



Original Article

## ENHANCING THE WORK PERFORMANCE OF UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC STAFF BY DELEGATED DECISION-MAKING APPROACH FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN UGANDAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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### ABSTRACT

This study focused on the decision-making approaches (DMA) of the academic deans and departmental heads in tandem with the work performance of the academics in the Ugandan public universities. The research was prompted by persistent cases of complaints and reports from different key stakeholders regarding the deteriorating quality of teaching, research, and community engagement in public universities in Uganda. The researcher hypothesized that the problem could have been gaps emerging from the types of decision-making approaches used by the academic deans and departmental heads. As a result, the research was approached from the positivist research paradigm with a focus on the pragmatic philosophical approach in which both the quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated from 325 respondents with the use of questionnaire survey and in-depth interview methods. The study examined the effects of the delegated decision-making approach of the academic deans and departmental heads on the work performance of the academics in selected public universities in Uganda. A systematic random sampling strategy was used to administer the questionnaires to the target respondents. The data obtained was analyzed and presented with the aid of descriptive statistical techniques (tables, percentages & histograms), inferential statistical techniques (Student T-test, Pearson's correlation, ANOVA & regression), and content analysis methods. The study findings revealed that low and high work performance had a direct bearing on the type of DMA used by academic deans and departmental heads in Uganda. The study concluded that the kind of DMA academic units managers employ when interacting with their institutional academic staff has a direct effect on how the academics perform their routine work. Thus, the study recommended that academic deans and departmental heads who are concerned with the decision-making process should employ more often delegated decision-making approaches at the workplace because it has a significant positive correlation with the work performance of the academic staff.

## INTRODUCTION

This study looked at delegation as the transfer of authority by a manager to staff to enable them to make decisions and take actions required for their work performance. With the expansion of university enrolment coupled with the private students' scheme, university management has become more complex (Mayanja, 2007). To be effective, university managers need to delegate some tasks to their academic staff (Sullivan & Glanz, 2005). According to Musaaazi (2006), delegation is a situation in which power and authority are shared between the manager and the subordinates (the academic staff) in carrying out different activities. Chandan (1995) noted that delegation is a motivational factor because employees are given authority hence making them feel recognized and boosting their morale to work with dedication. In support of the foregoing argument, Maicibi and Nkata (2005) state that delegation of tasks and responsibilities to staff builds their performance to work. Prasad (2007) observes that the delegation of tasks and responsibility to subordinates is a tool for staff motivation. However, Prasad's assertion does not demonstrate how the performance of workers is affected by the delegated decision-making approach. This is the key gap this study established and attempted to fill.

A study conducted by Milind (2004) found that higher levels of delegating decision-making were associated with job satisfaction, which had a bearing on one's work performance. Marshall, Adams, and Cameron (2001) posit that in order to have a successful delegation, there should be a clear definition of responsibilities and authority to accomplish them. Responsibilities should be stated in writing by the manager, and the employee should have a good idea of how the job fits into the total picture and why it is vital (Cole, 2004).

According to Duke and Hinzen (2006), the delegation of authority and responsibility is an effective tool for school management though it is not effectively used. Hannagan (2005) observed that execution of delegated assignments suffers from poor monitoring; thus, he puts forward guiding principles to effective delegation such as why, what, how, where, and when to delegate.

Mullins (2005) further suggested that delegation should be based on clear objectives, supportive relationships, and acceptance of authority. This is re-affirmed by Armstrong (2007), who agreed that delegation strengthens the workforce by developing employee's aptitude. Unfortunately, all the above scholars do not indicate whether or not delegated decision-making enhances work performance. This is the missing link that this study examined.

According to Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (2013), the attitudes of the superiors and subordinates are sometimes barriers to delegation. The superior may feel that decisions can only be made by top management or may fear losing importance, influence, or future control of some activities within the organization (McShane & Von Glinow, 2003). On the other hand, subordinates may lack the confidence to make decisions (Maylor, 2003) or may reluctantly make decisions or refuse extra responsibilities. In such cases, the aspect of delegated decision-making approach remains very difficult for deans and departmental heads to deploy. Despite the above, the researcher opined that there could be a substantial relationship between the delegated decision-making approach and work performance. This study investigated that opinion.

Kasule and Neema (2014) in their study assessing the career goals and attainment of higher academic qualification by the academic staff at Kyambogo University, found that little or no attention was put on the performance of lecturers who serve in universities in Uganda. This is not healthy as it leaves one to doubt the quality of teaching and research provided. However, Neema-Abooki (2004) in his study investigating the *Integration of Total Quality Management in Management of Universities in Uganda* states that academic staff must continuously keep abreast of the teaching, learning, and research demands in a university for quality education to be achieved. However, Kasule and Neema-Abooki did not mention whether their assertions had any effects on the work performance or the decision-making approaches used. This study has attempted to find the link between the delegated decision-making approach and the work performance of academic staff.

Kasozi (2009) observed that a direct outcome of doubling the teaching load was that more and more lecturers found it difficult to mark a doubled load of coursework and final examinations. The outcomes of these were incomplete results for some students and late submission of results. In one of the faculty of education board meetings which the researcher attended, the lecturers complained that they were not being paid in time for marking the extra load, and yet the students were paying for it and this affected their work performance. This study finding concurred well with Mamdani (2007) when he noted that, increasingly, more academic staffs were unwilling to give priority to tasks for which they were not paid directly and immediately. For example, Mamdani (2007) wrote that most lecturers do not provide reading lists and if they did, they are provided in the last quarter of the semester and at times with references that are not locally available. Some lecturers do not give a course outline because they allegedly fear to expose their weaknesses as many lecturers appear to be using the same lecture materials repeatedly, some in the form of yellow notes, some lecturers dodge lectures and send notes to students for photocopying. The above are some of the indications of inefficiency in participation in research and generation of new knowledge by the academic staff. The above literature cited was based on a study done at Makerere University that may equally be applied to other public universities in Uganda.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used the pragmatist research paradigm, which according to Feilzer (2010) is a deconstructive paradigm that advocates for the use of the mixed-methods approach in research. The researcher approached the issue of decision-making approaches (DMA) of academic deans and departmental heads in relation to the work performance (WP) of academic staff in public universities in Uganda as a matter of both objective and subjective reality. Therefore, the study did not lean either towards the positivist nor interpretivist research paradigms but on the pragmatist paradigm. This is because pragmatism rejects the paradigm wars where most of the researches are associated with either positivism or interpretivism only.

This study chose to use the mixed-methods research approach because of its ability to overcome the disadvantages that are inherent when adopting mono-method research. For example, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) pointed out that combining questionnaires and interviews in a single research study brings together the advantages of breadth and depth associated with the two respective methods. By carrying out quantitative research along with qualitative research, this mixed-methods study helped to overcome some of the drawbacks with qualitative research, such as the influence of the researcher's personal biases when interpreting research results. Likewise, by conducting qualitative research with quantitative research, this mixed-methods research overcame some of the drawbacks with quantitative research, such as the reductionist research models that would have omitted important constructs that could have been identified by using qualitative methods to generate theory.

In this study, the sequential explanatory research design was complemented by using a cross-sectional survey given a large number of respondents that were involved. The cross-sectional design was intended to enable the researcher to collect data at one point in time in order to avoid returning to the field several times if the design was longitudinal in nature. This helped to reduce the time and costs that were used in the study. The accessible population comprised of all the academic deans and heads of department, and the academic staff (professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, assistant lecturers, teaching assistants, and graduate fellows) of the three selected public universities totaling 1744 according to NCHE (2017).

To settle on the sample size from the population size mentioned, Yamane's (1967) method for determining sample size was used. According to Yamane (1967), the sample size is determined mathematically using the formulae stated below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:  $n$  is the sample size desired;  $N$ , population size and  $e$ , level of significance measured at 0.05 or 5%

For the quantitative part of the study, the academic staff was sampled using a stratified but convenience sampling technique. This involved the stratification of academic staff according to their schools/faculties, departments and ranks

Three data collection methods and tools were used to collect the required data. The methods used included surveys, interviews, and documentaries, and the tools employed were a questionnaire, interview guides, and document checklist respectively. The use of different methods enabled the purpose of triangulation (i.e., a combination of methodologies in a study of the same phenomena to increase credibility and dependability of the study findings).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Work performance of the academic staff was conceptualized into three sub-variables, namely: teaching, research, and community engagements. These were further subdivided into 41 specific items (21 on teaching, 13 on research, and 7 on community engagement). The items were then presented in close-ended five-point Likert Scales (1 represented very rarely, 2 represented rarely, 3 represented occasionally, 4 represented frequently, and 5 represented very frequently).

Concerning the use of delegated decision-making approach and how it affected the work performance of the academic staff in the selected public universities, delegated decision-making approach was sub-divided into six components namely; transfer of authority, transfer of power, and transfer of leadership roles, entrusting others with authority, passing on authority, and assigning tasks to others. These were later developed into six questionnaire items that were used to measure the respondents' ratings of the delegated decision-making approaches in the respective universities. The results on the item whether the academic deans and departmental heads assigned any tasks to staff showed that cumulatively, the majority (54.4%) said that they rarely did so as opposed to the minority (42.1%) of the respondents who agreed that they were often assigned tasks. However, considering the mean score of 1.38, which was close to code 1, which corresponded to the verdict never, the results suggested that the academic deans

and departmental heads never assigned any tasks to the academic staff.

In regard to whether the academic deans and departmental heads transferred any authority to influence the work performance of the academic staff, the majority of respondents with a cumulative percentage of 56.1% said that they rarely did so compared to fewer respondents with a lower cumulative percentage of 39.8% who said that the academic deans and departmental heads transferred some authority. The mean score of 2.49 indicated that the respondents seemed to be sure that their academic deans and departmental heads never transferred any authority since the mean score tended to code 2, which represented the verdict of value rarely being represented.

The concern on whether the academic deans and departmental heads gave any authority to their staff revealed that the majority with a cumulative percentage of 56.8% reported that they were rarely given any authority as opposed to fewer respondents (39.8%) who said that they were always given some authority. Besides, the mean score of 2.57 was close to code 3 which corresponded to the verdict sometimes. This suggested that the respondents seemed to say that the academic deans and departmental heads sometimes gave some authority to the academic staff.

When asked if the academic deans and departmental heads shared their leadership roles with the academic staff, the majority of the respondents (63.7%) reported that they rarely did so compared to 33.5% of the respondents who agreed with the statement. On the contrary, the mean score of 2.62, which tended to code 3, represented the verdict sometimes. This suggested that the academic deans and departmental heads sometimes shared their leadership roles with the academic staff.

The researchers also assessed whether the academic deans and departmental heads entrusted the academic staff with their responsibilities. The majority of the respondents (65.2%) claimed that the academic deans and departmental heads rarely entrusted them their responsibilities while only 29.6% agreed to the statement. However, the mean

score of 2.83 was close to code 3, which corresponded to the verdict sometimes. This suggested that the academic deans and departmental heads sometimes entrusted the academic staff with their responsibilities.

Regarding whether academic deans and departmental heads passed on any authority to academic staff, the majority of the respondents (60.6%) said they rarely did so but 34.1% of the respondents supported the statement Considering the mean score of 1.40 which was close to code 1, which corresponded to the verdict never, the results

indicated that the academic deans and departmental heads never passed on their authority to the academic staff.

To establish the overall picture of how the respondents rated the delegated decision-making approach used by the academic deans and departmental heads in their respective universities and how it affected their work performance, an average index of Del.DMA was computed for the six items measuring the delegated decision-making approach as presented below.

**Table 1: Summary Statistics for Delegated Decision-Making Approach**

		Statistic	Std. Error	
Delegated Approach	Mean	2.7033	0.1444	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	2.5741	
		Upper Bound	2.8324	
	5% Trimmed Mean	2.6692		
	Median	2.5000		
	Variance	1.237		
	Std. Deviation	1.11199		
	Minimum	1.00		
	Maximum	5.00		
	Range	4.00		
	Interquartile Range	1.83		
	Skewness	0.442	1.44	
	Kurtosis	0.935	0.287	

Table 1 showed the 5% trimmed mean of 2.7033, the median of 2.5000, the standard deviation of 1.1119 and the range of 4.00. With both the mean and the median almost equal, this suggested a normal distribution. Therefore, despite the positive skew (skew 0.442), the results were normally distributed. The mean and median were close to code 3, which suggested that the Del.DMA that were used by the academic deans and departmental heads sometimes affected the work performance of the academic staff because the scale or the verdict used code 3 which represented sometimes. The standard deviation of 1.1119 suggested a perfect dispersion in the responses. Conversely, measures of dispersion (standard deviation) were analyzed for each of the variables of interest to describe how to spread or blown out the responses were from the central position.

In this study, it was revealed that 54.4% of the academic deans and departmental heads had rarely assigned any tasks to their academic staff, 56.1% rarely transferred any authority, 56.8% of them rarely gave any authority to the academic staff, 63.7% rarely shared any leadership roles with the academic staff, 65.2% rarely entrusted any responsibilities to the academic staff, and 60.6% rarely passed on any authority to the academic staff. Accordingly, this implied that the spirit of sharing, entrusting, and delegating were too limited among academic deans and departmental heads in the public universities in Uganda. This definitely had a negative relationship with the work performance of the academic staff. This scenario was in agreement with Adair (2007), who stated that the more people have a share in the decisions that affect their working life, the more they are motivated to carry them out. Johansen and Lundstrom (2006) also reported that the key issues in decision-making

were how far a manager shared the decision function with his/her team.

In measuring the effects of applying delegated decision-making approaches, the levels of work performance of the respondents were compared using the Student's T-test and ANOVA on the determined respective indicators of the delegated decision-making approaches. Thereafter, the bivariate tests of their significance as the correlates of the dependent variable were made. The final step was testing of the hypothesized derived indicators of the delegated decision-making approaches using multiple regression modeling. The results were then presented item by item following the order of the self-administered questionnaire survey.

To establish whether there were any relationships between the academic staff work performance and the delegated decision-making approach, a correlation analysis was done to establish the relationships. The results indicated that all the delegated decision-making components had a significant positive correlation with the academic staff work performance. This is because the critical values of all the items were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), hence supporting the hypothesized relationship at a preliminary level. However, the results showed that the delegated decision-making approaches correlated most significantly with the WP, followed by transfer of authority, transfer of power, transfer of leadership roles, entrusting others with authority, passing on authority, and assigning tasks to others respectively.

To establish if the delegated decision-making approach predicted academic staffs' work performance, the study regressed the constructs of delegated decision-making against work performance. The constructs of the delegated

decision-making approaches regressed were namely: transfer of authority, transfer of power, transfer of leadership roles, entrusting others with authority, passing on authority, and assigning tasks to others. The results showed that five components of the delegated decision-making approach explained 10.6% of the variations in the work performance (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.106$ ). This meant that 89.4% of the variations were accounted for by extraneous variables; that is, other approaches not considered in this study. The regression model was significant ( $F = 6.633, p = 0.000 < 0.5$ ). While all the five indicators of the delegated decision-making approach were positively correlated to the work performance of academic staff, only one namely: transfer of authority to staff ( $\beta = -0.003, p = -0.009$ .) proved to be a statistically negative significant component of the delegated decision-making approach.

The results while testing hypotheses at the bivariate statistical analysis level exposed that there was a PLCC,  $r = 0.340^{**}$  between delegated decision-making approach used by the unit academic managers and the work performance of the academic staff. With the non-appearance of a negative sign on the coefficient, it was disclosed that the two variables were positively linearly correlated. The observed Sig. (p-value) was 0.000, which was less than the  $p = 0.05$ . This suggests that there was a significant correlation at a 95% confidence level between the delegated decision-making approach and the work performance of the academic staff. To establish if the delegated decision-making approach predicted the academic staff's work performance, this study as was designed regressed work performance against it, and the table below shows the respective betas and their corresponding Sig values.

**Table 2: Regression Results of Delegated Decision-making Approach on Work Performance**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	
1 (Constant)	2.518	0.092		27.336	0.000
DelegatedApproach	0.050	0.032	0.116	1.598	0.111

a. Dependent Variable: Work Performance

Table 2 illustrated and revealed that the delegated decision-making approach possessed a positive

beta (0.116), suggesting that the existence of a significant positive effect of delegated decision-

making approach on academic staff work performance. The observed Sig.-value (0.111) was larger than the popular p-value of 0.05, ( $p > 0.05$ ) suggests an insignificant effect at the 5% level. Hence, using the regression analysis, the hypothesis which stated that, there was no significant effect of delegated decision-making approach of the academic deans and departmental heads on the work performance of the academic staff was rejected. The interpretation of this is such that, an increase in the use of delegated decision-making approaches by the academic deans and departmental heads by one unit is associated with a corresponding increase in academic staff work performance by 0.050.

The finding of the study that delegated decision-making approach significantly enhanced work performance of the academic staff was consistent with those of Sullivan and Glanz (2005) and Maicibi's work of 2005 who indicated that to be effective, university managers need to delegate some tasks to academic staff they are managing, Maicibi and Nkata (2005) also agreed that delegation of tasks and responsibilities to staff build their performance at work and Mullins (2005) who suggested that delegation should be based on clear objectives, supportive relationships, and acceptance of authority.

On the contrary, the works of scholars such as Heresy, Blanchard, and Johnson (2002), as well as Mc Shane and Von Glinow (2003), found out that the attitude of the superiors and subordinates were sometimes barriers to delegation. Their findings revealed that the superior might feel that decisions can only be made by top management or may fear losing self-importance, influence, or future personal control of some activities within the organization (university). On the other hand, subordinates might lack the confidence to make decisions or might reluctantly make decisions or refuse any extra responsibilities (Maylor, 2003). In such cases, the aspect of delegated decision-making approach remains very difficult for the academic deans and departmental heads to deploy.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study finding established that delegated DMA as used by academic deans and departmental heads

had a significant effect on the work performance of the academic staff in public universities in Uganda. Therefore, the hypothesis, which stated that "the use of delegated decision-making approach by academic deans and departmental heads significantly enhanced the work performance of the academic staff was accordingly upheld. Delegated decision-making approaches had a significant positive effect on the work performance of academic staff, and this implied that the delegated decision-making approach was effective in enhancing academic staff work performance.

The knowledge of the enhancement of work performance of university academic staff by using delegated decision-making approaches in public universities in Uganda is not conclusive. Therefore, further studies need to be carried out in different contexts of higher education in order to establish its benefits and shortcomings. Academic deans and departmental heads of public universities should engage more in a clear and purposeful delegated decision-making approach because it has a positive effect on the work performance of the academic staff. This is because an increase in the use of delegated decision-making approach by one unit is associated with a corresponding increase in academic staff work performance by 05%. This means that the delegated decision-making approach is a tool that can be used to align the vision and mission of public universities as well as the objectives of the academic staff. Therefore, special emphasis should be positioned on enhancing the work performance of academic staff using the delegated decision-making approach. For example, workshops and training courses should be organized, and conducted for academic deans and departmental heads on how to intensify, articulate, communicate, and implement the benefits of using the delegated decision-making approach. Such sensitization programs are likely to re-awaken the interest and participation of all the key stakeholders. This is because the higher the level of the academic staff participation in decision-making, the higher the devotion to the university's vision and mission and the higher the academic staff's work performance will be. This calls for interventions that encourage collegial relationships to discourage adversarial relations among the academic staff based on the spirit of sharing power and authority.

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