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The Influence of Organisational Culture on Leadership Style in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the impact of organisational culture on leadership styles in Nigerian universities. The study utilises cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede's insights) and the social exchange concept as theoretical lenses to examine the phenomena.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative approach, 40 interviews were conducted with senior academics and non-teaching staff working in Nigerian universities.

Findings – The findings reveal hierarchical, patriarchal, servile, and interdependent values as the underlying characteristics of organisation culture, shaping the choice of leadership styles in the management of Nigerian universities. As a result, it emerged from the study that positional, formalised exchanges, paternalism, relational approach, and gendered reactions to leadership were typically adopted in university administration in this context.

Limitations/implications – The study relies on a small qualitative sample size, which makes the generalisation of findings difficult. However, the study provides a good understanding of cultural hegemony, framing leadership styles different to those of western cultures.

Originality/value – The findings of this study help to bridge the research gap concerning the implications of organisational culture, and its influence on leadership behaviours in the Sub-Saharan African context. Research within this subfield in Africa is rare. Specifically, the study also enriches our understanding of cultural dimensions, informing the leadership methods adopted in higher education institutions.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, there has been widespread scholarly interest in the interrelationship between leadership and culture. Most recently, a wide array of topical issues, such as global leadership (Jurgen, 2018), cross-cultural leadership (Stephan and Pathak, 2016), and the impact of culture on leadership (Chong et al., 2018) have burgeoned. While these studies have furthered our understanding of leadership theory and practice, research analysis on the application of leadership theories across cultures considers that leadership behaviours and practices are culture-bound (Alves et al., 2006). Significantly, what we know about the nature of leadership in work organisations emanates mostly from research from the western world, while there is a paucity of similar studies from developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, where institutional and cultural systems differ from the West. According to Mullins and Christy (2013), some of the cultural perceptions from the West appear around notions of orderly Germans, shrewd Italians and assertive British workers. This situation gives rise to questions concerning the portability of leadership constructs and concepts from the West to non-western regions. In an attempt to fill this gap in the literature, this study seeks to contextually explore the interconnection between organisational culture (OC) and leadership styles based on qualitative data drawn from Nigerian universities. By answering the following research question, we contribute new insights into this knowledge gap in understanding from a non-western context – What is the prevalent organisational culture shaping leadership styles adopted in university administration?

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3 Broadly, 'culture' is perceived as socially and generationally transferred. It consists of the
4 customary, value-related, traditional, religious, and behavioural patterns of a particular set of
5 people and is known as the essential root of behaviour and it forms the components of social
6 order (Bulley et al., 2017). For instance, the culture in West African regions (Ghana,
7 Cameroun, Liberia, Benin, Nigeria, etc.) is often described as less egalitarian, more religious,
8 and more collectivist (Ferguson et al., 2008). Collectivists tend to promote cooperation and
9 social relations among groups of people (Hofstede, 1980). The study focuses on Nigeria, the
10 most populous black West African country, with almost 200 million people spread across
11 over 250 ethnic groups (Central Intelligence World Factbook, 2017). Nigerians define
12 themselves as members of a social group (i.e. collectivists). As such, strong ties to and
13 mandatory obligations concerning extended relationships are prioritised far above personal
14 achievements and aspirations among individualistic nations such as the US and UK (Jackson,
15 2004). The institutionalisation of gender dominance also exists in Nigeria, as men have been
16 socialised to become breadwinners, while women are expected mainly to engage in childcare
17 duties and other domestic affairs (Mordi et al., 2013).

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22 Other everyday traditional features of Nigeria include acceptance of hierarchy, gender
23 inequality, and status differences, especially in the workplace (Ituma et al., 2011). This social
24 context is often perceived as providing the rationale for individual and organisational
25 behaviour in Nigeria (Adegboya, 2013). In other words, the macro-context has tendencies of
26 shaping organisational culture (Sackman, 2006). In assessing the leadership situation, Nigeria
27 is plagued with various problems arising from political instability, a high degree of
28 corruption, economic instability, and weak governance undermining good leadership in the
29 country (Dike, 2001). Despite these socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria, British
30 colonialism has strongly emphasised educational attainment in Nigeria (Ituma et al., 2011).
31 Thus, this paper seeks to provide insights into the cultural nuances and subtleties of how OC
32 influences leadership styles in Nigerian universities. In so doing, our study is organised as
33 follows: the second section presents perceptions of leadership styles and OC in the literature.
34 This is followed by a brief overview of the study context and the method used to collect and
35 analyse the empirical evidence. Thereafter, the results and discussion of the findings are
36 presented. The final section considers the conclusion, study implications, study limitations,
37 and areas for future research.

42 Leadership perceptions

43
44 Over the past five decades, leadership has been a fertile area of research, evidenced by the
45 substantial academic and practitioners' literature on the topic (Clark et al., 2009). While there
46 is no agreeable definition of 'leadership' in the literature, and diverse interpretations of the
47 construct space exist (Dickson et al., 2003), leadership may simply be described as a
48 relationship through which an individual or group of persons with authority influences the
49 behaviour and actions of others (Moorcroft, 2005). It also means getting others to follow
50 (Mauri, 2017). Therefore, leadership is incomplete without attention to followers (Hollander,
51 1980). A significant theory for explaining the nature of the leadership relationship and its
52 influences on the behaviours and actions of followers can be analysed through the lens of
53 social exchange theory (SET). SET's central premise is that the exchange of social and
54 material resources is a fundamental form of human interaction (Mitchell et al., 2012). In an
55 organisational setting, for instance, the exchange is often said to be characterised by mutual
56 trust, loyalty, respect, and obligations that generate reciprocal influence between managers
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3 and their subordinates (Wang et al., 2005). Thus, the social exchange involves leaders
4 conveying the role expectations to their followers and may even provide incentives to those
5 who satisfy these expectations. Similarly, followers will hold role expectations from their
6 leaders with respect to how they are treated and judging by the rewards they will receive for
7 meeting their leader's expectations (Maslyn et al., 2017). Regardless of the reciprocity rule
8 guiding the leader-follower exchange relations, the underlying feature is the nature of
9 leadership and approach according to which the leader influences the actions of others (Buch
10 et al., 2014).
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14 In theory, the antecedents of most leadership approaches have evolved around three areas:
15 trait, behaviour, and contingency (Yukl, 2006). However, leadership as a behavioural
16 category has drawn significant research focus showcasing the importance of leadership styles.
17 Mullins and Christy (2013) observed that these styles are ways in which leadership functions
18 are carried out, emanating from the ways that managers typically behave towards their
19 subordinates. Historically, prominent paradigms in leadership research are based on theories
20 of transformational and transactional leadership styles proposed by Burns (1978) and Bass
21 (1985) respectively. On one hand, the transformational style requires a leader to inspire and
22 stimulate followers to achieve higher levels of performance, with the end goal of developing
23 followers into leaders (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). On the other hand, transactional
24 leadership is a management style of controlling, organising, and promoting compliance from
25 subordinates with both reward and punishment framing the exchange process (Burns, 1978;
26 Bass, 1985). Other well-established leadership styles in the literature are laissez-faire (where
27 the leader delegates power and decision making to followers (Skogstad et al., 2007),
28 authoritarian (sometimes described as autocratic), and shared leadership (which aims to build
29 partnerships, promote joint responsibilities, and participatory in style (Yukl, 2006). While
30 these leadership styles and many more deconstruct leadership into different behavioural
31 categories, there are consistent views within the literature that the integral factor influencing
32 the choice of leadership styles is the cultural context (Dickson et al., 2012; Schnurr et al.,
33 2017).
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39 Due to increasing globalisation and economic integration among industrialised and even
40 developing nations in trade, education, goods, and services, scholarly interest on the
41 implications of cultural context on leadership practices has strengthened (Northhouse, 2013).
42 As explained above, cross-cultural research on leadership has revealed that there are different
43 cultural endorsements of leadership across cultures (e.g. Steers et al., 2012). For instance, it
44 was found in one study that Americans tend to over-romanticise and idealise their leaders to
45 the extent of even glossing or trying to hide some inconvenient truths about them (Parrillo,
46 2013). On the contrary, Europeans are known to be less enthusiastic about those in leadership
47 (Mittal and Elias, 2016). Moreover, these western societies are individualistic cultures and
48 tend to promote personal achievements, autonomy, uniqueness, and separateness (Hofstede,
49 1980). Brodbeck et al. (2000, p. 5) found that in western Europe, for instance, respect for
50 leaders is based on egalitarian values, which means 'achieved status is valued more highly
51 than ascribed status'.
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55 However, in West Africa, specifically Ghana, Cameroun, and Nigeria, the concept of
56 leadership is a function of deep-rooted collectivism displayed in communitarian dispositions
57 (Hofstede, 2001). These societies are typically socialised to give high regard to elders and
58 those with superior status, who are considered as having more wisdom and custodians of
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3 community traditions. Such a leadership position is consistent with the traditional chieftaincy
4 system of governance (Jackson, 2004). Bulley et al. (2014) are of the view that this less than
5 egalitarian nature of rulership has found expressions in the leadership styles used by
6 managers in African organisations, which are often perceived effective by subordinates. More
7 importantly, a pattern of managerial system in Sub-Saharan Africa is said to be underpinned
8 by the well-known Ubuntu leadership philosophy, which is anchored in history on
9 governance, reflecting headship under 'a family atmosphere...philosophical affinity and
10 kinship among and between indigenous people of Africa' (Karsten and Illa, 2005, p. 610).
11 'Ubuntu' is a term used among the Bantu tribe of South Africa and literally translates as a
12 humane style of leadership based on collective solidarity, morality, and communalities
13 (Okereke et al., 2018). As such, this cultural orientation is also a strong determining factor in
14 the formation of perceptions that shape social conduct in organisations. Therefore, there is a
15 plausible reason to believe that the dynamics of the leadership practices of a particular
16 workplace will be a function of the OC that persists in such a group or society.

21 **Organisational culture**

22
23 Since 'culture' is a collective programming of mindsets showing the perceived differences of
24 members of one group from another (Hofstede, 2001), OC, therefore, is analogous to an
25 organisation's personality and comprises deeply rooted artefacts, creations (e.g. slogans and
26 logos), shared values, and basic assumptions that give unique meaning to organisational
27 membership and guides workplace behaviour (Schein, 2010). Affirming this position, Choi
28 and Scott (2008, p. 34) consider OC as a 'deep and complex part of an organisation that
29 strongly influence organisational members'. Furthermore, the Global Leadership and
30 Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) project initiated by House et al. (2004),
31 conceptualised OC as 'shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or
32 meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of
33 collectives that are transmitted across generations'. In essence, OC is perceived as the
34 relationship between employers and employees influenced by workplace norms and traditions
35 (Sackman, 2006). Accordingly, leaders are perceived as needing a profound understanding of
36 OC, its impact, and its nature (Sharmar and Sharma, 2010). Moreover, leadership as a
37 phenomenon, particularly within a workplace context, plays an integral role in OC cultivation
38 (Kargas and Varoutos, 2015).

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40 Instructively, Bass and Avolio (1993, p. 51) argue that an 'organisation's culture develops in
41 large part from its leadership while the culture of an organisation can also affect the
42 development of its leadership'. For instance, the transformational leadership style is
43 associated with positive connotations engendering high levels of motivation, constructive
44 inspiration, and a sense of efficacy among followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). As such, the
45 cultural propensities of transformational leaders may be enmeshed in higher values for
46 motivation and morality built on a social exchange of mutual elevation and inspirational
47 stimulation between leader and followers. However, the transactional leadership style thrives
48 as a form of social exchange system between leaders and subordinates, according to which
49 compliance from subjects is obtained by means of rewards and sanctions (Suhha et al., 2016).
50 Assumedly, transactional leaders work within an OC that follows protocols, procedures,
51 rules, and regulations guiding such social exchanges. An authoritarian style (sometimes
52 autocratic) is exemplified when absolute power resides in the leader, who exercises total
53 control over decisions and procedures and works tasks with little or no input from group
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3 members (De Hoogh et al., 2015). This dictatorial style of leadership may portray an
4 oligarchic workplace culture. These landmark theories on leadership styles and their impacts
5 on shaping different OCs have immensely contributed to grounding knowledge on the
6 interface between leadership and OC. However, a vast majority of studies on OC and
7 leadership behaviours have been performed in Western societies. The validity of these
8 findings must be proven by a process of testing their applicability to other cultures.
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11 Thus, the Sub-Saharan African context can provide a fertile test field for OC as a concept
12 originating from the West, given the differences between the individualist and collectivist
13 cultures upheld by the members of these respective societies. Geert Hofstede's original
14 research on the impact of culture on the work values established that cultural individualism
15 and collectivism are opposite poles (Hofstede, 2001). According to Hofstede, individualist
16 societies emphasise the supremacy of individual goals and personal achievements, while
17 collectivists prioritise group relationships and communal responsibilities. Hofstede further
18 identified power distance (PD) as a cultural dimension; the extent to which a culture accepts
19 and endorses uneven distribution of power and status privileges among members (Hofstede,
20 1980). According to Hofstede, nations with high PD tend to expect unquestionable obedience
21 and submission towards superiors with acclaimed status and authority. In lower PD countries,
22 people expect and accept power relations that are more democratic and consultative in nature.
23 Additionally, a masculinity/femininity divide was also proposed to portray gender identities
24 as culturally determined by role expectations in different societies. For instance, Hofstede
25 contended that 'a society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct:
26 men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women
27 are supposed to be to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life' (Hofstede et
28 al., 2010). This is why men in most non-western countries are seen as breadwinners, while
29 women are perceived as home and child carers.
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35 **Cross-cultural researchers (Lok and Crawford, 2004; Furmanczyk, 2010) have long argued**
36 **that culture has implications on the attitude of people towards their surroundings, human**
37 **nature, action, time and interpersonal relations within the firm. For instance, leaders' cultural**
38 **socialisation affects their perception, behaviour and lifestyle (Furmanczyk 2010). Culture has**
39 **a substantial impact on the leader's interpersonal skills (whether they are empathetic or**
40 **intuitive), ethical, (their sense of organisation justice), leadership styles (charismatic,**
41 **transformational, authoritarian and paternalistic), or whether they are**
42 **collectivists/individualist; unitarist or pluralistic in mind-set etc. Culture also impacts**
43 **mechanisms through which leaders enforce their vision, i.e. through hierarchical or flatter**
44 **organisational designs or different forms of OC (including network, mercenary, fragmented**
45 **and communal) perspectives of OC (including integration, differentiation and fragmentation)**
46 **and different types OC such as bureaucratic, supportive and innovative in nature (Lee, 2001).**
47 **Also building on the strong foundation of Hofstede's theory, the current study seeks to**
48 **contextually examine the various types of leadership styles in Nigerian universities using the**
49 **different cultural dimensions (as proposed by Hofstede) to consider how leadership practices**
50 **in the workplace are influenced by OC.**
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55 **The study context**

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57 The evolution of universities in Nigeria began with the introduction of western education by
58 foreign Christian missionaries and British colonialists. Even though the development of the
59 Nigerian university system may not have been smooth sailing since its inception, one
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3 fundamental success it brought to the nation (especially after independence in 1960) was the
4 abundant opportunities for Nigerians to earn the requisite education necessary for labour
5 market entry both locally and internationally (Otonko, 2012). Thus, the increasing desire for
6 skilled human capital in an already saturated Nigerian labour market coupled with
7 astronomical unemployment rates, heightened corruption, and a problematic political climate
8 in Nigeria is making young people struggle to earn higher education degrees and certificates
9 needed for gainful employment. Moreover, the Nigerian society is known for maintaining
10 long-term commitment to the member groups, be it nuclear or extended families (Aluko,
11 2003). This is why parents take-up the responsibility of funding the education of their
12 children and wards in Nigeria.
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16 Despite the rapid expansion of Nigerian tertiary institutions as a result of the liberalisation
17 policy introduced by the democratic government in 1999, which brought about the
18 establishment of numerous public, private, and state-owned universities (Obasi, 2007), the
19 educational sector persistently faces challenges ranging from inadequate funding; student
20 cultism; declining teaching and research standards; deteriorating infrastructure; examination
21 malpractices; and various leadership problems. Daramola and Amos (2016) reiterated the fact
22 that there are diverse leadership categories within the Nigerian university community, namely
23 academics, administrators, non-academics, and student unions. It is essential to note that key
24 academic leadership positions, such as deans of faculties, departmental heads, and other non-
25 teaching leadership roles held by senior non-teaching staff, are integral to a university's
26 survival in Nigeria. While leadership is broadly interpreted as an interpersonal influence that
27 a person in charge exerts in a situation in getting others to follow them, it may often be the
28 influence level of the organisational context and culture that determines the preferred
29 leadership style. Therefore, the present study aims to explore influences of OC on leadership
30 practices in Nigerian universities.
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35 **Methodology**

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37 The exploration of leadership and organisational culture issues in higher education
38 institutions in Nigeria requires the adoption of a research approach, which is able to obtain
39 data that is both 'rich' in contextual information and 'deep' in understanding (Saunders et al.,
40 2012). Consequently, this study is rooted in the phenomenological research approach, which
41 emphasizes individuals' lived experience and perspectives of participants (Maykut and
42 Morehouse, 1994). We adopted a qualitative method involving 40 semi-structured interviews
43 with key informants considered leaders in their various universities based on their rank and
44 the key position they occupy in the three selected universities in the south-west region of
45 Nigeria. A qualitative approach was considered apposite for this study because it is an
46 appropriate means for an in-depth understanding of hitherto under-researched phenomena
47 (Cresswell, 2008) and leads to the discovery of 'richly detailed narratives of the lived
48 experiences of individuals' (Fassinger, 2001, p. 279). Moreover, the paucity of existing
49 research on leadership and organisational culture in the higher education in the Nigeria
50 context suggest that testing pre-conceived hypotheses could be premature. Thus, the
51 qualitative design enabled us to meet the objectives of this research, permitting in depth
52 exploration of the different issues that emerged around the topic of leadership and
53 organisational culture in the higher education context in Nigeria. The demographic
54 characteristics of the sample are specified below.
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3 As shown in Table 1, three universities located in the south-west region of Nigeria were
4 visited, and formal consent to conduct a field study in each institution was obtained. In Table
5 1, Public University 1 is one of the oldest universities in Nigeria (founded over 50 years ago)
6 while the two private universities (2 & 3) were established 10 and 12 years ago respectively.
7 The sampling technique adopted was purposive. As part of a wider study, semi-structured
8 interviews were conducted with key officers of each university comprising Deans of Faculties
9 (especially professors), Heads of Departments (mostly senior lecturers), senior registry staff
10 (heads of professional service unit), and heads of library services. **The sample included senior
11 academics and non-teaching staff in three Nigerian universities. Pseudonyms have been used
12 to represent the names of the interviewees and universities for confidentiality reasons. The
13 sample of university leaders deliberately included leaders from both 'old' and 'new'
14 universities in order to provide broader insight, enhance generalizability, and so that
15 divergent views could be explored.**
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19 Participants were solicited by a combination of existing contacts, referrals, and a snowballing
20 process, while eligibility to participate was based on the leadership position held and the
21 years of work experience: a minimum of 10 years. Participants completed consent forms and
22 were informed that they had a right to withdraw from the study voluntarily at any stage in the
23 interview for any reason. The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually for
24 about 45-60 minutes. The semi-structured interviews allowed for a deeper pursuit of
25 emergent topics and themes than the initial planned questions would have allowed. Interview
26 questions focused on understanding the underlying OCs of these institutions that influence
27 the choice of leadership styles. Representative of the questions asked are:
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- 30 1. What leadership style do you adopt in your day-to-day running of the affairs of your
31 faculty/department/registry?
- 32 2. What leadership qualities do you display in getting work done?
- 33 3. What is the prevalent OC in your institution?
- 34 4. How does this culture influence your leadership style?

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38 The questions were intentionally open-ended with prompts used to expand discussion and to
39 further elicit the views of the participants. Probes were developed to clarify and explore key
40 issues in depth and signalling to follow interesting lines of inquiry. All interviews were
41 transcribed verbatim shortly after the interviews. All interviews were audio recorded with the
42 permission of the respondents, using a flexible interview protocol. Theoretical saturation was
43 achieved after completing 35 interviews, but to ensure all themes relevant to the study were
44 covered, five additional confirmatory interviews were conducted. These supplementary
45 interviews were conducted to corroborate the previous interview findings. Thereafter, a
46 thematic analysis procedure (TAP) was used to examine the datasets after transcription of
47 audio recordings. TAP is a qualitative design used to identify, analyse, and report patterns
48 (themes) within datasets (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In ensuring the trustworthiness of our
49 qualitative study, as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), we meticulously adopted a
50 qualitative coding system, which is a well-known method in qualitative inquiry. This
51 involved generating codes indexed from transcribed interviews i.e. engaging in a data
52 reduction process through open coding, which involves analysing textual content and creating
53 'tentative descriptions' from chunks of data directly addressing the research question
54 (Cresswell, 2008). In TAP, data is fractured and integrated to form conceptual themes
55 grounded in the data. Thus, codes with similar characteristics (underlying ideas) were
56 identified and appropriately collapsed to form a category or theme during our analysis.
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3 The coding and categorisation were first conducted independently by two of the authors and
4 then corroboration given to emerging themes by comparing and discussing individual
5 interpretations. There was a high degree of corroboration with only four significant cases of
6 disagreement (this related to the interpretation of implied meaning of some of the participants
7 views) which were resolved by discussion until agreement on all classifications was reached.
8 To further enhance the validity of the data analysis process, we invited two experienced
9 qualitative researchers familiar with the aims of this research to independently review our
10 coding and categories. The researchers independently coded a random sample (15%) of the
11 interview transcriptions to assess the reliability of the categorisation scheme. We calculated
12 inter coder reliability using Cohen's (1960) kappa. The result of inter-rater reliability between
13 primary coding and secondary coding (Kappa 0.92) showed a high level of agreement which
14 is well above the minimal threshold (kappa 0.70) suggested by Cohen (1960).
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17 **Results**

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19 The research inquiry, themes, samples codes, and illustrative codes are presented in Table 2.
20 Overall, five themes emerged from our findings describing leadership styles. Furthermore,
21 the characteristics of OC were identified as: hierarchical, patriarchal, servile, and
22 interdependent values. In-depth analyses of each area are given below.
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25 **Positional style**

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27 In this category, ten academics narrated that their choice of using their position
28 authoritatively is derived from intensifying changes to the work environment in Nigerian
29 universities. This was perceived as propelling the need for senior academics holding
30 leadership positions (such as deans of faculties and heads of departments) to become task
31 oriented when managing academics and non-teaching staff under their headship. In the public
32 university, for instance, some of the deans and heads of departments described the extremely
33 high expectations from university management in ensuring teaching and research standards
34 are not compromised makes some of them act authoritatively. Professors also felt their
35 position as a professor should naturally command the utmost respect and ignite faculty
36 members to action. The following quotations typify the participants' shared views:
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39 As the dean of this faculty and a senate member (that is, the highest decision-making body on
40 academic matters in this university), my leadership style entails giving orders and commands
41 to the community of lecturers and scholars in getting our academic and administrative work
42 done, irrespective of our daily heavy workload. So, I ensure all academics and non-teaching
43 staff in my faculty have respect for hierarchy [...] I showcase self-asserting behaviours that
44 prioritise hard work at all times (Participant 2, Public University 1).
45

46 For me, my leadership style is characterised by peremptory headship. I am known for my
47 strict supervision of teaching and research activities of all lecturers in the economics
48 department, regardless of the long working hours and tight deadlines to publish papers [...].
49 Although to a permissive degree, I encourage everyone to contribute in decision making [...];
50 however, the final implementable decisions reside with me as the head of department.
51 Sometimes I listen to popular opinions from my colleagues in order not to distort our [tight-
52 knit] social ties and moral obligation to support one another as a team, [...] I sometimes also
53 discard those opinions I feel are irrelevant and ensure credible pedagogical approaches
54 emphasising practical skill acquisitions in our taught courses are strictly adhered to
55 (Participant 25).
56

57 I perceive our organisational culture thrives on a top-down control tradition whereby the
58 Vice-Chancellor is vested with absolute powers to oversee academic programming and
59 research development [...]; so, I adopt a directive style of leadership by setting strict but clear
60 objectives for my faculty staff in line with management decisions (Participant 4).

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3 These examples indicate that increasing workloads, a hierarchical culture, and bureaucratic
4 tendencies are features necessitating the use of power based on position and title. In
5 Hofstede's (1980) study, with a score of 80%, Nigeria is rated high in PD. This suggests that
6 Nigerians accept authority bestowed on those within the apex of management (traditionally
7 called 'bosses'). Consequently, university administration is regulated according to the
8 dictates of 'legal rationality' (Weber, 1978). The emphasis here is that those at the lower
9 cadre of employment are mandated to be submissive and obedient to those in organisational
10 leadership. These findings align with those of Heystek (2016), who considered educational
11 leadership in developing countries as sometimes authoritarian in nature and perceived that
12 positional leaders in those contexts often rely solely on their formally defined roles to
13 influence or coerce followers to obey them.
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16 This leadership style is also found in some East Asian countries e.g. Hong Kong, Korea,
17 Japan, and China, where a leader's legitimacy and acceptance are often perceived as
18 contingent on the individual's non-utilitarian qualities (Blunt and Jones, 1997). For example,
19 Whitley (1992, p. 113) reported that 'the virtuocracies of Korea and China ruled because of
20 their superior moral worth, demonstrated by their mastery of the Confucian classics. This
21 meant that they did not need to justify their status by performing some useful function on
22 behalf as a whole, except perhaps maintaining harmony [...]'. This may be different from
23 leadership practices in the West, where high value is given to teamwork, rationality,
24 delegation, and empowerment (Dickson et al., 2003). It is therefore unsurprising that cultural
25 differences play an integral part in creating guidelines and reinforcing preferred leadership
26 styles accepted in one country and rejected by another. Thus, positional leadership behaviours
27 may thrive in Nigeria where the PD is high when compared to some western societies with
28 lower PD indices (Hofstede, 1980).
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32 **Formalised exchanges**

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34 Eight respondents were identified as using this type of leadership approach. They described
35 being very formal and keeping to protocols when dealing with their subordinates. The style
36 was found to be transactional in nature and these leaders in the universities were those who
37 valued structure and order among followers. The effectiveness of this style is premised on a
38 social exchange between the leader and their followers, according to which the leader
39 champions compliance through the use of rewards and punishments. As a result, the leader-
40 member exchange is premised on a contractual obligation in which the respondents (i.e.
41 leaders) set goals; monitor and reward performance; and sanction academics and non-
42 teaching staff who fail to meet expectations. For instance, Participant 21 commented:
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45 Speaking metaphorically, a visible leadership style I am known for is 'dangling carrots',
46 which represents recognition and praise I often shower during our monthly faculty board
47 meeting on academics that are showing outstanding competences in the areas of teaching and
48 research output, and I 'wield a stick' by reminding those who are not pulling their weight of
49 the dire consequences of scoring below average during performance management reviews
50 done annually [...]
51

52 Similarly, Participant 11 stated:

53 Since our legitimate authority as heads of departments is derived from bureaucratic structures
54 of the university, my leadership style is shaped by our organisational culture, which demands
55 everything we do should be strictly formalised [...]. I follow these protocols and always
56 communicate by email all work tasks and outcomes expected by the university management.
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59 Participant 9 echoed this position:
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3 Institutional governance in Nigerian universities is, most of the time, centralised, which
4 makes me prefer leading by telling people what to do and ensuring compliance with standards
5 prescribed by top management for the community of teachers and scholars [...]. As the head
6 of department, I closely monitor deviances and correct errors through disciplinary actions and
7 also encourage those complying with the set standards.
8

9 Another example is as follows:

10
11 What works for me in terms of my leadership approach is to motivate and direct staff of our
12 university primarily through appealing to their own self-interest, which I do by making people
13 comply uncompromisingly with my instructions since they know the benefits of obeying
14 guidelines and the repercussions for deviating from them. This is because the managerial
15 approach to university governance in this institution is based on centralising decision-making,
16 which creates uniformity in the system (Participant 29).
17

18 From the findings, the ‘carrot and stick approach’ is evident in Nigeria, as institutional
19 leaders are clear about their expectations by setting rewards for those who adhere to
20 instructions and sanctioning erring staff. Thus, our findings confirm Bass’s (1997) conclusion
21 that there is a level of universality in the transactional leadership paradigm in a wide range of
22 organisations and cultures. Typically, this leadership style is based on a relationship of
23 mutual dependence and a social exchange tradition of ‘I will give you this, if you do that’
24 (Mullins and Christy, 2013, p. 385). However, this leadership approach may flourish more in
25 Nigeria because of the pronounced hierarchical OC (see Table 2) found to shape this
26 leadership style, and identified as focusing on managing by controlling, organising, and
27 ensuring adherence to tasks through the instrumentality of reward and punishment (Bass,
28 1981).
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31 **Paternalism**

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33 The leadership styles of nine participants conform to paternalism. Narratives from these
34 participants suggest a preference for a leadership style that combines the use of strong
35 authority and shows empathy for others. There is evidence in the participants’ comments that
36 Nigerians value leaders who, despite their power and position, are also concerned about the
37 needs and wellbeing of people. The perspectives shared by some of the participants revealed
38 a focus on institutional culture that demands respect for age, seniority, and professional
39 status. These interviewees described that the Nigerian culture practises customary obedience
40 to those ‘above’ them and espouses values of portraying excessive willingness to serve and
41 please superiors, who in return have the responsibility to make decisions that are in the best
42 interest of their subordinates. The following responses evidence this finding:
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45 Given the unduly complicated administrative protocols and academic cores of this public
46 university, I combine strong discipline and adeptness in my leadership style as I ensure
47 smooth running of the day-to-day administrative activities. With increasing pressure to
48 maintain our status as the best citadel of learning among other Nigerian universities, I assert
49 authority and control with some level of fatherly benevolence as part of our institutional
50 culture when relating to all members of staff (Participant 6).
51

52 As Nigerians, you know, our cultural roots indicate that obedience is owed to the leader,
53 mainly by virtue of his or her status [...]. This traditional value influences my style of
54 leadership, which is fashioned towards nurturing to build my work group [...]. I thank God
55 because both the permanent and adjunct lecturers in my department are very submissive and
56 respectful, maybe because of my age (Participant 35).
57

58 By the special grace of God, I use a didactic approach in leading members of my department
59 [...]. As a Christian, I believe in moral uprightness and hard work, which I demand strongly
60 from every departmental staff member. I equally try my best to provide support, guidance,

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3 and care in a paternal way so that no one is afraid of approaching me when they need help
4 (Participant 23).
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6 The above findings evidence that paternalistic leadership is associated with the use of control,
7 caring behaviour, moral integrity, and paternal benevolence. Instructively, cross-management
8 literature recognises paternalism as a thriving concept in developing economies in Asia and
9 Africa (Cheng et al., 2004; Ayoko and Hartel, 2006; Jackson, 2016). According to Bolden
10 and Kirk (2009), this is because cultural values shaping leadership and management in Sub-
11 Saharan Africa, for example, include sharing; the sanctity of commitment; respect for
12 compromises and concessions; deference to higher ranks; good social relations; and an
13 acceptable culture of servility. A similar culture of paternalism also exists in Chinese
14 organisations (Farh and Cheng, 2000). However, this leadership practice has been perceived
15 negatively in western societal contexts, where democratic, consultative, and participative
16 forms of management are more popular (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2008). Additionally, Aycan
17 (2006) argued that the benevolent feature of paternalistic management has been hard for
18 western scholars to comprehend. Martinez (2005) also raised concerns about the use of
19 'control and care' ingrained in paternalism, which is also difficult for westerners to digest.
20 Furthermore, Jackson (2016) perceived that a leader's care and protection roles may be seen
21 as a violation of privacy in these individualistic societies, where people tend to be self-
22 directed and autonomous (Hofstede, 2001).
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26 **Relational approach**

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28 Further evidence from the study, especially from the non-teaching staff (six participants),
29 revealed preferences for a relational approach, as evidenced in Table 2. These interviewees
30 appear to value collectivism and the Ubuntu style of management. They claimed that in order
31 to attain leadership effectiveness, emphasis should be placed on having a harmonious
32 relationship, humaneness, and collectivist bonds with subordinates. The participants shared
33 their views as follows:
34

35 Since we hold cultural values that strongly reflect a concern for others in high esteem, my
36 leadership style is informed by this conventional tradition, as I treat every staff member in the
37 registry as family members who need to be taught that the quality of cordial relationship
38 between leaders and their subordinates goes a long way in influencing the desired
39 performance-related outcomes (Participant 29).
40

41 I adopt a people-oriented style of leadership in getting my team (in this bursary department)
42 to carry out their daily work tasks [...]. I do so by establishing trust, establishing mutual
43 respect, and constantly building a rapport with the group members [...]. My close
44 interpersonal relationships even make some of them share with me their private life
45 challenges or family problems (Participant 39).
46

47 My style of leadership is humanist in nature, because I believe an organisation is only as good
48 as the people within it [...]. I treat people with dignity and sometimes demonstrate behaviour
49 targeted at contributing positively to sustaining their wellbeing, even if it means sacrificing
50 my own convenience to please them [...]. In this way, I develop a deep spirit of involvement
51 and willingness to work among all my library staff members (Participant 40).
52

53 The above quotations indicate that maintaining social harmony and fostering interpersonal
54 relationships significantly impact leadership behaviours in Nigerian universities. In this
55 context, a major part of the social fabric of Nigeria is its collectivist culture, according to
56 which individuals develop tight-knit social ties and obligations to support the goals and
57 aspirations of others (Mordi et al., 2013). The findings further highlight Ubuntu as an African
58 humanist philosophy shaping the leadership styles of these participants (Table 2). As seen in
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3 the comments of the participants, this philosophy stresses the importance of fostering strong
4 community connections and interdependence. Also, sharing and caring for others was
5 prioritised as opposed to autonomous and individualistic projections of the West. In most
6 western countries, individuals are independent and free from relying on others. They rather
7 strive to promote uniqueness and an inherent ability to stand out among others (Hofstede,
8 2001). On the contrary, Nigerians, as collectivists, seek to define themselves as members of a
9 social group (Ituma et al., 2011). Here, strong ties and mandatory obligations to extended
10 relationships are prioritised far above individual achievements and personal aspirations
11 (Jackson, 2004). This is why reciprocity in building the interests of others and maintaining
12 humane behaviour are key leadership qualities exemplified by these interviewees. **Therefore,**
13 **in assessing the use of this relational style of leadership through the lens of leader-member**
14 **exchange (LMX), our findings suggest that LMX in collectivistic tradition of Nigeria is more**
15 **influenced by role-based obligations; due to Nigerians stronger respect for authority and a**
16 **strong desire to build integrated relationships that also includes non-work related social**
17 **exchanges with their leaders (Mordi et al., 2013). This is in contrast with western context**
18 **where a substantial amount of international research has accumulated specifically over the**
19 **years with LMX theory reflecting United States preferences for a separation between work**
20 **and private life affairs (Uhl-Bien, 2006) and LMX interface predominantly based on work**
21 **contracts. Thus, Pellegrini and Scandura (2006), suggested more leadership cross-cultural**
22 **research as different LMX domains may lead to different workplace outcomes.**

23 **Gendered reactions**

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28 Given the fewer number of women (seven participants) than men in our study (Table 1), there
29 was an institutionalised culture of sexism arising from patriarchal values (see table 2)
30 evidenced in the study. Such culture affects the leadership style adopted by female academics
31 to combat gender stereotypes. In this study, the female participants specifically shared views
32 on how the masculine monopoly on university administration makes them aggressively flaunt
33 their leadership skills and competencies to dismantle gender prejudices and provoke
34 admiration and accolades from others irrespective of gender differences (see Table 2 for
35 narratives). In addition, two others spoke of how they seek to overcome gender stereotypes
36 by relentlessly adopting a leadership approach that encourages higher levels of motivation
37 and commitment among subordinates.

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41 Irrespective of the fact that I am a woman, who men sometimes feel is inferior to them, my
42 leadership approach (as an experienced professor of linguistics) is geared towards inspiring
43 both lecturers and administrative staff in my faculty to achieve remarkable results [...]. I do
44 so by giving them some level of autonomy in decision making, which sometimes makes some
45 of the male professors and lecturers surprised at the level of my dogmatic drive to make
46 people creative and innovative (Participant 34).

47
48 Interestingly, Participant 14 commented on how she 'breaks the glass ceiling' by displaying
49 traits typically associated with masculinity, such as aggressiveness, dominance, and
50 competitiveness in enhancing her leadership style, which she claims involves mentoring and
51 empowering the academic community concerning the use of library services.

52
53 My leadership style mainly draws on stimulating the learning and development of both staff
54 and students concerning the use of the library. Sometimes, I aggressively generate awareness
55 and elevate the interests of my members of staff in achieving this aim [...]. Men who are part
56 of my crew are sometimes intrigued by how passionate and zealous I can become, just like
57 them (Participant 14).

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59 In a similar vein, participant 24 further claimed that:

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3 Although there appears to be a culture promoting male chauvinism in our university, that
4 hasn't deterred me from showcasing charismatic and visionary leadership qualities that even
5 makes all lecturers under my headship aspire to imitate me (Participant 24).
6

7 The above statements represent feminist accounts of some form of transformational
8 leadership abilities that are described as successfully sustaining women in university
9 leadership positions. The narratives here described processes of engendering higher ideals
10 and values of followers as a way of overcoming feminine stereotypes. Interviewees were
11 emphatic concerning how they deal with gender stereotypes by showcasing behaviours
12 typically ascribed to men (Johnson et al., 2008). Here, masculine behaviours, such as
13 determination, courage, assertiveness, competitiveness, and being a visionary (Fernando,
14 2012), are explicitly highlighted. This is because Nigeria traditionally operates a social
15 system of patriarchy, where leadership is often associated with masculinity in workplaces
16 (Chukwu and Eluko, 2013). Eboiyehi et al. (2016), found that women (about 29.2%) are
17 generally underrepresented in academia compared to men (70.8%) in Nigeria. On the whole,
18 our findings confirm the general notion that women may simply be more inclined to
19 demonstrate an assertive style of leadership because of their innate characteristics to become
20 competitive like their male counterparts (Grant, 1988; Kabacoff, 2001; Morgan, 2004).
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24 Discussion

25 In board terms, this study set out to address knowledge gaps in existing African leadership
26 studies by establishing the interrelationship between culture and leadership practices in
27 Nigerian higher education institutions. Despite previous calls to evaluate the cross-cultural
28 applicability of leadership theories largely rooted in US and European ideologies to other
29 contexts (Jackson, 2004), this study seeks to incite scholarly awareness suggesting that
30 people's perceptions and orientations of leadership practices vary in accordance with cultural
31 background and experiences. Therefore, the study revealed the application of some western
32 theories of leadership varying to a large extent according to cultural connotations. More
33 specifically, the paper examined the influence of OC on choices of leadership styles adopted
34 in the administration of Nigerian universities. The participants' comments presented herein
35 have evidenced the rich context underlying those abstract cultural terms and have brought out
36 the vivid, lived experiences of the four different characteristics of OC i.e. hierarchical,
37 patriarchal, servile, and interdependent values shaping the five typologies of leadership
38 styles.
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42 From the study, some participants' choice of a positional style of leadership is derived from a
43 culture that is highly ingrained in hierarchy and managerialism (Gennard and Judge, 2011).
44 Managerialism as a capitalist ideology is anchored on promoting the self-interest of managers
45 and thrives on a culture that is largely authoritarian, non-participatory, and hierarchical
46 (Kikauer, 2015). As such, the managerialist system of leadership can be considered as
47 necessitating the adoption of an authoritative leadership style by some participants for the
48 purpose of tightening their control over the academic labour process. Furthermore, the
49 description of Nigerian employees as excessively submissive and obedient to superiors
50 coupled with the culture of high PD contributes to shaping the authoritarian style of
51 leadership in this context (Hofstede, 2001). **From a comparative perspective, another culture
52 that bears resemblance to our context are values of Confucianism found in some Asian
53 countries. For instance, Lee (2001) examined the impact of Confucian culture on Korean
54 higher education system. The author found that the main features of organisational culture
55 influencing leadership styles in Korean higher education are based on a hierarchically closed
56 system with a rigid communication patterns, an age-ranking system on the ground of
57 Confucian socio-political order. This findings is in congruence with GLOBE studies where it**
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3 is pointed out that there is a significant relationship between societal values and leadership
4 expectations and behaviour as part of cross-cultural leadership theory (House et al., 2013). As
5 such, there appears to be hard emphasis on institutional hierarchy and strong managerialism
6 in parts of Africa and Asia.
7

8
9 Conversely, western scholars (e.g. Blunt and Jones, 1997; Mullins and Christy, 2013;
10 Johnson, 2015) have argued that in contemporary work situations, it is becoming increasingly
11 difficult for managers to solely rely on the use of their positions in hierarchical structures. To
12 get the best results from subordinates, Johnson (2015) suggests the need for leaders to adopt a
13 more egalitarian approach similar to those of Scandinavian countries (e.g. Denmark, Sweden,
14 and Norway) where the desire to appear as a 'big chief' seems to be totally removed from the
15 behaviour of people in management positions. According to cross-cultural leadership
16 research, this type of leadership styles often thrives where a flatter organisational structure
17 and lower power distance identified with western societies exists which is at variance with
18 bureaucratic traditions of African workplaces (Lok and Crawford, 2004). Likewise, further
19 findings from our study reveal the prevalent OC of hierarchy framing the use of formalised
20 exchanges. It was found that this leadership behaviour was transactional in nature. This style
21 takes its root in an earlier leadership concept known as the path-goal theory (House, 1971).
22 The theory specifies that an employee's motivation is dependent on the belief that increased
23 effort to attain 'an improved performance will be successful, and expectations of that
24 improved performance will be instrumental in obtaining positive rewards and avoiding
25 negative outcomes' (Mullins and Christy, 2013, p. 383). Our findings however, show the
26 extent to which culture provides a frame of reference and guide for a transactional leadership
27 style adopted by senior academics in Nigerian universities. Since the OC is characterised by
28 some level of autocracy where subordinates display a high regard for superiors and are often
29 reluctant to bypass the chain of command, the social exchange between leader and follower
30 may only be at the behest of the leader's will and caprices in the transactional relationship.
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35 Furthermore, African leaders are perceived as demonstrating a benevolent disposition
36 towards their subordinates because a culture of servility is more pronounced there than in the
37 western context (Kuada, 2010). From a cross-cultural leadership standpoint, some of this
38 Sub-Saharan African cultural values contradict western management practices. Traditions
39 such as deep respect for elders since age and wisdom is often idolised as attributes of
40 leadership (Wanasika et al., 2017). Our study found that paternalistic leadership is prevalent
41 in the Nigerian context, since those in management positions with full authority show fatherly
42 benevolence towards their subordinates in exchange for commitment and dedication (Zoogah
43 and Beugre, 2012; Fanimihin and Popoola, 2013). In the literature on this topic, paternalism
44 as a leadership framework is associated with offering western alternatives to what is
45 perceived as African management of organisations (Jackson, 2016). This system of
46 organisational governance, particularly in Nigeria, is largely related to the extent of male
47 domination, based on higher superior stratum and upholding cultural values where paternal
48 relationships are highly recognised. This is evident in our findings. However, the defects of
49 this style are apparent with respect to the relationship between paternalism and the leader-
50 member exchange. It has been argued herein that since the choice of leadership style may be
51 based on conditions, the leader often has unfettered powers to decide the quality of individual
52 relationships or alliances with subordinates (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2008). While in-group
53 values are integral to paternalistic methods, there may be inclinations to practice nepotism
54 behind a disguise of benevolence. This is the reason why Daramola and Amos (2016) pointed
55 out that university administration in Nigeria sometimes reflects authoritative paternalism,
56 which hinders collegial and transparent governance. As such, the general perception in the
57 literature is that African leaders are grossly ineffective and adapt abysmally to global
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3 demands for ethical leadership (Nnabuiife, 2010). Evidently, our study features paternalism as
4 culturally bounded which makes cultural context define its meaning (Mansur et al., 2017).
5 From a cross-cultural leadership perspective, while paternalism is considered highly
6 acceptable in hierarchical and collectivists cultures (e.g. parts of Asia and Africa), it is
7 negatively conceived in more egalitarian and individualistic western contexts where
8 paternalistic leadership is perceived as “benevolent dictatorship” which can leads to “non-
9 coercive exploitation” (Aycan, 2006, p. 448). Thus, cross-cultural leadership theory and
10 research provides understanding of how people develop sets of beliefs about the
11 characteristics and behaviours of leaders based on different cultural endorsement (Mullins
12 and Christy, 2013).
13
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15 Interestingly, our findings unveiled preferences for a relational approach to leadership
16 influenced by cultural features of what Hofstede (1980) referred to as collectivism.
17 Apparently, cultural values in these societies (e.g. Nigeria) are characterised by diffused and
18 mutual obligations in prioritising communality. A similar cultural context is found in Kenya.
19 For instance, Abaya (2016) studied school principals in Kenya and confirmed the existence
20 and high level of dependence on communities and parents for resources needed to run schools
21 in some provinces in south-west Kenya. Being predominantly a collectivistic culture, the
22 Nigerian society is tightly integrated, while leadership practices in this context are a function
23 of a broader social order of manifesting interdependent values (see Table 2). Interestingly, in
24 a similar cross-cultural western leadership research between Germans and Polish
25 organisations, Furmańczyk (2010) found collectivistic propensities influencing German
26 enterprises which makes subordinates prone to identify with their leader’s aspirations and
27 shared vision of the group. In contrast, Polish organisations were perceived as high in
28 individualism and followers motivated to satisfy their own self-interests and personal
29 pursuits.
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33 Thus, the evidence from our study illustrates leadership behaviours entrenched in promoting
34 harmonious relationships and enacting humanistic management practices rooted in Ubuntu as
35 an African way of life, which provides moral guiding principles shaping leadership functions
36 (Tutu and Allen, 2011). As a concept with African origin, Ubuntu is a call to service in
37 making life humane for others, as evidenced in the relational style of leadership adopted by
38 some participants. Certainly, the style bears some resemblance to the servant leadership
39 theory originally proposed by Robert Greenleaf (1970). According to Greenleaf (1970), the
40 leader-follower exchange of servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants
41 to serve first, and thereafter, a conscious choice brings the individual to aspire to lead. Thus,
42 the relational style stands to project leadership practices that promote stewardship behaviours
43 for university management. Stewardship as an outcome of leadership behaviours certainly
44 enhances a sense of personal responsibility in followers when attention is given to their
45 needs, rather than using authoritative or position-based power as personal fiefdoms
46 (Hernandez, 2008).
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50 One of the most disheartening findings of this study is the gender stereotypes arising from the
51 patriarchal nature of the leadership system in Nigeria. This is evident in the narratives of
52 some of the female participants, highlighting how they act more masculine to combat gender
53 stereotypes. Studies (such as Ogbogu, 2011; Olaogun et al., 2015) have identified the causes
54 of gender inequality in academia and the struggles of academic development of females in the
55 university system caused by the male-dominated mode of governance in Nigerian higher
56 education institutions. This is confirmed in the present study, where the collected data shows
57 that men clearly outnumber the women in the three universities (see Table 1). However, in
58 diffusing these gender biases, women are inclined to adopt a leadership style that appears
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3 inspirational in nature. Eagly and Johnson (1990) perceives gender stereotypic expectations
4 as, hypothetically, a reason for women exhibit an interpersonal leadership style that values
5 communication, collaboration, and participation in contrast to the masculine mode of
6 management characterised in a task-oriented managerial style.
7

8 **Conclusion and implications of study** 9

10 This study has presented four different characteristics of OC influencing the leadership styles
11 adopted in university administration in Nigeria. As a result, five themes emerged as possible
12 ways of describing leadership styles from the study. Of particular relevance of this paper,
13 however, are a number of persuasive explanations of how leadership is largely informed by
14 context. Accordingly, the study can be said to have highlighted some preliminary alternatives
15 to western notions of leadership, thereby aiming to show how context might be taken into
16 account. Thus, our study findings have important theoretical and practical implications. From
17 a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study are relevant concerning the bi-directional
18 views proposed to exist in the relationship between leadership and OC (Schein, 2010). In this
19 sense, it remains to be seen whether organisational leaders should determine and shape
20 workplace culture or whether OC remains a contingent factor influencing leadership style.
21 The former is identified as a functionalist paradigm where an integral aspect such as culture
22 is treated as an object of managerial decision with emphasis placed on leaders taking the
23 primary responsibility in building OC, regardless of any pre-existing, in-depth fundamental
24 beliefs and values held in such organisations or contexts (Morgeson et al., 2010).
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28 However, the latter perspective is consistent with our findings that a major variable
29 influencing the choice of leadership style is OC, which is sometimes shaped by broader
30 societal norms and traditions (House et al., 2004; Mullins and Christy, 2013). Additionally,
31 Nikčević (2016, p. 191) argued that culture is older than leadership, so leadership represents
32 just one of the ‘manifestations and symbols of the culture in which it occurs’. Consequently,
33 the findings of our study provide evidence to support the notion that culture is deeply rooted
34 and drives workplace values and, more importantly, leadership behaviours. Therefore,
35 leadership styles are thus reflective of the specific characteristics of the Nigerian context in
36 which individuals in leadership positions operate. Accordingly, our study provides new
37 insights into the fact that different leadership styles employed by university deans,
38 departmental heads, and senior non-teaching staff of Nigerian universities are predominantly
39 shaped by the level of PD, collectivism, and feminine/masculine values (Hofstede, 1980).
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43 From a practical standpoint, it is clear from this study that context is a defining factor of
44 leadership behaviours. A thorough understanding of cultural influences can help change
45 leadership styles that tend to hinder effective leadership and management practices in this
46 context. Some studies have suggested that culture might be an integral factor associated with
47 leadership effectiveness (Morgeson et al., 2010; Mittal and Elias, 2016; Mauri, 2017).
48 Culture that emphasis teamwork, group affiliations, coordination and interpersonal
49 relationships have been associated with greater implementation of improved leadership
50 practices (Morgeson et al., 2010). Nevertheless, as we have noted earlier, OC in Nigeria is
51 more focused on higher levels of PD and cultural conditioning of one’s subordinates
52 (Hofstede, 2001). For instance, the inferences made from the study on the dominance of
53 cultural values, such as patriarchy; autocratic or benevolent tendencies are cultural features
54 that can potentially undermine leadership effectiveness in Nigerian educational institutions.
55 This is why Babalola (2005) argued that the poor management style of Nigerian universities
56 has emerged from a lack of higher cultural forms and ethical conduct that can stir institutional
57 leadership on the path to academic excellence through a university system that can sustain
58 developmental and salutary values. Therefore, it is important for university management
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3 teams to appropriately incorporate traditional values in conjunction with leadership styles that
4 promote an environment that fosters positive work engagement and always thrive to achieve
5 a win-win situation in leader-followership exchanges. In expressing a candid view about the
6 need for changes in leadership practices in Africa, Kiggundu (1988, p. 226) asserts that “there
7 is an acute shortage of quality leadership in Africa” due to the high focus on “authoritarian,
8 personalised, and politicised” culture of governance which is not in Africa’s the best interest.
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11 Therefore, the findings of our study call for leadership practices that initiate, shape, and
12 sustain the construction of a more nurturing, just, and reinforcing workplace culture in
13 Nigerian universities. Kuada (2010) argued that since culture is a dynamic construct, African
14 management culture is capable of changing. There is therefore a need for university leaders
15 and administrators in Nigeria to exhibit more attentiveness to existing cultural values in a bid
16 to change those age-long traditions hindering effective leadership. In so doing, universities
17 should allocate resources to training and development concerning how the required skillsets
18 for leadership success in Nigeria universities can thrive. Some few limitations of this study
19 should also be noted and addressed in future research. For instance, our study is restricted to a
20 collectivist culture and may not be generalised beyond this cultural orientation. **Also, the
21 study is based on sole accounts of those in leadership positions which makes findings
22 subjective and portrays tendencies for respondents to answer in ways that makes social
23 desirability biases plausible (Fisher, 1993). Future studies should take into account
24 perspectives from subordinates for purposes of reporting balanced views about leadership
25 behaviours.** Moreover, as this is a qualitative study, the small sample also makes the
26 generalisation of results difficult. To address this issue, future studies could use statistical
27 techniques to test larger representative samples. As a recommendation, it would make an
28 interesting study to investigate similar topics in other universities in other African countries
29 and those with a different cultural background.
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Table 1: Demographic data

Institution	Gender	Position held	Years in university employment
Public University 1			
Participant number			
1	Male	Dean, SMS	31
2	Male	Dean, Engineering	28
3	Male	Dean, B and AS	35
4	Male	Dean, Arts	31
5	Male	Director, AP	27
6	Male	Registrar	14
7	Male	HOD, English	10
8	Male	HOD, Law	12
9	Male	HOD, Biochemistry	10
10	Male	HOD, Geophysics	19
11	Male	HOD, Biotechnology	13
12	Male	HOD, Mathematics	11
13	Male	HOD, Accounting	12
14	Female	Chief Librarian	11
15	Male	Academic Affairs	15
16	Female	Student Affairs Manager	13
Private University 2			
17	Male	Dean, Humanities	26
18	Male	Dean, Agriculture	30
19	Female	Dean, Arts	21
20	Male	Dean, SMS	24
21	Male	Dean, Law	34
22	Male	Dean, Food Science	25
23	Male	HOD, Geophysics	12
24	Female	HOD, Bus. Admin.	10
25	Male	HOD, Economics	14
26	Male	HOD, Microbiology	13
27	Male	HOD, English	11
28	Female	HOD, Chemistry	10
29	Male	Assistant Registrar	16
30	Male	Chief Bursar	12
31	Male	Head, Student Affairs	16
Private University 3			
32	Male	Dean, Education	27
33	Male	Dean, Engineering	33
34	Female	Dean, Humanities	28
35	Male	HOD, HRM	13
36	Female	HOD, Property Law	10
37	Male	HOD, Economics	18
38	Male	HOD, Accounting	15
39	Male	Senior Accountant	19
40	Male	Head Librarian	14

Description of abbreviations in the table: SMS – Social and Management Sciences; B and AS – Basic and Applied Sciences; AP – Academic Planning; HOD – Head of Department; HRM – Human Resources Management; Bus. Admin. – Business Administration.

Research Inquiry	Themes	Sample Codes	Illustrative quotes
Leadership styles	Positional	Power-driven, coerciveness, less participatory, controlling, rigid, authority, fixed official duties, absolute and sustainable powers	“My style of leadership as the dean of this faculty is authoritative in nature because the managerial approach to university governance in this institution focuses on centralization of decision-making to create efficiency in the system” – Participant 3.
	Formalised exchanges	Social exchange approach, clarifies goals and directives, values order and structure, prioritizes rewards and penalties, reactive leadership, carrot and stick approach	“I thrive on leadership practices that fosters strict compliance to university conventions in teaching, research and community development [...] I formally recognize those diligent academics for their scholarly contributions in the area of research and issue queries to those I believe are lethargic” – Participant 17.
	Paternalism	Fatherly-like management style, moral obligation, affirming control and care, loyalty and deference expected, benevolence, moral guidance and authority	“As the HOD, my leadership style is underpinned by moral rectitude as I try to act as a role model to my members of staff [...] I show concern for their well-being as a parent will do for their children and in return expect absolute obedience from all” – Participant 37.
	Relational approach	Humanized management, social relations, group-level construct, interactive leadership, inclusive management, shared vision, Ubuntu orientation	“The qualities I display as the head of student affairs in this institution are based on respect for the dignity of others whether staff or students, encouraging teamwork and service to others which is the hallmark of responsible leadership” – Participant 31.
	Gendered reactions	Feminine leadership approach, breaking the glass ceiling, dismantling gender biases, overcoming stereotypes, performing masculinity, inspiring leadership, dogmatic, ambitious women	“Despite the high level of senior male academics and professors in this university, I demonstrate interpersonally oriented attributes as well as use a directive style which provokes admiration from male professors in my faculty who are sometimes astonished at the way I manage gender prejudices” – Participant 28
Organisational culture	Hierarchical	Managerialism, emphasizes levels and structures, control, coordination, stability, efficiency, bureaucracy	“The prevalent culture in this public university is founded on structure and control with strict institutional procedures in place for guidance [...] this is why I adopt a stern leadership style [...]” – Participant 1
	Patriarchal	Demonstrating masculinity, feminine prejudices, masculine domination, anti-feminism, propagates gender inequality	“I feel the culture here makes women find themselves in fragile positions relative to most men in the academy [...] but, it has made me resolute to energetically flaunt enviable leadership skills” – Participant 10
	Servile	Submissiveness, servanthood, groveling, accepting inequality, respectful attitude, customary obedience	“Our cultural values of showing high regard to academics senior in age and status predominantly features in our university system and this shapes my benevolent leadership style” – Participant 12
	Interdependent values	Social cohesion, maintaining harmony, collectivists, cooperation within group, social context	The institutional culture here promotes harmonious relationship between staff and students which makes me sometimes sacrifice personal interest for collective interests of my faculty members – Participant 18

Table 2: Main themes, codes and interview extracts
Source: Researchers' findings (2019).

Personnel Review

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