

Research Paper

Indigenous Knowledge vis-à-vis Development: The Potential of Gadaa System in Industrial Leadership Development

Hailu Beyecha Deti^{1,*}, Kassaye Gutema Jebessa²

¹Mechanical Engineering Department, School of Mechanical, Chemical & Materials Engineering, Adama Science and Technology University, P.O. Box: 1888, Adama, Ethiopia

²English Department, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Adama Science and Technology University, P.O. Box: 1888, Adama, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to scrutinize techniques in Gadaa system that helped to sustain leadership development of the Oromo Society and its implication for industrial leadership development. The study was conducted using qualitative research method and exploratory research design. Accordingly, data of leadership development practices in the Gadaa system were gathered from key informants through focus group discussion, key informant interviews and non-participant observation. The data were analyzed thematically. The study revealed that there were different strategies within the Gadaa system that helped to nurture the leaders perpetually so that they can manage the society and their resources properly. Gadaa system has got different leadership development techniques such as traditional education, training, experience sharing, observation, practicing and creating a sense of competition among individuals. The Gadaa system encompasses different institutions such as centers, parties, grades and structures of Gadaa system that enabled the society to deal with various challenges, ensure good governance and enhance efficiency in management. Moreover, the study revealed that the Gadaa system has got check and balance system that is undertaken in both the forward and backward directions. Thus, the researchers would like to suggest that the proposed technique of Gadaa system could have a bearing on the improvement of work environment and thus it could potentially be used in tandem with modern day industrial leadership development techniques. Therefore, the government and concerned stakeholders should customize the important technique of Gadaa system with regard to industrial leadership development for ensuring good governance and shaping the behavior of workforce in carrying out their roles and responsibilities properly.

1. Introduction

A number of scholars have conducted studies on the Gadaa system of Oromo people. Among them, the prominent scholar is Asmerom Legese (1973; 2006) who described Gadaa as an African democracy and as one of the most informative breakthroughs in the evolution of mankind. Similarly, Donald Levine (1974) noted that Gadaa is "one of the most complex systems

of social organization ever devised by the human imagination". Assafa Jalata (2012) underscored that Gadaa represents "the totality of Oromo civilization". Marko Bassi (2005) also described Gadaa as the system of generational classes through which specific activities and social responsibilities are associated with each class.

*Corresponding author, e-mail: beyechahailu@yahoo.com

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Considering the symbolic significance of Gadaa for the Oromo as well as its structural innovations, researchers in law, indigenous studies and pan-Africanism have been exploring how the system could be utilized in the 21st century. For instance, a research by Zelalem Tesfaye (2012) entitled "Ethiopia: When the Gadaa Democracy Rules in a Federal State" explores how the system could be integrated with the contemporary federal structure of Ethiopia, serving as a governance mechanism for the Oromia National Regional State. He analysed that the techniques of Gadaa system whereby consensus is reached through dialogue is unique but firmly rooted in Western democratic norms, and thus well-suited to adoption within Ethiopia's federally structured democracy.

According to Dessu Dulla (2011), the Borana rely on water wells that are guided by an indigenous harvesting knowledge, management system, property rights arrangements and conflict resolution under the Gadaa institution for centuries. The appropriation of scarce natural resources, like water, requires robust management and conservation for present and future generations. In connection with this, Marko Bassi (2005) noted that the Borana refer to their own culture and norms as 'Aadaa Booranaa' (the culture of the Borana) that helps to manage and properly use natural resources (pasture, water, etc.). Furthermore, Efa Tadesse (2018) asserted that Gadaa values and practices can have relevance in cultural development, social development, economic development and environmental protection and any other development of the society.

According to Dereje Hineu (2012), the Gadaa system provides a socio-political framework that institutionalizes the relationship between seniors and juniors among the members of the Gadaa grades so that the members can develop a consistent and stable sense of self and others. Additionally, Habtamu Disasa (2017) reiterated that leader and leadership development is a lifelong process wherein individuals are made to develop general gifts of leadership and learn knowledge, skills, and attitudes of leadership both individually and in groups before they assume power in the Gadaa system. Similarly, Solomon Emiru (2017) claimed that Gadaa system is a comprehensively guided, crafted and nurtured system of traditional administration under the

superb wisdom of the ancient Oromo people. Thus, the Gadaa system is extremely broad and comprises of all aspects of life like religion, politics, economy and culture of the Oromo people. As it reflects virtually every aspect of human experience, it is believed that there are many lessons to be learned if people strived to inculcate the principles of the Gadaa system in modern administration.

It has been underscored by scholars like Zelalem Tesfaye (2012) and Assefa Jaleta (2012), the Gadaa system nurtures every citizen with wisdom and skills to overcome challenges and manage resources properly. The scholars have also made it evident that the Gadaa system also encourages people to be productive citizens by creating a sense of competition among them. Furthermore, according to Tesema Ta'a (2016), the Gadaa system as a form of indigenous knowledge helps to perpetuate peaceful coexistence through conflict resolution, youth empowerment, natural resource management and good governance.

It is often reported that although Ethiopia has got a lot of peculiar indigenous knowledge and skills, there is reluctance or even resistance to make use of these skills in tackling the challenges facing the country. In this regard, the aspect of Gadaa system that has not attracted much attention appears to be its potential contribution to industrial leadership development in Ethiopia. Thus, it could be argued that the Gadaa practices seem to correspond with modern leadership techniques that have helped in industrial leadership development. The researchers would like to argue that given its unique innovative structures, the Gadaa system has got institutional experiences pertaining to practices and strategies that could be worth analyzing in light of present-day industrial leadership development.

Moreover, according to scholars like Shimelis Legesse et al. (2018), Israel Bekele et al. (2017), Wolde Shiferaw et al. (2020) and Tesfaye Teshome (2018), the motivation and commitment of workforce in their work place were very low in Ethiopia. This could possibly be attributed to the lack of motivational techniques and mannerisms in system of leadership among other things. To this end, it is compelling to revisit the industrial leadership development system so as to seek ways of motivating the workforce by using indigenous techniques. As a result, exploring indigenous

knowledge of the Gadaa system as a potential remedy seems to be a viable option. Thus, this study was meant to explore the techniques of Gadaa system with the view of determining their potential implication on enhancing industrial leadership development in modern industrial development.

2. Method

The study principally focused on qualitative research method and exploratory research design to find out techniques in the Gadaa system that were used for mobilizing the community to be effective in productive endeavors. Relevant data were gathered by using focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interview (KII) from the informed practitioners of Gadaa system such as Gadaa leaders, Gadaa writers and senior elders who have got the wisdom of Gadaa system.

The informants of the study were sampled by using snowball sampling technique. In addition, non-participant observation was used to collect relevant data of Gadaa system for dealing with industrial leadership development. The process of the study was such that firstly, the practitioners were informed about the intention and scope of the study whereby they agreed to comply with the researchers' demands. Afterwards, a common consent has been obtained authorizing the permission to go ahead. Finally, the collected data had been transcribed and compiled for analysis by using voice records and field notes. The organized data were thematically (inductively) analyzed by maintaining the original descriptions of the voice records and field notes. The overall data analysis and collation processes were iterative in that involved summarizing the data and interpreting their meaning in such a way that the results could be drawn.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Strategies for Social Organization in the Gadaa System

According to the key informants, the Oromo were continuously organizing themselves from time immemorial using different practices of Gadaa system. These practices include the centers, parties, grades and structures of Gadaa system.

3.1.1. Centers of Gadaa System

As stated by the key informants, the Oromo organized themselves according to the centers of Gadaa

system, which are located at every corner of Oromia. They centers are: Gumii Gaayyoo, Me'ee Bokkoo, Odaa Roobaa, Odaa Nabee, Odaa Bultum, Odaa Bisil, Odaa Bulluq, Odaa Dooggii and Odaa Hullee that are located at Borana, Guji, Bale, East Shoa, West Hararge, West Shoa, Horro Guduru Wollege, Ilu Abbaa Bor and Jimma respectively. Moreover, the centers of Gadaa system are considered as holy places wherein the Oromo held Gadaa assembly to amend and enforce new laws. The informants made it evident that the Oromo have further reorganized and added new centers at Karrayu, Matakal and Wallo for the practice of Gadaa leadership and administration. Moreover, the execution of Gadaa system (for instance, Irreecha celebration) was expanding globally as it is being held wherever the Oromo and their alliances live. This shows that the Oromo organize themselves in new frontiers so as to practice their tradition. The establishment of new centers in the vicinity of certain groups was made to help them apply the Gadaa principles for managing their livelihood and leadership development.

3.1.2. Parties of Gadaa System

Furthermore, the Oromo organized themselves according to the five parties of Gadaa system that have different names among Sabbo Gona, Sikko Mando, Macca-Tulama, Ittu Humbana, and Rayya Asabo. Based upon the naming of Macca-Tulama, the parties were named as Birmaji, Horata, Michile, Dulo and Robale. According to the key informants, any male Oromo should belong to one of the five parties of Gadaa system. The member of these parties should come to the power every eighth year in a rotational (or cyclic) manner. According to the principles of the Gadaa system, there are no competitions between the parties to assume power as the parties take power consecutively every eighth year. However, there is competition among the members of every party to take power based on their experience and performance mainly at three Gadaa grades prior to Gadaa grade where they assume power. These are Foollee from 16 - 24 years, Kuusaa from 24 - 32 years and Raabaa-Doorii from 32 - 40 years of age. This implies that the Gadaa system had enabled the Oromo to practice a multi-party system with the proper allocation of clear time for taking power and properly leading and managing the society.

3.1.3. Grades of Gadaa System

The finding revealed that the Oromo organize themselves according to the eleven grades of Gadaa system with their corresponding age ranges even if the age of the members varies. They are Dabballee (D) (0 – 8), Gaammee-Xixiqqaa (GX) (8 – 16), Gaammee-Guguddaa (GG) (16 – 24), Kuusaa (K) (24 – 32), Rabaa-Doorii (RD) (32 – 40), Gadaa (G) (40 – 48), Yuuba 1^{ffaa} (Y1) (48 – 56), Yuuba 2^{ffaa} (Y2) (56 - 64), Yuuba 3^{ffaa} (Y3) (64 – 72), Gadaamoojjii (GM) (72 – 80) and Jaarsa-Qululluu (JQ) (above 80) years. The members of every grade gain particular social, economic and political privileges based on the eight-year increments in the Gadaa hierarchy. The first five Gadaa grades (from Dabballee grade up to Raabaa-Doorii grade) are generally the periods of learning, training, development and military service in addition to shouldering some economic activities. The remaining five Gadaa grades (from Gadaa grade up to Gadaamoojjii grade) are the periods of educating, leading, advising, monitoring, and taking social, political and economic roles and responsibilities. The final grade, Jaarsa Qululluu is a stage at which one has to be cared for in the cycle of Gadaa system as that of the childhood. As such, the Gadaa system instils the principles of leadership into the youth so that they can have a good mind set for properly executing respective duties and responsibilities at different points in their lifespan.

Additionally, the roles and privileges of every grade of Gadaa system have been demonstrated in Figure 1.

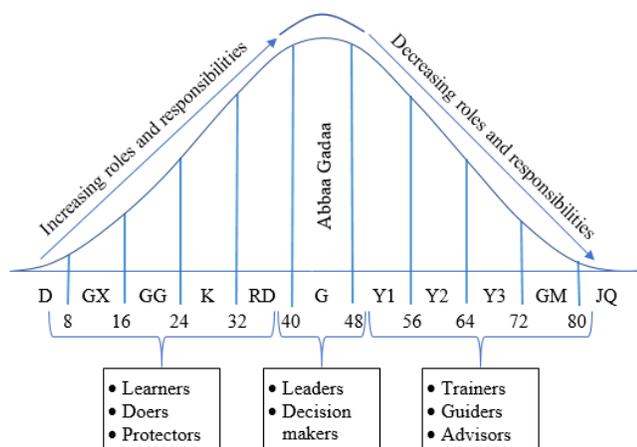


Figure 1: The continual change of Gadaa grades with their roles and responsibilities

As it can be observed from Figure 1, the role of a person increases along with increment of age until one completes the stage of Abbaa Gadaa. At the beginning, the new generations are taken care as they are introduced to principles of the Gadaa system. As they reach the stage of Gadaa, they take over the decision making process and presiding over the issues of the society. However, after the execution of the stage of Gadaa, the roles and responsibilities decrease gradually. This system will help to delineate the roles that a person is supposed to execute. In other words, the older generation will gradually withdraw from decision making pertaining to the major events of the society and resort to giving advices and training the more energetic and powerful new generation.

3.1.4. Administrative Structures of Gadaa System

The informants also affirmed that the Oromo organize themselves according to the administrative structures of Gadaa system. These administrative structures consist of the nine Gadaa leaders from among the same batch. These are Abbaa Gadaa – one presiding over the Gadaa, Abbaa Bokkuu – one in charge of holy sceptre, Abbaa Muudaa – one in charge of anointment, Abbaa Caffee – one in charge of Gadaa assembly, Abbaa Alangaa – one in charge of prosecution, Abbaa Seeraa – one in charge of law, Abbaa Sa'aa – one in charge of economy, Abbaa Duulaa – one in charge of military and Abbaa Maatii – one in charge of social affairs. These Gadaa leaders have full responsibilities to govern the Oromo people politically, economically, socially, culturally and spiritually for eight years of their tenure. Moreover, there are also supportive administrative units of Gadaa system such as Abbaa Raagaa (one in charge of forecast), Abbaa Dubbii (spokesperson), Abbaa Murtii (one in charge of resolution), Abbaa Faajjii (one in charge of Gadaa symbol/flag), Abbaa Malkaa (one in charge of the riverbank), Abbaa Tulluu (one in charge of mountains), Abbaa Qaalluu (one in charge of the hereditary spirit), and Abbaa Dhugaa (father of truth or God).

As it can be observed from Figure 2, Gadaa system has its own structure that helps the development of sound trust and credibility between the Gadaa leaders and the society based on its principles and the belief that they have on the creator (Abbaa Dhugaa). Furthermore, one could realize that there a number of structures for

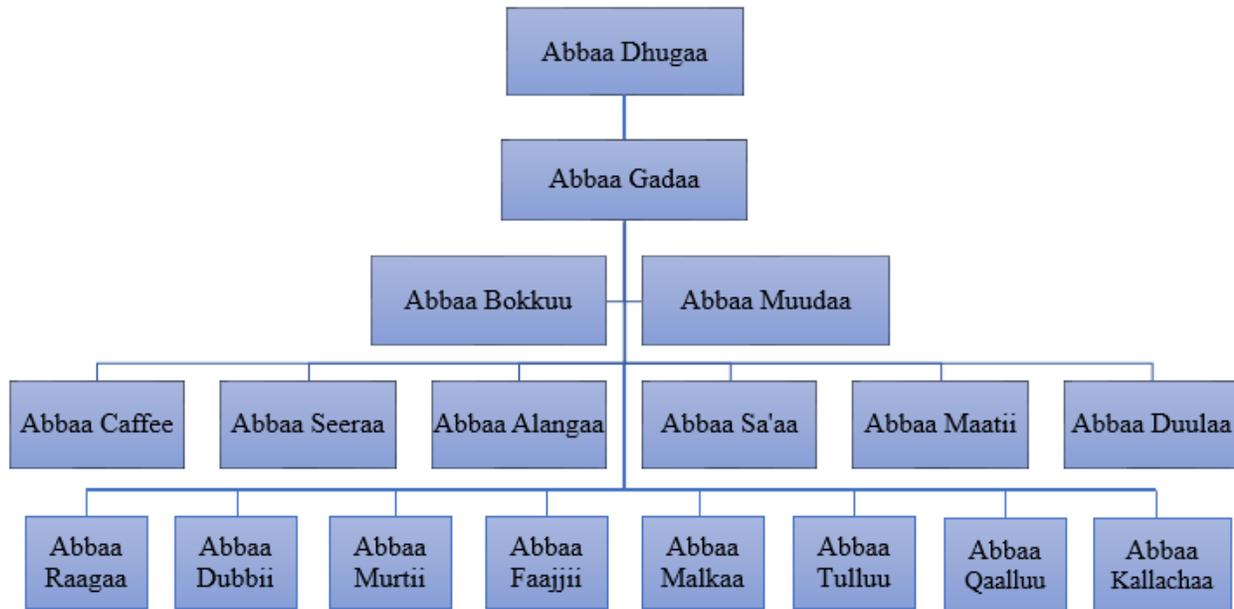


Figure 2: The Structure of Gadaa System

dealing with different types of issues. The informants have opined that respecting the norms and abiding by the principles of Gadaa system strengthens the cohesion among the Oromo.

According to the key informants, there are additional administrative units or clusters among the Borana. These administrative units or clusters help to oversee the proper management of the society at lower level, middle level and higher level of management. These units or clusters range from the lowest units of family which is led by Abba Warraa to the highest unit representing the entire Borana which is led by Abba Gadaa. These

clusters include: Warra (family), Shanacha (homestead), Ollaa (settlement), Reera (community), Dheeda (district), Gadaa (the entire Borana) and Dhugaa (truth). These clusters are led by Abbaa Warraa (head of family), Abbaa Shanachaa (head of homestead), Abbaa Ollaa (head of settlement), Abbaa Reeraa (head of community), Abbaa Dheedaa (head of district), Abbaa Gadaa (head of Gadaa Borana) and Abbaa Dhugaa (father of truth – the creator), respectively. This implies that there are different levels of leadership development and experience sharing on ways of managing resources from family level to the highest level.

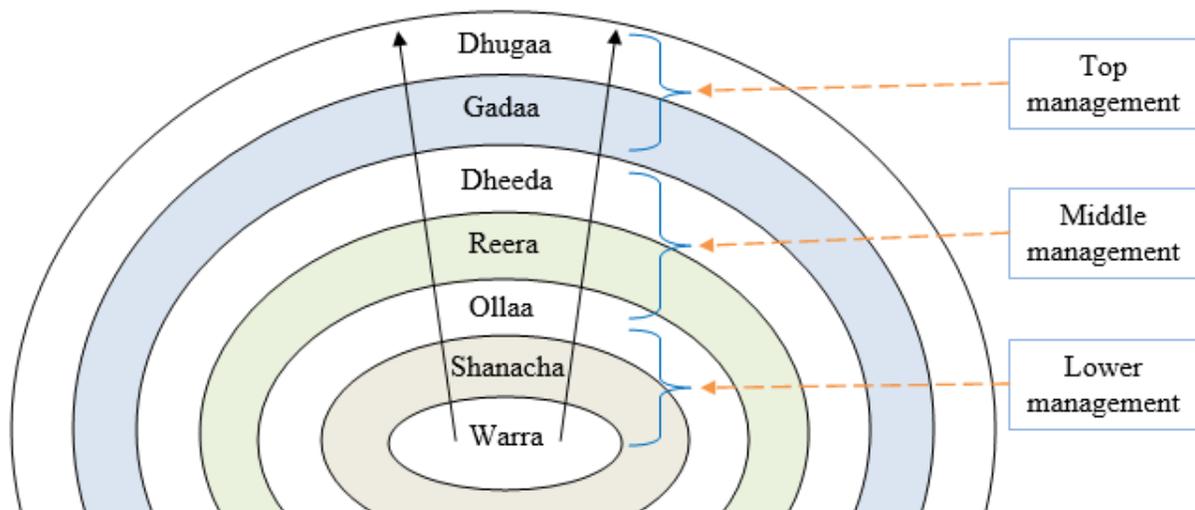


Figure 3: The administrative units or structures of Borana Oromo

Figure 3 shows that the Boranas have got an administrative structure that helps to inculcate the principles of leadership into the young generation so that they learn how to solve the challenges of the society from the lower management level to the top management level.

3.2. Strategies for Social Development in the Gadaa System

In the Gadaa system, every individual is nurtured and developed gradually through different educational techniques so that they become effective leaders. The Oromo conduct these didactic techniques phase by phase according to their importance and level of difficulty from the childhood (Dabballee) grade up to the administrative (Gadaa) grade under the main supervision of Abbaa Maatii and Abbaa Gadaa. The techniques are:

- Traditional education: the elderly (from Gadaa grade up to Gadaamoojjii grade) usually offer traditional education through wit-improving activities such as riddles, songs, proverbs and folksongs so as to enforce the right type of attitude;
- Training: the elderly (from Gadaa grade up to Gadaamoojjii grade) usually offer training to the new generation on specific activities such as farming, cattle rearing, riding, storytelling, etc. The Gadaa leaders give anecdotes to help the youth get acquainted with the desired skills and attitudes;
- Experience sharing and observation: the youth (from Dabballee grade up to Raabaa-Doorii grade) given the opportunity to observe the manner in which the Gadaa leaders handle different situations be it in economic affairs, social or environmental endeavours;
- Practicing: what is so peculiar about the Gadaa System is that it does not just expose the youth (from Dabballee grade up to Raabaa-Doorii grade) to merely observe the skilled ones manoeuvring things but it also renders opportunities for the youths to practice and internalize the activities. As such mainly the Abbaa Maatii and Abbaa Gadaa coach the youth to make sure that the principles have been recited well through practical exercises and cases;

- Competition: competition and rewarding conducted for improving and assuring the performance of individuals based on their stage from the childhood (Dabballee) grade up to the administrative (Gadaa) grade.

Based on the different techniques employed in the Gadaa system, one can realize that the Gadaa system enabled individuals to explore their potential and maximize their capacity through experiential learning, training and competition. Moreover, the Oromo were capacitating themselves individually or in a team form so that the next leaders of the society could be selected based on the track record of their performances in every grade level prior to the Gadaa grade (40 – 48 years). This implies that the Oromo amass potential management skills and capacities through continuous learning and improvement. This notion corresponds with David and Lisa's (2015) notion that promoting experiences, interventions and interactions are the main factors that enhance leadership development process.

3.3. Strategies for Social Administration in the Gadaa System

There are different practices and concepts of Gadaa leadership practices. In connection with this, the informants noted that there are two types of leadership (administrative) practices in the Gadaa system. These are:

- Individual leadership at which an individual leads himself and his family by using the concept of Gadaa norms and laws. Additionally, the informants added that an individual with good experience and performance may also lead her/his surrounding society as well, and
- Group leadership at which a group of persons known as Gadaa leaders (Abbootii Gadaa) collectively lead the society – the Oromo at large. The key informants also added that any problem encountered should be solved by using different mechanisms (such as jaarsummaa, gumaa and araara) with common consensus and full agreement in the Gadaa system.

This shows that the Gadaa system enables the Oromo to practice management through individual and collective decision-making processes. In the Gadaa system, there is a process of holding continuous

discussion so as to reach a unanimous decision. Gadaa leaders lead the society through power sharing, and check and balance system. The hierarchy of the leadership varies from lower management level of family to top management level (Abbaa Gadaa) that leads the Oromo at large. Moreover, a typical point the informants raised was that the Gadaa system has got a code of conduct known as safuu – a principle of morality that people can abide by to live harmoniously. Safuu serves as a code of conduct whereby anybody who violates the rules of Gadaa system will be alienated which will make the person devoid of any services from the society.

The notion of leadership development in the Gadaa system also corresponds with David and Lisa’s assertions whereby they highlighted the development of leadership in individuals and teams (David and Lisa, 2015). Furthermore, Habtamu Disasa, who made extensive studies on leadership development in the Gadaa system noted that leadership development is a lifelong process wherein individuals and groups can practice before they assume power (Habtamu Disasa, 2017).

Furthermore, the Oromo live harmoniously by observing their cultures and values (aadaa and duudhaa). The Oromo are administered and led by the Gadaa leaders according to the norms and laws (heera and seera) of Gadaa system. The norms and laws were generated from the Oromo cultures and values with common consensus at Gadaa assembly. Thus, the administration and leadership of the Oromo is a cyclic process that should be continuously updated.

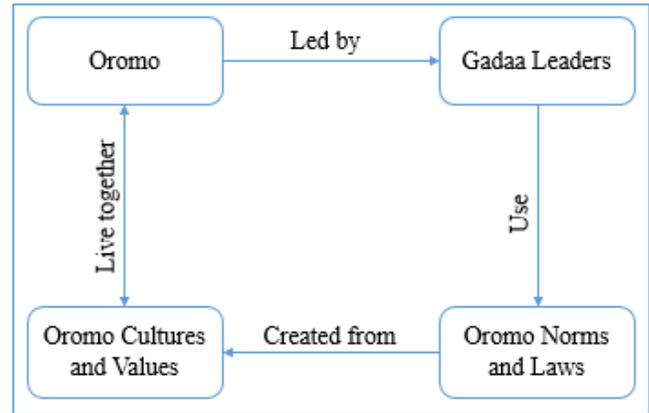


Figure 4: The cyclic nature of Gadaa administration

Figure 4 shows that the interconnections between the Oromo, Gadaa leaders, Oromo cultures, values, Oromo norms and laws are very strong so as to ensure the proper functioning of every individual in the society in a holistic approach. This has also been confirmed by Habtamu Disasa who stated that knowledge and practices of leadership development is ingrained into the belief and value system of the community (Habtamu Disasa, 2017).

Moreover, performing forward and backward monitoring system is the key technique in the check and balance of Gadaa leaders. Thus, the Foollee, Kuusaa and Raabaa-Doorii grades try to challenge Gadaa leaders by continuously voicing their disapproval and criticism in the form of songs. The Yuuba I, YuubaII, Yuuba III and Gadaamoojjii grades also try to check Gadaa leaders by guiding, advising, enforcing and even refusing to accept their decisions in the society.

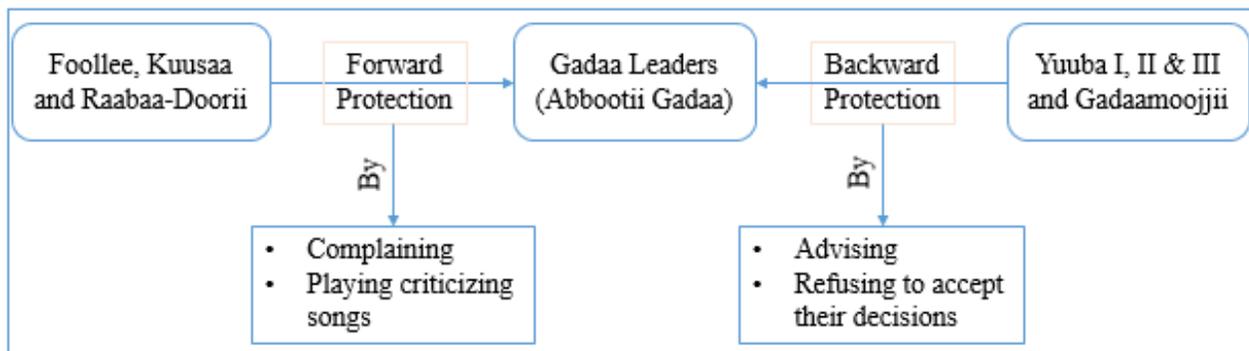


Figure 5: Forward and backward monitoring system of Gadaa administration

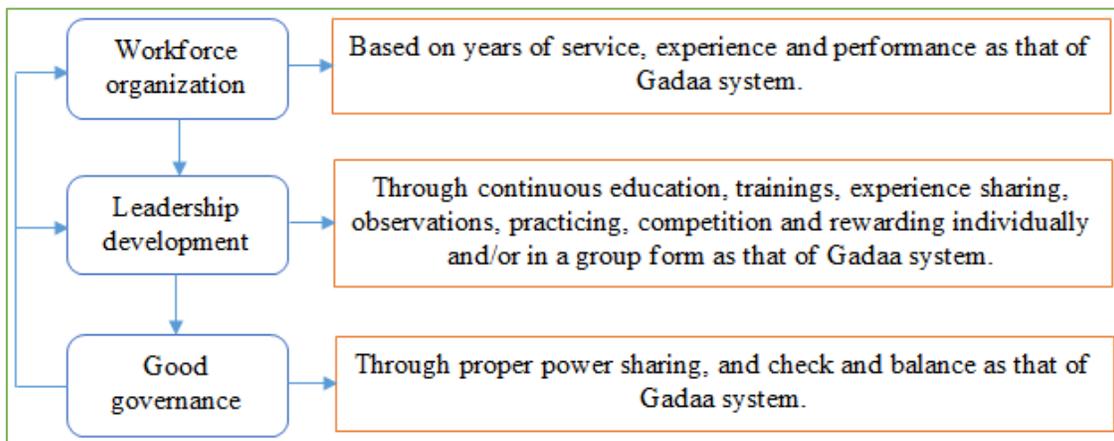


Figure 6: Proposed technique of Gadaa system

As it can be observed from Figure 5, Gadaa leaders are under a continuous criticism and appraisal by both their juniors and seniors of Gadaa grades through check and balance. Moreover, figure 5 presents the iterative processes of evaluation that have helped the Gadaa system to remain intact through generations. The figure also shows the dynamics of interaction between different Gadaa grades that have helped the Gadaa system to evolve. The interactions between the different actors are meant to inculcate the new generation with the right and desired type of skill and attitude at the different stages of Gadaa system. It also enables the youth to realize the code of conduct for dealing with different social events and circumstances that help them to become the next leader and/or manager of the society at their Gadaa grade.

3.4. Proposed Technique of Gadaa System for Industrial Leadership Development

Based on the analysis made, the researchers would like to suggest the following alternative technique of Gadaa system for possible adoption in modern industrial leadership development process.

Figure 6 shows that the workforces have to be organized according to their years of service, experience and performance as widely seen in the Gadaa system. Afterwards, they need to be developed through continuous education, trainings, experience sharing, observations, practicing and competition on specific activities and thereby rewarding the best performers. Moreover, activities need to be conducted transparently through good governance by using proper power sharing, check and balance by organizing platforms for

the forward and backward monitoring system in order to ensure sustainable development in industries.

4. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to propound the potential strategies of Gadaa system in enhancing industrial leadership development in Ethiopia. The findings of this study made it evident that the Gadaa system has got effective administrative structure that could help to ensure good governance and leadership development. Thus, the strategies of Gadaa system could help in nurturing the youth to acquire skills of management. Moreover, the strategies in the Gadaa system are used for properly organizing, developing and administering the Oromo people. What is more is that the Gadaa system has got practical experiences on human development techniques such as traditional education, training, experience sharing, observation, practicing and creating a sense of competition among individuals.

On the top of that, the Gadaa system has got institutions such as Gadaa centers, parties, grades and structures that enable the society in dealing with various challenges, ensuring good governance and enhancing efficiency in management. Thus, based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the proposed potential technique of Gadaa system can possibly be used as an alternative industrial leadership development technique in tandem with modern day techniques. Finally, the researchers would like to argue that as Gadaa system has been proven a panacea to almost every aspect of life, the government and concerned stakeholders should customize the valuable technique of Gadaa system.

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