The Nexus of Functional Stupidity Geometrics: Unpacking The Stupidity Theory on Leadership As A Toxic Mix Between Leaving A Legacy and Leadership Failure in Business Organizations

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Abstract:

This study fires shots on the irony of corporate stupidity in the 21st century. The present study reveals that corporate functional stupidity is viral among both smart and non-smart corporations leader, small and big corporations- capitalizing on leadership and intra-organizational power dynamics and the level of imbalances in authority between those leading and those being led [leadership-follower matrix]. The practice by corporates, especially leadership from within, to 'construct and build huge' systems of communicative blockades ear-marked at blind-folding and encourage employees to accept demonic and exploitative work practices as a prerequisite for corporate survival is ontologically surprising and a major cause for concern. This stupidity paradox in corporations spear-headed by leaders advances the notion that power dynamics and imbalances in authority at work places create stupid leaders who represents a distinctive form of cognitive failing. Paradoxically, modern corporations appear more stupidified from within. Stupidity is here viewed as functional and is understood definitively as a form of conceptual self-hampering, characterized by aetiology and with a range of delirious effects on both individuals at work and corporate performance at the other extreme. Functional stupidity, is in its entirety an "active refusal of using one's intellectual capacity in other than myopic ways" and leadership. The present study is a product of the researcher's quest and thirst for ontological perspectives in determining, what characterizes stupidity and determine the emancipatory models that are needed to contain the over-acculturalization of the practice. The primary research question posits and examines the salient characteristics of corporate functional stupidity. Together with other secondary questions, this question raises issues focused on interventions (stupidity management) leaders can make to drive down levels of stupidity in their corporates and make their organizations less stupid. A mixed methodological design is adopted in order to comprehend the ontology of functional stupidity as well as the original episteme of the same. This is done by reviewing existing literature on functional stupidity, with observatory and experiential knowledge obtainable from the researcher's work experience. The employment of discourse analysis and content merging of other studies conducted elsewhere is becomes the pedal for data analysis. The primary finding is that corporate stupidity can translate into a dangerous sense of futility that prompts even the brightest employees to abandon objectivity and silently accept absurd tasks. Corporate stupidity is a common hazard in many companies but paradoxically *enough*-it can prove useful to maintaining a certain degree of cohesion. Study further shows that stupid leadership attempts to structure individuals' internal conversations in ways that emphasize positive and coherent narratives and

marginalize more negative or ambiguous ones. Stupid leaders throw up a variety of communicative blockades that encourage employees to accept bad practices as an inevitability of life in the particular organizational ontology within which they find themselves. The study further perspective is that many corporations are caught in the stupidity paradox: they employ smart people who end up doing stupid things. This can produce good results in the short term, but can pave the way to disaster in the longer term. Paradoxically, the study reveals that when people are seized by functional stupidity, they remain capable of doing the job, but they stop asking searching questions about their work, get over possessed with loyalism and loose creativity and innovation. Smart corporations encourage stupidity that this pays off in the short term, but creates problems in the long term. The study recommends that systematic de-stupification and denaturalization of corporate leadership discourse is a necessary undertaking. The creation of deliberate innovative support cultures cannot be over-emphasized. The study unapologetically stands and proposes very practical steps that can be used to destupidify our corporations. Future research need to be contacted focusing on the benefits of creating stupid corporations whose stupidity manifests through the behaviour of its leaders. This study is not complete until further study is conducted across all corporates to deduce how stupidity can be transformed into both medium and long term benefits to the corporation.

1.0 Introduction

This paper investigates functional stupidity characteristics embedded in several corporate institutions in Africa. There is scarce and limited research to date on functional stupidity, despite its prevalence and it being a driving force in corporate performativity. Existing literature reviewed indicate that corporate rules are essential to deal with important considerations such as safety but arbitrary edicts for every aspect of office life act as handcuffs, limiting people's ability to achieve the best results (Paulsen,2018; Alvesson and Spicder,2012). Thinking differently, being freer and more connected to our intuition is sometimes more of a problem than an advantage in corporate environments. I reiterate that the research on functional stupidity remains fairly scarce and hence this study attributes itself to other studies conducted before it, including scholars (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Paulsen, 2018; Collingon, 2011; Spicer et al., 2016; Bloom and Alvesson, 2015b) themselves, whose studies leadership, management and on stupidity paradox provide lessons and insights into the discipline of stupidity and other stupidity functionalities they have raised. The present study opinionate that

'This study is a step towards animating the much sleeping management field branch of corporate stupidity and does extend the current debate on being bold to discuss a subject which is much a of a taboo. We cannot be afraid to be ourselves and be submissive for the good of others. Being an employee or being led by others does not and should not render us as 'unable to voice. Individuals have, depending with their circumstances choice to make–to question their environments or to be obedient with the environment despite how much it may not be compatible with them. I want to draw your attention to marriages that last so long not because there is binding love between the partners but one partner sticks to the marriage to meet certain goals despite internal conflicting views and practices. I guess at this point in time the majority of us-if asked whether you are comfortable with your present employer, will agree with me on a negative perspective. By hanging and sticking with your present employer outside your

will; typifies functional stupidity at work at its extreme. That you cannot resign and that you cannot even question your leaders resembles double-stupidity on your part and on the side of the leaders'.

The present study explores this painful phenomenon, as a way of creating further awareness and debate on the much unexplored modern stupidity trap that most corporates fall prey to. A handful of scholars have decided to take the bull by the horns and openly discuss this practice which, of course have positive and negative implications on corporate performance (Spicer et al., 2016; Driver et al., 2013; Callon, 2010 and Paulsen, 2018). Corporates are aware of the need for innovation and creativity, but the majority will settle for controlled innovation and creativity. The current systems is that many economies are based on innovation, creativity, and knowledge without risk of mistake, and that only 20% of businesses are putting this into practice (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Cabantous ; Butler, 2016). The present study questions loudly:

'What happens, then, with all those brilliant minds? With so many people willing to give the best of themselves but have no space to do so. Functional stupidity becomes the order of the day. If corporates create so much stupidity, what does that mean for the people who run them? The fact is, many managers try to ensure that smart people do not use their intellect in accomplishing their goals'

In trying to grapple with the prevalence of functional stupidity and unearth the primary characteristics making it up, it is ideal to critically anatomize the research conducted by Alvesson and Spicer (2018) who articulated that: "If you scratch the shiny surface of almost any organization claiming to be knowledge-intensive, you will find a quite different reality. Sure, there are often many well-educated smart people, but there is often little evidence that most of the corporate intelligentsia are fully using their intellect" (Alvesson and Spicer, 2018)

1.2 Problematization of the research

The debate about corporate stupidity is endless, with others disagreeing on the use of the term stupidity while others prefer use of terms that are negatively promotional in nature. The present status quo with the existing literature and realities on the ground is that corporates are functionally stupid and this cannot be ignored. The major issue is to interrogate the characteristics of functional stupidity together with other concerning issues and also explore whether the degree of stupidity is constructive or needs to be deconstructed. The paper posits three research questions in order to achieve purposively its intentions of broadening the debate on functional stupidity. The first research question examines the salient characteristics of corporate functional stupidity. The second question, questions on types of functional stupidity. The third question, questions how functional stupidity works and what its consequences are. The fourth question raises issues focused on interventions (stupidity management) leaders can make to drive down levels of stupidity in their corporates and make their organizations less stupid.

1.3 Significance of the study

The present study is one of rare studies focusing on a very sensitive area of corporate behaviour. It does contribute to existing debate on corporate stupidity and what can be done to destupify it. There is nothing unusual about corporates being stupid in their day to day operations, but a cause for concern is when the level of stupidity exceeds normality. Fundamentally these contributions are not only academically interesting, but also relevant from a practical point of view, as the identification of corporate stupidity in an organization can contribute to the development of better organizing practices, or to the removal of bad-negative practices. By focusing on leadership practices rather than the

ideological aspects of leadership, this study extends the current understanding of leadership within the 'stupidity-based theory of organizations. The study contributes to theory and knowledge of functional stupidity in a new context and also introduces the perspective of constructive parrhesia on stupid leaders. The current study on functional stupidity leadership development practices might contribute towards a more positive work culture and eliminate or reduce functional stupidity behaviour and practices. The present study is unique in that there is no such study on corporate stupidity written in Francistown – Botswana and more so within the SADC region, very scare and limited mentions have been done on corporate stupidity specifically serve to focus on poor leadership, bad management, corruption and the like.

1.4 Methodology

The research methodology for this study needs to be appropriate in this regard in order to gain valid insights into the research question: what characteristics makes up and influence functional stupidity at workplace. As an emerging discipline in the field of management sciences, I settled on reviewing existing studies to date, and also interrogate their findings with regard to functional stupidity in corporations. Data obtained from the study is thematically analyzed through content discourse. I used my experiential knowledge in putting the work of other researchers together descriptively to make meaning out of it. Use of phenomenology is limited to observation and personal interaction with four organizations that in have interacted with both as a researcher and employee. Phenomenology is an approach that lends itself particularly well to explorative studies because sociology should be connected to the lived experiences of people which is the main focus of phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). The study does not primarily rely on results from observation and experiential context but uses this to understand more the critical components of the selected literature and work of others on this emerging discipline of functional stupidity.

1.5 Literature

Before indulging in active literature review and analysis, I loudly present the abstract thinking of renowned business perspectives on functional stupidity:

Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe'. **[Albert Einstein]**

'The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.' **[Bertrand Russell]**

'To be stupid, selfish, and have good health are three requirements for happiness, though if stupidity is lacking, all is lost'. **[Gustave Flaubert]**

"Those who do not learn and 'remember' history are doomed to repeat it." **George (Jorge) Santayana**

Existing literature shows that scholars in Critical Management Studies (CMS) have been debating the unwieldiness of their findings ever since the discipline's conception-discipline of functional stupidity (Clawson, 2006; Burke, 2006; Baron, 2014; Paulsten, 2018). The present study argues and joins the bandwagon on the stupidity debate:

'Agreeing to disagree with those who disagree on the need to distance self from taking a parrhesiatic stance in promoting functional stupidity debate. Whether we like or not, corporates will remain and continue to be stupid in their ways and not to talk about it could more stupid than talking about it.'

Scholars disagree as to whether they should adjust their intervention strategies to the particular organizational ontology or remain at a critical distance, so as to not create the risk of their criticism being utilized for, argued to be malevolent, neoliberal purposes (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012b; Blom and Alvesson,2015b; Lough,2005). In its context, functional stupidity aims to explain why organizational phenomena become functionally stupid: because, on an individual level, members of the organizational system do not allocate, by choice or by the merit of coercion, cognitive resources to dwell on their stupidity (baron, 2014; Butler, 2016). This manifests not only in organization-wide cognitive defects, but also has consequences for motivational, moral, or emotional reasoning.

1.5.1 Preview of perceived tenets of functional stupidity

The following presentation dwell more on the perceived definition of functional stupidity-capturing views of many authors, whose work have been selected for review in this study. While the definitions and explanations are as different as the authors who wrote them, one thing is common: it is the robbing of individual intellect, in an attempt to limit the desire to question unpalatable practices, by those who deliberately choose to do so to satisfy corporate ego. The snapshot review below is critical as a step towards understanding the key facets of functional stupidity. As a follow up to this, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) argue "that stupidity exists structurally; claiming that we live in a "stupidity-based economy" opposed to the well espoused view that we live in a "knowledge economy". Their study claim that organizations are partly driven by functional stupidity which makes the organization functions in a stupidity-based economy. Scholarly debate in sociology of work circles zeroes on the need to understand power and the reactions to it. Different terminology is applied to conceal and hibernate stupid practices at workplaces. This includes words like: obedience, honest, respect, compliance, bureaucracy, order, discipline and coping. Functional stupidity is currently part of scholarly debate and provides insight to give a better understanding of how obedience, compliance and similar term should be used (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). By critically analyzing functional stupidity as a concept, it emerges that functional stupidity as a concept is more fitting in a variety of situations since it focuses on the counterfactual (Alvesson and Spicers, 2012). The bulky of the studies directed towards critical thinking and leadership discourse argue that the theory of functional stupidity is largely untested and is there for still in an explorative stage (Paulsen, 2017).

Deep insight and further lessons are drawn from Alvesson and André Spicer (2018), authors of the aforementioned book, *The Stupidity Paradox,* who point out that there are four aspects that prop up this stupidity problem:

- People tend to seek to please whoever has power in the organization.
- People have a need to avoid causing problems and not to tell certain people things that they do not want to hear
- Very often, being "functionally stupid" leads to things being pretty okay for us: we keep our job and we are accepted
- The grand majority of jobs today demand these characteristics. If you want to move up and, what's more, keep your job, it is better to be functionally stupid, mindful, serving, and not to question what is taking place.

Paulsen (2017, 2018) indicated that functional stupidity can be viewed as an unreflective mode of compliance, which one may succumb to for a variety of reasons, but can be reflected upon with hindsight leading to narrow cognitive capabilities. The study of functional stupidity brings with it, the

aspect of stimulation of certain practices that then limit their capacity or willingness to speak up against their, potential, stupidity. DeCeller and Pfarrer (2004) and Bligh et al., (2017) argues that leadership can be used to directly promote functional stupidity. This is done through asking employees not to speak or think too much about particular events. Hence, the extent to which leadership can retaliate or suppress resistance through sanctioning is herein critical to understand because this agenda is a red spot in functional stupidity. The study also observes at this juncture three key areas that characterize leadership behaviour and character to achieve and arrive at the goal post of stupefying employee intellect and boost employer's interests-and these are leadership manipulation, leadership subjectification and leadership obedience. A fundamental aspect on leadership is it being used symbolically for manipulative purposes (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). Manipulation, in this context of symbolism is using the political processes within an organization to fit the activities that occur within the organization within a particular frame of normality and abnormality. Habermas (1971) and Alvesson, (1987) further supports the view that when leadership is employed for agenda setting purposes, they contribute to setting a frame about what is important in the organization and ultimately voices that support alternative points of view arise less, and become less legitimate and suppressed. A study by Gordon (1991); stated that leadership, '*subjectification*' can work through promoting governmentality, "the conduct of conduct: a form of activity to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons". The iron of functional stupidity is that when thinking in such terms about power, being left to do one's work autonomously can actually be away of control; ideally the exercise of power functions through the veins of one's own identity, freedom becomes imprisoned by the self (Paulsen,2018; Alvesson and Spicer,2018). This study adds on to this argument that:

To the extent that individuals fail to see that there have been robbed of their professional and personal intellectual capacity, they will never realize that there are in themselves stupefied functionally.

1.5.2 Functional stupidity phenomenon

Functional stupidity is a branch of stupidity management-a specific kind of managerialism (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). According to Alvesson & Spicer, (2012b) functional stupidity comes from the recognition that stupidity is rather prevalent in organizational life. Stupidity management uses different techniques of blocking; to minimize and at times extinguishing critical thinking and reflection about the practices, means and goals of the organization (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). They further took up upon themselves basing on their experiences and observation recently to coin the idea of functional stupidity, the "unwillingness or inability to mobilize three aspects of cognitive capacity: reflexivity, justification, and substantive reasoning" or the "active refusal of using one's intellectual capacity in other than myopic ways"

Allow me to set the right tone right from the onset on the differences between the stupidity we are accustomed to and the 'constructed functional stupidity that is the subject of this paper. Functional stupidity is different from pure stupidity which is an individual trait that is not controllable (Paulsen, 2017). Functional stupidity is a mode that always exists in the context of stupidity management and leadership, so the leader must manage situations that are already stupid (Paulsen, 2017). Alvesson and Spicer supports this view by arguing that functional stupidity is not being applied in its psychological sense of indicating a mental deficiency, but articulates that "to be stupid at work is to suffer from what might be called an 'epistemological lack. Ideally stupid people have a low IQ. It is easy to suppose that people who do stupid things at work have a low IQ, poor education, a narrow mindset, or have been

seduced by dogmatic ideas. Corporates confronted by such, should not worry because often times .corporates are bound to recruit such persons, mistakenly of course. The major worry trickles in when people with high IQ become more stupid than those who are expected to be so

Further understanding is needed in differentiating who wears the 'hat' of stupidity. Hence this study discusses functional stupas or functional stupees (adopted names for stupid persons in organizations. In the context of this study a stupa is the stupid leader and stupee is the employee who is influenced to become stupid by the leaders' actions). The irony of functional stupas in functional stupidity is great-leaders are very good at doing things that look good, pleases management and hurts followers. Action is meant to please the third part at the expense of those who are involved in the actual work. The adage that; 'the customer is always right' is a case in point, on inflicting stupidity pain on employees just to make sure the customer is happy, when he/she is wrong. How can the customer be always right?

Paulsen (2016) and Alvesson and Spicer (2018) further argue that stupidity is then functional in the sense that not allocating intellectual resources fosters in individuals a sense of psychological security, consistency, and prevents cognitive dissonance through an avoidance of the burden of doubt. Literally speaking functional stupidity is an organized attempt to stop people from thinking seriously about what they do at work. This view is supported by Alvesson and Spicer, (2012) arguing that:

"When people are seized by functional stupidity, they remain capable of doing the job, but they stop asking searching questions about their work" (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012).

 Alvesson and Spicer (2018) further argue that in the place of rigorous reflection, they become obsessed with superficial appearances. Instead of asking questions, they start to obey commands and rather than thinking about outcomes, they focus on the techniques for getting things done. A key component of functional stupidity is that individuals themselves play an active role in limiting the extent to which they employ their cognitive capabilities for the broader purpose of reflexivity, seeking justification, and raising, or asking others to raise, their voices (substantive reasoning (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Clegg, 2009). When people start ignoring contradictions, avoid careful reasoning and fail to ask probing questions, they also start to overlook problems-functional stupidity will have occupied their central medulla oblongata. Paulsen (2017) argues that functional stupidity is an unreflective mode done willingly by "smart people" to "limit internal reflexivity" (Paulsen, 2017).

The definitions and explanation of functional stupidity is observed through techniques are used by leaders to naturalize functional stupidity. Chief among these techniques are suppression of dialogue by not listening, direct suppression, agenda setting, making threats and the production of a certain identity that is positive to the organization and practices (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). (Paulsen, 2017) writes that these techniques of stupidity leadership can be both subtle and more explicit. Leaders in the so called smart organizations use despair, cynicism, seduction and authoritarianism to exert their authority and instill ''loyalty forcefully''.

Paulsen's theory of obedience includes five different modes that the individual moves between. Mode in this theory refers to cognitive behaviour and behaviour and this behaviour can be on a continuum from elicit position to a certain level of emotions. Functional stupidity, it is also regarded as narrowing of thoughts to just focus on what gets the job done, accompanied with the disappearance of doubt and creation of a feeling of more certainty (Paulsen, 2017, Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). An interesting aspect of functional stupidity is the denial or prohibition to questioning of the practices, routines, norms is professionalized. Why does this questioning capability disappear? The individual willingly accepts not to use the critical capacities that he or she has (Paulsen, 2017, Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Studies

conducted to date show that leadership is argued to be a key driver of functional stupidity. A form of leadership that encourages employees to avoid thinking too much, choosing for them selectively what to think, limiting discussions and consultative processes, foster employee compliance- is a very dangerous and toxic form of leadership which promotes concentrated stupidity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016; Paulsen, 2017). To conceal using the direct wording of ill-leadership practices, other researchers use words differently but at the end of the day- it does manifest this leadership deficiency. Terms such as 'petty tyrants'; destructive leadership, corrupt leadership, authoritative leadership, bad leadership, poor leadership, leadership derailment, aversive leadership are just used to conceal 'crude stupidity' (Tepper, 2000; Kellerman, Benson and Hogan, 2008; Alverson et al.,2002; Buttler, 2016).

1.5.3 Types of functional stupidity

Stupidity manifests itself in various forms. Not all researchers have classified stupidity at workplaces, However, there is general consensus among a handful of researchers (Paulsen, 2018; Butler, 2016; Alvesson and Spicer, 2018; Baron 2014; Driver 2013) on various forms of stupidity classified as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Types of functional stupidity

Leadership-induced stupidity	People develop an unquestioning faith in their own boss ('the leader') and the magical powers of leadership more generally.
Imitation-Induced Stupidity	Copying practices of other corporations and implementing them but without really understanding why those corporations behaviour in that way
Branding-Induced Stupidity	Extent of supporting a corporate brand despite its short comings. Akin to supporting a political part and only realize that one is trapped in the wrongness of the party –continue to sloganeer about goodness of the party image.
structure-induced stupidity	Organo-structures that closes employees initiatives and instils fear of progressive mindsets
Culture-Induced Stupidity	Deliberate creation of a stupid culture that suppresses creative ideas coming from intellects within the organization

Source: Compiled by Gwakwa (2024)

The various methods alluded to above are complemented by the communication blockade strategy. A method that has seemed to be successfully adopted by the so called smart organizations is the communication blockade model of communication propounded by several researchers (Paulsen, 2018, Alvesson and Spicer, 2018, Baron, 2014 and Butler, 2016). The argument is that the method is used as a way of ensuring successful decision making without facing resistance. The three main blockade strategies used to enforce this functional stupidity model are shown in the table below:

Table 3: Communication blockade in functional stupidity

Direct coercion	Leaders engage in verbal derogation, shut down critique, and maintain a tight grip over information flows, which forces employees to cease any resisting communicative action in the formal decision-making arena

Emptying out of communicative action	Through refocusing attention into empty frames, appealing to fictitious elements of the organization's culture, or engaging in facadismic practices that render any render any resistant voices silent
Construction of organizing practices that entrench existing power structures	Established leaders, complemented by the normative authority that leadership at the organization is thought to possess.

Source compiled by Gwakwa (2024)

1.5.4 Characteristics of Functional stupidity

This paper takes you through some of the key characteristics of functional stupidity gathered from different sources by this study, while other statements are directly obtained from the lived experiences during my working career. While these may not be universally applicable, it should be acknowledged that they provide a pointer to some key determinants of functional stupidity. The table in the next pages provides a summary of the said determinants.

Table 4: Characteristics of a functional stupidity framework

When you stop asking yourself questions it becomes normal-and you qualify as a stupa

Oliver points out that he literally stopped asking himself questions, which is the central part of "functional stupidity". As is shown Oliver is not stupid in the sense of low IQ, he is deliberately pushing away questions as conscious act in order to function in what he saw as unethical.

And at times this is true. Most of us have encountered people in the workplace who have limited intellectual capacities, yet still seem to hold important positions.

We have also probably worked alongside someone whose irrational prejudices and dogged fixations stop them from making rational decisions.

But once in the grip of functional stupidity, you avoid thinking too much about exactly what you are doing, why you are doing it, and its potential implications.

Many organizations foster a deep belief in the rationality of what are clearly irrational structures and systems.

This means people cling to systems and structures that obviously do not yield the results they are meant to.

Perplexed by the brutal honesty – a virtue not common in a world where people prefer to believe what is preached rather than what is practiced.

Many organizations claim they rely on well-educated, reflective, bright people who are eager to learn. The sad reality is that they actually rely even more on almost the opposite: discipline, order, mindless enthusiasm, conformity, loyalty and a willingness to be seduced by the most ludicrous of ideas With repeated episodes of "winning" comes a belief that winning is an entitlement and that losing is not possible Perennial winners cloak themselves in a mantle of righteous armor that is impervious to criticism, self-doubt, or pleas to exercise caution. Like Icarus of Greek mythology, they soar higher and higher until they fly too close to the sun and discover that they are, indeed, only mortals who perish when their wings melt in the extreme heat Whereas individuals display hubris, successful, highly cohesive groups' exhibit groupthink, a kind of collective hubris described by sociologist and journalist William H. Whyte and researched by Irving Janis and others. Such groups tend to develop the illusion

that they are invulnerable and unanimous in their thinking, and a deep belief that their actions are moral These illusions blind them to the warning signs of potential danger and desensitize them to anyone within or outside the group who might raise concerns about group decisions or actions They prevent those with dissenting views from gaining access to key decision-makers Entrenched in power by a variety of structural and socio-normative procedures that prioritize research quality above all, maintain strict control over the organizational decision-making agenda

Source: compiled by Gwakwa (2024)

1.5.4 Functional stupidity benefits

Fundamentally, functional stupidity is the inclination to reduce one's scope of thinking and focus only on the narrow, technical aspects of the job. Contrary to the popular suppressive actions obtainable from functional stupidity, Alvesson and Spicer (2018) concurs with Paulsen (2017) on that shutting off parts of one's brain at work may seem like a bad idea, but it often comes with some big benefits. The study has compiled a number of these benefits to share with the readers thereto. The assumed benefits are shown the table below.

Table 4: Merits of functional stupidity to the corporate

Employees initiated as stupees, are not seen as troublemakers who ask too many awkward questions
At the height of functional stupidity employees are spared from the taxing task of using all their intellectual resources
By ignoring the many uncertainties, contradictions and downright illogical claims that are rife at work, people are able to ensure that things run relatively smoothly
People often value convenience over confronting the inconvenient truth
Functional stupidity persists however, due to its positive day-to-day influence on employees' sense of selves, providing security and certainty by preventing dissonance; it's not all bad. On an organizational level, this has beneficial implications for, amongst others, organizational decision-making, although when there is an excess of functional stupidity, it can prove destructive
Leaders throw up a variety of communicative blockades that encourage employees to accept bad practices as an inevitability of life in the particular organizational ontology within which they find themselves
Employees are found to self-stupidify, and adopt increasingly narrow perceptions within which they judge the desirability of organizing practices. This contributes to the development of a cognitive frame, whereby self-interest is subservient to collective interest, and various conflicts emerge, but are accepted as an inevitable reality of work life
Rather than protesting, or leaving the organization altogether, employees knowingly decide to remain silent, and stay
Doubts do not enter the domain of formal decision-making which entrenches the functional stupidities, as well as the power of those in control of the organizational agenda
This comes as a result of both leadership's actions to block, as well as individuals employees' active self-regulation of any such doubts, critiques, or resistance
This study found that stupidity, on the other hand, has a unifying effect. It boosted productivity and morale. People content in an atmosphere of functional stupidity came to consensus more

easily, and with that consensus came coherence and less conflict

Critical reflection can become an obstacle to creating compliance, motivating employees, implementing strategy and leading effectively. It can undermine authority and leadership. To nurture a positive image can be difficult if people think too much-hence corporates buy into stupid ideas.

Source: Gwakwa Researched data (2024)

1.6. Reflexity, Substantiveness and Justification

Despite the above benefits accrued from adopting a functional stupidity stance, corporations face a series of challenges as alluded to in the early stages of this paper. However, I will have done no justice to the pool of episteme on functional stupidity if the challenges of reflexity, substantiveness and justification are not interrogated. One of the challenges of stupidity is the aspect of reflexivity which is defined as the human capacity to question our own assumptions (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). A common characteristic of people, who are non-reflexive, is that they take for granted commonly held assumptions, and they do not question dominating beliefs, see things from a perspective of neutrality; things are what they are, and the possibility of them being subjected to change is not actively considered, even if they seem idiotic (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). Are you not one of them? According to Alvesson & Sköldberg, (2000) non-reflexivity means to identify assumptions that go about unquestioned within the boundaries of a particular organizational ontology. Another issue that dominates functional stupidity is the substantiveness so called substantive reasoning. Lack of it means people are not abler to question why things are don e but questions how things are done. It is important to realize that these assumptions provide a sort of 'rules of the game', which regulate people's cognitive capabilities into narrow frames of thinking and even praising idiotic practices. Thirdly the aspect of justification is connected to functional stupidity. This is where functional stupidity rules, people stop asking difficult questions in public. Rules are to be followed, even if there is no awareness of why the rule exists in the first place (Zbaracki, 1998; Alvesson, 2013). Zbaracki, (1998) and Alvesson, (2013) further argue that lack of justification; allow practices to become implemented without significant questioning by organization, as communicative action is prevented. These three substantive, justification and reflexive possess power that promotes communication blockage which is the essence of functional stupidity. Most employees are marginalized by blocking their communicative action, supported by the favorable mental conditions fostered by symbolic manipulation in addition to the three.

1.7 Result

Fundamentally, the results of this study are still tentative because of the few number of publications on functional stupidity reviewed [research in this area is still scarce] and the limited number of studies in this area. Researchers who conducted studies in this area argues along the same lines stating the scarcity of empirical research in particular on the discourse of functional stupidity serve on more studies conducted on critical thinking and management sciences (Paulsen,2018; Elvesson and Spicer,2018; Buttler,2016). In qualitative research saturation of themes is another way reaching validity rather than representation. The findings indicate that functional stupidity significantly shapes what is considered to be fundamentally important in organizations. Functional stupidity in its form narrows employee perceptions and contribute to the development of organizing practices that are in service of narrowly

defined goals, contributing to an imbalance between the different priorities that organizations have. A sizeable number of publications have evidence showing that top performers' take the stupidity route and take acculturalize own ways and norms in achieving organizational goals. These are dubbed benevolent hackers who find ways to get around stupid rules to get smarter results (Paulsen, 2017; Alvesson and Spicer, 2018). The other result from the study shows that functional stupidity result in an organization result in situations where employees knowingly subordinate themselves to organizational demands(sometimes unreasonable), which works in tandem with pressures emanating from leadership that encourage conformance, squelching resistance, producing progressively idiotic practices. Paradoxically, rather than voicing their concerns, employees 'self-stupify'; they align themselves to functional stupidities. Rather than revealing the stupidity in practices, participants preferred to stay silent when conflict emerged, not think too much about it, and rather just live with it. Pulsen (2018) arguably agrees with outcomes of studies conducted by Alvesson and Spicer (2012, 2018) on intellect lockdown caused by silence. In a nutshell they argue that;

By remaining silent, employees implicitly become co-authors of their own hardships. Important to note is that the process of self-stupidification to prevent conflict occurs within a context where leadership restricts dialogue

One of the down sides of functional stupidity is that it does trigger a profound sense of disappointment and disengagement on the part of employees and it becomes overwhelming, it can easily spread to customers, suppliers, communities, regulators and investors. As a result, the corporate reputation and image is at stake. Evidence from the literature review outcome shows that functional stupidity is sapping trust; creation of conditions for larger crises or disasters-occurring when minor problems build up, become connected, and create difficult to reverse problems that are impossible to ignore. The findings provide ground to doubt the common assumption of smartness in organizations. From the study, it is evident that stupidity at the very least seems to be an indication that individuals do not necessarily apply their cognitive resources to reflexively question their contribution to the perpetuation of bad organizing practices, think in other than myopic ways, or ask critical questions when negative outcomes do arise, even if they are themselves affected (Paulsen, 2018; Alvesson and Spicer, 2018; Spicer and Evelsson, 2016)..

It is clear from this study that functional stupidity has the purpose of shutting down critical dialogue, which is done efficiently by all leaders. Leadership irrationalities, bad priorities, corruption and unethical behaviour are all forms of leadership stupidity disguised terminologically. For high knowldges intensive organizations, brilliant, and well-educated individuals they needs a job. In the end, they will give into routine and low prestige jobs because resignation and the assumption of functional stupidity are basics for keeping a job.

Functional stupidity encourages to look beyond the manager or leader as a malign individual, towards an understanding of their behavior as actually being driven by a different set of motives to one's own; to another, one's actions might actually be very logical when reflecting upon them. Dialogue on the basis of functional stupidity therefore encourages a looking beyond ontologically-limited conceptualizations of right- and wrongdoing, through the employment of individuals' reflexive capabilities in encouraging them to develop their own point of view (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012a)

Studies conducted to date also reveals that in the wake of over-brilliance than thou, directors, management, leaders and coworkers less brilliant and creative than you, who will ask you to be quiet within that herd of white sheep. Because you are pointing them out, because your ideas could break the

"iron assembly line" often based on perpetuating their own mediocrity, they are bound to silence you. One point that may need to be raised is who is stupid here, the one who is being silenced or the silencer? Are you not one of them, the silenced, the silencer or both? Whichever category you belong, you find yourselves trapped in functional stupidity and also a celebrator of it yet we always claim to be smart leaders dressed in western suits. Obeying under the regime, to please the regime and keep oneself functional and active in the system. The majority of leaders who obey corporate policies and rules do so not because that is what they want but because for them to be relevant they have to be stupid (obeying out of fear and despair is one of the greatest icon of stupidity) (Butler, 2016; Baron, 2016; Paulsen, 2018). Stupidity can also manifest through the employees when they start to behave in a way that distracts their critical thinking. Thus functional stupidity has a spillover effect (BARON, 2014; Spicer et al., 2016; Learmouth and Morrell, 2017). Executives of most corporate including those four but one I have worked for embraced a militaristic identity. There seemed to be little reflection or doubt about the rigid rules of the (war) game inside the company. People appeared to be caught up in a quasi-totalitarian set of beliefs. The thematic review also shows that there is decreased stupa and stupee diligence which is only half of it of the problems caused by functional stupidity. In some job situations, being smarter, faster, and more rhetorically gifted might also keep you stuck in your current role longer than your peers (Paulsen, 2018).

The other issue clearly shared by many of the authors (Pundit, 2015; Kan, 2018; Kurakato, 2007; Paulsen, 2018) is that our society itself is not ready to receive employees who are capable of neither thought processes that are critical, dynamic, and creative nor are corporates receptive to that spark based on innovation. Many of us are then seized by the 'functional stupidity demon' and believe in nothing less than "we have no other option" than to accept whatever, just to arrive at the end of the month. Generally, the findings of this study suggest that no layer of organization is immune to functional stupidity, though degrees of stupid functionality may different and of course complicit in its perpetuation. The final but not in order revelation of the present study is that functional stupidity relationship is manifested in the manner in which leaders, enabled by power imbalances, play politics by constructing walls to block employees to communicate their inner feelings and emotions, thereby promoting narrow thinking.

1.8 Recommendations

Procedural performance is recurring among stupid organizations. Corporate Leaders need to appreciate that there is more than one way of doing things. The tools that are there outside of work are leapfrogging past what we use on the job. To prevent employees from using these tools renders work disinteresting and even more difficult. Allowing them to do so is a critical step towards employee empowerment. If corporates fail or deliberately become rigid, many will find a way to work around firewalls and use them anyway because these tools allow them to work more effectively and efficiently. Introducing positive corporate environmental practices is good for productivity-these include letting people be themselves, showing people how the daily work makes sense and, not surprisingly, having rules people can believe in—which translates into having no stupid rules. The study urges individuals not to become functionally stupid, unless otherwise. Creating an open culture of innovation and creativity –a culture that celebrates mistakes is one way of guaranteeing the reduction of functional stupidity at workplace. Dissolving over celebrated teams and groups at work also enables employees to think outside the box. The best way to deal with functional stupidity is to use a stranger's model-

allowing the strangers to have an eagles eye on the culture and leadership styles adopted by corporations. The only way to eradicate and or minimize stupidity is to de-stupify the corporate culture.

1.9 Further research

This study has its limitations; hence a number of areas of research can be identified that require further examination in the light of the study findings. The area that needs further research includes; can stupidity be openly discussed for public good by corporates; on comparative basis which organizations embrace functional stupidity more-women- led or male- led. The other area is to interrogate years spend at university –only to be employed to be told what to do-is it worth to do so in the face of growing stupidity in organizations. More empirical study using phenomenology needs to be conducted to understand the discourse of corporate stupidity in the face of knowledge based economies.

1.10 Conclusion

The present study notes that corporates dissolve completely into that supposed imbecility in order to sustain a system that is being kept, that is surviving, but that is not moving forward. This is entirely not productive and developmental. It is not so because in this context, employees are frustrated, disgusted, demotivated, demoralized, diminished, demeaned and above all else, unhappy and discontent. These are the products of functional stupidity. This discussion paper has demonstrated the need for closer study of corporate stupidity- side of leadership. The current literature pertaining to the dark side of leadership lacks a cohesive definition and congruent from different scholars and researchers. Further empirical studies are required in order to get more insight on functional stupidity and its prevalent in the corporate world. This will in deed enable the construction of an enhanced empirical conceptual framework based on experiences of leaders in Africa and beyond. This is important to consolidate major works done by fathers of functional stupidity and scholars such as Alvesson and Spicer (2018); Paulsen (2017) and others. Further expansion of the definition would entail a conceptual model for consideration by the academy. It is time that may be the creative brain must also be trained to be courageous and take initiative. The fear of taking on risks and step out of those old-fashioned cycles to found new companies capable of offering innovative services to an ever more demanding society should be thing of the past. How many of us have been compelled to do things we do not desire to and have had they ides suppressed or stolen but still cling on to our organizations? If functional stupidity cannot teach us to be ourselves, what will then? Significant to note is that great changes do not come overnight. Most companies have rules that frustrate employees. In this paradox, what is your take

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