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Application of Leadership Style on Employee Performance: A Focus on Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

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Abstract
The study examined the application of leadership style on employee performance of Delta State University, Abraka. Two dimensions of leadership styles (autocratic, democratic) were examined. The research adopted the cross-sectional research design method. The population of the study was Three Hundred and thirty academic staff of Delta State University. The sampling technique adopted in this study is multi-stage sampling and data was collected using structured questionnaire. The data generated was analysed using descriptive statistics for respondent's bio-data while inferential statistics (ANOVA) were used to analyse the research hypotheses with the aid of SPSS version 25.0 software. The study found a significant relationship between the variables studied and organizational performance (autocratic leadership style ß = .590, P = .000 < .05; democratic leadership style ß = .143, P = .000 < .05. The overall result showed leadership styles adopted in this study significantly predicts employee performance, F(4,271) = 334.731, R2 =.0912, p < .001. It was concluded that autocratic and democratic leadership styles have significant effect on employees' performance in Delta State University, Abraka. The study recommended that in order for the university to be productive, competitive, and successful, they need to embrace leadership styles that instil a strong sense of responsibility in their employees. Management teams of the university should foster an atmosphere that encourages employees to give their all and think beyond the box.

Keywords: Delta State academic staff**,** leadership styles, employee performance.

Introduction
Leaders and leadership practice have been in existence since the onset of mankind. Man is a complex social being that can be simplistically categorized into two groups namely leaders and followers. The successes recorded by most human endeavors can be attributed to leadership quality (Matira & Awolusi, 2020). Over the years, various scholars have studied the concept of leadership with the aim of understanding and improving the inherent benefits of effective leadership; these

studies have given rise to several definitions of leadership. While there are several and sometimes conflicting theories on leadership, what is immutable is that leaders inspire their followers and direct their actions towards the attainment of a set goal (Blazi & Awolusi, 2020; Mukonga & Awolusi, 2019; Olatunji & Awolusi, 2019). The practice of leadership has evolved considerably over time and the need for leaders and leadership has witnessed a significant upswing over the years. It was believed at that time that such individuals possessed innate talents and attributes that set them apart from others and conferred upon them the right to be leaders. This natural leadership selection process was the premise of the Great man theory (Matira & Awolusi, 2020).

The outcome of institution's performance depends practically on leadership style adopted. (Haque, 2017) Studies into employee performance and applicable researches done imply that capable and quality leadership styles are fundamental to effective institution or organization performance (Abdullateef, 2023). Additionally, employee performance refers to how your workforce carries out

their daily tasks within your organization, which will have an impact on the success or failure of your firm. Quality, number, and efficiency of employees as well as the traits your employees exhibit at work all affect how well they perform. It proves that an authoritarian leadership style leads to a decrease in worker productivity, and that any attempt to adopt such a style eventually lowers worker motivation, sense of community, and performance. Furthermore, the impact of leadership styles on worker performance was the subject of another study. Employee performance is positively impacted by the autocratic leadership style, and the researcher discovered a positive association between the two.

Statement of the Problem

The survival and development of any organization, be it public organization (Universities inclusive) or public organizations in Nigeria, basically depends on the effective leadership style adopted by leaders or managers heading the organization that will ensure employees commitment and performance. Leadership style is a key in realizing progress in the performance of academic staff too in Nigerian University system. It is also an issue of concern that Nigerian Universities should pay serious attention to the leadership styles prevalent and relevant to their setting. Although, empirical efforts has been made in understanding leadership styles and their impact on employees' performance in the contest of tertiary institution, because most tertiary institutions are yet to actualize goals as a result of challenges associated with leadership methods adopted.

Consequently, literature suggest that many employees still fail to understand what is expected of them, decisions are made too slowly, and they are less motivated, primarily due to the leaders' inactivity. Leadership is a crucial component of organizations since it helps in offering direction in the execution of business strategies, thus if leaders do not give direction, workers are left demoralized and may not perform their tasks efficiently. If these challenges are not addressed then the company is likely to experience low employee morale, low productivity. Accordingly, report from related studies on the subject matter, there is a lack of in-depth discovery in discourse of leadership styles towards achieving sustainable employee performance and the management of most Universities appears to lack competence leadership specificity. However, it turns into a real-world problem as the researchers tries to untangle the web of difficulties, the connection between different leadership philosophies and how they impact employees' performance in university administration. For this reason, the researcher intends to look into the effect of leadership style on employee performance in Delta State University, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine the application of leadership styles on employees' performance in Delta State University. Other objectives are to:

1. Determine the effect of autocratic leadership style on employees' performance in Delta State University.
2. Examine the effect of democratic leadership style on employees' performance in Delta State University

Literature Review

Concept of Leadership Style

Leadership style is the management approaches' managers used toward achieving organization targets and transforming available resources of the organization into outputs, (Neba et al 2024). The uniqueness of leadership style is the means by which decisions are made and various functions, goal setting and corporate objectives are fulfilled. It deals with leading strategy of planning,

directing organization goals, inspiring motivation and enhance staff potentials for growth and development. It is the process of exercising power and authority over the subordinates and influencing them in the organization. Leadership style is a means of improving, promoting, directing, shaping work behavior and organizing a group in achieving organization objectives such as profits, expansion, market shares, revenues and financial sustainability, Stanle, (2024) and is the process of leading and directing subordinates toward a shared objective, which are promotion, welfare and future expectations, (Olubode.2017).

Autocratic Leadership Style

An autocratic leadership is also otherwise known as authoritarian leadership, which is a leadership style deemed as a controlling type by most individuals. This is because the group leader makes all of the decisions and implements the strategy either alone or with minimal involvement from the other members of the group. In some situations, such as when decisions need to be made fast without consulting a big group of people, this leadership style can be advantageous even though it can kill any originality among the team members. Meetings will be necessary for a discussion in these situations, and as they must be scheduled around everyone's schedules, they are considered too time-consuming for an urgent decision (Pawar, 2019). Furthermore, in order to complete tasks quickly and effectively, some projects could require strong leadership. When client complaints occur in a chain of restaurants, for instance, the branch manager must take on an authoritarian leadership style in order to resolve the issue as quickly as possible without first consulting the restaurant's upper management. Customers will express even greater displeasure if the issue is not resolved right away (Islam, Rahman & Siddiqui, 2018).

Democratic Leadership

People who are usually viewed as inferior by hierarchical standards are given shared authority in the decision-making process under democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership (Yang, Zhang & Tsui, 2020). Additionally, every team member is given an equal chance to contribute to idea-generating procedures, and during brainstorming and group discussions, the best ideas are chosen using the democracy model (Christian, 2018). Because democratic leaders place a strong focus on group equality and free-flowing ideas, they will typically urge their team members to express any opinions. To avoid disputes and conflicts, the leader must still provide direction and keep an eye on things during the conversation, particularly if there are multiple parties with differing opinions or perspectives (Rifaldi, Ramadhini and Usman, 2019).

Employee Performance

Since employee performance affects the company's success and may be influenced by leadership, work happiness, and culture, it is a crucial component of organizations (Jamali et al., 2022). The quantity of tasks performed the caliber of the output, and the effectiveness in accomplishing corporate goals are all indicators of high employee performance, whether they are qualitative or quantitative. By establishing rules and standards that staff members must adhere to, motivating them, and showcasing their efforts, leadership affects worker performance (Dwivedi et al., 2020). According to the research, there is a significant relationship between employee performance and leadership styles, with various leadership philosophies producing varied results.

Theoretical Framework

Leaders Point of View Theory

Most Leadership theories emphasize leadership from the point of view of the leader; examples are trait, functional and style approaches (Akuoko, 2016). The trait approach is a leadership theory that suggests that certain people are born with special traits that make them great leaders, and these

include intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability (BPP, 2001). This theory seems to have advantage that it can be used for personal awareness and development. This theory is also intuitively appealing because it portrays leaders as "out-from" in society. However, this theory failed to take account of the impact of situation, thus indicating that leadership cannot be learned. The functional theory solves the failure of the trait theory by emphasizing that leadership is an art of performance, thus emphasizing that leadership cannot be created or promoted but can be learned or taught (Pedler, et.al, 2003).

However, the functional approach ties the leader into performing against specific categories and does not allow for much flexibility beyond these (Akuoko, 2016). A more fluid approach is provided in the options offered by the style theory. The style approach focuses on what leaders do rather than who leaders are. Here leaders engage in two types of behaviour-tasks and relationship. The style approach tends to broaden the scope of leadership to include behaviour, however, it failed to take into account the fact that certain situations may require different leadership styles.

Materials and Methods

The research adopted the cross-sectional research design. This is because this research design permits the collection of original data from large number of different individuals at a single point in time for describing random samples that are stratified in nature. The researcher conducted the study with a population of three hundred and seventy-two members which consists of academic staff in Delta State University, Abraka. These categories that were chosen by the researcher were believed to be key in the academic process, management and making of decisions in the organization. Questionnaire was used as a method of collecting primary data in this research. The responses from the questionnaire were on a five-point Likert scale type questions (strongly agreed, agreed, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree). For this study, the consistency of data was evaluated using the Cronbach alpha in line with SPSS reliability Coefficient of 0.79. The information that was gathered through the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 25.0. The demographic variables and questionnaire questions was described using descriptive statistics, while the hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics such as Regression and Product Moment Correlation. Regression statistical method was used to analyse the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables.

Results and Analysis

The population of this study consists of three hundred and seventy-two (372) academic and non-teaching staff of Delta State University, Abraka. A total of three hundred thirty (330) copies of questionnaire were administered on the respondents. Out of the three hundred and seventy-two (372) copies of questionnaire administered, only three hundred and thirty copies were retrieved. Out of the three hundred and fifty-one copies retrieved, twenty-one copies were not properly filled and only three hundred and thirty were usable and computed for the study analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	195	59
Female	135	41
Total	**330**	**100**
Age (Years)		
18–25	75	23

26–33	105	32
34–41	100	30
42-50	50	15
Total	330	**100**
Marital Status		
Single	81	24.5
Married	235	71
Divorced/Widowed	14	4.5
Total	330	**100**
Educational Qualification		
HND	90	27
B.SC	140	42
M.Sc/ Ph.D	100	30
Total	330	**100**

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

Findings from table 1 show the demographic distribution reveals that the majority of respondents (59%) were male, and most were within the 26–41 age group (62%). A significant proportion (71%) were married. The educational level of employees shows a majority hold higher degrees, indicating educated workforce. The educational system emphasis on higher education may contribute to its reputation for professionalism and expertise in the educational sector.

Analysis of Research Questions

This section recorded, summarized and classified into tables data derived from the questionnaire for each group of questions, the numbers of responses on each item in the questionnaire are noted, the corresponding mean and standard deviation computed used in the same manner for all the items.

Table 4: Autocratic Leadership Style and Employee Performance

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	U	SD	D	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	My leaders Provide me with in exchange for my efforts	180	110		-	10	1.66	2.01
2	My leaders fail to interfere until problems become serious	90	145	20	15	30	1.76	1.83
3	My leaders focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards	100	130	40	20	10	1.67	1.82
4	My leaders wait for things to go wrong before taking action	185	105	-	-	10	1.51	1.94
	Grand mean						**1.65**	

Source: Field Survey 2025

The questionnaire reveals that autocratic leadership style have significant effect on employee performance, with a grand mean of 1.65 indicating a positive correlation. Specifically, my leaders provide me with in exchange for my efforts (Statement 1), with 180 respondents strongly agreeing and 110 agreeing. However, my leaders fail to interfere until problems become serious (Statement 2), with only 90 strongly agreeing and 145 agreeing. Additionally, many respondents feel that the

leaders focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards (Statement 3), with 100 strongly agreeing and 130 agreeing. Nonetheless the leaders wait for things to go wrong before taking action (Statement 4), with 185 strongly agreeing and 105 agreeing.

Table 5: Democratic Leadership and Employee Performance

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	N	SD	D	Mean	Standard deviation
1	My leaders re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate or not	200	100	10	15	5	1.20	1.47
2	My leaders talk about the most important values and beliefs	140	115	30	20	25	1.62	2.02
3	My leaders Seeks different perspectives when solving problems	120	155	15	25	15	1.72	2.05
4	My leaders make it clear about what one can expect to receive when performance goals were Achieved	165	145	-	15	5	1.65	1.94
	Grand Mean						**1.54**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The questionnaire reveals that democratic leadership has significant impact on employee performance in Delta State University, with a grand mean of 1.54 indicating a positive correlation. Specifically, leaders re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate or not (Statement 1), with 200 respondents strongly agreeing and 100 agreeing. The leaders talk about the most important values and beliefs (Statement 2), with 140 strongly agreeing and 115 agreeing. Additionally, my leaders Seeks different perspectives when solving problems (Statement 3), with 120 strongly agreeing and 155 agreeing. Furthermore, leaders make it clear about what one can expect to receive when performance goals are Achieved (Statement 4), with 155 strongly agreeing and 145 agreeing.

Table 6: Employee Performance

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	N	SD	D	Mean	Standard deviation
1	I am always punctual in delivering the required output.	180	110		-	10	1.66	2.01
2	I understand the vision/mission of the organization very well	90	145	20	15	30	1.76	1.83
3	I could manage change in my job very well whenever the situation demands	100	130	40	20	10	1.67	1.82
4	I believe that mutual understanding can lead to a viable solution in organization.	185	105	-	-	10	1.51	1.94
	Grand mean						**1.65**	

Source: Field Survey 2025

The questionnaire reveals analysis of employee performance, with a grand mean of 1.65 indicating a positive correlation. Specifically, **on the respondents are** always punctual in delivering the required output (Statement 1), with 180 respondents strongly agreeing and 110 agreeing. The respondents understand the vision/mission of the organization very well (Statement 2), with only

90 strongly agreeing and 145 agreeing. I could manage change in my job very well whenever the situation demands (Statement 3), with 100 strongly agreeing and 130 agreeing. I believe that mutual understanding can lead to a viable solution in organization (Statement 4), with 185 strongly agreeing and 105 agreeing.

Test of Hypotheses

This study employed linear regression analysis using SPSS to test four hypotheses. In this analysis, if the significance level is less than 0.05 (for a 95% confidence level) or less than 0.01 (for a 99% confidence level), the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Conversely, if the significance level exceeds these thresholds, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis One: Autocratic Leadership Style does not have significant effect on employee performance of Delta State University.

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Ajusted R^2	Std. Error of the estimate
1	.897a	.805	.805	.589

Source: Field Survey 2025

The Model Summary table 7 shows a strong positive correlation (R = .897), with approximately 80.5% of the variation in employee performance explained by the democratic leadership style (R^2 = .805). The Adjusted R^2 (.805) and relatively low Std. Error of the estimate (.589) further support the significance of the relationship, suggesting that democratic leadership style has a substantial impact on employee performance, and thus the hypothesis can be rejected**.**

Table 8: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	233.955	1	233.955	674.222	.000b
	Residual	56.627	**329**	.347		
	Total	290.582	**330**			

Source: Field Survey 2025

The ANOVA table 8 presents a robust analysis of the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance, yielding a significant F-statistic (674.222) with a p-value (Sig.) of .000, which is far below the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This indicates a strong and statistically significant relationship between the predictor (democratic leadership style) and the outcome (employee performance), with the regression model explaining a substantial portion of the variance. Given the large F-statistic and minuscule p-value, there the researcher rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance, instead concluding that changes in democratic leadership style have a significant impact on employee performance.

Table 9: Coefficient

	Unstandardized co efficient		Standardized coefficient		
Model	**B**	**Std Error**	**Beta**	**T**	**Sig**
1(constant)	9.846	.118		83.261	.000
	.005	.002	.403	1.870	.078

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 9 presents the regression coefficients, indicating the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance. The unstandardized coefficient (B) joint consultation is 1.870, with a standard error of .078, indicating that for every unit increase in democratic leadership style, employee performance increases by 1.870 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is .403, suggesting that democratic leadership style explains approximately 40.3% of the variance in employee performance. The t-statistic (83.261) and p-value (.000) indicate a highly significant relationship, confirming that joint consultation has a substantial impact on employee performance. The constant term (9.846) represents the expected employee performance when democratic leadership style is zero, although this may not be a realistic or meaningful scenario.

Hypothesis Two: Democratic Leadership Style does not have significant effect on employee performance of Delta State University.

Table 10: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Ajusted R^2	Std. Error of the estimate
1	.925a	.856	.855	.500

Source: Field Survey 2025

The Model Summary table 10 presents a strong case against Hypothesis two, which states that there is no significant relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance. The results show a high correlation coefficient (R = .925) and a high coefficient of determination (R^2 = .856), indicating that approximately 85.6% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by strategic alignment. The Adjusted R^2 (.855) supports this finding, and the relatively low Std. Error of the estimate (.500) suggests a good fit for the model.

Table 11: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	242.990	1	242.990		
	Residual	40.804	329	.250	971.96	.000b
	Total	283.794	330			

Source: Field Survey 2025

The ANOVA results in table 11 show a statistically significant regression model, with a high F-statistic (F = 971.96) and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance. The results suggest that democratic leadership style have a significant effect on employee performance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance.

Table 12: Coefficient

	Unstandardized co efficient		Standardized coefficient	T	Sig
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1(constant)	-.671		.925	-	
	1.038	.132		5.079	.000
		.			
		033		31.156	.000

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 12 displays the regression coefficients, demonstrating a strong positive relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance. The unstandardised coefficient (B) of 31.156, with a standard error of .000, indicates that each unit increase in democratic leadership style is associated with a 31.156 unit increase in employee performance. The standardised coefficient (Beta) of .925 shows that democratic leadership style accounts for approximately 92.5% of the variance in performance. The constant term (–.671) reflects expected performance at zero leadership, though this is largely theoretical. The t-statistic (–5.079) and p-value (.000) confirm a highly significant relationship, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and affirming the substantial impact of democratic leadership on employee performance.

Discussion of Results

The Model Summary table 7 shows a strong positive correlation (R = .897), with approximately 80.5% of the variation in employee performance explained by the autocratic leadership style (R^2 = .805). This suggests that joint consultation does have significant effect on employee performance of Delta State University. The finding is in conformity with Dele, Ugwulali and Adewale (2025) on signalling effect of leadership styles and organization performance, evidence from private universities in South-West of Nigeria. They recommended that universities should adopt leadership styles that promote institutional performance relative to environmental structure that are conducive to enhance appropriate leadership style and university performance.

The results on table 10 show a high correlation coefficient (R = .925) and a high coefficient of determination (R^2 = .856), indicating that approximately 85.6% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by democratic leadership style. This suggests that democratic leadership style does have significant effect on employee performance of Delta State University. This finding is in agreement with the result of Kofi, Seth, Bremfi, Boateng, Boateng and Afriyie (2023), they examined the effect of leadership styles on: citizenship behaviour towards individuals (OCBI); and citizenship behaviour towards the organisation (OCBO). *They recommended that the leaders should increase the level of democratic practice to spur employee performance in a greater rate.*

Conclusion

Examining how leadership styles affect Delta State University employees' performance was the main objective of this study. Additionally, the study aimed to determine how gender influences the relationship between employee performance and leadership styles. As a result, the results showed a strong and favorable correlation between employee performance and autocratic and democratic leadership styles. According to the types of leadership styles in the company, the majority of employees said that the leader practiced democratic leadership, which suggests that it has a greater positive impact on employee performance in situations where employees feel empowered and confident to carry out their duties and make decisions. The leaders also gave their subordinates the chance to participate in decision-making, which increased their confidence in achieving the organization's challenging goals.

Recommendations

From the findings, the study recommends that:

1. The organizations focus more on developing transformational leadership styles through structured leadership training programs. Leaders need to be equipped with skills to inspire, motivate, and provide individualized attention to employees.

2. For universities to be productive, competitive, and successful, they need to embrace leadership styles that instill a strong sense of responsibility in their employees. Management teams at universities should foster an atmosphere that encourages employees to give their all and think beyond the box.

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