



Original Article

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING FOR ACADEMICS' WORK PERFORMANCE IN UGANDAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Wilberforce Okongo¹, Dr. David Onen² & Prof. Wilson Okaka³

¹Kyambogo University, P.O. Box 1, Kyambogo, Uganda, okongo2000@gmail.com.

²Makerere University, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda, donenotoo@cees.mak.ac.ug.

³Kyambogo University, P.O. Box 1, Kyambogo, Uganda, wokaka@kyu.ac.ug.

Article history:

Received: 09 Sep 2019

Accepted: 02 Oct 2019

Published: 21 Oct 2019

Keywords:

*Decision Making,
Democratic,
Academics,
Work Performance,
Public University,
Uganda*

ABSTRACT

The use of democratic decision-making approaches (DMA) by university academic unit managers is vital for improved scholarly productivity and regular work performance of academic staff's in Ugandan public universities. The study examined the democratic decision-making approaches of the academic unit managers in tandem with the work performance of the academics' in the Ugandan public universities. The research objectives were to examine the effects of democratic decision-making approaches as used by the various academic unit managers in the Ugandan public universities on the work performance of the various categories of university academics, examine the benefits of democratic decision making and explain its implications of academic productivity on education for sustainable development. The cross-sectional survey study employed mixed quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments that involved all categories of academics from assistant lecturers to professors in three selected public universities in Uganda. 325 respondents participated in the survey that was backed by in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed by the use of appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics as well as the thematic content analysis method. Preliminary findings indicated that among others, the high work performance of the academics was directly related to the democratic decision-making style which the decision-makers at various university academic units practiced. The use of democratic decision-making approach had a more significant positive effect on the work performance (WP) of the academic staff. The results showed that a unit increase in the use of DMA yields 19.1% increases in the WP of academic staff. We concluded that democratic decision-making approach promotes academic freedom, openness, incentives or motivations, and high academics' productivity in regular work. Therefore, it is recommended that academic unit managers who aim to achieve better staff work performance for university competitiveness should adopt the democratic decision-making model for enhanced academics' work performance output. The unit managers should also be trained and made skillful in the use of DMA because it is consultative, collective, and participative in nature.

INTRODUCTION

Academic staffs are perceived as one of the essential parts in postmodern universities. This is because their involvement in decision making is a very important aspect at the workplace (David, 2005). To efficiently progress and ultimately compete in the world of academics, universities must aim at maximizing the benefits derived from academic staff engagement in decision-making. Historically, decision-making approaches (DMA) as a topic was first discussed in the 1940s (Coch & French, 1948). At that time, DMA was used to measure individuals' performance. In the 1970s, scholars began to distinguish the levels of DMA, dividing it into three forms: formality versus informality, directness versus indirectness, and the degree of influence (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978). In the 1980s through 1990s, there were increased interest and growth of the number of studies on DMA focused mainly on its outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Some of the recent studies include the impact of DMA on the job training (Salim, Roszaide, Ismail, & Yussof, 2015), democratic approaches in financial decision making (Zaimah et al., 2017), democratic approaches in domestic decision making (Mamoni & Aviral, 2011) among others.

This paper focuses only on promoting democratic decision making for academics' work performance in Ugandan Public Universities. This is because, in a university setting, lecturer performance has a strategic role and is the main factor determining the quality of education, student performance, and thus university performance. Kingdon and Teal (2007) mentioned that teachers are a central actor in the learning process that takes place in schools. Studying how DMA affects lecturer performance in public universities from different settings is very useful for not only enriching and refining theory but also for developing reasonable recommendations to increase the quality of higher educational institutions.

World over, several scholars have been looking at how workers can be motivated to perform their work. Some of the scholars examined the relationship between organizational leadership and

decision-making, such as Vroom and Jago (1988). Wandira, Onen, and Kimoga (2015) investigated the effect of school governance and curriculum management training on the performance of primary headteachers. Giri and Kumar (2010) analyzed the relationship between organizational communication and job performance of employees in organizations while Kafeero (2014) looked at the relationship between management styles and work performance of teachers in secondary schools. However, a few other scholars examined the relationship between decision-making approaches and work performance of employees (Dar, Akmal, Naseem, & Khan, 2011; Daoanis, 2012). Unfortunately, even these studies did not pay attention to the DMA of academic unit managers in a university setting. This study was intended to fill this knowledge gap.

Many definitions in the literature refer to democratic decision making as employee involvement, employee participation, employee engagement, and employee empowerment. These terms are used interchangeably in previous literature, but its meaning refers to the concept of democratic decision-making. Wagner (1994) in one of his study defined Decision Making Approach as a process of involvement among employees and administration in sharing information processing, decision making and problem-solving in an organization. DMA can also be defined as a process that allows employees to exercise some level of influence over their work and the conditions under which they work (Strauss, 1998). This study was interested in validating for the democratic decision-making approaches as employed by academic unit managers affects academic staff in the context of Uganda universities.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used the pragmatist research paradigm that promotes the integration of more than one research methods in a single study. Therefore, a mixed-method research approach was adopted in this study to provide a deeper understanding of the DMA as a predictor of WP that would otherwise not have been accessible by

using one approach alone (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). 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. A sequential explanatory research design was used and beefed up by a cross-sectional survey because of the large number of respondents that were involved. A sequential explanatory research design is a two-phase study that starts with the quantitative data collection phase and then successively followed by the qualitative phase to enhance the quantitative findings (Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2009). The cross-sectional aspect of the 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. This helped to reduce the time and costs that were used in the study.

Regarding the study population, it comprised of all the academic deans, heads of department and the academic staff (professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, assistant lecturers, teaching assistants, and graduate fellows) of the selected public universities. The researchers targeted 1744 academic staff. Yamane's (1967) method for determining sample size was used to arrive at 325 respondents who completed the questionnaires for quantitative data. The researcher used a self-administered questionnaire to collect data on how the DMA of academic unit managers affected the WP of academic staff. Qualitative data from the academic unit managers were collected through face-to-face interviews based on an interview guide.

To ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire in this study, the items to measure the constructs under investigation were informed by the relevant items adopted from already-made instruments from Jeya and Sahari (2011); Smeenk, Teelken, Eisinga, and Doorewaard (2009) and were generally considered to be reliable for that matter. Furthermore, to establish reliability due to contextual differences, the tool was subjected to a pre-test on a group of academic staff who did not participate in the main study.

The quantitative data upon completion of the survey were checked for completeness, coded, and entered SPSS version 23 for data analysis. Data

were cleaned and presented using applicable tables, diagrams, and descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means. To establish if there existed any significant effect of the democratic decision-making approaches (IV) on the work performance (DV), the academic staff scores on work performance were then correlated to each of the three dimensions of DMA approaches (IV) using a simple linear regression analysis provided by SPSS (version 23). A multi-linear regression analysis was run to determine the aggregate effect of decision-making approaches on the work performance of academic staff.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Democratic decision-making approach (Demo. DMA) was conceptualized into seven items that were later sub-divided into 9 items to ascertain the respondents' rating it and to establish if the academic unit managers were democratic or not. The 9 items were stated as close-ended questions in tandem with the five-point Likert Scale (1 representing never, 2 representing rarely, 3 representing sometimes, 4 representing often, and 5 representing always). In order to establish whether there was any relationship between the work performance of the academic staff and the democratic decision-making approaches used by the academic unit managers, a correlation analysis was carried out and the results suggested that all the constructs of the democratic decision making approaches were significant correlates of the academic staff's work performance ($p < 0.05$).

When the study attempted to find out if the democratic decision-making approaches predicted the work performance of the academic staff at the confirmatory level, the work performance was regressed on the elements of the democratic decision-making approach. The results showed that 9 constructs of the democratic decision-making approach explained 29.9% of the variation in the work performance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.299$). This meant that 70.1% of the variation was accounted for by other factors not considered in this study. The regression model was significant ($F = 8.934$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). While all the nine constructs of democratic decision-making approach were positively correlated to WP, only 2 of them namely; consultations before a decision is taken and

participation in discussions significantly affected the WP. The magnitudes of the respective betas suggested that consultations before the decision was taken ($\beta = 0.242$, $p = 0.000$) and participation in discussions ($\beta = -0.184$, $p = 0.013$) were the most significant predictors of work performance followed by joint efforts.

In order to ascertain the effect of democratic DMA on the work performance of the academic staff, it was necessary for the researcher to establish first whether academic unit managers used democratic DMA at all. The results showed that the overall mean for all the nine items that measured the use of democratic DMA was 2.5 close to code 3 on the Likert Scale. Code 3 on the stated scale corresponds to the word "sometimes." With these results, it was evident that academic deans and departmental heads used democratic decision-making approaches.

The findings above were confirmed when this study regressed the dependent variable against the independent variable to establish whether the democratic decision-making approach significantly affected the academic staff work performance. A significant positive effect was revealed that the democratic decision-making approach significantly affected the work performance of the academic staff in public universities. This is why the hypothesis states that 'the democratic decision-making approach used by the academic unit managers significantly affected the work performance of the academic staff in public universities' was accepted.

This study finding concurred with the results of several other studies such as the ones of Appelbaum (2013), Sukirno and Siengthai (2011), Elele and Fields (2010), Abdulkadir, Isiaka, & Adedoyin, (2012) and Janudin et al. (2015). Appelbaum (2013) for instance, established that participation in decision-making positively affected workers' performance. Sukirno and Siengthai (2011) found out that at the individual level, 91% of lecturers were affected by participation in the decision-making process, which had a direct bearing on their teaching and research efficiency. Elele and Fields (2010) meanwhile established that employee participation in decision-making had a significant positive effect on employee performance which

view was also shared by Janudin et al. (2015) who established that a significant positive relationship exists between participation in decision-making by lecturers in matters that affect them and their work performance.

Furthermore, the finding of this study that democratic decision-making approach used by the academic unit managers affected the work performance of the academic staff under their jurisdiction matched the earlier finding by De Waal (2011). De Waal studied, "*Characteristics of high-performance organizations*" and observed that work performance increases when the workers believe that they have the power to decide (democratic decision-making approach) on how the work should be done.

The finding that democratic DMA significantly affects the work performance of academic staff is also in agreement with the finding of Abdulsalam and Mawoli (2012) that found a positive relationship existed between motivation and teaching performance except for the relationship between motivation and research that they found to be negative. This was affirmed when the researcher established the status of teaching using the 21 items that measured teaching performance and it was evident that the academic staff was frequently involved in teaching as one of their cardinal work performances. This is because they had high levels of teaching performance since they frequently executed their teaching roles.

Similarly, in establishing the performance levels of academic staff in relation to research, the overall mean score for all the 13 items that measured research revealed that the academic staff rarely researched despite being one of their cardinal roles. These finding confirms and links this stud's finding to the negativity that Abdulsalam and Mawoli (2012), as well as Abdulai and Shafiwu (2014), found out in relation to research in their studies. This study finding is also in agreement with Yariv's (2009) who observed that by applying the principle of probability, the more the decisions to enhance, the higher the quality of decisions, the more the stakeholders are likely to be motivated to implement, and the better the work performance.

Furthermore, this study finding is also in agreement with the ones of scholars like Walker and Dimmock (2000) who found out that in China, nine out of ten teachers were satisfied with their jobs because of the democratic decision-making approaches that were used. This was in congruence with Mayanja (2007) who did his study at Makerere University and posited that in a university, academic staff participation in decision-making as part of democratization which universities should espouse to achieve academic freedom and autonomy.

However, these study findings were at variance with the findings of other scholars, such as that of Henkin and Holliman (2008), who reported that participation in decision-making was marginally related to improved job performance. These results appeared to be a bit controversial because, whereas Henkin and Holliman (2008) found out that participation was marginally related to improved job performance, Janudin et al. (2015) established a significant positive relationship between participation and work performance in another study in Malaysian research universities. Perhaps the causes of this departure in the findings emerge from the differences in the contexts of these studies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of data and the discussion that ensued, individual academic unit managers employed different decision-making approaches. However, the use of democratic decision-making approach was found to be more dominant than the use of other decision-making approaches by academic unit managers. This implied that using the democratic decision-making approach by the academic unit managers was found to be more effective in enhancing the work performance of the academic staff. The knowledge on the effect of democratic decision-making approaches as used by academic unit managers on work performance of academic staff 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 the benefits and shortcomings of the various decision-making approaches.

Academic unit managers of public universities should engage more in clear and purposeful democratic decision-making approaches because it

has a positive impact on the work performance of the academic staff. This is because an increase in the use of democratic decision-making approach by one unit is associated with a corresponding increase in academic staff work performance by 19.1%. This means that democratic DMA 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 democratic 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 democratic 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, mission, and the higher the academic staff's work performance will be.

REFERENCES

- Abdulai, I. A., & Shafiwu, A. B. (2014). Participatory decision making and employee productivity. A case study of community banks in the upper east region of Ghana. *Business and Economics Journal*, 5(3), 99.
- Abdulkadir, D.S., Isiaka, S.B., & Adedoyin, S.I. (2012). Effects of strategic performance appraisal, career planning and employee participation on organizational commitment: An empirical study. *International Business Research* 5(4), 124–133.
- Abdulsalam, D., & Mawoli, M. A. (2012). Motivation and job performance of academic staff of state universities in Nigeria: The case of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 7(14), 142–148, doi: 10.1108/09596110910967809.
- Appelbaum, S.H. (2013). Participation in decision-making: a case study of job satisfaction and commitment (part two). *Industrial and Commercial Training* 45(6), 352–358.

- Coch, L. & French, J. R. P. (1948). Overcoming resistance to change. *Human Relations*. [Cited 13/5/2019]. Available from: <http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/1949-02436-001>.
- Dachler, H. P. & Wilpert, B. (1978). Conceptual dimensions and boundaries of participation in organizations: a critical evaluation. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 23, 1-39.
- Daoanis, L. E. (2012). Performance appraisal system: it's implication to employee performance. *International Journal of Economics and Management Sciences*, 2(3), 55-62.
- Dar, L., Akmal, A., Naseem, M. A., & Khan, K. U. (2011). Impact of stress on employees' job performance in the business sector of Pakistan. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 11(6), 1-4.
- David, F. (2005). *Strategic management: Concepts and cases*. Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey. Tenth edition.
- De Waal, A. (2011). Characteristics of high-performance organizations. *Journal of Management Research*, 4(4). doi.org/10.5296/jmr.v4i4.2062.
- Doyle, L., Brady, G. & Byrne, M. A. (2009). An overview of mixed-methods research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 14(2), 175-185.
- Elele, J., & Fields, D. (2010). Participative decision making and organizational commitment: Comparing Nigerian and American employees. *Cross-cultural management: An International Journal*, 17(14), 368-392, doi. 10.1108/13527601011086586.
- Giri, V. N., & Kumar, B. P. (2010). Assessing the impact of organizational communication on job satisfaction and job performance. *Journal of Psychological Studies*, 55 (2), 17-26.
- Henkin, A. B., & Holliman, S. L. (2008). Urban teacher commitment: Exploring associations with organizational conflict, support for innovation, and participation. *Urban Education Journal*, 44(2), 160-180.
- Janudin, E. S., Maelahb, R., Amirb A. M., & Abdullah, N. L., (2015). Performance measurement system and lecturers' performance: Testing the mediation role of competency in Malaysian Research Universities. *International Business Education Journal*, 8(1), 105-120
- Jeya, V., & Sahari, N. M., (2011). Psychometric analysis of lecturers' self-efficacy instrument. Research and development in Higher Education: *Higher Education the edge*, 34, 372-382.
- Kafeero, P. (2014). *Head teachers' management styles and teachers' performance in secondary schools in Rakai district*. (Unpublished Masters dissertation). Kyambogo University, Uganda.
- Kimoga, J. (2014). Lecturers' perceptions of using Information and Communications Technology in Higher Education Institutions. *African Journal of Education and Technology*, 4 (1), 70-82.
- Kingdon, G. G., & Teal, F. (2007). Does performance related pay for teachers improve student performance? Some evidence from India. *Economics of Education Review*, 26(4), 473-486.
- Mamoni, K. & Aviral, K.T. (2011). The state of Indian housewives' participation in domestic decision making and opposition to domestic violence. *Geografia-Malaysia Journal of Society and Space* 7(4), 9-15.
- Mayanja, K. M. (2007). Improving income from internally generated funds without provoking students or staff strike at Makerere University and other universities. Uganda Higher Education Review. *The Journal of National Council for Higher Education*, 4(2), 2-8.
- Morse, J. M., & Niehaus, L. (2009). Principles and procedures of mixed methods design. *Walnut Creek, CA: Left*.

- Salim, S. S., Roszaide, S., Ismail, A., & Yussof, I. (2015). Penentu keterlibatan pekerja dalam latihan: Kes sektor pendidikan swasta di Malaysia. *Geografia Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 11(10), 51-62.
- Smeenk, S., Teelken, C., Eisinga, R., & Doorewaard, H. (2009). Managerialism, organizational commitment, and quality of job performances among European university employees. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 589–607.
- Strauss, G. (1998). An overview. In: Heller, F., Pusic, E., Strauss, G., Wilpert, B. (eds). *Organizational Participation: Myth and Reality*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Sukirno, D.S., & Siengthai, S. (2011). Does participative decision-making affect lecturer performance in higher education? *International Journal of Educational Management* 25(5), 494–508.
- Vroom, V. H., & Jago, A. G. (1988). *The new leadership: Managing participation in organizations*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Wagner, J. A. (1994). Participation's effects on performance and satisfaction: a reconsideration of research evidence. *Academy of Management Review* 19(2), 312- 330.
- Walker, A., & Dimmock, C. (2000). One Size Fits All? Teacher Appraisal in a Chinese Culture. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 14(2), 155-171.
- Wandira, T. N. K., Onen, D., & Kimoga, J. (2015). Teacher Development and Management Systems (TDMS) Training Programme and the Performance of Head Teachers in the Management of Public Primary Schools in the Greater Masaka Region of Uganda. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 3(12), 231-244.
- Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis*. (2nd ed.). New York: Harper and Row.
- Yariv, E. (2009). Principal's informal methods for appraising poor-performing teachers. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability*. 21: 283-292.
- Zaimah, R., Sarmila, M. D., Awang, A. H., Lyndon, N., Selvadurai, S., Saad, S., ... & CR, R. A. (2017). Pembuatan keputusan kewangan: Kajian kes keluarga dwi-kerjaya di Malaysia (Financial decision making: A case study on dual-career families in Malaysia). *Geografia-Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 8(9).