

LEADERSHIP STYLES AND PERFORMANCE OF SMALL-SCALE ENTERPRISES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined leadership and performance of small-scale enterprises in Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, two research questions and corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Related literatures were reviewed based on the purpose of the study. Survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised one thousand six hundred and ten (1610) registered small business enterprises in Cross River State. Total sample of five hundred and thirteen (513) respondents were selected for the study using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The main instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire contained twenty (20) items. The instrument was validated by three experts, two from Business Management. Data collected were analyzed using tables while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis. All the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The study found that Laissez-faire leadership style and autocratic leadership style had significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State. The study recommended among others that small enterprises should ensure that the transformational leadership structure should be flexible by adopting other leadership styles that will complement the most preferred style to meet up with the dynamic challenges of the small enterprises business.

Key words: Leadership styles, performance, transformational leadership style and autocratic leadership style



Introduction

Leadership is critical to an organization's growth and performance, especially in today's competitive business world. As a result, it is possible to conclude that organizational performance is inextricably linked to leadership styles. Leadership in small enterprises is very complex and requires a leader with leadership characteristics that will help develop the business and most importantly, adopt and evolve with internal and external challenges (Seth, Rehman, & Shrivastava, 2018).

Leadership is all about influence; exerted on people or groups and organizations. The influence could be positive or negative. The positive influence leads to result attainment or of goal achievement and so an exemplary leader influences his followers positively. An effective leader holds the key to success and thus growth acquired. This trait theory of leadership, coupled with integrity is very important for the desired group change (Opara et. al 2020; Agbade et. al, 2019; 2022; Olofu & Ugbe, 2021). Leadership is a major subject in the study of organizational behaviour. Leadership drives organizational success and drives behaviour especially in today's competitive world. Effective leaders are required to create

enabling environments that enterprises require to gain competitive advantage. Leadership behaviour plays a very important role in enhancing employee job satisfaction, work motivation and work performance. In recognition of this fact, tremendous effort and resources have been expended, with varying degrees of success, to identify and develop personnel who will occupy the positions of leadership needed to meet present and future organizational requirements (Ojelade, Ajayi, Ajayi & Sikiru, 2020).

Leadership occurs as a process in various work groups with set objectives with individual goals over a period of time in a particular organization, leadership therefore influences group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group tasks or goals (Hersley & Blanchard, 2010; Patrick et. al 2025; Agbade et. al, 2020; Patrick et. al 2026; Usua et. al 2023). The implication of this is that there is no one best way of leading and leaders need to exercise a range of behaviour to maintain their roles effectively. Leadership is not confined to one person but may be shared among group members. Usually, an appointed leader (manager) is normally in charge of a group, he or she may not always be the leader in practice. Some leaders are mere figure heads.

Leadership style is the most potent factor that influences employees' attitudes and behaviour within diverse management groups. Leadership style is also a common theory of research subject and practice in business studies according to (Shrivastava & Hinkes, 2016). Leaders have adopted various styles when they lead people in organizations (Alkahtani, 2015). Some leaders practice democratic or relationship centered approach and others prefer autocratic, production-centered method in order to achieve a group goal, is an organizational objective. No matter the style of leadership, leaders must be skillful, competent, efficient and effective in their style so as to exercise the authority or influence vested in them. It was a keen analysis into these types of leadership styles that ushered in the adage that "Leaders are born not made" argues (Tabotndip, 2012; Antai et. al 2025; Agbade et. al, 2019; Bessong et. al 2025). This adage is still being debated by scholars of our generation because of better knowledge and understanding practitioners of the present civilization. Other serious argument is that leaders are made not born but whatever side of the divide we study the basic idea that raises a debate is that despite the potentials of the born leader, he or she still needs the necessary competencies to perform well in his or her tasks or roles. The choice of an adopted style is contingent on diverse factors such as personality traits of the leader, followers' acceptance of the leader, their readiness, task complexity and the norms and values embraced by the organizational members (Agbor et. al 2026; Meremikwu et. al 2022 Chiang & Wang, 2012; Effiong & Agbade, 2018; Ogunode et. al 2024). Therefore, leaders must possess special ability to diagnose the organizational environment, accurately identify the possible factors and subsequently make a sound decision in leading the enterprise towards success.

Successful enterprises have a fundamental philosophy of valuing and investing in their employees. Managing and retaining promising employees is considered a fundamental means of achieving competitive advantage. However, to achieve this aim, enterprises often have to put in place some mechanisms that enable managers monitor and assess the continued ability of employees to effectively and efficiently cope with the demands or requirements of their respective jobs. Such a system not only helps detect gaps in employees' skills and ability, but facilitates fair judgement of what is actually being accomplished by each employee, and therefore what he/she value is to the enterprise by way of contribution to accomplishment of set goals (Adie et. al 2026; Ibu et. al 2019; Ibu et. al 2019; Adie et. al 2020) . The mechanism used in facilitating this entrepreneurial need consists of a number of instruments including leadership styles. The leadership behavior shows the leader's expectations for followers to pursue excellence, quality and/or high performance, and motivates team members to re-examine certain assumptions about their work and think about how to improve (Jing, 2022; Olofu, & Hur-Yagba, 2019; Olofu & Patrick, 2019). Here,

emotional intelligence and ability are qualities that help to guide a leader in choosing the right leadership style.

For this study, leadership is measured based on transformational, autocratic, laissez-faire leadership, strategic and democratic leadership style. This is because there are the characteristics that related to the practice of good governance which must be performed by each employee to provide good service delivery in small scale business enterprises. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will focus on transformational and autocratic leadership style.

Transformational leadership style can be defined as an individual that lifts the level of consciousness, in followers, about the value of specific desired results and the approaches of reaching the specific results (Oyelade & Akpa, 2022). Bass and Bass (2008) cited in Oyelade and Akpa, (2022) add to this definition by stating that transformational leaders are able to persuade followers to surpass their self-interests to instead focus on the interests of the organization, all while raising the low-level concerns of the followers to higher-level concerns such as a need for achievement and raising one's full potential. Transformational leadership is interested in motivation, goal attainment, team work and behaviours that help employees find meaning in their work and at the same time enjoy their work.

Smolovic-Jones *et al.*, (2016) cited in Fiona (2020) describes the democratic leadership style as based on the assumption that people are trustworthy and motivated and like responsibility which in turn creates teamwork and high performance and job satisfaction. This being the opposite of the autocratic leader. Autocratic leaders make independent judgments and insist on strict adherence to the law. Hence the need to examine the interplay of these leadership styles and performance of small enterprises in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The workforce is an important component and resource of any enterprise, especially small enterprises. Without employees, small enterprises will not be able to produce business results or achieve organizational goals. When a small enterprise becomes insensitive to employees' needs, attrition rate may grow leading to lose of adequate manpower resources, relevant skills, learning curve, innovative ideas, and niche positioning. The nature of these losses is a critical issue that eventually affects business and individual performance. A poor work environment is often associated with reduced job satisfaction, absenteeism, complaints, burnout, depression, and labor turnover. People desire to work and stay in enterprises that work and make room for the personal growth and development of their employees. small enterprises are not an exception to this rule, providing a good and positive work environment where employees feel valued and relevant irrespective of their work does not hinder them from having the opportunity to learn, relearn and thrive and make an impactful input in the enterprise they work and the larger society.

At other times, goals set by administrators and the owners of most small enterprises are unrealistic and may have impeded the proportionate leadership and development/growth of small-scale enterprises. For employees, high turn-over can negatively affect employment relationships, moral and work place safety. The cost of replacing employees can be high, the problems associated with finding new employees can be considerable, and the specific workplace acquired skills and knowledge people walk away with can take year to replace. It is based on this background that it becomes expedient to investigate the effect and leadership styles and performance of small-scale enterprises in Cross River State, Nigeria.

In small scale business enterprises, it has impeded their capacity to employ large numbers of persons on an individual basis. As such, most small-scale enterprises are found to be able to employ very small number of staff. Even where small scale businesses, these same set of problems hinder their ability to offer competitive compensation packages to staff, thus

making them unable to compete with large firm for quality manpower. It is on the basis of the above observations that, the researcher wants to examine the relationship between leadership styles and diversity management in selected small-scale enterprises in Cross River State.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study was to examine the relationship between leadership styles and performance of small enterprises in Cross River State, Nigeria. The specific objectives include to:

- (i) Examine the relationship of between transformational leadership style on performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.
- (ii) Determine the relationship between autocratic leadership style on performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed for the study:

- (i) How does transformational leadership style relate to the performance of small business enterprises in Cross River State?
- (ii) What is the relationship between autocratic leadership style and performance of small business enterprises in Cross River State?

Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses formed the bases for this study:

- (i) Transformational leadership style has no significant relationship with performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.
- (ii) Autocratic leadership style has no significant relationship with performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.

Literature Review

Transformational leadership style

Transformational leadership was initiated by James McGregor Burns in 1978. According to Burns (1978) cited in Oyelade and Akpa (2022), a transformational leader can be defined as an individual that lifts the level of consciousness, in followers, about the value of specific desired results and the approaches of reaching the specific results. In order words, transformational leadership helps followers transform their behaviour from traditional to new way of thinking and to be innovative in the working environment. Transformational leadership is interested in motivation, goal attainment, team work and behaviours that help employees find meaning in their work and at the same time enjoy their work. Transformational leaders encourage subordinates to put in extra effort and go beyond what they (subordinates) expected before (Oyelade & Akpa, 2022)

According to Aghahowa (2021), the leader stimulates intellectual stimulation by inspiring followers to engage in critical thinking and discover novel ways to their careers. As a result of transformational leadership, an organization's organizational goal attainment, contentment, and commitment to its objectives would increase. These four components characterize transformative leadership; charisma, inspirational drive, intellectual stimulation, and personalized consideration (Obiwuru *et al.*, 2011; Effiong & Agbade, 2016; Agbade *et al.*, 2019). The first is charisma, or idealized influence, driven by a sense of purpose and objective, eliciting pride from the group and among its members and winning them over with respect and trust. The second is the inspirational drive, and according to Jyoti and Bhau (2015), a transformative leader inspires others to identify with him through his idealized and behavioural charm. A tailored relationship with a transformative leader helps create a positive

work environment. The third is intellectual stimulation, which exposes followers to novel, thought-provoking concepts and motivates them to abandon preconceived notions (Obiwuru *et al.*, 2011).

Oyelade and Akpa (2022) investigated the effect of transformational leadership on profitability of selected Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study was 8,395 which is the total number of registered SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. A sample size of 477 supervisors and middle managers of SMEs were enumerated using Cochran's (1977) formula. Adopted questionnaire was used and data was collected using a valid and reliable questionnaire with a Cronbach alpha value greater than 0.7. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential tools. Linear Regression Analysis was used to determine the effect of the variables using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25. The finding revealed that transformational leadership had effect on profitability ($\beta = 0.285$, $t = 2.987$, $R^2 = 0.049$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that there was a statistically significant effect of transformational leadership on profitability of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Therefore, the study recommended that transformational leadership style be used in Lagos State SMEs to attain profitability beyond expectations. This is because transactions are the foundation of transformations because when a leader honors his transactions with people, they come to trust the leader over time, and transformational leadership relies on higher levels of trust rather than compliance to achieve exemplary profitability and overall performance.

Autocratic leadership

An autocratic leader is perceived as a leader that is always aware of his position as a superior being, with little or no trust in their subordinates' ability to make better decisions (Chukwusa, 2018). The distinguishing traits of autocratic leaders are tradition and dominance; they anticipate their associates to follow their instructions (Al-Khajeh, 2018). In essence, autocratic rulers continue to exercise their authority (Obiwuru *et al.*, 2011; Igyu *et al.* 2022, Obi *et al.* 2020; Adie *et al.* 2019). An authoritarian employer thinks that paying workers is the only thing that can inspire them and that doing so is an appropriate reward for their hard work. This leadership style is characterized by total individual control over all decisions and little participation from group members. An autocratic/authoritarian leader is arbitrary, coercive, domineering, legitimate, power-focused, and oppressive (Olofu *et al.* 2024; Ushie *et al.* 2023; Olowonefa & Agbade, 2023; Al-Khajeh, 2018; Iqbal *et al.*, 2015).

Autocratic leaders make independent judgments and insist on strict adherence to the law. In most cases, these leaders often use centralized decision-making that takes full responsibility for their actions and those of their subordinates (Hogg, 2021). Autocratic leaders usually disregard their employees' viewpoints, make decisions based only on their convictions, and are perceived as totalitarian, having shown the traits of dictatorial control over their subordinates (Chukwusa, 2018). Other signs of autocratic leadership include little to no participation from group members, leaders making all choices, group leaders dictating all work procedures, and group members seldom being trusted with significant decisions or duties (Al Khajeh, 2018; Iqbal *et al.*, 2015).

Armstrong (2012) posit that the best scenarios when and where an autocratic leadership may be helpful include time of emergencies when tough decisions are needed to get an organization through rough patches. Additional precautions may be required in such cases to prevent a potential accident. On the other hand, autocratic leadership has several drawbacks, such as the inability of followers to feel pleasure in their accomplishments, the denial of personal growth or enjoyment from self-actualization and the tendency to irritate people and rob organizations of cooperation and long-term loyalty. Moreover, the dictatorial

approach is characterized by an "I tell" philosophy. Although this strategy might give a company a clear direction, it also has the potential to create issues (Obiwuru *et al.*, 2011).

However, an autocratic approach is occasionally necessary. It is useful when the company is in a crisis or when an issue must be addressed immediately (Bhargavi & Yaseen, 2016). Because there is no shared aim and force is the primary source of incentive, autocratic leadership is recognized for limiting devotion, creativity, and innovation (Al-Khajeh, 2018; Adie *et. al* 2019; Adie *et. al* 2019).

Ojelade *et al.*, (2020) examined the impact of autocratic leadership style on organization and employee performance in Mushin Local Government Education Authority, Lagos. Employee performance is measured by their level of output, initiative and productivity. The study employed descriptive survey design method through the use of a structured questionnaire. The data for this study was obtained by administering questionnaire on personnel in Mushin Local Government Education Authority, Lagos. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed with the help of chi square statistical tool to test the hypothesis. Finding from this study shows that the calculated chi-square (X^2) at 0.05 level of significance, is higher than the tabulated chi-square (X^2). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected which shows that autocratic leadership style has a positive impact on employee performance. It is recommended that leaders and managers should combine various leadership styles in proportions that produce a positive result when administering their leadership duties.

Performance expectation

This behavior shows the leader's expectations for followers to pursue excellence, quality and/or high performance, and motivates team members to re-examine certain assumptions about their work and think about how to improve (Jing, 2022). As enterprises become more and more formalized, leaders should pay more attention to performance improvement and build a high-performance team. Due to differences between employee personal goals and department goals, and between different department goals, various conflicts are inevitable. This requires leaders to take actions to coordinate various relationships and conflicts, balance their interests, and lead everyone to strive to improve performance, such as matching personnel and positions, redesigning positions, establishing reasonable performance standards and fair incentives System to stimulate the potential of employees and enable them to realize personal value while achieving high enterprise performance (Olofu *et. al* 2024; Agbade *et. al*, 2021)

Performance is an important building block of an organization and factors which lay the foundation for high performance must be analyzed by the organizations. Since every organization cannot progress by depending on one or two individuals' effort, it is collective effort of all the members of the organization (Ojelade *et al.*, 2020). Performance is a major multidimensional construct aimed to achieve results and has a strong link to strategic goals of an organization. Many employees in the workplace today seek a better understanding of the mind of a leader in an organization. However, employees are curious about the special traits, behaviours and styles that the leader exhibits at the workplace.

Results

Hypothesis one

Transformational leadership style has no significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.

Table 1: Correlation result showing the relationship between transformational leadership style and performance of small enterprises in Cross River State N= 504

Variables	Σx	Σx		
Σxy	Σy	Σy		Cal-r
Transformational leadership style (x)	3818	6995		
			89759	0.42
Performance (y)	3239	6578		

$P < 0.5$, $df = 502$, critical $r = 0.089$

The result summarized in Table 1 revealed that the calculated r - value of 0.42 is greater than the tabulated r - value of 0.89 at 0.05 level of significant and 502 degrees of freedom. The interpretation of this result is that transformational leadership style has significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.

Hypothesis two

Autocratic leadership style has no significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.

Table 2: Correlation result showing the relationship between autocratic leadership style and performance of small enterprises N= 504

Variables	Σx	Σx		
Σxy	Σy	Σy		Cal-r
Autocratic leadership style (x)	3693	6853		
			89826	0.46
Performance (y)	3693	6578		

$P < 0.5$, $df = 502$, critical $r = 0.089$

Table 2 indicated that the calculated r - value of 0.46 is greater than the critical value of 0.089 with 502 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. From the result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis is retained. This means that autocratic leadership style has significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State.

Discussion of findings

The first hypothesis states that transformational leadership style has no significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State. However, the result obtained from the analysis of data collected to test the null hypothesis was rejected. By implication, transformational leadership style has significant relationship with performance of small enterprises in Cross River State. The finding of this study is in accordance with the earlier finding of Oyelade and Akpa (2022) who investigated the

effect of transformational leadership on profitability of selected Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study was 8,395 which is the total number of registered SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. A sample size of 477 supervisors and middle managers of SMEs were enumerated using Cochran;s (1977) formula. Adopted questionnaire was used and data was collected using a valid and reliable questionnaire with a Cronbach alpha value greater than 0.7. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential tools. Linear Regression Analysis was used to determine the effect of the variables using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25. The finding revealed that transformational leadership had effect on profitability ($\beta = 0.285$, $t = 2.987$, $R^2 = 0.049$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that there was a statistically significant effect of transformational leadership on profitability of selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study recommended among others that transformational leadership style be used in Lagos State SMEs to attain profitability beyond expectations.

The second hypothesis states that autocratic leadership style has no significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State. However, the result obtained from the analysis of data collected to test the null hypothesis was rejected because the calculated value was found to be greater than the tabulated value. The interpretation of this result is that autocratic leadership style has significant relationship with the performance of small enterprises in Cross River State. The finding of this study is in line with the earlier finding of Ojelade *et al.*, (2020) who examined the impact of autocratic leadership style an organization and employee performance in Mushin Local Government Education Authority, Lagos. Employee performance is measured by their level of output, initiative and productivity. The study employed descriptive survey design method through the use of a structured questionnaire. The data for this study was obtained by administering questionnaire on personnel in Mushin Local Government Education Authority, Lagos. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed with the help of chi square statistical tool to test the hypothesis. Finding from this study shows that the calculated chi-square (X^2) at 0.05 level of significance, is higher than the tabulated chi-square (X^2). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected which shows that autocratic leadership style has a positive impact on employee performance. It is recommended that leaders and managers should combine various leadership styles in proportions that produce a positive result when administering their leadership duties.

Conclusion

The findings in this study showed that leadership styles and performance of small enterprises in Cross River State, Nigeria is best achieved through transformational leadership style and autocratic leadership style.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. That small enterprises should ensure that the transformational leadership structure should be flexible by adopting other leadership styles that will complement the most preferred style to meet up with the dynamic challenges of the small enterprises business.
- ii. That the leaders in small enterprises should also reflect on their personal and individual traits and how it influences their autocratic style to complement the lapses and drive employee and organizational goal attainment.

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