people skills so as to act intuitively in attempting to understand and predict other people’s behaviour. This helps them to get along with people from diverse backgrounds. According to Dike et al (2015) the modern organization leader must be an effective communicator, great team player, change manager, performance manager, quick-thinker and effective decision maker who can creatively use the power of information technology to communicate and coordinate actions in a timely manner. With wisdom, Heath et al (2017) observes that unfortunately, organizations do not put value in investing in the development of their leaders to strengthen their competencies. Clegg et al (2016) agrees with this and adds that leaders need critical and technical people skills that will enable them to develop strategic perspectives, read disruptive market changes and identify new opportunities so that the organization can adapt in a timely manner. Shaikh et al (2018) recommend the following leadership competencies; career awareness, strategic leadership, conflict management, global mind set, and cultural sensitivity. Dike et al (2015)
on the other hand advises that some of the desired competencies for the 21st century leader are; change management, team leadership, communication, performance management and intelligence. Kolzow (2014) affirms this by stating that these competencies can help a leader to manage the contemporary organization due to relentless change within and outside the organization coupled with volatility and uncertainty in the organizational context.

2.4 The Desired Competencies of the 21st Century Leader

2.4.1 Change Management

Voehl and Harrington (2016) define change management as a formulated framework for deriving results by changing processes, workflow and employee behaviour. Change can be targeted at organizational culture, structure and procedures. Stouten et al (2017) assert that change management is a challenge for many organization leaders as it entails the application of strategies to anticipate barriers and minimize resistance from employees and stakeholders. Dinwoodie et al (2015) differs with this and advises that to sustain change in the 21st century organization, what is needed is change leadership and not change management. The authors further advise that change leadership entails addressing the beliefs, mind sets and the development of the most appropriate practices and behaviours that help the organization members to adapt to change. The modern organization has to be more competitive, efficient and be able to sustain itself. This is what motivates organizations to change by transforming their goals to have sustainable impact on systems and job roles (Stouten et al, 2017).

Smith et al (2015) assert that leaders as change managers cannot easily attain emergent change and transformation in an organization. The leader needs to be strategic in his or her approach by challenging the status quo and supporting the emerging change proposals and ideas. As a leader, modelling the change agenda through actions and behaviour is key to successful change management. Hao and Yazdanizard (2015) have set forth some key guidelines for effective change leadership. Some of these are; making changes that are attainable and are likely to shift the prevailing paradigm. Any change in an organization has potential outcomes. These should be highlighted regularly as key performance indicators. In addition to this, the leader should be open to new information that may support the redefinition of the change outcome. Dinwoodie et al (2015) affirms that change management is a key competency for the contemporary organization leader because the unpredictable journey of change is travelled by the followers who encounter hazards and threats. At the same time, as much as the change outcome is predetermined, the leader needs to manage the way that activities are modified in light of emerging information in the change process. This is very important due to the dynamic context that contemporary organizations are operating in (Naveed et al, 2017).

2.4.2 Team Leadership

Sanyal and Hisam (2018) define a team as a group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal or objective within a stipulated timeframe. Al Salman and Hassan (2016) attach a lot of importance to team work because it helps in enhancing creativity, improves interpersonal relationships, boosts emotional security and creates a healthy working environment. De Smet et al (2018) agrees with this and states that comparatively, team work output is higher than individual output especially when the work involved requires diverse knowledge and opinions. Kovac et al (2015) confirms this and states that teamwork also helps in developing the skills and perspectives of team members. Koning (2020) observes that the 21st century organization has turned the traditional hierarchical management style upside down and needs teams that are dynamic, diverse, empowered and high-performing. Morrison et al (2019) advise that team leadership requires a leader to; support team members to effectively
use their abilities, show fairness in decision-making, create a sense of common purpose and most importantly, model behaviour that shows and inspires team members to be respectful, helpful and cooperate with one another. Lussier and Achua (2016) add that effective team leadership requires a leader to have some of the following key skills; an effective communicator, ability to set realistic objectives, manage conflict and provide timely feedback.

De Smet et al. (2018) opine that the 21st century team leader should be someone who can help his or her followers make the right decisions, bring out the best in people, facilitate cooperation and monitor progress without micromanaging the team. As aptly put by Koning (2020) team leadership is like farming whereby the farmer does not pull out the growing crops but creates a conducive environment to enhance their growth and survival. Tiftik and Kilic (2015) advise that teamwork when properly utilized can play a key role in helping organizations to come up with rationalist solutions to emerging problems, timely information sharing and proactive communication leading to the enhancement of its potential and competitive advantage. However, Koning (2020) cautions that team members can be unmotivated, perform poorly, fail to collaborate with other teams and in some extreme cases, may make talented employees resign due to poor team leadership. Such a team cannot help the organization to compete in a highly competitive environment. Sanyal et al. (2018) opine that the 21st century leader has to influence teamwork by creating a clear and concise organization vision and managing the individual/team performance.

2.4.3 Communication

Sayed and Edgar (2019) opine that the ability to communicate is a key competency for the 21st Century leader. This is because the leader has to be available for communication, encourage the exchange of communication through listening, evaluate information from different perspectives and gauge the right amount and type of communication that he or she can share with employees. Pfeffermann (2020) agrees with this and adds that the execution of leadership roles in an organization rides on the back of communication. Metaphorically, it is worth noting that communication is the glue that links the leader to his or her followers. Ejimabo (2015) adds that a leader needs communications skills so as to relate to employees and enhance the sharing of emotional and social moments. At the same time, Luthra and Dahiya (2016) point out that a leader who is able to communicate effectively exchanges ideas mutually and in a responsive manner. Communication is like tethering all the components of dialog in a meaningful and enriching manner.

Luthra and Dahiya (2016) assert that the 21st century leader must be a highly effective communicator because contemporary organizations do not need a leader who is inaccessible and only communicates using ambiguous memos. Employees in modern organizations expect informal and intimate communication to drive the workplace agenda. According to Hassanzadeh et al. (2015) it is a leader’s communication skills that motivates and inspires employees to achieve organizational goals, helps the leader to understand and inspire them to emulate the principles and values that he or she inculcates in them. Ejimabo (2015) sets forth some of the key characteristics of leaders who are effective communicators; ability to connect follower ambitions and passion, a unique quality of listening patiently to others and possess a strong set of working principles that they incorporate into team processes.

Kerns (2016) highlights that effective leadership communication is very important in the modern organization and states that “communication is a fundamental practice area within the interpersonal people skills domain that can contribute to leadership effectiveness and business outcomes” (p. 11). Men (2016) agrees with this and adds that effective communication influences policy formulation, fosters the management of workplace engagement and sustains
the culture of employee engagement which leads to the successful positioning of business enterprises in the global marketplace.

2.4.4 Performance Management

Pradhan and Jena (2017) define employee performance as the outcome of an individual’s achievement after exerting effort on the job. The achievement is associated with getting meaningful work done. Nzuve and Njambi (2015) define employee performance as the successful completion of assigned tasks to pre-determined standards with the efficient and effective utilization of organizational resources. De Waal and Heijden (2015) advise that a proactive performance management system is imperative for the modern organization and employee performance objectives must be aligned with the organizational goals so that the performance management system is strategic and employee focused. According to Wen et al (2019) it is important for the 21st century organization leader to have performance management skills due to the changing organizational requirements, the rise of knowledge workers and the need for organizations to acquire and sustain competitive advantage. Nzuve and Njambi (2015) advise that the role of the leader in performance management is vital because of the effect of the leader’s influence on employee work behaviour.

De Waal and Van De Heijden (2015) contend that the contemporary organization is highly dynamic. This mandates the leader to have effective performance management skills so as to; maximize the potential of employees, manage group and individual performance by guiding the groups using their task-specific knowledge and experience to motivate the groups to achieve organizational objectives. Knies et al (2016) argue that performance management in the modern organization entails delegation of tasks as appropriate, providing timely solutions to performance problems and time management. At the same time, Hossain and Saleh (2016) adds that performance management without credible outputs is an act in futility. The leaders should ensure that there are performance results and feedback is provided to all team members to ensure that all the talents that exist within the workforce is tapped and contribute towards the achievement of organizational goals (Wen et al, 2019).

Knies et al (2016) insist that leaders have the strategic choice to influence performance management. This is because the leader has the mandate of shaping the organization’s strategy, structure, culture and shared knowledge. Ahmady et al (2016) define organization structure as the systematic coordination of tasks in an organization in line with its goals and objectives. Nene et al (2019) opine that the contemporary organization is embracing a flat organization structure so as to eliminate the hierarchical bureaucracies of a vertical organization structure and ease the monitoring of employee performance. Li (2019) advises that to be effective, most organizations review their structures from time to time to ensure that it contributes to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Ajagbe et al (2016) contend that an organization structure is a key component of performance management as it enhances the clarity of authority and reporting lines. This helps employees to know what is expected of them and their relationships and job roles with others. The 21st century leader should be able to put in place an organization structure that supports the performance management processes through a clear pattern of authority, promotes coordination of activities and the achievement of the organizational strategic objectives (Nene et al, 2019).

2.4.5 Intelligence

Gage and Smith (2016) define intelligence as an individual’s ability to see the world from different perspectives and achieve goals in diverse contexts. Health et al (2017) highlight some of the intelligence competencies that make a 21st Century leader successful. Some of these are;
emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence and gender intelligence. Lubbadeh (2020) defines emotional intelligence as the ability of an individual to understand and harmonise emotions and discriminate among them so that they can influence his or her thinking and actions. Cote (2017) observes that the 21st Century organization is fast-paced and involves continuous interaction with diverse groups of people. The modern organization leader should be emotionally intelligent so as to succeed in building interpersonal relationships and social support networks in the workplace. Gupta and Baja (2017) add that a leader needs to collaborate and communicate effectively with others. The ability to do this is based on his or her emotional intelligence. Udod et al (2020) contends that there is a link between leadership behaviour (as influenced by his or her emotions) and its influence on positive employee response to workplace challenges, affective commitment and enhanced performance. This mandates a leader to use empowerment and the management of emotions so as to elicit these positive and effective employee behaviour.

Lukic et al (2015) a leader’s grasp of the mutual beliefs, assumptions, values and behavioural norms that are developed and adopted by employees in a modern organization is important. Dangmei (2016) defines cultural intelligence as the ability to adapt seamlessly to new cultural contexts. A culturally intelligent person is skilled and flexible in understanding diverse cultures. According to De Smet et al (2015) the contemporary organization leaders need to have cultural intelligence so as to develop and sustain strong cultures across the organization. Lukic et al (2015) advise that a strong organization culture is characterised by a clear and precise philosophy of how tasks should be carried out and new employees are recruited based on their ability to adapt to the culture. Kiznyte et al (2015) assert that a strong organization culture eases the coordination of tasks, reduces conflict, influences the motivation of employees and mobilizes the creativity of employees. The leader can develop a strong organization culture in collaboration with the employees who have creative mind sets. The leader should also be the culture maintainer and ensure that the prevailing culture fosters understanding amongst employees and facilitates the building of capabilities (De Smet et al, 2015).

Heath et al (2017) contemporary organization leaders need to have a clear comprehension of the differences between men and women and the appreciation of the unique talents that they bring to the workplace. Annis and Merron (nd) assert that the 21st century leader should have gender intelligence because the engagement of the differences between men and women in organizations can improve communication, enhance problem solving, give a dual-sided approach to innovation and enhance the quality of decision-making. Due to the competitive nature of their operating contexts, organization leaders need to harness the talent of both men and women in the workplace. Heath et al (2017) asserts that this will go a long way in creating balanced and effective organizations. The 21st Century leader should have gender intelligence skills and go out of his or her way to push for the advancement of women. Heath et al (2017) adds that the leader should make a deliberate effort to understand, value and combine the contributions of men and women together so as to enhance the organization’s competitive advantage (Dugarova, 2018).

2.5 The Interplay between Leadership Theories and the Desired Competencies of the 21st Century Leader

Wooi et al (2017) state that the applicability of leadership theories to the modern organization is influenced by contextualization and expectations of leadership. Leadership theories are very important as they serve as the underpinning foundation of leadership approaches that a modern leader combines with his or her competencies. The 21st century leader should be able to
appreciate the significance and relevance of leadership theories as a guiding framework for leading contemporary organizations. Zakeer et al (2016) emphasise that leadership theories have been refined and modified with the passage of time. This makes them applicable to the modern organization context, culture, ambiguities and useful for the constantly changing organizational dynamics.

Uzohue et al (2016) states that various leadership theories have been espoused by different authors and they all seem to agree on the fact that leadership is grounded on three perspectives; “leadership as a process or relationship, leadership as a combination of traits or personality characteristics, or leadership as certain behaviours, or as they are commonly referred to, leadership skills” (p. 19). According to Amanchukwu et al (2015) it is very important to have an interplay between leadership theories and leadership competencies. This is because it can significantly reduce or eliminate the disconnect between leaders and their followers. Kovach (2018) cautions that a disconnect between and leader and followers will lead to decreased productivity, low morale, high levels of absenteeism, employee turnover and unhealthy work environment. For an organization to be competitive, it needs a leader who can apply the leadership theories using his or her competencies to coach, motivate and enhance employee retention (Tucker & Au, 2016). Dike et al (2015) advise that the 21st Century leaders should be consistent in their actions so as to improve employee productivity and earn their trust. A high level of consistency can only be sustained if the leaders apply the most appropriate leadership theories that align the organization and employee expectations (Kovach, 2018).

2.6 Adaptive Leadership Theory and Change Management

Salicru (2017) contends that the 21st Century organizations are facing challenges that are not technical but adaptive as they are ambiguous and need new ideas to foster change. The author cites some adaptive challenges like; managing stakeholder relationships, implementing new systems and dealing with the complex people-management issues. These adaptive challenges mandate the 21st Century leader to have tolerance for conflict, uncertainty and risk. According to Teahan et al (2019) leading adaptively mandates the leader to become the change agent in the contemporary organization. Such a leader should encourage his or her employees to envision the benefits of doing things differently, see the value of new opportunities and act on embracing the policies and processes that promote and sustain change. This will motivate the employees to embrace change and actively participate in the change process. Northouse (2016) adds that a leader who is applying adaptive leadership theory in leading an organization cultivates an environment where employees are partners in the change process, have a sense of ownership to the process and strengthens the employee investment in the change initiative, implementation and its fruitful conclusion.

Bellamy (2016) assert that a key component of adaptive leadership is the correct diagnosis of challenges by the leader and focus on either solving the problems individually or seeking the collaboration of followers. The modern organization faces complex challenges that at times affect employee values, attitudes and beliefs. The skilful application of adaptive leadership is very important in such a scenario because the challenges could be value laden and stir emotions inappropriately. Northouse (2016) advises that for such challenges, the leader has to give support, challenge employees or if necessary mobilize them to adapt accordingly. Dinwoodie et al (2015) observe that organizations are made up of people with diversified built-in reactions to change. Due to this complexity, a leader must apply adaptive leadership to address their concerns, creatively leverage their varied contributions, anticipate the change pitfalls and adapt his or her change approach as needed.
2.7 LMX Theory and Team Leadership

Lussier and Achua (2016) contends that the effective application of LMX theory in the 21st Century organization is very important because a leader who is able to foster a climate of trust, loyalty and openness ends up enhancing employee retention and performance. Martin et al (2017) contend that leaders develop varied relationships with followers in their teams. Manata (2019) asserts that these varied LMX relationships affect follower performance in the team context. Azizan et al (2017) have highlighted the unique concept of LMX differentiation. This is the interactive exchanges between a leader and team members with unique dyads within a team context. According to Manata (2019) LMX differentiation can influence team performance if the team leader coordinates the different team member contributions so that they use the limited time and resources in a more productive way. The contemporary organization leader has to selectively delegate some tasks to the more reliable group members. Azizan et al (2017) assert that when a team leader differentiates the relationships with the team members, the varied LMX relationships are likely to influence the interactions between group members leading to effective team performance.

Mansueti et al (2016) advise that the 21st century leader can benefit from LMX differentiation as he or she allocates roles to team members based on their unique knowledge, abilities and skills. This serves to clarify team member roles and enhance team performance. Martin et al (2017) add that the modern organization is highly dynamic with very tight timelines. This mandates the leader has to use LXM differentiation by allocating complex group tasks to the talented members and allocating the less complex asks to the less talented members. This is very important as it will help the leader to delegate tasks, accomplish organizational goals and minimize burnout. Furunes et al (2015) contend that high quality LMX relationships are beneficial for the leader, team members and organizational outcomes. However, Manata (2019) differs and advises that the different relationships between team members and their leader can either enhance or impede team performance. Martin et al (2017) adds that at times, these relationships corrode team cohesiveness. Buengeler et al (2020) differs with this assertion and states that there are occasions when these relationships motivate individual effort and team performance. Yu et al (2018) advises that the application of LMX theory in the workplace is very important because this theory is the most useful and can help a leader to better understand how workplace relationships in the modern organization can be enhanced.

2.8 Servant Leadership Theory and Communication

Sendjaya (2015) asserts that servant leadership has gained a lot of currency in the 21st century organization because servant leaders use their talent for the growth of their followers and the organization. This is what works in the post-Enron operating context where self-interest leadership has failed and is highly applicable in the contemporary organization. Horsman (2018) adds that servant leaders care deeply about the workers and proactively empower them to lead. When employees feel and accept this empowerment, they work towards the development of their full potential as servant leaders. The workers response to the leader’s sense of care by compliance, loyalty and high levels of performance. Fotch and Ponton (2015) contend that the modern organization needs an environment where employees are treated with respect, ideas and opinions are respected, there is joint decision-making and each worker has a perspective that the servant leader can learn from. Laub (2018) advises that a servant leader should seek an adult relationship with the employees that expects more of each person and allows the diversified talents to be fully utilized and developed. Effective servant leadership empowers workers to become leaders and this can lead to seamless succession planning in the organization.
One of the key dimensions of servant leadership is transforming influence. Kumar (2018) opines that a servant leader makes multiple changes in his or her followers, the organization and the society at large. This can only happen effectively if there is formal and informal communication between the servant leader to minimize the barriers that inhibit success. Fotch and Ponton (2015) highlight communication as a supplemental characteristic that augments the functional attributes of a servant leader. Coetzer et al (2017) on the other hand highlights that one of the key characteristics of servant leadership is accountability. This entails ensuring transparent practices, setting clear expectations, monitoring performance. The effective implementation of these activities will ride on the servant leader’s ability to effectively communicate with followers. Gerstein et al (2016) add that the servant leader should have the deep commitment of listening actively by being conscious of what is unsaid in non-verbal communication, asking questions to create knowledge for the follower and providing time for reflection. As espoused by these authors, a servant leader must be a high impact communicator.

Tanno and Banner (2018) affirm that most servant leaders are good listeners that have empathy, presence, mirror ideas and express emotions. This resonates with Lawrence (2015) who asserts that effective leadership communication begins with listening and understanding the meaning of the speaker’s verbal and non-verbal language so as to enhance communication within and beyond the modern organizational boundaries.

2.9 Contingency Theory and Performance Management

De Waal and Van De Heijden (2015) advise that the 21st Century organization leader has to hold his or her followers accountable for their performance as stipulated in the job descriptions. Wen et al (2019) advise that due to the dynamic nature of the operating environment, contemporary organizations review their strategic intents frequently. These reviews must be communicated to the employees and their performance outputs maybe altered depending on the strategic changes. This calls for the leader to apply contingency theory of leadership to manage employee performance. The contemporary organization thrives on continuous improvement and renewal. Vidal et al (2017) confirm that this is because the set strategies have to be renewed and made unique to enable the organization to sustain its competitive advantage. Hossain and Saleh (2016) advises that for this to be done effectively, the leader has to enlist the services of employees with the core competencies who are able to; simplify and align processes and develop products of high quality. Without performance management skills, a leader cannot manage continuous improvement.

Wen et al (2019) observe that at times, the organization leader has to encourage employees to develop their skills and at the same time, hold them accountable for their performance. De Waal and Van De Heijden (2015) adds that this also mandates the leader to ensure that the organization is performance driven and everything that can enhance organizational performance is explicitly reported and incorporated into the employee performance objectives. According to Iqbal et al (2015) contingency theory propounds that leaders should adapt the leadership theory that best suits the prevailing situation in the organization and stimulate employee performance. This is done by the leader providing the knowledge and guidance for better employee performance and the production of quality goods and services. Zhang et al (2015) state that contingency theory highlights the effects of leadership behaviour on various outcomes in an organization. These outcomes depend on the contextual variables in the organization such as culture, procedures and strategy. These variables can be influenced by the way that the leader elicits follower commitment, cooperation and organizational support in the context of performance management.
3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The 21st Century organization demands effective leadership. The contingency, leader-member exchange, servant and adaptive leadership theories are the best guidelines for the contemporary leader. This is because all these leadership theories have the components of leader, followers, context and behaviour. The 21st Century leader must have the intelligence to be able to establish a common thread that cuts across these leadership theories. In order to effectively use and apply these leadership theories, the 21st Century leader must consider the broader contexts in which leadership occurs and how these contexts will facilitate the integration of a specific leadership theory. This is because context is at the heart of any successful leadership undertaking. This means that the leader must scan the internal and external environment of the organization and develop context intelligence. This will lead to the successful application of these leadership theories and help the leader solve the complex problems in the modern organization.

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