

**The Role of Leadership in The Empowerment of Nigerian Employees**  
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**The Role of Leadership in The Empowerment of Nigerian Employees**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to extend past research by investigating the role of leadership in empowering Nigerian employees. Reinforced by McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y and Participative leadership style the study explored the significance of leadership in the empowerment of Nigerian employees. The qualitative method was chosen above the quantitative and mixed methods to allow open-ended responses which provides, particular, in-depth and wide-ranging knowledge of the experiences of employee. The use of a qualitative case study was suitable for collecting different types of data for examining human actions and increasing knowledge in the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they occur (Levitt, Bamberg, Creswell, Frost, Josselson, & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The adoption of the purposive sampling strategy was appropriate for identification of study participants. A researcher-developed instrument facilitated data collection from population of federal government employee association, Abia State to capture deeper meanings of the phenomena under study. Although the target sample was 25, the actual sample size of the study was 22 based on the saturation point during the participant interview.

1. The following themes and subthemes emerged; leaders should respond to staff feelings; the organization should deploy appropriate strategy and management should deploy constant training on innovations. Four themes and twenty sub themes that emerged from this study. The findings suggest that need for leaders to empower employees through responding to staff feelings; deploying appropriate strategy, deploying constant training on innovations; and identifying and crushing challenges.

The major limitation was the inherent weaknesses of the transferability of the results.

All participants were from federal government establishments limiting holistic insights that may be generated from state and local government employees. The findings revealed some correspondence to the theoretical framework and existing literature to demonstrate the significance of the current study. The findings include "... processes and outcome, suggestions of actions, activities, or structures" (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p. 570) used to model leadership behaviour.

The study provides increased understanding and appreciation of employees in Nigerian federal public organizations. Thus, contributions of this original study relate to the extent the findings provide sustainable strategies to leaders and practitioners who wish to empower employees. The result shall extend scholarly arguments on leadership on the empowerment of Nigerian employees and significantly enhance the body of knowledge in this area of management by providing recommendations for scholars and practitioners.

## Introduction

Leadership is more than control of societal phenomena by a few individuals in a group (Bass, 1990a) but the totality of influence behaviors, interaction patterns, traits, and role relationships that reflect leadership processes (Yukl, 2013). Leadership is an imperative component for the evolution, and prosperity of civilizations throughout different times. The leadership process primarily underscores the influence of the leader upon followers including interactive influence between the leader and the followers (Silva, 2016). The critical nature of leadership is extraordinarily essential to both social phenomena and scholarly research and underscores popularity and the convolution of the phenomena of leadership (Burns, 1978).

Researchers and practitioners are increasingly aware of the positive influence of empowered employees on work units in organizational environments (Álvarez-García, et al. 2016; Potnuru, Sahoo, & Sharma, 2019; Voegtlin, Boehm, & Bruch, 2015). The awareness and influence of employee empowerment on organizational commitment are critical to organizational effectiveness, but organizational commitment may be flawed when employees are not adequately empowered (Amusan, Jegede, & Saka, 2017; Ighodalo, 2017; Potnuru et al. 2019; Renaud, Morin, & Béchar, 2017). Work units become empowered when the functionaries within those units receive the requisite resources and motivation for the execution of tasks. “Thus, the process of transferring power, authority with responsibility and accountability to the employees enables organisations to be more flexible and responsive to lead improvements in both individual and organisational performance...” (Adekoya et al., 2019, p. 35).

The moral character of a leader is instrumental in making trust a reality which makes leadership effective (Soane, et al., 2015). Proactive actionable leadership plans can communicate the organization’s concerns for employees and instructive to unraveling the creative potential of employees and enhancing organizational effectiveness (Kesting, Ulhøi, Song, & Niu, 2015; Solomon, Costea, & Nita, 2016). The goal is to facilitate the conscious development of a functional, result-oriented, and systematic leadership system that depicts efficient service delivery, public policy and socioeconomic development (Ajibade & Ibietan, 2016; Yusuf, Salisu, & Idris, 2016).

It becomes urgent incorporating employee empowerment into strategic designsto transform the power structure and increase control and choice for employees in daily decision-making process. The institutionalizing of sustainable ethical concepts defines 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). Dissatisfaction among employees can potentially increase absenteeism, job turnover, and lateness to work, which negatively affects the morale of the employees (Cervellon & Lirio, 2017; Umar, 2017). Employees need leaders who can empower the workforce by deploying essential empowerment factors (Babalola, 2016; Voegtlin et al. 2015).

Appropriate empowerment mechanisms guide the pursuit of solutions, and organizations benefit when leaders take steps to implement such solutions. The extent to which employees attain satisfaction are contingent on organizational leaders (Saleem, Bhutta, Nauman & Zahra, 2019). When adequately empowered, employees are positioned to make timely decisions, increase innovation, productivity, and bottom-line performance which increases commitment to the organization while responding to any changes in the environment (Adekoya, Jimoh, Okorie, & Olajide, 2019; Al-Ma'aita, & Abdullah, 2019).

## Background

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the eight in the world with over 166 million people, up from 140 million by 2006 census. She is richly endowed with abundant human and natural resources but is still in the poverty net. (Onyekeni & Ihediwa, 2016). According to the Nigerian Demographic and Health survey (2012, 2013). Nigeria is a rich country with poor people as poverty in Nigeria has been a problem for more than 50% of the population over the period of a decade, with surges over 60%.” (p.54-56). The rural areas of a region or country lie outside the densely-built up environments of towns, cities and suburban villages and their inhabitants are engaged primarily in agriculture as well as the most basic of a rudimentary form of secondary and tertiary activities. It is largely a location in an economy which deals in agriculture and rural enterprises, and it is a critical factor in nation-building. The conditions of our rural places are so despicable that it becomes an act of statesmanship to live and work in the rural areas (p. 56).

An estimated 60% of Nigerian youths remain unemployed (World Bank, 2018). While a minor quota of 170 million people in Nigeria dwells in towns, 70% people reside in remote areas of the country (Asogwa, 2013). Unemployment often illuminates why Africans cling to their work under depreciatory workplace conditions, causing most employers to take advantage of employees (Dartey-Baah & Ampofo, 2016). Leadership in Nigeria is especially problematic. Nepotism, tribalism, poor management of resources and corruption are prevalent across many systems (Ikeanyibe, 2016a; Kolawole & Adeigbe, 2016; Nwani, 2016; Ugoani, 2017). 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).

Nigerian public sector experiences ineffective service delivery following poor implementation strategies within the public sector (Ighodalo, 2017). Magnitudes of difficulties within Nigerian public organizations involve demotivation of people, rampant cases of indiscipline, operational ineffectiveness and inefficiency orchestrating some of the episodes of public policies summersault, mutual mistrust, and suspicion. As a result, socio-ethnic tensions and conflicts, economic and educational disparities, ethnocentrism tribalism, nepotism, social injustice and perceived inequity come about (George et al., 2017).

Developing an understanding of leadership strategies can resolve issues of employee empowerment and enhance capacity to achieve goals in Nigerian public organizations. As Nigerian public organizations become more complex, leaders face more demands, as their inability to cope are detrimental to both employees and the organizations they work for. The leaders' lack of commitment to employee growth and development are manifested in the non-recognition of essential factors, such as employee empowerment, job satisfaction, employee engagement, employer commitment, and other antecedents' leaders should recognize and deploy (Falola, Oludayo, Igbino, Salau, & Borishade, 2018; Ojekalu, Ojo, Oladokun & Olabisi, 2019; Olajide, 2018; Yaya, 2019).

## Theoretical Considerations

**McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y.** McGregor (1960) argues that Theory X and Theory Y, developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management contrasted two motivationally different ideas of man. McGregor (1960) postulated the two ways leaders see followers as Theory X or Theory Y do not belong to the same continuum but may co-exist simultaneously with different scores or parameter values (Ronald, 2014). McGregor (1960) assume that the lazy disposition of workers explained the prioritization of needs for security and acceptance of external control and authoritative management style.

McGregor suggests that the austere management style, Theory X, would increase employee dissatisfaction, reduce productivity, increase mutual distrust, sabotage, and restriction in production due to transactional attitudes (1960). Accordingly, obedience to the leader's orders connects with the implementation of reward and punishment. Orders are autocratically motivated which results in unmotivated and uninspired disregarding human relations, while the driving force (Head, 2011; Ronald, 2014).

Theory Y suggested that a leader assumes followers are passionate, motivated, and engage and empower employees to decision-making (Head, 2011). However, McGregor (2006) argues that Theory Y's style of management may be detrimental to organizational success because employees may take advantage of the leadership style and become complacent. In the comprehensive leadership review study, Ronald (2014) acknowledged the influence of the human relations movement and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, thus advocating employee adoption of Theory Y mentality because Theory X leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. In line with this argument, Pawar (2014) cautioned that Theory X leader is likely to be insensitive towards followers' needs in contrast but Theory Y with a democratic leader disposition (Pawar, 2014). Some criticism of McGregor Theory X and Theory Y include influence on worker creativity even if stimulated by ideal work conditions (Kirton, 1984). Theory Y may lack measurable impacts on job performance (Fernando, 2001).

**Participative leadership style (1966).** The participative leadership style of Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) proposed that since performance is instructive from the diversity of leadership styles, employees' inclusion in the decision-making processes of the organization is advantageous. Participative leadership carries the potentials for accomplishing results unachievable by the traditional rational-bureaucratic approach. In explaining the scope of participative leadership, Benoliel and Barth (2017) asserted that the concept of participative leadership belongs to wider-ranging investigations (Harris, 2017). Other forms of participative leadership include democratic leadership, shared leadership, and all managerial approaches to shared influence in decision-making (Fransen, et al., 2018). Participative leadership style gives employees a voice, reducing forms of resistance to policy change. Change must occur; managers should be accountable for decisions and incorporate employees at every stage of implementation (Linski, 2014) to avoid destroying individual accountability, which is the cornerstone of the whole approach (Lumbers, 2018).

The participative leadership style undermines performance while emphasizing people (Cahyani, 2016). For clarity, Yukl (2013) proposed six types of participative leadership styles include consultation, join in deciding, power-sharing, decentralization, empowerment, and democratic management. Two-way communication between the leader and employees is ideal for greater organizational performance (Yukl, 2013). From a pragmatic justification, the perception of participative leadership styles is motivational with differing benefits (Dufour &

Marzano, 2011; Thompson & Phua, 2012) emphasizing job satisfaction. Participative leadership styles encourage employee decision-making and motivate employees to understand the processes of management in public organizations (Sagie & Aycan, 2003). Dufour and Marzano's (2011) study demonstrated participative leadership by emphasizing that self-motivation of middle managers could increase organizational commitment and overall organizational performance. An organizational culture that incorporates employee values and opinions at all levels provide the totality of the organization to enhance change while reducing resistance to change.

## Literature Review

**The Problem of Poverty in Nigeria.** Despite the growth of GDP over the period of a decade, the exclusion of many Nigerian and incidence of poverty continue to rise among Nigerians (Figure 2). According to 2017 Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), aggravating economic and social exclusion derived from the high poverty rates, low development indicators, rising inequality, and mounting unemployment weakening welfare and living conditions. Majority of Nigerians remain under the burden of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Consequently, "the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is 61 percent, which means that approximately 100 million people live below the poverty line." (FRN, 2017, ERGP, p. 90). The multidimensionality of poverty reflects in poor health, education, deprivation in knowledge and communication, inability to exercise human and political rights and absence of dignity, confidence, and self-respect (UNDP Human Development Report, 2013). Other deprivations include indecent living standard reflecting on the percentage of people without access to safe water, health services, and percentage of malnourished children under five. This situation is disturbing because it presents a paradox considering the country's endowment with vast human and physical resources. It is even more disturbing that despite the vast human and material resources that have been devoted to poverty reduction by successive governments, no noticeable success has occurred in this direction.

Eradication of hunger and Poverty collaborates with today's global arguments on reciprocating values in building infrastructure, economy, and society for ameliorating living standard of the impoverished population. With unpromising global trends, issues of poverty demand significant action on existing shared dilemmas (Bendell, Sutherland, & Little, 2017). Equally, the sustainable developmental goal's (SDG) planned integrated action and revitalized global partnership recognized eradication of poverty including extreme poverty as the most significant global challenge (SDG, 2018 ).

Recognizing path of steady and steep developmental decline, Buhari- led administrative efforts aimed at tackling the national economic trajectory in a fundamental way (FRN, 2017) through the policy thrust demonstrating alignment with the sustainable development goals (SDG) in achieving an indivisible and integrated balance between three dimensions: the economic, social and environmental and aims to stimulate action plan of eradicating extreme poverty, achieving more peaceful and inclusive society by 2030 (SDG, 2018 ). Such renewed public sector vision underscores potentials of placing Nigeria as a major player in the global economy through human and natural resource endowments. Poverty incidence defined as the absolute poverty rate and measures the percentage of the population that lives below a specified threshold per day

In Nigeria, levels of social exclusion vary by state and are higher in the regions that face critical security challenges. In the North East, the Boko Haram insurgency has resulted in loss of

life and property, and much of the population now live in camps for internally displaced persons. In the Niger Delta, alienation, environmental degradation, and disaffection have led to a resurgence of militancy and vandalism. The destruction of oil and gas infrastructure has reduced crude oil exports dramatically and had a negative impact on federal government revenues

One of the many leadership ironies is that though poverty is preventable through efficient corporate governance and technological availability to over 7 billion; significantly, over 457 million people in sub-Saharan Africa remain undernourished (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2016). Concerned about neglected 'bottom of the pyramid,' Stanwick and Stanwick (2016) calls for commitment from global and local governance in elucidating levels of rural poverty facing many sub-Saharan African countries.

**Why Is Corruption Endemic in Nigeria?** The corruption perception indices of Nigeria by Transparency International is as high as 144/ 180 of the most corrupt counties in the world and scores of 27 % out of 100% in 2018 maintaining the score of 2017 attesting to the fact that Nigeria is still as corrupt as ever before (TICP, 2018). Albert (2016) expounded that political corruption particularly conspiratorial association hypothesis between civil servants and political appointees perpetuated pandemic unhealthy situation since independence. The cumulative effect of corruption is disproportionately alarming on ordinary citizens by undermining their capacity to expand their potentials, increasing poverty and unemployment. The abuse of the rule of law and breach of electoral processes tolerated the emergence of unsuitable leadership, alienation of the citizenry from the governance processes, conflict, political instability and the concentration of Nigeria's wealth in the hands the few rich and powerful.

The challenge for sub-Saharan Africa public sector is fighting persistent ethical dilemmas including corruption, human rights, transparency personal wealth accumulation, lack of integrity, and poor transparency through appropriate corporate governance. Public sector corporate governance must act socially responsible in supporting sustainable policies and fighting inequalities as a vital global concern. Embarrassments over corruption index rationalize individually and collectively value creation as guiding corporate culture (Albert, 2016; Oduntan, 2017; Setyaningrum, 2017).

Albert (2016) recognized a lack of leadership commitment as perpetuating corruption. The author explored the multi-dimensional nature of corruption, which is global recurrent decimal and the vast literature on corruption in Nigeria. Albert (2016) was critical of the low-income indices militating against national development in Nigeria in spite of socio-economic endowments. Leadership misappropriation of available state resources by for private short-term benefit and effect on nation-building in Nigeria's post-independence increased inappropriate societal values weakened ethical standard, the disparity between the poor and rich and allowed corruption become endemic (Boddy, 2016; Parmer, 2017). The author further expounded that infiltration of public bureaucracy by corruption caused abandonment of character of anonymity, non-partisanship, and professionalism. Others include persistent inequality in the distribution of wealth, over-dependence on the political office as the primary means of gaining access to wealth, the weakness of social and governmental enforcement mechanism, the absence of a strong sense of national community, the great difficulty of financing political parties (Nwankpa, 2016; Usang & Salim, 2016).

## **Corporate Governance**

Ekwueme and Akhalumeh (2016) in a quantitative study examined the effectiveness of corporate governance practices in Nigeria. Their study focused on a comparative analysis of



selected firms and hypothesized that corporate governance practices in Nigeria have significant effects on attracting investments. The study made recommendations that non-bank companies in Nigeria should incorporate principles of corporate governance under the guidance of corporate entity functionaries in Nigeria. The study called for an improvement of the Nigerian Stock Exchange to promote better corporate governance practices.

Concepts and trends of corporate governance globally and locally resonated from a series of corporate crises and business scandal that shocked the world (Ekwueme & Akhalumeh, 2016; Bello, 2016). The last economic recession and global meltdown highlighted extreme risks, rule-bending, and unethical practices causing public distrust of individuals, corporations, and nations (Ferrell et al., 2017). The inability of Sarbanes–Oxley Act to prevent failures in global businesses caused a rethink of capitalism on ideals of regulation but also the overall business approach. The abuse of internal processes and the inevitable downfall of the Nigerian stock market emphasized the dearth of effective governance plans (Bello, 2016). The future Nigerian leadership demands effective control of businesses to raise higher stakes of corporate governance which need to protect the interests of all stakeholders.

Adegbami and Uche (2016) examined the leadership styles of Nigeria’s political leaders and the impact of good governance and peaceful co-existence. The study relied heavily on secondary sources of data within Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. Good governance is in synchronism with accountability and ethics in decision-making and implementation; transparency and predictability; and responsiveness. Good governance follows constitutional provisions and explicit development in social services delivery for the benefit of the citizenry. Good governance is a prerequisite for social services delivery; economic advancement; national unity; and political stability through conveying peace, unity, safety, and development to the people. In alignment with prior studies, the magnitude of the misrule, self-service, and embezzlement of public funds manifested in increased poverty, enhanced insecurity that permeates the country obstructed the development of Nigeria.

Scholars recommended that Nigerians resist bad governance and pseudo-democratic practices and restructure the legal systems (Ikeanyibe, 2016b). Bad governance increases conflicts, insecurity, and poverty. Without the practice of good governance, Nigeria may not witness any meaningful development. In line with modernization, the public sector should engender good governance, and the functionaries must strategize accountability and transparency over profit-making (Awuah, 2018; Fatile, Olojede, & Kehindde, 2015; Ighodalo, 2017). With globalization and increased foreign investment in Nigeria, international codes of integrity are equally critical for the enhancement of corporate reputations, demonstration of respect for employees and cultures. Nigeria clamors for tighter rules and sanctions for improved quality of living and building trust (Asencio, 2016; Dartey-Baah & Mekpor, 2017; Sanda & Arthur, 2017; Sunday, 2016).

## **Historical Perspectives of Leadership**

**The Classical Era:** Bass (1990) contended the critical nature of leadership in organizational performance and presented the historical roots of leadership. The emergence of the classical era from the industrial revolution initiated several theories of efficiency and improvement of productivity. The philosophy of classical era emerged from management theorists like Taylor’s Scientific Management, Fayol’s Administrative Management, and Weber’s Bureaucratic management fall under the classical era (Ronald, 2014; Sarker & Khan, 2013).

**The Neo-Classical Era:** The Neo-Classical era ignored classical philosophies while focusing on a combination of both the formal and informal forms of organizing and explaining mostly the contingent part of leadership behaviors, styles, and abilities. The neo-classical emphasis on behavioral and humanistic schools of thought saw the emergence of theories of relations-oriented leadership style (1950); humanistic theory (1960 - 1966) represented by McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y including the participative leadership (1966) (Sarker& Khan, 2013).

**The Modern Era:** The modern era (The late 1950s to Early 1980s) impacted with technological advancement, increase marketplace competition that drove the new leadership theories like contingency theory (1960s), Situational theory, transformational theory, and transactional theory (1985).

**The Post-Modern Era:** The Post-Modern Era (The early 1980s to Present) more revolutionary rather than evolutionary called for the golden age of leadership of leaders and team members following determination of shared leadership in organizational performance (Curlee, 2008).

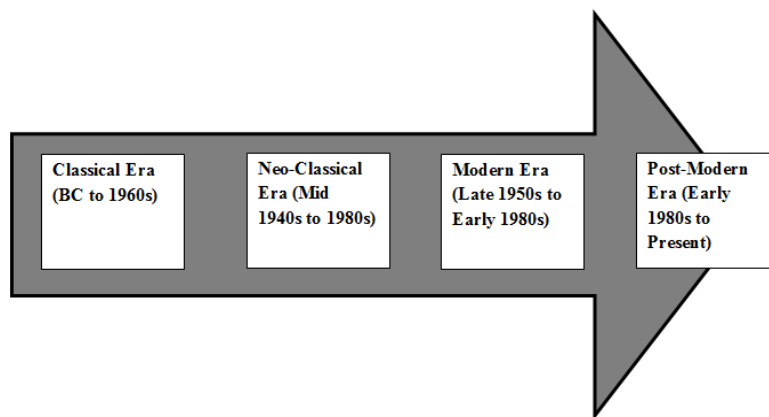


Figure 2. *Timeline of Leadership Research*. Adapted from Mumford, M. D. (2009). *Leadership 101*. Springer Publishing Company.

### Scholastic Perspectives of Leadership

Differential leadership definitions reflect abysmal divergence about the identification of leadership processes behaviors, interaction patterns, traits, role relationships, and profession (Yukl, 2013). The multiplicity and complexity of leadership concepts replicate the multitude of people who tried to define leadership (Anderson, et al. 2017; Bass, 1990b; Solomon, et al. 2016). However, culture gives each group uniqueness, national differences and influences behavioral Leadership ( Zuva & Worku, 2018). A review of the leadership literature demonstrates that a plethora of definitions conforms to authors' perceptions or descriptions of the leadership landscape during certain eras. Dartey-Baah (2014) argued that:

Dynamism or unsettling nature of discourses on the concept of leadership may be attributed to the dynamic nature of the concept itself. The construct of leadership, as a determining factor to the realization of collective goals fueled by man's insatiable needs dictated by changes in time and also its interaction with a wide range of entities (individuals, assets, and community) with different demands and behaviors must always seek to catch up to ensure its relevance, hence, its dynamic nature. (p. 204)

Ladkin (2010) opted for a scholarly description of the phenomena of leadership by differentiating leadership settings, contexts, or societies. The description invigorates different

expectations and practices. With different dimensions of phenomena of leadership, Silva (2016) adopted a more holistic and unifying definition. “Leadership is the process of interactive influence that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve common goals” (Silva, 2016, p. 3). Some of the characteristics suggested leadership to be a process and not just a personal quality. Other characteristics describe the leadership process as both leader influence on the follower and interactive influence between the leaders and followers; that the leadership process occur in a given context which changes along with the background; that the leadership process requires that followers accept someone influence of a leader either unwillingly accepted or willingly; and that the purpose of the leadership process was to accomplish shared goals between leader and followers.

**Leadership versus management.** The debates on leadership and management portray inherent differences in the purposes of exerting influence reflecting profound differentiation of leadership processes, methods of investigation and interpretation of results (Yukl, 2013). Conceptualizing leadership and management are necessary to avoid interchangeable usage. Such clarification of their distinctiveness and complementary purposes are essential for workplace performance to cope with changes in the environment (Glamuzina, 2015). Leadership is evidenced as broader than management. It involves integrating internal and external stakeholders within complex contexts (Barker, 2001). Leadership is a collaborative process not limited by behavioral, psychological, trait or disciplinary categories. It involves relationships influenced by leaders and followers to achieve authentic and sustainable change.

The need, therefore, arises for leaders in Nigerian public organizations to understand the difference between management and leadership. Management is a new phenomenon with the emergence of large complex organizations emphasizing the need for regulation in the workplace. Bargau (2015) proffered organizations need strong leadership and management for optimal performance. Whereas organizations need good management to assist in developing routine organizational processes, command, and control with short-term perspectives, leaders have long-term perspectives by creating a sense of excitement and purpose and challenging the statuesque (Bargau, 2015; Nahavandi, 2014). To be effective in performing management functions, leaders affect an organization’s culture by providing a sense of mission and purpose for future-oriented goals to motivate employees through shared values (Nahavandi, 2014).

Leadership comes with expectations from followers. Members of society would desire specific antecedents, and leaders face challenges to it appertaining (Badiora, Okunola, & Ojewale, 2016; Nichols, 2016). A leader’s approach has a more significant influence on employees’ job satisfaction and other divergent organizational developments (Shu-sien, Dachian, Yu-Chun, Li-Wen, 2017; Thompson & Phua, 2012). Lack of leadership development may result in leadership deficiencies thereby decreasing opportunities for generating motivated employees who bring expected societal change. Modern successful organizations require a well-articulated leadership development program for survival and provision of the solution to the problem (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Hasel & Grover, 2017; MacKillop, 2017). Incorporating employee empowerment may foster teamwork, organizational citizenship behavior, leadership trust, and organizational commitment as well as enhance job satisfaction and community involvement (Engelbrecht, Heine, & Mahembe, 2017). Employee empowerment can aid leadership strategies to perform cardinal functions which bring a positive impact on Nigerian society (Dahou, Hacini, & University of Mascara, 2018; Okeke, Jim-Ogbolo, Obiakonwamuo, & Imaga, 2017).

Numerous leadership development activities exist and contribute to organizational success (Ivensky, 2018). With the magnitude of unethical leadership practices and scandalously high corruption in Nigeria (TICP, 2017), research framework must identify ideal leadership. The emergence of best practices for competitive advantage is a necessary innovation foundation for organizational vitality, growth, and expansion (Fernandes, Vasconcelos, Galina, & Dobelin, 2018; Wal, 2017). Leadership development may be formal through the specific training program or informal through mentoring, 360-degree feedbacks, networking, executive coaching, action learning and job assignments (Nagy, Káposzta, Neszmélyi, & Obozuwa, 2018). Proactive actionable leadership plans can communicate an organization's concerns for employees and instructive to unraveling the creative potential of employees and enhancing organizational effectiveness (Ciulla, Knights, Mabey, & Tomkins, 2018; Sanda & Arthur, 2017). Leadership development begins with looking inwards to discover potential leadership abilities for better expression of leadership vision.

### **Methodology and Design**

The qualitative methodology provided the necessary tools for answering research questions with participant responses to interview questions (Levitt et al., 2018). Rigor and adherence to qualitative research rules enhanced validity and reliability after a systematic data analysis (Hoe & Hoare, 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). A researcher-developed instrument enlisting comparatively small size was developed to capture deeper meanings of the phenomena under study.

The population was from the members of federal government establishments in Abia State. Purposive sampling method along with researcher's experience facilitated recruitment of participant using inclusion and exclusion criteria to reduce the study population to the sample size of the study. The participants arose from the list of whose roles and experiences to form inclusion suitability. The researcher included middle and lower employees with over 10 years of working experience. Employees with the lower diplomas and university degree were considered. All prospects who did not fit the criteria were eliminated. The Director Generals and all those on contract and political appointments were excluded from this study.

The original semi-structured instrument followed the traditional qualitative processes to facilitate interviewing (Jamshed, 2014). Considering that the participants were not at the same location, and interviewing was not concurrent, a structured interview was inapplicable. Specific evidence was not readily predictable requiring an interactive inquiry to clarify the study purpose to make connections with the field of study (Agee, 2009). A structured instrument would limit participant's liberty with the tendency to increase the researcher's interjection while the semi-structured instrument opened wide-ranging ideas.

Insights from the validated MLQ 5X leadership style survey that identified transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles influenced questions on effective leadership (Dimitrov & Darova, 2016). The validated organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) informed questions on employee commitment (Aina, 2013). The criteria for building characteristics, consciousness and capabilities of future Nigerian leaders were integrated to motivate better organizational performance and serve to improve increasing employee autonomy and responsibilities and proactive work orientation (Nichols, 2016; Silva, 2016; Leonard, 2017).

Although the target sample was 25, the actual sample size of the study was 22 based on the saturation point during the participant interviews.

The final questions served as interview prompts in that a participant's response to a question generated the need for follow-up questions.

The interview questions were as follows:

1. Describe types of leadership behaviors that would motivate you to perform better? What do you think makes good leaders that empower?
2. What kinds of challenges do you experience in regard to your work?
3. If you have any additional information you would like to add, please feel free to do so.

The final questions underwent an iterative review process. Interpretive researchers must be open-minded and not sway towards expected evidence; this reduces power imbalance; avoids leading, evocative and judgmental questions; and adopts carefully worded neutral questions to serve the corroboratory purpose of the interview (Yin, 2018).

The researcher engaged participants in face-to-face approach within a semi-structured environment, and probed were necessary to solicit accurate and wide-ranging data from each interviewee. Semi-structured interviews facilitated in depth qualitative information because the focus in human conversation encouraged modification and structuring of questions which evoked the fullest responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Without much difficulty, data saturation 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).

## **Findings**

The research participants were emphatic on their expectations of leaders in the empowerment of employees. The data analysis software captured the level of importance each participant placed on the point being made. A cumulative compilation of the main elements of points resided in the word clouds for each zone. The participants were unequivocal about the what, how, and why matters regarding leadership empowerment expectations. The antecedents a leader had from zone to zone were generally be the same because the study was about the same organization. However, the differences already explained gave rise to variation in the level of importance a zone (cumulatively) placed on the elements.

The interviewees emphasized on the role of training in organizational capacity. Such capacity, according to the research participants hinged on personnel attitude to work, revealing a connection between organizational leadership attitude and personnel work ethic. In comprehending the mind map, it became necessary to highlight the mainstay of the organization as project planning and implementation. Therefore, all levels of staff understood the need to see everything from the standpoint of projects. Thus, the project mindset was a sine qua non to organizational success through employee empowerment. While staff feelings appeared as mundane and too subjective to factor in; the participants were virtually underlining how they felt. It also became clear that the way they felt had a direct connection with the attitudes of the leaders, and the empowerment of employees would be impossible under some of the leadership attitudes that came under most participant's scrutiny.

The importance of agency as a theme resonated with the participants while they answered interview questions. When the agency introduced a program, management calls a meeting two

days prior to the program to direct how the program was carried out. The development of structures and facilities was the responsibility of the government. Directing the structures and facilities was the responsibility of the organizational leaders. Operating the facilities and structures was the responsibility of the employees. With the loyalty of the agency-minded employees, the empowerment act was given. However, in some instances, the employees openly verbalized their yearnings for the structures, facilities, and leadership. To bring to perspective, some participants spread out in different zones shared the same view as Participant 3, "Director-General has not done much especially in terms of staff development."

The employees regarded training and development as empowerment, which informed the faulting of the agency and its leadership teams by agency-minded employees. For instance, Participant 6 stated; "periodic staff developmental training which needs good leadership but as time went on, they were not officially scrapped but they are no longer regular as it should be, they are absent." In holding the agency accountable, participants revealed; "that there used to be a reward system where the best-behaved staff in terms of character was projected as a peak for others and some other rewards based on output on what you have been able to do in your given assignments." Employees regarded this recognition as an empowerment act beyond the salaries. A participant stated it was not that the employees did not have leadership that knew about employee empowerment, but that the process was "not being oiled as expected." Participant 11 stated; "For you to function and provide a quality work within the organization, you must be educated and listen to all news because people expect you to know everything." To prove the existence and possibility of such empowerment, yet another participant postulated that the leader on their location created a lot of activities that kept them busy, that way the employees were able to learn; and that was within the first 3 years this particular employee in the organization; that empowering experience boosted the confidence of the employee.

To empower employees, a leader must recognize that the employees who go out to sensitize people face difficulties as mobilization resources were either nonexistent or insufficient . When mobilizers do not have money to work with, the level of expectation can no longer be achieved. If the logistics are not there, then, nobody can achieve anything. Participant 1 said; "the resources we were utilizing at the local government level are very inadequate. The only token we have from our head office which is the overhead allowance is no longer adequate to enable us to carry out our assignment effectively." Many participants echoed the sentiment that those working at the local government level have little or no training and cannot carry out their respective duties. The above challenges need leadership attention, and a leader who wanted to empower their employees must resolve these challenges. Another example was the lack of finance to cover a larger scope of the goals and programs. Furthermore, the timeframe for policy planners are not realistic in designing the programs of the agency, which adversely affected the empowerment of employees. A leader who identified these problems, took them on, and resolved them can likely empower employees.

Employee empowerment is a leader's responsibility within the zones or units the leaders cover . For instance, the lack of vehicles and mobility constituted major challenges faced by leaders to execute the organization's mandate. According to a participant, the organization's officers at the local government levels were expected to make the necessary contact with people within that local government. Unfortunately, the contact cannot be achieved without mobility.

Besides that, another major challenge was poor office accommodation, particularly at the local government areas. In other words, employee empowerment suffered an untold setback due to the absence of the execution paraphernalia. A leader with the intention to empower their

employees should express regret when they enter an office with no chairs, no tables, and leaking roofs. No employee can be empowered under such working conditions. Participant 2 said; “Since I have been working with this organization, there has never been a time they changed the chairs.” He continued, “I came into the agency when they were using Peugeot 504 and later Toyota Hilux Jeep. Thereafter, they never changed their working tools. An empowering leader would not allow his or her employees to transport themselves to their respective field works out of their personal pockets.” A participant narrated; “there was a time my director asked me to represent him in a function, he went to the driver and he said no fuel.” That participant concluded with a revelation about the outcome as follows; “I used a bike to that program. It was shameful because someone else who came from another organization to represent the director came in a car.” The empowerment responsibility of the leaders comes under scrutiny with this exposition.

Identifying challenges and overcoming them meant much to the employees, as participants from different zones explained. The differences between the organization’s zones did not affect the commonality depicted in this issue of challenges. From zone to zone, employees highlighted the frustration to face challenges in the normal course of their duties. The participants explained the ‘out-of-the-box-thinking’ that echoed from zone to zone. This meant that the leaders in several zones faced the similar problems consistently. The participants made it clear that any leader with the courage to tackle the challenges would empower the employees by that singular act of solving the infrastructure problems. According to a participant, “the problem now is that due to lack of funds, we cannot adequately carry out even the programs and other roles of the agency are done half hazardless these days.” Obviously, the issue of not empowering workers with required work tools maybe just a leader’s inefficiency and ineffectiveness. This is because a leader would not need to do more than provide a good working environment, office furniture, and mobility for the employees to feel empowered.

While training featured as a major element in the entire investigation, – Participant 12 addressing the issue of challenges stated, “One of the challenges we have in the agency was that of staff training deficiency.” The participant revealed that from time after time news of other people going for training filtered out without several people shortlisted for such training programs. The participant lamented; “so our major challenges are that sometimes you find that you are confronted with many problems that you need to solve, and your challenges are that you don’t have adequate resources. The following four themes and twenty subthemes emerged:

1. Leaders Should Respond to Staff Feelings: the desire to be involved, need to know, acknowledging versus ignoring, and understanding the organization.
2. 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.
3. Management Should Deploy Constant Training on Innovations: the importance of new knowledge, possible zonal training patterns, designing training programs, and external training facilities.
4. Identifying and Crushing Challenges Should Occur: work environment, uncaring leadership mentality, fieldwork inadequacies, and constant finance deficiency.
- 5.

### **Recommendations**

In order to equate with 21st-century dynamics, such platforms incorporate information resources that provide easier access to employees via the corporate intranet. It is not just about

the savvy platform, but the openness in the platform in cross-functional planning, enhancing feedback, and interactive dynamics to share information and collaborate across silos, empowering knowledge, and impacting employees and management.

To facilitate a deeper understanding of perceptions of the influence of leadership antecedents on employee empowerment, the researcher created recommendations for future research to determine how these perceptions may affect operations in a public organization. Following the complex nature of the Nigerian socio-political terrain, more research on employee empowerment should focus on each of the seven identified themes/strategies. Further research on how leaders integrated identified antecedents and the challenges the lack of it constituted to employees is required. Such an investigation will help gain a better understanding of the structural and psychological needs of both employees and organizations.

Using the same qualitative case study, researchers can limit the investigation into one of the six geopolitical zones. Doing this will increase the capacity to interview more participants and to gain more in-depth insight. Evaluating one geopolitical zone will widen opportunities for more employees to share perceptions that will assist leaders in gaining more in-depth insight into solving the problem. Further research can consider the delimitations of the current study by considering other qualitative research other qualitative designs such as ethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, and grounded theory. Future researchers can explore associational design (causal-comparative) to give additional perspectives on the influence of leadership antecedents on employee empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

The study contributes to the management literature by extending antecedents of collective empowerment in four thematic areas. The benefits of employee empowerment were numerous. When employees in federal establishments are happy, they are more likely to give higher levels of service delivery, increased productivity, and commitment towards achieving the goals of governance. The complex and hyper-turbulent Nigerian organization demand the integration of these strategies to make a positive difference in the lives of employees and society. Leadership styles should be strategic enough to create stable modes of behaviors to increase influence, establishing the appropriate essence of leadership (Mauri, 2017). Leaders should create an adequate empowerment arena for all three tiers, and levels of governance guarantee organizational efficiency, productivity, assertiveness in achieving goals, significant innovations, and a positive impact on society. The themes brought an understanding of the empowering strategies on employees. The strategies that can equip the public sector machinery entrusted with management begins with empowering the staff of the organization.



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