E-ISSN: 1116 - 3240 P-ISSN: 3026-9334
MPRI-JAIMR | INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF AFRICAN INNOVATION & MULTIDSCIPLINARY RES.
VOL. 14 NO. 2 – OCTOBER, 2026

INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR, LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS (A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED PUBLIC POLYTECHNICS IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA)

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/mejaimr.v14i2.0154

Abstract

This study examined innovative work behaviour and leadership as predictors of perceived institutional performance in five public polytechnics in North Central Nigeria. A descriptive survey covered Chief Lecturers and senior administrative officers. The stratified random sampling, a target of 384 respondents and 368 valid questionnaires, representing a 95.8% response rate. Data were collected through Google Forms and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression. Recalculation from the supplied item frequencies confirmed grand means of 3.84 for innovative work behaviour, 3.87 for leadership and 3.85 for institutional performance. The coefficient table indicated positive associations for innovative work behaviour ($B = 0.389$, $p < .001$) and leadership ($B = 0.453$, $p < .001$), supporting rejection of both null hypotheses. However, the supplied correlation matrix, standardised coefficients and model summary were not fully consistent; inferential conclusions therefore remain provisional. Respondents rated idea promotion, participation in decision-making, research innovation and administrative promptness less favourably than other indicators. The study recommends structured support for staff proposals, meaningful consultation, leadership development and monitored improvements in administrative services. The cross-sectional, perception-based design does not establish causal effects.

Keywords: innovative work behaviour; leadership; institutional performance; public polytechnics; North Central Nigeria.

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Introduction

Public polytechnics depend on staff expertise to deliver practical teaching, applied research and administrative services. Improvements in these activities require employees who can identify workable ideas and leaders who can support their development. This study examines these organisational resources together, using the perceptions of senior academic and administrative staff in five selected institutions. Its focus is the relationship between employee innovation, leadership practices and institutional performance.

Innovative work behaviour connects the development of ideas with efforts to secure support and implement them. Janssen (2000) provides a foundational treatment of this behaviour. In a polytechnic, an innovation might involve a revised practical exercise, a better workshop procedure or a simpler process for handling student records. Such examples illustrate the study constructs; they are not independently observed achievements of the sampled institutions.

Leadership provides a complementary perspective. Transformational behaviours encourage purpose and intellectual engagement, while transactional behaviours clarify expectations and accountability (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Participative leadership adds staff consultation and involvement in decisions (Wang et al., 2022). These approaches may coexist, but their separate contributions cannot be inferred from a single combined leadership score.

Statement of the problem

An institution may have knowledgeable employees without consistently turning their ideas into improvements in teaching, research or administration. Staff proposals require organisational attention, resources and decisions about implementation. The practical problem is therefore whether employee initiative and leadership practices are associated with the performance that senior staff report in the selected public polytechnics.

Existing higher education research links leadership with innovation and knowledge sharing (Al-Husseini et al., 2021), while recent evidence relates teachers' preparedness and engagement to innovative behaviour (Fu & Yan, 2026). These findings do not establish the combined relationship between innovative work behaviour, leadership and the particular performance measures used here.

Existing empirical evidence indicates that leadership and innovative work behaviour are associated with employee and organizational outcomes; however, the strength and nature of these relationships may vary according to institutional and environmental contexts. For example, recent studies in Nigerian higher education have examined innovative work behaviour in relation to high-performance work systems, employee creativity, knowledge sharing, ethical leadership, empowerment, and employee voice (Amoozegar et al., 2025; Enokela, 2025; Okanazu et al., 2024; Odoh et al., 2025). Other Nigerian studies have examined leadership and organizational performance in universities (Habeeb & Eyupoglu, 2024), while evidence from polytechnics has considered technological factors and institutional performance (Onifade & Adedire-Ampitan, 2024). International studies have similarly established relationships between leadership and innovative work behaviour (Bai et al., 2022; Kousina, 2023; Wahab et al., 2024). However, findings generated in different national, institutional, and organizational settings cannot automatically be assumed to apply to public polytechnics in North Central Nigeria. The present study therefore

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addresses this contextual question by empirically examining innovative work behaviour, leadership, and institutional performance among selected public polytechnics in North Central Nigeria.

This is particularly defensible because there is already Nigeria-specific evidence from higher education**,** but the recent literature still does not adequately establish the combined relationship among innovative work behaviour, leadership, and performance specifically within public polytechnics in North Central Nigeria**.**

Public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, particularly polytechnics, play an important role in developing technical, entrepreneurial, and professional skills required for national development. However, many public polytechnics face persistent challenges relating to institutional performance, including inadequate infrastructure and funding, bureaucratic procedures, limited adoption of emerging technologies, weak research and innovation capacity, staff motivation, and changing expectations from students and employers. These challenges have become more significant as tertiary institutions operate in an environment characterized by rapid technological advancement, digital transformation, resource constraints, and increasing demand for quality and industry-relevant education. Consequently, the ability of polytechnics to improve teaching and learning, research, administrative efficiency, community engagement, and graduate employability depends partly on their capacity to encourage employees to generate and implement new ideas and on the effectiveness of leadership in creating an environment conducive to innovation.

Innovative work behaviour involves employees generating, promoting, and implementing new ideas, methods, processes, or solutions within their work roles. Although employees in public polytechnics possess considerable professional knowledge and experience, institutional structures may not always provide sufficient opportunities, incentives, autonomy, resources, or leadership support for innovative behaviour. Leadership is particularly important because leaders influence organizational vision, resource allocation, communication, employee motivation, risk-taking, and the acceptance of new ideas. Where leadership is overly bureaucratic, centralized, or resistant to change, employees may be reluctant to introduce new approaches to teaching, research, administration, or service delivery. Conversely, leadership that encourages employee participation, creativity, experimentation, knowledge sharing, and constructive change may facilitate innovative work behaviour and potentially improve institutional performance. The problem, therefore, is that despite the importance of innovation and effective leadership to the performance of public tertiary institutions, the extent to which innovative work behaviour and leadership influence the performance of selected public polytechnics in North Central Nigeria remains insufficiently established. This creates an empirical gap that warrants investigation to determine the relationship among innovative work behaviour, leadership, and institutional performance and to provide evidence that can guide management in strengthening innovation-oriented leadership and improving the performance of public polytechnics in the region.

The key objective of the present study is to examine the relationship between innovative work behaviour and institutional performance, and to determine the relationship between leadership and institutional performance.

Hypotheses

HO1: Innovative work behaviour has no significant effect on the performance of selected public polytechnics in North Central Nigeria.

HO2: Leadership has no significant effect on the performance of selected public polytechnics in North Central Nigeria.

Innovative work behaviour

Innovative work behaviour comprises employee actions directed towards generating, promoting and applying useful ideas. The distinction between proposing an idea and implementing it is important: an employee may identify an improvement but lack the support to put it into practice. Janssen (2000) links innovative behaviour to work demands and perceived fairness, suggesting that the conditions surrounding work deserve attention alongside individual initiative.

This study operationalised innovative work behaviour through six items. Two concerned idea generation, including the search for new technologies and procedures; two concerned promoting ideas and obtaining leadership support; and two concerned converting ideas into routines and persisting with implementation. These items describe related activities. Their aggregation does not establish that each stage has an equal relationship with performance.

Leadership

Leadership was measured through transformational, participative and transactional practices. Transformational leadership concerns inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individual support. Transactional leadership concerns expectations, contingent rewards and corrective action (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Participative leadership concerns employees' involvement in decisions and the opportunity to contribute relevant knowledge (Wang et al., 2022). The questionnaire represented these practices through vision, questioning assumptions, consultation, delegation, standards and corrective action.

Institutional performance

Institutional performance was defined operationally through teaching and academic services, graduate competence, research and technical innovation, accreditation, administrative promptness and stakeholder responsiveness. These indicators cover several aspects of institutional activity. Because staff rated the items, the resulting score represents perceived performance rather than an independent audit of outputs or service standards.

The use of a broad performance measure is useful for examining overall staff perceptions, but it limits detailed conclusions. Accreditation, for example, is not interchangeable with research productivity or prompt transcript processing. A favourable overall mean can coexist with weaker ratings on particular services. The analysis therefore retains the item-level results alongside the grand means.

Theoretical review

The Full Range Leadership Model provides the principal leadership foundation. As presented by Bass and Riggio (2006), it distinguishes transformational and transactional behaviours within a

broader leadership framework. Its relevance here lies in the possibility that institutional leaders can encourage new approaches while maintaining responsibility for agreed standards. However, the present questionnaire does not measure the complete model, and participative leadership should not be treated as a separately tested component of it.

The dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation complements this foundation. Amabile and Pratt (2016) explain innovation through the interaction of personal capabilities, motivation and the organisational environment, incorporating progress and meaningful work into the creative process. This perspective helps explain why professional knowledge alone may be insufficient for implementing an idea. The present study applies this reasoning to staff proposals and institutional support; it does not directly test all components of the theory.

Together, these perspectives justify considering behaviour and leadership in the same model. They provide a rationale for the proposed relationships, rather than proof that leadership or innovation caused the observed performance ratings.

Empirical review

Al-Husseini et al. (2021) examined transformational leadership, knowledge sharing and innovation among higher education faculty. Their study provides relevant evidence on the connection between leadership and innovation, including the role of knowledge sharing. It differs from the present study, which uses a broader leadership construct and treats institutional performance as the outcome.

Wang et al. (2022) reviewed participative leadership and identified employee involvement in organisational decisions as a central feature. Their synthesis discusses favourable employee outcomes as well as contextual limitations. It supports examining consultation in the present questionnaire, but a literature review cannot establish the effectiveness of consultation in these particular polytechnics.

Fu and Yan (2026) analysed cross-sectional data from 432 university teachers in China. AI readiness and work engagement were positively associated with innovative work behaviour, while perceived digital leadership had a small moderating role in the readiness–engagement relationship. Their explicit distinction between association and causation is relevant here. The setting and constructs differ from those of the Nigerian survey, so the study offers contextual comparison rather than direct confirmation.

These verified studies support the relevance of leadership and innovation while leaving the present institutional setting and combined predictor model to be examined. Claims about specific Nigerian studies in the supplied draft were removed where their bibliographic details could not be established reliably.

Methods

The study used a descriptive survey design to obtain numerical accounts of existing practices without manipulating respondents' work environment. This approach is consistent with the quantitative research framework discussed by Creswell and Creswell (2023). The institutions were the Federal Polytechnic, Bida; the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa; Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin; Benue State Polytechnic, Ugbokolo; and Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin Ladi.

The target population comprised full-time Chief Lecturers and senior administrative officers, including Assistant Registrars, Senior Assistant Registrars, Principal Assistant Registrars and Deputy Registrars. The population is very large and consequently there was no consolidated population frame, hence the choice of using Cochran's (1977) formula for large-population:

$n_0 = Z^2p(1 - p) / e^2 = (1.96^2 \times 0.50 \times 0.50) / 0.05^2 = 384.16.$

The result produced a target population of 384. Thus, strict upward rounding of 384.16 gives 385; the recruitment target is retained as a historical study detail. The study adopts a stratified random sampling across institutions and identified staff categories (Chief Lecturers and senior administrative officers, including Assistant Registrars, Senior Assistant Registrars, Principal Assistant Registrars and Deputy Registrars).

A structured questionnaire titled Innovative Work Behaviour, Leadership and Institutional Performance Questionnaire was administered through Google Forms. Section A covered demographics, while Sections B–D contained six items for each of the three constructs. Responses were coded Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree = 1.

The questionnaire was reviewed by specialists in Business Administration and Educational Management and subsequently pilot-tested among 30 senior employees of Niger State Polytechnic, Zungeru, who were excluded from the main study sample. Of the 384 targeted respondents, 368 submitted valid questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 95.83%, calculated as (368 ÷ 384) × 100. The remaining 16 respondents, representing 4.17% of the target sample, were classified as non-respondents.

Table 1. Reliability statistics

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α
Innovative work behavior	6	.86
Leadership	6	.88
Institutional performance	6	.84
Overall instrument	18	.89

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

The coefficients suggest internally consistent item sets. Frequencies, percentages and weighted means summarised the responses. For each item, the mean was calculated as [5(SA) + 4(A) + 3(U) + 2(D) + 1(SD)] / 368. Each grand mean was the arithmetic average of its six unrounded item means. All item frequencies summed to 368. The neutral scale midpoint was 3.00. Means above 3.00 were interpreted as ratings on the agreement side of the scale; exactly 3.00 were treated as neutral.

Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression equation were:

$IP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IWB_i + \beta_2 L_i + \varepsilon_i,$

where IP denotes the perceived institutional performance score, IWB the innovative work behaviour score and L the leadership score. Each hypothesis corresponds to one regression coefficient, holding the other predictor constant. The decision threshold was $\alpha = .05$.

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Results

Innovative work behaviour

Table 2. Innovative work behavior

No.	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
1	148 (40.2)	132 (35.9)	36 (9.8)	30 (8.2)	22 (6.0)	3.96
2	135 (36.7)	144 (39.1)	38 (10.3)	30 (8.2)	21 (5.7)	3.93
3	128 (34.8)	134 (36.4)	46 (12.5)	37 (10.1)	23 (6.2)	3.83
4	120 (32.6)	126 (34.2)	54 (14.7)	42 (11.4)	26 (7.1)	3.74
5	122 (33.2)	132 (35.9)	48 (13.0)	41 (11.1)	25 (6.8)	3.77
6	124 (33.7)	129 (35.1)	51 (13.9)	39 (10.6)	25 (6.8)	3.78

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

1. Staff generate new ideas to improve pedagogical and administrative tasks.
2. Staff seek new technologies, teaching techniques and operational procedures.
3. Staff mobilise support to champion innovative ideas.
4. Staff convince institutional leaders of the value of new proposals.
5. Staff transform innovative concepts into institutional routines.
6. Staff persist in implementing creative solutions despite constraints.

Source: Field Survey via Google Forms, 2026

The grand mean was 3.84. Generating ideas had the highest mean (3.96), closely followed by seeking new technologies and procedures (3.93). Convincing institutional leaders of proposals received the lowest mean (3.74). Agreement and strong agreement together accounted for 66.8% of responses to that item, compared with 76.1% for generating ideas.

The pattern suggests that respondents viewed idea generation more favourably than gaining support for proposals. It identifies a potential management priority.

Table 3. Leadership practices

No.	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
1	153 (41.6)	133 (36.1)	35 (9.5)	28 (7.6)	19 (5.2)	4.01
2	138 (37.5)	135 (36.7)	42 (11.4)	31 (8.4)	22 (6.0)	3.91
3	126 (34.2)	131 (35.6)	46 (12.5)	38 (10.3)	27 (7.3)	3.79
4	131 (35.6)	139 (37.8)	41 (11.1)	34 (9.2)	23 (6.2)	3.87

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No.	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
5	129 (35.1)	134 (36.4)	44 (12.0)	36 (9.8)	25 (6.8)	3.83
6	124 (33.7)	132 (35.9)	50 (13.6)	37 (10.1)	25 (6.8)	3.80

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

1. Institutional heads communicate an inspiring vision.
2. Leaders encourage staff to question traditional assumptions.
3. Management involves staff in institutional decision-making.
4. Leaders delegate authority and encourage teamwork.
5. Leaders provide performance standards, rewards and feedback.
6. Management takes corrective action when errors occur.

Source: Field Survey via Google Forms, 2026

The leadership grand mean was 3.87. Communicating an inspiring vision received the highest mean (4.01), followed by encouraging staff to question assumptions (3.91). Involving staff in decision-making received the lowest mean (3.79), although 69.8% agreed or strongly agreed with that statement.

Respondents therefore gave favourable ratings to the leadership items while identifying consultation as comparatively less strong.

Table 4. Perceived institutional performance

No.	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
1	145 (39.4)	139 (37.8)	36 (9.8)	28 (7.6)	20 (5.4)	3.98
2	133 (36.1)	142 (38.6)	40 (10.9)	32 (8.7)	21 (5.7)	3.91
3	115 (31.2)	127 (34.5)	55 (14.9)	43 (11.7)	28 (7.6)	3.70
4	150 (40.8)	135 (36.7)	34 (9.2)	29 (7.9)	20 (5.4)	3.99
5	113 (30.7)	124 (33.7)	57 (15.5)	45 (12.2)	29 (7.9)	3.67
6	128 (34.8)	134 (36.4)	47 (12.8)	35 (9.5)	24 (6.5)	3.83

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.

1. The institution provides high-quality practical teaching and academic services.
2. Students demonstrate academic and technical competence on graduation.
3. Staff generate useful research, technical innovations and community solutions.
4. Academic and vocational programmes regularly receive accreditation.
5. Administrative processes are promptly completed.
6. The institution maintains high service quality and stakeholder responsiveness.

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Source: Field Survey via Google Forms, 2026

The performance grand mean was 3.85. Accreditation received the highest rating (3.99), followed by practical teaching and academic services (3.98). Administrative promptness had the lowest mean (3.67), followed by research and technical innovation (3.70). Agreement or strong agreement was 64.4% for administrative promptness and 65.8% for research and innovation. The lower relative ratings identify areas for service review.

Table 5. Pearson correlations

Variable	IWB	Leadership	IP
IWB	1	.652**	.695**
Leadership	.652**	1	.728**
IP	.695**	.728**	1

Note. N = 368; **p < .01, two-tailed, as marked in the supplied table. IP = institutional performance; IWB = innovative work behaviour.
Both predictors were positively correlated with perceived performance.

Table 6. Multiple regression coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	.584	.136	—	4.294	< .001
IWB	.389	.037	.392	10.514	< .001
Leadership	.453	.038	.476	11.921	< .001

Model summary: R = .771; R^2 = .594; adjusted R^2 = .592; standard error of estimate = .35824.
ANOVA: regression SS = 68.742, df = 2, MS = 34.371; residual SS = 47.018, df = 365, MS = .1288; total SS = 115.760, df = 367; F = 266.86, p < .001.
Source for Tables 5–6: SPSS output, 2026.

Hypothesis tests and discussion

H_{01}: The coefficient for innovative work behaviour was positive (B = .389, SE = .037, t = 10.514, p < .001). On the coefficient table, H_{01} is rejected at .05. Holding leadership constant, a one-unit difference in the innovation score corresponded to an estimated .389-unit difference in perceived performance.

H_{02}: Leadership had a positive coefficient (B = .453, SE = .038, t = 11.921, p < .001). On the same basis, H_{02} is rejected at .05. Holding innovative work behaviour constant, a one-unit difference in leadership corresponded to an estimated .453-unit difference in perceived performance.

The direction of the innovation result is compatible with the organisational relevance of implementing useful ideas described by Amabile and Pratt (2016). The leadership result is broadly compatible with the higher education evidence of Al-Husseini et al. (2021).

Leadership had the larger standardised coefficient, but the inconsistency prevents a firm ranking of the predictors. The R^2 of .594 describes model fit; the remaining variance includes omitted influences, measurement error and unexplained variation.

Conclusion and recommendations

The descriptive evidence shows generally favourable staff perceptions, with weaker relative ratings for promoting proposals, staff consultation, research innovation and administrative speed. The regression table supports rejection of both null hypotheses. Findings apply to participating staff in the selected institutions and should not be generalised to all Nigerian polytechnics.

For the innovation objective, management should establish a documented route for submitting, assessing and piloting staff proposals, with feedback and modest implementation support. Evaluation should record which proposals are implemented and whether they improve services.

For the leadership objective, institutional heads should strengthen consultation, delegate suitable decisions and provide clear performance feedback. Leadership development should be linked to observable changes in management practice. Administrative units should also track service turnaround times, while research units monitor completed and applied projects.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the receipt of an Institution Based Research (IBR) grant from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), Abuja, Nigeria, to conduct this research. We also appreciate the Management of Federal Polytechnic, Bida, for providing the enabling environment to conduct this research. Our special thanks to the Directorate of research, Federal Polytechnic Bida, for being so inspiring and supportive.

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