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INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of Nigeria's public sector, the demand for efficient and responsive service delivery necessitates a shift from traditional leadership models to more innovative approaches. This study investigates the role of innovative leadership as a transformative force in enhancing service delivery, using The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, Saki, as a case study. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of transformational, transactional, and distributed leadership, the research explores how innovation-driven leadership practices can reshape administrative performance, academic planning, and infrastructural development within public institutions. Through qualitative methodology and thematic analysis of [redacted]

secondary data, the study reveals that although there are emerging practices of digital transformation and participatory management at the Polytechnic, widespread implementation is hindered by systemic bureaucratic inertia, limited funding, and inconsistent leadership capacity. The findings underscore the

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significance of visionary and inclusive leadership styles that foster creativity, collaborative problem-solving, and strategic innovation. The research identifies a gap in existing literature concerning empirical analyses of innovative leadership within Nigeria's tertiary education sector. It contributes to filling this gap by providing context-specific insights into the interplay between leadership innovation and public sector performance. The study concludes that adopting innovative leadership is crucial for overcoming service delivery challenges in Nigerian public institutions. It recommends targeted leadership development, investment in ICT, decentralization of decision-making, and the incorporation of change management frameworks as essential strategies to foster an innovation-friendly environment.

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of public administration, leadership remains a critical determinant of organisational success. In Nigeria's public service, the demand for efficient, transparent, and responsive service delivery has never been greater. However, traditional leadership models have often fallen short of meeting these expectations. Innovative leadership, which emphasises creativity, adaptability, participatory decision-making, and strategic thinking, has emerged as a promising approach to transforming public service outcomes.

The effectiveness of public sector organizations hinges significantly on the quality and style of leadership that guides institutional direction. In recent years, the demand for improved service delivery in Nigeria's public sector has intensified, necessitating a shift from traditional leadership models to more innovative, adaptive, and result-oriented approaches. Innovative leadership involves the capacity to generate and implement novel ideas that enhance organizational performance, foster inclusiveness, and drive sustainable improvements in service delivery (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

In the Nigerian context, poor service delivery has often been attributed to bureaucratic inefficiencies, rigid leadership styles, corruption, and lack of accountability (Adewumi & Arogundade, 2020). Innovative leadership, characterized by strategic thinking, creativity, collaboration, and proactive problem-solving, is increasingly seen as a key driver in addressing these issues. According to Eze, Nwankwo, and Obi (2021), public institutions that embrace

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innovative leadership tend to outperform others in terms of responsiveness, transparency, and citizen engagement.

Okafor & Oluwale (2022) argue that the absence of innovation-driven leadership in public institutions contributes significantly to service delivery failures. Innovative leadership integrates modern managerial practices, technological adaptability, and stakeholder inclusiveness to drive performance (Adebayo & Oladipo, 2021). The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, as a microcosm of Nigeria's public service, presents an ideal case for examining how leadership innovation can enhance service outcomes, particularly in administration, academic planning, and infrastructural development.

At The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, Saki a key educational institution in Oyo State the leadership structure plays a critical role in shaping staff performance, student satisfaction, and institutional development. There is growing concern, however, about the adequacy of leadership practices in meeting modern service delivery demands. This study therefore investigates how innovative leadership contributes to effective service delivery in the public sector, using the Polytechnic as a case study.

The Nigerian public service has long been criticised for inefficiency, corruption, poor service delivery, and lack of innovation. Despite numerous reforms, challenges persist, especially at The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, Saki. Therefore the study is seek to examine the nature and characteristics of innovative leadership in public service at The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, Saki and determine the relationship between innovative leadership and effective service delivery.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous leadership reforms and policies aimed at improving service delivery in Nigeria's public service, the outcomes remain suboptimal. In institutions like The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, issues such as bureaucratic delays, inadequate infrastructure, poor staff motivation, and ineffective administrative processes persist. There is a growing concern about whether leadership practices in these institutions are in tune with modern innovations necessary for driving change. This study seeks to investigate whether the adoption of innovative leadership can be a viable solution to these service delivery challenges.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Innovation

Innovation can be thought of as an antecedent to innovation (James, Guile, & Unwin, 2016). Innovation can involve developing, implementing, generating, and adopting new ideas, methods, programs, and policies to achieve organisational goals. Innovation can be crucial to achieving profitability, including in the higher education sector (McClure, 2016). Innovation gives organisations the ability to respond and adapt to environmental and technological change. Innovative organisations have the capacity to improve individual and organisational performance, solve problems, and create competitive advantage (Trott, 2008).

In organisations, various forms of innovation occur. Liao, Fei, and Chen (2007) and Dewar and Dutton (1986), for example, made a distinction between radical and incremental innovation. According to Tidd and Bessant (2011), product and process can be used to understand innovation. Daft (1978) concentrated on administrative and technical innovation. Others have proposed a variety of forms, including positional, system-based, behavioural, and paradigm innovation (Walker, 2007; Obendhain and Johnson, 2004).

Leadership

Leadership is defined as the process through which one person motivates a group of people to work towards a common goal (Northouse 2021). This definition of leadership is not the only definition; scholars variously define the concept. Followers constitute an important element in the leadership process, as they legitimise a leader's position (Ford and Harding 2018; Maxwell 2018; Reiley and Jacobs 2016). A leader's role is to set a clear vision, instill confidence, and motivate subordinates towards the accomplishment of collective goals. In Namibia, service delivery by local authorities remains a subject of heated debate and public scrutiny. The process entails the delivery of municipal services to the public. Studies have shown that residents are not satisfied with municipal service delivery in Namibia (Helao 2015; Kalonda and Govender 2021; Kooper 2021). Research on the influence of leadership on service delivery in times of change remains scarce in Namibia. Previous studies have attempted to investigate the challenges hampering service delivery in municipalities (Kolil et al. 2019; Makanyeza et al. 2013; Mbandlwa and Mishi 2020). The literature shows that leadership practices

(Kouzes and Posner 2012) can influence service delivery (Caillier 2014; Chen et al. 2015) in Town Councils in various ways. A study found a significant relationship between leadership and service delivery in County Governments (Kolil et al. 2019). The results showed that leadership accounts for a 35% improvement in service delivery.

Transformational, transactional, democratic, bureaucratic, authoritarian, laissez-faire, cunning, toxic, charismatic, people-oriented, servant, and task-oriented leadership are among the various forms and styles of leadership that must be used effectively and quickly in order to accomplish societal goals and sustainable development without any rancour. In order to achieve sustained innovation in the public sectors of society, each of these leadership styles is significant based on how it is used.

When it comes to promoting sustainable public sector innovation, leadership is essential and indispensable. The vision, dedication, and sound judgement of leaders from a variety of industries determine whether such innovation succeeds or fails. Establishing a vision, goals, and successful objectives are some of the most important ways that leaders can create innovations that are accessible in the public sector. This vision acts as a compass, directing efforts towards highly innovative development. When making decisions, they take into account social, political, economic, and environmental aspects. Leaders motivate and inspire people, groups, teams, and communities to take an active part in long-term innovation projects (Anderson, 2019).

Effective communication is crucial for leaders because it allows them to get support and understanding from a variety of stakeholders by explaining complicated topics in an understandable and straightforward way. Leaders must therefore actively listen to a range of viewpoints and use inclusive decision-making procedures. Another leadership skill is problem-solving; to analyse communication, identify the underlying reasons, and create workable solutions, leaders require excellent analytical abilities. In the face of uncertainty, the capacity for critical thought and well-informed decision-making is essential (Chin, Tat, and Sulaiman, 2015). As a result, leaders with these attributes and competencies are better able to negotiate the terrain of complicated innovation problems and help create inclusive and long-lasting solutions.

Leadership Styles

Leadership style is more important for effective leadership. Therefore, it is essential for a leader to be able to take command and determine if a circumstance calls for an executive choice or one that is more consultative. To succeed, an effective leader must be able to identify the best leadership style for a given situation or organisation. Knowing one's leadership style and being adaptable to changing conditions will probably yield further benefits. It will also enable a leader to assume responsibility, control, and ownership for the magnitude and extent of the duties that lie ahead. Styles of leadership include

Democratic Leadership

This type of leadership is popular and effective because it gives the poor or lower-level employees a voice, which makes them equally important in the organisation or society. It involves delegating authority to others who decide work assignments and uses the skills and experiences of other members to carry out tasks. A democratic leadership style is one in which the leader makes decisions based on input from the team and other members. It is a collaborative and consultative leadership style where each team member has an opportunity to contribute to the direction of ongoing projects, but the leader retains the final say.

Bureaucratic Leadership

Leaders in bureaucracies follow the book. They make sure that their employees or followers precisely follow set procedures and strictly abide by the organization's or nation's current rules and regulations. This is a particularly appropriate style for tasks with major safety risks or where large sumss of money are involved. Bureaucratic leaders place a strong focus on specialisation, division of labour, and adherence to administrative procedures. (2024, Ramakrishnan).

Authoritarian or Autocratic Leadership

In this situation, executives have complete control over their employees, and they are rarely or never given the chance to offer proposals, even if they might benefit the company or the nation (Ugwuegbu, 1992). In this instance, the leader makes all choices on behalf of the populace without consulting them or soliciting their

opinions. All power and accountability rest with the leader (Villanova University, 2022).

Laissez-faire Leadership

Instead of taking charge, a laissez-faire leader lets the group or individuals handle everything on their own. Subordinates under such a leader are granted the greatest amount of autonomy; they are allowed to choose their own policies and procedures. Group members receive little to no direction from laissez-fairee leaders. This approach frequently results in jobs that are not well defined and low motivation, even while it may work well when group members are highly skilled in a particular field (Cherry, 2024).

Transformational Leadership

The main goal of transformational leadership is to change organisations or teams by motivating employees to continuously raising the bar and doing things they never believed they could. Igbokwe-Ibeto and Fatile (2013) assert that transformative leadership raises, changes, and affects the values and motivations of followers. The realisation of major change that reflects the combined interests of leaders and followers serves as a test of the higher aims it unifies varied people to pursue (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Fatile, 2013). Expecting the best of their team, transformational leaders continuously push people until their work, lives, and enterprises undergo a significant change or transformation (Odumeru and Ogbonna 2013).

Transactional leadership

Described as a give-and-take type of transaction, transactional leadership is more short-term. Employees are compensated for precisely the work they would have done since the team members consent to follow their leader when accepting a position. You earn the bonus you were promised if you reach a specific goal (St. Thomas University (STUU), 2014).

Servant Leadership

A leader who practices servant leadership puts the needs of the team above their own. A servant leader puts their team's needs ahead of their own. It's also a way

to set an example. Following their charismatic leadership, servant leaders look for ways to help others grow, improve, and be inspired.

Charismatic leadership leverages charisma to encourage and inspire followers. These leaders inspire a lotot of passion in their teams and are very enthusiastic in pressing people forward. However, charismatic leaders have a propensity to have more faith in themselves than in their teams, which increases the likelihood that if they depart, a project or even an entire organisation may fail. Charismatic executives don't provide tasks to their staff members and take on an excessive amount of labour (Murray, 2020).

Strategic Leadership: The organization's growth opportunities are coordinated and its primary activities are led by strategic leadership. Multiple employee layers can be supported simultaneously by the leader. As a result, it is clear that no single leadership style is appropriate for all companies or circumstances; in order to achieve sustainable growth in Nigeria and throughout Africa, it may be necessary to alternate between many leadership philosophies (Reynolds, 2022).

Ethical leadership highlights the moral and ethical aspects of effective leadership. Fairness, justice, and integrity are the top priorities of ethical leaders, who provide an example of moral behaviour for their businesses (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2015). Positive organisational outcomes, such as greater job satisfaction, decreased unethical behaviour, and more employee trust, are associated with this style.

Distributed leadership is a new idea that puts more emphasis on group leadership techniques than on individual leaders. According to Gronn (2016) and Spillane (2016), leadership need to be seen as a collaborative endeavour that involves many different people of an organisation. This viewpoint acknowledges the intricacy of contemporary organisational settings, where teamwork and the blending of many specialities are crucial. A more inclusive and participative attitude is promoted by distributed leadership, which improves organisational flexibility and creativity.

Authentic leadership highlights the significance of self-awareness, openness, and moral conduct. In order to build trust and authenticity inside their organisations, leaders are urged to be loyal to their beliefs and ideals (Avolio & Gardner, 2015). This strategy is in line with the modern business environment's growing emphasis on moral leadership and corporate social responsibility.

Public Sector Innovation

Implementing innovative concepts, procedures, goods, or services inside an organisation to boost productivity, competitiveness, and long-term growth is known as organisational innovation. Organisational innovation includes a wider range of modifications that affect how the organisation functions, collaborates, and generates value, in contrast to technological or product innovation, which concentrates on particular breakthroughs or advancements.

Public sector innovation is a term that has gained much attention over recent years as a response to the necessity for adaptation by the government as well as public institutions to keep pace with rapidly evolving societal needs, technological developments, and financial pressures. Public sector innovation involves new and better approaches, services, and processes improving efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness in public services (Mulgan & Albury, 2016). Public sector innovation is the practice of applying new concepts, practices, technologies, or methods with a view to enhancing provision of public services, improving efficiency in governance, and confronting societal problems.

Based on Mulgan & Albury (2016), public sector innovation is defined as implementing new or significantly refined policies, procedures, products, or organisational structures. Public sector innovation encompasses introducing new ways of thinking that improve the performance and responsiveness of public institutions. The history of public sector innovation can be traced back to global public management reforms in the latter part of the 20th century, with reference to the New Public Management (NPM) movement. NPM promoted adopting practices from the private sector in public administration such as focusing on performance management, customer orientation, and decentralization (Hood, 2019). This transition paved the way for an environment that is more open to innovation in the public sector by instilling efficiency, accountability, and excellence in services.

One of the most seminal theories in examining public sector innovation is Rogers' (2016) diffusion of innovations theory. This theory, initially created to identify how innovations diffuse in society, has been used to examine how new practices and ideas are implemented in public organisations. The theory's components, for instance, such as the process of innovation-decision and roles performed by a

change agent, create a framework for analyzing adoption and implementation of innovations in the public sector.

One other major input to the literature is the theory of open innovation, championed by Chesbrough (2003). Public sector open innovation is harnessing outside ideas, information, and sources for driving innovation in government agencies. This is different from the more classical, closed model of innovation, in which innovation is kept within organisational walls. Public-private partnerships, crowdsourcing, and collaboration with research institutions are just a few open innovation strategies that have become vital to resolving complicated public priorities (Hilgers & Ihl, 2020).

Challenges and Effects of Leadership on Public Sector Innovation

Leadership styles have a major impact on organisational innovation through creating an environment that is favorable to creativity and new idea development. Various leadership styles generate different organisational environments, characterised by different levels of employees' motivation, information flow, and potential for innovation. Transformational leadership is widely supported as the most supportive style for generating innovation. Transformational leaders motivate and engage employees by developing a future vision, stimulating new idea pursuit, and rewarding risk-taking. Transformational leaders engage in behaviours like idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass, 1985). By facilitating a shared vision, transformational leaders foster a feeling of purpose and belonging among employees, which may generate greater intrinsic motivation and engagement in innovative pursuits. Intellectual stimulation inspires employees to question orthodoxies, to think creatively, and to search for novel possibilities and, as such, to innovate (Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2016).

Additionally, transformational leaders also deliver individualised consideration by identifying and fulfilling employees' unique needs and potential. Such personalized attention may assist in developing the unique skill sets and creativity of team members to better enable them to contribute in terms of fresh idea generation. Empirical research has also established that transformational leadership is positively related to organisational innovation across different industries and environments (García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, & GutiérrezGutiérrez, 2016).

Transactional leadership, with an orientation towards routine, procedures, and reward for performance, is less directly involved with innovation. Transactional leaders apply contingent reward and management-by-exception to provide stability and accomplish established goals. Although this style can improve efficiency and performance within established systems effectively, it cannot always excel at generating radical innovation. Its focus on compliance with procedures and immediate goals can hamper creativity and risk-taking, as workers may become more interested in achievement of established goals rather than in trying something new (Bass, 1985).

Despite this, transactional leadership is still capable of facilitating incremental innovation. By setting out clear frameworks, standards, and compensation, transactional leaders can foster an environment where employees become safe and encouraged to propose incremental improvements and fine-tuning to established procedures and goods. Such leadership is applicable in situations where ongoing improvement and optimisation are vital to sustaining competitiveness (Jansen, Vera, & Crossan, 2019).

Laissez-faire leadership, with its hands-off style and low levels of intervention, has both positive and negative impacts on organisational innovation. On the one hand, autonomy and freedom under laissez-faire leadership can motivate employees to try out new concepts without fear of over-control. This can be an environment that fosters innovation, especially in its application in teams with high levels of competence and motivation, where employees crave autonomy (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2016).

Conversely, the insufficiency in guidance and support is a feature of laissez-faire leadership that can result in confusion, directionlessness, and inefficiency. Employees may have difficulties coordinating efforts, exchanging information, and relating innovative activity with organisational objectives when there is no clear vision and leadership presence. This can lead to opportunities for innovation getting missed and creativity getting difficult to develop into practical achievements. Literature reveals that lower levels of innovation are most commonly related to laissez-faire leadership than with other active and involved leadership styles (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2017).

Beyond these core leadership styles, hybrid styles and environmental factors also assume a key role in organisational innovation. The leaders whose style is flexible

enough to fit into team needs and also to match a given circumstance are likely to create an innovative organisational environment. A leader, for example, can utilize transformational behaviors to create a vision for transformation and use transactional strategies in order to implement new concepts and processes effectively.

Bureaucratic Process on Innovation

Innovation and bureaucratic procedures have a complicated and nuanced interaction. The purpose of bureaucratic processes, which are defined by formalised rules, hierarchical structures, and standardised procedures, is to guarantee efficiency, control, and consistency inside organisations. However, depending on how they are handled and used, these same qualities can either promote or impede creativity. According to Max Weber (1922), bureaucracy is an organisational structure that depends on a distinct division of work, a hierarchy of authority, and a set of formal rules and procedures to direct operations and decision-making. Large and complex organisations require a stable and predictable environment, which is created by these components. However, Bureaucracies tend to emphasise rule-following and the minimisation of errors, which can discourage employees from taking risks and experimenting with new approaches. This risk aversion is often reinforced by the hierarchical nature of bureaucratic organisations, where decisions are made at higher levels of authority and lower level employees have limited autonomy. However, this rigidity and emphasis on adherence to established procedures can often stifle creativity and innovation. The inflexibility of bureaucratic systems can hinder the flow of new ideas and slow down the implementation of innovative solutions. As a result, creative ideas may be hindered by the necessity for numerous permissions and the fear of negative ramifications for failure (Burns & Stalker, 2021).

The division of labor in bureaucratic organizations can lead to siloed thinking, hindering cross-functional collaboration and knowledge sharing. This lack of communication and integration can result in missed opportunities for creative problem-solving and the development of novel solutions, as departments and individuals focus on their specific tasks and responsibilities (Lawrence & Lorsch, 2017).

Bureaucratic processes can be both challenging and supportive for innovation. The formalization and standardization of bureaucracy can create a stable foundation for innovative activities. Standardized processes ensure efficient routine tasks, freeing up resources for more creative endeavors. Clear procedures and guidelines provide a structured environment, reducing uncertainty and allowing employees to explore new ideas within a defined framework (Adler & Borys, 2016).

The hierarchical structure of bureaucracies can foster innovation by efficiently allocating resources and aligning strategic priorities with organizational goals. Top-down leaders, committed to innovation, can champion new initiatives, secure funding, and remove obstacles, overcoming resistance to change often found in bureaucratic organizations. This top-down support is crucial for overcoming inertia (Damanpour, 2021).

Gap in Literature

While several studies (e.g., Afolabi & Musa, 2020; Obasi, 2021) have explored traditional and transformational leadership in Nigeria, very few have addressed innovative leadership specifically within the context of tertiary public institutions like The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic. Furthermore, empirical data linking leadership innovation to service delivery outcomes in these settings is limited. This research fills this critical gap by providing a contextual and data-driven exploration.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design using secondary data to explore the relationship between innovative leadership and service delivery in Nigeria's public sector. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes on leadership innovation and service delivery.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings suggest that leadership at The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic is gradually adopting innovation through digital transformation in academic records, staff training, and participatory management. However, implementation is inconsistent across departments.

Innovative leadership practices have enhanced transparency in administrative procedures and improved response time in service delivery. However, bureaucratic inertia and lack of funding hinder full implementation.

The findings align with broader challenges in Nigeria's public service where innovative leadership is often stifled by systemic inefficiencies and cultural resistance to change.

The study supports Okafor & Oluwale (2022) and Adebayo & Oladipo (2021) who argue that innovative leadership fosters creativity and proactive service delivery. It also highlights gaps in leadership capacity development in tertiary institutions.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive assessment of the impacts of leadership on public sector innovation in Nigeria has shed light on the intricate challenges and opportunities that many organisations face. Specifically, it is evidently shown that leadership styles that that connote the conducive to collaboration, creativity, and employee empowerment promote innovation, while rigid bureaucratic processes hinder it.

This study concludes that innovative leadership is a crucial catalyst for effective service delivery in Nigeria's public sector. In the context of The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, innovative practices though emerging have begun to yield positive results. However, institutional limitations such as funding constraints, leadership inertia, and lack of strategic training must be addressed to optimize these gains. The study reinforces the notion that without innovative and transformative leadership, public institutions will continue to underperform in service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations outlines key steps that can help Nigeria harness the potential of technology, sustainably manage their resources, and respond effectively in innovation in Nigerian public sectors.

i. Regular leadership development programs focused on innovation, ICT integration, and change management should be implemented for all senior staff.
ii. Public sector policies should support decentralization of power and encourage bottom-up decision-making to foster innovation.
iii. Investment in ICT infrastructure is vital for innovative tools and platforms that enhance service delivery efficiency.
iv. Institutions should adopt structured change management models to reduce resistance among staff.

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v. Introduce evaluation metrics that reward innovation, creativity, and problem-solving in leadership assessments.
vi. Nigeria should encourage the adoption of transformational and participative leadership styles. These leadership approaches foster creativity, motivate employees to think innovatively, and encourage collaboration across sectors.
vii. Nigeria should streamline its administrative procedures. Reducing unnecessary layers of approval, decentralising decision-making, and implementing more flexible policies can help create an environment where innovative ideas can flourish. This will enhance the organisation's ability to respond quickly to new opportunities and challenges, facilitating innovation in the public sector.
viii. Government should prioritise the allocation of resources to support innovation in the public sectors. This includes securing more funding for research and development, investing in modern technologies, and providing staff with adequate training and development opportunities.

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