

LEADERSHIP STYLES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

Adebanjo, Oluwakemi Kikelomo

Department of Public Administration,
Faculty of Social and Management Science,
University of Ilesa, Ilesa, Osun State.
oluwakemi_adebanjo@unilesa.edu.ng

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Oyalabu, Grace Idowu, PhD

Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, Adeleke University Ede.
oyalabugrace@adelekeuniversityede.ng

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Onifade, Olufunso Olayiwola, PhD

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State.
onifadeolufunso1@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between leadership styles, personnel management and service delivery in the Nigerian public service. The persistent challenges of inefficiency, poor accountability and low employee motivation in Nigeria's public institutions have been widely attributed to ineffective leadership practices. This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine how transformational, transactional, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles influence personnel management and service delivery outcomes. Using a descriptive survey design. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 150 public servants across selected ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). A self-designed questionnaire tagged "Leadership Styles in Personnel Management Questionnaire" (LSIPMQ) was used to collect data for the study. Expert screened the instrument to ensure its validity. The test-retest method were used to evaluate the instrument's reliability, fifty administrators who were not part of the study were given the instrument within an interval of two weeks. The Pearson's Products Moment Correlation was used to analyze the data collected. A reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. Findings revealed that transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly improve employee motivation, job commitment and service delivery efficiency, while autocratic and laissez-faire styles negatively impact organizational performance. The study further shows that leadership effectiveness directly influences personnel management practices such as training, supervision and performance appraisal. The study concludes that leadership style is a critical determinant of service delivery outcomes. It recommends leadership development programs, adoption of participatory leadership approaches and strengthening of institutional accountability systems. This study contributes to public administration literature and provides policy relevant insights for improving governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Service Delivery, Performance Management, Public Sector

Introduction

Leadership is widely considered a fundamental driver of organisational effectiveness, particularly within public sector institutions where performance directly impacts citizens' welfare. In Nigeria, the public service assumes a central role in policy implementation and service delivery; however, it continues to encounter significant challenges, including inefficiency, corruption, bureaucratic rigidity, and low employee motivation (Olaopa, 2021; World Bank, 2023). Scholars have increasingly highlighted that leadership styles have a considerable influence on organisational performance. Leadership style pertains to the behavioural patterns adopted by leaders in directing and influencing subordinates (Northouse, 2022). Transformational leadership centres on inspiring and motivating employees, while transactional leadership focuses on rewards and compliance. Autocratic leadership centralises decision-making, whereas laissez-faire leadership permits minimal supervision.

Empirical studies indicate that transformational leadership is the most effective in enhancing employee performance and organisational outcomes (Khan et al., 2022; Ameen et al., 2023). Conversely, autocratic leadership has been linked to low morale and diminished productivity (Okafor-Dike, 2023). Likewise, laissez-faire leadership frequently results in a lack of direction and inefficiency (Owotemu et al., 2024). Within the Nigerian public service, leadership challenges are exacerbated by bureaucratic structures inherited from colonial administration. These structures prioritise hierarchy and control, thereby constraining innovation and employee participation (Olaopa, 2021). Consequently, leadership practices often fail to facilitate effective personnel management and service delivery.

Personnel management encompasses the recruitment, training, motivation, and performance appraisal of employees. Effective leadership ensures that these processes are aligned with organisational goals. However, inadequate leadership frequently leads to substandard personnel management practices, culminating in low productivity and inefficiency (Armstrong, 2020; Adekoya & Guobiazor, 2023). Service delivery remains a significant concern in Nigeria, with citizens expressing dissatisfaction regarding public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure (World Bank, 2023). Leadership plays a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by promoting accountability, transparency, and responsiveness (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2020).

Despite the significance of leadership, there exists a paucity of empirical research investigating the interrelationship between leadership styles, personnel management, and service delivery in Nigeria. This study aims to address this gap by providing empirical evidence on these relationships.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian public service continues to face challenges related to inadequate service delivery, inefficiency, and low employee productivity, despite the implementation of numerous reforms. These issues are primarily linked to ineffective leadership styles and deficient personnel management practices (Olaopa, 2021). Dominance of autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles within various public institutions has led to diminished morale, inadequate supervision, and a lack of accountability (Owotemu et al., 2024). As a result, service delivery outcomes have remained suboptimal. Thus, there is a pressing need for empirical research to examine the impact of leadership styles on personnel management and service delivery.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between Leadership styles in personnel management and service delivery in the Nigerian public service. Specifically to:

1. assess the impact of leadership styles on service delivery.
2. identify the most effective leadership style for service delivery.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to achieve the objectives of the study.

1. How do leadership styles affect service delivery?
2. Which leadership style is most effective?

Literature Review

Concept of Leadership Styles

Leadership styles denote the behavioural patterns adopted by leaders to influence, direct, and manage subordinates towards the attainment of organisational objectives. This concept has garnered considerable scholarly interest due to its pivotal role in shaping organisational outcomes, especially within the public sector, where efficiency and accountability are paramount. As noted by Peter G. Northouse (2022), leadership style comprises the consistent behaviours, attitudes, and strategies employed by leaders in their interactions with followers. These styles significantly affect decision-making processes, communication patterns and levels of employee engagement within organisations. One of the most extensively examined leadership styles is transformational leadership, which prioritises inspiration, vision, and motivation, encouraging employees to surpass expectations and meaningfully contribute to organisational objectives. Transformational leaders promote innovation and creativity by cultivating a supportive work environment that values individual contributions. Empirical research has indicated that transformational leadership markedly enhances employee performance, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Khan et al., 2022; Ameen et al., 2023). In the context of the Nigerian public service, transformational leadership is particularly pertinent as it addresses challenges associated with low morale and resistance to change.

Transactional leadership, conversely, is predicated on an exchange relationship between leaders and followers. Leaders offer rewards or sanctions contingent upon employee performance, thereby ensuring compliance and operational efficiency. Although transactional leadership may not promote innovation to the same degree as transformational leadership, it proves effective in sustaining structure and accountability within organisations (Armstrong, 2020). In bureaucratic systems, such as the Nigerian public service, transactional leadership can facilitate adherence to established rules and procedures. Autocratic leadership is characterised by centralised decision-making and limited employee participation. Leaders make decisions unilaterally, often without consulting their subordinates. While this approach can result in expedited decision-making, it is typically associated with diminished employee morale, reduced creativity, and heightened levels of dissatisfaction (Okafor-Dike, 2023). In numerous Nigerian public institutions, autocratic leadership remains prevalent, largely due to hierarchical organisational structures that have been inherited from colonial administration (Olaopa, 2021).

Laissez-faire leadership, frequently characterised as a “hands-off” approach, entails minimal supervision and limited guidance from leaders. Although this style may empower highly skilled employees, it frequently leads to a lack of direction, poor coordination, and

diminished organisational performance (Northouse, 2022). Empirical evidence indicates that laissez-faire leadership is among the least effective leadership styles, particularly in contexts where strong guidance is necessary. Recent research has underscored the significance of adaptive leadership, which entails the integration of various leadership styles according to situational requirements. From a contingency-based perspective, no singular leadership style is universally effective; instead, the efficacy of a leadership style is contingent upon contextual factors such as organisational structure, employee competence, and environmental conditions (Fiedler, 1967; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2020). Within the Nigerian public service, leadership styles are pivotal in addressing systemic issues such as inefficiency, corruption, and inadequate service delivery. Scholars contend that the implementation of participatory and transformational leadership approaches can markedly enhance organisational performance and employee engagement (Owotemu et al., 2024; World Bank, 2023). Consequently, comprehending the concept of leadership styles is essential for evaluating their impact on personnel management and service delivery.

Leadership and Personnel Management

Personnel management, also known as human resource management, entails the strategic oversight of an organisation's workforce to fulfil its objectives. This domain encompasses various activities, including recruitment, training, performance appraisal, compensation, and employee relations. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping personnel management practices, as leaders are tasked with formulating policies, motivating employees, and ensuring the effective utilisation of human resources. According to Michael Armstrong (2020), the efficacy of personnel management is significantly contingent upon leadership competence and the capacity to align human resource practices with organisational goals. Leaders influence employees' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for development within the organisation. In the Nigerian public service, where personnel management inefficiencies are prevalent, the importance of leadership is magnified.

Transformational leadership has been extensively linked with effective personnel management. Leaders who adopt this approach prioritise employee development, motivation, and empowerment. They invest in training and capacity-building initiatives that enhance employee competence and performance. Empirical studies indicate that transformational leadership markedly improves employee commitment and job satisfaction (Adekoya & Guobiazor, 2023). In the Nigerian context, such leadership can effectively address challenges associated with low morale and insufficient professional development opportunities.

Conversely, transactional leadership contributes to personnel management by establishing clear expectations and reward systems. Leaders employ performance-based incentives to motivate employees and ensure accountability. Although this approach may not foster creativity, it is effective in maintaining discipline and achieving short-term organisational goals (Armstrong, 2020). In public sector institutions, where adherence to rules and procedures is paramount, transactional leadership can facilitate effective personnel management.

However, autocratic leadership often undermines personnel management practices. By restricting employee participation and suppressing feedback, autocratic leaders cultivate an environment where employees feel undervalued and demotivated. Research has demonstrated that such leadership styles result in elevated turnover rates, diminished job satisfaction, and reduced productivity (Osazevbaru & Akaliduwa, 2023). In the Nigerian public service, this issue is further exacerbated by rigid hierarchical structures and a lack of accountability.

Laissez-faire leadership also presents challenges to personnel management. The absence of clear direction and supervision can lead to poor coordination and ineffective performance appraisal systems. Employees may find themselves lacking guidance and support, resulting in inefficiencies and decreased organisational performance (Northouse, 2022). Recent research underscores the significance of leadership in cultivating a positive organisational culture that facilitates effective personnel management. Leaders who advocate for transparency, fairness, and inclusiveness foster an environment where employees are motivated to excel (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2020). In Nigeria, enhancing leadership capacity is crucial for improving personnel management practices and bolstering public sector performance.

Moreover, digital transformation and globalisation have introduced new challenges and opportunities in personnel management. Leaders must adapt to evolving work environments by embracing innovative approaches to employee management. Studies suggest that leadership styles promoting learning and adaptability are more effective in managing contemporary workforces (World Bank, 2023). Thus, leadership emerges as a critical determinant of personnel management effectiveness. Transformational and participatory leadership styles are particularly advantageous, whereas autocratic and laissez-faire styles impede employee performance and organisational growth.

Leadership and Service Delivery

Service delivery pertains to the provision of public goods and services to citizens in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner. Within the context of the Nigerian public service, service delivery encompasses sectors such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and public administration. Leadership is pivotal in determining the quality and efficiency of service delivery, as it influences organisational performance, employee motivation, and accountability. According to the World Bank (2023), effective leadership is crucial for enhancing public sector performance and ensuring that services adequately address the needs of citizens. Leadership styles shape organisational culture, which subsequently impacts the delivery of services. In Nigeria, inadequate service delivery has been associated with weak leadership, a lack of accountability, and inefficient personnel management systems (Olaopa, 2021).

Transformational leadership has been recognised as a significant driver of effective service delivery. Leaders who embrace this style inspire employees to pursue a shared vision and encourage innovation in service provision. Empirical studies indicate that transformational leadership enhances service quality by fostering employee engagement and commitment (Owolabi, 2025). In the Nigerian public service, this approach may assist in addressing challenges such as inefficiency and a lack of responsiveness. Conversely, transactional leadership contributes to service delivery by establishing clear performance standards and accountability mechanisms. Leaders employ rewards and sanctions to ensure that employees achieve organisational targets. While this approach may enhance efficiency, it may be inadequate for addressing complex challenges that necessitate creativity and innovation (Armstrong, 2020).

Autocratic leadership, however, has been widely critiqued for its detrimental effects on service delivery. By restricting employee participation and discouraging feedback, autocratic leaders cultivate an environment that stifles innovation and leaves problems unresolved. Research has demonstrated that such leadership styles result in poor service outcomes and diminished citizen satisfaction (Owotemu et al., 2024). In Nigeria, the continued prevalence of autocratic leadership practices has been identified as a significant obstacle to effective public service delivery. Laissez-faire leadership similarly adversely affects service delivery due to a lack of direction and accountability. In the absence of clear guidance from leaders,

employees may struggle to perform their duties effectively, leading to subpar service outcomes (Northouse, 2022). Recent literature underscores the significance of participatory and collaborative leadership in enhancing service delivery. According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2020), public administrators should embrace a “new public service” approach that prioritises citizen engagement, transparency, and collaboration. This approach aligns with the principles of transformational leadership and has been demonstrated to improve service delivery outcomes.

Moreover, technological advancements and digital governance have revolutionised service delivery processes. Leaders must implement innovative strategies to leverage technology in order to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of public services. Studies suggest that leadership styles promoting innovation and adaptability are more effective in contemporary public sector environments (World Bank, 2023). In conclusion, leadership is instrumental in shaping service delivery outcomes. Transformational and participatory leadership styles are most effective in enhancing service quality, whereas autocratic and laissez-faire styles impede performance. Therefore, strengthening leadership capacity is essential for improving service delivery within the Nigerian public service.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory and Contingency Theory.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, initially developed by political sociologist James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and subsequently expanded by organisational psychologist Bernard M. Bass in 1985, has fundamentally altered the understanding of leadership. Prior to the introduction of this theory, the majority of leadership models concentrated on transactional relationships, characterised by a straightforward exchange of "rewards for work" or compliance through punitive and incentivising methods. Burns and Bass shifted this paradigm towards a leadership style that transcends mere compliance, aiming to transform the beliefs, values, and attitudes of followers. The Core Philosophy: Transformational leadership is conceived as a process wherein leaders and followers elevate one another to greater levels of morality and motivation. Rather than merely managing the status quo, transformational leaders motivate employees to rise above their self-interests in pursuit of the organisation's overarching mission.

The Four Pillars: The Four Is of Transformational Leadership

Bass (1985) operationalized the theory by identifying four distinct behavioral dimensions that transformational leaders exhibit:

1. Idealized Influence (Charisma & Role Modeling)

- What it means: The leader acts as a strong role model, walk the talk, and embodies high ethical standards, integrity, and transparency. Because of this, followers respect, admire, and trust the leader, eventually seeking to emulate their behavior.
- Organizational Impact: It builds deep organizational trust and establishes a strong cultural foundation built on shared values rather than forced rules.

2. Inspirational Motivation (Visionary Leadership)

- What it means: Leaders articulate an appealing, inspiring, and clear vision for the future. They challenge followers with high standards, communicate optimism, and provide profound meaning and purpose to the work at hand.

- **Organizational Impact:** It aligns individual aspirations with organizational goals, creating high team spirit, passion, and collective energy.

3. Intellectual Stimulation (Fostering Innovation)

- **What it means:** Transformational leaders challenge the status quo, question long-held assumptions, and encourage creativity. They do not publicly criticize followers for making mistakes; instead, they view errors as learning opportunities and encourage out-of-the-box thinking.
- **Organizational Impact:** It empowers employees to become autonomous problem-solvers, breaking down rigidity and cultivating a continuous learning environment.

4. Individualized Consideration (Coaching & Mentorship)

- **What it means:** The leader treats each employee as an individual rather than just a cog in the machine. They pay close attention to the specific developmental needs, strengths, and aspirations of each follower, acting as a coach or mentor.
- **Organizational Impact:** It ensures that employees feel genuinely valued, which significantly drives psychological safety, personal growth, and long-term loyalty.

Linking the Transformational Leadership Theory to the Nigerian Public Service

The Nigerian public service has historically been marked by bureaucratic impediments, inflexible hierarchies, a culture of political patronage, and low employee morale, which frequently hinder effective service delivery. The application of Transformational Leadership Theory presents a crucial framework for reforming personnel management and enhancing public service outcomes. Empirical research indicates that transformational leadership enhances employee performance and organisational results (Khan et al., 2022; Ameen et al., 2023). Consequently, this theory serves as a robust basis for elucidating the anticipated positive impact of transformational leadership on personnel management and service delivery in this study.

Contingency Theory

Proposed by industrial and organisational psychologist Fred Fiedler in 1967, Contingency Theory represented a significant turning point in the literature on leadership. Prior to Fiedler's contribution, researchers endeavoured to identify a singular optimal style of leadership, often attempting to demonstrate that democratic leadership consistently surpassed autocratic leadership. Fiedler challenged this assumption by positing that the effectiveness of leadership is contingent upon the alignment between a leader's style and the specific demands of the situation at hand.

A leader who achieves significant success in one context may experience considerable failure in another if the circumstances shift. Consequently, to optimize organisational performance, an institution must either adjust the situational variables to align with the leader or appoint a leader whose inherent style is compatible with the existing environment. Fiedler identified three essential situational variables that influence the favourability of an environment for a leader:

1. **Leader-Member Relations:** The degree of confidence, trust, and respect that followers have in their leader.
2. **Task Structure:** The extent to which job assignments are formalized, proceduralized, and clearly defined.

3. **Position Power:** The level of formal authority the leader holds to hire, fire, discipline, or reward employees.

Linking the Contingency Theory to the Nigerian Public Service

The Nigerian public service does not constitute a monolithic entity. Rather, it represents a vast and fragmented ecosystem that includes ministries, departments, agencies (MDAs), as well as military and paramilitary formations. Each of these subsections functions within markedly different environments, thereby rendering Contingency Theory particularly pertinent. This integrated framework underpins the analysis of leadership styles within the Nigerian public service in this study.

Methodology

This chapter presents the research design / sources of data, instrument of data collection, method of data analysis and presentation of data analysis.

Research Design / Sources of Data

The study adopted a descriptive research design of the survey type. Descriptive research was deemed suitable as it centres on the observation and interpretation of existing situations, providing a description and analysis of relevant issues, conditions, and practices. The research design is descriptive because it entails the collection of data to delineate existing characteristics concerning leadership styles in personnel management and service delivery within the Nigerian Public Service. The survey design proved to be particularly advantageous due to its broad scope and coverage, thereby facilitating generalisation. Additionally, it offers an extensive amount of information, rendering it economical for independent researchers. The research is characterised as a survey design, as it encompasses a large area. A survey design examines a selected sample to uncover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelationships of the variables. Consequently, the survey research offers a conceptual and methodological framework for investigating the study's problems.

Instrument of Data Collection

One self constructed instrument designed by the researcher was used to collect data for the study. A structured Likert scale was used.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyses the research questions.

Presentation of Data

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Leadership Styles

Leadership Styles	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interprétation
Transformational	4.25	0.65	Highly Effective
Transactional	3.80	0.72	Effective
Autocratic	2.45	0.88	Less Effective
Laissez-faire	2.10	0.95	Ineffective

Initially, transformational leadership exhibited the highest mean score and the most robust positive correlation with service delivery. This finding corroborates the research conducted by Khan et al. (2022) and Ameen et al. (2023), which indicated that transformational leadership fosters enhanced employee motivation, innovation, and performance. Within the

Nigerian context, this suggests that leaders who inspire and engage employees can substantially enhance public service outcomes.

Table 2: Correlation between Leadership Styles and Service Delivery

Leadership Styles	Correlation (r)	Significance
Transformational	0.72	Significant
Transactional	0.60	Significant
Autocratic	-0.45	Significant
Laissez-faire	-0.52	Significant

The data presented indicate that transactional leadership demonstrates a positive relationship with service delivery, albeit weaker than that of transformational leadership. This observation is consistent with Armstrong (2020), who posits that reward-based systems can enhance efficiency, though they may not necessarily encourage innovation. Within the context of the Nigerian public service, transactional leadership may prove beneficial for sustaining structure and accountability. Furthermore, autocratic leadership exhibited a negative relationship with service delivery. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Owotemu et al. (2024), which indicates that autocratic leadership diminishes employee engagement and overall organisational performance. In Nigeria, where numerous public institutions continue to function under hierarchical models, this leadership style contributes to inefficiency and diminished morale.

Lastly, laissez-faire leadership recorded the poorest performance, corroborating Northouse's (2022) findings that a lack of leadership correlates with adverse organisational outcomes. In the Nigerian public service, this leadership approach results in inadequate supervision and insufficient accountability. Moreover, the study illustrates that leadership styles significantly influence service delivery practices. Transformational leaders actively promote training, motivation, and employee development, whereas autocratic leaders tend to inhibit participation and innovation. The findings also reinforce the theoretical framework, with Transformational Leadership Theory elucidating the positive effects of inspirational leadership, and Contingency Theory highlighting the necessity for adaptive leadership strategies.

Conclusion

The study concludes that leadership style is a crucial determinant of personnel management and service delivery within the Nigerian public service. Transformational leadership emerges as the most effective style, whereas autocratic and laissez-faire approaches impede performance. The research findings indicate that leadership styles have a significant influence on service delivery practices. Transformational leaders foster training, motivation and employee development, in contrast to autocratic leaders, who tend to discourage participation and innovation. Moreover, the findings corroborate the theoretical framework, with Transformational Leadership Theory elucidating the beneficial effects of inspirational leadership, while Contingency Theory highlights the necessity for adaptive leadership strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made;

1. Concern bodies should improve on the adoption of transformational leadership practices;

2. Provide leadership training and development programmes for the leaders to be effective in the delivering of service;
3. Concern bodies should improve performance based management systems to enhance service delivery;
4. Also, strengthening accountability frameworks by management should be encouraged.

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