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MODERATING EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT ON AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN SOME SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS IN KADUNA METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the prevalence of hierarchical structures in many organizations, rigid autocratic leadership often risks stifling the psychological dedication necessary for peak productivity. This study examined the moderating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance, specifically investigating whether engagement levels can mitigate the limitations of a leadership style. Data were gathered from 384 employees across selected institutions in Kaduna, including the Nigerian Defence Academy, St. Gerard's Catholic Teaching Hospital, St. Anne's Secondary School, Rapha Orthopedic Hospital, Nigerian Breweries and Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital. Utilizing a structured questionnaire, the data were analyzed via SPSS using a Hierarchical Regression Model to assess both direct effects and interaction dynamics. The findings reveal that autocratic leadership alone exerts a weak direct effect on staff performance; however, employee engagement significantly moderates this relationship. High levels of engagement were found to reduce the adverse impacts of autocratic control while concurrently enhancing performance outcomes. Based on these results, the study recommends that managers should exercise autocratic leadership selectively, restricting its application to situations requiring strict supervision, rapid decision making or high operational control, while minimizing excessive authoritarian practices that may undermine employee performance. The study further recommends that organizations should institutionalize strategies for enhancing employee engagement through effective communication, employee involvement, recognition, career development opportunities and supportive human resource policies to strengthen employee commitment and improve performance even within structured leadership environment.

Keywords: Autocratic Leadership, Employee Engagement, Employee Performance, Moderation Effect, Kaduna Metropolis.

Introduction

Historically, the conceptualization of leadership and performance originated within developed economies, evolving from the rigid "Scientific Management" of the early 20th century to the contemporary emphasis on affective engagement and participative governance. In these developed contexts, individual job performance is recognized as the definitive determinant of institutional capacity to realize strategic objectives (Al-Hajri, 2024). Research from these regions spanning the last decade increasingly suggests that superior outcomes are not merely products of technical training, but are significantly conditioned by the depth of emotional commitment personnel maintain toward their roles (Bakker & Albrecht, 2022).

As these theories transitioned to the African continent, they encountered unique institutional landscapes characterized by centralized hierarchies and resource scarcity. In many African organizational contexts, performance is frequently impeded by deep-seated structural weaknesses and bureaucratic management routines that inadvertently stifle workplace initiative (Vrontis, Belas, Thrassou, Santoro, & Christofi, 2023; Abibo, Vrontis, & Thrassou, 2023). Unlike the participative models prevalent in the West, leadership praxis in Africa remains largely anchored in traditional authority, where leadership serves as a vital but often rigid moderator of employee resilience against occupational stressors.

Within Nigeria, this continental trend manifests as a deeply entrenched autocratic praxis. Decision-making authority is traditionally concentrated at the institutional apex, a persistence often attributed to a societal orientation toward high power distance (Ogunfowora, Andiappan, Stackhouse, & Varty, 2023). While management trends advocate for collaborative models, Nigerian organizations particularly in the public and formal sectors frequently rely on centralized command-and-control structures to ensure discipline in volatile environments (Akinwale & George, 2021; Adeyemi & Akinwale, 2024).

The practical implications of this journey are most acutely observed at the localized level within the Kaduna Metropolis. In this urban workforce, employee disengagement has become increasingly evident, manifesting as "presenteeism" where workers are physically present but demonstrate low motivation and limited effort toward organizational goals (Business Day, 2025; Kayode-Samuel & Akinbo, 2026). In the specific socio-economic climate of Kaduna, the overreliance on directive supervision has created a unique dynamic where the efficacy of

leadership is no longer guaranteed by authority alone, but is instead contingent upon how employees psychologically "appraise" their leaders.

Statement of the Research Problem

Optimizing employee performance is fundamental to organizational efficacy; however, institutions in Nigeria continue to grapple with suboptimal productivity and diminished personnel commitment within authority-driven environments (Bakker & Albrecht, 2023; Meyer, Johnson, Williams, & Khan., 2023). While leadership is established as a primary determinant of performance, empirical consensus regarding the absolute effectiveness of the autocratic paradigm remains elusive.

In the Nigerian institutional landscape, a significant tension exists between global participative trends and local autocratic praxis (Olorunfemi & Adedoyin, 2023). Although such leadership is often justified for maintaining order, contemporary scholarship reports contradictory findings, indicating that autocratic leadership can either enhance or degrade employee performance depending on specific contextual moderators (Elia Pizzolitto, Ida Verna, & Michelina Venditti, 2023; Geremias, Silva, & Gomes, 2024)

Furthermore, while recent scholarship identifies employee engagement as a critical psychological condition that dictates how personnel respond to leadership, there is a profound scarcity of applied research conceptualizing engagement as a moderating variable between autocratic leadership and performance (Saks, 2023; Farahnak, Ehrhart, Torres, & Aarons, 2024). This gap is particularly acute in Sub-Saharan African settings, where the psychological mechanisms of the workforce remain under-theorized.

Consequently, there is a lack of context-specific empirical evidence regarding whether autocratic leadership significantly influences performance, or whether employee engagement functions as a buffer to alter this relationship within the unique socio-economic climate of the Kaduna Metropolis. This research addresses these critical voids by investigating the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance and evaluating the moderating role of employee engagement within this specific localized framework.

The evolution of organizational theory reveals a critical transition: while developed economies have moved toward participative and engagement-centric models, the African and Nigerian institutional landscapes remain tethered to autocratic praxis due to high power distance and structural rigidities. This creates a "theoretical friction" where Western models of performance

may not fully account for the behavioral outcomes observed in highly centralized environments like the Kaduna Metropolis.

Ultimately, the problem addressed by this research is the empirical uncertainty surrounding the efficacy of autocratic leadership in the modern Nigerian workplace. Despite its prevalence, its impact on performance remains inconsistent in literature, and the role of employee engagement as a moderating force is largely unexplored in the Sub-Saharan context.

Without this context-specific evidence, organizations in Kaduna will continue to apply leadership methods that may inadvertently stifle the very commitment required for institutional survival. This study, therefore, concludes that a rigorous investigation into the Autocratic Leadership, Employee Engagement and Job Performance triad is essential to bridge the gap between traditional praxis and modern organizational effectiveness.

Research Objectives

i. Examine the direct influence of autocratic leadership on employee performance in selected organizations in Kaduna Metropolis.

ii. Investigate the moderating role of employee engagement in the causal relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance.

Conceptual Review

Leadership Style

Leadership style refers to the behavioural approach leaders adopt in directing, motivating and influencing employees to achieve organizational objectives. Rather than focusing on inherent traits, leadership styles are best understood through observable behaviours and decision-making patterns that shape how employees perceive their roles and contribute to organizational outcomes (Borgatta, Bales, & Couch, 1963; Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). In this study, the moderating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance will be examined in selected organizations within Kaduna Metropolis.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is characterized by centralized authority, unilateral decision-making and strict supervision. While often criticized for suppressing employee voice, this style can enhance performance in situations that demand quick decision-making, strict compliance and efficiency (Mwesigwa, Tusiime, & Ssekiziyivu., 2020). However, when applied rigidly, autocratic leadership may reduce employee engagement and creativity, leading to lower job satisfaction and increased

turnover intentions (Pizzolitto, Verna, & Venditti, 2023). In service organizations within Kaduna Metropolis, excessive reliance on autocratic leadership may undermine employees' sense of autonomy, which is vital for engagement and sustained performance.

Autocratic leadership is fundamentally anchored in the construct of high-power distance, where a significant psychological and structural gap exists between the leader and the subordinate. This style is defined by a 'command-and-control' ethos that prioritizes hierarchy over horizontal collaboration (Ogunfowora et al., 2023). In developing organizational landscapes, this centralized approach is often perceived as a source of institutional stability; however, it risks fostering a culture of 'learned helplessness' among the workforce. Within the specific socio-cultural framework of Nigeria, while autocracy aligns with traditional respect for authority, it may simultaneously stifle the intrinsic motivation necessary for high-level employee engagement and proactive job performance (Akinwale & George, 2021).

Autocratic leadership operates as a high-intensity transactional mechanism where the leader provides absolute clarity in task execution in exchange for total subordinate compliance. This style is defined by the elimination of role ambiguity through top-down communication and a focus on 'instrumental' rather than 'relational' leadership (Farahnak et al., 2024). Although this ensures temporal efficiency and reduces error rates in volatile environments, it often fails to ignite the 'discretionary effort' associated with high employee engagement. Consequently, in institutional settings where creativity and adaptability are becoming increasingly critical, the rigid application of autocratic methods may prove counterproductive, resulting in a workforce that is compliant but lacks the engagement required for sustained competitive advantage (Breevaart & Zacher, 2023; Iqbal, Anwar, & Haider, 2023).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement refers to the emotional, cognitive and behavioural investment employees bring to their work roles, reflecting their commitment to tasks, colleagues and organizational objectives (Schaufeli, 2021; Eldor, 2021). Engaged employees demonstrate enthusiasm, energy and a willingness to exceed formal job requirements, which translates into higher productivity, creativity and adaptability (Bakker, 2022; Agarwal, 2021). This form of discretionary effort makes engagement a critical determinant of employee performance, particularly in knowledge-based and service-driven organizations.

Employee engagement is fundamentally defined as the harnessing of organizational members selves to their work roles,' wherein individuals employ and express themselves physically,

cognitively and emotionally during role performances (Kahn, 2022). This perspective posits that engagement is not merely a state of satisfaction, but a condition of being 'psychologically present' and fully invested in the execution of one's duties. In institutional settings characterized by high power distance, such as those in the Kaduna Metropolis, this internal psychological presence acts as a vital bridge; it allows employees to maintain a sense of purpose and individual initiative even when functioning within rigid, top-down command structures (Bailey, Yeoman, Madden, Thompson, & Kerridge 2024).

Contemporary scholarship increasingly defines employee engagement as a cognitive appraisal mechanism that dictates how personnel interpret leadership behaviors. In this sense, engagement is a moderating variable; highly engaged employees possess a 'positive valence' that allows them to perceive directive or autocratic supervision as instrumental guidance rather than coercive control (Farahnak et al., 2024; Saks, 2023). This definition shifts the focus from engagement as a passive outcome to engagement as an active lens. In the volatile organizational climate of Nigeria, this form of engagement determines whether strict supervision leads to burnout or whether it provides the structured environment necessary for high-level performance (Breevaart & Zacher, 2023).

Employee Performance

Employee performance is a central construct in organisational research, reflecting the extent to which individuals contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. It encompasses not only the completion of assigned tasks but also the quality, timeliness and creativity of work, as well as broader discretionary behaviours that sustain long-term competitiveness (Borman & Motowidlo, 2019; Mensah, 2022). High levels of employee performance are critical for organizational success because they directly determine productivity, service quality, customer satisfaction and innovation (Shanker, Bhanugopan, van der Heijden, & Farrell, 2017). For organizations in contexts such as Kaduna Metropolis, where operational efficiency and workforce motivation remain pressing challenges, understanding employee performance is particularly relevant.

Employee performance is defined as the total expected value to the organization of the discrete behavioural episodes that an individual carries out over a specified period of time (Al-Hajri, 2024). This perspective shifts the focus from mere 'outputs' to the specific 'actions' taken by employees to fulfill institutional mandates. In the Nigerian context, performance is increasingly viewed as a product of goal-directed behaviour that is either facilitated or constrained by the prevailing

leadership climate. According to Akinwale and George (2021), in environments characterized by high power distance, performance is often a measure of 'compliant productivity', the ability of the worker to meet the leader's specific directives while maintaining the operational rhythm of the organization.

In the modern era of institutional flux, employee performance is redefined as adaptive performance, the ability of a worker to modify their behaviour to meet the demands of a volatile or changing work environment (Zhou, Gul, & Tufail, 2022; Bakker & Albrecht, 2022). This definition moves beyond 'routine excellence' to include problem-solving, stress management and creative adaptability. For service-driven organizations in urban centers like Kaduna Metropolis, performance is no longer just about following top-down orders; it is about the employee's capacity to navigate complex regulatory and socio-economic challenges. Consequently, performance is viewed as the ultimate outcome of a 'psychological contract' between the leader and the led, where high engagement levels act as the catalyst for sustained excellence (Southgate et al., 2023; Farahnak et al., 2024).

Causal Relationship Between Autocratic Leadership and Employee Performance

Empirical evidence on the relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance remains mixed, with studies reporting reduced initiative (Daramola, 2025; Navruzov & Aktaş, 2025) and improved outcomes in structured, task-driven settings (Kavishemi, 2023). While traditional perspectives argue that centralized control and directive leadership can undermine psychological safety and employee engagement (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Eldor, Hodor, & Cappelli, 2023), recent studies suggest that the relationship is not always linear but depends on contextual conditions and leadership practices (Lee, Lyubovnikova, Zheng, & Li, 2023).

Employee engagement, in particular, acts as a key moderating factor, shaping how directive leadership is perceived (Bakker & Albrecht, 2022; Iyaji & Bakare, 2023). Highly engaged employees may interpret autocratic behaviour as supportive guidance rather than coercive control, thereby mitigating its negative effects on performance. By focusing on the Kaduna Metropolis, this study addresses the limited context-specific evidence and provides deeper insight into how leadership translates into performance outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Empirical Literature Review

Numerous researches have examined the relationship between leadership styles, employee engagement and employee performance across different contexts, providing insights that inform the current study.

Empirical studies on leadership styles, employee engagement and organizational performance have received considerable attention across different regions, although findings remain mixed and context-dependent. At the global level, Chen and Huang (2021) examined the impact of leadership styles on employee performance in Chinese manufacturing firms using a sample of 300 employees and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Using regression analysis, the study found that autocratic leadership reduced employee performance; however, high levels of employee engagement weakened this negative effect. Similarly, Buil, Martínez, and Matute (2022) investigated leadership styles in Spanish SMEs with a sample of 350 employees and reported that autocratic leadership negatively influenced performance, although engagement-enhancing practices mitigated this effect. In the same vein, Garcia and Lopez (2021), studying Latin American service firms with 330 employees, found that employee engagement reduced the adverse impact of autocratic leadership on performance. Despite these contributions, these studies were conducted in non-African contexts, limiting their generalizability to developing economies such as Nigeria.

Within the African context, Nkosi and Mhlongo (2020) explored the mediating role of employee engagement in South African banks using a sample of 400 employees and structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings showed that employee engagement significantly mediated the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. Likewise, Mensah and Asante (2021), in Ghana's public sector with 220 respondents, found that autocratic leadership reduced employee motivation and performance, although engaged employees demonstrated resilience under strict supervision. However, both studies combined multiple leadership styles without isolating the specific effect of autocratic leadership, thereby limiting deeper understanding of its unique dynamics.

In Nigeria, several studies have examined leadership styles and performance outcomes, though with notable methodological and conceptual gaps. Ajayi and Adeyemi (2022) investigated leadership styles and employee performance in public hospitals in Lagos using 250 healthcare workers and multiple regression analysis. The study found that autocratic leadership negatively affected performance, while employee engagement significantly improved outcomes. Similarly, Oladipo and Adewale (2019), using 200 healthcare professionals and correlation analysis, reported that autocratic leadership had a weak effect on productivity, while higher engagement improved

performance. However, both studies failed to examine the interactive or mediating role of employee engagement.

Further, Okeke and Eze (2022) examined leadership styles in Nigerian private universities with 260 staff and found that autocratic leadership reduced engagement and performance. Likewise, Abubakar and Bello (2024), using PLS-SEM on 300 employees in SMEs, reported that autocratic leadership had mixed performance outcomes depending on engagement levels. In Northern Nigeria, Ibrahim and Sadiq (2023) found that autocratic leadership negatively influenced performance, while engagement improved outcomes, although the study did not test interaction effects. Similarly, Yakubu and Lawal (2023), focusing on public sector organizations in Abuja with 240 respondents, reported that autocratic leadership reduced performance, but engaged employees remained productive. Across these Nigerian studies, a common limitation is the failure to rigorously test employee engagement as a mediating or moderating variable.

Beyond Nigeria, Khan, Abbas, and Raza (2020) in Pakistan's banking sector, using 310 employees and regression analysis, found that autocratic leadership negatively affected performance, while engagement improved productivity. However, employee engagement was treated only as an independent variable rather than an intervening mechanism, limiting deeper causal insights.

Overall, while existing empirical literature confirms that autocratic leadership often undermines employee performance, there is growing evidence that employee engagement can buffer or reshape this relationship. Nonetheless, most studies either combine leadership styles, rely on simple analytical techniques or fail to explicitly model the mediating or moderating role of engagement. More importantly, there is a scarcity of context-specific studies focusing on hierarchical organizational settings within Kaduna Metropolis. This study therefore fills these gaps by examining the direct effect of autocratic leadership on organizational performance while explicitly testing the mediating role of employee engagement in selected organizations in Kaduna Metropolis, Nigeria, thereby providing contextually grounded and methodologically robust insights.

Theoretical Framework

Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), established by Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1977), postulates that effective leadership depends on matching leadership behaviour to subordinates' competence and commitment. This model is mainly relevant to the current study as it explains the conditional effectiveness of autocratic leadership. In hierarchical and structured situations, such as the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, St Gerald Catholic Teaching Hospital, Kaduna, St Annes

Secondary School Kakuri, Kaduna, Rapha Orthopedic Hospital, Barnawa, Nigeria Breweries, Kakuri and Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital, Kaduna, where tasks frequently require close supervision and clear directives. According to SLT, when staff display low willingness or lack adequate experience, autocratic leadership characterized by directive behaviour, decision-making control and explicit guidance can improve compliance, role clarity and short-term performance results. The theory offers a basis for investigating the moderating role of employee engagement: even under autocratic leadership, employees' engagement levels may affect how effectively they respond to leadership, thereby shaping performance outcomes. In essence, SLT offers a conceptual basis for understanding why autocratic leadership may produce variable results subject on employee readiness, task complexity and engagement levels.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the study is anchored on the SLT, which provides the principal framework for explaining how leadership behaviour interacts with employee characteristics to influence organizational performance. Accordingly, SLT remains the central theoretical foundation underpinning this study.

Methodology

This research employs a cross-sectional survey design, which is appropriate for investigating the relationships between autocratic leadership, employee engagement and employee performance without experimental manipulation (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). The study population consists of 8,864 employees from seven diverse organizations in Kaduna Metropolis, representing the manufacturing, healthcare, telecommunications, education and military sectors. Utilizing Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% precision level, a sample size of 384 was determined and proportionally distributed based on staff strengths. Consequently, the Nigerian Defence Academy accounts for 166 respondents, followed by Nigerian Breweries Plc with 100 and MTN Nigeria with 78. The healthcare and education sectors are represented by Barau Dikko Teaching Hospital (23), St Gerald's Catholic Hospital (11), St Anne's Secondary School (5) and Rapha Orthopedic Hospital (1).

Primary data were gathered via a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from validated scales, including the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1995) for leadership behaviors, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006) for engagement, and the Koopmans et al. (2014) scale for performance. Quantitative analysis was performed using IBM SPSS (v.28/29). Descriptive statistics synthesized demographic profiles, while Hierarchical

Multiple Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses in three phases. First, the direct effect of autocratic leadership on performance was isolated. Second, the independent contribution of employee engagement was assessed. Finally, an interaction term (Autocratic Leadership × Employee Engagement) was introduced to rigorously test for moderation, in alignment with the frameworks established by Aiken and West (1991) and Hayes (2022).

Results and Data Analysis

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to examine the moderating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance. The analysis was done in three stages. In **Model 1**, autocratic leadership was entered as the independent variable. In **Model 2**, employee engagement was introduced. In **Model 3**, the interaction term (Autocratic Leadership × Employee Engagement) was entered to test the moderating effect.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R2	Adj R2	Std Error	R2 Change	F Change	Sig
Model 1	0.227	0.052	0.049	0.672	0.052	19.52	0.000
Model 2	0.553	0.306	0.302	0.541	0.254	86.41	0.000
Model 3	0.571	0.326	0.321	0.533	0.020	8.49	0.004

Source: SPSS (2025)

Interpretation

As shown in table 1, Model 1 shows that autocratic leadership explains **5.2%** of the variance in employee performance. When employee engagement was introduced in Model 2, the explanatory power increased significantly to **30.6%**, indicating that engagement strongly predicts employee performance. In Model 3, the interaction term between autocratic leadership and employee engagement increased the explained variance to **32.6%**, confirming the moderating effect of employee engagement.

Significance of the Model

Table 2: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression (Model 1)	8.811	1	8.811	19.52	0.000
Residual	160.884	381	0.422		
Total	169.695	382			
Regression (Model 2)	51.865	2	25.932	86.41	0.000
Residual	117.830	380	0.310		
Regression (Model 3)	55.305	3	18.435	64.92	0.000
Residual	114.390	379	0.302		

Source: SPSS (2025)

Interpretation

The ANOVA results indicate that **all three models are statistically significant (p < 0.05)**. This suggests that the regression models significantly predict employee performance.

Table 3: Coefficients

Model	Variable	Beta	Std Error	t	Sig
Model 1	Constant	2.876	0.292	9.841	0.000
	Autocratic Leadership	0.227	0.051	4.418	0.000
Model 2	Constant	1.962	0.292	6.711	0.000
	Autocratic Leadership	0.118	0.053	2.241	0.025
	Employee Engagement	0.487	0.053	9.106	0.000
Model 3	Constant	1.841	0.297	6.204	0.000
	Autocratic Leadership	0.083	0.049	1.702	0.089
	Employee Engagement	0.441	0.053	8.371	0.000
	Autocratic × Engagement	0.156	0.054	2.913	0.004

Source: SPSS (2025)

Interpretation

The results captured in table 3 indicate that:

a. Autocratic leadership significantly predicts employee performance in Model 1.

b. When staff engagement is presented in Model 2, it becomes a strong predictor of employee performance.

c. In Model 3, the interaction term (Autocratic Leadership × Employee Engagement) is statistically significant (p = 0.004), confirming that employee engagement moderates the relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance.

Conclusion of the Moderation Test

The hierarchical regression results prove that employee engagement significantly moderates the relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance. This indicates that the efficiency of autocratic leadership in influencing employee performance depends mostly on the level of employee engagement within the organization.

Discussion of Findings

The empirical results demonstrate that while autocratic leadership exerts a significant direct positive effect on performance, its operational efficacy is inherently contingent upon the degree of employee engagement. This validation of the moderation hypothesis strongly aligns with the study's anchor, Situational Leadership Theory (SLT). According to SLT, leadership effectiveness is not a "one-size-fits-all" phenomenon but is dependent on the "readiness" or maturity of the

followers. In this context, employee engagement serves as a critical proxy for follower readiness; when engagement is high, employees possess the psychological maturity and task commitment necessary to thrive even under the directive, "telling" style characteristic of autocratic leadership. Furthermore, these results resonate with contemporary extensions of the theory, such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). It suggests that highly engaged employees in the Kaduna Metropolis use their internal motivation as a resource to navigate the rigid hierarchical structures typical of the region. This creates a nuanced "compliance-engagement" dynamic in these sampled organizations, staff who are engaged demonstrate resilience and discretionary effort, allowing them to sustain high productivity despite limited participation in decision-making (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Harms et al., 2018).

Consequently, the findings confirm that an autocratic style is most effective when paired with high follower engagement, as the leader's high-task orientation is met with the follower's high-commitment levels. This suggests that organizations should not focus solely on leadership behaviour in isolation, but must actively cultivate employee engagement to exploit and sustain performance outcomes in high-pressure or centralized environments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that autocratic leadership is not a primary or self-sufficient determinant of employee performance within the organizations surveyed in Kaduna Metropolis. While centralized authority and hierarchical structures are prevalent in these contexts, their capacity to drive productivity is fundamentally contingent upon broader organizational and psychological dynamics. Specifically, the data reveals that autocratic leadership lacks a significant direct impact on performance, whereas employee engagement emerges as a superior and significant predictor of productivity.

The research underscores that employee engagement serves as a pivotal moderator; staff who possess high levels of vigour, dedication and absorption are capable of maintaining optimal productivity regardless of the prevailing leadership style. Ultimately, within the framework of Situational Leadership Theory, leadership effectiveness cannot be assessed in isolation from the workforce's psychological state. The results indicate that employee engagement acts as the regulatory mechanism through which leadership behaviours are filtered and translated into performance outcomes. These findings reinforce contemporary viewpoints in organizational behaviour, asserting that the success of any management style especially in rigid institutional

environments rests on the ability to cultivate the motivational resources that empower employees to thrive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and in line with the research objectives, the following recommendations are made:

i. Organizations in Kaduna Metropolis should adopt a more balanced and situational application of autocratic leadership. Although autocratic leadership may be useful in situations requiring quick decision-making, strict supervision or crisis management, managers should avoid its excessive use. Instead, they should apply directive leadership only when appropriate to ensure that employee performance is enhanced rather than diminished.

ii. Organizations should strengthen employee engagement through deliberate human resource practices such as employee recognition, effective communication, opportunities for career development, regular performance feedback and supportive supervision. Since employee engagement moderates the relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance, improving employees' level of engagement will help sustain high performance even where autocratic leadership is occasionally adopted.

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