



THE EFFECT OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP ON PHYSICAL ASSET MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: EVIDENCE FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of authentic leadership on physical asset management (PAM) practices in local governments (LGs) in Acoliland, Mid-north Uganda. The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive design and targeted LG employees in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, and Amuru. The researchers used simple random and purposive sampling to select respondents. The researchers used a questionnaire to collect the required data. The researchers used descriptive statistics in the form of percentages and frequencies to analyze the data. It was established in the findings that authentic leadership promoted effective PAM practices through self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Authentic leadership had a positive significant effect on PAM practices in the LGs in Uganda. There is a need for management to promote the principles of authentic leadership and enforce them at all levels of the local governments so as to reap the benefits of effective PAM practices.

Key Words: *Authentic Leadership, Effect, Local Government, Physical Asset Management Practices, Uganda*

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INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

PAM is an essential activity for physical assets to perform in safe, cost-effective, and reliable ways to support local government functioning (Alhazmi, 2017). It serves a significant contribution to the development, deployment, use, and retirement of physical assets. Since physical assets allow LGs to achieve strategic objectives and meet stakeholder needs, its optimized management requires consistent decision-making on those activities that impact physical asset-related risks, performance, and cost profiles. This implies that the management must have access to quality data and decision-making tools which can result in predictable, objective, and consistent decisions (Emmanouilidis & Komonen, 2013). Increasing challenges from technological advances and social change, to rising expectations in, and diversification of the local populace's needs, have led to an increase in demand for physical assets and ultimately become scared for the daily operational activity of the LGs. A large number of frameworks and/or models have been developed and implemented to meet the increasing demand for effective physical assets and control over their use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal. But it is reasonable to opinion that most frameworks and/or models have gone through a shape of conceptualization, adoption, and subsequent implementation with much trumpet blast and naïve assertions about their abilities (Tore, 2017). Nevertheless, elsewhere effective PAM practices have accomplished tangible results through optimal lifecycle management to sustainably achieve the stated objectives of the organization (Maletič et al., 2022).

The worsening in the use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal of physical assets is snowballing in spite of the implementation of several frameworks and/or models (Batac et al., 2021; Abuzayan et al., 2014; Port et al., 2011; Van der Lei et al., 2011). The need for a new framework for effective operational PAM practices has been raised by many researchers and practitioners (Munyao & Moronge, 2017; El-Akruti & Dwight, 2013; Lee et al., 2015). There is a

serious concern about deficient frameworks for a promising justifiable use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal of physical assets (Alhazmi, 2018; Dadashi et al., 2014; Arif & Bayraktar, 2012). Especially LGs are vulnerable to failed effective PAM practices because of their heavy reliance on technical aspects for the management of physical assets at their disposal (Emovon et al., 2016; Kriege et al., 2016). The LGs management is also on the defensive in order to address specific functions or issues like technical integrity, lifecycle, life extension specifically degradation of a physical asset (Lind, 2013; Baker, 2011). In his article, Amadi-Echendu (2004) alluded to a multidisciplinary framework to cover business or organizational-related as well as technical-related issues (Tore, 2017) resulting in the multidisciplinary approach requiring a multidisciplinary framework and/or model for its success.

Physical assets are a mainstay and fundamental resource for organizational activities (Maletič et al., 2020b). They are essential for organizations to carry out their activities with long-term use and actual economic value for gaining revenue and achieving organizational values (Maletič et al., 2020a). Throughout the world, many LGs including those in Uganda are partly or wholly dependent on physical assets (Pais et al., 2020). Developing countries, Uganda inclusive, have made strides towards PAM practices in the past decade compared to the pre-reform period of the 1990s. The centralized management of physical assets has slowed down, and the ownership and power to determine the fate of physical assets in a decentralized manner has greatly increased (Mkandawire et al., 2011). The percentage increase in regulatory compliance is positive since the governance and public procurement reforms. There was no change in total reliance on technical issues most specifically the maintenance, operation, inspection, or reliability ones (Rahim et al., 2010). Multidisciplinary approaches can contribute to the integration of the physical asset, the organization, the objectives, and the means of control (Tore,

2017) in attaining safety and efficiency. Developing countries must intensify efforts in order to achieve sustainable consumption and production of physical assets through excellent physical assets as part of multidisciplinary framework initiatives. More so, the traditional approaches have been unable to adequately grasp and address the complexity involved in executing PAM practices (Komljenovic et al., 2015) except for stifling operational performance (Maletić et al., 2020) in its place.

PAM practices in Uganda dating back to colonial times with the colonial crown agents (Wanyama, 2016). In 1967 administration of physical assets in government, organizations were backed by the central tender board regulations (Wanyama, 2016) and followed by the latest then of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Asset Act of 2003. Since then, policies consistent with the use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal of physical assets have been vigorously pursued. Over the years have experimented with the spells and reviewed to encounter changing PAM practice opportunities. Since the enactment of the LG Act that brought about decentralization to the fore, LGs in Uganda have been under statutory obligation with a comprehensive power to plan and manage their physical assets and an institutional framework that demands policy evaluation, analysis, and monitoring. With time, the process has generated into bottom-up planning framework effort that succumbs to active participation by the local communities. Today thorough standards and brink bounds exist for managing physical assets. From time to time, upon existing regulations, the GOU issues manuals, guidelines, and circulars that promote effective PAM practices in LGs. This puts LGs in Uganda on the world scene as one of the evolving developing countries in the world to be making advances toward effective PAM practices in a decentralized system. No wonder Uganda has been acclaimed to be among the best decentralization models in Africa (Sonko, 2013).

In Acoliland, the management of physical assets by LGs still faces a number of challenges that need

concerted efforts from all key stakeholders. The current management of physical assets in the LGs in Acoliland is still marred by a reactive approach, rigid accounting principles, pressures for high profitability and returns on physical assets, increased requirements from a safety and environmental point of view, corrupt practices, lack of standard disposal procedures, and lack of physical asset information. Other challenges are a lack of storage facilities for physical assets, a lack of a physical asset register, a reactive approach, and toxic leadership. These physical assets are managed by LG employees who ensure that they are protected from mismanagement by whoever may have access to their hold. In addition to the day-to-day management of the physical assets, GoU and development partners have been encouraging the employees to avoid wastefulness in the use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal in order to promote effective PAM practices execution. Despite the interventions put in place by the Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINU) and the annual LG performance assessment by the Office of the Prime Minister to promote effective PAM practices in the land, the state of the management of the physical assets in Acoliland has been worsening. Without proper management of physical assets serious health, safety, environmental, and financial consequences can occur (Ratnayake & Markeset, 2012).

There has been persistent mismanagement of physical assets by all the LGs in Uganda. This has been drastically experienced in the LGs in Acoliland as reported in the statutory reports of the Office of the Auditor General as well as the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Asset Authority for the years 2016 to 2021. In addition to the rampant mismanagement through wasteful use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal of the physical assets, the current portfolio of physical assets is costly to manage leading to heavy losses to the already cash-strapped LGs. Amidst these challenges, there have been no coordinated efforts from the leadership to mitigate the challenges. This lack of

coordinated leadership initiative has left physical assets vulnerable to mismanagement in addition to the inability to mobilize stakeholders to reap value in the physical assets that leave them to waste as is the practice now. The LGs have been underfunded to enable them to plan for the use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal of the physical assets. Currently, the LGs are experiencing leadership challenges in managing the physical assets with an unpredictable outcome which has adversely affected the promotion of effective PAM practices. This is the background raised concern to investigate the link between authentic leadership and PAM practices with a special focus on Acoliland in mid-north Uganda.

Significance of the study

The issue of PAM practices is a matter of global concern, particularly at a time when resource depletion is threatening every corner of the globe. Efforts to save PAM practices from mismanagement have been compromised due to countless unprofessional conduct and the increased need to meet not only changing but the endless need for sustainable consumption and production. In Uganda, GOU and development partners involved in promoting effective PAM practices have set a number of initiatives to have the issue of unprofessional conduct of physical assets sorted but there are still loopholes along this approach. It was the hope of this study to bring to light the effect of authentic leadership on PAM practices in LGs in Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted a mixed methods research design with both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis. It also undertook a cross-sectional survey design which helped the researcher to collect data from the population at one particular point in time (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The population of the study comprised LG employees in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, and Amuru in Acoliland, mid-north Uganda. From the districts, only district councils,

city councils, division councils, town councils, and sub-county councils were considered based on the degree of responsibilities, most especially heads of departments and units. The targeted population comprised both female and male respondents. The researchers used Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) to analyze quantitative data while the qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The Institute Research Centre of Uganda Management Institute authorized the research and was cleared by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the researchers present the findings as per the dimensions of authentic leadership that were measured. The findings are as well corroborated by previous studies.

Self-awareness and physical asset management practices

Self-awareness concerns the understanding and knowledge of the individual about themselves inclusive of moral, cognitive, and moral development (Nikolic, 2014). Besides being aware of strengths and weaknesses, self-awareness enables an understanding of others' perception of the leadership (Browning, 2018) so presents acceptable actions and beliefs. In the literature, self-awareness is generally believed to be the most crucial competency associated with emotional intelligence in the workplace (Ertenu et al., 2011). To ensure the proper execution of effective PAM practices, LG employees need to be intelligent emotionally so as to become self-aware as possible. In view of this premised the respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on a five Likert-scale of 1=strongly disagrees to 5= strongly agree, on the level of their agreement on their superiors' self-awareness with respect to PAM practices. In other words, they sought to establish respondents' perception of self-awareness as a promoter of effective PAM practices in their LGs. The results of the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Self-awareness and Physical Asset Management practices

Issues	Responses					
	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Seeks feedback from others to improve interactions	26	81.2	4	12.5	2	6.3
Has accurate description of his/her capabilities by others	12	68.8	7	21.9	3	9.4
Can list three of his/her greatest weakness	19	59.4	10	31.3	3	9.4
Can list three of his/her greatest strength	21	65.7	9	28.1	2	6.3
Average percentage		68.8		23.5		7.9

Table 1 demonstrates the perception of the employees towards the self-awareness dimension of authentic leadership with its effect on PAM practices in LGs in Uganda. The Table shows that 26 (81.2%) of the respondents agreed that their supervisor sought feedback from others to improve interactions, 2(6.3%) disagreed, and 4(12.5%) abstained. On whether their supervisors had an accurate description of their capabilities by others, 12 (68.8%) of the respondents agreed, 3(9.4%) disagreed and 7(21.9%) were neutral. 19(49.4%) of the respondents indicated that their supervisors can list at least three of their greatest weaknesses. This was followed by 10(31.3%) of the respondents who were neutral and only 3(9.4%) of the respondents disagreed. Meanwhile, a total of 21(65.7%) of the respondents agreed that their supervisors can lease at least three of the strengths, 9(28.1%) were neutral and only 2(6.3%) disagreed. On average 68.8% of the respondents agreed that self-awareness has a positive effect on PAM practices, as only 7.9% disagreed though 23.5% of the respondents remained neutral.

This finding corroborates the study by Okpara and Edwin (2015) who found that self-awareness positively influences net profit and return on investment. The study recommended the training of managers/employees by the organization for them to acquire all the competencies associated with self-awareness. Abdelhamid et al., (2015) capture the importance of self-awareness when in their

study they concluded that through self-assessment LG identifies its needs and the corresponding potentials and available resources. In a study by Butler et al., (2013), the results indicated that self-awareness resulted in increased perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Kellick (2016) in his study stresses leadership as the missing link in PAM practices.

Relational transparency and physical asset management practices

The capacity to articulate and process values and thoughts with the subordinates by the leaders is termed relational transparency by Walumbwa et al., (2008), the protagonists of authentic leadership theory. This creates a mutual and open trust relationship between the subordinates and the leader. To be beneficial, the incessant effort of self-control and emotional regulation by the leader is essential. By dissuading hidden motives and intentions, relational transparency shows one's true self, good or bad, to other people something precariously needed in the complex situation of executing PAM practices. We asked the respondents whether their superiors exposed their true selves more willingly than a counterfeited self in their fore by indicating their level of agreement with the four indicators of these dimensions of authentic leadership when it came to the execution of PAM practices. The results of the responses are captured in Table 2.

Table 2: Relational transparency and Physical Asset Management practices

Issues	Responses					
	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Says precisely what he or she means	18	56.3	9	28.1	5	15.6
Acknowledges mistakes when they are made	21	65.7	8	25.0	3	9.4
Openly share with others his/her feelings	21	65.7	8	25.0	3	9.4
Does rarely gives a 'false' front to others	20	62.5	9	28.1	3	9.4
Average percentage		62.6		26.6		10.9

Table 2 shows the majority of the respondents affirmed that their supervisors kept promises while engaged in the practices of managing physical assets as 18(56.6%) of them agreed with only 5 (15.6%) disagreeing although 9(28.1%) of them disagreed. When the respondents were asked about mistakes acknowledgment by the supervisors, 21(65.7%) were in agreement, 8(25%) remained neutral and 3(9.4%) respondents were in disagreement mode. 21(65.7%) of the respondents agreed on the open sharing by the supervisors with others, 3(9.4%) disagreed and 9(28.1%) did not take a position. On the supervisor rarely giving a 'false' front to others, 20(62.5%) of the respondents agreed, 9(28.1%) of the respondents were neutral and 3(9.4%) respondents disagreed. In sum a total of 62.6% of the respondents agreed that relational transparency has a positive effect on PAM practices, only 10.9% disagreed though 26.6% were neutral. It was revealed that relational transparency has a positive effect on PAM practices in LGs in Uganda. It is further shown that PAM practices require transparent decision making which is fact-based where alternative solutions are evaluated as suggested by Alhazmi (2018).

Kusawati et al., (2019) stated that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are important parts of good management practices which are equally important in the implementation of PAM practices affecting effectiveness as well. Effective M&E outcome is a manifestation of transparent acts that can guard

against biases. The results of a study by Ahmad et al., (2018) show that behavioral biases have the possibility of impacting the thought, decisions, and investing strategies of a physical asset manager. Yet, in the study, they uncovered the neglect of measures of behavioral biases in PAM practices. In spite of this, the results of a study by Ekayanti et al., (2018) show that the internal control system of government has a positive and significant effect on the variable effectiveness of management of physical assets.

Internalized Moral Perspective and Physical Asset Management Practices

The ability of the leader to be guided by a well-developed value in all actions through an internal locus of control irrespective of any external pressure make a confident internalized moral perspective. According to Olsen and Espevik (2017), with internalized moral perspective, a leader is embedded with a consistent value system in the heart. This enables the leader to identify intended actions for resolving discrepancies between the standards and potential or actual outcomes. We asked the respondents to indicate their levels of agreement with respect to the ability of their superiors to promote and uphold self-controls in the process of using, maintaining, renewing, and disposing of physical assets. Table 3 presents the findings on whether internalized moral perspective has an effect on PAM practices in the LGs.

Table 3: Internalized moral perspective and PAM practices

Issues	Responses					
	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Demonstrates beliefs which are consistent with actions	19	59.4	10	31.3	3	9.4
Bases own decisions on personal core beliefs	20	62.5	9	28.1	3	9.4
Does not allow to be controlled by pressure group	23	71.9	6	18.8	3	9.4
Makes stand on controversial issues known to others	19	59.4	7	21.9	6	18.7
Average percentage		63.3		25.0		46.9

Table 3 presents the results of the respondents' opinions on the dimension of internalized moral perspective of authentic leadership. The majority of the respondents 19(59.4%) indicated that they agree with whether their supervisors demonstrated beliefs consistent with their actions in the process of using, maintaining, renewing, and disposing of physical assets in their LGs. 10(31.3%) of the respondents remained neutral while 3(9.4%) of them disagreed. On whether their superiors based their own decisions on a person's core beliefs, 20(62.5%) agreed, 9(28.1%) were neutral and 3(9.4%) disagreed. As many as 23(71.9%) of the respondents agreed that their supervisors could not be allowed to be controlled by pressure groups while managing physical assets, 3(9.4%) disagreed while 7(21.9%) remained neutral. 19(59.4%) of the respondents agreed that their supervisors made stand on controversial issues known to others, 7(21.9%) were neutral while 6(18.7%) disagreed. The average percentage of the respondents' opinion as to the effect of internalized moral perspective on PAM practices shows that 63.3% of them were in agreement that indeed internalized moral perspective affects PAM practices. 25% of the respondents remained neutral while 46.9% disagreed. From the finding, it can be argued that internalized moral perspective has a positive effect on PAM practices. It further demonstrates that the supervisors' attributes combine their principles and behaviors in keeping with internal moral standards. This as Kasa et al., (2020) found affects the attitudes of the subordinates creating a changing environment critical for commitment.

Diop et al., (2021) conclude in their study such a commitment is imperative to look thoroughly to grasp all the implications of a subject matter. They recommend crucially coming up with the proper balance between the various challenging considerations for instance costs and benefits as well as opportunities and risks while managing physical assets. Bish et al., (2015) in their study indicate that commitment is critical to collaborate and influencing others. they concluded that it promotes complete objectives within organizational guidelines and the ability to manage themselves. Similarly, in their study, Ismail et al., (2019) found that employees' knowledge and internal control have a significant positive influence on PAM practices.

Balanced Processing and Physical Asset Management Practices

Balanced processing, Nikolic (2014) attests to the capacity of the leader to not only objectively process information but also to critically reflect on tasks and circumstances before any decision is taken. Neither positive nor negative, a leadership with balanced processing, collects and interprets self-relevant information without exaggerating or distorting the content. We used questions items to test this dimension according to Walumbwa et al., (2008) to elicit the opinions of the respondents as to whether their superiors' capability reflects optimism in objectively and realistically assessing the use, maintenance, renewal, and disposal of physical assets without favor or fear, before making a decision (Gardner et al., 2005). Table 4 presents the results obtained from the respondents.

Table 4: Balanced processing and Physical Asset Management practices

Issues	Responses					
	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Asks views contrary to personal deeply held positions	18	56.3	7	21.9	7	21.9
Derives conclusions from different points of view	20	62.5	8	25.0	4	12.5
Listens attentively to other who disagrees with him/her	21	65.7	6	18.8	5	15.7
Does not emphasize personal viewpoint at others' expense	15	46.9	9	28.1	8	25.0
Average percentage		57.9		23.4		18.8

As presented in Table 4 above, one of the ways in which balanced processing was being practiced in the LGs by the supervisors was asking for views contrary to personal deeply held positions for which 18(56.3%) of the respondents agreed, 7(21.9%) were either neutral or disagreed. It was also revealed that 20(62.5%) of the respondents agreed that their supervisors derive conclusions from a different point of view 4(12.5%) disagreed and 8(25%) remained neutral. On whether their supervisors listen attentively to others who disagree, 21(65.7%) of the respondents agreed, 6(18.8%) of them were neutral and only 5(15.7%) disagreed. We also asked the respondents about the supervisors not emphasizing personal viewpoints at the expense of others, as many as 15(46.9%) of the respondents agreed, 9(28.15) were neutral, and 8(25%) disagreed. All in all, 57.9% of the respondents agreed that balanced processing affect PAM practices as 18.8% disagreed and 23.4 % remained neutral. This result shows that by questioning their own positions, the leaders signal that they value open communication. Apart from signaling openness to one another, it promotes a feeling of trust and safety among the parties.

The finding supports an earlier study where Baum and Vlok (2013) found that dysfunctional information flow and poor decision-making are the primary constraints that hinder PAM practices. Similarly, the results of a study by Syaifudin et al., (2020) reveal that the effectiveness of the performance of PAM practices can be influenced by the commitment of the leadership, the competence of the employees, and the internal control system. Shah et al., (2017) conclude in their

study that a strong commitment is a requirement to improve the PAM practices capability for physical asset data effective use. Tarigan et al.,'s (2022) study reveals that the analysis of the effectiveness of PAM practices has not been effective as seen from the incompatibility of timeliness, the accuracy of cost calculations against applicable regulations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current practice of managing physical assets in LGs in Uganda has affected the effectiveness and excellency of the physical assets through a decentralized system of governance and public procurement reforms. This has been supplemented by regular issuance of manuals and circulars from time to time to ensure that the physical asset remains in their excellent state to provide the service for which they were procured. And this has been promoted through good best practices internationally recognized. It is thus worth noting that to a large extent, leadership in the decentralized LGs has ensured the effectiveness and excellency of physical assets in the LGs. Despite the realized success in terms of demonstrating effectiveness, the major challenge of toxic leadership still prevails have marred all the processes of managing physical assets.

It was found that a good number of respondents remained unsure of the critical role that authentic leadership can play in promoting effective PAM practices in their LGs. This calls for more and regular sensitization programs on the virtues of authentic leadership to be extended to all the employees in the LGs as a means to create awareness and make all the employees' part of authentic leadership.

Considering the current state of affairs in the management of physical assets, it will be difficult for the LGs to promote authentic leadership for effective PAM practices minus the efforts of all the employees.

Staff in the LGs departments and units are sort of authentic leadership skills and this has compromised the smooth running of all the PAM practices activities. Thus, there is a need to induct and reorient the staff on the virtues and skills of authentic leadership to enable employees to make authentic plans and enforce them up to the lowest level in the LGs. With adequate authentic leadership skills, activities aimed at holding excellent physical assets and promoting effective PAM practices through authentic leadership can be efficiently executed.

Apparently, there is a disconnect among different stakeholders involved in PAM practices, particularly

at the leadership level. This calls for the need to design a network of core leadership cohorts at the utilization, maintenance, renewal, and disposal stages that promote smooth coordination among the players for better decision-making as well as implementation. With this network of cohorts, decision-making in all the stages of PAM practices can be taken easily and more players empowered with authentic leadership skills and abilities concerning effective PAM practices.

Some of the employees have a negative attitude toward PAM practices. They look at every opportunity to manage their physical assets for self-enrichment. Therefore, more measures need to be put in place to drill in them the sense of authentic leading with the adequate mindset of promoting effective PAM practices.

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