

Exploring the Role of Leaders in Cross-Cultural Contexts in Seventh-Day Adventist Institutions in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

The article has a critical impact on SDA institutions with a diverse workforce, therefore, leaders and employees in Adventist institutions must be oriented to cross-culture behaviors, making the organizations achieve its goals. The responsibility of the leaders is to define, teach, measure, and reward the type of culture they want to adopt. Organizations that practice cross-cultural behaviors become accommodative to all cultures, and employees have positive attitudes towards each other and have outstanding performance. The gap of lack of culturally oriented leaders in the institutions must be addressed. Leaders must develop cross-cultural leadership skills to provide cross-cultural competencies. In addition, all leaders must accommodate the change to allow a cross-cultural environment. The conceptual paper explores the different roles that leaders play in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) organizations. Data was collected through systematic literature review from Africa and beyond. Meanwhile, cross-cultural leaders play significant roles in the success of the organizations. SDA institutions are comprised of people from diverse cultures. As such, leaders must exercise cross-cultural leadership to address cultural conflict. The paper focuses on acquiring cross-cultural leadership skills, the leader's ability to perform self-awareness in a cross-cultural context, cross-cultural training of employees in SDA institutions and challenges that come along with cross-cultural leadership. The findings of this this literature review identified that cross-cultural leadership is significant and leaders are to be cross-cultural sensitive; and employees must be trained to accommodate a cross-cultural environment for the institutions goal achievement.

Keywords: Cross-culture, Employees, Leadership, Leadership skills, Seventh Day Adventist institutions, Self-awareness, Systemic literature review.

INTRODUCTION

The role of a cross-cultural leader is to bring together the workforce into one strong team with similar values. The leader must understand different cultural behaviors, as cultural differences bring in conflicts among the workers. "Organizational culture can significantly influence the performance and effectiveness of a company" (Warrick 2017, p 1). A leader must accommodate the voices of the followers. Leaders must communicate effectively to promote a cross-cultural environment. In such a way, leaders can bring the organization together for productivity as they lead in diverse cultural environments. According to Hofstede et al. (1997), a multicultural team is a team whose members have different cultural backgrounds. People can be from different countries or within the country but having diverse cultures.

Employees must be aware of cultural differences (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). Meanwhile, Lewis (2017) illustrated that leader development in cross-culture is very effective but mostly, relies on the leader to develop self. According to Lin et al., (2017), leaders are to provide cohesion amongst members of different cultures, as culture is different globally. Leaders must be aware of the surrounding culture and be willing to train their followers in cross-culture.

Nevertheless, the cross-culture supervision model will be incorporated with the cross-cultural leadership model to concentrate on global multiculturalism (Lee & Kealy, 2018). The major purpose of the paper is to explore the role of leaders in cross-cultural contexts in SDA institution in Malawi. Adventism encourages a complex cultural environment (Ganu, 2021). All leaders are supposed to be cross-cultural leaders; however, most leaders do not know cross-cultural leadership. As such, organizations do not become effective, as there is lack of trust, miscommunication, and fear (Ganu, 2021). Leaders need to learn about cross-culture and must take the initiative to train the employees on cross-culture. This will promote a cross-cultural atmosphere in the organization. Thus, the SDA institutions need to promote cross-cultural leaders, employees, and the environment.

Globally, SDA institutions are comprised of people from diverse cultures and leaders sometimes fail to incorporate people from different cultures. The SDA institutions encompass education, health, publishing, and church sectors, including the local cultures from the same country and other cultures from other countries. Therefore, the paper aims to explore the role of leaders in cross-cultural contexts (Omwega, 2014). Leaders face many challenges as they lead people from different cultures and they need to be culturally competent so that cross-cultural leadership is provided in the institutions (Wooi et al., 2017).

In the meantime, many leaders lack self-awareness, cultural leaders do not undermine any culture, and the leader must manage an organization with employees from different cultural backgrounds. Leaders educated in cross-culture must teach the followers as well as incorporate a cross-cultural environment in the organization (Ma, 2020; Shepherd 2019). The leader is required to portray cross-cultural skills for effective communication in the organization.

Merrell-James et al., (2019) identified that there is a gap in accommodating cross-culture in the organizations. The SDA has its foundation in cross-culture and has a global view of cultural aspects (De Melo, n. d.). Further scientific research work must be conducted in the future. The paper aims to explore the role of leaders in cross-cultural contexts in SDA institutions. This paper will discuss first, the leader's self-awareness in cross-cultural settings; second, employees training in cross-cultural contexts, third, cross-cultural leadership skills and finally, the challenges in cross-cultural leadership.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

SDA institutions have people from all corners of the world who come to work. Some as missionaries who relocate from one region to another and need to have cultural awareness in the workplace. In addition, some are local employees from different cultural backgrounds. All employees come from diverse cultures and sometimes there are misunderstandings arising from simple issues. Some employees come from within the country but from different cultures with similar challenges. The leaders are overwhelmed with the situation at hand.

In the above situation, leaders need to have cross-cultural skills so that they respond to any situation that may arise. As workplace diversity and multicultural environments increase, many leaders must balance their traditional organizational responsibilities with the need to make cultural adjustments that take into account the wide range of employee backgrounds (Ali, 2017). Merrell-James et al. (2019) found that companies struggle to accommodate different cultural backgrounds. Leaders must comprehend the relationship between

culture and leadership as globalization has blended people from many cultures and ethnicities. Another essential element is the capacity to apply the same in a particular work environment (Ali, 2017).

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

The paper is supported by Geert Hofstede’s model of cultural dimensions that provides insight into other cultures, tolerating the engagement of people from different countries and backgrounds. The engagement will decrease worry, anxiety if well understood. Hofstede, (2003) provided an edge of understanding which will lead to the institution’s goal achievement. The degree to which weaker members of the institution accept and expect that power be divided unfairly is assessed through the theory. The theory further describes the individual culturists who have loose relationships need to be incorporated in the cross-culture. It is stated that a society may tolerate a certain amount of ambiguity and uncertainty when seeking the truth (Hofstede, 2003).

Similarly, Lee and Kealy (2018), expressed that the cross-cultural supervision model will support orientation and understanding of cross-cultural supervision by leaders and employees’ training. Additionally, goal setting for cross-cultural integration, active listening for cross-cultural markers, bonding through a leader’s self-awareness, and integration of cultural tasks will lead to achieving institutional goals.

The conceptual framework alludes to differences in cultural backgrounds, and accommodates that leaders must be aware of the cultural differences and train the followers for institutions to reach their desired goals. The conceptual framework reveals that cross-cultural leadership through training attains accomplishment of institutional goals. In addition, the presence of cross-cultural leadership can lead to achievement of the institution’s goals because the leader is able to handle complex cross-cultural issues. The leader will direct and lead employees. The leader will understand cultural differences (Vogelgesang et al., 2009). Hence, institutional goals cannot be achieved where employees are not aware of what to do. Training employees on cross-culture will develop effective skills towards a positive change. Similarly, the cross-cultural staff training will promote achievement of institutional goals.

The cross-cultural interaction will leverage a complex relationship (Adler, 2019). The overall aim of the paper is to present how cross-cultural leadership is grounded to achieve institutional goals through cross-cultural education and how cross-cultural education can do likewise. The paper discusses the leadership role in cross-cultural contexts, the leader, as a supervisor needs to apply cross-cultural leadership skills through training to develop a cross-cultural environment. The cross-cultural leadership model supports leaders through training to achieve organizational goals (Figure 1).

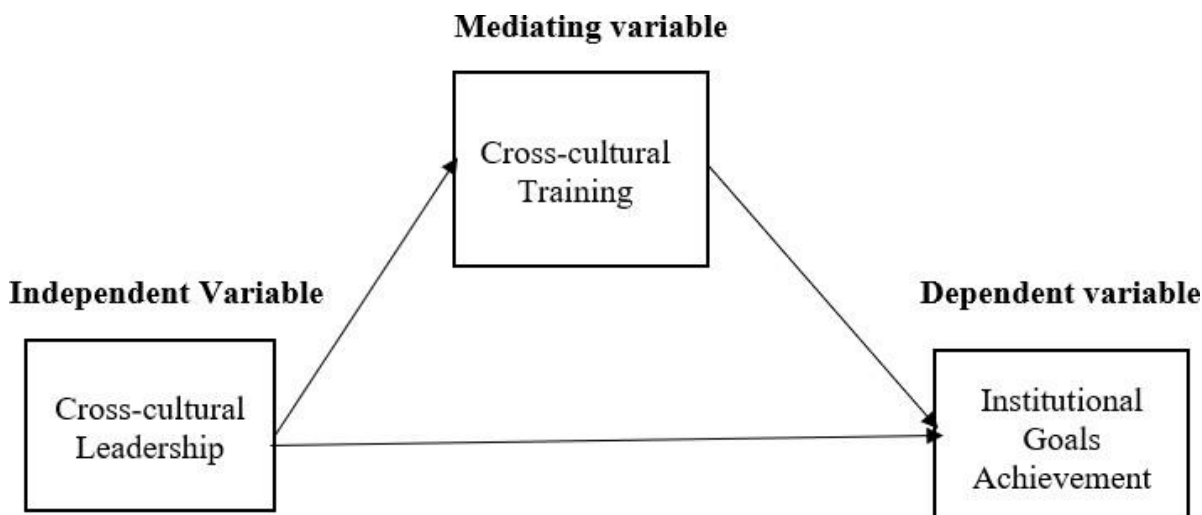


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Cross-Cultural Leadership Skills

Many SDA institutions work in cross-cultural environments both at national and international levels. Cross-cultural leaders possess many skills to enable them to carry out cross-cultural leadership in organizations. McConnell (2018) complemented that “leaders must see everyone, members of the organization and others from various cultures as people, all created in God’s image” (p 109). In this regard, leaders must learn about different cultures to obtain skills to be cross-cultural leaders. Leaders who have skills in accepting feedback from their followers are likely to bring in cross-cultural change (Pienaar, & Nel, 2017).

Relatively, cross-cultural leaders must promote teamwork and unify people from different cultures (Lisak & Harush, 2021). Cross-cultural leadership in SDA institutions is very important because people come from diverse regions to work as missionaries and hold different positions. Ganu (2021) illustrated that Adventists work in culturally diverse environments where people believe they have each other. Cross-cultural leadership skills are a set of multiple skills that cross-cultural leaders need to use such as openness, flexibility, accommodating and patience. A combination of cross-cultural skills and self-awareness will promote institutional goal achievement (Vogelgesang et al., 2009).

COMMUNICATION

Communication is an effective means of sharing cross-cultural information among people in SDA institutions. A substantial amount of research indicates that cultural differences make it harder to communicate effectively (Cagiltary, 2015). Precisely, the leader has to use a form of communication to enhance the cross-cultural environment (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). Furthermore, Oline (2018) and Guo, (2019) verified that the organization’s effective communication is the basis of the learning culture to promote a cross-cultural working environment. The leader’s role is to have a message strategy for communication by setting realistic communication objectives. “Communication has its challenges” which need to be looked into, declares Oline (2018). Leaders’ effective communication promotes success in organizations.

Cultural adaptability

Cultural adaptability involves “willingness and ability to recognize understand and work effectively across cultures” (Harunavamwe & Palmer, 2020 p 21). Therefore, cultural adaptability is an important skill for leaders who want to be successful in the organization and can be gained through cultural training. For the leader to be culturally adaptable it requires ongoing training and experience. According to Omwenga (2014), leaders should be trained to adapt to different cultural beliefs. SDA institutions accommodate people from all cultures that is at national and international level.

Integrity

Cross-cultural leader, according to Bonsu and Twum-Danso (2018), is designated to have moral and ethical standards as well as cognitive abilities, empathy, confidence, and forgiveness that are important in cross-cultural leadership. Well-learned cultural leaders will interact effectively with people from different cultures as expressed by Jyoti and Kour (2016). Cross-cultural leaders with integrity are successful.

Decision-making

At some point in time, the cross-cultural leader must involve others in decision-making; this means that some delegation is essential to making cross-cultural decisions (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). Employees’ delegation provides confidence in their work, they usually own their work, and in return, they respect the

cross-cultural leader.

Assigning tasks to the right people

Bonsu and Twum-Danso (2018) support the assignment of the right employees in the right positions for better performance. The leader must make this known to all the employees for them to understand and appreciate the role the leader is playing and must be practical. The skill makes employee performance excellent thereby achievement of institutional goals. Employees must not be favored according to cultural background, but by bestowing merit.

Leader's Awareness in Cross-Cultural Contexts

The leader is supposed to have cross-cultural self-awareness to accommodate diverse cultures in an organization. According to Caligiuri (2013) in Bonsu and Twum-Danso (2018), it is illustrated that “Cross-cultural leadership entails leading in a diverse cultural environment” (p 4). Among the roles of cross-cultural leaders, they are subjective and molded by cultures. Intrinsically, leaders must have self-awareness in the performance of cross-cultural behaviors. It is confirmed that cross-cultural leaders must be culturally sensitive, which means being respectful and accepting of people with other cultural backgrounds. The cross-cultural leader must learn the cultures of other people by being open and must be knowledgeable enough about cross culture; must lead a diverse group and place different people in the right positions (Bonsu and Twum-Danso, 2018; Merrell-James et al., 2019).

Largely, cross-cultural leaders perform as religious leaders in that they have self-awareness to meet the daily demands of the day-to-day work. As leaders create self-awareness, it should be remembered that Jesus was in a cross-cultural ministry where Galatians 3:28 states; “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ.” Wooi et al., (2017) complemented that if the leader follows cultural factors the understanding of the followers on cross-culture will be enabled. To lead effectively, Bonsu and Twum-Danso, (2018) support the importance of the leader's knowledge and cultural background. The effectiveness of cross-cultural performance lies solely in the staging of the leader.

Employee Training in Cross-Cultural Contexts

Train all employees in cross-culture to sensitize them and permit them to practice cross-cultural skills. Cross-cultural awareness training for employees is widely being conducted as narrated by Shepherd (2019) that it is conducted in many professions. Besides, the training being offered in many professions as workshops and not adequate information is offered. Shepherd, (2019) argued that the training is not satisfactory as it only covers a few days as such, there is need to improve the trainings.

Arici, (2018) focuses on supervisor support to make the followers cross-cultural oriented. Therefore, employees must have training on multicultural competence as expressed by Merrell-James et al., (2019). Joo and Jo (2016) complemented that training promotes understanding and people who are trained can accept change so easily. “Learning involves change and educational experiences” as collaborated by Odine, (2018). The cross-cultural leader in SDA institutions must have strategies for employee training in cross-culture.

The employees' attitude towards cross-culture must be developed towards working with employees from other cultures. This is only achieved through cross-cultural training as stated by Dulluay et al., (2015). The cross-cultural training should involve all employees and managers to offer culturally diverse behaviors. According to Hofstede (2003), short-term orientation may provide respect for tradition and fulfil social obligations in cross-culture setting.

Challenges in Cross-cultural Context

Lingenfelter (2008) defined cross-culture as building a community of trusting among people who come from diverse traditions/cultures that provoke a clash of worldviews. The cross-cultural leadership is faced with challenges such as poor communication, not establishing trust, and accountability. According to Hofstede (2003), another challenge is the difference between genders that poses societal concern around us; where women's values may differ less among the institutions and communities.

According to Service (2014), acculturation, a natural part of moving to a new nation, involves challenges that call for the application of coping mechanisms, leading to emotions of cultural shock and acculturative stress. Culture can have a variety of effects on copying. As people socialize, they pick up coping mechanisms that are acceptable and even promoted in their community (Service, 2014).

Some leaders may find it difficult to keep employee's morale regarding cross-cultural exposure. Leaders necessitate challenged institutional communication therefore; leaders must be culturally intelligent (Shazeb, A. (2017). Leaders worldwide face the challenge of upholding moral integrity while staying true to their own principles and the customs and traditions of the nation they are visiting. Therefore, cross-cultural leaders can find a balance in the conflict between their own firmly held beliefs and those of the host country's culture by understanding differences in how different cultures prioritize and apply universal principles. Additional challenges include change avoidance, fixed worldview and unaccepting of differences in leaders as well as employees that hinder institutional goal achievement (Service 2014). Challenges will hinder an organization's goal achievements.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This review has identified that cross-cultural leadership is important in SDA institutions and must be practiced, as employees come from diverse cultures. A contribution is made on cross-cultural leadership in SDA institutions. Leaders must have cross-cultural skills such as assigning people to the right places so that a cross-cultural environment is created (Bonsu and Twum-Danso, 2018). The conceptual framework portrays how cross-culture employee training mediates cross-cultural leadership and institutional goal achievement.

Further, the leaders have to use a form of communication to enhance the cross-cultural environment Oidine (2018) and Guo, (2019) verified that the organization's effective communication is essential. It has been identified that cross-cultural leaders must carry out certain responsibilities such as assigning people to the right places, effective communication, integrity, positive decision-making, and cultural adaptability. In addition, the leader must have self-awareness in managing cross-cultural leadership. The leader must have strategies to train employees in cross-culture (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018).

Joo and Jo (2016) identified that cross-cultural training will automatically change peoples' behavior towards acceptance of people from other cultures positively. Jyoti and Kour (2016) expressed that well-learned cultural leaders will interact effectively with people from different cultures and cross-cultural leaders with integrity are successful leaders and may lead to the organization's goal achievement.

The implications are that the SDA institutions policy makers will use cross-cultural context in decision-making. The paper will add knowledge to the practice and further scientific research on cross-culture. Once institutional leaders exercise cross-cultural behaviors, they are likely to become accommodative, and employee job satisfaction will be achieved. The result suggests that cross-cultural training in SDA institutions will be beneficial for cross-cultural behavior change. In order to advance the cross-cultural leadership further, needs incorporation of indigenous concepts and have a direct discourse at all levels

(Adler & Aycan, 2018).

In conclusion, the role of leaders in cross-cultural contexts in SDA organizations is crucial as employees from different angles globally work in one place. The paper challenges leaders to use different skills in cross-cultural leadership to promote cohesion among followers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Jyoti & Kour, 2016). As such, cross-cultural leaders must have cross-cultural skills to perform as cross-cultural leaders in organizations. Cross-cultural leadership is significant and leaders are to be cross-cultural sensitive; and employees must be trained to accommodate a cross-cultural environment for the institutions goal achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation is that cross-cultural leaders attain cross-cultural skills for the success of promoting a cross-cultural environment in SDA institutions in Malawi. Leaders must possess multiple skills for the effectiveness of transferring information to their followers. A suggestion is that leaders must be culturally oriented must adjust to multiple cultures and must handle the diverse personnel effectively (Jyoti & Kour, 2016). Cross-culture if well managed at an organization will have the potential competitive advantages that will be gained if managers are trained to become knowledgeable about other cultures (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018).

Self-evaluation and employees' psychological empowerment have a significant impact on employees therefore; leaders must have self-evaluation skills for better performance (Joo & Jo, 2016). In addition, McConnell (2018) said that leaders must see everyone as people, all created in God's image, including members of the organization and others from various cultures. Employees must be aware of cultural differences (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018).

Besides, cross-cultural leaders are supposed to have critical cross-cultural self-awareness to accommodate diverse cultures in an organization. Cross-cultural leaders must be culture-sensitive, which means being respectful and accepting of people with other backgrounds. The cross-cultural leader must be capable of learning about other cultures all the time. The cross-cultural leader must have strategies for training the followers to attain cross-cultural knowledge and behaviors for a successful cross-cultural environment.

Furthermore, employees must have training on multicultural competence as expressed by Merrell-James et al., (2019). Joo and Jo (2016) complement that training promotes understanding and people who are trained can accept change so easily. If employees are well-trained in cross-culture, they will accommodate people from other cultures.

Employees must have cultural adaptability in order to handle cultural issues easily (Harunavamwe & Palmer, 2020). A research is required on a similar topic to identify deeper meaning of the role of leaders on cross-cultural context in SDA institution in Malawi.

Seventh Day Adventists in Malawi are encouraged to commit to cross-cultural behaviors and the church must be consistent (Ganu, 2021). Adventism cherishes "there is one body and one spirit" (Ephesians 4:4).

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