

# Leadership and organisational performance in the Nigeria small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

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## To cite this article

Abdulazeez Abioye Lawal, Hakeem Adeniyi Ajonbadi, Bisayo Oluwatosin Otokiti. Leadership and Organisational Performance in the Nigeria Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). *American Journal of Business, Economics and Management*. Vol. 2, No. 5, 2014, pp. 121-127.

## Abstract

Leadership is widely recognised as an important function needed to move organisations forward. The study examined empirically the relationship between leadership style and organisational effectiveness in the Nigerian small and medium enterprises. A survey of two hundred and sixty eight small and medium enterprises was undertaken. Data generated were analysed by means of descriptive and inferential statistics. The results found that the Nigerian SMEs are more autocratic and less participative as the power distance between business owner and employees is very wide. The study further revealed an insignificant relationship between leadership style and organisational effectiveness. Hence, it is concluded that leadership style among Nigerian SMEs is not a major factor in determining organizational performance.

## Keywords

Leadership, Organisational Effectiveness, Small and Medium Enterprises

## 1. Introduction

Leadership has been a topic of interest, speculation and debate. Since the time of Plato, studies on leadership have examined leaders focusing on what leaders do in the physical world of human beings. One principal factor which makes organisations to survive, grow and adapt to environmental challenges is leadership (Rossouw and Vuuren, 2013). The distinction between successful and unsuccessful organisations can be attributed to differences in the levels of intellectual development and effectiveness of leadership in each group (Goleman, 2000).

Although, there has been increase in literatures on leadership and organisational performance in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) most of them are either foreign based or lack empirical data to justify the essence of leadership in SMEs within the Nigerian context. In fact, majority of empirically based literature focus on leadership in large organisations on the premise that the findings could be generalised to other categories of business organisations.

Given the significant role of SMEs in the Nigerian economic development, the need for this sub-sector to catch up with their counterparts in the globalised world cannot be over-emphasised. More so, the fact that leadership is always identified as the missing link (Amanda and Hodgkinson, 2006) cannot be underestimated.

The main purpose of this study is therefore to analyse the leadership styles of Nigerian SMEs and determine the extent to which these styles correlate with the performance of the organisations. Meanwhile, the study is premised on the assumption that leadership styles and organisational performance are significantly related. This assumption can be represented in the following research questions and subsequent hypothesis:

- What type of leadership styles do Nigerian SMEs adopt?
- How productive and effective are the SMEs in the Nigerian economic development?
- To what extent do these styles correlate with performance?

The thrust of the hypothesis of this study can be represented as:

Ho: Leadership styles and effectiveness of small and medium enterprises are not significantly related.

Hi: Leadership styles and effectiveness of small and medium enterprises are significantly related.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Leadership is an elusive concept. Like many complex ideas, it is deceptively used in everyday conversation. A common idea that runs through most definitions is the notion that leadership involves influence in one form or the other (Jogulu 2010). The very idea of leadership presupposes the existence of follower. The activity of leadership cannot be carried out without followers to lead and what leaders do is to influence the behaviour, beliefs and feelings of group members in an intended direction (Ensley, Pearson and Pearce, 2003). Wehrich and Koontz (2005) define leadership as the art of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of group goals.

Northouse (2007) suggests that there are four components that characterise leadership: that leadership is a process; it involves influence; it occurs within group context and it involves goals attainment. Some writers have however given the impression that leadership is synonymous with management. This assumption may be incorrect (Jung, Wu and Chow, 2008). Leaders are not only found in the managerial hierarchy but also in informal work groups. The difference between leadership and management has been stated as follows: “Leadership is a part of management but not all of it. Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor, which binds a group together and motivates it towards goals. Management activities such as planning, organising and decision-making are dormant cocoons until the leader triggers the power of motivation in people and guide them toward goals.” (Davis, 1967: 212).

Ultimately, Caldwell (2003) clarifies the difference between these two concepts using the concept of change leaders and change managers. He held that change leaders are the executives/senior members of the organisation who envision, initiate and strategically guide the organization to the desired place in history. On the other hand, change managers are considered to be middle cadre members of an organisation who are functional specialist and ensure that necessary support are built for the desired organisation change.

Benis (1989) explicated a dichotomy between managers and leaders by drawing the following twelve distinctions:

Managers	Leaders
Managers administer	leaders innovate
Managers ask how and when	leaders ask what and why
Managers focus on system	leaders focus on people
Managers do things right	leaders do the right things

Managers	Leaders
Managers maintain	leaders develop
Managers have short term perspective	leaders have long term perspective
Managers accept the status quo	leaders challenge the status quo
Managers have an eye on the bottom line	leaders have an eye on the horizon
Managers initiate	leaders originate
Managers emulate classic good soldiers	leaders are their own person
Managers copy	leaders show originality

Meanwhile, a distinction between leadership and management may nevertheless prove useful. This would allow for a reciprocal relationship between the two concepts, implying that an effective manager should possess leadership qualities and an effective leader should demonstrate sharp managerial acumen and skills.

Management leadership is needed to reshape organisational culture (Rao, 2012), propose a challenging vision of the future and set a performance improvement target (Arham, 2014). Mesu et al (2013) view leadership as a key element that shapes corporate culture, and a key component of organisational climate, which is a critical element of a learning organisation.

Various researches have generated the trait, behavioural, situational and the power-influence approaches to leadership (May 2010; Obiwuru et al 2011, Albers-Garrigos et al, 2014). Common among suggested leadership styles are autocratic and participative styles as opined by Neely and Adams (2000) who classify leadership styles into initiating structure and consideration. Gonzalez and Guillen (2002) perceive leadership as job-centered and employees-centered. McGregor also develops highly authoritarian theory X and people oriented leadership style theory Y. Adesua-Lincoln (2010) also conceives leadership as a continuum, ranging from highly boss centered to highly subordinate centered.

A participative leadership style encourages members to partake in decision-making and exercise discretion on how to perform their tasks. An autocratic leadership provides for specific directions to subordinates by organising the necessary functions to be performed, specifying rules, regulations and procedures to be followed, classifying expectations, scheduling work activities, establishing communication network and evaluating the work group performance (Robbins, 1996; Chang, Polse and Chue, 2003). Leadership style has its concomitants such as power, authority, line of command, span of control and delegation of authority (Afuwape, 2004).

Managers at all levels and in all kinds of organisations have their own personal leadership styles, which determine not only how they lead their subordinates but also how they execute other management tasks. Apart from the manager’s personal leadership styles, some research evidences suggest that leadership styles also vary among countries and culture. For instance, evidences abound that the European managers tend to be more humanistic or people oriented than both Japanese and American managers (Collins 2001). The

collectivist culture in Japan places prime emphasis on group rather than individual; so the importance of individual's own personality, needs, and desires is minimised (Kotterman 2006). Organisations in the United States tend to be very person oriented and thus tend to downplay the importance of individual employee's needs and desires (Richard et al, 2008).

### 3. Theoretical Background

Although effective leadership is widely recognised as one of businesses most pressing problems, there is surprisingly little agreement on what makes effective leaders. The literatures on leadership are full of prescriptions regarding effective leadership. The first systematic attempt to describe successful leadership focused on identifying personal characteristics responsible for effective leadership. The argument often has been that leaders were born, not made. Around the turn of the 19th century, Weber brought into vogue the bureaucratic mode of management that stressed efficiency, equity and accountability (Wright and Marlow, 2012). About the same time, Fayol laid the foundation of the professional functional school of thought (Coulson-Thomas, 2013). For many decades thereafter, writers on management prescribed the professional leadership style of management. Initially, this consisted of principles culled from experience (Yang, 2008). Later in the fifties, writers with training in social and industrial psychology began to advocate participative style of leadership (Likert, 1961). McGregor participative style of management was reinforced by human resource and organisational development (Al-bahussin and El-garaihy, 2013).

Sporadically, management scholars and practitioners have also been extolling the entrepreneurial model of leadership that creates new industries, and transforms old ones (Arham et al, 2013). The growing awareness of social responsibility of organisations and efficacy of enlightened self-interest has led to formalisation of altruistic modes of management (Avolio and Bass 2004). In the seventies and the eighties, the economic success of Japan led to a lively interest in the paternalistic Japanese style of management (Uchiwaka, 2008). The concern with having to cope with breakthroughs of technological and market change has led to the identification of the flexibility and teamwork oriented organic style of management (Khandwalla, 1992; Sternberg 2007).

In recent times, transformational leadership, i.e. leadership role at strategic level has become an existing new kind of leadership sweeping the globe. It is a form of leadership that articulates a vision, inspires and motivates followers and creates a climate for favourable organisational change (Wehrich, and Koontz, 2005). Transformational leaders are charismatic, intellectual influencer and engage in developmental consideration (Ismail et al, 2010).

Studies on leadership and organisational outcomes such as organisational performance and work outcomes including job satisfaction, morale, commitment and communication have generated mixed results due to different methodologies used

in these studies (Wagner 1994; Huang 1997; Lipman, 2006; Hayat and Riaz, 2011; and Missioura, 2014). Although, most of these results demonstrated positive relationships between participative leadership and organisational outcomes (Wagner 1994; Verma 1995, Batti and Qureshi 2007, Obiwuru, et al 2011, and Arham, 2014), this cannot be said to be in a definite position. Participation was found as an important dimension of work unit among management firms in the US (Mishra, 1995; Papalexandris and Galanaki, 2009; Missioura, 2014). The efficiency of participation in Mexico was doubtful. The message of these conflicting findings to practicing managers is clear that is, adapt your management styles to suit the environment. When in Rome, do as the Romans

### 4. Research Methodology

Data were collected by surveying small and medium enterprises in Lagos State, the commercial hub of Nigeria. A self-administered questionnaire that contained measures of leadership, productivity, job satisfaction and organisational commitment was used.

Participating SMEs were members of Nigerian Association of Small Scale Industrialists (NASSI) and membership of this association cuts across different industries, manufacturing, agro-allied, chemicals and services among others.

As at December 2012, approximately 268 SMEs representing the population of interest were registered with NASSI. The self-administered questionnaires were administered to these SMEs spread across Lagos State. A total number of 209 copies of the questionnaires were returned and properly filled and subsequently used for the analysis.

Leadership styles were measured using 18 items for self-assessment style adapted from Brown and Gioia (2002). Items in the instrument requested respondents to indicate how they would behave in some situations. Out of the 18 items, 9 items measured autocratic style while the remaining 9 measured participative style. The items were evaluated on a 5-point scale using Likert scaling method. The scales showed satisfactory reliabilities with Cronbach alpha of 0.76 and 0.77.

Organisational effectiveness was subjectively measured by means of a scale adapted from Gronn (2002). Respondents were requested to rate performance of their firms relative to competitors on a scale ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high) performances. The effectiveness criteria used include growth, sale, financial strength, operating efficiency, performance stability, public image, staff morale, adaptability, innovativeness and social impart.

On the basis of Pallant (2001) scale, a 10 – item scale was developed specifically to measure work attitudes: organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Four items measured job satisfaction and the remaining 6 measured organisational commitment on a five point scale. The scale had an alpha of 0.80 and 0.81 for job satisfaction and organisational commitment respectively which represented adequate reliability.

To derive useful meaning, descriptive statistics-T-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation test were used. Data processing and analyses were carried out with the aid of computer using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). All the analyses were conducted using 5% level of significance.

**4.1. Data Analysis**

Data generated were analysed at two levels: the individual responses on job satisfaction and organisational commitment were aggregated to obtain score for organisations. Responses of SMEs operators in leadership and productivity were used to constitute organisational analysis. The areas of activities of respondents were categorized into 11. All the industry groups were fairly represented by the sampled firms. About 45.5%

*Table 1a. Descriptive Statistics of Scores of Participating Firms on Autocratic Leadership Styles N = 209*

S/N	Variable	Individual	Median	Mode	SD	SE	5% Significance Level
1.	Production Centre	2.75	2.78	2.78	0.48	.032	2.69 – 2.82
2.	Employee Centre	2.43	2.44	2.44	0.34	.034	2.37-2.50

Source: Field Survey, 2013

*Table 1b. Descriptive Statistics of Scores of Participating Firms on Participative Leadership Styles N = 209*

S/N	GROUP Variable	Mean	Media	Mode	SD	SE	5% Significance Level	
							Low	High
1.	Production Centre	24.77	25	25	4.19	0.22	24.19	25.34
2.	Employee Centre	21.90	22	22	4.50	0.31	21.29	22.54

Source: Field Survey, 2013

From the tables 1a and 1b above, participating firms scored average on the pair of instrument measuring autocratic and participative leadership styles 2.75 and 2.43 respectively. The firms had a group mean of 24.77 on autocratic and 21.90 on participative respectively. Participating firms were occasionally autocratic and occasionally participative in style. In addition, the results of the analysis indicate that small and medium enterprises operators were slightly more autocratic than participative leadership style.

To confirm the above assertion, correlation test was employed to compare the mean scores of responding firms on leadership styles. As predicted, the test was found to be statistically significant. Individual Mean X = 2.75 Vs. 2.43 and grand mean X = 24.77 Vs. 21.90 ‘t’ (209) = 7.82 P < 0.05 suggesting that mean score of participating firm on autocratic differed significantly from the mean on participative leadership style.

**4.3. Organisational Effectiveness of Participating SMEs**

Performance appraisal of Nigerian small and medium enterprises was undertaken by requesting responding firms to subjectively evaluate their effectiveness relative to competitors on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). The descriptive statistics of organisational effectiveness of responding firms are given in Table 2 below.

of the sampled responding firms were manufacturing establishments operating in Lagos. These firms had staff strength ranging from 10 -100 with a mean of 14 and mode of 25. The age of participating firms ranged between 5 - 20 years. The mean age of existence was approximately 10 years.

**4.2. Leadership Styles of Participating SMEs Operators**

The first question addressed in this study is the leadership style of SMEs operators. The 18-item instrument measuring two main leadership styles was used by requesting respondents to react to some statements with options: always, frequently, occasionally, seldom and never coded 4,3,2,1 and 0 respectively. The distribution of scores on leadership styles is presented in table 1a and table 1b below.

*Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Participating SMEs Effectiveness*

S/N	Effectiveness Criteria	Mean	S.D	S.E	5% Significance Level	
					Lower	Upper
1	Profitability	3.76	.94	.065	3.63	3.89
2	Growth Rate	3.77	.85	.059	3.65	3.88
3	Financial Strength	3.52	1.07	.074	3.38	3.87
4	Operating Efficiency	3.88	.97	.057	3.75	4.01
5	Performance Stability	3.95	.96	.066	3.82	4.08
6	Public Image	4.05	.91	0.63	3.93	4.18
7	Staff Moral	3.75	1.05	.972	3.62	3.90
8	Adaptability	3.76	.96	.066	3.64	3.89
9	Innovativeness	3.88	1.01	.070	3.74	4.01
10	Social Impact	3.69	1.10	.076	3.54	3.82

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 2 shows a satisfactory performance with means ranging from 3.52 to 4.05. This table demonstrates that the trend in effectiveness of participating SMEs is quite encouraged.

**4.4. Leadership Styles and Organisational Effectiveness**

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the strength of relationship between leadership and organisational effectiveness. Table 3 provides the results of the analysis.

**Table 3.** Correlation between Leadership Styles and Dimensions of Organisational Effectiveness of Participating SMEs N=209

S/N	Effectiveness Criteria	Leadership styles/autocratic Participative	
1	Profitability	.54	.134
2	Growth Rate	.036	.076
3	Financial Strength	.065	.001
4	Operating Efficiency	.004	.005
5	Performance Stability	.051	.004
6	Public Image	.047	.089
7	Staff Morale	.041	.123
8	Adaptability	.127	.039
9	Innovativeness	.101	.042
10	Social Impact	.110	.034
11	Organisational Commitment	.009	.003
12	Job Satisfaction	.030	.066

Source: Field Survey, 2013

\* p < 0.05

\*\* p < 0.01

N = 209

The main hypothesis of the study predicts that leadership styles are associated with organisational effectiveness. However, in table 3, out of the 12 correlation coefficients generated by leadership styles and organisational effectiveness, none is statistically significant. This may be interpreted that the leadership styles of respondents have little relationship with effectiveness. Our hypothesis was not supported.

## 5. Discussion and Recommendations

SMEs all over the world play fundamental roles in the growth and development of an economy. The effectiveness and efficiency in performing these roles depend largely on sound management practices (Rao, 2012). The overall findings of the study addresses the research questions and hypothesis raised.

The findings of this study revealed mixed leadership styles of Nigerian SMEs. Responding SMEs are occasionally autocratic and participative in style. However, they are more autocratic than being participative. The findings to some extent, support the study of Eze (1988); Goldsmith (2003); Graen (2006) and Mesu et al (2013). A typical Nigerian manager is by nature more autocratic. He demands for nothing but respect and obedience from his subordinates – a management style that results from managers' perception about Nigerian workers who are believed as having negative attitude to work and as an economic man must be bullied and exploited to get things done (Ihua, 2009). However, the level of education and the adaption of democratic system of government might have accounted for the occasional use of participative style by participating SMEs.

The assessment of organisational effectiveness of participating Nigerian SMEs shows that the trend of

organisational effectiveness of Nigerian SMEs is encouraging. Most of the participating firms reported quite good performance in all dimensions of effectiveness with the highest in public image followed by performance stability, innovativeness and operating efficiency, growth rate, profitability, adaptability, among others as depicted in table 2 above. This confirms the findings of Goethals (2005) and CBN (2008) on the Nigerian informal sector.

Kark and Van (2007) attributed the enhanced profitability of the informal sectors to the motivation of the operators who seek opportunities with high potentials in the post reforms environment. Beyond this is the ingenuity and imagination of the entrepreneurs who are determined to make a livelihood in a grossly hostile economic and social environment.

Actually, a testimony to the creativity and survival instinct of Nigerian SMEs is evidenced by the findings of Yang (2008), May (2010), and Rao (2012) survey where overwhelming percentage of responding firms foresee bright prospect for their enterprises. Leadership vision and corporate direction are some of the internal challenges facing SMEs (Arham, 2014). Not only must managers of SMEs lead but also they need to continuously examine their leadership styles in the light of the environment.

The model of this study predicted a correlation between leadership style and organisational effectiveness. This study revealed an insignificant relationship, which may be attributed to the following:

- i. An occasional leadership style that is both autocratic and participative may invariably result in low correlation.
- ii. Even research evidence has shown that effective leadership style is not a choice of one leadership but a good leader needs to analyse the situation and adapt appropriate leadership style (Vroom, 1973; House, 1975; Fiedler, 2001; Obiwuru, 2011)
- iii. The leadership style required by SMEs change drastically as they move through different stages of success and growth (Suriyankietkaew and Avery, 2014). In fact, leadership skills and attributes at one stage can spell disaster at the next. Effective start up SMEs operators who are autocratic in style may find themselves struggling to delegate to a management team as the firms grow.

## 6. Conclusion

From the discussion of findings on leadership styles, it is evident that effective leadership is situational. Leadership in management involves concern for both tasks and people; concern for people's involvement, attention and acknowledgement of the influence, which motivate people as members of groups and individuals. The way in which a manager chooses to exercise leadership styles will have a strong influence on the performance, motivation and morale of subordinates. Training and development can help SMEs to develop more effective styles. There is however, no single style likely to be effective in all circumstances. The

effectiveness of a management style will vary according to situation (Keller, 2006; May, 2010; Rao, 2013; and Arham, 2014).

Therefore, SMEs should be prepared to be flexible and adjust styles to circumstances. They should however avoid seeming to be inconsistent if they adopt a different style in a particular set of circumstances. The reason for the change should be made clear to subordinates.

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