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Influence of Leadership Styles and Sex on Work Engagement among Private Sector Workers in Agbara, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Keywords:

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This study examined the influence of leadership styles and sex on work engagement among employees of randomly selected private organisations in Agbara industrial estate, Ogun State. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, simple random and convenience sampling techniques in selecting participating organisations and 303 employees who participated in the study, respectively. These participants consisted of 110(36.3) below 25years of age, 117(38.6%) within 25-34years, 57(18.8%) within 35-44years, 17(5.6%) are within 45-54 years of age, while just 2(.7%) are above 55years; 183(60.4) are single, 105(34.7) are married, while 15(4.9) are divorced. In terms of educational attainment, 188(62.1%) had a Bachelor's degree and above, 108(35.6%) had a diploma certificate, and 7(2.3%) were working with Senior Secondary School Certificate. In terms of organisational cadre, 10(3.3%), 34(11.2%), 40(13.2%) and 219(72.3%) are of the managerial, supervisory, machine operator and general employee cadre, respectively; 146(48.2%) had worked for less than 10years, 98(32.3) had been engaged in the organisation for between 10-19years, while 59(19.5%) had been in the organisations for 20years and more. Two standardised scales were utilised for data collection; they are a 17-item self-report Utrecht work engagement scale developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) with Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.93 and a 36-item multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ-5x) scale developed by Bass & Avolio (1995). Two hypotheses were raised and tested, and the results revealed a significant joint influence of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire Leadership styles on work engagement [$R^2 = .301$, $F = (42.99)$, $P < .05$]; independently, transformational leadership [$\beta = .391$, $t = .611$; $P < .05$] and transactional leadership styles [$\beta = .213$, $t = 2.972$; $P < .05$] had significant independent influence on work engagement, while laissez-faire leadership style [$\beta = -.012$, $t = -.211$; $P > .05$] had no significant influence on work engagement, therefore the hypothesis was partially accepted. The second hypothesis on sex showed there was no significant influence of sex on work engagement ($t = -3.19$, $df (301)$). The results were discussed, and recommendations were raised for future studies based on some identified limitations of the study.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement describes the level of enthusiasm and dedication of workers toward their job. This enthusiasm and dedication can be seen in the way employees care about their work and about the performance of the company. An engaged employee sees beyond pay or salary but links his/her well-being to work performance, which invariably leads to organisational success and growth (Abdul, 2022); this linkage is important for organisational's higher productivity and directly linked to job satisfaction. Engaged employees are more likely to invest all within themselves in the work they do, which leads to higher quality and quantity of work produced. According to Baldoni (2013), organisations that scored higher on employee engagement reported 48% fewer safety incidents and 41% fewer patient safety incidents, which invariably increases productivity and reduces higher costs linked to safety issues.

The importance attached to engagement has made it at the top of the most recent Global Human Capital Trends survey, with 79% of survey respondents saying that fostering a sense of belonging in the workforce was important to their organisation's success in the next 12–18 months, and 93% agreed that a sense of belonging drives organisational performance (Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Survey, 2020), this is one of the highest rates of consensus on importance of engagement ever seen in a decade of Global Human Capital Trends reports. A study by BetterUp (2020) has also revealed the importance

of employee engagement to performance and the overall growth and success of an organisation. The results of the study revealed an estimated 56% increase in job performance as a result of engagement, a 50% reduction in turnover risk, and a 75% decrease in employee sick days. Furthermore, the study found that a single incidence of "micro-exclusion" (disengagement) can lead to an immediate 25% decline in an individual's performance on a team project (BetterUp, 2020).

Because of the chains of advantages attached to employee engagement, organisations desired the services of employees who are willing to go the extra mile (work outside assigned job roles) to create an agile organisation in order for an organisation to remain competitive in the market. Such employees apply themselves totally (body, soul, and emotion) to their assigned roles and perform extra-role activities not stipulated in their job responsibilities but that are necessary for superior organisational productivity (Amah & Sese, 2018), which is the hallmark of difference between engaged and disengaged employees. Moreover, Global happening within the organisation, particularly since early 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 epidemic, is having a great impact on the organisational. The traditional way of working in which workers assemble in one place to carry out their daily tasks is fast changing, and a lot of organisations are adopting different work alternative schedules and workplace technology; these are having a serious impact on employee engagement. For instance, technology

enables instantaneous communication with virtually anyone; the way people use that technology can paradoxically contribute to increased feelings of isolation. Many virtual workers have cited loneliness as one of remote working's challenges (Griffs, 2020). For instance, in the United States, the number of people who regularly work from home has grown by 173 percent since 2005 (Global Workplace Analytics, 2020). All these changes in the way employees carry out their work have made employee engagement more imperative to the survival of organisations; businesses with unengaged employees have a higher potential failure rate than organisations with engaged workers, and the quality of the relationship between leaders and employees will always go a long way in determining the extent to which employees engage.

Despite employee engagement being viewed as positive company-wide, the majority of employees are disengaged at work. According to Gallup data (Statistica Research Department, 2022), the overall percentage of engaged workers during 2021 is only 39%, up from 36% in 2020. Global Human Capital Trends survey (2020) suggests that three factors mostly influence an employee's engagement in an organisation, of which leadership styles were ranked second. Leadership style in an organisation is one of the factors that play a significant role in enhancing or retarding the interest and commitment of the employee in the organisation. The difference in leadership styles and their importance is intrinsically felt in the work environment, and the influence of leadership can be measured in the productivity and profitability of businesses. An effective leader influences followers in a desired manner to achieve desired goals (Akpapere, Jengre, & Mogre, 2019); such a leader inspires and relates to subordinates in order to increase the employees' motivation, and make employees loyal to the organisation (Sadia & Aman, 2018), because disengaged employees can disrupt organisational goals and growth through a significant decline in productivity, and can negatively affect the financial performance of

many organisations. Also, there are significant differences between male and female work engagement, as female workers were found to be more engaged than their male counterparts (Kong, 2009). In a study by Sarwar and Arwan (2010), they noted that female employees value their jobs more than their male counterparts.

Despite all the advantages attached to engagement in the workplace, much has not been done in the industrial setting in our culture to empirically examine factors that could influence employee engagement in Nigeria. This gap in knowledge was a motivating factor in carrying out this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have established a strong relationship between leadership, management styles, and employee engagement. For instance, studies have revealed that leaders who build strong relationships with subordinates or clients are more effective at increasing employee engagement because people are more willing to follow leaders with whom they have a relationship (Hamon & Bull, 2016). Khuong and Yen's (2014) study showed that the higher the levels of employee sociability, ethical leadership, and visionary or transformational leadership, the higher the levels of employee engagement, while the study could not find a significant correlation between transactional style of leadership and employee engagement unlike transformational leadership style and concluded that transformational leadership required more focus regarding employee engagement than the transactional style of leadership. A study designed by Breevaart et al. (2014) sought to measure the effect of leadership style on employee engagement by examining the impact of transformational leadership on the engagement of 61 military cadets. The result of the study showed that the cadets were more engaged on days when the leader demonstrated a transformational leadership style compared to days of absence of transformational leadership behaviours. This was also supported by Schaubroeck et al. (2016) study, in which the effect of transformational leaders was found on employee engagement and productivity.

Ugwu et al. (2014) also found that trust in the organisation and psychological empowerment are predictors of employee engagement. Leaders must keep their promises to build trust, as the leaders implement strategies to increase employee engagement. Effective leaders who encourage worker enthusiasm might positively affect employee engagement, and such employees feel engaged and productive (Hamid & D'Silva, 2014).

Maundu et al. (2020), in a study that examined the effect of transactional leadership style on employee engagement in public secondary schools in Kenya using 674 public secondary school teachers, revealed that transactional leadership had a positive significant effect on employee engagement and its dimensions. The researchers concluded that applying a transactional leadership style in public schools in Kenya could increase employee engagement significantly. Also, Atalla et al. (2021), in a study designed to identify the association between work engagement, and transformational and transactional leadership styles, participants in this study were 273 full-time employees of Greater Amman Municipality, Jordan. Transformational leadership was found to be a better indicator of employee engagement when compared with transactional leadership in this study.

Gender has been implicated in whether an employee will engage or not. However, Ariani (2013) found no statistical significance in work engagement between male and female employees but reported differences in their organisational citizenship behaviour.

Hypotheses

- There will be significant independent and joint predictive influence of leadership styles on employee engagement.
- Female employees will score significantly higher on work engagement compared to male employees.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. This was necessitated since there was no active manipulation of variables, and all the variables were sampled on the participants at the same time. The independent variables in the study were leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) and sex, while work engagement served as the dependent variable.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The participants for this study comprised 182 male and 121 female participants, which together sum up to 303 employees in Agbara Industrial Estate, within the age range of 25 and 55 years. The organisations were selected using the simple random technique, while the participants were selected from these organisations using a convenient sampling technique.

Instruments

The researcher made use of existing scales developed into questionnaires for data collection. The questionnaires were structured into sections. Section A: consisted of information on respondents' socio-demographic data. Section B: This section asks questions on Work engagement using the Utrecht work engagement scale, which consists of a 17-item self-report developed by Schaufeli & Bakker (2003). The scale is a multi-dimensional one: 6 items measure vigour, six items measure dedication, and the other five items measure absorption. The instrument is on a 5-point Likert format ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree. The researcher reported Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.93 for the scale. Section C: This section contains information on Leadership styles measures with a Multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ-5x) which consists of 36 scale item that measures how individuals perceive themselves with regard to specific leadership behaviour using (360-degree feedback method) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). It evaluates

three different leadership styles: Transformational, Transactional, and Passive-Avoidant. The instrument is on a 5-point Likert format ranging from not at all, once in a while, sometimes, fairly often, frequently. The researcher reported Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.97 for this scale.

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher sought approval from the human resources of the selected organisations via an introduction and adequate explanation of the purpose and assurance of full confidentiality of participants before embarking on the study. The participants were informed accordingly to obtain adequate permission and ensure the cooperation of employees prior to the administration of the questionnaires. The organisations delegated to staff who help in soliciting the cooperation of other employees for the study since the researcher has limited access to these employees. The questionnaires were administered with the assistance of 5 trained undergraduate research assistants.

During the questionnaire administration, the researcher introduced himself and explained the purpose of the study to the intended participants. Permission was sought from the intended, and they were informed that participation is voluntary. Copies of the questionnaire were administered only to those who showed interest and agreed to participate in the study. The questionnaire administration was done during the working hours of 10-4 pm for three days with the help of the research assistant. The researcher distributed 420 copies of questionnaires; however, only the questionnaire that was properly filled was analysed in this study. Data from the study was subjected to computer analysis.

Statistics

The first hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis, and the second was tested using a t-test for independent scores.

RESULTS

Participants Demographic information

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

		Frequency	%
Sex	Male	182	60.1
	Female	121	39.9
	Total	303	100.0
Age	Below 25	110	36.3
	25-34	117	38.6
	35-44	57	18.8
	45-54	17	5.6
	55 above	2	.7
	Total	303	100.0
Marital status	Single	183	60.4
	Married	105	34.7
	Divorced	15	4.9
	Total	303	100.0
Education level	Ph.D.	14	4.6
	Master	25	8.3
	Bachelor	149	49.2
	Diploma	108	35.6
	SSCE	7	2.3
	Total	303	100.0
Job title	Manager	10	3.3
	Supervisor	34	11.2
	Operator	40	13.2
	Employee	219	72.3

		Frequency	%
Total		303	100.0
Work experience	less than 9 years	146	48.2
	10-19 years	98	32.3
	20y ears above	59	19.5
	Total	303	100.0

Table 2: Work engagement and leadership styles (work engagement and transformational leadership styles)

		N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Er
LOWTFS		12	3.181	1.454	.4197
MODTFS		222	4.285	1.069	.0718
HIGHTFS		69	5.304	.705	.0849
Total		303	4.473	1.130	.0649
Model	Fixed Effects			1.016	.0584
	Random Effects				.5939

NB: LOWTFS – Low; MODTFS- Moderate and HIGHTFS- High on transformational leadership

Hypothesis 1

The hypothesis stated that there would be a significant joint and independent influence of transformational (a leader who acts as a role model for his followers, inspires, motivate them and meet their needs), transactional (a leadership

style based primarily on processes and control, and requires a strict management structure), and laissez-faire (a leader who do not provide visions or directions for his followers, tend to delegate the tasks and avoid decision making) leadership styles on work engagement was tested using multiple regression, and the result is presented in *Table 3*:

Table 3: Multiple regression of independent variable and joint influence of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles on work engagement

Variable	R	R ²	F	P	B	t	P
Transformational					0.391	6.611	<.05
Transactional	0.549	0.301	42.99	<.05	0.213	2.972	<.05
Laissez-faire	<.05				-0.012	-0.211	<.05

The result in the table shows that there is a significant joint influence of Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-faire Leadership styles on Work Engagement [R² =.301, F= (42.99), P<.05]. The Predictors accounted for 30% of the total variation in work engagement. The result further shows that Transformational leadership style [β= .391, t= .6.611; P<.05] and Transactional leadership style [β= .213, t= 2.972; P<.05] had a

significant independent influence on work engagement. However, the Laissez-faire leadership style [β= -.012, t= -.211; P>.05] showed no significant independent influence on Work Engagement. The stated hypothesis is hereby partially accepted.

Hypothesis two:

Table 4: Summary table of independent t-test showing the influence of sex on work engagement

	Sex	N	Mean	Std	Df	t-value	Sig
Work engagement	Male	182	4.3072	1.15116	301	-3.19	.195
	Female	121	4.7234	1.05364			

The result from the table above shows that there was no significant influence of sex on work engagement (t = -3.19, df (301)). The stated

hypothesis is hereby rejected. Sex does not play a significant role in employee work engagement. Though differences existed in their mean scores,

with women having a higher mean, the differences are not significant enough to validate the stated hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis, which stated that there will be significant joint and independent influence of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles on work engagement, was tested using multiple regression analysis, and the result partially supported the stated hypothesis. The three leadership styles: Transformational, transactional, and Laissez-faire, had a joint influence on employee work engagement. The three Predictors accounted for 30% of the total variation in employee work engagement. In other words, the presence of the three leadership styles resulted in a 30% increase in the level of work engagement. Furthermore, the result further shows that transformational and transactional leadership styles had a significant independent influence on work engagement. However, the laissez-faire leadership style showed no significant independent influence on work engagement. Therefore, our stated hypothesis was partially accepted.

This finding is supported by previous studies on leadership styles and work engagement. For instance, a study by Avolio et al. (2009) revealed the importance of leadership styles in today's dynamic global working environment on both work engagement and employee engagement. This study supported the importance of the joint influence of leadership styles on work engagement. Several other studies have also established the importance of leadership styles on engagement. For instance, Ugwu et al. (2014) found that leadership trust and psychological empowerment, which are both leadership qualities, are strong predictors of engagement. The researchers emphasise the importance of keeping and fulfilling promises by leaders to build trust, and as leaders do this, they are technologically sowing seeds that will birth engagement among workers. Likewise, Khuong and Yen (2014) strongly supported the outcome of this study; the researchers in a series of studies

found that whenever there is a positive relationship between the employee and management, such a relationship will end up being the basis for the employee becoming engaged. Other studies have also shown that effective leadership styles create a conducive working environment that fosters work engagement, commitment, and satisfaction (Hamid & D'Silva, 2014). When leaders encourage enthusiasm among workers, such encouragement might positively affect employee engagement, and such employees feel engaged and productive. The presence of effective leadership styles propelled work engagement among the followers who are workers. Such workers would love to reciprocate the leader's effectiveness by becoming engaged in his/her work and organisation, and this will subsequently result in higher productivity for the organisation. This dual relationship is supported by social exchange theory.

Therefore, the present study, just like previous ones, supported that leadership styles play a key role in work engagement and subsequent productivity. When leadership can be seen from a positive end in the organisation, such will motivate employees to be engaged, and the outcome of such engagement is higher productivity, which is beneficiary to both leaders in the organisation and the subordinates (employees). This reciprocal relationship may not be unconnected with the fact that employees are always observant of what is happening around them; when leaders are sensitive to and respond sincerely to changes in employees' needs, such employees will want to reciprocate the gesture by working more actively to repay the leader, and this is supported by social exchange theory. Such employee will bring into work their natural skills and characteristics that can bring about qualitative and positive change in productivity because they are already engrossed in their job and ready to give it extra energy because a leader has made them connected to the job. This is so because, empirically, it has been revealed that leaders who build strong relationships with subordinates are more effective at increasing employee

engagement because people are more willing to follow leaders with whom they have a relationship (Hamon & Bull, 2016).

The independent influence of two of the leadership styles was also supported by previous studies. For instance, a study by Khuong and Yen (2014) revealed that the higher the levels of employee sociability, ethical leadership, and visionary or transformational leadership, the higher the levels of employee engagement. Likewise, Breevaart et al. (2014), in a study, examined the impact of transformational leadership on the engagement of 61 military cadets in their work. The result showed that the cadets were more engaged on days when the leader demonstrated a transformational leadership style than other days when there was the absence of transformational leadership behaviours; Breevaart and others' study was also confirmed by a similar study by Schaubroeck et al. (2016) in which the effect of transformational leaders was found on employee engagement and productivity.

When a leader is emotionally connected to his/her followers/subordinates/ workers, there will be a sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organisation; when the leader leads by example for followers to inspire them, challenge the followers to be in-charge and ownership of their job, identified and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, and assigned task and distribute workers into work groups based on strengths and weaknesses with tasks that optimise their performance, such a leader is building a legion of engage workers, and this will result in higher productivity for the organisation. A leader achieves this goal through encouragement, by inspiring and motivating employees to innovate and create change that will help grow and shape the future success of the company and by so doing get engrossed in their work.

The result also revealed an independent significant influence of transactional leadership style on work engagement. This finding found strong support in previous studies. For instance, Maundu et al. (2020) and Atalla et al. (2021) in a

separate study, found transactional leadership style to be an important predictor of work engagement. Though in a comparative study, transformational leadership style was found to be a better predictor. In other words, employees get engaged once leaders identify the roles and tasks of employees and provide them with positive and negative rewards based on their performance. A transactional leader gets employed and engaged by clarifying the role and tasks that are assigned to followers and providing them with negative and positive rewards based on successful performance. In this relationship, the contingent reward is based on the leader identifying a way to draw a connection between goal achievement and reward, offering commendations for successful performance, exchanging promises, and resources for support, clarifying expectations, arranging mutually satisfying agreements, negotiating for resources, and exchanging effort assistance.

There was no significant relationship between a leader that let loose the employees by failing to provide guidelines and set targets for followers. This implies that when a leader gets involved and pushes employees towards goal attainment and thinks about new products and possibilities, such employees are more engaged than those who are let loose. The laissez-faire leadership style showed no significant independent influence on work engagement. This is not unexpected; if a leader fails to provide direction, the follower will be directionless and may do things as they please, and this may not be the right way in most situations.

The second hypothesis, which examined the influence of sex on work engagement, was not significant. The result revealed that sex does not have a statistically significant influence on employee work engagement. Though differences existed in their mean scores, with women having a higher mean, the differences are not statistically significant enough to validate the stated hypothesis.

The finding contradicted Kong (2009) and Sarwar and Arwan (2010), who both found significant differences between male and female work

engagement, as female workers were found to be more engaged than their male counterparts. However, the present finding is supported by Ariani (2013), who found no statistical significance in work engagement between male and female employees. The absence of differences between males and females might not be unconnected with the rise in career women and gender equality between men and women; as a result unprecedented increase in dual career couples in our culture. Men and women competed in nearly all spheres of life, work included, and everybody wanted to get to the top, and this may be partly responsible for the change in the influence of sex on work engagement. This also calls for further studies on this relationship.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was designed to examine the influence of leadership styles and sex on work engagement. The result of data analyses revealed that leadership styles had a joint influence on work engagement, confirming the importance of leadership styles on work engagement. When the right and effective leadership are put in place in an organisation, such organisation are set to harvest chains of engaged workers. Furthermore, the result revealed that a leader who intellectually stimulates, offers support and encouragement to individual followers, with a clear vision that they are able to articulate to followers and act as a role model, get more engaged followers; follower keyed into transformational leaders vision and got engaged because they want to reciprocate the leaders' gesture. Likewise, the transactional leadership style was found to have a significant influence on worker engagement. When a leader makes the workers see the advantages of completing a specific task, with the passage of time, such employee gets engaged and gets used to doing the right things in the workplace.

With the same eyes, they see the punishment that goes with not working according to organisational goals and vision. Laissez-faire leadership style and sex do not exert significant statistical influence on work engagement. Leaders who fail

to provide direction and allow both the workers that do not know and understand the given task, though willing to carry out the task and those that understand but are not willing to teach others nor carry out the task diligently, lack engaged workers. The willing but unable workers may get frustrated after several trials and hence get disengaged, while those who are able and understand the task may not get engaged too, because there is no visible direction and guidance which is to be provided by a leader. Sex was not significant also; this might be unconnected with swift changes in working demographics in recent years; more women are joining the working class, and competition for top positions among males and females has drastically closed the gap in the level of engagement between the two.

The study established that leadership is an important variable in work engagement; it can alter the direction of an organisation if they understand the appropriate strategies to engage employees. To be a successful organisation, one needs effective leadership with purpose and motivate their employees (Mehmood et al., 2014). Rayton & Yalabik (2014) argued that the quality of the relationship between leaders and employees determines the extent to which employees engage, which suggests that leadership style may be the most important factor in determining whether employees engage. Employees act and behave according to the style of the leader.

Therefore, it is suggested that:

- Organisational should create a leadership culture in the organisation, where leaders are trained how effective ways of getting employees engaged.
- Leaders should learn to inspire their employees not just to execute their jobs well but also to find purpose within their roles, which will bring about work engagement.
- Positive and negative rewards attached to performance and engagement should be made visible and should be consistent.

- Leaders should avoid adopting a Laissez-faire leadership style, as this will make the workers clueless in the time of taking important decisions.
- Both males and females should be targeted in getting employees engaged.
- This study should be replicated in public organisations and spread to other parts of the country.
- Other variables not covered in this study, such as the need for achievement, personality type, and religiosity, among others, should be examined in future studies.

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