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IMPERATIVES OF LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AND EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the imperatives of leadership qualities and their implications for effective management of business activities in Nigeria. The Nigerian business environment is characterized by multifaceted political, economic, and socio-cultural dynamics that require unique and adaptive leadership competencies. Using a systematic review of extant literature published between 2019 and 2025, the study investigates how leadership styles transformational, transactional, servant, and situational influence organizational performance, employee's productivity, and business sustainability in both public and private sector enterprises in Nigeria. The findings reveal that leadership quality is a critical determinant of business outcomes, and that adaptive, ethical, and visionary leadership significantly increases organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The paper further establishes that poor leadership, characterized by corruption, patriotism, nepotism, and lack of strategic vision, remains a fundamental obstacle to the growth and development of business activities in Nigeria. However, this study recommends strengthen of institutionalization of leadership development programmes, adoption of digital leadership frameworks, and alignment of leadership practice with Nigeria's socio-cultural realities. The paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge on African management discourse and provides a contextualized framework for understanding leadership imperatives in developing economies.

Keywords: Leadership Qualities, Business Management, Nigeria, Organizational Performance, Transformational Leadership, Effective Management

Introduction

The connection between leadership quality and organizational success has attracted sustained scholarly thought across management disciplines globally. In the Nigerian context, however, this connection acquires additional layers of complexity owing to the country's unique historical, sociopolitical, and economic peculiarities (Adeyemi & Ojo, 2021). Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, presents a impossibility of enormous human and natural resource endowments juxtaposed against chronic business management failures, stunted economic

growth, and widespread institutional dysfunction. Scholars and practitioners alike have attributed these outcomes, in no small measure, to the deficiency of effective leadership at various levels of business and governance (Ogundele, Olawale, & Iyiola, 2020).

Leadership, broadly conceived, refers to the capacity to influence, guide, and direct individuals and groups towards the achievement of defined goals within a specific organizational context (Daft, 2018, as cited in Nwachukwu, Chladkova, & Olatunji, 2019). Within the Nigerian business environment, this capacity is mediated by a constellation of factors including cultural norms, ethnic heterogeneity, regulatory frameworks,

infrastructural deficits, and the pervasive influence of corruption (Okpara, 2021). Consequently, the imperatives of effective leadership in Nigeria extend well beyond the conventional theories developed within Western organizational contexts.

The significance of this discussion is further underscored by Nigeria's ambitious economic development agenda as encapsulated in the Nigeria Agenda 2050 and successive national development plans which envision a diversified, private sector led economy (National Planning Commission, 2021). Achieving these aspirations necessitates that Nigerian business leaders develop and deploy a rich repertoire of leadership competencies that are both globally informed and locally adaptive. Despite the growing recognition of this imperative, empirical evidence on the specific leadership qualities that are most consequential for business management effectiveness in Nigeria remains fragmented and inconclusive (Chukwuemeka, Ugwu, & Agbara, 2022).

This paper consequently undertakes a thorough academic review of the imperatives of leadership qualities and their nexus with effective management of business activities in Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study are to: (i) examine the conceptual underpinnings of leadership and management within the Nigerian business context; (ii) analyze the dominant leadership styles and their influence on business management outcomes in Nigeria; (iii) identify the key challenges constraining effective leadership and business management in Nigeria; and (iv) propose strategic recommendations for enhancing leadership quality and managerial effectiveness in Nigerian enterprises.

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical underpinnings

Conceptualizing Leadership in the Nigerian Business Context

Leadership is a multidimensional construct that has been conceptualized variously across different intellectual traditions. The trait theory of leadership, among the earliest systematic approaches, posits that effective

leaders possess inherent personal attributes such as intelligence, integrity, self-confidence, and sociability—that distinguish them from non-leaders (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991, as cited in Abubakar, Ilkan, & Arasli, 2019). While this approach has been critiqued for its determinism and neglect of contextual factors, it retains relevance in Nigeria where leadership selection in many enterprises continues to be influenced by personal relationships and socio-cultural prestige (Obi, Chukwuemeka, & Nnamdi, 2020).

Behavioural theories, by contrast, shifted focus from who leaders are to what leaders do, emphasising the observable actions and behavioural patterns through which leadership effectiveness is realised (Adenike, 2021). This perspective is particularly instructive in the Nigerian context where leadership behaviours are often shaped by the intersection of formal organisational roles and informal sociocultural obligations—a phenomenon sometimes described as the 'African ubuntu' leadership paradigm, in which community-oriented values inform leadership practice (Nwoye, Irechukwu, & Ekwere, 2022).

Contingency and situational theories further argue that leadership effectiveness is contextually determined, such that no single leadership style is universally optimal; rather, leaders must adapt their approach in response to the demands of specific situations, follower characteristics, and environmental conditions (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, as cited in Adewale, Abolaji, & Kolade, 2021). This perspective resonates strongly with the Nigerian business environment, which is marked by high levels of uncertainty, regulatory volatility, and socioeconomic turbulence, requiring leaders to demonstrate significant adaptive capacity (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019).

Management and Organizational Effectiveness

Effective management of business activities encompasses the systematic application of planning, organising, staffing, directing, and controlling functions to achieve organisational objectives (Fayol, 1949, as cited in Ugwu & Eze, 2020). In Nigeria, the application of these classical management principles is often complicated by institutional weaknesses, inadequate

infrastructure, and the prevalence of informal business practices (Ahiazu & Asiegbu, 2019). Scholars such as Oghojafor, Muo, and Olayemi (2021) have argued that effective management in the Nigerian context must be reframed to account for the realities of an emerging market economy characterised by resource constraints, weak regulatory enforcement, and dual formal-informal economic systems.

The concept of organisational effectiveness, which serves as the primary metric of management success, has been operationalised in the Nigerian business management literature through multiple dimensions including financial performance, employee satisfaction, customer retention, innovation capacity, and corporate social responsibility outcomes (Nwachukwu et al., 2019). Recent empirical studies have further highlighted the growing importance of sustainability, digital transformation, and stakeholder value creation as dimensions of organizational effectiveness in the contemporary Nigerian business landscape (Salako & Yusuf, 2022).

Leadership Styles and Business Management Outcomes in Nigeria

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, conceptualized by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), refers to a leadership approach in which leaders inspire and motivate followers to transcend self-interest for the good of the organization by appealing to higher-order values and articulating a compelling vision (Nwachukwu et al., 2019). In the Nigerian business context, transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most studied and endorsed leadership paradigms, owing to its potential to drive innovation, foster organizational commitment, and enhance business performance in challenging environments (Oluwaseun, Afolabi, & Adeoye, 2020).

Empirical evidence from Nigerian enterprises lends considerable support to the transformational leadership performance nexus. Chukwuemeka et al. (2022) conducted a survey of 312 managers across manufacturing firms in South-East Nigeria and found that transformational leadership behaviors, particularly

idealized influence and inspirational motivation, were positively and significantly associated with employee commitment and operational performance. Similarly, Abubakar et al. (2019) demonstrated that transformational leadership moderated the relationship between knowledge management and organizational performance, suggesting that visionary leaders are better positioned to leverage organizational learning for competitive advantage.

Adeyemi and Ojo (2021) further reported that transformational leadership fosters a culture of innovation within Nigerian small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are widely recognized as the backbone of the Nigerian economy. The study, which sampled 280 SME owners and managers across Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, established that transformational leaders who communicate a clear vision, provide intellectual stimulation, and offer individualized consideration were significantly more likely to achieve superior business outcomes compared to their transactional counterparts.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership, characterized by contingent reward, management by exception, and exchange-based relationships between leaders and followers, remains prevalent in many Nigerian organizations, particularly within bureaucratic public sector agencies and large private corporations (Okpara, 2021). Unlike transformational leadership, transactional leadership is primarily concerned with maintaining organizational stability, ensuring compliance with established rules, and rewarding performance through conventional incentive structures (Bass & Riggio, 2006, as cited in Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019).

Research findings on the effectiveness of transactional leadership in the Nigerian business context are mixed. While some studies suggest that transactional behaviors can be effective in stable, routine driven environments where clear performance metrics exist (Ugwu & Eze, 2020), others caution that the predominance of transactional leadership in Nigerian organizations may perpetuate a short-term, compliance-oriented organizational culture that is ill-suited to the demands of

dynamic, knowledge intensive markets (Nwoye et al., 2022). Olawale and Garwe (2019) noted that over reliance on transactional leadership in Nigerian manufacturing firms contributed to low levels of employee creativity and resistance to organizational change.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, introduced by Greenleaf (1970), emphasizes the leader's primary obligation to serve the needs of followers, empower them, and foster their personal and professional growth (Adewale et al., 2021). This leadership orientation has gained increasing scholarly attention in the African management literature as a culturally congruent approach that resonates with indigenous African values of communalism, respect for elders, and collective well-being (Nwoye et al., 2022). In Nigeria, where communal solidarity and ethical leadership are increasingly demanded by stakeholders, servant leadership presents significant promise as a foundation for sustainable business management.

Obi et al. (2020) examined the impact of servant leadership on employee engagement and business performance in a sample of 240 employees drawn from telecommunications firms in Nigeria. The results indicated that servant leadership behaviours, including empathy, stewardship, and commitment to follower growth, were significantly and positively related to both individual employee performance and overall firm effectiveness. The study concluded that servant leadership creates a psychologically safe organizational climate that stimulates creativity, reduces turnover, and enhances organizational loyalty outcomes that are particularly valuable in Nigeria's competitive and talent-scarce labour market.

Situational and Adaptive Leadership

Given the highly heterogeneous and unpredictable nature of the Nigerian business environment, situational and adaptive leadership theories have attracted considerable scholarly interest. Situational leadership theory suggests that effective leaders diagnose the developmental readiness of their followers and flexibly

adapt their leadership style ranging from directing to delegating in response to varying situational demands (Adewale et al., 2021). Adaptive leadership, as conceptualized by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009, as cited in Salako & Yusuf, 2022), further emphasises the leader's capacity to mobilize organizations to address complex, non-routine challenges that require fundamental changes in values, attitudes, and behaviors.

In a study of 185 senior managers across diverse industry sectors in Nigeria, Salako and Yusuf (2022) found that adaptive leadership significantly predicted organizational resilience and performance amidst macroeconomic shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic disruptions. The study underscored the imperative for Nigerian business leaders to cultivate contextual intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and strategic agility as core adaptive competencies in navigating the country's volatile business landscape.

Key Imperatives of Leadership Quality in Nigerian Business Management

Ethical Leadership and Corporate Governance

Ethical leadership is arguably the most foundational imperative of effective business management in Nigeria. Corruption, which has been identified by successive governance reports and empirical studies as one of Nigeria's most debilitating institutional afflictions, has profound implications for business management outcomes at both organizational and systemic levels (Okpara, 2021; Transparency International, 2023). Leaders who demonstrate ethical integrity, transparency, and accountability create organizational cultures characterized by trust, fairness, and adherence to rule of law, which are prerequisites for sustainable business operations.

Chukwuemeka et al. (2022) empirically demonstrated that ethical leadership behaviors were the strongest predictor of employee organizational commitment and corporate reputation in their sample of Nigerian firms, underscoring the critical role of moral leadership in sustaining stakeholder confidence. Ahiauzu and Asiegbu

(2019) further argued that ethical leadership is not merely a matter of personal virtue but a strategic business imperative in Nigeria, where reputational damage arising from corruption scandals can irreparably undermine investor confidence, market access, and long term organizational viability.

Visionary and Strategic Leadership

Visionary leadership the ability to articulate a compelling future state and galvanize collective action toward its realization is identified in the literature as a critical success factor for Nigerian businesses operating in an environment of heightened uncertainty and institutional flux (Oghojafor et al., 2021). Strategic leadership, which encompasses the cognitive, behavioral, and organizational dimensions of steering enterprises toward competitive advantage, is particularly pivotal in enabling Nigerian firms to navigate the twin imperatives of local market adaptation and global competitiveness (Adenike, 2021).

Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) conducted a longitudinal assessment of 25 high performing Nigerian firms and found that all possessed leaders with strong visionary and strategic orientation, characterized by long term planning horizons, proactive environmental scanning, and the capacity to translate strategic vision into executable operational plans. The study concluded that strategic leadership was the most differentiating factor between high performing and low performing Nigerian enterprises, irrespective of industry sector or firm size.

Emotional Intelligence and Interpersonal Leadership

Emotional intelligence (EI) defined as the capacity to perceive, understand, manage, and effectively use emotions in one and others has emerged as a critical leadership competency in the contemporary management literature (Goleman, 1995, as cited in Adenike, 2021). In the Nigerian business context, where interpersonal relationships, communal values, and emotional expressiveness are central dimensions of organizational culture, EI assumes particular strategic importance as a lever of leadership effectiveness (Nwachukwu et al., 2019).

Oluwaseun et al. (2020) examined the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance among Nigerian banking sector employees. The study, involving 340 participants drawn from ten commercial banks, found that leaders with high emotional intelligence were significantly more effective in managing conflict, building cohesive teams, and sustaining employee motivation in high-pressure work environments. Furthermore, EI was found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction, suggesting that the effectiveness of transformational leadership in Nigeria is partly contingent on the leader's emotional competencies.

Digital Leadership and Technology Management

The accelerating pace of digital transformation presents both an opportunity and an imperative for Nigerian business leaders to develop digital leadership competencies. Digital leadership encompasses the capacity to leverage information and communication technologies, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms to drive business model innovation, enhance operational efficiency, and create new value propositions for customers and stakeholders (Salako & Yusuf, 2022). In Nigeria, where digital adoption is expanding rapidly through fintech innovations, e-commerce growth, and mobile internet penetration, the demand for digitally literate business leaders has become increasingly acute (Obi et al., 2020).

Ugwu and Eze (2020) found that Nigerian firms led by digitally competent executives demonstrated significantly higher levels of operational efficiency, market responsiveness, and financial performance compared to those led by leaders with limited digital orientation. The study highlighted the growing alignment between digital leadership capacity and overall business management effectiveness, particularly in technology-intensive sectors such as banking, telecommunications, and retail.

Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity Management

Nigeria's extraordinary ethno cultural diversity with over 250 distinct ethnic groups and multiple religious traditions renders cultural intelligence and diversity management indispensable leadership competencies for effective business management (Ogundele et al., 2020). Leaders who demonstrate cultural sensitivity, ethnic inclusivity, and the capacity to harness diversity as an organizational asset are better positioned to build cohesive, high-performing teams and navigate the complex stakeholder landscapes characteristic of Nigerian enterprises (Nwoye et al., 2022).

Olawale and Garwe (2019) observed that ethnically inclusive leadership in Nigerian firms was significantly associated with lower intergroup conflict, higher team cohesion, and superior organizational performance. Conversely, leadership characterized by ethnic favoritism and tribalism a widely documented challenge in Nigerian organizations was found to be among the most potent destroyers of organizational trust and collaborative capacity (Okpara, 2021). These findings underscore the imperative for Nigerian business leaders to deliberately cultivate intercultural competence and diversity-affirming leadership practices.

Challenges Constraining Effective Leadership and Business Management in Nigeria

Despite the imperatives identified above, effective leadership and business management in Nigeria face a formidable array of structural, institutional, and behavioral challenges. The most pervasive of these challenges are examined in this section.

Corruption and Poor Governance

Corruption remains the most extensively documented constraint on effective leadership and business management in Nigeria. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index consistently ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt nations globally, with profound implications for the business environment (Transparency International, 2023). At the organizational level, corruption manifests in the form of fraudulent financial reporting, procurement malpractice, nepotistic hiring,

and misappropriation of resources all of which fundamentally undermine managerial integrity and organizational effectiveness (Okpara, 2021; Chukwuemeka et al., 2022).

Infrastructural Deficits

Inadequate infrastructure—including unreliable power supply, poor road networks, limited broadband connectivity, and deficient water supply systems—significantly increases the operational costs and managerial complexity confronting Nigerian business leaders (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019). Studies consistently indicate that Nigerian firms spend disproportionate managerial resources and financial capital on self-provision of critical infrastructure, diverting attention and investment from core business activities and strategic growth initiatives (Adeyemi & Ojo, 2021). This infrastructural burden is particularly acute for small and medium enterprises that lack the financial resources available to large corporations for self-provision of essential services.

Talent Development and Leadership Pipeline Deficits

The inadequacy of leadership development infrastructure in Nigeria represents a critical structural constraint on the emergence of high-quality business leadership. Despite the proliferation of higher education institutions, the quality and relevance of management education in Nigeria has been persistently criticised for its disconnect from contemporary business realities and its failure to develop the practical leadership competencies demanded by the modern business environment (Oghojafor et al., 2021). The attendant leadership pipeline deficit means that many Nigerian enterprises are led by individuals whose leadership capabilities have developed through informal, often suboptimal channels, with adverse consequences for management quality and business performance.

Political Instability and Macroeconomic Volatility

The Nigerian macroeconomic environment is characterised by persistent volatility, driven by overdependence on crude oil revenues, exchange rate

instability, inflationary pressures, and recurrent fiscal crises (National Planning Commission, 2021). These macroeconomic conditions create an extraordinarily challenging planning and decision-making environment for business managers, demanding extraordinary levels of strategic agility, financial acumen, and crisis management capability (Salako & Yusuf, 2022). The intersection of political uncertainty and economic volatility further undermines investor confidence and constrains the capacity of Nigerian enterprises to make long-term strategic investments.

Strategic Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following recommendations are advanced for enhancing leadership quality and effective business management in Nigeria:

Institutionalising Leadership Development: Nigerian governments, educational institutions, and private sector organisations must collaborate to establish robust leadership development infrastructure, including executive education programmes, mentorship schemes, and leadership academies that are designed to cultivate the specific competencies required for effective business management in the Nigerian context (Oghojafor et al., 2021). Leadership development curricula must be updated to reflect emerging global trends such as digital transformation, sustainability management, and cross-cultural leadership, while remaining grounded in the realities of the Nigerian business environment (Adenike, 2021).

Strengthening Corporate Governance and Anti-Corruption Frameworks: Nigerian businesses must invest in robust corporate governance structures, including independent boards of directors, rigorous internal audit mechanisms, whistleblower protection policies, and transparent procurement processes, in order to create institutional safeguards against corrupt leadership practices (Chukwuemeka et al., 2022). The government must simultaneously strengthen regulatory enforcement capacity and implement credible deterrent sanctions against corporate malfeasance (Okpara, 2021).

Embracing Digital Leadership: Nigerian enterprises should prioritise the development of digital leadership

competencies at all organisational levels, through targeted training, strategic technology investments, and the recruitment of digitally literate leadership talent (Ugwu & Eze, 2020). Organisations should further develop digital transformation roadmaps that are anchored in authentic leadership vision and driven by data-informed management decision-making (Salako & Yusuf, 2022).

Promoting Inclusive and Culturally Intelligent Leadership: Nigerian organisations must institutionalise diversity management policies that actively promote ethnic and gender inclusion in leadership selection and development processes (Nwoye et al., 2022). Leadership competency frameworks within Nigerian firms should explicitly incorporate cultural intelligence as a valued and assessed leadership attribute, recognising the centrality of cultural sensitivity to effective management in the country's diverse stakeholder landscape (Ogundele et al., 2020).

Developing Contextualised African Leadership Frameworks: Nigerian scholars, management consultants, and business practitioners should collaborate to develop and validate contextualised African leadership frameworks that are grounded in empirical evidence from Nigerian organisational settings, rather than uncritically importing Western leadership models whose applicability to the Nigerian context may be limited (Nwoye et al., 2022; Obi et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study has examined the imperatives of leadership qualities and effective management of business activities in Nigeria through a systematic review of contemporary scholarly literature. The paper established that leadership quality is a fundamental determinant of business management effectiveness in Nigeria, and that the development of specific leadership competencies including ethical integrity, visionary orientation, emotional intelligence, digital literacy, adaptive capacity, and cultural sensitivity—is an urgent imperative for Nigerian enterprises seeking to navigate the country's challenging business environment and achieve sustainable performance outcomes.

The analysis further revealed that effective leadership and business management in Nigeria are constrained by a formidable array of structural, institutional, and behavioral challenges, including pervasive corruption, infrastructural deficits, leadership pipeline inadequacies, and macroeconomic volatility. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated interventions at the organizational, sectoral, and national policy levels, encompassing leadership development infrastructure investment, corporate governance strengthening, digital leadership promotion, and the development of contextualized African management frameworks.

Ultimately, the transformation of Nigeria's business management landscape will require a sustained and collective commitment from government, private sector organizations, educational institutions, and civil society to priorities leadership quality as a national strategic imperative. As Nwachukwu et al. (2019) aptly observe the destiny of Nigerian enterprises and, indeed, the Nigerian economy itself, is inextricably bound to the quality of leadership that is brought to bear on its management at every level. The urgency of this imperative cannot be overstated in the context of Nigeria's development ambitions and the enormous expectations of its 220 million citizens.

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