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Leadership Styles: Understanding the Approach to Leading Others in Community-Company Relations

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Abstract
Companies operate within communities inhabited by people who, in one way or the other, maintain organized and genuine expectations. This therefore means that there must be a contractual relationship between the company and the community as an organized unit. In light of the above, this paper examined the issue of leadership in community-company relations as an integral part of corporate governance. The study addressed key questions, such as what strategies, patterns, or trends are adopted in community-company relations. and what leadership style (s) can guarantee harmonious community -company relations? The study explained the concepts of Leadership, leadership styles, and community–company relations and adopted the Stakeholder theory as its theoretical basis. The theory is predicated on mutuality of interests and utilitarianism. In this context, the socio-economic fortunes of the community are affected by the companies' operations in the same way that companies function optimally when they operate within the framework of stakeholder theory. The study relied solely on secondary data and analyzed the same using content analysis. Analyzing the patterns and trends of community-company relations, it was found that they are characterized by a tripod of conflictual rules of engagement, a doctrine of tokenism, and ethno-tribal tendencies. It is also our finding that community-company relations are shaped largely by intimidatory leadership traits. The study therefore recommended the adoption of the principles, norms, and values enunciated in stakeholder theory as a guarantee of a paradigm shift from confrontation to collaboration, in line with best international practices.

Keywords: Leadership, Community, Company, Relations, Stakeholder.

Introduction

The maxim in Political Science and Conflict Studies that “politics is conflict” can be extended to the larger perimeter of corporate organizations and institutions to say that ‘business is conflict’. This is premised on the notion that most community–company relations are essentially defined by starkly contradictory interests (Nyewusira & Nweke, 2007). Companies' interests stand in constant opposition to those of the communities. This is expected considering the assertions of Marx and Engels in Ezeani (2010, p. 59) that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle”. Although Marx and Engels were particular about “class struggle”, evolving social relationships and interactions have gone beyond “class” to encompass struggles among state actors and non-state actors, ethno-religious and tribal groups, families, state agencies, political parties, companies, and host communities, etc. Whatever may be the scope and scale of conflict and struggle, leadership, at any level, remains a key interventionist actor’

The leaders of any organization or community are usually responsible for establishing clear goals and organizing members to achieve them. Over time, leaders in both the private and public sector have exhibited various leadership styles, and these styles both affect and are affected by organizational goals. It is for this reason that the topic,

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"Leadership Styles: Understanding the Approach to Leading Others in Community-Company Relations," is apt to the Theme of this workshop, which is "Confrontation to Collaboration: A Paradigm Shift in Community-Company Relations." The paper, therefore, is intended to interrogate leadership styles in the context of community-company relations, a core mandate in corporate governance. Interestingly, community-company relations are one of the major Human resource management functions in many private and public organizations. We shall address several questions. How important is leadership to community-company relations? What are the strategies, patterns or trends adopted in community-company relations? What leadership style (s) can guarantee harmonious community -company relations? What theoretical perspective can be applied or deployed in a community-company relation?

Conceptual Clarifications: Leadership

Like many other concepts in the Social Sciences and the humanities, the term leadership has been defined in several ways by various authors. Bernard M. Bass, in Elaigwu (1991, p.125), defined it as "the ability to decide what is to be done and then go get others to want to do it". This is in sync with the popular treaties of Professor Pat Utomi entitled, "The Art of Leading" Open Secrets of Leadership Effectiveness". Adeniyi (2016, P.56), in his review of the book, sums up the art of leadership as a leader having "a vision of the future of the country or organization under his /her watch and should be able to communicate this vision to members of the group in such a manner that they would buy in and help him in the realization of those goals". The kernel of Utomi's work is that leadership is about inspiring and influencing people to do things willingly, and using knowledge, character, and responsible, accountable behavior to influence them positively. It is basically about people "inspiring goal-directed behavior in others". This form of leadership has a philosophical underpinning described as "Leading from behind" (Adeniyi, 2016). It is a form of leadership that uses a person's beauty, intellect, charisma, and compassion to influence others to act and, in the process, advance the fortunes of the larger society. It is beyond having political power, authority, or position to be an agent of change. In other words, one does not need power, authority, or position to cultivate a circle of engagement for the progress, prosperity, and development of society.

Onah (2005, p.188) defines leadership as "a social influencing process for the attainment of goals". Leadership has been severally described as the ability to use communication to influence the activities of others for attainment of goals; the ability to counsel and inspire subordinates to deliver their jobs; and exerting influence over members of a group (Catt & Miller, 1985; Muher & Chemers, 1976; Tilley & House, 1969 in Onah, 2005). Qualities of leadership include initiative; affective communication; dependability; perseverance; ability to inspire followership; and a high level of integrity (Onah, 2005). To Awujo (1997, p.108), leadership is "the sum of activities by which a hierarchical superior voluntarily influences the behavior of the subordinate in such a way as to efficiently achieve the organization's objectives". In this context, leadership involves a relationship between at least two people, in which one attempts to influence or direct the other towards the attainment of some goals. Irikana and Orisa (2007) admit that leadership is "a crucial factor in institutional effectiveness" and that it is a major determinant of the success or progress of not just an institution but also a nation.

Leadership Styles

Leadership style is the philosophy that guides a leader's decision-making. Irikana and Orisa (2007) believe that leadership style determines the nature and level of effectiveness of the relationship between leaders and followers in terms of relationship and development. Consequently, they identified the following leadership styles;

i. Authoritarian Style; the leader determines all policies, timelines, techniques, procedures, and activities relating to work or tasks.
ii. Democratic style; the leader encourages participation of persons and groups in discussing and determining policies and tasks, and gives people latitude to choose and divide tasks as they deem fit and competent.
iii. Laissez-faire style; the leader grants total freedom to group decisions with little or no participation, and takes no part in work discussions or decision-making. In other words, the leader adopts the principle of non-interference in the workplace. He only intervenes where there is disorder or danger in the organization (Irikana & Orisa, 2007).

Onah (2005) also identified three leadership styles: autocratic, participative, and laissez-faire. To Awujo (1997), there are also three major leadership styles: participative or employee-centered leadership; authoritarian or job-centered leadership; and laissez-faire leadership. Their characteristics are basically the same as those presented by Irikana and Orisa (2007). There are, however, variations in the nomenclature for some leadership styles.

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While the above categorizations appear to be more related to leadership styles in organizations, Mazrui (1977 in Elaigwu, 1999, pp. 125-126) provides leadership styles operational in politics, political systems, and institutions, especially in Africa. These are;

- Intimidatory leadership; the leader relies primarily on fear and instruments of coercion to assert his authority, and specializes in the use and /or threat to use force to extract compliance from his countrymen.
- Patriarchal leadership; a leader who commands neo-filial reverence, reflecting a near-father figure or status.
- Reconciliational leadership; the leader relies on qualities of tactical accommodation and capacity to build consensus and engineer compromise between antagonistic groups, parties, or viewpoints. He is a leader who believes and practices politics of compromise and inclusivity.
- Mobilizational leadership: the leader relies on ideology as a guiding principle of governance (i.e., progressivism, conservation, middle-course, etc). which he sustains with charismatic qualities. He deploys his charismatic traits, which stem from exceptional leadership qualities, to bolster his ability to mobilize the populace for a particular kind of social action. The people's devotion, loyalty, obedience and submission to the will of the leader is based on certain attributes of the leadership such as heroism, patriotism, honesty, commitment, etc.
- Bureaucratic leadership; this leader relies on efficiency rather than evocation and on procedure rather than passion. There exists a formal system of rules, procedures, and regulations which the leader applies both judicially and administratively. Here, the leader's right to rule or make decisions is based on established law (Mazrui, 1997, in Elaigwu, 1991). We shall adopt the thesis of Ali Mazrui on leadership styles for two main reasons; the first is that it covers leadership styles within states, institutions, politics, and political systems.
- In political economy, the state, by its giant, complex, modern, and behemoth nature, is the "super-structure" while the economy and other organizations and systems, such as companies, are the "sub-structure". The state confers authority, authenticity, and legitimacy on the actions and activities of other sectors; it creates order and sets boundaries within which companies and private enterprises operate. Therefore, the character of the state is, largely, going to determine and shape community-company relations. Again, we adopted a thesis on leadership styles that addresses the state, political behaviors of individuals, groups, societies, and state and non-state actors, phenomena, and institutions.

Community – Company Relations

This can be explained as clear, established patterns, trends, and systems of engagement, interaction, communication, exchange, and collaboration among communities and companies operating within their geographic area. The essence is to primarily build and sustain synergy and partnership between communities and companies in and around mutually beneficial areas, such as environmental protection, health, safety, a peaceful work environment, societal values, social welfare, etc. Community – company relations, which are sometimes integrated into Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), are a tacit contract between business organizations and a host community" (Joel, 2018, p.8). Community-company relations cover job opportunities for communities, protection of the company's facilities, reciprocity in the value chain, award of contracts, business ethics, promotion of human welfare, and matters of general concern to both communities and companies.

Theoretical background

Stakeholder theory is used to elaborate this paper. According to Garriga (2004, in Joel 2018, p. 28), major exponents of stakeholder theory are Freeman (1984), Emshoff (1978), Wartick and Cochran (1985), Donaldson and Preston (1995), and Carroll (1991). The basic assumption of stakeholder theory is that society or a community will support a company or corporate organization if they receive value in return, especially in projects and programs that engender sustainable development. The theory is predicated on mutual interests and utilitarianism (i.e., generating the greatest good for the greatest number). It holds the view that companies exist not just for the purpose of profits and money. Beyond these purposes, their actions and policies serve the greater good of stakeholders such as employees, consumers, government, trade unions, contractors (suppliers), partners, and the community. Joel (2018, p. 30) defines stakeholders as "those individuals or groups who may affect or are affected by the organization". In this context, the community is a key stakeholder. It is assumed that companies function optimally when they operate within the framework of stakeholder theory. The relevance of stakeholder theory in community-company relations includes the following:

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1. The support of the community is guaranteed for the operations and facilities of the company
2. Projects and programs are executed by companies in communities to engender sustainable development
3. Companies function optimally and effectively within the framework of stakeholder theory.
4. Relationships and communication between the company and community are optimized, thereby strengthening project initiatives
5. Mutual interests of the company and community are expressed, discussed, and realized under conditions of ethics and conviviality, resulting in a 'win-win' situation for both parties.
6. The stakeholder theory is a triumph of social contract theory; a sort of social contract entered into by the community and company, reflecting a code of direct and indirect duty and obligation between the company and the community.

Analysis

Patterns and Trends of Community-Company Relations

Generally, community-company relations are characterized and influenced by leadership styles and other practices involving a network of relationships, including company staff, contractors, opinion leaders, chiefs, youth, and claim agents (Okoko & Nna, 1998). For this paper, the patterns and trends in community-company relations stand on a tripod of conflictual rules of engagement, doctrine of tokenism, and ethno-tribal tendencies.

A dominant feature of community-company relations is the tacit adoption of conflictual rules of engagement. It is a common practice in the Niger Delta in general, and Rivers State in particular. The rule of engagement is clear and predictable: 'if you do not war, you do not win', manifesting in conflict that, sometimes, degenerates to violence. The violence is both direct and structural. While the former is usually expressed in the form of open and physical harms, killings, assaults, and batteries, the latter is expressed in such conditions as poverty, exclusion, deprivation, marginalization, and monopolization of resources. Communities and companies deploy instruments of terror against each other using state and non-state actors to adv and sometimes degenerate into situations that Ake (1996, in Onah & Nyewusira, 2005, p. ance their course or protect their operations and facilities. This is because companies operate under palpable tension, and sometimes degenerate into situations that Ake (1996 in Onah & Nyewusira, 2005, p.160) describes as "a case of killing and drilling in the Niger Delta". Structural violence is unleashed on communities by companies through deliberate disregard for corporate social responsibility, exclusion, poor environmental exploitation, and weak regulatory policies. Predictably, while communities resort to protests, closure, and destruction of company facilities, the companies, on their part, leverage coercive state agencies, like the police and the military, to confront community agitations, leading to conflict suppression. Conflict suppression is the deliberate use of coercive instruments (force) to stifle conflict (Gilbert, 2018). In community-conflict relations, the powerful parties (companies and government) use instruments of power and force to push aside the demands and issues affecting communities and impose solutions that are neither satisfactory nor sustainable for the communities. Related to conflict suppression is the weapon of intimidation. Amadi (2025) considers intimidation a behavior that involves deterring or coercing people, using threats with the intent to subject victims to general discomfort, such as humiliation, an inferiority complex, and limited freedom. In fact, companies use state apparatus to create and sustain what Prof. Wole Soyinka calls "a climate of fear" in communities. They achieve this by deploying heavily armed, fierce-looking military and police personnel around their offices in operational areas. These practices are hallmarks of community-company relations between multinational oil companies and their host communities. Examples are Shell-Ogoni, Shell-Umuechem, Shell-Rukpokwu, Elf-Rumuekpe, Elf-Obagi, WAOS-Ogbogoro, Avion-Rumuolumeni, etc.

A second feature of community-company relations is the application of the doctrine of tokenism. This doctrine smacks of a perverted sense of benevolence on the part of the companies to the communities. Although there are sporadic community development prospects such as health centers, water, classroom blocks, transformers, boats, internal roads, drainage, building of community halls, and a few pilot projects in agriculture executed by some companies in the operational areas, these islands of sporadic interventions in communities make little or no impact in a sea of monumental needs. They are negligible compared with the basic or minimum tenets of corporate social responsibility (Nyewusira, 2004). For instance, a few scholarship schemes awarded to indigenes of the communities are not backed up by regular employment. The paltry sums of money given to community chiefs and youth leaders as "public relations" yield no meaningful or far-reaching results. The doctrine of tokenism gives no room for the communities to determine their priorities. Projects are largely determined by the company through contractors. As Aladimere (2023, p.14) argued, community projects are largely determined by contractors and are also "a very lucrative avenue for

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accumulation by elite elements who serve as contractors, consultants, and project-lobbyists for hapless communities". Again, most of the roads constructed by companies are built to facilitate their operations rather than to improve the living conditions of the communities (Azaiki, 2003; Nyewusira, 2004). In July, 2001, I personally observed a plenary session of the Rivers State House of Assembly wherein the then General Manager, Community Development of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Mr Hubert Nwokolo, admitted before the House of Assembly that some of the 2001 community development projects executed by SPDC in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State are latrines. A project of this nature in the 21st century, to say the least, is not only perfunctory but provocative. It is for these reasons that we insist that community-company relations are merely tokenist gestures and therefore shaped by the doctrine of tokenism.

The third feature of community-company relations is the manifestation of ethno-tribal tendencies. Mair (2001 in Nna, 2024, p. xvi) reveals that Nigeria has deteriorated to the point where ethnic and tribal prejudice "now find fertile ground to grow". This shows that ethnicity, tribalism, and other centrifugal forces have become a defining feature of the Nigerian state and institutions. As we argue in political science, "the dominant tendencies in the super-structure will always penetrate and take hold of the sub-structure". Thus, the infiltration of corporate organizations and companies by nepotistic, ethnic, and tribal elements. These tendencies, in all their ramifications, are averse to the principles of social justice, development and inclusivity, especially in a plural and complex society such as Nigeria. Nnorom (2023 in Nna 2024, p.3) posits that "pluralistic societies contain desperate ethnic and cultural elements".

Discussion

Given the predictable weakness in such systems, some scholars have argued that appointments to the top hierarchies of companies are made on partisan, affective, ascriptive, and nepotistic considerations (Wilson, 2022; Nweke, 2024; Joel, 2018). Amadi (2025, p.41) identifies the negative effects of such practices to include "unfair treatment, bias in decision making, exclusionary practices, and resentment" in both public and private establishments. Community relations managers and top management staff of companies that are employed based on tribe and ethnicity, rather than merit, are likely to use arrogant, hurtful, and divisive language and actions in managing community-company relations. A classic case in point is the Wilbros-Choba relation between 1998 and 2000. Mr Nwasuluba, an indigene of Mbaise in Imo State and General Manager (Administration) of Wilbros Nigeria Limited, was quoted several times as describing Choba youth as "unemployable entities". Such derogatory remarks show that corporate leaders, such as the then General Manager of Wilbros Nigeria Limited, not only lack 'consequential thinking' but also portray him as an ethnic chauvinist. As expected, the Choba community's response to such indiscretion and hate speech led to a breakdown of the rules of engagement and communication with the company. The lawlessness and associated restiveness that followed these alleged 'tasteless remarks' of Mr Nwasulunba degenerated into violent protests, killings, maimings, destruction of community and company properties, and full acts of state repression against the Choba community by operatives of the Nigerian Army and Police attached to Wilbros Nigeria Limited. Similar belligerence between communities and companies, resulting from poor management of ethnic relations, has occurred in Ogoni, Uwuechem, Rumuekpem, Egi, Wgbema, Kula, Rukpokwu, etc. (Okoko & Ibaba, 1998; Nyewusira & Nweke, 2007).

Conclusion

Since community-company relations are characterized by conflictual rules of engagement, the doctrine of tokenism, and ethno-tribal tendencies, it is therefore apparent that they are shaped largely by intimidatory leadership traits. An intimidatory leadership style is not only non-participatory but also rooted in a system of unequal relationships between companies and communities. The former, with humongous financial resources at its disposal and the support of the state's coercive instruments, erects a regime of deprivation, exploitation, exclusion, hostility, and a perverse form of development against the latter. Clearly, community-company relations in Rivers State have gradually assumed a paradigm of predators (companies) and prey (communities), with the prey showing many distress signals. As a matter of fact, the current behavior of community-company relations appears, strongly, to be that of 'holders without a stake'. Such practices and regimes are incapable of engendering or fostering collaboration between communities and companies.

Suggestion

It is therefore our suggestion that adopting the principles, norms and values enunciated in the stakeholder theory will guarantee a paradigm shift from "confrontation to collaboration" in community-company relations in our cline and

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beyond. In other words, applying the stakeholder perspective in community-company relations is key to inclusive corporate governance.

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