

Leadership Antecedents in Employee Empowerment among Nigerian Public Organizations: A Case of the National Orientation Agency, Nigeria

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Abstract

This qualitative single-case study explored how leadership antecedents influence employee empowerment in Nigerian public organisations. The study focused on the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Nigeria. Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment and Bass's Full-Range Leadership Theory served as the conceptual frameworks. The study analysed how leadership antecedents affect organisational challenges and empowerment. Data were collected from 30 NOA employees across Nigeria's six geo-political zones. Collection methods included semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document review: triangulation of interview, document, and observation data. Key findings reveal that employees perceive empowerment primarily as being equipped with the tools, resources, and support needed to execute organisational mandates, particularly in project planning and implementation. This is especially true in project execution. Recent studies also suggest that ethical leadership, digital tool adoption, and generative leadership mediate empowerment (Hassan & Aliyu, 2024). Seven critical leadership themes for empowerment emerged: entrenching an agency mindset, addressing challenges, fostering cross-team collaboration, establishing two-way feedback, responding to staff feelings, applying tailored leadership strategies, and implementing training on Innovation and digital fluency. The study recommends that Nigerian public organisation leaders intentionally adopt these antecedents. Doing so can boost empowerment, organisational commitment, and service outcomes. The study has implications for policymakers and leaders in post-pandemic contexts and during digital transformation.

Keywords: Leadership antecedents, Employee empowerment, Public organisations service, National Orientation Agency, Nigeria, Federal Character, Generative leadership

Introduction

Leadership is a complex, vital process that guides a group toward shared goals (Stogdill, 1950). In public administration, leadership supports both individual and group goal attainment by managing organisational dynamics (Gerard et al., 2017). Leadership traits affect satisfaction, collaboration, and outcomes. Recent studies stress leadership's role in post-pandemic challenges and digital transitions (Mazzetti et al., 2023; World Bank, 2023).

Diverse antecedents shape a leader's performance. These are foundational leadership factors or conditions that precede and influence leadership effectiveness. Leadership antecedents include leadership style, ethical stance, organisational culture, communication practices, and the quality of leader-member relationships. These factors serve as frameworks for

understanding leadership success or failure (Dartey-Baah & Ampofo, 2016; Emuwa & Fields, 2017). The extant literature highlights consequences of employee empowerment as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and employer commitment (Adanri & Singh, 2016; Gandolfi & Stone, 2017; Mercurio, 2015). However, when employees feel demotivated and disempowered, both the organisation and society suffer (Ighodalo, 2017).

In today's workplace, leadership, digital empowerment, and generative leadership have become prominent and focus on enabling empowerment (Lee, 2022; Hassan & Aliyu, 2024). Administrators in Nigeria's public service struggle to create an equitable, inclusive, and representative bureaucracy. This challenge hinders sustainable socio-economic growth (George et al., 2017). Citizen welfare suffers, causing poverty, insecurity, unemployment, and corruption (Ighodalo, 2017; World Bank, 2023). Nepotism, tribalism, and poor resource management are major obstacles (Ikeanyibe, 2016; Kolawole & Adeigbe, 2016). Corruption and the elite non-compliance further erodes public trust (Albert, 2016; De Bruyn, 2017; Transparency International, 2024).

Organisations in developing countries, including Nigeria, urgently need to empower their employees. Adopting specific antecedents especially those identified by this study can improve leadership and empower NOA employees. This study gathered detailed experiences from NOA employees about leadership development through the qualitative case study.. The goal was to extract themes for a framework to guide future leaders in Nigerian public organisations. Current research focuses on the leadership antecedents participants report at NOA.

Problem Statement

Employee empowerment boosts organisational success. It enhances working conditions, engagement, autonomy and competence. Employee empowerment improves commitment and effectiveness (Potnuru et al., 2019; Voegtlin et al., 2015). Effective empowerment tools lead to greater satisfaction, quicker decisions, more innovation, and higher productivity, improving commitment and adaptability (Saleem et al., 2019; Adekoya et al., 2019). The complexity of Nigeria's public sector and leadership reveals gaps in empowerment. Many leaders do not support growth or use tools like empowerment, satisfaction, and engagement (Falola et al., 2018; Ojekalu et al., 2019). This attitude causes dissatisfaction, absenteeism, turnover, and poor service, leading to economic and legal problems (Ajibade & Ibietan, 2016; Umar, 2017).

Despite growing scholarly awareness of empowerment's positive impact on organisational commitment and effectiveness (Potnuru et al., 2019), there remains a notable gap in Nigeria-specific research examining the role of leadership in fostering employee empowerment within public agencies particularly in Nigerian current socio-political climate. Existing studies have not sufficiently explored how leadership antecedents shape empowerment within key Nigerian parastatals such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), where empowered leadership is essential for motivating the workforce and delivering quality public service (Amusan et al., 2017). Fewer studies have explored leadership factors in parastatals like the NOA. Empowered leadership is vital for motivating staff and ensuring service quality (Babalola, 2016; Amusan et al., 2017). This study addresses these gaps by exploring how NOA leaders influence employee empowerment. It assesses whether NOA's efforts offer a positive guide for leaders and policymakers.

Research Questions

The research questions reflect the experiences of leaders and employees. For instance, if the study explores specific empowerment strategies, participants should outline which methods were effective. The study analyses results to answer each question.

RQ1: How have leaders in the NOA implemented employee empowerment strategies?

RQ2: How are employee empowerment strategies related to organisational goals?

These clear research questions guide data collection and ensure credible, reliable results.

Overview of the National Orientation Agency (NOA)

The National Orientation Agency (NOA) is a federal parastatal under Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Information and Culture. In 1993, four Sectors merged to create the agency. NOA's mission is to foster national unity, civic engagement, and awareness of government policies. NOA pursues its activities through grassroots sensitisation, orientation and public enlightenment (NOA, 2015, 2016). The agency maintains a hierarchical but decentralised three-tier structure: The Director-General oversees twelve departments at the National Headquarters. They manage policy, strategic planning, and nationwide evaluation. The State Directors in Nigeria's 36 states adapt and implement national policies for local contexts. The Chief Orientation and Mobilisation Officers (COMOs) across Seven hundred seventy-four local governments engage citizens and drive grassroots mobilisation.

NOA's operational framework emphasises two-way communication and feedback mechanisms. These mechanisms create a continuous information loop between the government and citizens (NOA, 2008). Nigeria established the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to promote national values, social harmony, patriotism, and civic responsibility. NOA's structure mobilises citizens for national development, fosters unity, and instils discipline in public life. However, like many large public organisations. However, NOA faces challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, gaps between policy design and implementation, and difficulties adopting modern approaches, including e-governance and digital engagement tools. Effective leadership and Structural adaptability will allow NOA achieve empowerment potential, foster innovation, and ensure employee commitment in a dynamic public service environment (Chakkol et al., 2018; Stipp et al., 2018).

The expectation was that the NOA's strategic positioning would improve employee empowerment by demonstrating real internal and external network ties and dyadic relationships between leaders and employees, thereby enabling sustainable employee advantage. Equally, the researcher explored whether NOA leaders enhance e-governance through a structure that provides simultaneous, credible, and timely feedback. This overview contextualises the study's exploration of leadership practices and their impact on employee empowerment within NOA's unique operational and structural realities.

Leadership skills are thus valuable in large organisations because if the process is not effective, communication, and organisational collaboration, employee satisfaction, and the culture of innovation are frustrated. Employee dissatisfaction may result in lateness to work, absenteeism, dereliction of duty, misappropriation of public funds, job turnover, and a lack of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Weakly implemented internal processes

often create unstable decision-making chain of command, reducing successful integration and employee engagement (Alhyari et al., 2013).

Scholastic and Contemporary Perspectives of Leadership

Leadership is more than control of societal phenomena by a few individuals in a group (Bass, 1990a), but the totality of influence behaviours, interaction patterns, traits, and role relationships that reflect leadership processes (Yukl, 2013). Leadership is an imperative component in the evolution and prosperity of civilisations throughout history. The critical nature of leadership is extraordinarily essential to both social phenomena and scholarly research, underscoring its popularity and complexity (Burns, 1978). The multiplicity and complexity of leadership concepts reflect the efforts of many people to define leadership (Anderson et al., 2017; Bass, 1990b; Solomon et al., 2016).

A review of the leadership literature reveals a plethora of definitions that reflect the leadership landscape across different eras. Dartey-Baah (2014) attributed the unsettling nature of ambiguity to the inherent dynamism. Leadership is a determining factor in the realisation of collective goals fueled by man's insatiable needs. This dynamism positions leadership not as a fixed construct but as a socially embedded, context-responsive process.

Ladkin (2010) argued that leadership settings, contexts, and societies distinguish leadership expectations by situational and cultural contingencies. Silva (2016) adopted a community-centric and unifying definition. "Leadership is the process of interactive influence that occurs when, in a given context, some people accept someone as their leader to achieve common goals" (Silva, 2016, p. 3). The interactive pattern supports the notion that leadership is a process, not just a personal quality. Leadership is an interactive process that occurs when followers accept a leader's influence, either willingly or unwillingly. The leadership process is to accomplish shared goals between the leader and followers.

In the 21st century, the scholarly perspective has catalysed a paradigm shift from hierarchical and leader-centric models toward more relational, ethical, and adaptive frameworks. Scholars often project leadership as a dynamic process of enabling collective capacity within complex systems, rather than as authority vested in formal roles (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). This shift resonates with the focus on participative, shared, and complex models of leadership, which see leadership as an interactive pattern between leaders and followers.

In an increasingly hyper-turbulent environment, leadership theory further emphasises adaptive, agile, and digital leadership capabilities. Adaptive leadership focuses on mobilising learning, resilience, and innovation in the face of systemic challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009), while digital leadership emphasises the strategic use of technology to reshape organisational culture, communication, and value creation in interconnected contexts (Lee, 2022). These perspectives collectively converge toward sustainable and generative leadership models that prioritise long-term organisational viability, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship (Gerard et al., 2017).

Leadership Antecedents

The expression, "antecedents" refer to things, events, or elements that pre-exist specific contexts. In other words, antecedents occur before or logically precede other events. Organizational leaders are responsible for empowering employees. In the process of such empowerment, diverse elements might be at work. The current research activity

involved learning about specific elements from research participants and enumerating those elements as the antecedent to the leadership environment at NOA. Such antecedents become clear when research participants answer interview questions (Guest et al., 2006). It brings to fore the extent to which employee attain satisfaction are contingent on organizational leaders (Saleem, Bhutta, Nauman & Zahra, 2019).

Numerous leadership development activities exist and contribute to organizational success. The expectation is that when organizational leaders or chief operators put in place those elements contained in research interview data (themes), leadership will be better, and employees at NOA may thus be empowered. Before then, identifying known antecedents observable in the work environment is important; these include employees' gender, the leader's tenure in office, the organisation's commitment to employee empowerment, job satisfaction, and the different employee categories. A leader's style might determine the extent to which the identified antecedents factor into employees' empowerment. The diagram below highlights the interaction of the antecedents.

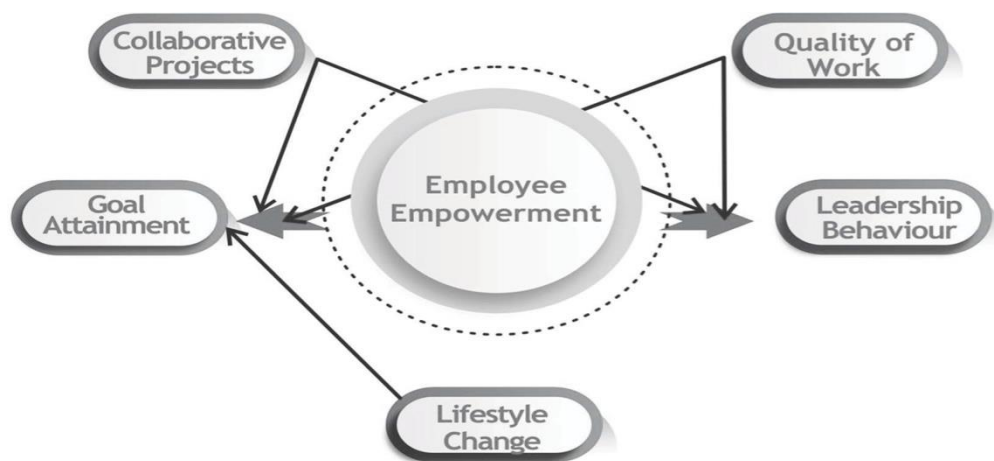


Figure 1. The operational model of research questions.

The text describes it as illustrating employee empowerment, with antecedents like employee gender, job satisfaction, leader tenure, organisational stance on empowerment, and ranking gap influencing the leader-employee relationship depending on leadership style. Employee empowerment is illustrated in Figure 1. One or more antecedents could influence the relationships between the leader and employees, depending on the leader's style.

Theoretical Framework

Two complementary theoretical perspectives undergird this study: Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment (Kanter, 1977, 1993) and Bass's Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) (Bass, 1985), along with Insights from emerging concepts, such as generative leadership.

Kanter's Theory of Structural Empowerment posits that organisational structures, rather than personal traits, are the primary drivers of empowerment. Kanter (1977) argued that employees feel empowered when they have access to: (a) opportunities for growth and mobility, (b) information, (c) resources needed to do their work, (d) support from supervisors

and peers, and (e) formal and informal power. Leaders can create empowering environments by ensuring these structural elements are in place (Manojlovich, 2007; Upenieks, 2002). Thus, leaders with formal and informal power can access empowerment structures and more effectively practice goals in ways that support organisational outcomes (Babenko-Mould et al., 2016). Recent applications of this theory emphasise the role of digital infrastructure as a critical new resource for empowerment in public organisations (Garson, 2022; Adegboye & Okafor, 2025). This theory provided a lens to analyse the structural and systemic factors within NOA that facilitate or hinder empowerment.

Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT), developed by Bass (1985) and later refined by Bass and Avolio (1997), describes a spectrum of leadership behaviours ranging from passive/avoidant (*laissez-faire*) to active transactional (management-by-exception, contingent reward) to transformational leadership. Transformational leadership, characterised by idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, is particularly associated with empowering followers, raising their consciousness about collective goals, and transcending self-interest for the sake of the organisation (Bass, 1998; Antonakis & House, 2013). Contemporary Research integrates ethical leadership and generative leadership as core components, linking them directly to trust, innovation, and empowerment in public sector contexts (Hassan & Aliyu, 2024). FRLT guided the exploration of the leadership styles and behaviours exhibited by NOA leaders and their perceived impact on employee empowerment.

Leadership styles and organisational commitment positively affect job performance. This integrated view is essential for understanding empowerment in complex bureaucratic settings facing modernisation pressures (Kim & Beehr, 2023; Eze, 2025).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach utilising a single-case study design. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to explore complex social phenomena in depth, focusing on participants' meanings, experiences, and perspectives within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Such experiences align with The study aims to understand the nuanced influence of leadership antecedents of employee empowerment. This design was deemed appropriate as the research sought an in-depth exploration of the bounded system of The National Orientation Agency (NOA), a key federal parastatal in Nigeria.

The case study allowed for the examination of the complex, context-rich interactions between leadership practices and employee perceptions of empowerment within this specific public organisation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The single-case (holistic) design was chosen for several reasons. First, NOA represents a critical case (Yin, 2018) for studying empowerment in the Nigerian public service, given its national mandate for public. Communication and civic education, which makes its internal employees' dynamics particularly significant. Second, a single in-depth case study enables a thorough investigation of the specific circumstances and intricate conditions within NOA, providing a detailed understanding essential for generating a contextual model (Creswell, 2013). As noted According to Creswell (2012), this design allows a researcher to "explore a real-life, contemporary bounded system... over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection" (p. 97).

Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). The sample consisted of 30 employees from the NOA, drawn from its offices across Nigeria's six geo-political zones (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South West, and South-South). Participants were required to be university graduates with over 15 years of leadership experience within the agency, ensuring they had substantial exposure to its leadership dynamics and empowerment practices, as well as the characteristics of the traditional qualitative data collection process (Levitt et al., 2018).

Data Collection

The qualitative case study is suitable for collecting different types of data types to investigate human actions and for aggregating knowledge within their social, cultural, and political contexts (Creswell, 2013; Salkind, 2003). Data were collected from three primary sources to ensure triangulation and enhance the trustworthiness of findings (Carter et al., 2014):

1. **Semi-structured Interviews:** Primary data were collected through one-on-one, in-depth interviews using an open-ended interview guide. The interview allowed participants to share their experiences and perceptions freely (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews were Conducted between June and August 2024.
2. **Document Review:** Official documents from NOA were analysed, including strategic plans (NOA, 2018), recent annual reports (NOA, 2023), policy manuals, published speeches, and PowerPoint slides from employee meetings and internal memoranda. This provided insight into the agency's espoused values and formal structures.
3. **Non-participant Observation:** The researcher observed formal and informal interactions in selected office settings to note behaviours, communication patterns, and the work environment, adding contextual depth to the interview data.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts, observational notes, and document extracts were coded using NVivo 14 software. The analysis involved a cyclical process of reading, coding, categorising, and theme development. Initial codes were grouped into categories, which were then refined into overarching themes that captured the core antecedents of leadership influencing empowerment. Member checking was employed by sharing preliminary findings with some participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their experiences. The analysis was further refined through peer debriefing with colleagues specialising in public administration.

Since the mainstay of NOA was project planning and implementation, employees expected leaders to view empowerment as equipping staff with the tools and resources needed to achieve organisational goals. The participants were unequivocal about what, how, and why regarding leadership empowerment expectations. The antecedents a leader must address were the same because the study focused on the same organisation. Triangulation of the three data sources revealed that achieving the organisation's mandate required both individual and collective empowerment. The investigation involved multiple facets, including zone-by-zone, node-by-node, and code-by-code analyses. The keywords and catchphrases that arose from participants' postulations, rather than a pre-analysis presumption, led to the emergence of the mind map. Four indirect and direct antecedents guided the emergence of themes. Data

analysis yielded seven core themes that represent the key leadership antecedents for employee empowerment at NOA.

Theme 1: Leaders Should Entrench Agency Mindset

Participants consistently expressed a deep-seated expectation that both Leaders and employees should adopt a mindset wholly dedicated to the agency's mission. Empowerment was viewed as a reciprocal process: Employees give their loyalty and effort, and in return, leaders should make organisational resources accessible. The psychological reciprocity Loyalty existed in the employees' subconscious. Table 1 shows the zonal contributions to the overall theme emergency schematic.

Furthermore, subthemes identified during data analysis included commitment to the organisation, contributions of leaders to organisational resources, organisational growth, and work and staff training. These subthemes showed unequal representation across zones and did not require further investigation.

Table 1: Theme Emergency Schematic

Theme	Cumulative	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
Agency	79	10	3	16	31	9	10
Mindset							
Contribution	100%	12.65%	3.79%	20.25%	39.24%	11.39%	12.65%

In NOA, participants viewed their activities from the angle of organisational programs. Everything revolved around the entity. Thus, situations occasionally arose that compelled them to seek external alternatives, which they referred to as "thinking outside the box." Thinking about the agency meant giving to and taking from the agency. Employees gave their time and talent to the agency in the normal course of their professional activities. In like manner, employees took (or expected to take) from the agency remuneration appropriate to the tasks they faced. Participants expected organisational leaders to make the organisation more accessible to employees as part of an empowerment strategy. However, employees occasionally found inefficiencies in the system that hindered such empowerment. For instance, Participant 26 stated, "The empowerment strategy is not as expected because of inefficient finance to carry out elaborate programs of the agency that can make a difference." This participant viewed empowerment from the standpoint of an equipped organisation. Given the agency's primary goal of sensitising people, employees should be equipped with the necessary tools to carry out these sensitisation activities.

According to Participant 1, "the NOA employees are referred to as the arrowhead of the agency because they have direct contact with people." Moreover, must, through their employees, make the requisite contact with the people. A participant explained that there were times when employees used their meagre salaries to fund major agency programs. Several other employees echoed that experience, even though a few employees did not experience such a draught. Confidentiality requirements in research forbade, in this instance, specific zone or zones and the applicability of this resource draft thereto.

Viewing everything from the agency's angle, a participant revealed that once the agency introduced a program, "the management would call a meeting, say, two days to the program to direct on how to carry out the program." The participant further lamented that policy planners were often unrealistic in designing the agency's programs, which affected the organisation's ability to empower employees tasked with entering communities and achieving the expected program impact.

This highlights the link between structural empowerment (access to resources, per Kanter) and psychological commitment. Employees expected leaders to model and foster this agency-centric view, aligning with the transformational leadership component of promoting collective goals over individual interests (Bass, 1998). This finding resonates with recent studies on public service motivation and generative leadership, which show that fostering a strong organisational identity is a key mediator of performance and future leadership development (Park & Kim, 2023; Hassan & Aliyu, 2024).

Theme 2: Identifying and Crushing Challenges Should Occur

The ability of leaders to proactively identify and decisively address organisational challenges was a strong marker of empowering leadership for participants, on their own behalf and on behalf of others. Some participants complained about challenges and, in the same breath, revealed instances where they were under control. Table 2 shows the zonal contributions to the overall theme reference pool. The subthemes observed were a work environment, an uncaring leadership mentality, fieldwork inadequacies, and constant financial deficiencies. These subthemes were almost equally represented across the zones.

Table 2: Per Zone Theme-Specific References

Theme	Cumulative	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
Challenges	134	27	25	21	18	22	21
Contributions	100%	20.14%	18.54%	15.67%	13.43%	16.41%	15.67%

The presence of challenges became a strong indicator of leadership's ability to empower employees. The participants expressed an expectation that placed the onus on organisational leaders to demonstrate their ability to empower employees. Participants provided examples of directors from zone to zone who recognised challenges and demonstrated tenacity and courage in confronting them. However, directors who faced challenges relied heavily on their subordinates. In other words, such directors who delegated duties to employees to address challenges, demonstrated tenacity, and involved subordinates in solving problems were highly regarded. This theme aligns with both Kanter's element of providing support and the transformational leadership behaviour of intellectual stimulation, in which leaders engage followers in tackling difficult problems (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Contemporary research confirms that leader problem-solving, agility, and resilience are critical antecedents to employee empowerment in resource-constrained environments (Ogunyomi & Okafor, 2022). Recent work also positions this as a core The behaviour of generative leaders who build systemic problem-solving capacity (Eze, 2025).

Theme 3: Employees Should Collaborate Across Project Teams

Participation in collaborative projects, both internally and with external partners, was identified as a significant source of empowerment. Participants described how collaboration provided exposure, made their "opinion matter," and enhanced their skills. The theme resonated with participants when challenges and positive milestones were addressed. The employees who already participated in projects wanted more of the experience. Those who had not yet experienced project teams yearned for the experience. Thus, the collaborative project team theme was important to the analysis. The zonal disparity in the emergence of the theme was only ephemeral, as each participant seized every opportunity to comment on project themes. Table 3 shows the zonal contributions to the theme references.

Table 3: Per Zone Theme-Specific References

Theme	Cumulative	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
Collaborative	61	11	5	8	9	12	15
Contributions	100%	18.03%	8.19%	13.11%	14.75%	19.67%	24.59%

Four subthemes emerged from the zonal contributions. They included project team participation experiences, selection to team projects, interaction with external bodies, and the leader's influence on the team selection. The zonal spread of these subthemes was proximate to subtheme to subtheme and required no further investigation.

Collaboration made an impact on several of the organisation's employees. The interviewees were certain of the need to increase collaboration across communities and entities in multiple fields of human endeavour. Research participants confessed to the benefits they derived from participating in collaborative project teams. Participant 11 stated, "I have been in a lot of collaborative projects, like National Primary Health Care, UNICEF." Providing an example, "there was a time I represented the office in mobilising to know why people do not come out for immunisation. The collaboration gave a lot of exposure." The exposure obtained empowered this participant's understanding. This reflects Kanter's emphasis on access to opportunities and information through informal networks and aligns with the transformational aim of fostering teamwork and collective efficacy. The importance of cross-functional and inter-agency collaboration for public sector innovation and digital transformation has been further emphasised in recent studies (Stipp et al., 2021; Adegboye & Okafor, 2025).

Theme 4: Establishing a Two-Way Feedback System Is Required

A pervasive desire among employees was for a robust, open communication channel where feedback flows upwards as effectively as it does downwards. Participants critiqued the current system, where report-writing (a key NOA mandate for citizen feedback) was strong but internal upward communication was weak. Participants' needs centred on staying informed about the organisation's goings-on. Leaders had the challenge of reaching down to the employees who were perpetually reaching up in vain. The proximate reference showings arose from the cumulative interest in the feedback theme. Participants across the zones emphasised report writing as if they were employed to write reports. However, report writing is critical in achieving the NOA mandate of providing a timely and credible information loop between the government and the citizenry. The intense activity of this theme in all zones is displayed in Table 4. Emerging subthemes included top-down communication, granting

employee requests, verifying employee needs, and initiating internal contact. The subthemes had nominal value as they were only supportive of the core theme.

Table 4: Per Zone Theme-Specific References

Theme	Cumulative	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
Feedback	143	23	27	33	18	19	23
Contributions	100%	16.08%	18.88%	23.07%	12.58%	13.28%	16.08%

An effective two-way system is a structural prerequisite for empowerment (Kanter's information and support) and is encouraged by transformational leaders through individualised consideration (Bass, 1985). NOA participants consistently expressed a need for an open, two-way communication line from top to bottom and bottom to top. A participant expected the organisational leaders "... to encourage the staff, especially at the local government levels ..." by providing diverse resources. In achieving this format, many participants explained the negotiation-type discussions in which leaders and followers shared a common understanding of status. Modern feedback systems increasingly leverage digital platforms to facilitate this exchange, a gap noted by participants (Adegboye et al., 2023). Generative leadership specifically advocates for creating feedback-rich environments that fuel continuous learning and adaptation (Hassan & Aliyu, 2024).

Theme 5: Leaders Should Respond to Staff Feelings

Participants emphasised that leaders must acknowledge and respond to employees' emotional and psychological states. According to a study on Nigerian public organisations, staff often reported feeling underutilised, stagnant, or negatively challenged due to inadequate funding. While these feelings might appear minor, the intensity with which they were expressed in affected areas was notable. A possible explanation for that dichotomy was that, between the occurrences and the leadership's responsibility to employees, there was an inability and a corporate will to address the issues adequately. The frequencies were unpredictable due to cultural differences among the zones and the indigenous peoples within them. Table 5 revealed staccato thematic occurrences across different zones. In like manner, subthemes identified during data processing included the desire to be involved, the need to know, acknowledging versus ignoring, and understanding the organisation. The subthemes had varied occurrence levels from zone to zone, but overall within proximate bands.

Table 5: Per Zone Theme-Specific References

Theme	Cumulative	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
Staff Feelings	59	6	4	11	28	6	4
Contributions	100%	10.16%	6.77%	18.64%	47.45%	10.16%	6.77%

Any leader who intended to empower their followers considered their personal feelings. Research participants expressed their feelings through several statements, suggesting that their superiors paid little or no attention to them. By considering what made employees happy, one can deduce the factors that made them sad. Participant 4 stated, "I am not satisfied with the quality of work I do because I know there are so many things I am supposed to do,

but the materials, equipment, and resources needed to do this work are lacking." While this comment sounded like a complaint about resources or about challenges, ignoring these feelings eroded trust and commitment. The employees preferred a situation in which their leaders took steps to eliminate the factors that cause sadness. Participant 1 stated, "I was happy and made many friends from the other 27 stakeholders from other agencies that participated," which means a leader must take note of what makes their followers happy. Putting such things in place empowered the followers. Participant 4 confessed, "I feel the organisation is underutilising me." Discontentment was another element of sadness that leaders identified and considered to eliminate. Employees were not allowed to degenerate to the point where their feelings were affected. Employment with NOA was a professional activity that did not require expressing personal feelings about workplace activities.

Employees were required to follow the rules of engagement and execute their professional tasks. Participant 24 lamented, "Unfortunately, the management (policymakers) are not doing the best for workers to achieve the goal of the agency." Participant 18 stated, "I feel negatively challenged because, as an accountant, money is not released." Participant 7 stated, "I believe that the quality of work I do is not equal to the degree I attained because poor funding has hampered programs of the agency. I feel underutilised."

This theme directly aligns with the transformational leadership factor of individualised consideration, in which leaders act as mentors and attend to individual needs (Yukl, 2013). The concept of leader empathy has gained renewed focus as a critical component of ethical and empowering leadership, especially following periods of widespread stress (Miao et al., 2022). Recent 2024 reports on the Nigerian Public service highlights burnout and morale as pressing issues requiring empathetic leadership (Transparency International, 2024).

Theme 6: The Organisation Should Deploy an Appropriate Strategy

Deploying the most appropriate strategy revealed participants' strengths through rich data, enabling strong themes to emerge. The strategy theme was connected to virtually every aspect of the investigation, as participants seized every opportunity to ascribe strategy-level importance to every factor they could imagine. Table 6 showed that each zone matched its demographics. A cross-check of zonal numbers against zonal names gave impressions of how each zone dealt with the theme of strategy. Several subthemes emerged during data handling. Some of them were staff duty assignments, staff transfers, work tool allocation, leadership mentoring, training scheduling, and mutual trust among staff and between leaders and staff. The subthemes did not require further investigation.

Table 6: Per Zone Theme-Specific References

Theme	Cumulative	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
Strategy	213	64	50	12	22	20	45
Contributions	100%	30.04%	23.47%	5.63%	10.32%	9.38%	21.12%

Leaders made an impact on people around them, thereby becoming known by the styles and skills they demonstrated. Of critical importance was a leader's ability to be purposeful in the normal course of his or her activities. Participants consistently expressed a desire that their zonal or unit leaders either do specific things or do them in specific ways. What the leaders

did and how they did those things constituted a strategy. Participant 18 stated, "... the most important leadership strategy that should be adopted is the bottom-top approach." He explained that, along with other colleagues, he was at a lower level and generated ideas for how best to move the agency forward and motivate staff to bring out the best in themselves. He continued, "... as it stands now, I do not think that it is being done." This statement showed that the participant identified gaps that were either style or skill-related. Participant 9 explained, "... the leadership empowerment strategy will make you bring out yourself, because if you are looking at what you will get, it will make you redundant." The participant revealed that because of the way things were, employees would be forced to do something for themselves. This lamentation showed that the strategy was lacking. Many participants determined that "... the issue of interpersonal relationship communication between the director and subordinate has been very effective" and appropriate for deployment. Participant 1 gave a good example: "My Director is always having direct contact with us in the local government. He is good at communicating with people under him, and this encourages me greatly." These examples point to an appropriate strategy incorporating styles and skills. A satisfied participant revealed that "... any information from the national headquarters to the state is immediately passed to us at the local government." The communication element became predominant as the participants drew on their respective zonal or unit operational experiences. Describing what made a director stand out, a participant stated that their leader was personally effective, humane, effective with communication systems, and deploys modern technology such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and similar freeware applications to the admiration of his subordinates.

This theme encapsulates the conscious application of both transactional (clear communication, resource provision) and transformational (inspiring, participative) behaviors from the FRLT spectrum to create an empowering environment. Recent discourse advocates "adaptive" and "generative leadership" in the public sector, which involves dynamically selecting strategies based on contextual demands and building leadership capacity at all levels---a competency participants implicitly sought (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2023; Hassan & Aliyu, 2024).

Theme 7: Management Should Implement Training on Innovations and Digital Fluency

Participants consistently positioned training as the essential mechanism for empowerment and for bridging the gap between NOA's mandate and its operational capacity. The demand was unanimous, with a strong contemporary focus on training for technological innovation and digital fluency. Participants explicitly linked the lack of modern training to feelings of professional obsolescence and disempowerment. As one participant stated, "The world is moving digital, but we are still using megaphones and posters. How can we sensitise the youth without understanding social media or data tools?" This sentiment highlights a critical dissonance between NOA's strategic mandate for grassroots sensitisation and the outdated tools and skills available to implement it.

The need for innovation-focused training was twofold, directly addressing gaps in the agency's structure:

1. **Operational Competence:** Participants cited urgent needs for training in digital content creation, social media management, data analytics, and mobile technology applications---skills essential for effective fieldwork and modern communication.

2. **Adaptive Mindset:** Beyond tools, employees sought training to cultivate an innovative, problem-solving approach, enabling them to leverage technology for community engagement and utilise digital feedback mechanisms, thereby strengthening NOA's critical "feedback loop" with citizens.

This theme directly aligns with the study's exploration of NOA's structural configuration. The call for digital training underscores a gap in the agency's "flattened hierarchy" and "two-way communication" design, which is theoretically meant to favour flexibility and information synthesis but is hampered by a lack of modern skills. It connects to Kanter's structural empowerment, where access to knowledge and resources is key, and to transformational leadership's intellectual stimulation.

In the study's context, this finding points to a strategic imperative: for NOA to fulfil its role in providing a "credible information loop" and "enhancing vertical and horizontal collaboration," investing in the digital and innovative competencies of its frontline staff are not optional. It is fundamental to overcoming structural inefficiencies, enabling the governance and responsiveness that the study identifies as necessary for public sector relevance (Adegboye & Okafor, 2025).

Discussions

Presenting a Leadership Blueprint to Guide Nigeria's Public Service. The central argument is that empowering public servants demands an integrated leadership model, not sporadic or generic programs, for agencies like NOA. The Integrated Empowerment Model (IEM), rooted in Purpose, Agency, and Adaptability, offers a practical, context-driven solution. The Nigerian context, marked by federal character complexities, resource scarcity, and a legacy of hierarchical control, makes these antecedents not merely beneficial but essential. The study identifies a critical disconnect: while NOA's structure is designed for feedback and collaboration, a lack of empowering leadership and modern skills stifles its potential. Leaders who embody these seven themes can thus overcome systemic constraints, translating formal structure into lived empowerment. Leaders who intentionally align organisational structure and behaviour foster staff support, ensuring empowerment and job satisfaction, particularly amid digital transformation and national mandates.

Championing Purpose & Cultivating an Agency Mindset (Themes 1 & 6). Empowerment is psychological, resonating from a shared sense of mission. Leaders must transcend transactional management to champion the agency's purpose and align individual roles with organisational and national mandates. Such leaders deploy strategic clarity and participatory approaches to make the organizational vision tangible. This requires leaders to consistently communicate the agency's vision, ensure fair access to resources, and demonstrate unwavering commitment. When employees see their work as integral to the NOA's mission and perceive reciprocal loyalty, which their effort is met with organisational support, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and motivation, directly linking structural access (Kanter) to transformational commitment (Bass).

Empowering leadership is defined by the proactive identification and resolution of challenges. Empowering leaders are proactive, problem-solvers who "crush challenges" rather than perpetuate bureaucratic inertia. The ability to identify and address challenges, such as resource deficiencies and unethical activities, integrates Kanter's structural elements with transformational leadership behaviours (Bass, 1998). Agile problem-solvers can foster confidence in their capacity to dismantle challenges in resource constraints and systemic inefficiencies, employees view leaders as empowering when they confront logistical,

financial, or bureaucratic obstacles with tenacity and ingenuity. Leaders who involve their teams in problem-solving not only provide crucial support but also intellectually stimulate their staff, building collective resilience and capacity to achieve mandates despite adversity.

Catalysing Collaboration & Competence (Themes 3 & 7). Empowerment is amplified through exposure and growth. Leaders must actively engineer collaborative opportunities across teams and with external partners, providing staff with networks, new perspectives, and a sense that their "opinion matters." Concurrently, targeted training on innovation and digital fluency is non-negotiable. For NOA to fulfil its mandate in a digital age, equipping staff with modern skills is a critical structural resource. This directly addresses the observed gap between the agency's strategic role and its outdated operational tools, fulfilling Kanter's condition of providing access to information and growth opportunities.

A strong two-way feedback system is essential for empowerment. Participants stressed that empowerment requires credible, consistent two-way communication, with a top-down and bottom-up approach, because employees cannot feel empowered in environments where communication is one-directional or where staff needs are ignored. The demand for a robust two-way feedback system emerged from a perceived deterioration in employee welfare and a high degree of formalisation. Although the National Orientation Agency is responsible for communicating government policy and staying informed about public opinion, participants expressed concerns about the agency's internal feedback processes, highlighting issues of centralisation and a lack of effective follow-through. Structural mechanisms alone are not enough without supportive interpersonal dynamics (Themes 4 & 5). Overcoming challenges requires establishing robust, two-way feedback systems that transform formal reporting into genuine dialogue. Crucially, this structural openness must be paired with emotional intelligence, which leaders acknowledge and respond to staff feelings of underutilisation or stagnation. When employees believe their voices are heard, and their concerns are valued, trust and psychological safety flourish, enabling empowerment. Effective empowerment needs open, upward, and downward communication. Strengthening internal feedback and mirroring citizen feedback protocols boosts inclusiveness, learning, and morale.

Leaders must demonstrate responsiveness to staff feelings and well-being. Empowerment erodes when employees are ignored or treated unfairly. Empowered employees feel individually valued, trusted, and empathised with, building trust and commitment. Staff feelings were presented as an overlooked but decisive dimension of empowerment. When leaders acknowledged staff concerns, involved employees in decisions, and showed empathy, employees reported stronger motivation and a greater willingness to contribute. Conversely, where employees felt ignored or unfairly treated, satisfaction and commitment declined. This theme highlights that empowerment is not only structural but includes the relational climate created by leadership behaviour. Aligning with Kanter's elements of empowerment, such as providing support. If employees do not feel trusted or valued, they do not feel empowered (Timmerman, 2016). Unmet emotional needs demotivate employees, as supported by cross-cultural evidence (Bercu & Onofrei, 2017), highlighting it as a universal leadership imperative. In a post-pandemic climate where burnout is a risk, empathetic leadership is not a soft skill but a critical imperative for maintaining morale and motivation.

Empowerment requires the deployment of conscious and adaptive leadership strategies. Employees call for purposeful approaches that encourage bottom-up input, utilise modern communication technology, and promote participative practices. An effective strategy was described as essential to reposition NOA to fulfil its bridging role between the government and citizens. Leaders were expected to be purposeful, set standards, shape

conduct, and consistently align daily operations with the agency's mandate. This antecedent encapsulates the need for leaders to move beyond improvisation and thoughtfully select behaviours from the full leadership spectrum, from clear transactional direction to inspirational transformational practices to suit specific contexts, aligning with contemporary concepts of adaptive leadership.

Deployment of leadership strategies encapsulates conscious application of behaviours from Bass's Full-Range Leadership Theory to create an empowering environment. Leaders in resource-constrained public sectors must be strategically focused and cannot afford to act arbitrarily (Solaja & Ogunola, 2016). Recent discourse advocates "adaptive" and "generative leadership," which involves dynamically selecting strategies based on context and building leadership capacity at all levels, a competency that participants implicitly sought (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2023; Hassan & Aliyu, 2024).

Targeted investment in training is crucial. Targeted training, especially in innovation and digital fluency, is the essential conduit for sustainable empowerment. Training was consistently described as a direct mechanism of empowerment because it strengthens competence, confidence, and readiness for complex assignments. Participants valued training that builds innovation capacity, supports collaboration, and equips employees to handle field realities. Where training was inadequate, employees felt underprepared and less empowered to deliver outcomes; where training was present and relevant, employees described greater courage, initiative, and performance. For NOA to fulfil its modern mandate, investing in the digital competency of its frontline staff is a strategic imperative for building innovation, responsiveness, and effective service delivery. The proposed strategic framework should be carried out by investing in technological innovation and digital fluency (Theme 7). Training is the critical step for empowerment. It directly builds competence, confidence, and creativity. The stark gap between NOA's modern sensitisation mandate and its reliance on outdated tools has created a sense of professional obsolescence. Investing in digital skills and innovative problem-solving training directly provides the "access to knowledge" Kanter prescribes and stimulates intellectual growth, enabling employees to take initiative and handle complex tasks. Strengthening capability and training turn strategy into skillful fulfilment of leadership goals of intellectual stimulation (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Overall, these strategies were seen as directly related to organisational goals because they improve commitment, execution capacity, and responsiveness conditions required for effective public service delivery.

Theoretical Synthesis: Bridging Structure and Behaviour. The study reinforces the synergy between Kanter's structural perspective and Bass's behavioural perspective on empowerment. It demonstrates that, in a real-world organisational setting, these theories are interdependent; appropriate leadership behaviours must activate structural opportunities to lead to perceived empowerment. The findings confirm that empowerment arises from the deliberate integration of **enabling structures** (Kanter, 1977) and **transformational leadership behaviours** (Bass, 1985), thereby validating the study's integrated theory. Empowerment is a two-fold concept. Structural Enablers (Kanter's Theory) indicate that employees need access to tools, information, support, and growth opportunities.

The study extends these classic models by embedding contemporary imperatives: **digital transformation** as a core structural resource and **generative leadership** as the forward-looking behaviour that builds adaptive capacity at all levels (Hassan & Aliyu, 2024). Gaps in digital infrastructure (Theme 7) and collaboration forums (Theme 3) are areas for leaders to

address. Behavioural Activators (Full-Range & Contemporary Leadership Theories) reveal that structures alone are not enough. Leaders must animate them. Data call for Transformational Leadership to inspire an agency mindset (Theme 1) and provide individual support (Theme 5). Intellectual Stimulation helps tackle challenges (Theme 2) while Contingent Reward clarifies expectations tied to a purposeful strategy (Theme 6). By focusing on digital transformation and generative leadership, leaders can build adaptive and self-sustaining capacity.

The proposed Integrated Empowerment Model (IEM) addresses the study's main questions and reinforces the central argument: empowerment occurs when structural supports (resources, technology, and collaboration) are combined with strong leadership behaviour (inspiration, participation, and empathy). For RQ1 (Implementation), strategies are holistic rather than fragmented. For RQ2 (Relation to Goals), this approach ensures an empowered workforce. This leads to achieving NOA's goals and building public trust.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that leadership antecedents for employee empowerment in the Nigerian public sector are multifaceted, encompassing both the creation of enabling structures and the demonstration of supportive, responsive, and strategically flexible leadership behaviours. It may be challenging for leaders to balance employee empowerment with organisational needs. However, the seven themes identified provide a robust, context-sensitive framework for understanding and improving empowerment practices, with clear connections to contemporary leadership concepts such as generative leadership. Given the unique Nigerian socio-economic milieu and cross-cultural nuances, the onus lies on leaders to model transformational leadership antecedents that deliver essential factors that affect empowerment. Employee devotion to an organisation may not wane when they know that leaders are committed to their welfare. When logistics are unavailable to implement functions effectively, employees sacrifice to ensure the continuity of their organisation. For agencies like NOA and for Nigerian public service reformers, prioritising this integrated approach is vital for building organisational commitment, enhancing service delivery, and navigating the demands of digital transformation and public trust in the 21st century.

Practical Recommendations

1. **For NOA and Similar Agencies:** Leadership development must be tailored and forward-looking. Training should focus on: building a compelling agency narrative (Theme 1), developing resourcefulness and problem-solving agility (Theme 2), designing and incentivising collaboration, including digital collaboration (Theme 3), implementing modern, safe feedback mechanisms (Theme 4), training in emotional intelligence, empathic communication, and burnout prevention (Theme 5), and cultivating adaptive, ethically grounded, generative leadership strategies that develop leadership in others (Theme 6).
2. **For Policymakers (e.g., Federal Civil Service Commission, Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation):** Public service reform should explicitly target the "empowerment infrastructure." This includes budgeting for essential work tools and digital platforms, formalising cross-functional and inter-ministerial team mandates, institutionalising protected upward feedback channels in performance management systems, and integrating principles of generative leadership into succession planning and competency frameworks.
3. **For Leaders:** Authentic empowerment requires moving from a control-oriented, hierarchical mindset to a facilitative, coaching-oriented, and generative one. Leaders

who adopt the right strategies are more likely to have committed employees who are willing to sacrifice to ensure the organisation's continuity. Leaders must consciously audit their unit's environment against Kanter's structures and their own behaviours against the full range of leadership, with a keen eye on ethical conduct, employee well-being, and their role in developing the next generation of leaders.

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