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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Leadership Antecedents Empowering Employees in Public Organizations

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the influence of leadership antecedents in employee empowerment among Nigerian public organizations. This study examined the problems of how leadership antecedents influenced employee empowerment in Nigerian public organizations. The theoretical framework that drove the leadership this study was Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment developed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter in 1977, and reinforced by Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) by Bass (1985). The sample size consisted of 30 employees of National Orientation Agency (NOA) selected from six geographical zone offices, who were university graduates with more than 15 years of leadership experience. The properly crafted interview questions from field tests aligned with research questions to maintain the purpose and focus of the study and emergence of systematic themes, meaning-making and credible findings. The findings of the study may assist leaders in Nigerian public organizations to make effective decisions in empowering employees in Nigerian public organizations. Results may strengthen Nigeria's public sector as a critical factor in achieving leadership goals.

Introduction

Leadership antecedents constitute the framework to explore employee empowerment among Nigerian public organizations through this qualitative single case study. Leadership is multidimensional and considered a vital relational process of “influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement” (Stogdill, 1950, p. 3). Thus, leadership understanding, management and influencing of the interrelatedness of different dynamics facilitate individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives (Gerard, McMillan, & D’Annunzio-Green, 2017; Kotterman, 2006; Lush, 2019) Leadership is valuable because if leadership characteristics are not effective, employee satisfaction, organizational collaborations, and organizational goals are frustrated.

Antecedents refer to things, events, or elements that pre-exist specific contexts, preceding logically before other events. Leadership antecedents refers to precursors, forerunners, or predecessors leaders who wish to empower employees demonstrate .Diverse antecedents circumscribe the performance of an organizational leader, thereby serving as ways to interpret the success or failure of such a leader (Dartey-Baah & Ampofo, 2016; Emuwa & Fields, 2017). Some of such antecedents include employee empowerment, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, employer commitment and other psychometric factors (Adanri & Singh, 2016; Gandolfi & Stone, 2017; Mercurio, 2015; Nash, 2016).When employees entrusted with articulation, administration, and implementation of pivotal state duties and attainment of government policies are demotivated, the organization and society suffer (Ighodalo, 2017).

The current study involved learning about specific elements from research participants and enumerating those elements as the antecedent to the leadership environment. It brings to fore the extent to which employee empowerment are contingent on performance organizational

leadership (Saleem, Bhutta, Nauman & Zahra, 2019). The expectation is that when organizational leaders put in place those elements contained in research interview data (themes), leadership will be better.

Background

Levels of employee trust and motivations are critical factors for value creation, organizational effectiveness, and development (Diala & Ude, 2015). Appropriate leadership styles and high levels of employee fulfillment play significant roles in building positive organizational culture, enhancing job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and preventing high labor turnover that deteriorates organizations and employee performance (Bambale, Girei, & Barwa, 2017; Nwankpa, 2016; Thompson & Phua, 2012). Therefore, employee empowerment is imperative to humanize the work environment for a conducive collaboration and achievement of personal and organizational success (Chakkol, Selviaridis, & Finne, 2018). Effective managers seek ways to empower lower-level employees in making relevant decisions particularly in matters affecting them and work environment to influence employee behaviors and organizational effectiveness. Empowerment repositions employees firmly for greater innovations to positively impact today's communities.

Employee empowerment is urgent in developing countries. In Nigeria, leadership is especially problematic. Nepotism, tribalism, poor management of resources and corruption are prevalent across many systems (Ikeanyibe, 2016a; Kolawole & Adeigbe, 2016; Nwani, 2016). Ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world with corruption perception index score of 27 (TICP, 2018), impropriety manifests in the absence of personal and institutional discipline. Widespread corruption persists with unexplainable affluence, and unrestrained greed and noncompliance with the rule of law is rife among the elites and the political class (Albert, 2016;

De Bruyn, 2017; Harris, 2017; Omale & Amana, 2014; Zayyad & Toycan, 2018). The institutionalizing of sustainable ethical concepts define positive public sector culture, demonstrating integrity, feedback, transparency and ethical decision-making, value judgments, and stakeholder values in sustainable standard operating procedures (Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2017; Shaw, 2016).

The Nigerian complex heterogeneous national culture consists of over 250 ethnic groups and 400 languages. The multi-ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity provide fertile ground for potential conflict and empowerment dilemmas (NOA, 2018a). The deepened cracks along ethnic, religious, regional and class lines heightened interreligious crises (Anwuluorah, 2016; Nwankpa, 2016) and engendered herculean management (Alozieuwa, 2017). George et al. (2017) argued that Nigeria's diversity and the constitutional requirement of the 'federal character principle' created to manage diversity ironically increased social injustice, inequity, and reduced trust in the Nigerian public sector performance. Nigerian leadership needs to think globally and be accepting of cultural diversity in order to be successful.

Nigerian federalism lacks merit (Ibietan, 2019). The system fails to give power to the people and skews toward an extremely powerful federal government, creating power at the center. This fosters the most esteemed political purpose for the elite despite Nigerian constitutional federal character principle (Ezeibe & Ikeanyibe, 2017). Thus, when employee empowerment activities reveal a lack of theoretical and practical understanding of leadership, they tend to proffer solutions (Afoaku, 2017). Incidentally, the emergence of new leaders has not closed the leadership gap to fix long-term solutions (Usman & Abubakar, 2017). The need exists for leaders to show an understanding of employee empowerment tenets to engender growth and development of public organizations. An appropriate leadership is essential to help institute

principles of permanency, anonymity, impartiality as enabling environment for innovation, the entrenchment of core values and promoting professionalism in the Nigerian public sector (Ighodalo, 2017; Usman & Abubakar, 2017). The proposed study, therefore, shall produce recommendations for leaders and managers, and employees equally providing further knowledge for the improvement of e-readiness required in the 21st century and promoting ethical leadership

Theoretical Considerations

An undergirding theory must support the trustworthiness aligning with the congruency of worldviews and research questions to theoretical orientation. Such a theory must be complementary or supplementary to other theoretical propositions for the attainment of full comprehension of the direction of a research project. Kanter's theory on structural empowerment (1979) propounded the structural theory of power that management functionaries might use to empower members of their respective workforce. The six requirements for empowerment include an opportunity for advancement, access to information, access to support, access to resources, formal power and informal power to enhance productivity (Manojlovich, 2007). Leaders' perception of job roles regarding relevance, flexibility, importance, and existence of well-established informal alliances enhance performance (Scanlan & Hernández, 2014; Upenieks, 2002). The deployment of Kanter's theory was strong for this qualitative exploratory study in cultivating environments that enhance empowerment, a positive impact on employees and building trust and respect. Kanter's theory elaborated on effective ways of addressing empowerment, influence, power, and structural power in organizations (Manojlovich, 2007; Upenieks, 2002). Empowerment solutions enhance psychological empowerment, employee self-efficacy through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 484).

The Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) Bass's (1985) theory and the forerunner of Bass and Avolio (Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1997, comprising transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire system was another theory that focused on leadership behavior in different contexts primarily driving leadership styles as a useful complement to Kanter's (1979) structural theory of power in this qualitative investigation. Antonakis and House (2013) explained that the advent of FRLT moved the arguments of the "... trait approaches of the 1930s, the behavioral approaches of the 1950s and contingency approaches of the 1970s to account for predominantly emotional and spiritual effects of leaders on followers" (p. 4).

Literature Review

Nigerian Ethnographic Landscape. Leadership means the same things on all platforms, but leadership practices in diverse organizations or geographies might portray inconsistencies. Consequently, the leadership antecedents that are of interest in this scholarly exercise pertain to the activities leaders engage in when they face the need to empower the employees. Furthermore, the geographic component reveals a focus on public organizations in Nigeria. A comprehension of the NOA workings may gain traction against the backdrop of the Nigerian ethnographic landscape. A summary description of Nigeria is critical to that understanding thus:

Nigeria has a rich and relatively complicated history. With a Federation comprising of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory situated in Abuja, further clustered into six geographical zones, namely: North West, North Central, North East, South West, South East and South-South, and more importantly, roughly divided into two regions, the North and South. The three "major" ethnic groups include the Hausa-Fulani (consisting of 29 Percent of the population), the Yoruba (21 percent) and the Igbo (18 percent), while smaller minority ethnic groups make up the remaining (Adeleye, Atewologun, & Matanmi, 2014). Nigeria ranks among the four biggest

economies in Africa – others being South Africa, Algeria, and Egypt (George, Yusuff, & Cornelius, 2017, p. 242).

Historical Overview of Empowerment

Solomon (1976) used the concept to give the attributes of empowerment by focusing on black families while arguing on myths and stereotypes as monolithic and inescapable effects of racism. Germinal scholars, Berger and Neuhaus (1977) came up with mediating structures such as family, neighborhood, church, voluntary and civil associations as institutions in public policy that increase citizen participation. Rappaport's (1981) case study focused on empowerment in a religious setting (Gibson, 1991). Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) adapted the three levels of empowerment as individuals, groups, and communities and argued for the need for leaders to be consistently sensitized, mobilized and empowered with using appropriate transformational strategies to challenge harmful or oppressive statuesque entities. Thus, accessing opportunities without restrictions, acquiring decision-making capabilities and taking actions redefines employees for personal and organizational success.

Empowerment is multifaceted and central to good leadership and effective functioning of an organization. However, its meaning sometimes changes contextually (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). Empowerment is an "... active, participatory process, which allows individuals and groups to gain greater control over their lives, acquire rights, and reduce marginalization ..." (Rappaport 1981, p.1981). Bechara and Van de Ven (2011) explained a critical standpoint on empowerment like any management philosophy underscoring moral undertone with sets of ideas essential to fulfilling individual, organizational and community needs for achieving valid and reliable solutions (Sang, Goh, Muhammad Badrull, & Owee, 2016).

Since researchers and scholars often grapple with appropriate guidelines and research methodologies to challenge the status quo, empowerment iteratively builds key elements and environment that encourages participation in decision-making processes to enhance goal achievements, reducing poverty, social integration, dignified work and sustainable development (Cierniak-Emerych, & Piwowar-Sulej, 2017). Empowerment is an antecedent of innovative behavior (Schermyly, Meyer, & Dämmer, 2013). Psychological empowerment as a motivational construct presented by Schermuly et al. (2013) is an individual evaluation of the work role of employees such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, strain, turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior, task performance, and workplace innovation. Scholar's attestation of existing associations between leadership styles and organizational performance implies that specific leadership styles can bring about employee satisfaction or employee dissatisfaction (Asencio, 2016; Fiaz, Qin, Ikram, & Saqib, 2017; Herzberg, 1974).

Socio-Economic Perspectives

Background and context of Nigeria is significant to leadership practice. The multiplicity of culture, religion, language, and high-power distance scholars highlighted the apparent difficulty in applying modern leadership theories in Nigeria (Ude & Bete, 2013). African Leadership (AL) embodies the encouragement of diverse follower viewpoints and collaborative relationships with followers, behaviors that may be inconsistent with followers in high-power settings such as Nigeria.

African underdevelopment is a deliberate action to undermine societal interest and pressure groups, clientelism within the state elite and ideological factors (Durokifa & Abdul-Wasi, 2016). Underdevelopment is also perpetuated by the chaos of political leadership, through self-aggrandizement that defies economic development and conflict. A colonial legacy, social

pluralism, corruption, poor planning, and incompetent management, limited in-flow of foreign capital and low levels of saving and investment are the reasons for poor economic development in Africa (Zayyad & Toycan, 2018).

The nature of government leadership, public governance and economic development in sub-Saharan Africa constitute the totality of social, economic, and even cultural antecedents to economic growth and social development. The dilemma of African states is the endemic corruption is a consequence of poor governance and eradication of the rule of law. The effect of corruption underscores the enormous annual corruption cost of roughly \$150 billion spent by the continent (Dibie & Dibie, 2017).

Leadership is one of the most important global trends conceptualized differently in different cultures. An individual's perception and understanding of leadership resonates with their cultural setting. Bulley, Osei-Bonsu, and Rasaan (2017) reviewed the demography of West African cultural practices that affect the concept of leadership. The qualitative study explored specific attributes of leadership effectiveness in Ghana and Nigeria to provide management solutions for local and international business organizations. Some characteristics reflecting West African values include masculinity, the importance of religion and spirituality, and having a sense of humor. A summary of the distinct culture that influenced leadership in each country and the emphasis thereof constituted part of the research agenda. In general, evidence shows the collectivist nature of West Africans (Hofstede, 2015).

High power distance characterizes both Nigerian and Ghanaian societies where subordinates accept unequal distribution or hierarchical order of power. Thus, the leadership style adopted by most Nigerian business leaders is predominantly task-oriented geared towards high job performance resulting in low job satisfaction among subordinates (Ogbeidi, 2012).

Leadership in Africa is an emerging trend that entails complex academia and casual conversation. Scholars argue that the lack of responsible leadership underpins continued challenges; others regard effective leadership as a key solution to issues in developing Africa (Ogbeidi, 2012).

Scholars from diverse disciplines highlighted the ramifications of leadership failures in sub-Saharan Africa (Afoaku, 2017; Anazondo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, & Nkah, 2015; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Olaniyan, 2016; Ugoani, 2017). The problem exists because past literature either neglected followership or focused on followers' attributions of exceptional qualities to leaders. Olaniyan (2016) aptly established that gaps in effective leadership resonate from good followership which unfortunately lacks robust representation in Nigerian literature. The characteristics of the Nigerian society include leadership impunity, recklessness, and insensitivity to the plight of the people; these characteristics stem from the inability of citizens to have a say in the emergence and conduct of leaders. There is a presence of poor followership in Nigeria. Attention on followership is pertinent because leaders need followership for adequate performance, and leaders came out of teeming followers (Epitropaki et al., 2017; Olaniyan, 2016). Therefore, bad leadership indicates decay in most society.

Olaniyan (2016) inferred that even in the intricate and complex nature of leadership phenomena derived from biological, social and environmental milieu, discussions on the centrality of followership are inherent. Leadership as a driver of change is unachievable in the isolation of followers. The concept of leadership connotes that without follower there can never be leadership and vice versa. Followership is interactive and controlled by follower's choices thus strong governance lies in the hands of the followers. Because good leadership seldom emerges in the absence of good followership, the study identified obstacles to the emergence of

good followership in Nigeria. The problems with bribery and corruption are not limited to religious sentiments, ethnicity, cultural beliefs, elite manipulation, poverty and hunger, ignorance and illiteracy impacting effective followership. Burke (2013) asserted that leadership is not about command but requires transforming leaders with self-awareness and high emotional intelligence (EI) to garner significant followership (Burke, 2013). The organizational development (OD) consultants emphasized the essence of selecting effective leaders who can increase trust through a demonstration of appropriate actions by individuals to promote interpersonal relationships, two-way communication, positive reinforcement, and decision-making (Anning-Dorson, et al. 2017).

Transformational leadership style. The transformational leadership style, with the attendant properties of idealized influence, was attributed to individualized influence, behavioral and intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration as keys to support the delivery of superior performance. The core of transformational leadership involved leadership ideals which ignite charisma. A leader's moral and ethical orientation is the center of authentic transformational leadership while personalized and self-aggrandizing leaders are pseudo-transformational and inauthentic (Bass 1998). Using transformational instead of transforming Bass (1985) proposed an integrated organizational theory where leaders act as change agents by transforming followers' attitudes from lower to higher.

Transformational leadership (TL) style is about those behavioral dimensions of leaders that support and promote employee behaviors and higher-order needs for a greater level of performance and satisfaction unlike other leadership styles (Phillips et al. 2018; Philipson, 2016). Transformational leaders care about followers' welfare and

development and can motivate followers to achieve beyond their standard levels of performance. Thus, transformational leaders usually achieve the desired behavioral responses efficiently from followers (Antonakis & House, 2013; Kazmi, 2017; Philipson, 2016). Transformational leaders lead by example creating a consciousness of purpose, empowering employees, aiming to use a shared vision to inspire achievement goals of the organization (Bass, 1985). TL provides positive augmentation for leader performance beyond transactional leadership. TL represents the prototype of the ideal leader anywhere in the world. Though there many are cultural differences and organizational factors, authentic transformational leaders impact all cultures and organizations because transformational motif transcends self-interest (Bass & Riggio, 2010; Kalala, Cam, & Verl, 2018).

Transactional leadership. Burns (1978) transactional theory initially stated; “Transactional leadership occurs when one person takes the initiative in contacting others for an exchange of valued things” (p. 19). Burns (1978) argued that individuals in an organization are influenced and motivated by leaders thus transactional leaders have a unique exchange relationship or “give and take” type of relationship between employees and managers (Ajayi, Aboyade, & Madu, 2017; Kaptein, 2017). The exchange relationship allowed leaders to accomplish tasks and perform extraordinarily to overcome challenges (Ohunakin, Adeniji, & Akintayo, 2016). Unlike transformational leadership that inspired members beyond expectation, transactional leadership employees performed up to expectation. Northouse (2013) contended that managers who employed a transactional leadership style focused on job execution to achieve the goal of the organization, without attention to employee’s growth and development. In the

transactional process, followership defined objectives, values, and boundaries with fixed remuneration on hierarchical order and bureaucracy to encourage learning (Ajayi et al., 2017). Transactional leaders have insights into employee's needs by including rewards and contributions to garner employee commitment (Ohunakin et al., 2016).

Laissez-faire Leadership Style. Laissez-faire leadership is about the typical failure of the responsibility of management (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Lewin et al., 1939), omission and punishment omission (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008), and the abdication of authority (Casida & Pinto-Zipp, 2008). In laissez-faire, Lewin et al. (1939) saw “complete freedom for group or individual decision, without any leader participation” (p. 273). Laissez-faire leadership is about the absence of leaders and zero leadership (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007).

Laissez faire leadership styles entailed leadership evasion of responsibility and lack of guidance to groups but allow employees' freedom of decision-making, irrespective of the nature of the task (Yukl, 2013; Bass, 1985). Laissez-faire leadership style is only effective when employees are highly skilled, experienced, educated, and trustworthy and leadership is not necessary to motivate followers (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Such leaders exhibit nonchalance at the employee challenges in the execution of job tasks (Kirkbride, 2006).

Methodology and Design

The purpose of the qualitative single case study was to explore leadership antecedents in employee empowerment among Nigerian public organizations. The properly crafted interview questions emanating from field tests resulted to alignment to maintain the purpose and focus of the study and emergence of systematic identification of themes, meaning-making and credible deconstruction of findings (Doody & Bailey, 2016; Mackieson, Shlonsky, & Connolly,

2018). The original semi-structured instrument followed the traditional qualitative processes (Jamshed, 2014) and facilitated natural and comfortable two-way conversation between researcher and respondent (Mok & Clarke, 2015). Flexibility, clarity, and intelligibility in the study instrument along with researchers' reflexivity helped extrapolate hidden facets of human and organizational behavior (Creswell, 2013; Fan & Sun, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The primary source of evidence was the open-ended interview response collected with a researcher-developed instrument. Since closed-ended questions were inadequate to capture in-depth and multiple human experiences and generate extensive contemporary knowledge (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). The open-ended questions allowed all feasible options and prevented imposing researcher's perspectives on respondents. Respondents' own words contained vital clues to the concepts required in answering research questions (Greener, 2011).

The population for this study was selected from NOA employees from the offices 6 geographical zones (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South West and South-South) in the 36 states of the nation. The Inclusion criteria explains researcher's ability to demonstrate justice and fairness. The sampling frame was upper and lower employees with at least 15 years of working experience. Although the target sample was 36, the actual sample size of the study was 30 based on the saturation point reached when "there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1408).

Multiple steps culminated in the analysis and reporting of this qualitative research involving zone by zone analysis, node by node analysis, and code by code analysis. Data analysis involved processes associated with the collection, scrutiny, and organization of evidence from

various data sets for developing broad themes and meaning to enable further action and theory building (Rowley, 2002; Yin 2018). The analysis process mimicked Yin (2018).

NVivo 12[®] software facilitated the compilation, processing, and sensemaking of the study. NVivo12[®] software was used for the organization of unstructured textual interview data and facilitated coding, and theme development (Levitt et al., 2018). The researcher controlled the coding processes that demonstrated participant's language to enhance accuracy and guarantee transcription and organization according to themes, patterns, sections and trends in the data before interpretation of the evidence (Long, Doerer, & Stewart, 2015).

Extensive data arose from the zonal spread this scientific inquiry necessitating compartmentalization. The NVivo 12[®] nodes feature enabled the analysis of zonal data in their respective nodes. The patterns and trends that became visible helped to identify what mattered to the participants. Thus, codes began to emerge. However, multiple processing efforts were necessary to check for inconsistencies. The zonal compartmentalization of data overtook the need to interpret word trees. The processing of each zone's data produced summaries

First, second, and third iterations of the analysis were instrumental to the confirmation of true themes. Of critical importance was the assemble-process-dissemble pattern through which data operational effects culminated in theme confirmation after the third round. The way participants invested their heart and spirit eliminated doubts and uncertainties regarding the authenticity of emerging themes. Based on the certainties embodied in refined data, leaders used proxy methods to deliver empowerment to their employees. The strategies involved in their delivery were multi-faceted because the geographic coverage of the study warranted the consideration of zonal differences. Each leader implemented employee empowerment within the

subject zone in ways based on the leader's level of exposure, level of knowledge, level of related experience, level of connections, and personal courage.

Properly crafted questions arising from this thorough field tests resulted in consistent and systematic identification of themes, more meaning-making and credible deconstruction of findings (Doody & Bailey, 2016; Mackieson, Shlonsky, & Connolly, 2018).

The final interview questions were as follows:

1. Based on your experience, what is your opinion of your organization's current leadership empowerment strategies?
2. Can you describe the leadership development strategies that based on your experience you think is most beneficial and/or important?
3. Was there an incident or a time when you felt empowered at work? If yes, can you relate the story behind it? If not, can you relate why you do not feel empowered in your workplace at all?
4. Have you ever been part of a collaborative project at work? If so, can you relate what the project was about and your role in it? How did you do in that project? How did participating make you feel? If you have not been part of a collaborative project at work, can you share why you think you have not had the chance?

Findings

The data analysis, accelerated by the NVivo 12[®] qualitative analysis software, revealed seven major themes and thirty subthemes identifying leadership antecedents in empowering employees in Nigerian public organizations. The themes and sub themes were associated with research questions:

RQ 1: How have leaders in the NOA implemented employee empowerment strategies?

RQ 2: How are employee empowerment strategies related to organizational goals? were as follows:

The subthemes were directly associated with the core themes and presented with that perspective for the more explicit association as follows:

- 1) Leaders Should Entrench Agency Mindset: commitment to the organization, leader utilization of organizational resources, organizational growth, and work and staff tooling.
- 2) Identifying and Crushing Challenges Should Occur work environment, uncaring leadership mentality, fieldwork inadequacies, and constant finance deficiency.
- 3) Employees Should Collaborate across Project Teams: project team participation experience, selection to team projects, interaction with external bodies, leader influence on team selection.
- 4) Establishing a Two-Way Feedback System is Required: top-down communication, granting employee requests, verifying employee needs, and initiating internal contact structural defects and inferior technology.
- 5) Leaders Should Respond to Staff Feelings: desire to be involved, need to know, acknowledging versus ignoring, and understanding the organization.
- 6) The Organization Should deploy Appropriate Strategy: staff duty assignment, staff transfers, work tool allocation, leadership mentoring mentality, training schedule, and mutual trust among staff as well as between leaders and staff.
- 7) Management Should Implement Constant Training on Innovations: the importance of new knowledge, possible zonal training patterns, designing training programs, and external training facilities.

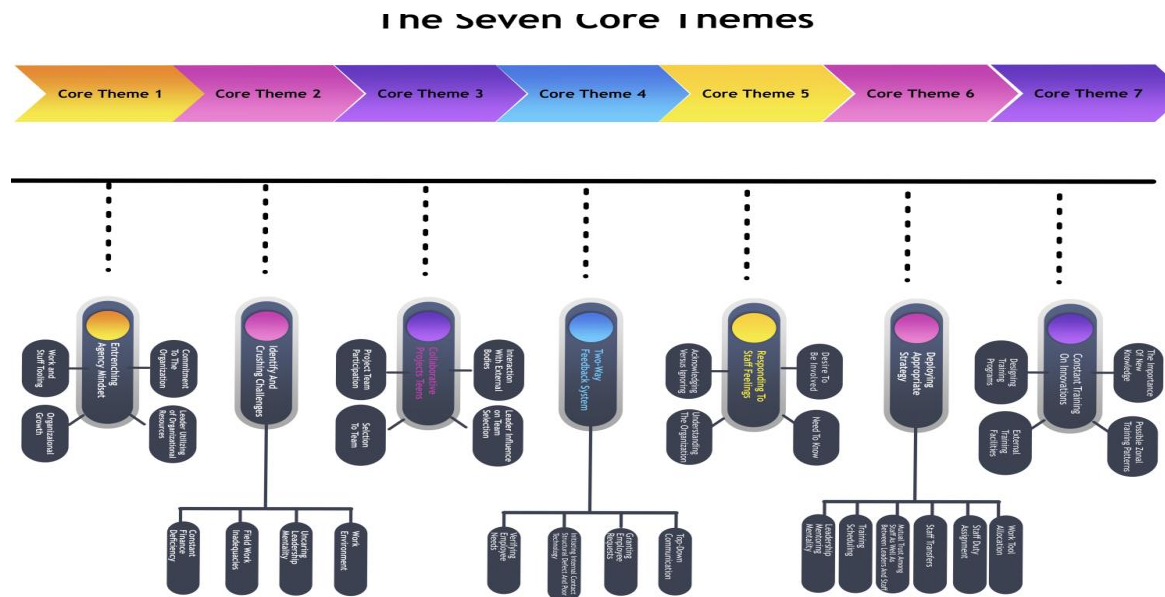
From the pronouncements of the participants, their organization had the mandate to step down government policies to the grassroots. In achieving that mandate, the employees had to make constant trips to rural areas throughout their respective zones to sensitize dwellers either on general issues or specific ones that occur from time to time. The employee empowerment strategies were related to the organizational goal based on data, in that attaining the goals of the organization required the identified strategies. Any organization bound for competitive advantage must employ appropriate employee empowerment as a tool to enhance the attainment of the organisational goals (Adekoya, Jimoh, Okorie, & Olajide,2019). Leaders who truly want to achieve organizational goal must implement real empowerment that will increases employees' self-confidence through recognition, power sharing devoid of concentrated at the top through “access to information, control of resources, autonomy, and participation in organizational culture and mission (Kte’pi, 2019).

The employee empowerment strategy regarding leaders’ deployment of appropriate strategy related to the goals of the organization. All the elements constituent in the core and sub-themes were for one sole purpose; to empower the employees and strengthen the organization towards its tasks of sensitizing members of the zones’ immediate communities. Training employees to do their jobs better was at the heart of the organization’s goals. To sensitize community members, employees charged with the sensitization responsibilities were become better equipped and bought into the government programs designed to communicate to community members. Therefore, there was a direct connection between training and the organization’s goals. Data revealed that the organization executed programs in project formats. Therefore, employees had to have a project mindset to successfully contribute to the organization’s goals through those programs. Considering the extent to which participants

extolled the virtues of collaborative teams, a direct connection existed between employees' project mindset and the organization's goals. The employee empowerment strategies as implemented addressed the organization's goal of reaching and sensitizing the communities. The organization's goal was well-articulated, which led to participant eloquence in recapitulating the goal at every turn during the interviews. The findings in this study revealed some correspondence to the theoretical framework discussed and existing literature to demonstrate the significance of the current study.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following practical recommendations will add to the body of knowledge. Practitioners and leaders to adopt the seven themes/antecedents for sustainable empowerment.



To mitigate cultural, structural and economic challenges, additional recommendations include adoption of basic strategies of learning by the organization through training programs identified as antecedents of collective empowerment and employee empowerment. Constant

training guarantees vertical transfer of empowerment across levels of analysis, human resources, comprehensive skill acquisition. The motivational training program turns companies into learning organizations.

The second recommendation is the adoption of high-performance teams (HPT) necessary to enhance collaboration. The study's zonal investigation identified a vague coalition among employees and management. Consequently, HPT proffered solutions for restructuring internal processes, tackling organizational complexities, communication, and employee empowerment, and achieving organizational goals performance. Team effectiveness informs effective feedback mechanisms for more significant innovation and creativity (Oyekanmi & Majekodunmi, 2016).

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership antecedents in employee empowerment among Nigerian public organizations. The focus created an understanding of how leadership characteristics can influence employee empowerment so that leaders will incorporate strategies for building future leaders. The primary source of data collection was the 30 open-ended interview responses through researcher-developed instrument from middle and upper employees from the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The undergirding theory Kanter's theory on structural empowerment (1979 reinforced by the Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, helped shape and provide a rationale for the study's design and research questions. The data analysis, accelerated by the NVivo 12[®] qualitative analysis software, revealed seven major themes and thirty subthemes identifying leadership antecedents in empowering employees in Nigerian public organizations. Based on the research findings, practitioners and leaders may adopt the 7 identified leadership themes/

antecedents. In addition basic strategies of learning organizations and high-performance teams (HPT) will enhance capacity to empower employees.

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