Examining the management and leadership styles and practices at higher education institutions: A case of three African universities

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Abstract

Instructional supervision is an important aspect of educational management and leadership in any school and college. For this reason, every educational institution has established structures within the supervisory hierarchy as a form of division of labour and mechanism to ensure the effective and smooth running of the faculty at universities. Various universities have different supervisory hierarchy in the faculty, as dictated by the prescripts in each case. The most common hierarchical nomenclature would comprise the deans and deputies, directors and/or heads of departments, senior, junior managers and/or supervisors for various courses or programmes. The three universities used as cases in this article were closely similar to the provided description. The assumption of this article is that there is a possibility for some senior managers and supervisors within the faculty structures who abuse their positions by practicing double standards or overtly and covertly resort to divide and rule tactics to undermine some junior supervisors who might not even directly report to them. The objective of this case study was to examine the management and leadership styles and practices of three faculties at three universities in Africa. The study explored and established the existence of practices that might undermine structures. Forty-five (45) faculty members from the three different universities participated in this study. A mixed-methods approach where qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Data was collected by means of interviews and the administration of questionnaires emailed to selected participants. The study found out amongst other malpractices that some senior supervisory executives within the faculty seem to be resorting to double standards and divide and rule tactics as a face-saving mechanism to protect themselves and positions.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

In every organisation, stakeholders provide monitoring systems, which may include supervision, and educational institutions are no exception to this arrangement and practice. In this article, the phrase 'instructional supervision' goes beyond teaching; which is a key performance area in most educational institutions; it encompasses leading, managing, guiding and supporting lecturers in their academic duties to ensure better teaching. Supervision of instruction or educational activities is an important aspect of "administration, management, and leadership of any educational institution", Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2009:194).

The objective of this case study was to examine the management and leadership styles and practices of three faculties of education in three universities in Africa and to:

- explore the possible existence of practices that might undermine structures within the faculty and

- establish the raison d'e^tre for such tendencies within the faculty that seek to deliberately undermine the established structures of the faculty. This often leads to bullying, emotional tension and stress among the victims of such unprofessional behaviours.

The problem statement of this article is that there might be a tendency among some senior supervisors within the faculty structures at universities who might attempt to address challenges that come from staff members who do not report to them directly e.g. (department, school, faculty or college - depending on each institutional hierarchy or organogram). By so doing, such supervisors might often abuse their positions by practising double standards, nepotism or overtly and covertly resorting to divide-and-rule tactics of instigating some staff to undermine their own supervisors who may not even directly report to the more senior supervisors. Such incidences do not indicate respect for the hierarchical

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structure of the organisation; and should be avoided. This article discusses the literature and the relational theory underpinning issues being discussed. The article ends with some recommendations based on the findings at the three universities that participated in the study.

2. INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION

Instructional supervision is hierarchically structured in such a way that at any layer some experienced and expert personnel oversees specific educational activities. Although tutors and lecturers may be experts in their specific discipline-authorities in educational institutions (government, a ministry of education, parents, students and the public), should not leave things to chance as education is important to all stakeholders and the nation at large. It is argued in this article that effective supervision of educational programmes or activities is the oil that greases the smooth running of educational institutions. Its main goal is effective teaching for increased student learning output. Unravelling quality culture in higher education, a realist review affirms that the "most important factor affecting student achievement is the quality of instructional staff" (Mestry 2017:258). Although, the study was referring to principals in public schools' management, a similar situation also applies within the higher education institution faculties under discussion in this article. The point raised in this article is that increased student learning largely depends on well-designed instructional training, derived from teacher efficiency and good management practices.

2.1 Management and supervisory hierarchy

Just as it happens in first and second-band educational institutions (i.e. primary and secondary education), now called General Education and Training in South African context. Accordingly, it is at the tertiary level where higher education institutions have established structures within the supervisory hierarchy as a form of division of labour and mechanism to ensure the effective and smooth running of the faculties and their educational programmes. The role of instructional supervisors within the structures of a faculty is to "lead, manage, teach, mentor, coach, guide and support instruction and other educational activities to improve teaching and learning", (Bendermacher, oude Egbrink, Wolfhagen, & Dolmans 2017:50). The authors further affirm that maintaining and nurturing quality instruction represents a major trend in todays' educational organisations and thus calls for economic support, knowledge regarding the teaching and learning processes and efficient teachers.

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Within the faculty, the management and supervisory hierarchy comprise programme managers/coordinators who work with several academics in a programme. The programme managers/coordinators report to the head of a department who reports directly to the director of the specific school where that department resides. The School Director also reports directly to the Vice-Dean who works hand in hand with the Dean of the faculty and deputizes for him or her when s/he is out of office. Depending on each universities' hierarchy, the terminology may be different, and this article should be read with that in mind. Every supervisor is accountable to the next and or the immediate line manager in the structure within the faculty. While each of the supervisors may exhibit specific supervisory styles and practices within the structures, there are protocols that need to be followed or observed within every level of the faculty structure.

2.2   Management and supervision

Supervision of instruction is not done for finding fault or to 'catch out' and punish staff members but for correction, professional growth of the person and the achievement of institutional goals. Instructional supervision should rather, "aim at fostering educator growth and development" (Paul 2000:388). It has in fact been shown to be an excellent way to improve both teaching and learning, (Nwosu, Bechuke & Moorosi 2018).

Supervision should not be based on the master-slave relationship but must be perceived as a form of apprenticeship where an expert or a senior colleague may provide leadership, guidance, and support to the colleague for the improvement of instruction and achievement of educational goals.

As a target for institutional concern, supervision should not be seen as a licence for domination and subordination. As Tomlinson (2015:3) points out, "the starting point is to propose dogmatically that it is the supervisors' role to treat supervisees actively as junior colleagues and not as" [students]. Frawley-O'Dea (2003:358) intimates that supervision is an initiating, "integrative journey during which the supervisor fulfils the archetypal role of initiator who does not analyse or interpret other unconscious processes; supervisors should rise above petty and trivial issues not affect the normal and proper functioning of the faculty they are managing". Supervision concerns the work of the supervisee and his/her inner world hence it should be based on a good relationship between immediate participants, the supervisor and the supervisee. Studies on management and supervisory hierarchy in higher

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education institutions are many and varied, however, literature on management and practices highlighting double standards and divide and rule tactics are limited, hence the article is contributing to the knowledge gap in that regard.

3.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded in the relational theory of supervision. This theory emphasises the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee within an organisation.   The relational theory emerged as a critique of the parallel process model of supervision - the traditional approach (TA). Relational-theory advocates argue that the parallel process model of supervision is a traditional approach that puts the supervisor in an authoritative position and is therefore undemocratic, (Hargaden 2009; Kennedy, Keaney, Shaldon & Canagaratnam 2018). Grant, Schofield and Crawford (2012) intimate that using supervisory dynamics in a parallel process may be a resistance to the awareness of the supervisors' own transferences to the supervisee.

A close examination of supervision from the relational point of view provides a deeper appreciation of the complexities involved in any supervisory encounter. For this reason, Grant *et al.* (2012) warn that people should not apply overarching theory to unwieldy facts. Although the parallel process model of supervision has received much criticism from the relational theorists, the literature of TA attest that a move to a two-person modality supervision and research should keep pace with the new paradigm shift, (Callifronas, Montaiuti & Nina 2017). This study adds its voice in addressing the gap which still exists within the higher education institutional instructional supervision discourse.

The relational theory postulates that what transpires between the supervisor and the supervisee is of crucial importance to the effectiveness of the process and the act of supervision. The relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee should be likened to a mentor and mentee partnership and not be seen as a relationship between a figure of authority and a subordinate. The relational theory postulates that the supervisor has objective knowledge that is conveyed to the supervisee in a didactic manner; the relationally-based supervisor recognises that s/he has a sanctioned position within the structured community; but the power and authority of the position is continuously evolving in negotiation with the supervisee, (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly & Konopaske 2012).

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It is emphasised here that the supervisors' role should be to lead, teach, guide, mentor, coach and manage the aspects of the organisation that fall under his/her supervision. Frawley-O' Dea (2003) and Zorga (2007) assert that the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee is not symmetrical in that, while the supervisor has his/her advanced skills and experience, the special talents and skills the supervisee might possess should be acknowledged. Kennedy *et al.* (2018) add that the relational supervisor is conscious of the necessary and ever-present tension between assumed and authorised power that infuses the work of the supervisory pair. The more fully and freely supervisor and supervisee represent the intricacies of their own relationship, the more completely and effectively the supervisee can identify with the activities regarding relational paradigms operating within their relationship.

The position of the relational theorists is that supervision can be most useful when supervisors and supervisees engage in an ongoing dialogue that explores difficulties and mutual transferences that occur during supervision. To make supervision effective and successful, the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee should be like a mentor and mentee relationship where stakeholders can freely explore their feelings and responses towards each other as the process unfolds (Schriver, Cubaka, Itangishaka, Nyirazinyoye & Kallestrup 2018). They further argue that a successful supervision programme should take into consideration the perceptions of each person involved in the process.

Supervision is a human endeavour and as such, it could be influenced by the supervisors' own social identity and other societal factors that permeate the work of supervision. Being human, supervisors cannot ignore their own reactions and that those of the supervisees that might emanate from personality styles, values, beliefs, if they are a complexity of activities that are crucial to the work of supervision, and the objectives of their own organisations and faculties. The personal issues that are likely to jeopardise the supervision relationship should be checked and managed or eliminated to ensure that the process is not hindered. The relational model of supervision, therefore, appreciates that some regressions in both supervisee and supervisor might be normative and that effective intense or cognitive issues need to be hidden in the supervisory relationship. To understand this, Miehls (2009) points out that listening attentively for transference enactments in supervision enriches supervisory

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conversations and communicates emphatic interest in the manifest and latent messages of what supervisees communicate.

3.1   The theory and its implications

The theory has implications for all stakeholders in education who are involved in instructional supervision. What can be learnt from the theory is that supervision should aim at achieving the goals of professional growth of tutors and lecturers, quality teaching, effective learning and better learning outcomes. Miehls (2009) affirms that the boundaries between cognitive and affective learning and those between professional development and personal growth and personality change are permeable in ways the traditional supervisory literature has been reluctant to acknowledge.

For educational goals to be realised, the onus is on supervisors to lead by example, teach and guide, support and exhibit the skills, knowledge, and should have the capacity to tolerate and acknowledge their own anxieties and conflicts which might interfere or endanger the supervisory relationship rather than projecting them onto the supervisee. Thus, the relational supervisor should enrich the relationship and the process of supervision by trying to understand the enactment of the process of the supervision.

Relational theory asserts that the boundaries and limits of the supervision should be co-constructed by the participants and the supervisees should retain the authority and decision-making about the extent of the personal issues that are open for scrutiny in the supervision (Frawley-O'Dea 2003; Hargaden 2009). Supervision within the relational model assumes a less authoritative stance. Supervision relationships are most meaningful when co-created and where supervisor and supervisee anticipate a reciprocal process that may reflect enactments of treatment scenario. Legitimising some relational principles in supervision permits a more extensive interaction between supervisee and supervisor. Some supervisors will continue to improve their craft when they integrate aspects of relational theory into their practice and when they expect relational enactments as the cornerstone of their supervisory actions.

4.   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted both a qualitative and quantitative research which took the form of a case study investigation, with three universities as units of analyses. The utilisation of mixed methods approach was done to achieve triangulation because the researchers assumed that

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one data collection tool would not be adequate in achieving the objectives of the study. Romm and Ngulube (2015) attest that mixed-methods research is the kind of research where the researcher mixes or combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language in a single study or a set of related studies. Ponce and Pagan-Maldonado (2015) affirm that educational researchers have acknowledged the value of mixing methodologies to provide a complementary set of information that would be more effective than a single method. This type of research may be used when the contingencies suggest that it is likely to provide superior answers to the issues at hand.

The study was set up to examine the management and leadership styles and instructional supervisory practices at higher education institutions in the education faculties of three Universities on African Continent. In order to obtain candid views on the subject, the researchers distributed questionnaires to selected faculty members from the participating universities and conducted face-to-face interviews with others. It should be noted that the incidence of good acceptable and unacceptable management and supervisory practices reported by the participants in the findings might not necessarily apply to all instructional supervisors and for all higher educational institutional settings. This study should be read with that context in mind.

4.1 Population, sample and piloting of the study

The entire population in the three faculties of education involved in this case study was made up of 430 lecturers, senior lecturers, and professors from the three universities under study. In each of the faculties of education of the universities involved in the study, the researchers used the convenience sampling technique to select forty-five (45) academics in supervisory positions to be interviewed (i.e. 15 members from each university). In doing so, they requested lists of names of all the faculty members in supervisory positions from course coordinators, heads of departments, school directors, vice deans and deans. These academic staff members were deliberately and conveniently selected to participate in the investigation because, as supervisors, they were deemed information-rich and were selected from a pool of expertise in the universities for their experience in supervisory positions and roles in leadership and management. The researchers also used their networks in the three universities to be able to identify and locate the right people, and those identified were called telephonically. However, this method proved to be extremely impractical as in most cases

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their direct telephone lines were not answered. Some executives could not be located after several efforts through their personal assistants, secretaries and administrative staff, who used gatekeeping tactics to prevent the researchers from directly contacting the selected participants. In such instances, emails were used to communicate with them, although some did not respond either. This reality affected the findings of the study, as member-checking was tried but was not done as researchers wished to do, due to some participants', non-availability when needed.

A pilot study was conducted where five (5) participants from a (neutral) university of technology were randomly selected to answer a questionnaire. This means that those who participated in the pilot study were not from the three faculties of education identified by the researchers. These five academics answered a questionnaire similar to the one used for the main study on supervision practices in their faculty and the responses were later compared to those of the 45 participants from the three faculties of education, during the analysis and report writing. Piloting and pre-testing in self-completing questionnaires and interviews, according to Bryman and Bell (2011:262) help in identifying "persistent problems that may emerge after a few interviews have been carried out".

4.2 Data Collection

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and administration of a questionnaire as the major data collection tools. Where feasible, questionnaires were delivered and shared with the participants face-to-face, while communicating the purpose and ethical considerations of the study. For those far from the researchers, or who could not easily be reached due to their busy work schedules, questionnaires were sent via email, after permission was sought from the universities.

4.2.1 Interviews

A semi-structured four-item interview guide was administered to the 25 individuals who could be reached and were available for interviews at their respective workplaces at the three universities. The interviews, which took 45 to 60 minutes each, covered supervision practices of programme managers, heads of departments, school directors, deputy deans and deans in their respective faculties, depending on their issues. The items were aimed at finding out whether, within the structures, there were incidents of double standards and divide-and-rule tactics used by some managers against others. The data collection process

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took three months to complete because of distance and work obligations of some participants, despite confirming their availability at times.

4.2.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were distributed via email to the targeted and selected supervisors. The quota of 20 participants for this study was met with the serious challenge of a low return rate. In some instances, alternative participants who met certain criteria set for participants' selection were approached. The process of questionnaire distribution took the same amount of time as the interviews - three months to complete.

4.3   Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is of crucial importance. Trustworthiness refers to the level of dependability or reliability of the data gathering instruments, the process used in collecting the data, the quality of data collected and the validity thereof (Nowell, Norris, Deborah, White & Moules 2017). To ensure trustworthiness in this study, the researchers kept journals on what was observed, seen and heard during the interviews. Where clarity was required during the interviews, the researchers requested this by restating or confirming the responses and where necessary, telephonic follow-ups were done by phoning to seek clarity. This was to minimise any factual errors or misinterpretations. The responses from the interviews and those obtained from the questionnaire were triangulated. This was done by comparing the two sets of responses to see where they corroborated with or differed from each other. The researchers put these measures in place to ensure that the findings were trustworthy.

4.4   Ethical considerations

The issue of ethics is crucial to any credible research, especially where human lives are involved, and on sensitive issues such as the ones addressed in this article. The researchers therefore adhered to the important ethical principle of consent. Before the data collection by the researchers began, meetings were held with each of the 25 selected interviewees and the purpose of the study was explained; the remaining 20 were sent emails to explain the purpose of the study. The participants were made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary and that anyone who did not want to participate was free to do so at any time or stage of the study. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality the researchers assured the participants that their names would not be recorded during the investigation. Due to small

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numbers, the participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their institutions and educational faculties since some responses might be identified if their institutions and educational faculties were mentioned. As supervisors, line managers and people who could benefit from the findings of the study, the participants were promised a copy of the final report of the study.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The interpretive approach was used for the qualitative data analysis where the researchers arranged the interview texts under various themes in order to interpret, understand and report the meanings indicated by the data. As Teodoro, Rebouças, Thorne, Souza, Brito and Alencar (2018) affirm, the approach made the various constitutive elements in the data clearer through the inspection of whether there were relationships between concepts, constructs, and variables. The thematic approach was also used to see whether there were any patterns or trends. Moreover, the thematic approach was illustrated through the presentation of an auditable decision trail, interpreting and representing textual data, thus increasing the traceability and verification of the analysis (Nowell *et al.* 2017).

In commenting on quantitative data analysis, De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011) denote categorical and numerical data broad classes as measurement levels. The measurement levels used in the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data included averages/means, percentages and nominal scales as extrapolated in Table 1 below, reflecting leadership gender imbalance at higher education institutions. Of the 45 participants of the study, there were 27 males (60%) and 18 (40%) females.

Table 1:   Data analysis coding gender of respondents

University (U)	U1	U2	U3	Subtotals
Male (M)	10	6	11	27
Female (F)	5	7	6	18
Subtotal	15	13	17	45
TOTAL	45			

Key:
UIM: University 1 Male
U2F: University 2 Female
Source: Authors' compilation

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6.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses of the selected participants were arranged under four themes, as analysed and interpreted in the section that follows:

i)   Interfering in duties of other supervisors in the faculty structure

ii)   Intimidation, undermining and inciting colleagues against their line managers

iii)   Divide-and-rule tactics and double standards

iv)   Favouritism and nepotism

6.1   Interfering in duties of other supervisors in the faculty structure

With 25 interviews across the three universities, and 20 questionnaires distributed and returned, the incidences of unwarranted interference in the duties of supervisors by some managers were mentioned by many respondents (36) constituting [80%] of the total 45 participants. The participants corroborated in their responses that a few of the senior supervisors often arbitrarily attempt to overturn or reverse decisions of some supervisors below them within the faculty supervisory structures without consulting the supervisors involved or following protocol and policy. Three participants recounted, who had been heads of departments before, how some senior supervisors in their faculties' supervisory structures lobbied them to support the applications of their favourite candidates for lectureship positions, with no regard for due processes and job requirements. When the heads of departments reminded the senior supervisors that those candidates had no knowledge of the discipline or relevant experience and that therefore endorsing their applications for hiring would not be in the interest of the departments and the students, they became offended. A female respondent from University 2 (U2F) added that, in her case, the senior supervisor became overly critical of her submissions where he (the senior supervisor) would always find fault with genuine documents that had to be signed by him, a practice she realised after she was hired instead of someone that the senior supervisor had preferred. She added:

> *"He turned himself into a school teacher who critically marked all my submissions by looking for minor oversights such as the absence of commas, full stops etc. as excuses to delay urgent submissions by either keeping them till the submission time expired, returning unsigned documents or parts of the documents missing. I was frustrated and emotionally drained by that situation, to a point of looking for a transfer to another faculty".*

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As the response here indicates, some senior instructional supervisors abuse their positions and when their unprofessional behaviour is resisted, they resort to various tactics to criticise their subordinates in their duties or frustrate their efforts, such as intimidation and inciting their friends to rebel against their subordinate line managers. Because these supervisors have no powers to fire their juniors, they frustrate their efforts to grow and use dubious means of sanctioning their work. When such incidences happen, junior staff resorts to requesting a transfer to other faculties or resigning from the institutions (Maduegbuna 2015). Within the context of a relational theory, the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee should be likened to a mentor and mentee partnership and not be a relationship between a figure of authority and a subordinate. This practice, as indicated from the interview, is the opposite of what is postulated by the relational theory.

6.2   Intimidation and inciting of colleagues against their line managers

The 45 respondents who participated in the study through interviews and questionnaires were asked if, within their faculties, they experienced psychological, emotional and physical intimidation or incidents that seek to undermine them as line managers. Forty-one (41) of the responses answered in the affirmative and mentioned their suspicion of some senior supervisors behind troubles caused by few individuals in their sections and departments. One male participant from University 1 (U1M) who happened to be a programme/line manager, had this to say:

> *"I suffered traumatic stress in the last semester after it was alleged that one senior incited junior staff to rebel against (me) the line manager. Some staff members were reporting incidences that happened in meetings to the supervisor without me knowing that some issues were said out of context and facts distorted. It became clear that my supervisor was colluding with the junior staff without consulting with me on issues of managements' importance. He was taking sides with them to intimidate and incite them against me".*

In one response from University 3 (U3M) a male course coordinator explained his experience with a junior staff member, who did not relate well with him, and preferred that issues and documents needing his line managers' approval be taken directly to the upper level, completely flouting procedures and signing protocols. In most instances, the junior

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staff members' issues would be rejected by the upper levels, and the blame shifted to his immediate supervisor who knew nothing about such submissions. He added:

> "While these may seem like minor issues, left to accumulate and not addressed, they can result in total rift between supervisors, and create emotional, psychological and unhealthy conflicts".

As Grant *et al.* (2012:529) point out, "the importance of relational strategies to maintain an effective supervisory alliance, reflective strategies - particularly when difficulties pertain to the supervisory relationship - and confrontational strategies with …unhelpful characteristics and behaviours that impede supervision". That said, in the context of the medical school where Grant *et al.* (2012) carried out their research, the perspectives of this unhealthy relationship can exist in other environments, as reflected by the participants in this study.

6.3 Divide-and-rule tactics and double standards

From the findings, all 45 responses indicated that the universities have policies and procedures guiding human resources, communication strategies and other management, tuition, assessment and administration. It was revealed that these policies are discussed in staff meetings from time to time, while other staff are encouraged and reminded to keep abreast of all relevant policies and procedures. However, some responses revealed that most academics may not necessarily be aware of them, until when faced with issues that concern them. Twenty-seven (27) (60%) of the respondents concurred that some supervisors knew the policies clearly, but when they dealt with individuals' issues, they tended to bend the rules and misinterpret procedures in favour of certain individuals. A male respondent from University 1 (U1M) remarked:

> "These are the double standards they practise; knowing what is expected of certain policies and their practices while deliberately giving wrong or misleading information to some staff members who may be ignorant of the guidelines. This they do to quell divisions between the line managers and their junior staff or to trap the supervisor".

Applying double standards, according to Raaphorst and Groeneveld (2018:1180), refers to the "use of differential criteria to evaluate similar situations". They state that:

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[The sociological status characteristics and double standards theory shows how people belonging to certain social groups could also serve as "lenses" through which other attributes of the person are assessed. This implies that signals are interpreted differently depending on the social group persons are perceived to be part of. Studies on status characteristics theory are usually conducted within the context of work relations, such as hiring decisions, or decisions within group tasks, and typically focus on explaining why certain groups in society are privileged in attaining positions and rewards over other groups in society].

Five (5) supervisors said some line managers were fond of dividing junior workers against others, to be able to control them (divide-and-rule tactics). Maduegbuna (2015:82) defines divide-and-rule management as:

"keeping control over people by making them disagree with and fight each other, therefore not giving them the chance to unite and oppose you together. This concept refers to a strategy which a leader employs to break existing power structures and renders small power groups less effective to challenge those in authority".

As some respondents across the three institutions suggested in their interviews and questionnaire responses, some leaders are inconsistent in dealing with the same issues; thus, they favour some workers against the others, and do not apply the same principles when approaching issues. In environments where the divide-and-rule strategy is applied, there is a lack of coordination, sometimes anarchy and negative attitudes to work and destructive behaviours, rendering the atmosphere uncontrollable and difficult for a manager to be in control. A female respondent from institution 3 (U3F) further supported the notion that some senior managers use the tactics or this strategy:

"*to ensure that the supervisors fail in their efforts and their management and leadership skills become questionable, no matter how hard they try to do the right things*".

In his article on governance and leadership issues in Nigerian higher institutions of learning and the government, Maduegbuna (2015) observes that divide-and-rule is a poison that destroys countries and institutions alike and it happens at various levels of the society.

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"There is, in fact, no limit to which this technique could destroy governance both at institutional or governmental level" (Maduegbuna 2015:85).

6.3.1 Favouritism and nepotism

Related to the above themes on double standards and divide-and-rule tactics and strategies, some participants who were interviewed individually agreed that some individual senior instructional supervisors often resort to the practice of double standards and divide-and-rule. Thirty-eight (84%) of the 45 respondents agreed that the practice was worrying because it bordered on favouritism and nepotism where some academic colleagues felt they were not treated equally. Eighteen of the participants (40%) mentioned that they had been victims of the practice of double standards from some of their senior supervisors.

In two universities (U1 & U2), six (6) participants showed how they applied for a promotion with colleagues with the same qualifications and experience, but they were excluded. One academic (U2F) said she was shortlisted and invited for interviews because a senior supervisor in the faculty who happened to chair the panel pushed for her inclusion. The three academics (U2F; U1M; U2M) who were excluded from the shortlisting said they were told that their research output was insufficient. One of the victims, a female academic (U2F), who was very assertive, had this to say:

> "When I heard from my colleagues that they were attending an interview for promotion, I felt my right has been violated and so I reported the matter to the Vice Principal under whose portfolio our faculty falls. The VP did some investigation and ordered the faculty authorities to interview all the candidates who had the same qualifications and experience as those who were interviewed earlier. Additionally, this is how I got promoted to the rank of an associate professor! The senior supervisor felt humiliated and does not like me ever since he heard that I was the one who reported the matter to the VP".

What can be deduced from the above is that the practice of favouritism and nepotism side-lined colleagues who were not in the good books of some senior supervisors and that demotivated academics in the faculty. The unprofessional supervisory practice can also lead to conflict between those favoured by a senior supervisor and those who are not and does not augur well for teamwork and collegiality. Favouritism and nepotism which preclude employees from being promoted based on their academic performance and merit is

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damaging to the effectiveness and efficient functioning of the workplace. "*It demoralises those who were treated unfairly, as they felt their efforts were not recognised and acknowledged by their supervisors,*" one academic from University 2 (U2M) remarked.

The results of this study may not be generalisable in other situations and should not be regarded as the only management styles, practices and supervisory behaviour displayed in all higher education institutions. However, the findings sought to narrow the knowledge gap, and thus contribute to the relational theory studies that seek to display some malpractices that still exist and their impact in improving management styles, practices and supervisory behaviour in universities.

7.   SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study found that while there were very good supervisors across the three universities, who are highly respected by some faculty members, some senior supervisory executives within the faculty resort to double standards and divide and rule tactics or instigate their friends to foment trouble within a department or a school. The tactics, as noted in the findings, amongst others, is face saving mechanisms to protect themselves and their positions by shifting blame to innocent supervisors who might insist on a commitment to work and provide services to students and other stakeholders.

The study revealed amongst other issues, that deliberate interference, undermining of other supervisors and inciting junior colleagues not to do their work or cooperate with their line managers, were major obstacles. The items also disclosed that there were deliberate efforts to frustrate those at the lower level of the faculty structures by means of nepotism, intimidation and personal dislike for those who were not the allies of some seniors in the faculty.

8.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the empirical investigation, the study recommends that, in order to eliminate the abuse of power by some senior instructional supervisors within the faculty structure, the following remedies should be put in place:

▪   The role and parameters of every supervisor within the faculty structure must be spelt out and documented for all faculty members. This includes especially those in supervisory positions, to know their spheres of operation and the limits of their authority.

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- There should be a forum for supervisors where they can meet regularly to discuss successes and challenges supervisors face in order to nip in the bud all incidences of bad supervisory practices.
- Universities should establish a neutral bureau where supervisors who feel intimidated, undermined or abused by those above them could be reported for investigation and redress.

9.   CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to investigate the management and leadership styles and instructional practices and behaviour that seek to undermine the supervisory hierarchy within three faculties of education in three universities on the African continent. The goal of instructional supervision in management and leadership practices is to ensure quality teaching for improvement in students' learning output. The findings from the exploratory study indicated that there is a sporadic effort by some senior supervisors who seem to deliberately undermine, frustrate, unduly interfere with and thwart the instructional supervisory work of those below them. They do this for various reasons, some of which include shifting the focus of their own leadership weaknesses, failures, and unpopularity to those they consider as a threat to them. The article concludes that for instructional supervision in any higher education institution such as a university to achieve its goals, there must be mechanisms to ensure that supervisors, especially those at the helm of the faculties, do not abuse their positions to serve their parochial selfish interests and agendas.

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