

Employees' perceived leadership traits and job performance in selected Agricultural Research Institutes in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Leadership traits are essential components of effective management because it helps to maximize organization efficiency and achievement. Studies have established that the majority of people who leave their organizations do not quit their organization but they quit their boss. Hence, understanding the extent to which leadership traits affect employees' job performance, most especially in agricultural research institutes in Oyo State, Nigeria, becomes pertinent. The study, therefore, empirically established the extent to which employee perceived leadership traits affect employee performance in Agricultural Research Institutes. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 211 employees from three selected research institutes (IAR&T, NIHORT and FRIN), and primary data was obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the Chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Prominent perceived leadership traits highly exhibited by the employees were the ability to communicate ($\bar{x} = 4.59$) and being energetic ($\bar{x} = 4.32$). About work product index of performance ($\bar{x} = 2.92$), employees did not meet job performance expectations. Correlation analysis showed a positive significant relationship between perceived leadership traits ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$) and employees' job performance. In conclusion, since the employees did not meet work product index, employee perceived leadership traits are inadequate. Hence it is recommended that a leadership empowerment and training programme should be conducted for the employees to enhance performance on the job.

Keywords: Leadership, traits, performance, employee, communication

Introduction

Leadership is the act of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it. It is also regarded as the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives or an individual influencing a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Dubrin, 2007). However, Bennis (2007) viewed leadership as a process of influencing a group in a particular situation at a given point to stimulate people to attain organizational objectives. Leadership in a workplace is the backbone and lifeblood of the organization which generally will embrace the mission of the organization. Leaders will agree to work hand in hand with the followers, within the followers' patient-driven organization from the grassroots level (Shafie, Baghersalimi, and Barghi, 2013). Leadership is required for better performance of the subordinates to introduce and change their behaviour (Islam, Khan, Shafiq, and Ahmad, 2012).

The roles of leadership in any organization cannot be overemphasized because it influences the employees as well as the organization as a whole. However, these roles are properly and effectively played when the leader possesses the necessary qualities to influence

the employees to work towards job satisfaction and taking necessary actions or steps that will influence the followers towards achieving the goals and objectives of the organization (Chong, 2013).

Leadership trait is defined as a component of a person's behaviour that is assumed to serve as an explanation of his/her enduring personal characteristics. It can also be regarded as a distinguishing characteristic typically belonging to a person or one genetically inherited (Hough and Schneider, 1996 cited in Lawal, 2019). Statements such as, "*She is a born leader*" and "*He was born to lead*" imply a perspective toward leadership that is trait-based (Yukl, 2006). Leadership traits include: sociable, creative, popular, humorous, intelligent, insightful, responsible, persistent and self-confident. These leadership traits are very important; however, it should be noted that individuals do not become leaders solely because they possess certain traits, but such traits need to be relevant in the job the leader is performing. Ginneth and Curphy (2009) viewed performance as those behaviours directed towards the organization's mission or goal. It could be inferred from the assertion of Ginneth and Curphy that performance is goal-oriented behaviour that requires elements of management such as individual's control supervision and direction toward organizational objective. This implies that employees may decide to work or not depending on the prevalent situation and circumstances in the organization. For example, the desire for promotion will result in high performance only if the person believes there is a strong expectation that his performance will lead to promotion. Apparently, individual administrative staff behaviour reflects a conscious choice between the comparative evaluations of alternative behaviours. This implies that the choice of behaviour of any worker is based on the expectation of the most favourable consequences. Empirical studies revealed that some factors are highly significant to employees' productivity or performance in the organization. Ghania, Yunusb and Bahryc (2016) found that with good leadership traits, employees can perform the job well and easily communicate with other team members. Valentine (2018) was of the opinion that effective communication in a workplace is imperative in a leadership role. In a more recent study by Popoola (2015), there is a significant relationship between age, years of working experience and job performance in research institutes in Nigeria. Feldman (2009) found out that education is positively related to job performance. Likewise, Oso, Adebayo and George (2017) found that employees with higher qualifications performed better in an organization. Studies indicated that a significant majority of people who leave their organizations do not quit their company; they quit their boss (Zaccaro, 2007). It is often argued that the success or failure of an organization hinges on the leadership trait (Abraham, 2001). By having certain good leadership traits, a leader should be able to adapt his/her leadership traits and behaviours to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Works of literature revealed that leaders with bad leadership traits will display the following symptoms: ditching of face-to-face communication, displacement of charisma, causing confusion, fear and anxiety in the mind of the employees, dominating decision-making, feeling never wrong, hoarding and withholding of information, looking after themselves only (Schwantes, 2019). These symptoms/characteristics will affect employee morale, cause the organizational bottom line to plunge, poor employee retention, demotivate the employees, and cause the employees to be much less productive than they would otherwise be. The agricultural research institute is an organization where several leadership traits are supposed to be manifested. Good and effective leadership traits matter to the overall performance and well-being of the agricultural

organization and its members. However, much work has been done on several aspects of organisation such as factor of production, supervision of organization, control and planning of organization, with little work on employee leadership traits; hence the need to conduct this research.

Research Objectives

The research had the following objectives: (i) to describe employees' socio-economic characteristics in selected agricultural research institutes, (ii) examine employees' perceived leadership traits, and (iii) ascertain the extent to which employees are performing the job.

The hypotheses of the study were:

(i) There is no significant relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics of the employees' and employees' job performance; and

(ii) There is no significant relationship between perceived leadership traits and the employees' job performance. The research finding would enable management/executive officers of private and public organizations, particularly agricultural-based research institutions to realise that leadership trait is a factor to be considered essential in the recruitment and appointment of leaders in order to ensure the effective realisation of employee efficiency and productivity. Furthermore, apart from promoting research on factors of production by organization managers, focus should be channelled towards employee psychological feeling and well-being.

Method of data collection

A multistage sampling technique was used for the selection of employees in the study institutions. Stage 1: Oyo state was purposively selected out of the six (6) states in southwest Nigeria due to the high number of agricultural institutions in the state. Stage 2: Random sampling technique was used to select Institute of Agricultural Research and Training (IAR&T), National Horticultural Research Institute (NIHORT) and Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria. Stage 3: Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select an equal proportion of employees in each department/unit from the selected institutions where the sample size of 10% was drawn from each department. Stage 4: Simple random sampling technique was used in this stage to randomly select the employees sampled for the study. Hence, 211 out of 2014 employees in the three selected research institutes (IAR&T, NIHORT and FRIN) participated in the research. Employees' perceived leadership trait was measured by adapting the scale developed by [Heather](#) (2014) and modified. It is a five-point Likert type scale of Strongly Agree (SA= 5), Agree (A= 4), Undecided (U=3), Disagree (D= 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD= 1) which was used to source for appropriate information which contains 13 items. Job Performance was measured by adapting the job performance scale used by Sogo (2018) and modified. The scale consists of twenty-six possible statements measured using a five-point rating scale of Exceptional (E= 5), Exceeds Expectation (EE= 4), Meets Expectation (ME=3), Improvement Needed (IN= 2) and Unsatisfactory (U= 1). Primary data were obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire. A response rate of 95.0% was obtained with 201 copies

of the questionnaire retrieved. Data were analysed using frequency counts, means and standard deviation, Chi-square, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Regression analysis.

Result and Discussion

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	27-36 years	60	29.9	40.00	6.412
	37-46 years	109	54.2		
	47-56 years	32	15.9		
Sex	Male	117	58.2		
	Female	84	41.8		
Marital status	Single	27	13.4		
	Married	153	76.1		
	Divorced	12	6.0		
	Widowed	9	4.5		
Educational qualification	SSCE	2	1.0		
	OND	5	2.5		
	HND	37	18.4		
	B.Sc.	81	40.3		
	M.Sc.	53	26.4		
Religion	Ph.D.	23	11.4		
	Christianity	121	60.2		
	Islam	79	39.3		
Annual income (#)	Other	1	0.5		
	186T-1M	117	58.2	1,120,248.76	1,003,192.897
	1.1M-5M	82	40.8		
	5.1-10M	1	0.5		
Above 10M	1	0.5			
Rank	Junior staff	48	23.9		
	Senior staff	153	76.1		
Years of experience	2-7 years	121	60.2	6.89	3.905
	8-13 years	67	33.3		
	14-19 years	13	6.5		
Specialization	Admin	58	28.9		
	Agric dept	115	57.2		
	Planning	14	7.0		
	Library	14	7.0		

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

The result in Table 1 indicates that 84.1% of the employees were within the age range of 27-46 years with a mean age of 40years. This implies that the majority (84.1%) of the employees were below 46years. Agricultural employees in the study area are quite within the active age group and still have more productive years with great expectation that they should be active in the organization. This study is quite in line with that of Ibeun (2002) who described that more

than half of agricultural employees in South–West Nigeria are within the age range of 31 -40 years. The study shows that the majority (58.2%) of the employees were male, which indicated that the number of male working in agricultural research station was more than their female counterparts. It could be deduced from the result as to why gender inequalities have been one of the pre-existing problems in most organizational settings. The result of this finding agrees with Banmeke and Ajayi (2010) who reveal that the number of males in research institutes of Southwest Nigeria was more than the female. The study also reveals that the majority (90.1%) of the respondents have higher educational qualifications. This manifests the fact that working in agricultural research institutes requires the attainment of higher degrees. Table 1 further reveals that the mean annual income of respondents in the study area was between 186,000-1,000,000 Naira annually, it showed the majority (58.2%) earns 186,000-1,000,000 Naira annually. This indicates the difference in the salary scale of the agricultural employee based on their rank or level of educational qualification. This implies that most agricultural employees with a high qualification or higher rank can afford an average standard of living. The result also reveals that 23.9% of agricultural employees in the study area were junior employees and 76.1% were senior agricultural employees. Most (60.2%) of the respondents had less than 11 years of work experience and 39.8% had above 11 years' experience while the average years of experience were 9 years. This implies that most of the respondents were still young and were trying to build up experience on the job. Results also show that 28.9% of the respondents were specialized as administrators, 57.2% of the respondents were in the agricultural research department while 7.0% were in the planning department and library, respectively.

Table 2: Employees' perceived leadership trait

s/n	Leadership traits	\bar{x}	S.D.
1	Ability to communicate effectively with other employees	4.59	0.64
2	Energetic in nature	4.32	0.65
3	Ability to give account when necessary	4.26	0.80
4	Genuinely concerned about the welfare of the organization	4.23	0.84
5	Ability to perceive issues from other employees perspective	4.19	0.86
6	Ability to create good working environment	4.15	0.88
7	Ability to take proactive measures	4.14	0.86
8	Approachable and willing to listen to other employees	4.13	0.95
9	Passionate about achieving success in the organization	4.12	0.98
10	Good at analyzing problems and finding creative ways of solving it	4.10	0.92
11	Ability to build trust between myself and other people	4.08	1.06
12	Ability to assign roles to people	4.01	1.00
13	Ensures I see things from other employees perspectives	3.93	1.13
Weighted Mean = 4.17			
=Mean, S.D=Standard Deviation.			

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Employee's perceived leadership traits

The weighted mean score ($\bar{x}=4.17$) of leadership trait reveals that the employees possess enough leadership traits that will enable them to manage their organization effectively. Specifically, the result in Table 2 shows that out of the 13 leadership traits considered, ability to communicate effectively with other employees ($\bar{x}=4.59$); employees' energetic nature ($=4.32$); ability to give account ($\bar{x}=4.26$); genuinely concerned about the welfare of the organization ($\bar{x}=4.23$), were all rated high as perceived leadership traits possessed by the employees. Out of the 13 perceived leadership trait items identified, all the employees had a mean score of more than 3.0 the cut-off point for exhibiting leadership trait which indicates that they possessed these perceived leadership traits. The finding shows that employees perceived as possessing good leadership communication traits and full of energy are required to achieve organizational goals effectively. The research findings are in tandem with Valentine (2018) whose assertion is that effective communication in a workplace is imperative in a leadership role.

Table 3: Extent of Employee's Job performance

s/n	Job performance	\bar{x}	S.D.
	Work product		
1	Can vouch for the quality of my work	2.86	1.00
2	Take my work seriously	2.85	0.94
3	Complete and submit work that supervisor can trust	2.97	0.86
4	Get work done within stipulated time	2.98	0.92
	(Weighted Mean =2.92) Dependability		
5	Arrive at work on time	2.96	0.87
6	Meet work deadlines	3.09	0.98
7	Take initiatives at work	2.96	0.98
8	Have good work ethics	2.98	0.93
	(Weighted Mean =3.00) Cooperativeness		
9	Willingly accept new assignments	3.00	0.96
10	Open to suggestions and new ideas	2.97	1.03
11	Work well with my peers	2.97	1.06
12	Exhibit a positive attitude when working as part of a team	3.11	1.05
	(Weighted Mean =3.01) Adaptability		
13	Show willingness to adapt to changes	3.06	1.02
14	Show enthusiasm about new challenges and ideas	2.91	0.96
15	Effectively adjust work to account for changing circumstance	2.94	0.98

16	Think ahead to plan how to account for changing circumstances at work	2.91	0.94
	(Weighted Mean =2.96) Communication		
17	Communicate effectively with peers and supervisors	2.97	1.06
18	Escalate issues to supervisors when appropriate	2.91	0.97
19	Show willingness to assist others when necessary	2.99	0.98
20	Inform supervisors of concerns or frustrations	2.89	1.04
	(Weighted Mean = 2.94) Other items		
21	Maintain high level of integrity and reliability	3.10	1.10
22	Do not vandalize the properties of the organization	3.03	1.03
23	Hold the interest of subordinates in high esteem	3.07	0.98
24	Accept faults and do take corrective actions	3.02	0.98
25	Take additional task with no complaint	3.01	1.05
26	Submissive to organization rules and regulation (Weighted Mean = 3.05)	3.08	1.02

Source: Field survey, 2019.

\bar{x} =Mean, S.D=Standard Deviation.

The extent of Employees' Job performance

The weighted mean score of (\bar{x} =3.05) indicated that employees' job performance is moderate, that is above average. The result in Table 3 further indicates that sub factors of employees' job performance, work product weighted mean score (\bar{x} =2.92), did not meet job performance expectations which shows employees need improvement. Concerning dependability for employees' job performance factor, the mean score (\bar{x} =3.00) shows employees meet job performance expectations, also indicating the need for training because employees are on an average scale. Also, cooperativeness for employees' job performance (\bar{x} =3.01) indicates employees meet job performance expectation; however, they still need improvement. Adaptability for the employees' job performance (\bar{x} =2.96) reveals that employees were unable to meet job performance expectation, and thus need improvement. Moreover, communication for employees' job performance (\bar{x} =2.94) also shows that employees did not meet job performance expectations, indicating they need improvement. Other items for employees' job performance (\bar{x} =3.05) reveal that employees were able to meet job performance expectations. From the result, it shows employees' work productivity, adaptability and communication did not meet job performance expectations indicating that they need improvement in those areas. On the other hand, dependability, cooperativeness and other items reveal that employees were average in meeting job performance expectations which also indicates the need for training.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 4: Test of association between respondents' socio-economic characteristics and their Job performance (Chi-square)

Socio-economic characteristics	Chi-square value	Contingency co-efficient	DF	P-value	Remark
Sex	1.325	0.081	2	0.515	NS
Marital status	9.932	0.217	6	0.128	NS
Educational qualification	20.533	0.304	10	0.025	S
Religion	4.662	0.151	4	0.324	NS
Rank	1.138	0.075	2	0.075	NS

Source: Field survey, 2019

DF= Degree of Freedom

P.VALUE <0.05 significant

P.VALUE > 0.05 not significant

Table 5: Test of relationship between respondents' socio-economic characteristics and their Job performance (PPMC)

Socio-economic characteristics	Correlation (r)	P-value	Remark
Age	0.193*	0.006	S
Annual income,	0.065	0.360	NS
Years of experience	0.171*	0.015	S

Source: Field survey, 2019

* Sig. at 0.05 level

Test of Hypotheses

Test of association between respondents' socio-economic characteristics and their job performance

The result of this hypothesis: “there is no significant relationship between respondent’s socio-economic characteristics and their job performance”, was tested using Chi-square test (χ^2) for variables measured at nominal level, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for variables measured at interval level and the results are presented in Tables 4 and 5 respectively. Chi-square statistical analysis revealed a significant association between respondents’ educational level ($\chi^2=20.533$, $df=10$) and job performance. The result indicates that those with high educational level had better job performance. The finding supports that of Feldman (2009) who found out that education is positively related to job performance. This is also related to the findings of Oso, Adebayo and George (2017) that supported that employees with higher qualifications performed better in an organization. The correlation analysis shows there was a significant relationship between respondents’ age ($r = 0.193$) and years of experience ($r = 0.171$) and employees’ job performance. This implies that agricultural employees’ age determines their effectiveness on the job; likewise, the level and type of experience agricultural

employees have gained on or off the job influences their job performance. In a more recent study by Popoola (2015), findings revealed there was a significant relationship between age, years of working experience and job performance in research institutes in Nigeria.

Table 6: Test of relationship between perceived leadership traits and employees job performance

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	p value	Remark
Perceived leadership traits	54.2587	5.8960	201	0.412*	.000	Sig.
Employees job performance	72.4428	17.0704				

Source: Field survey, 2019

*correlation is significant at 0.05 level

Test of the relationship between perceived leadership traits and employees' job performance

The hypothesis which states that, "there is no significant relationship between perceived leadership traits and employees' job performance" was tested using PPMC and the result is presented in Table 6. The correlation analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between perceived leadership traits and job performance ($r=0.412$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, it could be deduced that leadership traits influenced employees' job performance in selected Agricultural research institutes in Oyo state. This is consistent with the study conducted by Barrick, Parks and Mount (2005) who found out that leadership traits play an important role since they influence job performance. Hence, with good leadership traits, employees can perform the job well and easily communicate with other team members (Ghania, Yunusb and Bahryc, 2016).

Conclusion

It has been found that leadership traits can directly or indirectly impact organizational performance. The study reveals the employees' possessed leadership traits that enable them to perform in the organization. However, the employees need improvement in some of these sub-factors of performance namely, work productivity, adaptability, and communication. The study also revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between leadership traits and employees' job performance. A good leader should have all the needed leadership traits to direct the organization towards the goals so that the organization can become successful. Employees exhibiting good leadership traits like effective communication show that the highest perceived leadership trait in the workplace is imperative in a leadership role. It helps to eliminate misunderstandings and can encourage a healthy and peaceful work environment. The study further revealed that certain personal characteristics (age, marital status, and educational qualification) commonly contributed to employee performance level.

Recommendations

To enhance job performance, it is essential for management and practitioners of agricultural institutions in Nigeria to consider employees' leadership traits as important employee motivators

or performance enhancers. Hence, empowerment programmes on identified leadership traits should be organized for the employees to improve their job performance ability. Moreover, the aspect of performance sub-factors where the employees needed improvement should be put into consideration in planning developmental programmes for agricultural research institutes. Funding of agricultural research institutes becomes pertinent for the government since leadership traits improvement and meeting performance job expectation sub-factors are a function of release and availability of funds from the government for the institutes to execute it.

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