



Varied Leadership Approaches Taken by Different Leaders in Managing the Changes Arising from Covid-19 (2019-2020): A Case Study of Nigeria

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Abstract

The Corona Virus Disease pandemic (hereinafter referred to as COVID-19), has been described as the greatest health challenge since World War II. The pandemic has affected humanity and all sectors of world economies in unimaginable ways, necessitating varied approaches to leadership the world over. Thus for governments to continue enjoying the trust of her citizens and for economies and businesses to continue to exist or thrive, especially in the context of trade, aviation, tourism, health sectors, people at the helm of affairs must respond to threats and opportunities presented by COVID-19 in swift, efficient and effective ways. However, what will determine success or otherwise is dependent on how willing leaders are to embrace the flexibility in managing change. It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper addresses the varied leadership approaches to COVID-19, from 2019-2020, with particular focus on Nigeria and its impact on stakeholders.

Introduction

Background to the Research

Nigeria is the most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa, with an estimated population of over 206.14 million, ranking 7th in the World (Nigeria Population 2020). Nigeria has been facing a severe crisis in the context of

security, infrastructure, health and economy amongst others, which are basically attributed to factors such as demography, unemployment, internal conflict, low literacy level, absence of good governance and corruption. Amidst these crises is the dreaded COVID-19, a

global health crisis and a threat to the international economy, which affected the economies of even the most economically advanced countries. This was due to imposition of the lockdown of businesses, various sectors, which was with a view to curbing the spread of coronavirus. The lockdown achieved the purpose for which it was imposed in the developed world but lives were lost in some parts of Nigeria during the lockdown due to hunger, which was due to wrong leadership approach. This underscores the significance of leadership approaches to unforeseen circumstances such as COVID-19.

Statement of the Research Problem

The problem this research intends to address is the leadership approach taken by the Nigerian government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether or not, the approach had negative or positive impacts on citizens will be brought to the front burner upon comparing Nigeria's approach with the approach taken by countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. Hence this research work raises the following questions:

1. What leadership role or roles did the Nigerian government play in the context of managing change due to COVID-19?
2. In what ways did the roles impact her citizens?
3. Can the role or roles be described as satisfactory?
4. What are the differences between the leadership approaches of the United Kingdom and Nigeria?

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to specifically evaluate the leadership approaches taken by the Nigerian government during the COVID-19 pandemic (2019-2020).

The objectives of this research are:

1. To highlight the leadership role or roles the Nigerian government played in the context of managing change due to COVID-19.
2. To discuss the impact of the Nigerian government's decisions on her citizens.
3. To analyse the decisions taken in relation to its effectiveness/efficiency or vice versa.
4. To compare the leadership approaches of the United Kingdom and Nigeria with a view to knowing which of the two approaches is better in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency.

Justification

The importance of leadership cannot be overemphasised because the prosperity, stability, legitimacy and survival of every nation and entity depends on good

leadership. This is especially so in contemporary times, where challenges such as competition, globalisation, innovations in science and technology are prominent, not to mention the greatest challenge of our time, which is the covid-19 pandemic. Thus, for stability and prosperity to continue existing, leaders at the helm of affairs must first adopt approaches or styles that will address the challenges posed by COVID-19 in an effective and efficient manner and also by putting strategies in place to address future, unforeseen circumstances, with emphasis on lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic. This research will be beneficial to leaders, students of knowledge and legislators, amongst others.

Scope and Limitation of Research

The thematic scope of this research is confined to the leadership role of the Nigerian Government in addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19 from 2019-2020. The geographical scope is Nigeria however, for this research to be meaningful, impactful, and a basis for improving the approaches undertaken by the Nigerian government, reference will be made to the approaches adopted by the United Kingdom Prime Minister in addressing COVID-19.

Research Methodology

To achieve the aim and objectives of this research, the doctrinal method is adopted. Thus, the information used is from two sources:

- a. Primary Sources: Legislations
- b. Secondary Sources: This includes books, articles from journals and the internet.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious health crisis that the world is still struggling with, in addition to the negative implications it is still having on economies even of the most economically advanced nations. Nigeria is not an exception, where the virus has not only caused the deaths of thousands but has led to the loss of livelihoods. This is in addition to the multifaceted problems that Nigeria has been facing such as kidnapping, banditry, terrorist acts, corruption and other forms of instability. “94 percent of the Fortune 1000 across the globe, and businesses in Nigeria have been impacted and are already seeing COVID-19 disruptions” (KPMG, COVID-19: A Business Impact Series: Business Implications of COVID-19). Suffice it to mention the ever-important role of leaders in addressing the socio-economic implications of COVID-19 hence the necessity of considering the various leadership styles, approaches and theories. This is with a view to focusing on the attributes of a strategic leader, whose focus is primarily on rethinking ways of managing the COVID-19 pandemic in effective and efficient ways.

The Nigerian Government's Approach to COVID-19

Nigeria confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on the 27th February, 2020 and since then there have been reports on the numbers of persons with confirmed cases of COVID-19. Measures were put in place to reduce the spread starting with the restriction of movement in Lagos and Ogun States and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. It was not until the 29th of March, 2020, that Nigeria's President gave his first address on COVID-19, following intense backlash from Nigerians on the President's unexplained silence in the face of a pandemic. This was in contradistinction to the approach taken by world leaders such as Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom and Donald Trump of the United States of America, who took swift actions to address the pandemic, in the light of the peculiarities of their countries. The participatory approaches taken by these leaders through delivering press conferences were considered participatory, did away with bureaucracy, was effective and afforded citizens to better understand the issue at hand, which led to citizens reposing more confidence in their leaders.

However, the late intervention of the Nigerian President in announcing measures geared towards limiting the spread of the virus as well as palliatives to cushion the effects of COVID-19 in the context of hardship was through a delegative approach i.e. establishing a Presidential Task Force on COVID-19.

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), through the National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) has continued to lead the national public health response in Nigeria with oversight of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 (PTF-COVID-19) and is also working closely with all states of the Federation to support their response activities to the pandemic (NCDC, Overview). The measures established by the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 along with the Federal Ministry of Health includes "an initial lockdown of non-essential activities; closure of schools; a ban on international flights etc. Nigeria is one of many countries that have commenced the gradual easing of lockdown measures initially instituted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic" (NCDC, Overview). The measures were basically derived from those put in place in economically advanced countries thus it did not address the peculiar problems to Nigerians. For example, people lost their lives during the initial lockdown period because they did not have food in their homes to feed themselves and their families. The government should have ensured the equitable distribution of palliatives before imposing a lockdown.

The measures were later reviewed and included: Provision of further palliatives and incentives in the form of hazard allowance and insurance for frontline health workers, provision of protective equipment to security personnel against infection by the disease, the direct distribution and expansion of palliatives to most vulnerable

households as well as the deployment of necessary provisions needed by businesses and traders to continue production and thus restore jobs (Ikeyi Shittu & Co, Nigeria Government's Revised Approach to Containing COVID-19).

Other Measures to Tackle COVID-19 by the Nigerian Government:

The economic implications of COVID-19 is felt in various sectors of the Nigerian economy and has affected businesses, individuals and families. The consequences of COVID-19 are projected to continue for a long time. It is in the light of these implications especially as it affects the economy that governments across the world put some measures in order to save their economies from total collapse and to reduce the suffering of citizens. Consequent to this is the announcement of tax and economic measures by the Federal Inland Revenue Services and the Central Bank of Nigeria to mitigate the suffering of citizens. Also, proposals have been sent by the House of Representatives (HORs) in the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill, 2020 (the Bill). Some of the tax measures out in place by the Federal Inland Revenue Service to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on taxpayers include the use of electronic platforms for payment of taxes and processing of tax clearance certificates, proposed creation of a portal where documents required for desk reviews and tax audits will be uploaded by taxpayers for online access by the tax authority and submission of tax returns online by taxpayers or by designated email accounts published by the FIRS (Wole Obayomi (KPMG, Nigeria introduces tax and economic measures in response to COVID-19). The economic measures put in place by the Central Bank of Nigeria include the reduction of interest rate on intervention facilities from 9% to 5%, creation of fifty billion Naira target credit facility for affected households and small and medium enterprises, improving foreign exchange supply to the Central Bank of Nigeria, by directing oil companies and oil servicing companies to sell foreign exchange to the Central Bank of Nigeria instead of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, identification of few key local pharmaceutical companies that will be granted funding facilities to support the procurement of raw materials and equipment required to boost local drug production and providing additional one hundred billion naira intervention fund in healthcare loans to pharmaceutical companies and healthcare practitioners intending to expand/build capacity (Wole Obayomi (KPMG, Nigeria introduces tax and economic measures in response to COVID-19).

The Role of Strategic Leadership in Addressing COVID-19

The importance of strategic leadership in the face of current and emerging trends cannot be overemphasised. The importance has become most prominent due to COVID-19, a pandemic that was never envisaged but brought the world to a standstill, within a short period and necessitated varied approaches by world leaders and leaders

of organisations. For governments to continue enjoying support from her citizens and for the growth and survival of nations and entities, strategic leadership is a must.

Strategic leadership is the prospect of influencing organisational members and executing organisational change through establishing organisational structure, allocating resources and expressing strategic vision (Juneja, Prachi, Strategic Leadership - Definition and Qualities of a Strategic Leader). Thus strategic leadership requires the following: (Hugh M. McKinney. The Meaning, Value, and Experience of Strategic Leadership for Law Enforcement Executives in Today's World).

... a combination of art and discipline. By art, we mean thinking that is creative, out of the box, and blue sky. Examples include the creation of alternative strategic visions for top team assessment, new product development, the crafting of what-if scenarios, the identification of decision-making criteria, and the design of a new culture that is strategically aligned. Creativity is also required in other activities such as communicating the strategy and supporting ownership of and commitment to it... Discipline is essential, both in the thought process involved in strategy and in its execution....[the strategic leader needs to] craft and implement a plan...[the leader] needs to ensure consistency of decision making throughout the organization...when so many options are available ...[and the strategic leader must be sure to] regularly...monitor, review, and update strategy.

Strategic leadership resides in a strategic leader, whose role is creating vision, inspiration and momentum in a group of people (Mackian, Sara and Simons Joan, Leading, Managing, Caring: Understanding Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care). In the context of COVID-19, there were significant uncertainties with regards to the correct approach to be taken in addition to the limited time leaders were expected to respond to the threats posed by the pandemic. The challenges associated with decision making leaders are further heightened due to significant uncertainty and requires a rapidly adaptive response that is not usually associated with leadership in more 'business-as-usual' times (Anderson L. Leadership during crisis – navigating complexity and uncertainty, 2018: 49–54).

A key challenge of a pandemic is that an effective management of the situation requires large-scale human behaviour change. When adoption is insufficient, collective benefits are not guaranteed. eWhen adoption is insufficient, collective benefits are not guaranteed. A global pandemic is therefore a 'litmus test of trust in a health system' (Gopichandran V, Subramaniam S, Kalsingh MJ. COVID-19 Pandemic: a Litmus Test of Trust in the Health System, 2020).

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<https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/advisory/3>.

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