

Leadership Style and Employees' Productivity in Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

With work/service quality as a metric for employee performance, the study looked at leadership styles and worker performance in small and medium-sized businesses in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The cross-sectional survey design was selected as the appropriate research approach, and the structured questionnaire instrument was utilised to gather primary data for this study. Regression analysis and descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in the data analysis process. The unexpected findings regarding laissez-faire leadership raise important questions about its interpretation and practice within Bayelsa State SMEs. The analysis's findings showed a statistical correlation between the combined set of leadership styles (autocratic, transformational, and transactional), while the laissez-faire style reported a negative and insignificant relationship on work/service quality among small and medium-sized enterprises in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Among other things, the researcher recommended that SMEs implement leadership development programs that focus on the fundamental elements of transformational leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, leadership styles, autocratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, employees, productivity, work quality.

Introduction

Employees' productivity is a crucial factor for businesses, because, most often than not, organisations principally relate their success to the productivity of their staff. Higher productivity yields beneficial growth in their economies, significant profits, and improved societal advancement (Sharma & Sharma, 2014). Better pay, better working conditions, and more effective employees also have access to attractive employment opportunities. According to Hill et al. (2014), increased performance can maximise a company's comparative edge by reducing expenses and generating better results. Moreover, a higher level of productivity often translates into improved customer service, and a satisfied customer is likely to be more loyal to the organisation's brand. The report revealed that in all professions, the average worker is only productive for roughly 60% of the day; however, office clerical staff have a significantly lower productivity rate (Quixy, 2024). Research by Voucher Cloud cited in Quixy (2024) shows that a typical employee at work only produces two hours and twenty-three minutes of labour per day. Mahajan (2024) found that 48 per cent of employees reported that they are productive at work less than 75% of the time. Accordingly, most employees are not engaged at work or are actively disengaged and such could result in a 7 trillion-dollar loss in productivity annually (Gallup, 2024).

Several factors have been identified as issues causing low levels of employees' productivity at the workplace, among which include obesity and other chronic health-related issues, multitasking, stress-related disorders, unproductive meetings, time spent on social media

like Facebook, Twitter (X) and so on. While some employees, as well as employers, usually believe that multitasking can improve productivity, contrary, reports show otherwise as statistics reveal that multitasking decreases employees' productivity by 40 per cent (SoftActivity, 2024). Similarly, inefficient use of productive time at the workplace caused low productivity.

Reports reveal that every year, employees lose over 24 billion hours as a result of ineffective gatherings, which lowers productivity at work (Quixy, 2024). In addition, obesity and other chronic health-related issues, stress-related disorders, and time spent on social media, cost employers around the world a whopping sum of about 150 billion dollars, 200 to 300 billion dollars and 28 billion dollars, respectively, per year (Quixy, 2024). While the cost associated to productivity might be alarming and humongous, continuous training, employee recognition programme, proper resources allocation, effective managerial practices explored through different leadership styles and approaches, just to mention but few, can mitigate the issues of unproductivity or low employee productivity at work organisations (Malek, 2024).

Accordingly, Okoh (1998), cited in Okafor (2013), affirms effective leadership as the fundamental avenue through which productivity can be enhanced at the workplace. To create a foundation for economic equilibrium and the equal partnership between employers and employees to guarantee increased efficiency, it is necessary to positively influence worker behaviour in addition to the requirement that managers and staff meet on regular intervals to discuss issues of shared interest, wages, the work atmosphere, and additional benefits. This can be achieved through effective leadership. Olayisade & Awolusi (2021) described leadership as the skill to get tasks done via others. Leadership helps people realise their potential and develop new skills, and not all about usurping authority over someone else. It is about positively influencing others to achieve greater heights. Although effective leadership entails giving an organisation clarity of purpose, inspiring, and guiding it to realise its mission, leadership is a crucial component of management that supports directing the assets of an enterprise to increase productivity and accomplish corporate objectives. Leadership plays an important role in helping all organisations actualise their objectives. The accomplishments or shortcomings of a business are reliant on how well all levels of management performance is a vital component in improving the productivity and general performance of most, if not all, organisations.

Nonetheless, there has been a lot of research conducted in the past decade on methods of leadership. Given that innovative management and transactional management have been demonstrated to be very effective methods for increasing leaders' efficiency, Hassi (2018) deduced that most of these studies concentrated on these approaches. In this case, managers can motivate, excite, and energise their workers to meet the necessary objectives (Andersen, 2016). While most organisations utilise different leadership styles, including transactional, laissez-faire, autocratic and transformational leadership styles in achieving employees' productivity, organisational efficiency and economic growth, among managers, autocratic leadership is the most preferred style, in several industries, according to Ipas (2012), who claims that this approach delivers the best results. While Gimuguni et al. (2014) indicate a significantly favourable link between authoritarian, laissez-faire, and democratic leadership styles and performance, Tsigu & Rao (2015) believe that transaction leadership is a poorer explanation for the variance in employee performance when compared to transformation leadership. Contrarily, Aboushaqah et al. (2014) in a study showed a negative correlation between employee performance and a laissez-faire leadership style. This implies that there is conflicting data regarding this leadership approach.

Based on the review of literatures above, it is obvious leadership styles can have crucial impact on employee productivity at individual and managerial level, however, studies on different

types of leadership styles and employees' productivity in small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria, particularly in Bayelsa state, is lagging, irrespective of the strategic significance of these enterprises to the growth and advancement of Bayelsa state.

The introduction of small and medium-sized businesses in Nigeria could be traced to 1945, when the paper on "A Ten-year Plan of Development and Welfare of Nigeria 1946" was published. Ever since, the sector has been growing in terms of participants. According to data from 2010, over 32 million people are working in the SMEs sector overall, which supports the industry's importance and ability to address economic problems, including robbery, smuggling, child trafficking, and kidnapping. Corroborating, reports indicate that small and medium scale enterprises employ more than eighty-four per cent of Nigeria's workforce, accommodate almost ninety-six per cent of businesses in the country and account for nearly forty-eight per cent of Gross Domestic Product (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). In spite of these, the performance of these enterprises remains low. Nigerian Small and Medium Businesses Development Agency (SMEDAN, 2018) reports that a large number of Nigerian SMEs fail during the initial five years of use as a result of a variety of hurdles, including inadequate financing and infrastructure deficits. The issue of poor productivity affecting SMEs can be identified and remedied through effective leadership. Peter (2023) opines that effective leadership can improve workers' job performance and behaviour, and boost their productivity.

Against this background, this study intends to ascertain how leadership philosophies affect workers' output in small and medium-sized enterprises in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study will assess the effect of autocratic, laissez-faire, transactional and transformational leadership styles on work/service quality in small and medium-scale enterprises in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Leadership style

A single specific definition of leadership is extremely difficult to come by because there is a wide range of literature and studies on the subject, and no definition that is widely and universally accepted. The term "leader" was first used in organisations around 1300 AD to acknowledge the part that rulers and statesmen play, but it was not until the early 19th century that it was used to describe the activity carried out by "leaders" (Hawkins et al., 2011). Wammy & Swammy (2014) view leadership as a method of social impact where the leader tries to get subordinates to voluntarily participate to accomplish the goals of the organisation. According to Kifle (2023), when a group and a person are united by a shared interest, leadership occurs when the group acts in a way that the leader directs or determines. Some definitions state that leadership is an act of influence, while others describe it as a process, and still others have examined a person's characteristic traits.

Silaen et al. (2021) opine that part of an individual's leadership capacity is to persuade people to support their objectives, thus, the need for leadership style. Kuncoro (2021) states that leadership style is an individual's way (leadership) of impacting other people or their subordinates to be willing to do what they want, to achieve organisational goals. The manner a leader provides instructions is referred to as their leadership style (Kiboss & Jemiryott, 2014), carry out strategies and inspires others to meet company objectives. Gutterman (2023) described leadership styles as a direct influence on employees' work performance, leading them to meet their goals and discover their roles in the organisation. Yahaya & Ebrahim (2016) identified leadership style based on the use of authority; they mentioned the autocratic, democratic and the free vein leaders.

Consequently, over the years, new ideas, for instance, servant, transformational, and transactional styles of leadership have been incorporated into leadership styles (Lynch, 2016). The Whole Spectrum of Leadership Theory later incorporated these leadership philosophies (transformational and transactional leadership). As a result, three different leadership styles are identified by the entire spectrum of leadership theory: transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire (Udovita, 2020). But according to Ali et al. as cited in Mansaray (2019), the most prominent leadership philosophies used in corporate organisations are bureaucratic, transformational, laissez-faire, transactional, democratic, strategic, authoritarian, or autocratic leadership, and servant leadership.

Autocratic Leadership Style

In an autocratic leadership style, the manager is the centre of authority as well as accountability. Autocratic leadership, also referred to as authoritarian leadership, is described as controlling, as such, it is acquired through sanctions, demands, directives, threats, guidelines, and laws (Duguma, 2019). Authoritarian leadership roles incorporate one-sided rule-making, task-assignment, and problem-solving, while authoritarian followers obey the leader's orders without question or comment. Autocratic leadership can be useful when managers need to make quick decisions before contacting a large number of individuals. This style of leadership is useful when a catastrophe strikes the company or an urgent issue emerges that needs to be addressed right away. Most of the time, an autocratic leader makes decisions based on their own opinions and judgments, rarely taking followers' recommendations into account (Zareen et al., 2015).

Laissez-faire Leadership Style

The French phrase "laissez-faire" translates to "let it be." It talks about executives who let their employees work independently (Alan, 2013). According to Kendoa (2013), allowing group members to make decisions on their own is a component of laissez-faire leadership. Laissez-faire leadership has drawn attention in a variety of organisational contexts and is frequently defined by a hands-off style whereby managers offer little direction and let members make decisions on their own (Darwish, 2024). Laissez-faire managers have a mindset of trust and dependence on their employees. Laissez-faire leadership has been largely regarded as the most indifferent leadership style that may have a variety of detrimental effects on employees. They encourage their staff to assist them in accomplishing their objectives by utilising their assets, expertise, and inventiveness. They do not become too involved or micromanage, and they do not give too much guidance (Parveen et al., 2022). Nonetheless, numerous studies have demonstrated that laissez-faire leadership may not always result in poor results. For example, Chaudhry & Javed (2012) stated that laissez-faire leadership has a positive influence but no connection with employee willingness to work, while Fiaz et al. (2017) noted that laissez-faire leadership has a significant impact on motivation. More recently, Oprea et al. (2022) discovered that laissez-faire leadership may result in helpful job creation behaviours.

Transactional Leadership

According to Hoy & Miskel (2008) in Peter (2023), transactional managers want a cost-benefit assessment, which is an economic trade that satisfies followers' current material and mental demands as a substitute for goods and services that the subordinate has agreed to give. They trade incentives and publicity for the worker's hard work. Transactional leadership is defined as an exchange of dedication in which employees receive rewards in exchange for accomplishing certain goals.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the practice of altering and reforming individuals via outstanding impact that inspires individuals to go beyond and above what is frequently expected. According to Sun & Henderson (2016), Burns established a new leadership model known as transformational leadership, which focuses on persuading staff members "to seek higher-order needs, to look beyond their self-interest to organisational goals, and to elevate their sense of morality." The four elements of Bass's 1985 transformational leadership theory - idealised influence, inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration - were explained by Anderson (2017). Bass (1997), quoted in Kasa (2018), claims that a transformational leader transforms followers by assisting them in understanding the significance of organisational outcomes, motivating them to put aside their interests so as to fulfil organisational objectives, and inducing lower-order needs.

When leaders exhibit idealised influence, they serve as role models for followers because of their high moral standards, ethical principles, and integrity. A facet of transformational leadership is inspirational motivation, which focuses on the leader's communication and raising the bar for followers' performance and production. Transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to challenge followers' preconceived notions, attitudes, and beliefs and, when applicable, the leaders' that might not be relevant to today's problems or outdated. Inspirational motivation involves a leader's capacity to arouse enthusiasm and optimism in followers. Furthermore, individualised consideration happens when a leader considers followers as unique people instead of just as coworkers.

Employees Productivity

A worker's or group of workers' efficiency is measured by their productivity, which can be defined as the amount of time they spend actively working on tasks that need to be completed and produced. Productivity can be measured by the amount of output a worker generates in a given period. Ferreira & Du Plessis (2009) stated that productivity can be measured by how much time a worker puts into actively performing the duties they were recruited to do in order to achieve the intended outcomes of their job description. Employee productivity was described by Coker (2011) as "the level of employees' performance in relation to attendance, work quality, the capacity of performance and personal factors.

Product/Service Quality

Service quality, according to Kotler & Keller (2012), is the totality of a product or service's characteristics that influence its ability to satisfy stated or implicit requirements. Therefore, the degree to which a business can deliver services that meet customer expectations is known as service quality. Five important factors should be considered in order to gauge the quality of the service. Accordingly, the five essential components are responsiveness, empathy, palpability, assurance, and reliability (Syaparudin & Hertati, 2020).

Reliability is the ability to deliver the promised services with accuracy and dependability; assurance is the knowledge and manners of employees as well as their ability to demonstrate trust and confidence; empathy is the state of paying attention and providing personal attention to customers, such as when employees try to put themselves in the shoes of customers; and responsiveness is the willingness to assist customers, deliver services promptly, and hear and address customer complaints at work. One might also consider the physical appearance of personnel and their communication style to be indicators of the quality of the services they provide.

By incorporating the intricacies of consumers' actual experiences into their notions of service quality, Schembri & Sandberg (2011) have attempted to transcend static characteristics like timeliness and dependability. Six criteria were further identified by Gr  nroos (1988) in Roy, Lassar et al. (2015) as being required for a favorable perception to provide services excellence: (1) competence and expertise; (2) behavior and viewpoints; (3) adaptability and ease of use; (4) reliability and trustworthiness; (5) service restoration; and (6) trustworthiness and reputation.

Empirical Review

Using Chevron Nigeria Limited as a case study, Olayisade & Awolusi (2021) investigated how managerial style affects worker output in the Nigerian oil and gas sector. 40 questions on a Likert scale with five points that address transactional, bureaucratic, laissez-faire, charismatic, autocratic, and democratic leadership styles, as well as employee productivity factors, were used in the study. Ninety-three (93) valid responses were obtained through the distribution of the questionnaire to 125 respondents. The responses obtained were examined using SPSS. Results from a reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha), homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, normality test, and demographic analysis support the validity and dependability of the study findings. Following laissez-faire, bureaucratic, transactional, democratic, and charismatic leadership styles, the autocratic style of leadership was rated the most common in Nigerian oil and gas.

Kagwiria (2016) investigated how leadership affects worker efficiency at KCB Bank Kenya Limited. The study employed a design of descriptive surveys to ascertain how leadership influences employee performance. The study population comprised all KCB Bank Kenya Ltd. managers and employees; 225 people were chosen out of 450 managers and employees. Primary data were collected via a semi-structured survey questionnaire and were administered to commercial banks' staff, including those at the managerial level, using a drop-and-pick-up method. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were used to analyse the data. According to the study, effectiveness among employees rises with each unit increase in transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles.

Ansar et al. (2016) examined the impact charismatic leadership has on the efficacy of organisations, focusing on 100 staff of Pakistan's telecom sector. The results showed that charismatic leaders inspired their workforce, which in turn increased employee dedication to the company's objectives. Additionally, the study showed that charismatic leaders match their employees' skills and abilities to organisational tasks to achieve organisational goals. The dedication of staff members to the duties they were given and their improved productivity both grew as a result. Thus, charismatic leaders improve organisational performance, thereby generating organisational commitment.

The influence of the management style of leadership on the performance of employees at Guaranty Trust Bank of Abuja, Nigeria (GTB), was examined by Nse (2020). 60 of the 100 questionnaires that were issued for the descriptive survey were collected. Employee and manager self-ratings were obtained using the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire 360. To measure the correlation with the research hypothesis, regression analysis and Pearson correlation were employed. Findings from the study indicate that the most widely used leadership style at GTB Abuja is transformational leadership. The respondents' suggested transactional leadership style comes in second. By far the least popular leadership style among GTB Abuja's managers was autocratic and laissez-faire. Leadership style and employee performance were found to be negatively correlated; employees' performance was negatively impacted by both transformational, transactional, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles.

To determine which leadership style suits police organisations, Mboka (2021) examines the impact of autocratic leadership styles on the performance of employees in the Tanzania Police Force, specifically focusing on employees at the Police headquarters in Dodoma. A study research design was used. Data was collected from 85 respondents across the seven departments at police headquarters. The study's hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics (Spearman's rho (rs) statistical measure). The results showed that authoritarian leadership was the most prevalent style in the police force. The hypothesis was accepted, nonetheless, because it had a negligible negative correlation with workers' performance ($p = 0.608$). The idea that there is no meaningful correlation between employee performance and autocratic leadership was therefore accepted. This leadership style was associated with less productive work groups and significant levels of job dissatisfaction among subordinates.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey and a quasi-experimental design were used in the research. A cross-sectional survey helps the researcher gather primary data on specific issues and provides firsthand knowledge about the topic under study. Notably, the report indicates that there are up to 3,417 estimated registered small and medium-scale enterprises in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, n.d.). However, it is impossible to study the entire population of SMEs in various industries in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, hence the study target employees of registered 20 SMEs in selected manufacturing firms, educational institutions (schools), hospitals & clinics, hospitality businesses and agricultural firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, with a selected number of employee amounting to 263 elements. Census was adopted in which the entire 263 employees selected from the twenty (20) small and medium scale enterprises in Bayelsa state were involved. The researcher engaged the services of research assistants in distributing and retrieving the questionnaire to employees at their workplace. Convenient sampling techniques were used to choose the respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, Multiple Regression with the aid of SPSS was used for analysis.

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Various Indicators

		Descriptive Statistics					
		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Autocratic Leadership (ALP)	ALP1	225	2	5	4.53	.662	
	ALP2	225	3	5	4.40	.574	
	ALP3	225	2	5	4.25	.720	
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	TFL1	225	2	5	4.25	.867	
	TFL2	225	2	5	4.25	.720	
	TFL3	225	2	5	4.36	.779	
Transactional Leadership (TSL)	TSL1	225	2	5	4.24	.864	
	TSL2	225	2	5	4.25	.701	
	TSL3	225	2	5	4.31	.801	
Laissez-faire (LLP)	LLP1	225	3	5	4.44	.706	
	LLP2	225	3	5	4.52	.559	
	LLP3	225	3	5	4.41	.703	
Work/Service Quality (WSQ)	WSQ1	225	2	5	4.19	.907	
	WSQ2	225	2	5	4.22	.710	
	WSQ3	225	2	5	4.33	.773	

Source: Researcher's desk: SPSS Data result, 2025

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the indicators used to assess leadership styles and employee productivity within Bayelsa State SMEs. The table shows responses from 225

participants across all indicators, with scores ranging from 2 to 5 on the Likert scale, indicating that while some respondents strongly agreed with the statements, others disagreed or remained neutral. Notably, no one strongly disagreed with any statement, as the minimum score was 2. The mean scores for Autocratic Leadership (ALP) are relatively high, ranging from 4.25 to 4.53, suggesting a general perception of leaders exhibiting autocratic behaviours, particularly in independent decision-making (ALP1, mean = 4.53). Similarly, Transformational Leadership (TFL) also shows high mean scores (4.25 to 4.36), with the highest mean for encouraging creativity (TFL3, mean = 4.36). Transactional Leadership (TSL) indicators also exhibit high means (4.24 to 4.31), with the highest mean for focusing on mistakes and expectations (TSL3, mean = 4.31). Interestingly, Laissez-faire Leadership (LLP) also presents high mean scores (4.41 to 4.52), suggesting that leaders are perceived as providing minimal guidance. This seemingly contradictory finding of high scores across multiple leadership styles, including both autocratic and laissez-faire, requires further investigation to understand if leaders are using a blended approach or if there are issues with the interpretation of the questions. Regarding employee outcomes, Work/Service Quality (WSQ) has mean scores ranging from 4.19 to 4.33, indicating generally positive perceptions of work quality, with the highest mean for meeting or exceeding expectations (WSQ3, mean = 4.33). The standard deviations across all indicators are relatively small (ranging from .559 to .907), indicating consistency in responses. While these descriptive statistics provide a valuable overview, further inferential statistical analyses are necessary to explore the relationships between leadership styles and employee productivity.

Work/Service Quality (WSQ) and Dimensions of Leadership Styles

Presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4 are the results of the tests for the hypotheses of the study. The hypotheses assessed the relationship between work/service quality and autocratic leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership. It is listed as follows:

Table 2: Model Summary Hypothesis Ho

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.759 ^a	.552	.544	.833

a. Predictors: (Constant), Autocratic_Leadership, Transformational_Leadership, Transactional_Leadership, Laissez-faire Leadership

Table 3: ANOVA for Hypothesis

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	188.124	5	45.364	76.617	.000 ^b
	Residual	152.985	233	.787		
	Total	437.998	237			

a. Dependent Variable: Work/Service_Quality
b. Predictors: (Constant), Autocratic_Leadership, Transformational_Leadership, Transactional_Leadership, Laissez-faire Leadership

Table 4: Coefficients for Hypothesis Ho: 1 to 4

		Coefficients^a				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	6.877	1.483		4.458	.000
	Autocratic_Leadership	.168	.058	.762	13.344	.000
	Transformational_Leadership	.044	.074	.748	12.594	.000
	Transactional_Leadership	.079	.072	.281	1.261	.000
	Laissez-Faire_Leadership	-.042	.053	-.489	3.799	.131

a. Dependent Variable: Work/Service_Quality

Four distinct approaches to leadership were examined using a multiple regression analysis (autocratic, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) and work/service quality (WSQ) within businesses of all sizes (SMEs) in Bayelsa State. The results, presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4, reveal a statistically significant and complex interplay between these variables. The overall model demonstrates a substantial favourable link between the combined methods of management and WSQ, as evidenced by a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of .759. The model explains a substantial 55.2% of the variance in WSQ ($R^2 = .552$), proving that management approaches play a considerable part in shaping work/service quality within these SMEs. The ANOVA results (Table 3) confirm the overall statistical significance of the model ($p < .000$).

However, a closer look at the individual leadership styles (Table 4) reveals some unexpected findings. Autocratic, transformational, and transactional leadership styles all exhibit statistically significant positive relationships with WSQ ($p < .000$ for all three), suggesting that increases in these leadership styles are associated with improvements in work/service quality. Autocratic leadership appears to be the strongest predictor of WSQ in this model, as indicated by its relatively large standardised coefficient (beta = .762).

Conversely, the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and WSQ presents a puzzle. While the beta weight for laissez-faire leadership is negative (-.489), suggesting a potential inverse relationship, its effect on WSQ is not statistically significant ($p = .131$). This discrepancy between a negative beta and a non-significant p-value raises concerns about multicollinearity – high correlations between the predictor variables, which can inflate beta weights and make them unreliable. Essentially, while the model suggests that if the relationship were significant, more laissez-faire leadership would be associated with lower WSQ, the lack of statistical significance prevents us from drawing this conclusion. The relatively high beta weights for several of the leadership styles, coupled with the non-significance of laissez-faire, strongly suggest multicollinearity, which should be addressed before drawing firm conclusions about the individual effects of each leadership style. Further investigation, potentially using qualitative methods, is recommended to explore the nuanced dynamics of leadership and work/service quality within these SMEs. It is also crucial to remember that this analysis reveals correlations, not causal relationships, and that other unmeasured factors could be influencing WSQ.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings show a relationship between work/quality and dictatorial management service amongst small and medium-scale enterprises in Bayelsa State. This agrees with the work of Olayisade & Awolusi (2021) who saw autocratic leadership style as the most common leadership

style in Nigeria's oil and gas industry. This leadership style can enhance job role clarity, which is crucial for efficient task execution, as workers know exactly what they are supposed to do and the expectations placed upon them (Setiawan et al., 2021). Also, findings showed there is a strong, favourable and significant relationship between transformational leadership and work/service quality amongst small and medium scale enterprises in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. This suggests that higher levels of transformative management are linked to higher-quality work and services. In healthcare settings, transformational leadership is positively related to service quality. For instance, in UAE hospitals, transformational leadership dimensions were found to correlate positively with service quality, suggesting that enhancing these leadership traits can improve patient satisfaction (Jabnoun & AL Rasasi, 2005).

Furthermore, findings show that among all sizes of businesses, transactional leadership and work/service quality are positively and significantly correlated in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. This suggests that higher levels of transactional leadership are linked to higher-quality work and services. Transactional leadership has a significant positive effect on employee performance, which can indirectly improve work quality. This is particularly evident when job satisfaction acts as a moderating variable, enhancing the effectiveness of transactional leadership (Abdullatif et al., 2023).

Lastly, the result shows that there is a negative and insignificant relationship between laissez-faire and work/service quality amongst small and medium-scale enterprises in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Laissez-faire leadership is associated with role ambiguity and workplace stressors, which can lead to psychological distress and reduced work quality. Employees under such leadership may perceive their leaders as incompetent, leading to a loss of confidence and decreased performance (Chita et al., 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the complex relationship between leadership styles and employee productivity within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The findings offer valuable insights into how different leadership approaches influence employee outcomes, but also raise important questions that warrant further investigation. The regression analyses revealed a statistically significant overall relationship between the combined set of leadership styles (autocratic, transformational, transactional), while laissez-faire reported a negative and insignificant relationship on work/service quality of employees amongst small and medium scale enterprises in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The unexpected findings regarding laissez-faire leadership raise important questions about its interpretation and practice within Bayelsa State SMEs. While conventionally viewed as a passive and ineffective style, the data suggests a more complex dynamic. Employees in these SMEs may perceive a lack of direct supervision not as neglect, but as autonomy and empowerment, which could positively influence certain aspects of productivity.

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the complex relationship between leadership styles and employee productivity in Bayelsa State SMEs. The findings underscore the importance of leadership in shaping employee outcomes and highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of laissez-faire leadership. Ultimately, this research contributes to a growing body of knowledge that can inform the development of leadership training programs and interventions aimed at enhancing productivity and performance in SMEs, a vital sector of the Nigerian economy. From the findings and conclusion, the researcher recommends that:

- i. Small and medium-scale enterprises in Bayelsa State should establish clear guidelines when autocratic decisions are necessary and when collaborative approaches are more appropriate.
- ii. SMEs should implement leadership development programs that focus on the core components of transformational leadership.
- iii. SMEs should formalise performance management systems that clearly define expectations, provide regular feedback, and link rewards to performance outcomes.
- iv. SMEs should conduct internal surveys and focus groups to understand how employees perceive the current leadership approach and to identify areas for improvement in delegation and support. It is crucial to determine if perceived "laissez-faire" is a lack of leadership or a well-managed delegation and empowerment strategy.

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