

Leadership Styles and Their Influence on Staff Morale and Productivity in the West African Examinations Council, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of leadership styles on employee morale and examined leadership's ability to guide and motivate employee to work together to achieve a common goal and examine causes and consequences of bad leadership style on employee morale in WAEC Nigeria between 2019 and 2024. A descriptive survey design was used, and the target population comprised all 1,712-permanent staff of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Nigeria. A sample size of 261 respondents participated in the study. Four research questions were raised to guide the study, and a questionnaire was developed and used to collect data. The result of the reliability coefficient was .714. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency count and percentages. The results indicated, among others, that WAEC management (Nigeria) adopts leadership style that increases staff morale and productivity. Delegative leadership style was being used, and democratic leadership style was rarely used in the organisation. Management of the organisation has demonstrated great ability in guiding and motivating employees to work together to achieve common goals through giving clear instruction, involvement in assignments to motivate staff, recognition of subordinates' efforts and motivation of staff. Recommendations were made, among others, that leaders should cultivate good communication skills and provide clear instructions to their subordinates on what is expected of them.

Keywords: *Employee's productivity, Leadership styles, Management, Morale, Nigeria, WAEC.*

Introduction

Effective leadership is a necessity in practically all human activities. Whether operating within the close quarters of the home, the institutional environment of a learning institution or the politics of a more significant organisation, leaders are critical in the guiding activities and the decisive leadership they offer. This pervasive need shows that leaders are not incidental, but form some of the baseline factors affecting the way society functions. Leadership involves influencing, persuading and inspiring people, in its most basic sense, it is about being able to work together to achieve a common objective. Various scholars have provided various definitions, but one thing seems to keep recurring, leadership is an art of influencing other people towards a shared goal. According to Kesting et al. (2016), it refers to a practice in which a person encourages and affects colleagues to strike organizational targets, and usually this occurs through confidence and reassurance. Hemphill and Coons (1957) further postulate that a good portion of this is the act of channeling the action of a group towards a

common dream. Great leaders are more than guides and provide feedback as pointed out by Toastmasters International (2024), they are role models who show how they want others to behave and assist them to nurture their own skills. It is the methods that leaders employ to help their followers in achieving collective goals. It is leadership styles that define the effectiveness of the leaders in offering guidance, inspiring motivation as well as meeting the targets (Fertman and Van Linden, 1999). Scholars have over the years identified a number of powerful models. Spears (1996) was an advocate of a concept called Servant Leadership, a management style that underlines a strong sense of serving others and taking a holistic perspective of work, community building and sharing power in making decisions. A breakthrough work by Lewin et al. (as cited in Cherry, 2023) has revealed three basic styles, namely authoritarian/autocratic, participative/democratic, and delegative/laissez-faire, implying that skilled leaders alternate between them, depending on the situation. This perspective was broadened by subsequent works, which introduced Goleman

(2000) identified six leadership styles that can impact organisational climate. Each of these leadership styles took off from various emotional intelligence competencies, they also operate best in particular situations and influence the organisational environment in different ways. Toastmasters (2024) identified eight leadership styles, these are bureaucratic, authoritative, innovative, pacesetter, democratic, affiliative, coaching, and altruistic

One of the most widely used models today is Bruce Avolio's Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), introduced by Lindberg (2022). This model was a complete approach to leadership styles that range from low to high engagement leading to various leadership efficiency. FRLM identified three styles of leadership which are laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership. Each of these leadership styles could lead to various grades of efficiency and engagement. Laissez-faire leadership being the lowest, transactional could lead to medium levels, while transformational could be identified with strong efficiency and high engagement in its official variant, which is laissez-faire (low engagement) to transactional (medium engagement) to transformational (high efficiency and engagement).

In addition to the process of being a leader, the morale of the staff has become one of the determinants of the well-being of an organization. Malik et al. (2019) define morale as a somewhat abstract concept, which portrays the optimism, helpfulness, and shared sentiments of trust, self-worth, and faith of success of the group among employees. Bowles and Cooper (2009) further insinuate that it is also about the psychological wellbeing of a person based on confidence and purpose, which is usually manifested through a strong esprit de corps that leads the group to success. The morale in this study is based on the overall level of satisfaction, passion, and enthusiasm with respect to the work given to the staff members. Tightly connected with morale is employee productivity which is a gauge of how efficiently and effectively workers are able to convert the inputs (instructions, efforts) to outputs preferred (Stryker, 2024). According to Yunus and Ernawati (2017), this is the inherent ability to create goods and services that will directly serve

organizational objectives. Empirical evidence from various studies, including Yunus and Ernawati (2018) and Iqbal et al. (2019), consistently highlights a strong positive correlation: enhanced employee productivity invariably leads to improved organizational performance. This study aimed at investigating the crucial impact of various leadership styles on both staff morale and employee productivity within the West African Examinations Council. WAEC, a foremost examining board with a seventy-year history, serves five English-speaking West African nations (The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone) and has, throughout its existence, been shaped by the leadership of numerous individuals at its helm.

Globally, the concept of leadership is a pathway to organization's goals and objectives. Leadership inspires and motivates people to work and achieve or even surpass the goals of any organization. The leadership styles adopted in developed countries are more democratic oriented than developing countries, hence the staff morale of the developed world might be high which might boost their productivity. In most of the organisations in Africa generally and Nigeria particularly, the staff morale still needs to be improved upon.

Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of effective leadership in organizational success, many organizations continue to struggle with low staff morale and productivity, suggesting that the leadership style adopted by their leaders may be a significant contributing factor. A large amount of literature has examined the impact of the leadership style on morale and productivity of staff members in different organizations, both within and beyond Nigeria. However, no such study has been conducted on leadership styles in the West African Examinations Council. Therefore, this study specifically examined the implications of leadership style on the employee morale in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Nigeria. The study took critical look at the role of competencies of leaders in guiding and motivating personnel in achieving organizational goals and objectives. In addition, it examined the antecedents and the consequent impacts of the dysfunctional leadership styles on the employee morale in WAEC Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study aims to address the following key research questions.

- What leadership style increases staff morale and productivity in WAEC, Nigeria?
- How does leadership in WAEC guide and motivate people effectively to work together to achieve a common goal?
- What are the consequences of bad style of leadership on the morale and productivity of the employees in WAEC, Nigeria?
- Do employees participate and be involved in decision making in WAEC, Nigeria?

Methodology

This research adopted a descriptive survey design. This design was used in this study so as to be able to describe in details characteristics and behaviour of WAEC staff in Nigeria as it relates to leadership styles as it affects staff morale and productivity using both quantitative and qualitative data. The target population for this study consisted of all 1,712 permanent staff members of the West African Examinations Council in Nigeria. From a total of 1,712 staff of WAEC, Nigeria, Taro Yamane sample size formula was used to calculate the appropriate sample size for the population. Simple random sampling method was used to select participants for the study. The appropriate sample size was 324 participants. However, only 261 respondents returned the completed questionnaire. The submitted questionnaire, which is 80.5% of the total sample size was suitable for analysis. For this study, a questionnaire was created, divided into two sections. Section A gathered demographic information from respondents, including gender, staff cadre (National or Registrar), highest educational qualification, and years of

service. Section B utilized a four- point Likert-type rating scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) to collect data on various aspects: the types of leadership styles that enhance staff morale and productivity within the organisation, the leadership ability to guide and motivate staff towards common goals, the consequences of poor leadership style on employee morale and productivity, and the extent to which employees participate in decision-making at WAEC. The instrument was developed by the researchers for this purpose. The instrument was pilot tested, and Cronbach's Alpha (α) reliability method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The result of the reliability coefficient is .714. This is an indication that the items on the instrument have greater internal consistency. Alpha (α) scores range from 0 to 1 and scores of $0.7 \geq 0.9$ are considered good and acceptable. The final questionnaire was deployed electronically through google form for staff. Data was analyzed by means of descriptive statistics (Frequency counts and percentages). In this study, "Strongly agree" was coded 4, "Agree" coded 3, "disagree" coded 2 while "Strongly disagree coded 1. Completed data were exported to Excel spreadsheet from Google Forms. The data was further copied to IBM SPSS 26 for further analysis.

Research Question 1: What is the leadership style that increases staff morale and productivity in WAEC in Nigeria?

To address this research question, participants were surveyed to identify the leadership styles that enhance staff morale and productivity within WAEC, Nigeria. The response is as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Type of Leadership Style that increases staff morale and productivity in WAEC, Nigeria

S/N	Statement	Responses			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	Management of WAEC Nigeria adopts Leadership style that increase staff morale and productivity	98 (37.5)	103 (39.5)	52 (19.9)	8 (3.1)
2.	Democratic leadership is adopted to increase staff morale and Productivity	18 (6.9)	76 (29.1)	139 (53.3)	28 (10.7)
3.	Laissez faire (delegative) leadership style is being used by leaders	32 (12.3)	123 (47.1)	79 (30.3)	27 (10.3)

Note: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree
% are in parenthesis

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents (77%) agreed that management of WAEC Nigeria adopts Leadership style that increases staff morale and productivity. The table further revealed that 59.5% of respondents agreed that Laissez faire (delegative) leadership style is being used by leaders, while more than half (64%) of the respondents disagreed that democratic leadership style is adopted to increase staff morale and productivity. This is an indication that management of the organization are delegative in their decision making. The reason for this might not be unconnected with

WAEC's operations that required every department, section and unit to follow laid down procedures to the letter.

Research Question 2: *How does leadership in WAEC guide and motivate people effectively to work together to achieve a common goal?*

To address this research question, participants were asked how leadership in the organisation guide and motivate effectively to achieve common goals. The responses are as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Leadership ability to guide and motivate people to work together to achieve common goals

S/N	Statement	Responses			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	Staff are more productive when leaders provide clear instruction on what to do	132 (50.6)	123 (47.1)	6 (2.3)	0 (0.0)
2.	Leaders' involvement in any assignment gets staff motivated	86 (33.0)	153 (58.6)	21 (8.0)	1 (0.4)
3.	When leaders recognize employees' work, staff are likely to take on more assignments	129 (49.4)	116 (44.4)	14 (5.4)	2 (0.8)
4.	When staff are motivated, they work together for common goal	46 (17.6)	112 (42.9)	97 (37.2)	6 (2.3)

*Note: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree
% are in parenthesis*

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents (97.7%) agreed that staff are more productive when leaders provide clear instructions on what to do. The table also shows that 91.6% of the staff revealed that when the leaders are involved in an assignment, subordinates are motivated. This implies that involvement of leaders in a task could serve as motivation for staff. However, 39.5% of the participants disagree that when staff are motivated, they work together for common goal. This percentage of staff that disagree is worrisome because working towards common goals, under normal circumstances, is supposed to motivate and

excite employees. This shows that motivation of staff is not enough reason for staff to work together, indicating there might be other contributing factors.

Research Question 3: *What are the consequences of poor leadership style on employees' morale and productivity in WAEC in Nigeria?*

Consequences of bad style of leadership on employees' morale and productivity is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Consequences of poor leadership style on employees' morale and productivity

S/N	Statement	Responses			
		SA	A	D	SD
1.	When leaders do not appreciate effort of their subordinate, it decreases organizational efficiency.	47 (18.0)	139 (53.3)	64 (24.5)	11 (4.2)
2.	When leaders provide poor leadership, staff are likely not to be satisfied with their job.	87 (33.3)	159 (60.9)	12 (4.6)	3 (1.1)
3.	When leaders are not approachable, subordinates will not feel free to share ideas that will improve organizational success.	75 (28.7)	139 (53.3)	41 (15.7)	6 (2.3)
4.	When the work environment is friendly, staff are more comfortable.	191 (73.2)	68 (26.1)	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)

*Note: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree
% are in parenthesis*

From Table 3, majority (71.3%) of the staff agreed that one of the consequences of leaders not appreciating their subordinates' efforts is decreased organizational efficiency. When leaders show care and concern toward their subordinates and even appreciate little effort, it will go a long way in motivating them to put in their very best. In the same vein, 94.1% of the respondents agreed that when poor leadership is provided, staff are likely not to be satisfied with their jobs. This is an indication that one of the consequences of poor leadership is job

dissatisfaction on the part of staff. Almost all the staff (99.3%) attested to the fact that the work environment is friendly and staff are more comfortable.

Research Question 4: *Do employees participate and get involved in decision making in WAEC in Nigeria?*

Participation and involvement of employees in decision making in WAEC is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Participation and involvement of employees in decision making in WAEC

S/N	Statement	Responses			
		SA	A	D	SD
1	Staff have sense of belonging when leaders involve them in decision making	106 (40.6)	139 (53.3)	11 (4.2)	5 (1.9)
2	When leaders are approachable, subordinates feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns	75 (28.7)	139 (53.3)	41 (15.7)	6 (2.3)
3	Staff are more likely to be committed when involved in decision making	138 (52.9)	113 (43.3)	10 (3.8)	0 (0.0)
4	Staff feel more valued and supported when leaders listen to their ideas	137 (52.5)	112 (42.9)	9 (3.4)	3 (1.1)

Note: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree
% are in parenthesis

Table 4 shows that overwhelming majority (93.9%) of the staff agreed that there is a great sense of belonging when leaders involve their subordinates in decision making. As regards sharing ideas and concerns, 82% of WAEC staff were of the view that it is easier to share their ideas and concerns with their leaders when such leaders are approachable. Almost all the staff agreed that they feel more valued and supported when leaders listen to their ideas.

Discussion of Findings

The study shows that the organization's management utilized a leadership style that successfully boosted both staff morale and productivity. Leadership is one of the key factors influencing the organizational setting and has a direct impact on the engagement of employees and their productivity. As the Economic Times

(2023) implies, leadership goes beyond official roles, and one has to embrace heterogeneous leadership styles that simultaneously appeal to the needs and aspirations of employees. Delegative leadership style was seen as the style being mostly used. Organizations adopt the style that best suits their operations which could even be varied at every level. Using this style might not be unconnected with the operations of WAEC, that depend mostly on delegation of duties while the leader monitors the outcome. With offices in all the state of the federation, the most feasible and appropriate leadership style could only be delegative style.

In a similar vein, overwhelming majority opined that staff are more productive when leaders provide clear instructions on what to do. Giving clear instructions, according to Sharma (2017), asserts that clear instructions are fundamental to productivity in any organization. When team

members clearly understand their tasks, expected outcomes, and available resources, they're more likely to work efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, providing clear instructions demonstrates a leader's respect for their subordinates, fostering a positive work environment where staff feel valued and understood. Conversely, unclear instructions often result in frustration, confusion, and a sense of being undervalued. Staff do respect leaders who are knowledgeable about tasks more than those who are not knowledgeable. Leaders could motivate their staff by giving a sense of purpose and direction.

Leaders must also find ways to show recognition for effort put in by their subordinates. This was one of the findings of this study and it aligns with Hastwell's (2025) view that when employees are recognised, it helps them feel valued for their contributions to the team and overall company success. She further suggested that such recognition could foster sense of security in their value to the company, motivating them to continue their excellent work. The extent to which employees care about their work, as well as the success of the organization could be determined by their level of involvement. Poor leadership could create negative and uninspiring work environment, negatively impact employee morale and engagement, and ultimately, affect their job satisfaction.

In addition, one of the findings of the current study showed that majority of the staff agreed that leaders who are not approachable make their subordinates not free to share ideas that will improve organizational success. Poor leadership goes beyond affecting individual staff, it also has its ripple effect on the success of the organization. Positive and friendly work environment significantly increases staff comfort, leading to higher morale, reduced stress, and improved job satisfaction. Once staff are comfortable in their work environment, better teamwork and open communication engendered which will potentially increase productivity. A conducive work environment promotes employee's well-being, which in turn allows them to apply themselves vigorously to their roles, leading to increased productivity (Akinyele, 2007).

The study further shows that positive attitudes from superior officers can motivate staff and increase their sense of belonging, particularly when leaders involve subordinates in decision-making. This indicates a positive correlation between leadership engagement and employee morale, and motivation. Greater involvement of subordinates in decision making leads to a stronger sense of belonging. According to Heartcount (2024) supportive and inspiring leaders foster trust, which create positive work environment. The implication of this is that employees that feel valued are more likely to be engaged and motivated in their roles, this will foster open communication which would allow for quicker problem-solving and a more efficient workflow. When leaders at workplace are approachable, according to Henderson (2025), it fosters a more cohesive team dynamics where employees collaborate more effectively, and employees are more likely to stay with a company where they feel supported and respected by the management. This means that active listening leaders make employees feel valued, heard and empowered. This fosters positive and productive work environment. Actively listening to subordinates' ideas when making decisions demonstrates respect and empathy, leading to increased engagement, higher morale, and improved team performance.

Conclusion

Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn:

This study examined the implications of leadership style on the employee morale in the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Nigeria. The role of competencies of leaders in guiding and motivating personnel in achieving organizational goals and objectives was also investigated. The study showed delegative leadership style as the method being used in the organisation due to the nature of the operations. Another notable finding of this study is on participation and involvement of employees in decision making. This signifies great sense of belonging among the employees. This is quite commendable even when the leadership style in the organization is delegative, the management created ways of making the voice of the employees heard. The current study further

strengthens the model postulated that delegative leadership style promotes employees' involvement and fosters productivity. This study is only limited to WAEC Nigeria and could be replicated in other WAEC member countries, as well as other publicly owned organisations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore recommended that:

1. WAEC management should sustain the style of leadership that has brought such success, as recorded in its operations.
2. Leaders should cultivate good communication skills. This will help leaders to provide clear instructions to their subordinates on what is expected of them.
3. Leaders irrespective of the leadership style being adopted should endeavour to involve staff in decision making. Involving them would foster unity, togetherness, conducive working environment and other indicators that would enhance organizational growth and success.
4. Leaders should create conducive environment, positive working atmosphere and leaders that are approachable for enhanced productivity.

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