SITUATIONAL VARIABLES AND LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN RIVERS STATE PUBLIC SECTOR: AN ANALYSIS OF CONTINGENCY FACTORS



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Abstract
This study investigated the determinants of leadership effectiveness across public sector institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria including Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Using a survey design, data were collected through questionnaires, field observations, and semi-structured interviews from 345 public sector employees selected through non-probability sampling. Descriptive analysis employed percentage distributions to examine respondent ratings and Chi-square (χ^2) test analysis was used to test the postulated research hypotheses. The findings demonstrated that follower competence and capability constitute more critical factors for leadership effectiveness than leadership improvement alone which challenges prevailing organizational development assumptions. Key constraints on leadership effectiveness within Rivers State public institutions included deficient recruitment and selection practices, inadequate staff training initiatives, substandard working conditions and political interference in

institutional operations. The study concluded that public sector institutions should engage in objective recruitment and selection processes and redirect resources toward employee development rather than exclusive focus on leadership training. It was recommended that Rivers State public sector institutions should strengthen fair hiring procedures, expand training investments, create viable career progression pathways and implement governance mechanisms to mitigate political interference in institutional functioning.

Keywords: *Leadership, Leadership Effectiveness, Rivers State Public Sector, Situational Variables.*

1.1 Introduction

Every organizational group comprising individuals performing diverse functions and activities to achieve predetermined goals is typically headed by a person proficient in the art of leadership. The proficiency constitutes a composite of five principal ingredients comprising the ability to use power effectively and responsibly, the ability to comprehend that human beings have different motivating forces at different times and situations, the ability to inspire others, the ability to act in a manner that develops a climate conducive to responding and arousing motivation (Weihrich, Cannice & Koontz, 2011) and, the ability to use requisite leadership skills (Bateman & Snell, 1999) to achieve results.

Leadership is not merely a facet of personality, tradition, opportunism or appointment but rather constitutes a dynamic process that exerts positive influence on actions and outcomes that is intricately linked to actual behaviour and attributes towards oneself and others. Thus, leadership emerges as a dynamic process wherein an individual within a group assumes responsibility for collective results and actively pursues the collaboration and commitment of all members toward achieving predetermined objectives within a specific context and against the backdrop of a particular institutional culture (Cole, 2004).

Leadership functions emerge across all spheres of group activity including business, the military, schools, hospitals and government (Briggs, 2003). The public sector is the part of the economy that provides government services and goods to the public. In the Nigerian public sector, effective leadership is indispensable for translating policy into actionable outcomes that drive service delivery and societal need fulfillment. It is structured into three tiers of government namely Federal, State and Local Governments each with distinct responsibilities. The Nigeria's political geography is divided into 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) which are further subdivided into 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs) across the country. This administrative structure facilitates decentralized governance and grassroot representation (Adeyemi, 2013)

Rivers State is one of the 36 States of Nigeria comprising 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Situated within the Niger Delta region, it was established on 27 May 1967. The State is renowned for its vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas contributing approximately 20% of the Nigeria's total crude oil production (Eghosa, 2025). The petroleum industry constitutes Nigeria's principal economic asset featuring offshore locations and a refinery located at Eleme in Rivers State. The petroleum industry remains a significant source of employment within the private sector in Rivers State but despite its prominence, the public sector remains a major driver of the economic and social activities contributing significantly to wage employment (Iwuoha & Chikwendu, 2024).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Rivers State public sector institutions span diverse spheres including retail, banking, hospitality, education, health, public administration, social services, information technology, communications, transport, arts, entertainment, recreation, electricity and water supply. Several reform initiatives have been undertaken in the State's public sector with the objectives of institutional strengthening and effective service delivery, notably through digital transformation, biometric verification, merit-based recruitment, capacity development and leadership training aiming to mitigate mediocrity and promote excellence (Okoroma, 2010). Nevertheless,

attainment of the desired objectives within Rivers State public sector institutions remains elusive owing to a complex and multi-faceted institutional environment characterized by entrenched bureaucratic hierarchies, resource constraints, political interference, accountability deficits, transparency shortcomings and challenges in leadership and followership.

These challenges result in poor decision making, resource mismanagement and ineffective policy implementation. They also foster corrupt practices, demotivate employee morale, generate instability and conflict, impede economic development, social progress and good governance in the State public sector institutions. To this end, this study seeks to examine the factors influencing leadership effectiveness in Rivers State public sector institutions through the lens of situational leadership theory.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to examine the extent to which six key situational variables influence leadership effectiveness outcomes within Rivers State public sector institutions. The six situational variables identified with contingency leadership literature include leader willingness (motivation and psychological commitment), leader ability (competence and technical capability), follower willingness (employee motivation and commitment), follower ability (employee competence and skills), task structure (goal clarity and role definition) and leader-member relations (interpersonal trust and communication) (Njoku & Nwosu, 2017).

1.4 Research Questions

The research addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does leader willingness influence leadership effectiveness outcomes within Rivers State public sector institutions?
2. To what extent does leader ability influence leadership effectiveness outcomes within Rivers State public sector institutions?
3. To what extent does follower willingness influence leadership effectiveness outcomes within Rivers State public sector institutions?

4. To what extent does follower ability influence leadership effectiveness outcomes within Rivers State public sector institutions?
5. To what extent does task structure influence leadership effectiveness outcomes within Rivers State public sector institutions?
6. To what extent does leader-member relations influence leadership effectiveness outcomes within Rivers State public sector institutions?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated to guide the study:

H_{01}: Leader willingness and leadership effectiveness outcomes are independent within Rivers State public sector institution.

H_{02}: Leader ability and leadership effectiveness outcomes are independent within Rivers State public sector institution.

H_{03}: Follower willingness and leadership effectiveness outcomes are independent within Rivers State public sector institution.

H_{04}: Follower ability and leadership effectiveness outcomes are independent within Rivers State public sector institution.

H_{05}: Task structure and leadership effectiveness outcomes are independent within Rivers State public sector institution.

H_{06}: Leader-member relations and leadership effectiveness outcomes are independent within Rivers State public sector institution.

The rationale for this study is to generate empirical evidence on how situational factors shape leadership effectiveness within Rivers State public sector institutions. The study aims to inform policymakers on targeted leadership development strategies to improve governance and service delivery. Finally, the findings and recommendations of the study seeks to enrich situational leadership theory by testing its applicability in a Nigerian public sector context where studies have focused mainly on the private sector.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Economic Policy

2.1.1 Contingency Theory Development and Extensions

Contingency leadership theory originated from Fred E. Fiedler and his associates at the University of Illinois and has been extensively validated by subsequent research. This theory posits that leadership effectiveness is contingent upon the interplay between leader orientations, follower developmental readiness, leader-follower relations and task structure characteristics rather than relying on universal leadership traits or behaviours (Weihrich, Cannice & Koontz, 2011). This perspective is consistent with Briggs (2003) assertion that leadership effectiveness is closely tied to the favourableness of the environment highlighting the situational nature of leadership success. Subsequent theoretical developments including the situational leadership model proposed by Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchrd posit that leadership efficacy is contingent upon the maturity level of followers which encompasses their ability and willingness to assume responsibility for directing their own behaviour (Njoku and Nwosu, 2017).

The Path-goal theory developed by Robert House in 1971 posits that leader effectiveness depends on the extent to which leader behaviours facilitate follower goal accomplishment by clarifying performance paths, removing obstacles and increasing rewards for goal achievement (Bans-Akutey, 2021). Kerr's (1977) Substitutes for leadership theory further extended contingency thinking by positing that certain organizational characteristics including follower expertise and task clarity can substitute for or neutralize traditional leadership behaviours. These converging theoretical developments collectively establish that organizational effectiveness emerges through complex interactions among multiple situational factors rather than through any single leadership characteristic or approach thereby supporting Yuki's (2013) assertion that certain situational variables can render leadership unnecessary or irrelevant.

2.1.2 Follower Ability and Performance

Follower ability is a characteristic that underlies behaviour and attitudes comprising technical competencies, knowledge and skills that enable followers to perform tasks effectively, efficiently and competitively at a workplace. Developing

employee abilities is intricately connected to improved performance, enhanced goal achievement and increased organizational resilience (Anam & Suryanto, 2022; Wijayanti & Sari, 2023). In the public sector context, Gieske, van Meerkerk & van Buuren (2018) demonstrate that employee learning capacity and administrative workforce capability substantially influence policy implementation and effective service delivery across multiple dimensions including stakeholder satisfaction and efficient resource utilization. Augustina, Revida & Siregar (2024) also show that both employee competence and performance in the public sector are critical drivers of service delivery. These findings validate theoretical propositions that follower capability is critical to institutional effectiveness.

2.1.3 Leader-Member Relations Quality and Organizational Performance

The Leader-member relations literature consistently highlights the significance of interpersonal relationships in shaping organizational outcomes. According to Willie (2025), high quality leader member relations marked by trust, warmth, open communication and shared understanding play a crucial role in boosting follower motivation, performance commitment and organizational loyalty. With regards to the public sector, the quality of leader-member relations has a significant impact on employee engagement, organizational commitment and motivation towards development of organizational citizenship behaviours for effective service delivery (Yeo, Ananthram, Teo & Perason, 2015). Positive relationships between leaders and members reduce employee turnover, improve knowledge retention and facilitate positive organizational change initiatives. However, Salehzadeh (2019) posits that perceived dissimilarity, feelings of betrayal, unmet expectations and impression management hinder high quality relationships in the public sector.

2.1.4 Task Structure and Performance Clarity

Task structure significantly affects organizational performance through enhanced efficiency, communication, and accountability mechanisms. Clear task structures are critical to organizational success and goal attainment (Cole, 2004). In relation to the public sector, Bohte & Meier (2001) affirms that task structure shapes performance in public institutions and its impact on performance varies with task

difficulty. This suggets that organizational investments in clarifying task structures, defining roles and ensuring transparency in performance standards yields substantial enhancements in organizational effectiveness without necessarily changing leadership behaviour.

3.0 Research Methodology

This investigation utilized a descriptive survey design deemed suitable for characterizing organizational variables and examining relationships among situational factors without manipulating the variables (Creswell, 2014). The study population comprised all personnel employed within the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the Rivers State public sector institutions. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select 345 respondents distributed across Rivers State public sector institutions. The rationale behind the use of purposive sampling was to identify respondents who possess in-depth knowledge of the problem under investigation and are willing to respond objectively and adequately to questions (Patton, 2015).

Stratified hierarchical sampling was employed targeting personnel from the cadre of assistant directors or equivalent and above and those below the cadre of assistant directors or its equivalent thereby capturing perspectives from diverse institutional categories. This approach facilitates comprehensive representation and enables a detailed understanding of organizational conditions from diverse perspectives and levels of analysis. The distribution of 345 questionnaires among the cadre of assistant directors or equivalent and above and those below the cadre of assistant directors or its equivalent was undertaken in a ratio of 3:7 respectively. This allocation was informed by the preponderance of those below the cadre of assistant directors or its equivalent within the Rivers State public sector.

Data collection employed a structured questionnaire utilizing a 5-piont Likert scale and the scale ranges from 1 – 5 signifying 1- ‘very low’, 2- ‘low’, 3- ‘uncertain’, 4- ‘high’ and 5- ‘very high’. Respondents rated the extent to which each of six situational variables influenced organizational leadership effectiveness. The questionnaire was pilot tested with 35 respondents to validate clarity and

appropriateness before full-scale implementation. The study utilized simple percentage to characterize the response patterns of participants across the five response categories for each variable. Chi-square (χ^2) analysis was employed to test the postulated hypotheses. These analytical techniques are suitable for ordinal categorical data (Kothari, 2004). Response frequencies were subsequently aggregated into three functional groupings namely 1. negative assessments category (very low and low combined), 2. neutral assessments category (uncertain) and 3. positive assessments category (high and very high combined). The Chi-square (χ^2) analysis was conducted at $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level and was further employed to rank situational variables by their impact on leadership effectiveness thereby quantifying the extent to which observed data diverges from the expected outcomes under the assumption of variable independence.

3.1 Data Analysis and Findings

The distribution of respondents' ratings along with percentages across situational variables are presented in Table 1.

Table – 1

Distribution of Respondents Ratings (%) Across Situational Variables (n = 345)

Situational Variables	Respondents Ratings (%)				
	Very low	Low	Uncertain	High	Very High
Leader willingness	32 (9.3%)	141 (40.9%)	3 (0.9%)	167 (48.4%)	2 (0.6%)
Leader ability	24 (7.0%)	93 (27.0%)	5 (1.4%)	216 (62.6%)	7 (2.0%)
Follower willingness	9 (2.6%)	221 (64.1%)	3 (0.9%)	107 (31.0%)	5 (1.4%)
Follower ability	4 (1.2%)	45 (13.0%)	5 (1.4%)	257 (74.5%)	34 (9.9%)
Task structure	36 (10.4%)	114 (33.0%)	3 (0.9%)	173 (50.1%)	19 (5.5%)
Leader-member relations	28 (8.1%)	109 (31.6%)	5 (1.4%)	191 (55.4%)	12 (3.5%)

Source: Field Study (2025)

Hypotheses Testing

Chi-Square (χ^2) test at a 5% significance level was used to test the five hypotheses. The formula for the Chi-Square (χ^2) is:

$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O - E)^2 / E$

Where:

χ^2 = Chi-Square test statistic

O = Observed frequency

E = Expected frequency

Σ = Summation symbol

In this equation, (O) is derived from survey responses in Table 1 while (E) is the mean of the observed values calculated as 345÷5 = 69 (Briggs, Wege, & Nwiana, 2020). The summation symbol (Σ) indicates that the calculation is performed across all categories.

Table – 2

Calculated Values of χ^2

H_{01}: Leader Willingness and Leadership Effectiveness Outcomes Are Independent Within Rivers State Public Sector Institutions				
O	**E**	**(O - E)**	**$(O - E)^2$**	**$(O - E)^2 / E$**
32	69	-37	1369	19.84
141	69	72	5184	75.13
3	69	-66	4356	63.13
167	69	98	9604	139.19
2	69	-67	4489	65.06
$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O - E)^2 / E$ = 362.35				
H_{02}: Leader Ability and Leadership Effectiveness Outcomes Are Independent Within Rivers State Public Sector Institution				
O	**E**	**(O - E)**	**$(O - E)^2$**	**$(O - E)^2 / E$**
24	69	-45	2025	29.35
93	69	24	576	8.35
5	69	-64	4096	59.36

216	69	147	21609	313.17
7	69	-62	3844	55.71
$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O - E)^2 / E$ = **465.94**				
H_{03}: Follower Willingness and Leadership Effectiveness Outcomes Are Independent Within Rivers State Public Sector Institutions				
O	**E**	**(O - E)**	**$(O - E)^2$**	**$(O - E)^2 / E$**
9	69	-60	3600	52.17
221	69	152	23104	334.84
3	69	-66	4356	63.13
107	69	38	1444	20.93
5	69	-64	4096	59.36
$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O - E)^2 / E$ = **530.43**				
H_{04}: Follower Ability and Leadership Effectiveness Outcomes Are Independent Within Rivers State Public Sector Institutions				
O	**E**	**(O - E)**	**$(O - E)^2$**	**$(O - E)^2 / E$**
4	69	-65	4225	61.23
45	69	-24	576	8.35
5	69	-64	4096	59.36
257	69	188	35344	512.23
34	69	-35	1225	17.75
$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O - E)^2 / E$ = **658.92**				
H_{05}: Task Structure and Leadership Effectiveness Outcomes Are Independent Within Rivers State Public Sector Institutions				
O	**E**	**(O - E)**	**$(O - E)^2$**	**$(O - E)^2 / E$**
36	69	-33	1089	15.78
114	69	45	2025	29.35
3	69	-66	4356	63.13
173	69	104	10816	156.75
19	69	-50	2500	36.23
$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O - E)^2 / E$ = **301.24**				

H_{06}: Leader-Member Relations and Leadership Effectiveness Outcomes Are Independent Within Rivers State Public Sector Institutions				
O	**E**	**(O - E)**	**$(O - E)^2$**	**$(O - E)^2 / E$**
28	69	-41	1681	24.36
109	69	40	1600	23.19
5	69	-64	4096	59.36
191	69	122	14884	215.71
12	69	-57	3249	47.09
$\chi^2 = \Sigma (O - E)^2 / E = 369.71$				

Source: Computed Data (2025)

Table 3 presents the ranking of situational variables by their impact on leadership effectiveness as determined by (χ^2) analysis. The table value for (χ^2) with 4 degrees of freedom at 5% level of significance is 9.488

Table – 3

Ranking by χ^2 Comparative Analysis of Situational Variables (n = 345)

Situational Variables	**Positive (%)**	**Neutral (%)**	**Negative (%)**	**χ^2 Calculated**	**Critical value (df = 4)**	**p-value**	**Rank**
Follower Ability	84.3%	1.5%	14.2%	658.43	9.488	<0.001	1
Follower willingness	32.5%	0.8%	66.7%	530.43	9.488	<0.001	2
Leader Ability	64.6%	1.5%	33.9%	465.94	9.488	<0.001	3
Leader-member relations	58.8%	1.5%	39.7%	369.71	9.488	<0.001	4
Leader Willingness	49.0%	0.8%	50.2%	362.35	9.488	<0.001	5
Task	55.7%	0.8%	43.5%	301.24	9.488	<0.001	6

Structure							

Source: Computed Data (2025)

3.1.1 Follower Ability as an Organizational Dynamic

Follower ability received the strongest endorsement among all variables examined suggesting that it substantially influences leadership effectiveness. 291 respondents (84.3%) offered positive ratings comprising 257 respondents (74.5%) who rated follower ability as high and 34 respondents (9.9%) as very high. Only 49 respondents (14.2%) provided negative assessments. This overwhelming consensus indicates that most participants viewed follower ability as a significant driver of leadership effectiveness. The response distribution showed marked concentration in positive categories with little variation elsewhere. Chi-square analysis confirmed this pattern as highly statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 658.43$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$) demonstrating strong agreement across the sample regarding follower ability's importance.

3.1.2 The Paradox of Follower Willingness: A Significant Yet Negatively Perceived Factor in Leadership

Follower willingness ranked as the second most significant factor affecting leadership effectiveness based on the χ^2 comparative analysis of situational variables. However, the response distribution revealed a striking negative bias. Only 112 participants (32.5%) rated this factor positively whereas 230 participants (66.7%) provided negative ratings implying that roughly one-third of respondents viewed follower willingness as a critical barrier to effective leadership. A chi-square test confirmed this pattern as statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 530.43$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$) demonstrating a strong relationship between follower willingness and leadership effectiveness outcomes.

3.1.3 Leader Ability and Competence

Leader ability emerged as the third important determinant of leadership effectiveness with a significant number of participants perceiving it favourably. Specifically, 216 respondents (62.6%) rated leader ability as high while 7 (2.0%)

rated it as very high collectively representing 223 participants (64.6%) who held positive views. Conversely, 117 respondents (33.9%) expressed disagreement about its importance. This distribution shows that approximately two-thirds of the sample considered leader competence a critical component of effective leadership whereas one-third questioned this assertion. The results reveal competing perspectives on how central leader competence is to effective leadership. Statistically analysis confirmed that these differences in response patterns were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 465.94$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$).

3.1.4 Leader-Member Relations Quality Impact

Leader-member relations quality ranked fourth among factors perceived to influence leadership effectiveness. A modest majority of participants comprising 203 respondents (58.8%) evaluated this factor positively with 191 (55.4%) rating it as high and 12 (3.5%) as very high. In contrast, 137 respondents (39.7%) provided negative assessments reflecting considerable disagreement regarding the significance of relationship quality in determining leadership outcomes. Although, most respondents recognized the importance of leader-member relations, a substantial minority questioned whether it significantly affects leadership effectiveness. Statistical analysis revealed that the observed variation in response patterns was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 369.71$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$) indicating a genuine division in participants' perceptions of this factor's impact.

3.1.5 Leader Willingness Assessments

Leader willingness emerged as the fifth factor in terms of perceived influence on leadership effectiveness. 171 respondents (49.6%) assessed this factor positively comprising 167 participants (48.4%) who rated it as high and 2 (0.6%) who rated it as very high. Conversely, 173 respondents (50.1%) provided negative assessments creating an almost evenly divided response distribution. The data reveal a near-parity in participant opinions with approximately half acknowledging the critical importance of leader willingness to leadership effectiveness while the other half questioned its significance. This pronounced split in perceptions underscores the contested nature of leader willingness as a determinant of

leadership outcomes. Statistical analysis confirmed that this difference in response patterns was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 362.35$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$) validating the genuine divergence observed in participants' assessments.

3.1.6 Task Structure and Performance Clarity

Task structure demonstrated moderate to substantial perceived significance in influencing leadership effectiveness. A marginal majority comprising 192 respondents (55.7%) evaluated this factor favourably with 173 participants (50.1%) marking it as high and 19 (5.5%) marking it as very high. Likewise, 150 respondents (43.5%) rendered negative assessments revealing a meaningful division in participant perspectives. Although the preponderance of respondents recognized task structure as an important element of leadership, a substantial minority disputed whether it constitutes a primary determinant of leadership effectiveness. The overall response pattern reflects qualified consensus alongside considerable skepticism suggesting that task structure's role in leadership outcomes remains contested among the sample population. Statistical analysis validated that these differences in response distributions were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 301.24$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$) confirming the genuine variation in participants' evaluations of this factor's importance.

4. Discussion

4.1 Follower Ability as Dominant Institutional Effectiveness Factor

Follower ability emerged as the paramount factor influencing leadership effectiveness with an overwhelming 84.3% of respondents rating it as either high or very high. This pronounced consensus aligns with organizational literature demonstrating that employee competence functions as a foundational organizational asset that determines organizational effectiveness regardless of leadership qualities (Anam & Suryanto, 2022; Wijayanti & Sari, 2023). The concentration of positive responses for follower ability aligns with Augustina, Revida & Siregar (2024) submission that follower competence is a critical driver of public sector service delivery and as such requires serious attention. Interview participants attributed the deficiency in employee competence within Rivers State public sector institutions to systemic challenges including flawed recruitment and

selection mechanisms, misaligned job placement practices, promotion decisions based on tenure rather than performance metrics, employee knowledge and skill gaps and insufficient training provision. These deficiencies were predominantly attributed to political interference and structural limitations inherent in the public sector. These findings suggest that organizations should prioritize recruitment policies and investment in employee development rather than focusing primarily on leadership improvement.

4.2 Follower Willingness and Service Delivery

Employee motivation emerged as a significant concern with two-thirds (66.7%) of respondents viewing follower willingness as having minimal impact on organizational performance. While employee capability remains the primary organizational problem, inadequate employee motivation further worsens the situation. Improving employee motivation is crucial for delivering effective and sustainable public services (Udoba & Mokwe, 2025). Interview participants identified several factors contributing to low motivation in Rivers State public sector institutions including inadequate compensation, insufficient training, lukewarm attitude induced by age-old perception about the public service, and negative effects of favoritism and nepotism. The study suggests that improving leadership alone cannot address the underlying problems in the Rivers State public sector. Instead, public institutions need comprehensive strategies that focus on enhancing employee motivation, developing employee capability, and clarifying job roles to achieve real improvement.

4.3 Leader Ability and Its Impact on Public Sector Performance

Nearly two-thirds (64.6%) of respondents considered leader ability as a factor affecting leadership effectiveness ranking it as the third most important in the study. Leader ability is critical for effective leadership in Rivers State public sector institutions because it allows leaders to influence, guide and motivate teams toward common goals (Briggs, 2003). When leaders possess strong abilities, public institutions experience tangible benefits including improved productivity, greater innovation, and a more positive work culture. Nevertheless, interview participants

identified several barriers that prevent leaders from performing effectively in Rivers State public sector institutions. These barriers include insufficient training and leadership development programmes, poor leadership selection due to political patronage and preferential treatment, excessive political interference in public institutional decisions and rigid bureaucratic processes. These obstacles limit leaders' effectiveness and require solutions at both the institutional and policy levels in Rivers State.

4.4 Leader-Member Relations Quality and Institutional Performance

Leader-member relations ranked as the fourth most important factor affecting leadership effectiveness. Just over half (58.8%) of respondents reported that this relationship has a high or very high impact on leadership outcomes supporting Njoku and Nwosu (2017) who argue that the quality of relationships between leaders and team members significantly influences organizational performance. This relationship quality matters regardless of other factors like task skills or individual abilities. The strong focus on leader-member relations in this study shows that Rivers State public sector leaders recognize how important these interpersonal connections are to leadership success. Yet, interview participants identified several serious problems damaging leader-member relationships in Rivers State public sector institutions. These include leadership changes based on political patronage and interference, internal conflicts from competition over promotions and transfers, formation of rival groups that undermine organizational goals, excessive bureaucratic procedures and delays, and lack of trust and empathy in the system. These problems weaken relationships between leaders and their teams and reduce organizational effectiveness.

4.5 Leader Willingness and Commitment

Leader willingness shows a mixed picture in the findings. Only 49.0% of survey participants rated this factor as having high or very high impact with responses split equally between positive and negative views. This modest rating contrasts with the theoretical importance of leader willingness in organizations. Scholars recognize that leader willingness (a leader's commitment and readiness to act) is fundamental

to effective leadership (Bateman & Snell, 1999). When leaders show genuine willingness, they build trust with staff, create more positive work environments, and improve key areas like communication, employee motivation, and productivity (Briggs, 2003). Though, interview data from Rivers State public sector institutions revealed significant obstacles to leader willingness in practice. Participants identified several barriers that prevent leaders from engaging willingly in their roles. These barriers include undue interference in institutional operations, compensation issues, limited organizational resources due to economic constraints, weak institutional structures, lukewarm attitude and leaders' lack of competence or capability. Together, these factors create conditions leaders struggle to demonstrate the willingness needed for effective leadership and organizational success.

4.6 Task Structure Importance and Organizational Role Clarity

Task structure emerged as a moderately important factor in organizational effectiveness with 55.7% of survey respondents rating it favourably. Organizational research shows that clear goals, explicit procedures and transparent performance standards contribute to organizational effectiveness (Jones, Geroge & Hill, 2000; Njoku & Nwosu, 2017). Notably, task structure was rarely mentioned as a problem in interviews possibly because the public sector operates within a highly bureaucratic framework (Briggs, 2003). This suggests that in these settings, structural clarity may be less problematic than the actual working conditions in Rivers State public sector institutions. The implication is that while investments in clearer role definitions, better procedures and more transparent performance standards are worthwhile, these efforts will have limited impact unless the Rivers State public sector institutions address more fundamental challenges particularly developing employee capability and creating working conditions that enable effective performance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

The study reveals that employee capability is the most critical factor for leadership effectiveness in Rivers State public sector institutions with 84.3% of respondents rating it highly. However, the findings show multiple interconnected challenges preventing effective leadership and organizational performance. While leader ability, leader-member relations, and task structure are recognized as important, they are undermined by systemic problems including inadequate employee motivation, poor recruitment practices, political interference, and weak institutional structures. The research demonstrates that improving leadership alone cannot solve the complex organizational problems in the public sector. Instead, comprehensive organizational approaches addressing employee development, motivation, working conditions, and institutional reforms are essential for achieving sustainable improvement.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

Rivers State public sector institutions should implement transparent hiring standards, performance-based advancement criteria and clear recruitment procedures to ensure qualified employees are hired and promoted based on competence rather than political connections or tenure. The State public institutions should invest in comprehensive employee development programmes that include technical training, skill enhancement, and leadership development. These programmes should address capability gaps, improve employee competence and provide leaders with the skills needed to effectively guide and motivate teams toward organizational goals.

Rivers State public institutions should enhance employee and employer motivation and working conditions by improving compensation packages, reducing bureaucratic delays and fostering a positive organizational culture. Leader-member relationships and organizational culture should be strengthened within Rivers State public institutions by promoting open communication, building trust and empathy

among staff, establishing clear role definitions and transparent performance standards, and eliminating nepotism and rival group formation that undermines institutional goals.

Protect the State public institutional operations from excessive political interference by establishing clear policies and boundaries between political leadership and operational management. Implement governance reforms that ensure organizational decisions prioritize public service effectiveness and institutional sustainability over political considerations.

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