Leadership Styles and Organisational Performance of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between leadership styles and organisational performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of leadership communication style, decision-making style, and emotional intelligence on organisational performance. A descriptive research design adopting a cross-sectional survey approach was employed. Data were collected from 101 employees of selected SMEs through a structured questionnaire using a convenience sampling technique. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis at a 5 per cent level of significance with the aid of SPSS version 23. The findings revealed that leadership communication style had a very strong and positive effect on organisational performance ($B = 0.8915$, $p < 0.001$). Emotional intelligence was also found to have a significant positive influence on organisational performance ($B = 0.146$, $p = 0.028$). However, decision-making style exhibited a significant negative effect on organisational performance (B =

–0.247, p = 0.005), suggesting that rigid or non-inclusive decision-making practices may hinder SME effectiveness. The study concludes that effective leadership in SMEs depends largely on clear communication, emotional intelligence, and inclusive decision-making practices. It therefore recommends that SME owners and managers invest in leadership development programmes aimed at strengthening communication competence, emotional intelligence, and participatory decision-making in order to enhance organisational performance and sustainability.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Communication, Decision-Making, Emotional Intelligence, SMEs, Organisational Performance.

Introduction

In contemporary organisational environments, leadership has increasingly been recognised as a critical factor influencing organisational effectiveness, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability. As organisations operate in contexts characterised by rapid technological change, market uncertainty, and intense competition, the attainment of organisational goals has become more dependent on how effectively employees are motivated, coordinated, and guided. Consequently, human resources are widely regarded as the most valuable asset of organisations, as it is the human element that provides direction, innovation, and adaptability in dynamic business environments (Mahapatro, 2022; Robbins & Judge, 2023).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in mobilising and aligning human resources towards the achievement of organisational objectives. Effective leadership provides employees with clarity of purpose, emotional support, and motivation, which in turn enhances both individual and collective performance. Al Khajeh (2018) observed that leadership effectiveness is reflected in leaders' ability to create enabling work environments that foster employee engagement and commitment. Similarly, Eva et al. (2023) argued that leadership behaviours significantly shape employee attitudes, job satisfaction, and discretionary effort, which ultimately translate into organisational performance outcomes. Northouse (2021) further noted that leadership effectiveness is best understood through a leader's capacity to influence followers in ways that support organisational goals.

Leadership is increasingly conceptualised as a social influence process that is embedded within specific organisational, cultural, and environmental contexts rather than as a function of formal authority alone (Yukl, 2020). Modern leadership effectiveness is shaped by behavioural competencies such as communication practices, emotional awareness, and decision-making orientation. Robbins and Judge (2023) emphasised that contemporary leaders must effectively manage interpersonal relationships, regulate emotions, and communicate expectations clearly in order to respond to uncertainty and complexity in organisational settings.

Within the context of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), leadership assumes even greater significance. SMEs typically operate in environments characterised by limited financial resources, infrastructural challenges, market instability, and intense competition (SMEDAN & NBS, 2021). In such settings, leadership weaknesses can quickly manifest in poor communication, low employee morale, weak coordination, and ineffective decision-making, thereby undermining organisational survival and growth (Afolayan et al., 2022; Oludiran, 2020). Unlike large organisations with formalised structures and systems, SMEs rely heavily on owner-managers whose leadership behaviours directly shape employee performance and organisational outcomes.

Although traditional leadership studies have focused on typologies such as autocratic, democratic, transformational, and transactional leadership styles, recent scholarship suggests that these approaches may not fully capture the realities of leadership in contemporary SME environments. Modern organisations increasingly require leaders who possess strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and adaptive decision-making capabilities (Northouse, 2021; Yukl, 2020). Such behavioural leadership dimensions are particularly relevant in SMEs, where leader-employee interactions are frequent, informal, and highly personalised.

Recent studies have highlighted leadership communication effectiveness, emotional intelligence, and decision-making style as critical determinants of organisational performance. Effective communication enhances clarity, trust, and coordination, thereby improving employee engagement and productivity

(Nwachukwu, 2020; Musheke & Phiri, 2021). Emotional intelligence enables leaders to manage emotions, resolve conflicts, and foster positive workplace relationships, which contribute significantly to organisational effectiveness (Suchitra & Sasmita, 2021; Alamri & Thabet, 2024). Similarly, decision-making style influences employee commitment, innovation, and acceptance of organisational decisions, especially in dynamic and resource-constrained environments (Al-Husseini et al., 2021; Iyaji et al., 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Competition within the Nigerian business environment has intensified significantly over the past decade, exposing small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) to heightened operational, financial, and strategic pressures. While macroeconomic instability, infrastructural deficits, and limited access to finance remain major constraints, increasing evidence suggests that organisational performance in SMEs is equally shaped by internal leadership practices that influence employee behaviour, coordination, and commitment (Afolayan et al., 2022; Oludiran, 2020). Given the labour-intensive and people-centred nature of SMEs, leadership effectiveness plays a decisive role in determining organisational outcomes.

In Nigeria, and particularly within emerging commercial clusters such as Owo in Ondo State, SMEs continue to experience high failure and stagnation rates despite their recognised contributions to employment generation, poverty reduction, and economic development (SMEDAN & NBS, 2021). Many SME owners and managers operate without formal leadership or managerial training, relying largely on intuition, personal experience, and informal management practices. This often results in weak employee engagement, poor coordination of activities, ineffective communication flows, and inconsistent decision-making processes, which collectively undermine organisational performance (Nwachukwu, 2020; Musheke & Phiri, 2021).

Empirical studies have increasingly linked these organisational challenges to leadership deficiencies rather than purely technical or financial limitations. Haque et al. (2017) argue that leadership behaviour significantly affects employee motivation and organisational commitment, while Yukl (2020) notes that

leadership effectiveness is contingent on behavioural competencies such as communication clarity, emotional regulation, and decision quality. In SME contexts, where leader and employee interactions are frequent and personal, deficiencies in these leadership dimensions can rapidly translate into reduced productivity, high labour turnover, and poor service delivery.

However, much of the existing Nigerian literature on leadership and SME performance has concentrated on traditional leadership typologies, including autocratic, democratic, and transformational leadership styles (Agwu, 2018; Oladele, 2019). While valuable, these approaches may be insufficient in capturing the complexity of leadership demands in contemporary SME environments characterised by uncertainty, informality, and diverse employee expectations. Modern leadership effectiveness increasingly requires emotional intelligence, effective communication, and adaptive decision-making capabilities to manage interpersonal relationships and organisational change (Northouse, 2021; Suchitra & Sasmita, 2021).

Despite the growing recognition of these behavioural leadership dimensions, empirical studies that integrate emotional intelligence, communication style, and decision-making style in explaining organisational performance remain limited in Nigeria. This gap is particularly evident at the local level, including Owo, Ondo State, where SMEs operate under unique socio-cultural and economic conditions. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence to guide SME owners, managers, and policymakers on how these leadership dimensions jointly influence organisational performance. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining the effect of emotional intelligence, communication style, and decision-making style on organisational performance among SMEs in Owo, Ondo State.

Research Objectives

This study is designed to examine the relationship between leadership styles and organisational performance of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The overarching objective of the study is to determine how leadership practices influence the performance outcomes of SMEs operating within this emerging business environment. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate the influence of leaders' emotional intelligence on organisational

performance, examine the effect of communication style on organisational performance, and assess how decision-making style impacts the performance of SMEs in Owo.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and organisational performance of SMEs in Owo, Ondo State.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between communication style and organisational performance of SMEs in Owo, Ondo State.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between decision-making style and organisational performance of SMEs in Owo, Ondo State.

Literature Review

Leadership and Organisational Performance

Leadership and organisational performance remain central themes in management research, particularly within small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), where leadership influence is direct, personalised, and often decisive. Organisational performance refers to the extent to which an organisation effectively achieves its objectives through the efficient utilisation of human, financial, and informational resources (Neely et al., 2020). Contemporary perspectives conceptualise organisational performance as a multidimensional construct encompassing both financial outcomes such as profitability and growth and non-financial indicators including employee commitment, adaptability, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency (Kaplan & Norton, 2001).

In SME contexts, non-financial performance indicators are especially critical because leadership practices often exert their influence on employee morale, coordination, and internal processes before translating into measurable financial gains. Hashem (2015) emphasised that organisational performance should be evaluated through efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability lenses, particularly in volatile business environments. This perspective is relevant to developing economies such as Nigeria, where SMEs operate under conditions of economic uncertainty, infrastructural challenges, and intense competition (SMEDAN & NBS, 2021).

Leadership style is widely recognised as a key determinant of organisational performance. Leadership style refers to the consistent pattern of behaviour adopted by leaders in influencing, motivating, and guiding subordinates towards organisational goals (Northouse, 2021). While earlier leadership studies focused on rigid typologies such as autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership, contemporary research increasingly highlights behavioural and relational leadership dimensions that reflect flexibility, emotional competence, and interpersonal effectiveness (Yukl, 2020).

Empirical studies consistently show that leadership effectiveness extends beyond authority and control to include soft skills such as communication competence, emotional intelligence, and decision-making orientation. Eva et al. (2023) demonstrated that leadership behaviours significantly influence employee attitudes and discretionary effort, which in turn shape organisational performance outcomes. Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2023) argue that leadership effectiveness is closely linked to how leaders communicate expectations, manage emotions, and involve employees in organisational processes.

Leadership Communication Style and Organisational Performance

Communication is a fundamental leadership function through which organisational goals, expectations, and values are transmitted and internalised. Tubbs (2021) conceptualised communication as a process of shared meaning, while Men and Yue (2019) emphasised its role in building trust, engagement, and alignment between leaders and employees. In SMEs, where formal communication structures are often limited, leadership communication style becomes a critical determinant of organisational performance.

Effective leadership communication is characterised by clarity, openness, feedback, and two-way interaction (Nwachukwu, 2020). Empirical evidence suggests that effective communication enhances employee understanding, coordination, and commitment, thereby improving productivity and organisational outcomes. Ufuophu-Biri and Ayewunmi (2022) found that communication quality significantly predicted organisational performance in African SMEs, while Musheke and Phiri (2021) reported that poor communication practices contributed to inefficiencies and employee disengagement.

Conversely, ineffective communication leads to misunderstanding, conflict, and poor task execution, which undermine organisational performance. Athamneh and Jais (2023) noted that communication breakdowns negatively affect managerial decision-making and strategy implementation. These findings suggest that leadership communication style is a critical behavioural mechanism through which leaders influence SME performance.

Decision-Making Style and Organisational Performance

Decision-making is a core leadership responsibility that shapes organisational direction, adaptability, and performance. Decision-making style refers to the manner in which leaders evaluate alternatives, involve subordinates, and implement organisational choices (Dean & Sharfman, 1996). In SMEs, decision-making authority is often centralised in owner-managers, making leadership orientation particularly influential on organisational outcomes.

Participative decision-making has been shown to enhance employee commitment, innovation, and acceptance of organisational decisions, especially in dynamic environments (Bozionelos & Wang, 2021). Iyaji and Bakare (2023) further demonstrated that decision-making quality mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and organisational performance in Nigerian SMEs. These findings suggest that inclusive and flexible decision-making styles positively influence organisational effectiveness.

However, rigid, autocratic, or exclusionary decision-making styles may negatively affect organisational performance. Abubakar (2017) argued that decision-making practices that limit employee input reduce motivation and ownership, particularly in labour-intensive SME contexts. In developing economies, where employees often possess valuable contextual knowledge, failure to involve them in decision-making can result in poor decision quality and resistance to implementation.

Emotional Intelligence and Organisational Performance

Emotional intelligence has emerged as a critical leadership competency in contemporary organisations. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilise emotions effectively in oneself and others (Wong & Law, 2002). Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better

equipped to manage interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, and create positive work environments.

Empirical studies strongly support the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational performance. Zehir et al. (2019) found that emotional intelligence significantly enhanced leadership effectiveness and employee performance. Similarly, Alamri and Thabet (2024) demonstrated that emotional intelligence dimensions such as empathy, self-awareness, and social skills positively influenced organisational performance in SMEs.

In SME contexts, where leader–employee interactions are frequent and informal, emotional intelligence becomes particularly important for maintaining trust, cohesion, and motivation. Tafamel and Ejechi (2022) observed that emotionally intelligent leaders are more effective in aligning employee emotions with organisational goals, thereby enhancing productivity and organisational outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory, which provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining the relationship between leadership styles and organisational performance among small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs). The theory is particularly suitable for this study because it emphasises leadership flexibility, behavioural adaptability, and context-specific leadership practices attributes that are critical for managing SMEs operating in dynamic and resource-constrained environments such as Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The Situational Leadership Theory was developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969 and later refined in subsequent editions of The Management of Organizational Behaviour. The theory is premised on the assumption that there is no single best leadership style applicable to all situations. Instead, effective leadership is contingent upon the leader's ability to adapt their style to the readiness, competence, and commitment of followers as well as to the nature of the task and organisational context (Hersey et al., 2013).

According to the theory, leadership effectiveness depends on the appropriate balance between task-oriented behaviour and relationship-oriented behaviour.

Leaders are expected to diagnose situational variables and adopt one of four leadership styles directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating based on followers' levels of ability and willingness. This behavioural adaptability underscores the importance of leadership communication, participatory decision-making, and emotional sensitivity in influencing employee performance and organisational outcomes.

The relevance of Situational Leadership Theory to this study lies in its strong emphasis on communication style. Effective leaders must clearly communicate expectations, provide feedback, and adjust the tone and content of communication based on employee competence and motivation. In SME contexts, where formal communication structures are often limited, leadership communication style plays a pivotal role in coordinating activities, reducing ambiguity, and enhancing employee commitment.

Furthermore, the theory aligns closely with decision-making style as a leadership variable. Situational leaders are required to determine when decisions should be leader driven and when employee involvement is necessary. In SMEs, decision-making flexibility allows leaders to respond promptly to environmental changes while fostering employee ownership and innovation. Participative and consultative decision-making styles, as suggested by the theory, can enhance organisational performance by improving decision quality and employee acceptance.

The theory also provides a strong conceptual basis for examining emotional intelligence in leadership. Situational leadership requires leaders to accurately assess followers' emotional states, motivation levels, and readiness to perform tasks. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, and provide appropriate support, thereby enhancing individual and organisational performance. Emotional intelligence therefore enhances leaders' capacity to apply situational leadership effectively.

Morgeson and Ilies (2007) classified Situational Leadership Theory as a behavioural leadership theory because it focuses on observable leadership

behaviours rather than innate traits. This behavioural orientation makes the theory particularly suitable for empirical investigation, as leadership behaviours such as communication, decision-making, and emotional regulation can be measured and linked directly to performance outcomes in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria, thereby justifying its adoption as the sole theoretical foundation of the study

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design with a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationship between leadership styles and organisational performance among small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised a total of 1005 (one thousand and five) employees of SMEs operating within Owo metropolis as at August 2023 (Oseghale et al., 2025). A convenience sampling technique was employed which adopted a total of 101 SME employees as sample size. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was designed to capture information on leadership dimensions including communication style, decision-making style, and emotional intelligence as well as indicators of organisational performance. The instrument was pre-tested to ensure clarity and relevance. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha yielded coefficients of 0.753 for organisational performance, 0.777 for communication style, 0.987 for decision-making style, and 0.997 for emotional intelligence, indicating high internal consistency across all constructs.

The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and key variable distributions. Multiple regression analysis was applied to test the hypotheses and determine the effects of leadership dimensions on organisational performance, with all tests conducted at a 5% significance level. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 23.

Regression Analysis Output

Model Summary

Metric	Value
R	0.834
R^2	0.695
Adjusted R^2	0.685
Std. Error	0.118

ANOVA

Metric	Value
F	73.593
Sig.	0.000

Coefficients Table

Predictor	B (Coef.)	Beta	T	Sig.
Communication Style (CS)	0.8915	0.931	11.17	0.000
Decision-Making Style (DS)	-0.2468	-0.3097	-2.89	0.0047
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	0.146	0.198	2.24	0.0275

Interpretation of Regression Analysis Results

Model Summary

The multiple regression analysis examined the influence of communication style, decision-making style, and emotional intelligence on organisational performance. The model summary indicated a strong correlation between the independent variables and organisational performance, with an R value of 0.834, demonstrating an 83.4% relationship. The R^2 value of 0.695 suggests that 69.5% of the variation in organisational performance is explained collectively by the three independent variables. The adjusted R^2 of 0.685 confirms the robustness of the model even after accounting for the number of predictors, while the standard error of 0.118 indicates a good fit and low estimation error.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The ANOVA results produced an F-statistic of 73.593 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant. This confirms that the combination of communication, decision-making, and emotional intelligence styles reliably predicts organisational performance among SMEs in Owo.

Regression Coefficients

The coefficients table shows the individual effects of each leadership dimension:
Communication Style (CS): B = 0.8915, Beta = 0.931, t = 11.17, p = 0.000. This demonstrates a very strong and statistically significant positive impact on organisational performance.

Decision-Making Style (DS): B = -0.2468, Beta = -0.3097, t = -2.89, p = 0.0047. This indicates a significant negative effect, suggesting that rigid or exclusionary decision-making can hinder organisational outcomes.

Emotional Intelligence (EI): B = 0.146, Beta = 0.198, t = 2.24, p = 0.0275. This reveals a significant positive relationship, showing that emotionally intelligent leadership contributes positively to organisational performance.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One (H_{01}): There is no significant relationship between communication style and organisational performance.

The p-value for communication style is 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance threshold. Therefore, H_{01} is rejected, confirming a significant positive relationship between communication style and organisational performance.

Hypothesis Two (H_{02}): There is no significant relationship between decision-making style andorganisational performance.

The p-value for decision-making style is 0.0047, which is less than 0.05. Thus, H_{02} is rejected, indicating that decision-making style significantly influences organisational performance, though negatively in this context.

Hypothesis Three (H_{03}): There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence andorganisational performance.

The p-value for emotional intelligence is 0.0275, below the 0.05 threshold. Consequently, H_{03} is rejected, confirming that emotional intelligence has a significant positive effect on organisational performance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence on the influence of leadership communication style, decision-making style, and emotional intelligence on organisational performance among SMEs in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria.

The results revealed that leadership communication style has a strong and statistically significant positive effect on organisational performance, making it the most influential predictor among the studied variables. This finding aligns with prior studies by Men and Yue (2019), Nwachukwu (2020), and Desta and Chamiso (2023), which emphasised that effective leadership communication enhances employee understanding, engagement, and productivity. In SME contexts, where structures are informal and interactions are frequent, clear and open

communication appears essential for coordinating activities and achieving organisational goals.

The study also found that emotional intelligence has a significant positive influence on organisational performance. This result supports the findings of Zehir et al. (2019), Tafamel and Ejechi (2022), and Alamri and Thabet (2024), who established that emotionally intelligent leaders foster positive workplace relationships, manage conflict effectively, and enhance employee motivation. The result further suggests that emotional intelligence strengthens leadership effectiveness by enabling leaders to respond appropriately to employees' emotional and motivational needs in resource-constrained SME environments.

Conversely, decision-making style was found to have a significant negative effect on organisational performance. This finding suggests that rigid, centralised, or non-participatory decision-making practices may hinder employee commitment and organisational effectiveness in SMEs. The result is consistent with Abubakar (2017) and Iyaji and Bakare (2023), who observed that exclusionary decision-making reduces employee ownership and acceptance of organisational decisions. In the context of Nigerian SMEs, where employees often possess valuable operational knowledge, failure to involve them in decision-making may result in suboptimal decisions and resistance to implementation.

Overall, the findings suggest that leadership effectiveness in SMEs is not determined by authority or control alone, but by behavioural competencies that promote engagement, trust, and collaboration. Leaders who combine effective communication, emotional intelligence, and inclusive decision-making practices are more likely to enhance organisational performance and sustain competitiveness in dynamic business environments.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between leadership styles and organisational performance among small and medium-scale enterprises in Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on communication style, decision-making style, and emotional intelligence. The findings revealed that leadership communication style has a strong and significant positive effect on organisational

performance, highlighting the importance of clear, timely, and effective communication in enhancing employee engagement and organisational outcomes. Emotional intelligence was also found to contribute positively to organisational performance, indicating that leaders who are emotionally aware, empathetic, and capable of managing interpersonal relationships are better positioned to foster productive work environments.

Conversely, decision-making style was found to have a significant negative effect on organisational performance, suggesting that rigid, centralised, or non-participatory decision-making practices may hinder employee commitment and organisational effectiveness in SME contexts. This finding underscores the need for leaders to adopt more inclusive and flexible decision-making approaches that encourage employee involvement and ownership.

Overall, the study concludes that effective leadership in SMEs requires a balanced integration of strong communication skills, emotional intelligence, and participatory decision-making practices. SME leaders who demonstrate these competencies are more likely to enhance employee motivation, improve organisational effectiveness, and achieve sustainable performance. The study therefore contributes to leadership literature by providing empirical evidence on the behavioural leadership dimensions that are most relevant to SME performance within a developing economy context.

Recommendations

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

1. Enhance Communication Skills: SME managers should prioritise continuous leadership communication training to improve clarity, ensure effective feedback mechanisms, and foster higher employee engagement and understanding.
2. Adopt Inclusive Decision-Making: Leaders should implement participatory and consultative decision-making processes to enhance employee buy-in, reduce resistance, and prevent negative impacts on organisational performance.
3. Develop Emotional Intelligence Competencies: SME leaders should invest in developing emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, empathy, and

interpersonal skills, to create a positive work environment, strengthen team cohesion, and improve overall organisational outcomes.

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