

# Leadership Development Case Series

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## The Role of Authentic Leadership in Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness: A Case of NWSC



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### Abstract

*National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) growth indicators (1990-2021) show that the achievement of SDG 6 is possible in Uganda. In this article, we illustrate the meaning and the role of authentic leadership in enhancing organizational effectiveness. This entails getting great people on board to help in executing the strategy and achieving great results. The most important questions to consider in cultivating authentic leadership to achieve effectiveness relate to: building and empowering teams, fostering teamwork, performance feedback, developing a mix of talents, evolving an incentives philosophy and having a culture of discipline. . .*

### 1. Introduction

National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) is a public parastatal that is 100 percent owned by the Government of Uganda, having been formed by decree in 1972. Its legislative framework was revised and strengthened in 1995. Overtime, the NWSC has registered significant growth. Figure 1 below shows some growth indicators. More specifically, between 1990 and 2021, the urban water coverage (with urban boundaries) has increased from 18 percent to 85 percent; the

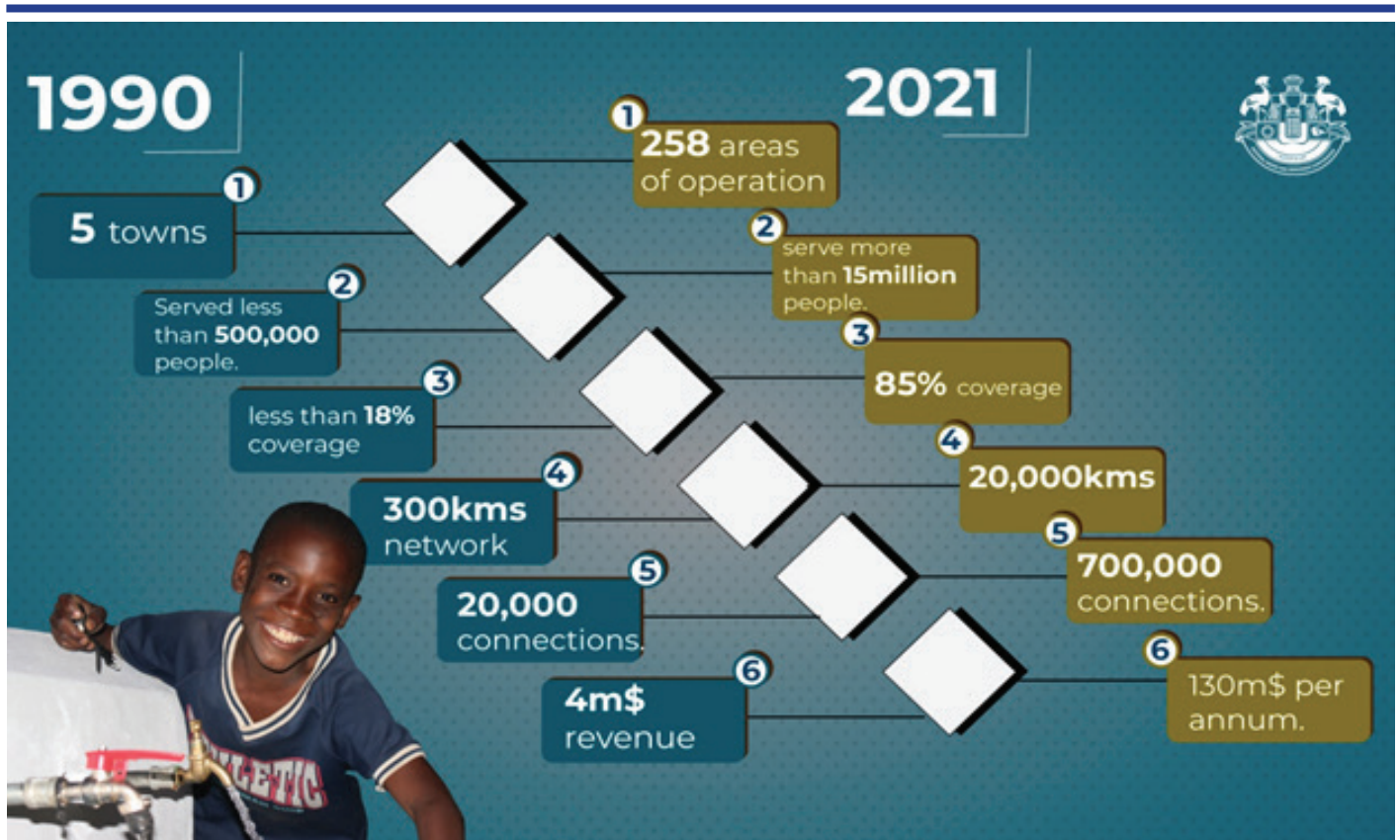
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from 20,000 to 700,000 connections. We now examine the role of authentic leadership and some illustrations underpinning management effectiveness, based on NWSC growth experiences and practice.

urban population served with water has increased from 500,000 people to 15million people. This is because the water pipe network length has increased from 300Kms to 20,000Kms while the number of water connections has increased

### 1. Role of Authentic Leadership

In Harvard Business Review (HBR) 10 must reads on leadership (2011), the article by Bill George, Peter Sims, Andrew N. McLean and Diana Mayer on Discovering your Authentic Leadership, point out that authentic leadership is concerned with demonstrating passion for purpose, practicing values consistently, and leading with hearts as well as heads.



Authentic leadership helps to establish long-term, meaningful relationships and creates self-determination to achieve results. It also helps leaders to know who they are and what they stand for. The authors pinpoint a number of perspectives about how people become authentic leaders. They frame their life stories in ways that allow them to see themselves not as passive observers of their lives but rather as individuals who can develop self-awareness from their experiences. They act on that awareness by practicing their values and principles, sometimes at substantial risk to themselves. They balance their motivations so that they are driven by these inner values as much as by a desire for external rewards or recognition. Authentic leaders also keep a strong support team around them, ensuring that they live integrated, grounded lives. Clearly for this understanding of authentic leadership, we discern the following corresponding perspectives that may be key to driving organizational effectiveness:

**(a) Learning from institutional memory and life story:** organizations learn a lot from what has happened in the organization in the past – how processes and structures have been improved progressively and what next needs to be done. Sometimes there has been successes and sometimes failures/challenges. The way these incidences were managed creates a scene for better ideas to handle reoccurrences. Such experiences provide sources of inspiration and enable leaders to understand the deeper purpose of their job placement. Where transformative changes happened in the past, designing high successor plans and their replication becomes easier.

**(b) Creating a strong culture of knowing authentic self:** if organizations have staff that resent criticisms, feedback and personal evaluation, sustaining high performance becomes problematic. At the same time, if an organization prefers closed-door policy: hardship in information disclosure and overly defending wrong behavior, the spaces for continuous improvements narrow. Organizations must lay a strong foundation of self-respect and accountability, take criticism and not deny it. A leadership logic that abhors failures and disappointments remains performance short-sighted and limits scope for innovation and creativity.

**(c) Inculcating a high spirit of practicing values and principles:** most organizations have a raft of values outlined in their strategic plans. The values that pass the test of authentic leadership derive from institutional beliefs and convictions but the robustness of those values can only be seen when the system is faced with pressure and extreme disruptions. It is easy to live by and talk about institutional values but when extreme events surface, you learn what is important, what you are prepared to sacrifice and what trade-offs you are willing to make.

**(d) Building internal and external motivations:** successful leaders are those that utilize internal and external interdependencies and emotions. Leaders cannot succeed on their own: they need support, advice, relationships and cohesion from inside and outside the organization. Otherwise, it is easy to be distracted. Authentic leaders build strong networks and collaborative arrangements inside the organization to give them advice, support, advocacy and protection, based on the prevailing circumstances.



Mentoring and coaching are also important in creating learning opportunities and self-confidence of leaders. It is also important to note that to be true to yourself, namely, letting someone know what should be known and not what they want to know, creates better learning opportunities.

**(e) Building a strong culture of work-life balance:**

productive organizations will continue to leverage a lot from employees who integrate their life by staying grounded. Authentic leaders put emphasis on win-win approaches for their employees: finding innovative ways of making sure organizations win and employees win. This interdependence is important. Employees must be encouraged to have lasting relationships, networks, stable families, social capital, healthy living and personal development. Personal development is usually the employee's responsibility but if not tactfully demanded, absence of it can be a source of grievances and sub-optimal productivity in the organization. Thus, authentic leadership may require directing efforts to life assurance schemes for employees and strong advocacy and education to ensure maximum uptake.

**(f) Empowering people to lead:** the best way of simplifying leadership is to delegate and empower people to lead. One way is to allow people to plan and take risks: when they fail, you provide support and assurance and when they succeed, you encourage them to celebrate their success and aim at the next practice. Everything, of course, remain pivoted to the overall strategy. Authentic leadership requires that there is a system of continuous re-engineering and reset, always looking for new ways of improving production technologies and efficiencies.

**(2). Enhancing organizational Effectiveness:**

Applying Aspects of Authentic Leadership. The whole world is awash with the need to achieve SDGs by 2030. Specifically, SDG 6 is about ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. In this article, we outline ten (10) illustrations, based on experience at National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), how authentic leadership can be used to enhance organizational effectiveness.

**i. The manager's role is not to please everyone:** good managers don't ruthlessly drive for performance goals and targets in ways that leave everyone injured in the wake. But they are also not obsessed with making everyone happy at the expense of organizational interests. Good managers create a good balance between the two extremes to make sure that right people are mobilized to implement strategy and achieve results – and they feel proud to be part of the collective effort.

**ii. Good managers find the right mix of people to work with:** to achieve effectiveness, managers must carefully select people to work with directly to implement the strategy and helping them work together in harmony, collaboratively, across functions and silos. The manager's role is to decompartmentalize roles and create a conducive environment that promotes harmony and job satisfaction.

**iii. Ensure your direct reports get needed feedback:** good managers aim to give feedback with the purpose of enhancing productivity and accountability. In doing this, managers should not be obsessed with only giving good feedback but rather needed feedback that reflects reality and performance status. People should be given enough feedback that helps them to either get better or try their talents elsewhere. It is important to note that a lot of investment is made in building employee experiences and competences. Therefore, continuous and timely needed feedback helps to reap from this investment or cut losses as a result of continuing with an unproductive employee.

**Good managers enable spaces for great people to learn, grow and develop themselves....**

**iv. Create learning opportunities:** good managers enable spaces for great people to learn, grow and develop themselves. It is to be noted that learning is associated with a much bigger scope including gaining or acquiring knowledge and/or obtaining a skill required to enhance performance. The worst that can happen is for a manager to continue using same knowledge landscape and expect different results.





**v. Articulate an explicit incentives philosophy:** good managers motivate their people to put their best in doing the right things for the benefit of the organization and themselves. Everything must be done to encourage people to apply the power of their knowledge superiority in ways that maximize output and net benefits. That requires tact and direction so that a strong mindset is inculcated to the effect that when the organization wins the people also win.

**vi. Mind about people's potential:** rather than putting an emphasis on selecting people with technical skill or specific knowledge, the most critical characteristics that managers should look for in selecting people to form a working team is potential – the ability to adapt to and grow into increasingly complex roles and environments. This approach is good for adaptive environments the global landscape faces – changing digital skills, competences, work challenges and ecosystems.

**vii. Emotional intelligence is key:** as organizations become flatter and work collaboratively, emotional intelligence is increasingly becoming important. In such circumstances, managers have to apply skill sets that are characterized by self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social aspects – those that resonate well with unpredictable environments, ever changing customer needs and complex political economy contexts. If managers want to adopt one-plus-one-equals-two approaches, they will be disappointed and discouraged by real-life situations that, instead, require adaptive leadership logic. Great organizations embrace and welcome change and mutating problems that require a leadership mindset of openness, deliberative approaches and continuous learning..

**viii. People don't need to look alike:** for a good manager, people in your team who report directly to you and who meet your selection criteria do not have to look alike, act alike, or behave alike. Getting people with complimentary and diverse skills is important. A good manager must mix and match talents, experiences and backgrounds. You must also consider personality types to ensure that you have people who are different enough to ignite creative thinking, while keeping harmonious working ethic.

**ix. Help your team to think horizontally:** as a manager, your team might be situated in an ecosystem of different teams with their own identities, goals, priorities, and work patterns. These teams may be located in different geographical locations or even outside your own organization in form of partners and/or service providers. As a manager, your role is to help team members to work horizontally with these other teams, even when they don't report to you. The important questions you need to continuously ask yourself, as a team leader, include: what other teams do you need to collaborate with to have an impact and get results; what do we need from these teams and how does that fit in their priorities; what is the best way to operate on the same frontier?

**x. Invest in building social capital:** a good manager must seek support from external networks to help in the grounding of the organization. Social capital helps to mobilize stakeholder buy-in, not only in the achievements of the organization but also in the challenges being faced and strategies to solve them. The long-term sustainability of an organization depends so much on the social capital

invested by the manager. The tools for doing this investment include: corporate social responsibility activities, participating in other stakeholder functions and meetings, showing humility and concern to problems facing stakeholders.

**4. Conclusion**

Authentic leadership plays a key role in enhancing organizational effectiveness. This entails getting great people on board to help in executing the strategy and achieving great results. The most important questions to consider in cultivating authentic leadership to achieve effectiveness relate to: building and empowering teams, fostering teamwork, performance feedback, developing a mix of talents, evolving an incentives philosophy and having a culture of discipline.

