

# Leadership Styles and Organizational Commitment of Academic Staff in Selected Universities in Uganda

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**Abstract**— *The study established the extent to which leadership styles influence organizational commitment of academic staff in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian Universities. The three specific objectives that guided the study included; to establish the influence of democratic, autocratic and laissez faire leadership styles on commitment of academic staff in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian Universities. The study utilized Contingence theory of leadership to extensively discuss the research variable. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The population involved lecturers, heads of departments and deans. Data was collected using a Conventional Leadership Questionnaire and an interview guide. This data was analysed at Univariate level and study hypotheses were analysed using Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient index and Multiple Linear Regression. Results revealed an insignificant relationship between democratic leadership style and commitment of academic staff. On the contrary, results revealed that there was a positive significant relationship between autocratic and laissez faire leadership styles on commitment of academic staff in the two universities. In order to increase commitment therefore, head of departments and deans in both universities should attempt to construct vigorous, energetic collective work conditions and increase their concern regarding loyalty of academic staff to the institution and their satisfaction. Furthermore, there must be a mechanisms put in place to ensure constant supervision, offer deadlines, warnings for non-compliance while keeping in mind the nature of work tasks, university culture, values and ethical perspectives, since all hinge on commitment.*

**Keywords:** Autocratic, Democratic, Laissez-faire, Leadership Styles.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Academic staff commitment is recognized as an essentiality in the discharge of quality education in universities. This is normally defined by desired academic and co-curricular standards including decency in human resource discipline. <sup>[1]</sup>Beyond the problem of wanting leadership styles, staff welfare and discipline is established as key challenges in Universities globally. This is because organizational success is usually dependent on employees' loyalty and hard work as well, dedicated managers are highly desired. <sup>[2]</sup> Heads of higher education, such as academic leaders and Deans, need to be aware of and understand the fact that relevant leadership styles are substantial according to the changing circumstances in the effort to achieve organizational and institutional goals. <sup>[3]</sup> <sup>[4]</sup>There is great demand for leaders to be more accountable to staff, students and society due to the growing complexity and increasing challenges of the university; internally and otherwise. Regrettably, one cannot give what one does not have! If the state of affairs remains un-attended too, it is more probable for these universities to lose track of their goals and objectives and fail to fulfill the intentions contained in the higher education policy in Uganda. The current study remained timely, thus.

The study was guided by the Contingency Theory of leadership developed by Fred Fiedler in 1958. It stated that different situations require leaders to apply different ways of

leadership and a leader should be able to identify the best leadership style amongst a list of many to achieve the organizations goals in each situation<sup>[5]</sup>. Basing on this contingency theory, highly experienced, participative and qualified academic staff, a democratic or laissez faire leadership style may be applicable to enlist commitment of academic staff. However, unfavorable situations, coercive means might be employed to enlist the commitment.

Leadership styles, is a set of acts that the leader displays within the organization because of internal or external pressure and exerts direct or indirect effects on organizational employees' behavior -positively or negatively<sup>[6]</sup>. The current study focused on the three most investigated leadership styles; democratic leadership, authoritative leadership style, and *Laissez faire leadership styles*. On the other hand, organizational commitment is the degree to which employees identify with their organization and add value to accomplish the set goals and objectives <sup>[7]</sup>. In 1990, Meyer and Allen developed a three-component model of commitment involving affective, continuance and normative commitments. The three components were adopted for this research to better understand the commitment of staff in line with the leadership styles practiced by university leaders.

## Problem Statement

High organizational commitment is essential in the realization of quality University education provision in Uganda<sup>[8]</sup> This is possible, in part, when university lecturers have a high sense of organizational commitment. However, a

report on Kyambogo University revealed that lecturers were not willing to work in difficult times, did not respect the values of their University and at times engaged in academic malpractices and some have decided to leave for other opportunities<sup>[9]</sup> which are issues reminiscent of low organizational commitment. A similar scenario was also reported in private universities in Uganda where commitment of academic staff was alleged to be low<sup>[10]</sup>. These scholars contended that declining motivation and commitment by academic staff in private Universities manifested itself in threats of strikes, absenteeism from work, delay to mark examinations and shockingly, instead faking marks for students. Although several factors might have been considered in various research to be responsible for the low organizational commitment of academic staff in Ugandan universities, these efforts appear to have remained far-fetched, as leadership styles appear to have been snubbed, yet they are also alleged to impact on staff organizational commitment in these institutions. It was feared that if this trend continues unabated, the anticipated contribution of universities to sustainable socio-economic development shall remain, but beyond the periphery. This research therefore intended to come up with strategies in which university leadership should act to ensure staff commitment.

#### **Purpose of the study.**

To establish the extent to which leadership styles influence organizational commitment of academic staff in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian Universities.

#### **Specific Objectives**

1. To establish the extent to which democratic leadership style influences organizational commitment of academic staffs in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian Universities.
2. To establish the extent to which autocratic leadership style influences organizational commitment of academic staffs in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian Universities.
3. To establish the extent to which *laissez faire* leadership style influences organizational commitment of academic staff in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian Universities.

#### **Conceptual Framework.**

Leadership styles as an independent variable, is investigated with three constructs (democratic, autocratic and *laissez faire* leadership styles). Organizational commitment a dependent variable is investigated with the three components of affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment of Meyer and Allen.

#### **Literature Review**

##### ***Autocratic Leadership***

The study of autocratic leadership and employee commitment has revealed varying results. For example, the descriptive results acquired from Abdullah medical city showed that the autocratic leadership style was the most frequently used type of leadership style<sup>[11]</sup>. Also the

Regression analysis results from the investigation into the impact of authoritative and *laissez-faire* leadership on thriving at work revealed that authoritative leadership style (autocratic) significantly affects thriving work<sup>[12]</sup>. This presumes that authoritative/ autocratic leadership styles always reminds employees about their work ethics and leads to a high sense of job commitment<sup>[13]</sup>. Using one way analysis of variance, correlation and linear regression in an empirical study about the effect of leadership styles on employee commitment in private universities in United States International University revealed a statistically strong and positive correlation between directive leadership style (autocratic) and employee commitment. However, many of the studies have been conducted in fields of medicine, business and more efforts to conduct such research in education institutions in Africa remains wanting.

##### ***Democratic leadership***

Democratic leadership style leads to continuance commitment or intentions to continue on the job. This finding was established from a study about leadership style and employee turnover intentions in organizations in Kenya. However, this study considered one aspect of commitment (continuance commitment) while this current study was three aspects of commitment. Leadership allows participation of employees in whatever is happening on the job leading to a high sense of job commitment revealed in a study about leadership styles on employee commitment in private universities in United States<sup>[13]</sup>. This participation was perceived as team work that enlisted high employee commitment on the job. These findings were descriptively arrived at while this current study was inferentially done and the theory used to guide the study.

##### ***Laissez faire leadership***

*Laissez faire* leadership style has no significant effect on all dimensions of organizational commitment. This was revealed in a study conducted to establish the effect of leadership style on employee's organizational commitment<sup>[14]</sup>. In addition, *laissez faire* leadership style has a weak positive significant relationship with the commitment of employees from Nigeria. This is revealed from an investigation about leadership styles and employees commitment in Nigeria<sup>[7]</sup>. The investigation into the impact of leadership styles on employee commitment in Madaa Walabu University revealed that a significant and positive relationship existed between *laissez faire* leadership style and continuance commitment. The same study found out an insignificant and negative weak correlation that existed between *laissez faire* leadership style and affective commitment. However, normative commitment had no relationship at all with *laissez faire* leadership style<sup>[16]</sup>. An empirical study about *laissez faire* leadership and affective commitment with use of the leader member exchange theory revealed that that *laissez* leadership style had a negative effect on affective organizational commitment. However, in

this study laissez faire leadership style was related with only affective commitment ignoring the other elements of commitment that normative and continuance commitment<sup>[17]</sup>.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey design hinged on Plato's deductive reasoning philosophy. The population involved academic staff in the two universities and administrative staff. These were sampled using simple and purposive random sampling. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and interview guide. This data was analysed at Univariate level using descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. The study hypotheses were analysed using Pearson's Correlation Co-efficient index and Multiple Linear Regression.

## III. RESULTS

**Table 1:** Pearson's correlation coefficient showing relationship between democratic leadership style and commitment of academic staff.

		Commitment	Democratic
<i>Commitment</i>	Pearson correlation	1	0.116
	Sig (2-tailed)		0.078
	N	234	233
<i>Democratic</i>	Pearson correlation	0.116	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.078	
	N	233	234

Table 1 shows Pearson's correlation coefficient results  $r = 0.116$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.078$  less than 0.05. This suggests that there was an insignificant correlation between democratic leadership style and commitment of academic staff. It suggest that even if democratic leadership is fairly done or not the level of organizational commitment remains intact.

**Table 2:** Pearson's correlation coefficient between autocratic leadership style and organizational commitment of employees in UCU and Kyambogo Universities

		Commitment	Autocratic leadership
<i>Commitment</i>	Pearson correlation	1	0.280**
	Sig (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	234	234
<i>Autocratic leadership</i>	Pearson correlation	0.280*	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	234	235

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2-tailed

Table 2, shows Pearson's correlation coefficient index between autocratic leadership style and organizational commitment of employees  $r = 0.280^{**}$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.000$  less than 0.05. This implied that there was a positive significant relationship between autocratic leadership and academic staff commitment in these two universities. As one practices coercive use of deadlines, close supervision, reminders, and the level of organization commitment enhances and the reverse is true.

**Table 3:** Pearson's correlation coefficient results on laissez faire leadership style and organizational commitment

		Commitment	Laissez faire leadership style
<i>Commitment</i>	Pearson correlation	1	0.434**
	Sig (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	234	234
<i>Laissez faire leadership style</i>	Pearson correlation	0.434**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	234	235

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level 2-tailed

Table 3 shows Pearson's correlation coefficient between laissez faire leadership style and organizational commitment of employees  $r = 0.434^{**}$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.000$ , less than 0.05. This implied that as laissez faire leadership style is effectively done, the better their job commitment would. Thus, with leaving employees to take self-control, self-regulation, self-direction their organizational commitment enhances and the reverse is true. Also, when employees are allowed to solve their own problems, their commitment improves.

## IV. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The first objective of the study was to establish the relationship between democratic leadership style and the commitment of employees in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. Results obtained from Pearson's correlation coefficient index revealed that there was an insignificant correlation between democratic leadership style and employee performance in the two universities. These results revealed that even if democratic leadership style is applied, the commitment of employees in the two universities remain constant. These findings were in direct agreement with earlier studies that investigated the influence of democratic leadership style on three organizational commitment components. The results established that democratic leadership styles had an insignificant relationship<sup>[18]</sup>.

The second objective was to establish the relationship between autocratic leadership style and the commitment of

academic staff in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. Results on this objective revealed that autocratic leadership had a positive significant relationship on the commitment of academic staff in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. This revealed that academic staff close supervision, setting deadlines, reminders and punishments as means of autocratic leadership can easily contribute to effective commitment of academic staff employee on their jobs.

The third objective of the study was to establish the relationship between laissez Faire leadership style on the commitment of employees in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. Results from the objective revealed that there was a highly positive significant relationship between laissez faire leadership style and the commitment of employees in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. This finding was also in agreement with the Contingency Theory of Leadership where in situations when employees are intelligible and know what to do and can do it without close supervision and force, it is rational for the university administrator to let employees take self-direction and control of themselves as a way of enlisting commitment.

The study findings which revealed that laissez faire leadership style had a positive significant relationship with the commitment of employees were in direct agreement with results from study on leadership style and employee turnover intentions in organizations<sup>[15]</sup>. Findings revealed that laissez faire leadership style would lead to 0.564 increase in employee turnover intentions on XYZ Company. Furthermore, laissez faire leadership style was found to directly affect organizational commitment of cadres, lecturers and staff at public universities.

The current study concludes that autocratic and laissez faire leadership styles had a positive significant influence on the commitment of academic staff in UCU and Kyambogo Universities. To enhance the commitment of employees/academic staff in Kyambogo and Uganda Christian University Mukono, the university council in the two universities, faculty administrative boards, deans, departmental heads should emphasize more use of autocratic and laissez faire leadership styles. This may be done by carrying out constant supervision of employees, a mechanisms ensure that employees are reminded of their work, offered deadlines, warnings for non-compliance, among others. Universities are full of intellectuals and these should be studied carefully and opportunity given to self-directed staff to do what is expected of them without coarse means. The university councils should allow these employees to take an independent mind, take individual decisions in what they do.

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