



Research Article – Humanities

When your boss decides to mess you up: The two decades experience in public service in Ghana

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Abstract

This study examined both the objective and subjective dimensions of leadership qualities of public service in Ghana. It also unraveled and compared the contours, dynamics and patterns of management blocks. The paper offered innovative works that discussed basic and applied public service activities, emphasizing inter-and multi-disciplinary approaches to various domains of leadership qualities. The study further examined other factors such as frontal attack, transfer techniques, special assignments, nitty gritty tactics, layering, delays, evasion, shouting regimes and double bind techniques. Besides observation, the study relied on literature review (Desk Study) Thus, it appealed to a variety of fields in humanities, social sciences and other professional disciplines.

Keywords: Boss, Mess up, Public Service, Experience, Leadership Styles, Management, Ghana.

Introduction

A Boss is defined in Daniel and Chung (2015) as individual who supervises a number of employees and has certain capacities and responsibilities to make decisions. The term “boss” itself is not a formal title, and is sometimes refer to any higher level employees in a company. These include supervisor, manager, director or the chief executive officer. The paper examined the administrative roles, employees and institutional requirements that promote superb performance among managers and employees in public services.

As quoted in Agel (1997) a “Boss does no wrong”. It is therefore useful to note that if a subordinate can read the thinking of his boss, their relationship rolls freely. Gardona and Morley (2012) posited that many bosses never bother whether their actions hurt their subordinates or not. They take the loyalty of their subordinates for granted. Daniel and Chung (2015) pointed further that a sour relationship between a boss and subordinate never comes on suddenly. Many fail to see the signs until they are up against a stone wall. By this time, it is too late to make amends. They argued that how do you know that your boss is fed up with you? What do you do when you realize that your boss has decided to mess you up? Public service is the largest and most populous sector in Ghana. Yet, while scholars and policy makers have focused on why productivity has dwindled, not much has been written on how productivity is affected through quality leadership which the paper seeks to address.

Materials and Methods

The analysis of this study is based on secondary data supplemented with observations of the styles of management-subordinates’ relations in public service.

Literature Review and Findings

Frontal Attack

Maxwell (1999) pointed that a frontal attack is an offensive maneuver in which the action is directed at specific individuals and if keenly observant, one will realize a change of attitude towards you. Dubois *et al.* (2004) argued that when your boss has made up his mind that he can no longer tolerate you, he will criticize your every action. Dubois *et al.* (2004) further emphasized that the boss will make things look as if you can never get anything done right. He will not be diplomatic in telling you this. This should strike you as quoted in Victor (2008) “like an old hunting dog or fat cat”, you are no longer a useful ally to him. Smither (2006) put it nicely that “What is the use of a cat if it cannot catch mice that are a nuisance in a home? A hunting dog that allows a limping rabbit to escape through its legs might soon learn that the owner is wiser for the agony it has caused him”. A frontal attack sends unmistakable signs that you are finished. Pack up and be ready to move on.

Transfer Technique

Peter and Ivanovic (2003) indicated that “if staff are spared scathing criticisms for minor slips, you might be transferred. Staff will not be transferred if his transfer will cause work to suffer. Most transfers are used not to offer opportunities for talent display but to avoid subordinates whose viewpoints are at variance with their bosses”. The boss may simply want to teach you where power lies. Keith and Rowley (2010) observed that the misuse of power is the reason why authority in every organization should be treated more seriously than we often see.

Special Assignment Technique

Pennington, Macklin and Campbell (2007) stated that special assignment technique as used in this context indicates that the boss put a detestable subordinate busy and out of sight. In most cases, the assignment is not a pleasant one which the assignee will enjoy. The assignment could be

a deliberate mismatch of your competencies and the task which is very close to punishment. According to Agel *et al.* (1997) “For what is the point in asking a cook to be a barber when he has not got the training to do that job”.

Layering

Pynes (2009) pointed that layering is another method often used by bosses to frustrate subordinates. Thus, bosses deliberately place loyalists above the subordinate who are considered not to be in their good books. This ensures that the unlike persons will work through the loyalists and will not have direct access to the boss. In some cases, the arrangement can be so nebulous that other subordinates might end up working through their juniors since they are not one of the bosses' favourites. Britt (2001) argued, this weapon cuts both ways and could create serious problems in discipline by working subordinates against others.

Nitty Gritty Tactics

Morson (2010) looked at nitty-gritty as a technique that involves making several minor criticisms on a completed assignment and on the basis of these minor criticisms reject the whole job and ask that it be re-done. This saps a subordinates' energies and attempts to breakdown the confidence the subordinate has built in himself/herself over several years. The subordinate will compare his output with that of others and come to the conclusion that there must be other consideration in the boss's evaluation of his work.

Delays

Peter and Ivanovic (2003) considered delay as one of the life's difficult skill. They observed that assignments and personal matters from unliked subordinates never get worked on. Other subordinates write much later and their requests and jobs are readily worked upon. The subordinates get the feeling that they are being discriminated against. Peter and Ivanovic, (2003) further observed that subordinates' interests, attention and demands compared with other peoples' interests are treated as less important or urgent. they wait in vain to see their interests being attended to. The delay is becoming unbearable and get them to the wall. Thus, subordinate should watch out and not to allow his frustration to come to hatred. When the unliked subordinates begin to show apathy towards your work, keep to themselves at the workplace, they are burning out. Pynes (2009) posited that in trying to find some help from peers. While, Victor (2008) rightly put it, “the road to the top is rough and slow, but the journey downhill is so faster that many operatives are terrified and devastated when they lose a privileged position”.

Evasion

Some bosses try avoiding all kinds of discussion with unliked subordinates. Daniel and Chung (2015) observed that even on his own business letters, it is difficult to get the boss to discuss them. They know that what they are doing hurts the subordinates. The boss fears that after the discussion, subordinates may bring other topics he does not wish to openly discuss. They do not have time to discuss anything with the subordinate. Gardona and Morley (2012) emphasized, most bosses have time to discuss with others. Unliked subordinate speculates about this evasion and become disturbed. Thus, a subordinate is near the end of the road. Thus, unliked subordinates are probably strong

candidates for redeployment.

Shouting Regime

Taylor (2009) considered shouting as an utter of a loud cry, typically to register an expression of strong emotion. Thus, shouting at the top of one's voice to get work done has never worked as a regular approach to achieving targets. It is effective when it is used sparingly. A boss who shouts at subordinates has to remain a policeman at the work place throughout the working period. Victor (2008) coined it that “Whenever the cat is not around, the mice will go to play”. Subordinates will most often pretend to be busy when he is around. What a subordinate will do to beat his intelligence is to shuffle papers, packing and repacking files as if he is in a serious search of a very important document. This pretense is systematic soldiering; referring to the practice where a soldier endeavours to march on even when he is very tired. The best way for a boss and subordinate to go along is through commitment, communication, co-operation and counseling (Taylor, 2009). When your boss begins to shout at you openly to let people know that you are a bad guy, you should take one step back and ask yourself, why? If you cannot find any reason, ask to know from the boss if there is any way he thinks you can improve upon your performance. He may hand you a list of disappointments if he thinks you are not yet finished but burnt out.

Double Bind Technique

Taylor (2009) posited that double bind as a situation in which a subordinate is confronted with two irreconcilable demands. Contextually, it is a choice between two undesirable courses of action. Dubois *et al.*, (2004) looked at it as an emotionally distressing dilemma in communication in which an individual receives two conflicting and one message negates the other. Thus, for Victor (2009) “Some people can stab you in broad daylight and still afford to smile back at you writhing in pain”. Such people are good pretenders who need to be seen through and through in every society. Some subordinates are also like snakes in green grass. They appear to be very nice to you, they are doing so for an advantage.

According to Britt (2001), double bind technique involves a boss communicating with subordinates in a manner where recipients feel challenged to act but also afraid to make mistakes. This is, in an authoritarian leadership style where the boss comes heavily upon his subordinates in exercise of his authority. In the use of this technique, subordinates face several ambiguities daily. They see themselves as damned if they do anything and they are also damned if they do nothing. Such people fear to be in the office and are relieved when the boss is not around. Agel (1997:96) posited that “Only staff who do not fear survive such as system”.

Conclusions

The paper concludes that if things are no longer going well, stay calm and ask yourself again, “Do I really know my boss well?” If you know him well, you should be able to do things the way he wants them. He may not really hate you, but perhaps there may be somebody else who is not making the mistakes you continue to make. Show sincerity and commitment to your boss. Do not give the impression that you

cannot be trusted. As Victor (2008) stated, “Remember that it is easier to fall than to climb in every human endeavour. Remember that the Peter Principle says everybody rises to his level of incompetence”. Perhaps this is the time you need retraining. The tongue and teeth co-exist but they occasionally do battle. A bit of patience or tolerance may do the trick. The workplace is hell on earth for many people. The day that every manager and subordinate shall understand each other shall be the time when productivity shall be high. May such a period not be too far away.

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