



# LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

By

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## Abstract

This study examined the relationship between leadership styles and employee productivity in the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Specifically, it focused on how transformational and transactional leadership styles influence two key indicators of employee productivity: service timeliness and service quality. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, with 196 valid responses collected from non-academic staff across various administrative units. The data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0. Findings revealed that both leadership styles had significant positive effects on employee productivity dimensions, with transformational leadership demonstrating stronger effects. The study concludes that effective leadership is critical for enhancing service performance in tertiary institutions and recommends targeted leadership development programs that emphasize both transformational and transactional elements to achieve a balanced improvement in timeliness and quality of service

## Keywords:

*Leadership Styles, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Employee Productivity, Service Timeliness, Service Quality*

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## Introduction

Leadership remains a critical determinant of organizational success in both private and public institutions. In the context of tertiary education, leadership styles have far-reaching implications on employee motivation, service delivery, and overall institutional performance (Northouse, 2021). The University of Port Harcourt, like many Nigerian universities, operates in a dynamic and complex environment characterized by increasing student population, resource constraints, and the need for high service standards. These pressures require responsive and effective leadership to drive productivity among staff.

Transformational and transactional leadership styles are among the most widely studied paradigms in organizational behaviour and have been linked to various performance outcomes. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation, fosters employee commitment and innovation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Conversely, transactional leadership focuses on structured tasks, performance monitoring, and reward-punishment mechanisms. Transactional leadership emphasizes structured roles, reward systems, and clear expectations to drive performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The relevance of these leadership styles within academic institutions is increasingly gaining attention as universities strive to meet national and global expectations.

Employee productivity within a university setting can be evaluated through service timeliness and service quality—two indicators that reflect the responsiveness and effectiveness of administrative and academic staff. Employee productivity in academic institutions is often measured through service timeliness and service quality, which determine how efficiently employees' complete tasks and the level of excellence in their outputs (Olowookere, Aluko & Osibanjo, 2016). With increasing administrative demands and student engagement expectations, leadership effectiveness directly influences employees' ability to meet institutional objectives.

Despite the importance of leadership styles in academic productivity, there is a limited focus on how these styles affect service timeliness and service quality within Nigerian universities. Existing studies emphasize corporate environments, neglecting academic institutions where leadership dynamics differ significantly (Umar & Idris, 2022). This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employee productivity at the University of Port Harcourt.

Through an empirical investigation, this research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on academic leadership, offering recommendations for leadership development and institutional effectiveness. By assessing employee perceptions and leadership approaches, this study will provide strategic insights into optimizing leadership styles to enhance service timeliness and quality, ultimately improving institutional performance.

## Statement of the Problem

Despite the significant role leadership plays in organizational effectiveness, many public universities in Nigeria, including the University of Port Harcourt, continue to grapple with low staff productivity, delayed services, and complaints about service quality. Issues such as bureaucratic delays, lack of motivation, inadequate supervision, and inconsistent reward

systems persist in the face of growing expectations from students and stakeholders. These challenges have raised questions about the adequacy of leadership approaches in these institutions. While leadership styles such as transformational and transactional approaches have been extensively researched in the corporate sector, their application and effectiveness in the context of Nigerian public universities remain underexplored. Specifically, there is limited empirical evidence on how these leadership styles affect key dimensions of employee productivity, including service timeliness and service quality in a university setting.

Furthermore, conflicting findings in previous studies add to the complexity. Some studies suggest that transformational leadership leads to improved employee engagement and performance (Ng, 2020), while others report minimal or no impact in public sector environments (Ojo & Abolarin, 2021). Similarly, the transactional approach, though effective in some contexts, is often criticized for being overly rigid and demotivating in academic settings. These contradictions point to a need for localized and context-specific research. This study addresses this gap by empirically analyzing the relationship between leadership styles and employee productivity within the University of Port Harcourt. It seeks to provide data-driven insights that can guide leadership development and strategic management in Nigeria's higher education sector.

### **Research Objectives**

The specific objectives are;

1. To examine the relationship between transformational leadership style and service timeliness.
2. To examine the relationship between transformational leadership style and service quality.
3. To examine the relationship between transactional leadership style and service timeliness.
4. To examine the relationship between transactional leadership style and service quality.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses served as a tentative answer to the research questions.

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership style and service timeliness.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership style and service quality.

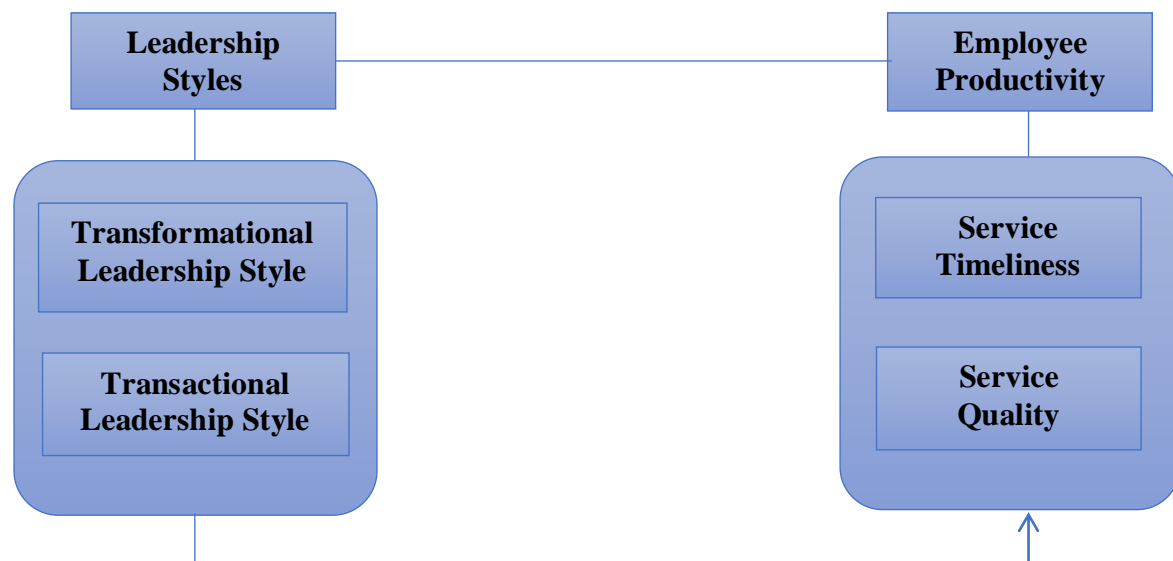
Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between transactional leadership style and service timeliness.

Ho<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant relationship between transactional leadership style and service quality.

## Literature Review

This study is anchored on the Goal-Setting Theory. Proposed by Locke and Latham (1990), this theory states that specific and challenging goals, when accepted by employees, lead to higher performance. In leadership contexts, when goals are clearly communicated and tied to feedback and rewards (as in transactional leadership), or when employees are inspired toward collective goals (as in transformational leadership), productivity is likely to improve. This theory reinforces the relevance of leadership communication and motivation to staff productivity in university administration.

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework

## Leadership Styles

Leadership style refers to a leader's approach to guiding, motivating, and managing subordinates. It shapes organizational climate, influences employee attitudes, and affects overall performance (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Leadership styles can be broadly categorized into transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. However, in organizational psychology, transformational and transactional styles remain dominant in studies linking leadership to productivity and innovation (Yukl, 2013). According to Bass and Avolio (1994), leadership style is not just a personality trait but a set of consistent behaviors deployed to elicit desired outcomes from team members. Leadership styles refer to the approaches and behaviors that leaders adopt to influence and guide their employees. Different leadership styles impact employee motivation, engagement, and productivity in various ways (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leadership effectiveness is crucial for ensuring efficient service delivery and maintaining institutional performance (Umar & Idris, 2022). In academic environments like universities, the type of leadership style adopted can influence administrative efficiency, service delivery, and institutional image.

### ***Transformational Leadership Style***

Transformational leadership is characterized by a leader's ability to inspire and motivate employees beyond immediate self-interest to achieve collective goals. It includes four key components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders with this style foster innovation, empower staff, and cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment among employees. In the context of Nigerian universities, transformational leadership has been shown to positively influence job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviours, leading to better service outcomes (Ololube, 2021). It is particularly effective in dynamic environments where adaptation and creativity are critical for performance. Transformational leadership is associated with higher employee engagement, improved service timeliness, and enhanced service quality (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Key attributes of transformational leadership include: Idealized Influence – leaders serve as role models, earning trust and respect; Inspirational Motivation – leaders articulate a compelling vision that motivates employees; Intellectual Stimulation – leaders encourage creativity and problem-solving; and Individualized Consideration – leaders provide personalized support and mentorship.

### ***Transactional Leadership Style***

Transactional leadership is based on structured roles, performance expectations, and a system of rewards and penalties. It emphasizes clear communication of tasks, monitoring of performance, and correction of deviations from standards. This style is more task-oriented and less focused on individual development. In academic institutions, transactional leaders are often found in administrative positions where rule enforcement and policy adherence are paramount. While this approach ensures short-term productivity, it may lack the motivation and innovation needed for sustained institutional success (Adeniran et al., 2023). Leaders who adopt this style inspire employees to exceed expectations by fostering innovation and commitment. Transactional leadership is based on structured rewards, clear expectations, and performance monitoring (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders who adopt this style focus on maintaining efficiency through task-oriented supervision and reinforcement mechanisms. Key attributes of transactional leadership include: Contingent Reward – employees receive rewards based on performance; Management by Exception (Active) – leaders intervene when performance deviates from expectations; and Management by Exception (Passive) – leaders take corrective action only when necessary. While transactional leadership ensures service timeliness, it may limit employee creativity and long-term engagement (Olowookere et al., 2016).

### **Employee Productivity**

Employee productivity refers to the efficiency and effectiveness with which employees fulfill their job roles. In the university context, productivity extends beyond academic outputs to include timely service delivery, responsiveness to student needs, and the quality of administrative services (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). It serves as a measure of institutional health and reflects the alignment between staff efforts and organizational goals. Employee productivity refers to the efficiency and effectiveness of employees in achieving

organizational goals. In academic institutions, productivity is measured through service timeliness and service quality (Umar & Idris, 2022).

### ***Service Timeliness***

Service timeliness refers to the promptness and reliability with which staff deliver services to internal and external stakeholders. Service timeliness implies the speed and efficiency with which employees' complete tasks and respond to institutional needs. Leadership styles influence service timeliness by shaping employee motivation and work processes. In universities, this includes meeting deadlines for student registration, result processing, and administrative approvals. Timeliness directly affects stakeholder satisfaction and organizational credibility (Iwu et al., 2019). Leadership style plays a key role in enforcing service standards and minimizing bureaucratic delays.

### ***Service Quality***

Service quality is the degree to which a service meets or exceeds expectations. It encompasses tangibles (e.g., infrastructure), responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and reliability. In educational institutions, high service quality contributes to positive student experiences and institutional reputation. Transformational leadership has been positively linked to service quality through enhanced staff engagement and commitment (Acho-Elendu et al., 2024). Service quality reflects the accuracy, reliability, and excellence of employee outputs. Transformational leadership enhances service quality by fostering innovation and commitment, while transactional leadership ensures adherence to standards and expectations (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

### ***Empirical Review***

A study by Ng (2020) found that transformational leadership significantly enhances service responsiveness and timeliness in public institutions. The research demonstrated that leaders who exhibit vision and encouragement promote proactive behavior among employees. Research by Olowookere et al. (2016) found that transformational leadership significantly improves service timeliness in Nigerian universities.

A study by Umar & Idris (2022) revealed that transformational leadership enhances service quality by fostering employee engagement. Ololube (2021) reported a strong correlation between transformational leadership and service quality in Nigerian universities, citing improved staff morale and innovation as key mediators.

In a study by Hassan (2016), transactional leadership was found to positively influence task efficiency but had minimal long-term impact on creativity or initiative. The research concluded that transactional mechanisms help maintain routine service delivery. Bass & Riggio (2006) demonstrated that transactional leadership ensures service timeliness through structured supervision.

Research by Avolio & Bass (2004) indicated that transactional leadership maintains service quality but may limit innovation. Adeniran et al. (2023) revealed that while transactional leadership ensures consistency, it often results in lower service quality due to lack of staff motivation and engagement.

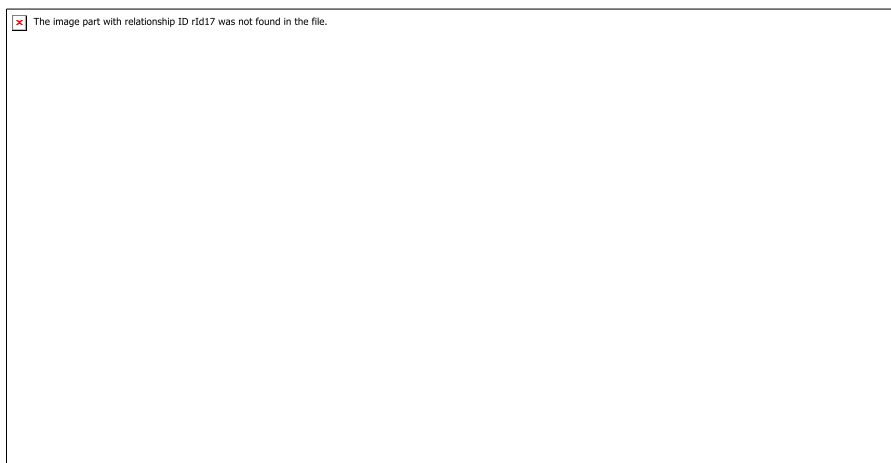
## Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, which is appropriate for examining the relationship between independent and dependent variables at a specific point in time. The cross-sectional nature of the study ensures that data is collected from a large number of respondents simultaneously, allowing for generalizability of findings. The population of the study comprises non-academic staff members of the University of Port Harcourt across various faculties, departments, and administrative units. A stratified sampling technique was used to ensure representation across key units such as registry, bursary, admissions, examinations, and faculty offices. A sample size of 220 staff members was selected for the study to ensure statistical reliability. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. Data collected were coded and analyzed using Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS version 4.0 software.

## Analysis and Discussion

A total of 220 questionnaires were administered to selected non-academic staff of the University of Port Harcourt. Out of these, 203 were retrieved, and 196 were correctly filled and deemed usable, representing an 89% valid response rate. This high response rate reflects the relevance of the topic and the willingness of staff to contribute to improving institutional performance.

The variables are: Leadership Styles (LES), Transformational Leadership Style (TFL), Transactional Leadership Style (TNL), Employee Productivity (EPY), Service Timeliness (STS) and Service Quality (SQY). Sixteen observable variables were employed, conceptually associated with one of the four latent variables. These connections are illustrated in the Path Diagram in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Research Model

Figure 2 shows the latent variables and their corresponding observable variables. Transformational leadership style has TFL1 to TFL4; transactional leadership style is operationalised using TNL1 to TN4; STS1 to STS4 are linked to service timeliness; while service quality has SQY1 to SQY4.

Table 1 presents the results of reliability and validity testing for four key constructs: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Service Timeliness, and Service Quality. Three indicators are used—Fornell-Larcker Criterion, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's Alpha—to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

**Table 1: Reliability and Validity Tests**

Variables	Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha
Transformational Leadership	<b>0.946</b>	0.896	0.971
Transactional Leadership	<b>0.946</b>	0.895	0.971
Service Timeliness	<b>0.832</b>	0.692	0.889
Service Quality	<b>0.962</b>	0.925	0.980

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion values, all above the recommended threshold, indicate strong discriminant validity, meaning each variable is empirically distinct. The AVE scores, all well above 0.50, confirm excellent convergent validity, showing that each construct explains a substantial amount of variance in its indicators. The Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.889 to 0.980, confirming very high internal consistency. This suggests that the items within each construct are reliably measuring the same underlying concept. Overall, the measurement instruments used to assess leadership styles and employee productivity are both valid and reliable, providing a strong foundation for further analysis and interpretation in the study.

**Table 2: Hypotheses Testing Result**

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	P Values ( $p$ )	Predictive Accuracy ( $R^2$ )	Decision
Ho <sub>1</sub>	Transformational Leadership → Service Timeliness	0.612	0.000	0.375	Reject null hypothesis
Ho <sub>2</sub>	Transformational Leadership → Service Quality	0.497	0.002	0.247	Reject null hypothesis
Ho <sub>3</sub>	Transactional Leadership → Service Timeliness	0.338	0.010	0.114	Reject null hypothesis
Ho <sub>4</sub>	Transactional Leadership → Service	0.311	0.014	0.097	Reject null



Quality

hypothesis

*Significance level:  $p < 0.05$* **Discussion of Findings***Transformational Leadership Style and Service Timeliness*

The result revealed a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and service timeliness. This indicates that leaders who demonstrate vision, encouragement, and intellectual stimulation positively influence how promptly staff deliver services. This aligns with Ng (2020), who found that transformational leadership improves service delivery efficiency by promoting initiative among employees.

*Transformational Leadership Style and Service Quality*

Transformational leadership also had a significant impact on service quality. Leaders who motivate and consider individual staff needs can enhance responsiveness and empathy, leading to superior service experiences. This confirms the findings of Ololube (2021), who linked transformational practices to improved quality outcomes in Nigerian universities. Avolio & Bass (2004) highlighted that transformational leadership enhances employees' engagement and service excellence.

*Transactional Leadership Style and Service Timeliness*

The analysis showed a statistically significant effect of transactional leadership on service timeliness. This suggests that when rules, monitoring, and rewards are in place, employees tend to meet deadlines and execute tasks efficiently. This supports Hassan (2016), who observed similar task compliance in structured public-sector environments. While transactional leaders ensure structured processes and compliance, their reliance on reward and punishment systems may not foster intrinsic motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

*Transactional Leadership Style and Service Quality*

A significant relationship also existed between transactional leadership and service quality, although the effect was less pronounced than transformational leadership. This implies that transactional mechanisms can enforce minimum standards, but may not inspire service excellence. Adeniran et al. (2023) similarly found that transactional leadership maintains performance but limits staff creativity.

**Conclusion**

The study investigated the relationship between leadership styles on employee productivity among non-academic staff of the University of Port Harcourt. Leadership styles was operationalised using transformational and transactional, while employee productivity was operationalized through service timeliness and service quality. The findings reveal that both transformational and transactional leadership styles have significant positive relationships with the indicators of employee productivity.

Transformational leadership showed stronger effects, suggesting that when leaders engage, inspire, and mentor employees, staff are more likely to go beyond routine duties, thereby improving both the speed and quality of service delivery. Transactional leadership, while still effective, exerted a moderate influence, indicating that structured expectations and reward systems are also beneficial for timely and consistent service output, though they may not necessarily inspire long-term commitment or innovation. In a higher education environment where administrative efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction are critical, leadership styles must be strategically applied to boost productivity, morale, and institutional success.

Based on the tested hypotheses and findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- University management should prioritize leadership development programs that equip supervisors with transformational skills. These skills can foster a sense of urgency and ownership among staff, leading to more timely service delivery.
- Departmental heads and unit leaders should be trained to provide individualized support and mentoring to staff. This can enhance empathy, creativity, and a service-oriented mindset, thereby boosting service quality across administrative departments.
- Leadership should maintain clear expectations and enforce rules that reward punctuality and task completion. Structured reward systems can motivate staff to adhere to deadlines and service targets.
- To maximize the benefits of transactional leadership, leaders should complement their rule-based management with periodic feedback and reinforcement. Ensuring that staff clearly understand performance metrics will help maintain minimum service quality standards.

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