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## **IMPACT OF TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE ON EMPLOYEE VOICES IN THE FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of transactional leadership style on the management of employee voices. Employee voice represents how employees communicate their views to their employers and influence matters that affect them at work. More specifically, this paper focuses on scrutinizing the propensities of how transactional leadership style instigates employees' promotive or prohibitive voice behaviours. In doing this, a survey design was used to collect data from 100 employees and 20 supervisors working in food cafeterias of a private Nigerian university – Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin, Ondo State. The findings unveiled a significant relationship between the transactional style of leadership and employee voices. The result also demonstrates the perceived nature of the transactional leadership style adopted in moderating employees' promotive or prohibitive voice behaviours. Considering the contributions of this article, the findings provide valuable insights into the underexplored dimensions of the relationship between transactional management mode and voice behaviours and offers new directions for leadership and employee voice research.*

**Keywords:** Transactional leadership, Employee voice, Elizade University, Prohibitive voice, Promotive voice

### **1.0 Introduction**

The fierce competition for market dominance, profitability and effective human resource management in contemporary workplaces is now making large corporations or small-medium scale enterprises heavily rely on skills, competencies, cognitions and knowledge base of their workforce (Bono, Foldes, Vinson & Muros, 2007), which is necessitating the facilitation of employee voices (Arian, Hameed & Crawshaw, 2019). From a large and growing body of studies, employee voice generally suggests all forms of informal and/or official communication of employees' concerns, suggestions, propositions and information about work-related issues to those in organizational leadership who can take appropriate action (Burris, 2012). Given the potential advantages of 'employee voice', Wang, Xu and Liu, (2019) suggests that motivating workers to voice out their concerns and thoughts about work have become integral to fostering organizational improvement and preventing poor leadership propensities. Since organizational leadership is more often than not, the target of employee voices, it makes corporate disposition and behaviour directly influence the willingness of employees to speak up or remain silent (Song & Kwan, 2021). As such, the transactional style of leadership can potentially have an impact on employee voice behaviours since this method of leadership is associated with motivating and directing followers primarily by appealing to their self-interest. This is because the powers of transactional leaders come from formal authority and responsibility in the organization (Bass, 1985).

While the transactional approach features positive and negative patterns of managing individual performance through the instrumentality of rewards and punishment (Bass, 1985), curiosity on how these components of transactional leadership style shape employee voice behaviour is an important area of research yet to be fully examined. Prior studies have shown that transformational leadership is associated with managers being interested in raising subordinates' level of consciousness about positive change with an end target of developing subordinates into leaders themselves. Consequently, this desired goal of a transformational leader will predominantly encourage and empower subordinates to speak up without fear or inhibitions (Duan, Li, Yue & Wu, 2017). However, there remains a paucity of research on how transactional leadership mode shapes employees' voice role perception (Bass, 2008). This is the research gap that this study seeks to address.

Thus, the present current study offers a novel understanding of how transactional leaders frame employees' voice behaviour. It is worth noting that while significant research has been undertaken on leadership influences on labour-management relations (Carnevale, Huang, Crede, Harms & Uhl-Bien, 2017), little is known from developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Nigeria, which has a patriarchal, inequalitarian and collectivist culture unlike the individualistic and low power distance tradition existing in the west (Hofstede, 1980). Thus, our paper aims to answer the following research question: what is the effect of the transactional style of leadership on employee voices? We develop our contribution in the context of Nigeria, a black nation with a population of almost 200 million identified with a culture of gender dominance, religious proclivities and high-status differentials, particularly in organizational settings (Ituma, Simpson, Ovadje, Cornelius & Mordi, 2011).

More specifically, our study context focuses on the food service industry with particular reference to student cafeterias in a private university setting. Historically, the liberalization of the higher education sector in the late 1990s by the Obasanjo administration created avenues for wealthy persons and corporate bodies that fulfil the licensing guidelines set by the Nigerian Government through its regulatory body, the National Universities Commission to look into the establishment of private universities (Akanji, Mordi, Ajonbadi & Mojeed-Sanni, 2018). One of these private universities is Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin, Ondo State. The university was founded in 2012 by Chief Michael AdeOjo. The University is fully residential and students living in hostels are disallowed from cooking their food but purchase their meals from the school cafeterias. Notably, the goal of food service establishments such as restaurants and cafeterias are to provide decent meals and good service to customers while remaining within food and labour costs to make profits. This can be achieved through a good leadership style adopted by cafeteria managers and the extent to which employees' voices are also allowed. Thus, the present study aims to fill the research gap in the literature by making a significant contribution toward our understanding of how transactional style shapes employees' voices using Elizade University as a business case. Thus, the research question we seek to address focuses on what is the effect of the transactional style of leadership on employee voice behaviours?

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical background and hypothesis development***

Leadership as a concept has, over the years attracted substantial academic and practitioners' interest. The burgeoning interest in leadership stems, in part, from the recognition that organisational performance is contingent largely on the effectiveness of its leadership to harness the potentials of its workforce to achieve strategic organisational goals (Shin, Heath & Lee, 2011). While it is hard to find a single definition for leadership in the literature, it is generally perceived as a means through which a person or group of individuals influences the actions, dispositions and behaviours of others. Additionally, there have been different theories on leadership styles proposed over the years, of which

the transactional and transformational leadership theories (Burns, 2003; Bass & Stoghill, 1990) are predominant concepts in leadership research.

In this paper, however, we shall be focusing on the transactional leadership style that is generally identified as a style that focuses on the basic method of organizing, controlling, and planning tasks for followers through the use of a carrot and stick approach (Bass, 1990). Unlike the transformational style of leadership earlier defined, the transactional style is generally contested to be impactful in moments of crisis, bleak circumstances, chaotic conditions and/or moments of uncertainty (Ma & Jiang, 2018). Transactional leaders often direct and push forward more effectively by clarifying followers' tasks and role demands by linking such roles and demands with rewards and punishments. Thus, transactional leaders can make their followers happy by rewarding their dedication to work as well as punishing defaulters (Wegner, 2004). Such circumstances are magnified in challenging or ambiguous circumstances, which is often the context of most organisational difficulties (Waldman, Ramirez, House, & Puranam, 2001).

Accordingly, extrinsic motivators, such as contingent rewards and punishments, which are typical characteristics of transactional leadership can shape employees' communicative behaviours directed towards work-related problems and concerns (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). An example is for transactional leaders to encourage employee communication in moments of business uncertainties in a bid to make workers look up to their leaders to help set priorities and goals right if confronted with tough business situations that may affect employees. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis within the context of this present study:

*Hypothesis 1: Transactional leadership in Elizade University cafeteria is positively related to employee communicative behaviours.*

Employee voice as a concept, has a long and varied antecedent in organisational behaviour research, including a mainstay in procedural justice (Duan, Li, Yue and Wu, 2017). In its broadest sense, employee voice is defined as giving workers opportunities to express their concerns, ideas and perspectives with authenticity and without intimidation or fear of social or workplace consequences. This means employees are empowered to influence workplace decisions through their feedback, with the sole aim to bring about organizational change or improvement. In theory, employee voice is two dimensions known to be either promotive or prohibitive. For instance, promotive voice is perceived as an individual vocalizing expression that is beneficial to the organization and its suggestion focused while prohibitive voice is seen as when a person vocalizes complaints and deficiencies about the organization (Song & Kwan, 2021).

It happens when individuals vocalize their apprehension and misgivings about problems bothering the affairs of the organization. It is worth noting that leadership style is considered an integral factor in the analysis of the benefits or risks that may occur from employee voices directed to the general conditions of the workplace. In other words, leadership styles have a direct effect on employee voices with respect to organizational functioning (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). While studies have shown how employees adopt different voice strategies for different categories of leadership styles, (Mowbray, Wilkinson & Tse, 2015), little is known about how a single or chosen leadership style affect whether employees adopt a promotive or prohibitive voice in response to such management approach. For instance, expressing promotive voices may be useful to transactional leaders who are likely to be prone to reward such voice behaviours when employees' promotive voices focus on freely expressing innovative thoughts to increase operational efficiencies in the organisation. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2: Transactional leadership is positively related to promotive voice.*

Contrarily, prohibitive voices are known to occur when employees present their dissatisfactions and misgivings about problems experienced within the workplace. However, prohibitive voices may involve more risks than promotive voices as exposing harmful propensities and unpleasant conditions in an organization may displease the implicated personnel (Song & Kwan, 2021). Since a major feature of transactional leadership style is using punishment to enforce control, engaging in prohibitive voice behaviours may attract the wrath of transactional leaders in a bid to reinforce their formal authority simply because the main goal of the follower in this context is to obey the instructions of the transactional leader. This may be a salient reason why some employees remain silent for fear of unpleasant outcomes (i.e. punishment) for speaking up. If voices are withheld due to these reasons within an organizational context, both performance and employee morale may suffer and such consequences may be significant (Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012). As such, we propose the following hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 3: Transactional leadership style is negatively related to prohibitive voice.*

### **3.0 Methodology**

The total number of staff working in both cafeterias at Elizade University includes 224 employees. Out of this total population, our sample size includes 20 supervisors matched with 100 subordinates consisting of waiters, waitresses, cooks, chefs, cleaners and sales record keepers who all work in two cafeterias at Elizade University, Nigeria. Thus, two different types of questionnaires were prepared and distributed. In the first set, the subordinates were invited to fill out questionnaires that evaluate their supervisor's transactional style of leadership identified and its influence on their promotive or prohibitive voice. We collected all the questionnaires back which we found usable. The response scale of all the measures in both questionnaires was based on the five-point Likert scale. Therefore, participants were asked on a scale of 1-5 to tick the rate of their level of agreement with all the questions ranging from 1 representing - Strongly Agree, 2-Agree, 3-Undecided, 4-Disagree, 5-Strongly Disagree. In evaluating the perceived transactional leadership style of supervisors, we adapted a 15-item measure developed by (Den-Hartog, Van Muijen & Koopman, 1997). Within the context of our study, we further measured promotive and prohibitive dimensions of employee voices using an adjusted 15-item developed by Liang, Farh, & Farh, (2012). The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance.

### **4.0 Results and Discussion**

Descriptive analysis showed that the majority of the study participants were male (52.2%) with (47.5%) female, between the age group of 18-24 (42.5%), single (70.8%) and were Christians (89.2%). Concerning academic rank, the majority of the participants held high school certificates (54.2%) and were waiters/waitresses (25%), having worked in the cafeteria for less than one year (55.8%). The result showed that the majority of the participants worked on regular/permanent basis in the cafeteria (67.5%). (Table 1).

<b>Table 1: Demographic Samples</b>		
<b>Gender</b>	f	%
Male	63	52.5
Female	57	47.5
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	51	42.5
25-29	43	35.8
30-34	13	10.8
35-39	4	3.33
40-44	1	0.83
45-49	6	5.0
50-above	2	1.70
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	28	23.3
Single	85	70.8
Divorced	6	5.0
Widowed	1	0.83
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	107	89.2
Muslim/Islam	12	10.0
Traditional	1	0.83
<b>Highest level of education completed</b>		
High school	65	54.2
Bachelors	42	35.0
Masters	3	3.0
Others	10	8.3
<b>Job title/position in the cafeteria</b>		
Waiter/waitress	30	25.0
Bartender	8	6.6
Cook/chef	18	15.0
Assistant cook	12	10.0
Storekeeper	9	7.5
Food and Beverage Manager	20	16.7
Others	23	19.2
<b>Years of service in the cafeteria</b>		
Less than one year	67	55.8
Between 1-2 years	39	32.5
Between 2-5 years	13	10.8
More than 5 years	1	0.83
<b>Terms of service</b>		
Regular/permanent	81	67.5
Contract	10	8.3
Casual	29	24.2

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

**Table 2:**

<b>Correlations Matrix for Transactional Leadership and Employees Communicative Behaviour</b>			
		Employees Communicative Behaviour	transactional leadership
Employees Communicative Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	1	.544**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
transactional leadership	Pearson Correlation	.544**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 1: Transactional leadership in Elizade University Cafeteria is positively related to employee communicative behaviours.

The correlation coefficient (r) reveals that there is a significant and positive relationship between transactional leadership and employee communicative behaviours in the cafeteria. The *rho* value 0.544 indicates this relationship and it is significant at  $p\ 0.000 < 0.05$ . The correlation coefficient represents an average correlation indicating a strong relationship. Therefore, based on our findings, the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between transactional leadership and employees' communicative behaviour. The result from the respondents shows that they are allowed to speak when necessary and contribute to important decisions and are being listened to by their management.

*Hypothesis 2: Transactional leadership is positively related to promotive voice*

**Table 3:**

Correlations Matrix for Transactional Leadership and promotive voice

		transactional leadership	promotive voice
transactional leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.377**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
promotive voice	Pearson Correlation	.377**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient (r) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between transactional leadership and the promotive voice of the employees in the cafeteria. The *rho* value 0.377 indicates this relationship and it is significant at  $p\ 0.000 < 0.05$ . The correlation coefficient

represents an average correlation indicating a strong relationship. Therefore, based on the findings, the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between transactional leadership and employees' promotive voice in the cafeteria. The result from the respondents shows that they are rewarded for every effort made, while their skills and capabilities are recognized.

*Hypothesis 3: Transactional leadership is negatively related to prohibitive voice*

**Table 4:**  
**Correlations Matrix for Transactional Leadership and prohibitive voice**

		transactional leadership	prohibitive voice
transactional leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	-.165**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	120	120
prohibitive voice	Pearson Correlation	-.165**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	120	120

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The coefficient (r) shows that there is no relationship between transactional leadership and the prohibitive voice of the employees working in the cafeteria. The *rho* value -0.165 indicates a strong negative relationship and it is significant at  $p < 0.000 < 0.05$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. In this study, three hypotheses were tested and based on the result, it is concluded from the correlation table that the transactional leadership style dimension has a positive relationship with employees' communicative behaviour and promotive voice in their job. In addition, this study discovered that there is no relationship between the leadership style and the prohibitive voice of the employees. This suggests that the transactional leadership style could be perceived as strong leadership management strategies that will enable the employees to have an understanding of their given tasks in the organization.

From the result of this study, it is clear that transactional leaders seek to motivate their people by enticing or appealing to their self-interests. It was also discovered that transactional leaders adhere to standards, duties, and task-based objectives. The study shows that the employees in the cafeterias are rewarded for their performance, indicating extrinsic motivation. Transactional leadership is reported to be a leadership style that manages using clarification of the responsibilities of those being led and providing rewards when they achieve the set standards. The findings of the study are in tandem with those of Shah & Hamid (2015) which explored the relationship between transactional leadership and job performance and established that transactional leadership has a significant relationship with job performance particularly when employees are allowed to express their concerns.

The respondents also strongly agreed with the statements that the transactional leadership style of the management is effective in motivating the employees in becoming productive and efficient members of the team, and that rewards promised by transactional leadership style serve as motivators for the employees to do their tasks at the shortest time possible for incentives, whether monetary or other

means and that through transactional leadership style, the management ensures that its visions for the cafeteria are realized through promotive voices of workers.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Due to the changing business environment, many service companies have abandoned the idea of maintaining staff through motivation and other traditional methods. Managers are adopting other leadership styles that encourage staff to stay with the company. It is a well-known fact that good leadership fosters loyalty, which can be extremely beneficial to businesses. Employees would go to any extent if a specific performance was complemented by a specific reward while employees are also allowed to freely express themselves. The study shows the understanding of the relationship between transactional leaders' and employees' voices. It is also observed that through freedom of expression (i.e. promotive voice), employees can help identify problematic behaviours or issues and bring up concerns and opportunities for organizational improvement. However, facing the risk of defensiveness by leaders or receiving negative work evaluations, employees will choose to remain silent, even though they believe their words could be useful to the organization. The supervisors delegate authority to the employee to promote employee voices so that they feel included following that organizations need to respond to uncertain environments with efficiency and effectiveness and this is not possible without employees' voices.

The study showed that transactional leadership style has a positive relationship with the employees' communicative behaviours (H1) which was positively related to promotive voices and negatively related to prohibitive voice behaviours of the employees (H2 and H3). Fasola, Adeyemi & Olowe (2013) also reiterates that transactional leadership style affects the employees' commitment and voice behaviours positively in the banking sector of Nigeria. Consequently, this study makes an important contribution by suggesting that managers can increase perceived workplace inclusion, as an important management practice, by delegating tasks and accepting employees' voices. Perceived workplace inclusion is an effective HRM practice, it tends to foster employees' involvement and belongingness to the organization. For the leadership in Elizade University cafeterias, the study recommends that they also strive to perform exemplary leadership and keep motivating their employees through an acceptable style of leading. They should also keep encouraging their subordinates by giving recognition for their achievement, rewarding accordingly and embracing employee voices.

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