

Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance in Tertiary Institutions in the Gambia

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the effect of transformational leadership on employee performance in selected tertiary institutions in The Gambia, including MDI, UTG, and USET. Using a quantitative survey of academic and administrative staff, the study examines how transformational leadership—characterized by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence—affects motivation, commitment, and innovation. Findings indicate that transformational leadership positively enhances employee performance compared to other styles, providing insights for institutional leaders and policymakers to adopt strategies that improve productivity and ensure long-term institutional sustainability.

KEYWORDS: Transformational Leadership, Employee Performance, Leadership Styles, Tertiary Institutions, The Gambia, Organisational Performance, Employee Motivation, Higher Education, Leadership Effectiveness, Institutional Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a critical determinant of organisational success, as leaders are responsible for guiding, motivating, and influencing employees toward the achievement of institutional goals. Effective leadership enhances employee performance, organisational productivity, and long-term sustainability. It involves not only directing and coordinating activities but also inspiring, empowering, and fostering commitment among employees to achieve shared objectives (Reichard et al., 2010). Consequently, leadership style plays a significant role in shaping employee attitudes, job satisfaction, and overall organisational outcomes.

Scholars widely acknowledge that the success or failure of organisations is closely linked to the effectiveness of leadership (Cummings & Schwab, 1973; Fiedler & House, 1988). Leadership establishes organisational vision, mission, and strategic direction, while also influencing how resources, particularly human capital, are mobilised to achieve these goals (Xu & Wang, 2008). In modern organisations, where competition, technological advancement, and workforce diversity are increasing, the demand for adaptive and effective leadership has become even more critical. Employees are regarded as the most valuable asset of any organisation, and their performance is largely influenced by leadership practices. Effective leaders foster motivation, engagement, and commitment, which in turn enhance productivity and organisational effectiveness (Paracha et al., 2012; Al Khajeh, 2018). Leadership styles—defined as the patterns of behaviour, traits, and approaches used by leaders—significantly impact employee morale, performance, and the quality of leader–employee relationships (Shirzad et al., 2011). As such, the adoption of appropriate leadership styles is essential for improving employee outcomes and achieving organisational excellence.

In today's dynamic and competitive environment, there is no single best leadership style; rather, effectiveness depends on situational factors and organisational context (Fiedler, 1967). This has led to increased scholarly interest in examining how different leadership styles influence employee performance across sectors.

2. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite the recognised importance of leadership, many organisations continue to experience challenges related to ineffective leadership practices, which negatively affect employee performance and organisational outcomes. In the context of The Gambia, the rapid growth of public and private tertiary institutions, including online platforms, has intensified competition, making high employee performance essential for institutional survival and success. Ineffective leadership styles may result in low employee motivation, reduced job satisfaction, and poor organisational performance. Given the increasing complexity of organisational

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environments and the need for innovation and efficiency, it is crucial for leaders to adopt styles that best suit their institutional context and workforce dynamics. However, existing literature indicates that no single leadership style is universally effective, as leadership effectiveness is largely situational (Fiedler, 1964, 1967).

Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on the most appropriate leadership styles within tertiary institutions in The Gambia. This gap necessitates an investigation into how different leadership styles—particularly transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, democratic, and autocratic—affect employee performance. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the impact of leadership styles on employee performance in selected tertiary institutions in The Gambia, with the aim of identifying the most effective leadership approach for enhancing employee productivity and institutional performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the effect of leadership style on employee performance in selected tertiary institutions in The Gambia. Data were collected from both academic staff (lecturers) and administrative staff using paper-based and online questionnaires, enabling broad and efficient data gathering at a single point in time. A correlational research approach was employed to assess the relationship between leadership style and employee performance. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, allowing the study to identify patterns and test relationships. The findings formed the basis for drawing conclusions and making recommendations.

4. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Transformational leadership has received considerable attention in organizational and educational research due to its strong influence on employee attitudes, motivation, and performance. It is characterized by four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, which collectively inspire employees to exceed expectations (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 5). Empirical studies consistently show that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on employee performance. For instance, transformational leadership enhances organizational performance by promoting innovation, employee motivation, and adaptive capabilities (Jiang et al., 2017, p. 3). Similarly, Paracha et al. (2012, p. 58) found a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance, indicating that leaders who motivate and inspire employees tend to achieve better organizational outcomes.

In the context of higher education, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in improving staff engagement and institutional effectiveness. Bogler (2015, p. 360) noted that leadership style significantly influences teachers' job satisfaction, which in turn affects their performance. Additionally, Hallinger (2011, p. 130) emphasized that leadership for learning in educational institutions enhances both teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.

Research in African higher education contexts further supports the relevance of transformational leadership. Studies have shown that transformational leadership fosters employee commitment, trust, and motivation, which are critical for improved performance (Sakiru et al., 2013, p. 4). In Ghana, Amoah-Mensah and Darkwa (2018, p. 5) found that transformational leadership positively influenced organizational performance through increased employee engagement. Moreover, transformational leadership enhances employee performance through empowerment and intellectual stimulation. Leaders who provide individualized consideration and encourage creativity enable employees to develop problem-solving skills and improve their productivity (Shafie et al., 2013, p. 23). This empowerment leads to higher job satisfaction and stronger organizational commitment among employees. In tertiary institutions, where knowledge creation and dissemination are central, leadership style significantly affects both academic and administrative staff performance. Transformational leaders promote collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning, which are essential for institutional growth and sustainability (Hitt et al., 2010, p. 412). Despite the extensive global and regional literature, there is limited empirical research specifically focused on tertiary institutions in The Gambia. Most existing studies have been conducted in other African countries such as Ghana and South Africa. This highlights a contextual gap, as leadership practices and institutional dynamics may differ across countries. Therefore, there is a need for localized research to better understand how transformational leadership affects employee performance within Gambian tertiary institutions.

In conclusion, the literature establishes that transformational leadership significantly enhances employee performance through motivation, engagement, empowerment, and commitment. However, the lack of context-specific studies in The Gambia underscores the importance of this research in contributing to both academic knowledge and policy development in the country's higher education sector.

5. RESULTS OF FINDINGS

The results presented in the table provide insights into respondents' perceptions of transformational leadership practices exhibited by their supervisors. Overall, the findings reveal a mixed pattern of responses, with notable levels of dissatisfaction, neutrality, and moderate positive perceptions across different dimensions of transformational leadership. Regarding the statement "*My supervisor makes others feel good to be around him/her,*" responses were divided. A significant proportion of respondents, 67 (32.8%), disagreed and 13 (6.4%) strongly disagreed, indicating that many supervisors are perceived as lacking the ability to create a positive

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work environment. However, 18 respondents (8.8%) agreed and 47 (23.0%) strongly agreed, while 59 (28.9%) remained neutral, suggesting uncertainty or varied experiences among staff. Similarly, responses to *"I have complete faith in my supervisor"* indicate low levels of trust. A combined 108 respondents (52.9%) expressed disagreement, while only 34 (16.1%) showed agreement. A considerable 63 respondents (30.9%) remained neutral, reflecting uncertainty or lack of strong conviction regarding their supervisors' credibility.

In relation to *"I am proud to be associated with my supervisor,"* the findings show a predominantly negative perception, with 100 respondents (49.0%) disagreeing and 9 (4.4%) strongly disagreeing. Only 40 respondents (19.7%) expressed agreement, while 55 (27.0%) were neutral, further indicating weak identification with leadership. However, responses to communication-related leadership behaviour were relatively more positive. For the statement *"My supervisor expresses in a few simple words what we could and should not do,"* a majority of 105 respondents (51.5%) agreed and 8 (3.9%) strongly agreed, suggesting that supervisors are relatively effective in providing clear guidance despite other shortcomings.

On inspirational motivation, the statement *"My supervisor provides appealing images about what we can do"* received generally positive feedback, with 87 respondents (42.7%) expressing agreement. Nevertheless, 42 respondents (20.6%) disagreed, and a substantial 75 (36.8%) remained neutral, indicating moderate but not overwhelming inspiration from leadership. With respect to meaningful engagement, responses to *"My supervisor helps me find meaning in my work"* were somewhat positive, as 106 respondents (52.2%) agreed or strongly agreed. However, a considerable proportion, 84 respondents (41.4%), expressed dissatisfaction, highlighting inconsistencies in supervisors' ability to foster meaningful work experiences.

Findings on intellectual stimulation reveal high neutrality. For instance, 123 respondents (60.3%) were neutral regarding whether supervisors encourage new ways of thinking about old problems. Similarly, 142 respondents (69.6%) remained neutral on whether supervisors encourage rethinking of previously unquestioned ideas. This suggests limited evidence of strong intellectual stimulation, a key component of transformational leadership. Nevertheless, a more favourable perception emerged for the statement *"My supervisor provides others with new ways of looking at puzzling things,"* where 111 respondents (54.4%) agreed or strongly agreed, although 36.8% remained neutral. In terms of individualised consideration, responses were mixed. While 117 respondents (57.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisors support personal development, 81 respondents (39.7%) disagreed, indicating uneven attention to employee growth. Similarly, feedback mechanisms appeared weak, as 132 respondents (64.7%) disagreed that their supervisors provide adequate feedback on performance.

Finally, regarding supportive leadership behaviour, the statement *"My supervisor gives personal attention to others who seem rejected"* produced mixed results. While 77 respondents (37.8%) expressed agreement, a larger proportion, 111 respondents (54.4%), disagreed, indicating that many supervisors are perceived as lacking empathy and individualized support. In summary, the findings suggest that while some elements of transformational leadership—such as communication clarity and moderate inspiration—are present, there are significant gaps in trust, employee support, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These shortcomings may limit the overall effectiveness of transformational leadership in enhancing employee performance within the institutions studied.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of leadership style on employee performance within selected tertiary institutions in The Gambia using a quantitative, cross-sectional and correlational approach. The findings demonstrate that leadership plays a critical role in shaping employee performance, organisational efficiency, and the overall capacity of institutions to adapt to changing environments. The results revealed significant challenges affecting organisational performance, particularly in relation to capacity development, technological infrastructure, and institutional readiness for digital transformation. A substantial majority of respondents indicated that employees lack adequate training to effectively develop, implement, and support digital services. This suggests that insufficient investment in human capital development remains a key barrier to improved performance. Similarly, the findings highlighted serious limitations in IT infrastructure, which constrain the ability of institutions and organisations to innovate and deliver efficient digital services.

Furthermore, the study established that organisational transformation, especially towards a digital culture, is likely to be slow due to systemic constraints, resistance to change, and inadequate resources. The absence of a strong legal and regulatory framework was also identified as a major impediment, limiting operational efficiency and restricting the growth of digital and e-commerce services. Despite these challenges, the findings indicate that technological advancements have a positive impact on productivity where implemented, although the lack of full automation continues to hinder optimal performance outcomes. Additionally, the study revealed that increasing competition from private actors exploiting regulatory gaps poses a significant threat to institutional sustainability and market relevance. This underscores the need for strategic leadership capable of responding proactively to external pressures and internal inefficiencies.

In conclusion, the study affirms that effective leadership—particularly transformational leadership—is essential for enhancing employee performance, fostering innovation, and ensuring organisational sustainability. Addressing gaps in training, infrastructure,

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regulatory frameworks, and resource allocation is critical for improving performance and enabling institutions to remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven environment.

7. RECOMMENDATION

Tertiary institutions in The Gambia should adopt transformational leadership and strengthen leadership development, employee participation, and continuous professional development to enhance performance.

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