

## **Influence of Leadership Styles on Employees' Engagement Among Non-Academic Staff of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Engagement of an employee with the work describes the identification with the organization he/she works for in which they have expectations from the work, are provided with the resources to do their work, have opportunities to participate in making the organization better, and receive feedback on how well they perform in their roles. The foregoing concerning the employees and their organization and this can be influenced by the style through which those employees are led. The study made use of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and Leader Member Exchange (LMX) to collected data from the selected sample. The result of the analysis revealed autocratic style of leadership ( $F(1,92)=.147; p>.05$ , does not independently predict employee engagement as well as democratic style ( $F(1,92) = .671; p<.05$ ) and laissez-faire style ( $F(1,92) = 4.005; p<.05$ ). Taken together, leadership style is important to the employee engagement of the selected workers. This study concludes that a highly engaged workforce is the sign of a healthy organization, and having them contribute their best to the success of the organization which is influenced by the way they are lead will contribute to the overall success and accomplishments of members of the organization and the organization at large. This study recommends that leaders within the Nigerian university should appropriately incorporate cultural values in conjunction with the styles with which they lead people that will promote work environments that fosters positive work engagement among employees.

**Keywords:** leadership, engagement, employees, effectiveness, style, organization, university

### **Introduction**

Employees that are fully engaged with their work tend to care about their organization, their work and will continue to improve themselves to reach the organization's goal both from a personal front and alongside other colleagues. Employee engagement could be considered as the emotional attachment and commitment an employee has got towards his/her job, colleagues and institution

that profoundly influence the level of performance, commitment and loyalty. Employee engagement has been receiving a great deal of interest widely. Employee engagement also displays a deep and positive emotions to connect their employees with work.

An employee is considered to be an engaged employee when he/she is fully involved in and act in ways that will further the interest of his/her organization from where he/she earns a living. This means that such employees commit themselves towards accomplishing the vision and mission of such organization with the belief that they are contributing meaningfully to the advancement of the organization. Thus, they do with the mindset that the progress of their workplace is also their own personal progress.

It is therefore not out of place to implement practices and policies that will make employees feel more engaged in that it could be an unspoken strategy for employee retention. This is because an employee who feels intellectually and emotionally bound to the organization will be passionate about the concerns of the organization and therefore go above and beyond the call of duty when demanded o put in extra efforts on behalf of the organization.

If an organization has workers that are engaged in their work for the betterment of such, it is likely to enjoy the opportunities for them to use their initiatives, to be creative, to be solution providers, and to be proactive in the delivery of their tasks and responsibilities. This will help the organization in its main objectives either in meeting specific societal needs or providing goods and services with the belief that they have the right set of individuals to help accomplish those lofty targets.

Leadership serves the purpose of social influence which seeks to direct the activities of people within an organized group to the achievement of specific goals and objectives. It necessarily may not have anything to do with seniority or one's position in the hierarch of a company. Leadership is described as the capacity to translate vision into reality, which simply means bringing the paper work and brain work into existence. Leadership relates to the leader's ability to influence other people, towards meeting specific organizational targets.

Leadership style is a leader's style of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating employees. Leadership is not "one size fits all" thing, often a manager must adapt their style to fit a situation, task, or a specific group and this why it is important to grasp a thorough understanding of various leadership styles; after all, the more approaches the manager is familiar

with, the more tools they will be able to use to lead effectively (Murray, 2010).

The manner in which the leaders in the various strata within various business, social, and conventional organizations direct the affairs of people in their units and departments plays a key role in how those individuals will feel engaged with the work which will translate to the overall output of such unit or department in terms of efficiency and productivity. Employees would possibly fare better if they know or feel that they are not arm strung in their decision making, autonomy, and exhibition of creativity and ingenuity while at work by bosses who feel like they owe it to them exclusively how every facet of the work will be carried out.

Insofar as employees have the basic knowledge on how to organize their tasks and responsibilities, there is the expectation of them carrying out their duties without the fears of antagonism, authoritarianism, or even dereliction of supervisory duties on the altar of the approach that their leader uses in directing them.

The role that leaders play and their styles of leading the people are crucial in employee engagement. This can either motivate or discourage them as relating to their job delivery in that it can cause an increase or decrease in their engagement levels and propensity to remain as members of the organization. The belief is that leaders can influence their employees' work engagement through changing work conditions to those which suit them and allow them to thrive as well as through inspiring them, leading by example, and strengthening their employees to achieve greater things.

Though there are many types of leadership, this study focused on the 3 most common types, which are Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-Faire, which are briefly discussed here.

## **Autocratic Leadership**

This leadership is one in which one person controls and makes all the decisions with very little inputs from other individuals within the group. These leaders make choices for and on behalf of the organization on the yardsticks of their own beliefs, reasoning, and perspectives and as such do not involve others in seeking for their suggestions and advice. This kind of leadership is effective in organizations where the nature of work engaged requires quick responses and decision-making and where the people to be led are new, naïve, or from whom high loyalty is demanded. This means that the sole responsibility of whatever decisions are made and the

outcomes thereof rest solely with the leader.

## **Democratic Leadership**

This is a type of leadership style in which the members within the group are more involved and participative in the overall decision-making process of the group. In such a leadership, everyone has the opportunity to air their views, to participate, to engage, and collaborate. Ideas are discussed freely among members, and there are open discussions about all matters from the members. While the goal of the democratic process is on group member equality and a free flow and cross-fertilization of ideas, the job of the leader of such is to offer guidance, control, and encouragement. The leader is therefore charged in deciding who belongs to the group, those that get to contribute to the decisions reached, and the prosecution of the framework of accomplishing overall goals and decisions reached.

## **Laissez-faire Leadership**

This style, also known as delegative leadership, is one in which leaders operate a hands-off approach and allows members of the group to make decisions. This style is used when majority of the group are experts, or very knowledgeable people who know what is expected of them, such that little or no supervision is required to get the job done. With this mode, the leaders give the group members very minimal information and little direction about the task to be done, and allows the employees to carry out their jobs independently. For some individuals who work in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry for instance, they are experts who to a great extent may already know what is expected of them, and require minimal supervision to get their jobs done, and as such may thrive under such kind of leadership.

## **Statement of the problem**

In a dynamic work environment, a lot of factors contribute to the ambitions of delivering consistent and sustainable growth and success, both for the employees and their organizations. The ability to know how to increase the levels of engagement in the workforce that one is leading is an essential leadership skill that leaders in today's work enterprises should possess in order to maintain the desires to remain with the organization and not feel disengaged.

Leading a group of such individuals with diverse interests therefore seem to be a unique experience in that the leaders of these unions who are set up as Interest groups (that is, to defend the interests of its members) are able to effectively manage the individual and group interests of

people who make up these unions whilst ensuring that they offer their utmost service to their organization.

When organizations understand those conditions that are able to enhance employee engagement, they will have achieved something that their competitors will struggle to imitate, to the disadvantage of those that do not understand or may not be willing to toe the line. Northouse (2012) stated that a good leader with excellent leadership skills is able to influence a group or team to achieve certain objectives and goals.

Furthermore, the leadership behaviour or style in most organizations which believe that workers could be treated anyhow as a result of unemployment situation in the country which makes job switch difficult has resulted in the hardship workers face in their Nigerian workplaces. This approach to leadership may impact on reforming and/or creating organizational culture which in turn affects organizational performance and employees' engagement. So given this situation, how effective a leader is is vital to elicit the best response from subordinates and make for the highest or best engagement from the employees they lead.

The expectation is that they can motivate their followers through their knowledge and skills. This is because without effective leadership, the organization is likely to lose clear directions, suffer morale drop, slow decision making, resource mismanagement, and disengaged employees. Although research has been carried out on investigating the subject of leadership and employee engagement across a growing body of literature, this study aims to look at how the leaders of the non-academic staff unions in the selected university convince members to join the strikes declared by the national body to press home their demands on payment of earned allowances, payment of shortfalls in salaries, and funding of the University system. This in line with activities of directing and leading those individuals so as to understand how these styles of leadership have influence on the engagement of their followers.

## **Research Questions**

This research will provide answers to following questions:

1. Will autocratic leadership style have influence on employee engagement?
2. Will democratic leadership style have influence on employee engagement?
3. Will laissez-faire leadership style have influence on employee engagement?
4. Will leadership style significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected workers?

## **Hypotheses**

1. Autocratic leadership style will significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected workers
2. Democratic leadership style will significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected workers
3. Laissez-faire leadership style will significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected workers
4. Leadership style will significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected workers

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive survey design. The participants for this study consisted of the Non-Academic staff of the Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye. The total number of one hundred (100) respondents was considered. A purposive sampling technique was used to get a representable quota of the population. The Total number of one hundred (100) respondents was considered from the study area. A total number of 100 questionnaires were given to respondents in the study area but 4 of the questionnaires were not properly filled so it was rendered as void which leaves response from 96 respondents used for analysis in the research.

### **Research Instrument**

The study sought information from the respondents on their socio-demographic characteristics including gender, tribe, marital status, educational qualification and employment status. The instruments used for this research work were two standardized scales namely; Leader Member Exchange Questionnaire and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

### **Leader Member Exchange Questionnaire**

The Leader-Member Exchange 7 questionnaire (LMX-7) was developed to measure the quality of working relationship between leaders and followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Through this 7-item instrument, employees are able to report on the level of trust, mutual respect, and obligation they exchange in their superior-subordinate relationships. Previous researchers used LMX-7 to evaluate how the nature of relationships between superiors and subordinates affect

various individual and organizational factors such as communication, motives for communication, identification with the organization, and job satisfaction.

## Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

The UWES has initially item pool of 24, but after psychometric evaluation, 7 unstable items were eliminated so that 17 items remained (Schaufeli, 2002). It is a 17-item self-report instrument which constitutes the three dimensions; vigour, dedication and absorption. The original UWES (UWES-17) includes 17 items broken down as follows: vigor (6 items), dedication (5 items), and absorption (6 items).

## Results

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Information of Sampled Respondents**

| Demographic Variable      | Category      | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Sample                    | Total Number  | 96        | 100        |
| Gender                    | Male          | 33        | 34.4       |
|                           | Female        | 63        | 65.6       |
| Tribe                     | Yoruba        | 81        | 84.4       |
|                           | Igbo          | 7         | 7.3        |
|                           | Hausa         | 6         | 6.3        |
|                           | Others        | 2         | 2.1        |
| Marital status            | Married       | 67        | 69.8       |
|                           | Single        | 29        | 30.2       |
| Educational Qualification | SSCE          | 14        | 14.6       |
|                           | ND            | 10        | 10.4       |
|                           | HND           | 22        | 22.9       |
|                           | Degree        | 33        | 34.4       |
|                           | Postgraduate  | 17        | 17.7       |
| Employment Status         | Casual worker | 12        | 12.5       |
|                           | Junior Staff  | 64        | 66.7       |
|                           | Senior staff  | 20        | 20.8       |

Table 1 revealed the socio-demographic information of sampled respondents; 34.4% were male

while 65.6% were female. Thus, majority of the sampled respondents are female. The tribe indicated that 84.4% respondents are Yoruba, 7.3% of the sampled respondents are Igbo, 6.3% of the sampled respondents are Hausa and 2.1% indicated others as their choice of tribe. Thus, majority are Yoruba. On the basis of marital status, 69.8% indicated that they are married and 30.2% indicated that they are single. On the basis of educational qualification, 14.6% are secondary school graduate, 10.4% of the sampled respondents have National Diploma Certificate (ND), 22.9% of the sampled respondents have Higher National Diploma Certificate (HND), 34.4% have a degree certificate and 17.7% of the sampled respondents have post graduate. Thus, majority have a degree certificate. On the basis of employment status, 12.5% of the sampled respondents are casual worker, 66.7% are permanent workers and 20.8% are senior officer. Thus, the majority are permanent worker.

## Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 states that *autocratic leadership style will significantly influence employee engagement*. The result is presented in Table 2 below.

*Concerning the clarification sought here, questions 4 and 5 directly points to the position that was taken concerning autocratic leadership style. This was used to explain the formal authority the leader has built into his or her position. The higher the scores are will interpret the use of formal commands.*

Table 2: Regression analysis, Standard Errors, and model summary information for influence of autocratic leadership style on employee engagement.

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Multiple R=.040<sup>a</sup>  
R Square=.002  
Adjusted R Square=.009  
Std. Error of the Estimate=21.89035

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| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F    | Sig.              |
|---------------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|-------------------|
| Regression          | 70.428         | 1  | 70.428      | .147 | .702 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual            | 44085.232      | 92 | 479.187     |      |                   |
| Total               | 44155.660      | 93 |             |      |                   |

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a. Dependent Variable: UWES

b. Predictors: (Constant), autocratic



The result of the analysis revealed autocratic style of leadership does not predict employee engagement ( $R^2 = .002$ ;  $F(1,92) = .147$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Autocratic leadership style accounted for 2% percent of the variance in employee engagement. This means that autocratic leadership style does not predicts employee engagement. Therefore, the result presented on the table above revealed that hypothesis one is rejected. Hence, autocratic leadership style did not significantly influence employee engagement.

Hypothesis 2 states that *democratic leadership style will significantly influence employee engagement*. The result is presented in Table 3 below.

*Table 3: Regression analysis, Standard Errors, and Model summary information for influence of democratic leadership style on employee engagement.*

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Multiple R=.086<sup>a</sup>  
 R Square=.007  
 Adjusted R Square=.004  
 Std. Error of the Estimate=21.92087

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| <b>Source of Variation</b> | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>Df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Sig.</b>       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Regression                 | 322.209               | 1         | 322.209            | .671     | .415 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual                   | 43727.748             | 91        | 480.525            |          |                   |
| Total                      | 44049.957             | 92        |                    |          |                   |

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a. Dependent Variable: UWES

b. Predictors: (Constant), democratic leadership

The result of the analysis revealed that democratic leadership style does not predict employee engagement ( $R^2 = .096$ ;  $F(1,92) = .671$ ;  $p > .05$ ). This means that democratic leadership style does significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected employees considered for this study. Therefore, the result presented on the table above revealed that hypothesis two is rejected. Hence, democratic leadership style does not significantly influence employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3 states that *laissez-faire leadership style will significantly influence employee engagement*. The result is presented in Table 4 below.

*Table 4: Regression analysis, Standard Errors, and Model summary information for influence of laissez-faire leadership style on employee engagement.*

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Multiple R=.202<sup>a</sup>  
 R Square=.041  
 Adjusted R Square=.031  
 Std. Error of the Estimate=21.40985

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| <b>Source of Variation</b> | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>Df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Sig.</b>       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Regression                 | 1835.861              | 1         | 1835.861           | 4.005    | .048 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual                   | 43087.878             | 94        | 458.382            |          |                   |
| Total                      | 44923.740             | 95        |                    |          |                   |

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a. Dependent Variable: UWES

b. Predictors: (Constant), democratic leadership

The result of the analysis revealed that laissez-faire leadership style does not predict employee engagement ( $R^2=.041$ ;  $F(1,92) = 4.005$ ;  $p>.05$ ). Laissez-faire leadership style account for 4.1% of the variance in employee engagement. This means that laissez-faire leadership style could not predict employee engagement. Therefore, the result presented on the table above revealed that hypothesis three is rejected. Hence, laissez-faire leadership style did not significantly influence employee engagement.

Hypothesis 4 states that *leadership style will significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected workers*. The result is presented in Table 5 below.

*Table 5: Regression analysis, Standard Errors, and Model summary information for influence of leadership style on employee engagement.*

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Multiple R=.188<sup>a</sup>  
 R Square=.035  
 Adjusted R Square=.025  
 Std. Error of the Estimate=21.47167

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| <b>Source of Variation</b> | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>Df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Sig.</b>       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Regression                 | 1586.683              | 1         | 1586.683           | 3.442    | .047 <sup>b</sup> |

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|          |           |    |         |
|----------|-----------|----|---------|
| Residual | 43337.057 | 94 | 461.033 |
| Total    | 44923.740 | 95 |         |

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a. Dependent Variable: UWES

b. Predictors: (Constant), LMX

The result of the analysis revealed that leadership style predict employee engagement ( $R^2=.035$ ;  $F(1,92) = 3.442$ ;  $p>.05$ ). This means that the leadership styles used on the selected employees in those organizations could only predict 3.5% of the variance. This means that leadership style did not predict employee engagement. Therefore, the result presented on the table above revealed that hypothesis four is accepted. Hence, leadership style did not significantly influence the employee engagement of the selected workers.

## Discussion

The result of hypothesis one revealed that autocratic leadership style did not significantly influence employee engagement. This leadership pattern is said to influence the decision of subordinate through force, hence without the consent or considering the subordinate, this study present the proof that much cannot be attained using autocratic leadership style. This is against the study of Goethals, Sorenson, and Burns (2004) who posit that autocratic leaders like to force, manipulate and threat their employees to achieve organization's objectives. Although they usually lead to high efficiency in completing tasks, most employees are unsatisfied. And due to stressful working environment and low participation in decision making process, it is not rarely occurred high absenteeism, poor morale and high turnover.

The nature of the university community is such that it does not give platforms for leaders at various strata to be extremely autocratic in their approach to their colleagues as members of staff of the same unit. There are various levels of administrative and leadership compositions within the university that will make it inimical to the success of the tasks to be done for the leaders to be autocratic when dealing with their subordinates.

The result of hypothesis two revealed that there was not a significant influence of democratic leadership style on employee engagement. It is indeed no doubt that a leader with democratic characteristic can easily influence and persuade subordinates without them murmuring or getting displeased with their leader. This kind of leaders gives room for their followers to feel among and relate well with their leader in good faith.

This correlates with the finding of Liu, Kee, Feng and Ahmad (2017) who posit that democratic leaders like to invite employee to participate the decision-making procedure. They not only give an order or concern on the result of work but are also fully involved in finishing the work they are willing to listen to employee's feelings (Suharti and Suliyanto, 2012). Employees under democratic leadership style usually feel more participative, motivated and responsible to their work, their leader, and the organization.

The result of hypothesis three revealed that there was no significant influence of laissez-faire leadership style on employee engagement. It will only take responsible and trustworthy subordinates to faithfully follow the leadings of a laissez-faire leader as he/she is only interested in the delegation of duties without much involvement in the achievement of the task. Members of staff in the university will yield to a Laissez-faire leadership because they have expertise in their jobs and do not necessarily need a boss nagging down on their necks to do their jobs. They just need few guidelines and they will continue to work to the best of their abilities. Everyone has fairly autonomous levels of work organization that allows for independent thinking and accomplishment of results which would then be vetted and approved by the leaders without them having necessarily input their own modes too much on the intended overall result.

This is supported with findings of Liu, Kee, Feng and Ahmad (2017) who assume that leaders who lead through laissez-faire adjudge employees know everything and can handle any problems. It can therefore be said that leaders who use this means may fail to assert control on the employees and direct them towards accomplishments. Hence, employees become apathetic, low motivated and resentful towards the leader and the organization and show it through absenteeism, lower morale and productivity.

The result of hypothesis four revealed that there is no significant influence of leadership style on employee engagement. While the study did not establish a significant influence of leadership on employee engagement, it is believed that the appropriate use, combination, and switching of different leadership style as it relates to the tasks to be completed and the nature of the people to be led will influence the engagement of employees and help shape the perspectives they nurse about their leaders. As the workers themselves may not be able to predict what the leader may want to employ so they will be conscious of accomplishing the task they are given.

This is in accordance with the findings of by Sundi (2013) that concluded that there is a positive and significant effect of leadership styles on job satisfaction of employees. These findings are in support of the idea that styles cannot be strictly separated and both are not conflicting leadership styles. Leadership styles are important and needed for success of transport sector. Parastatals need vision, encouragement, and commitment spearhead by transformational leaders. But parastatals also requires having transactional leaders to provide direction to focus on and reward work done properly. Neither transactional leadership style alone can be applied nor can transformational leadership replace the transactional leadership style. The finding of this research can also mean that transactional factors such as contingent reward and management by exception compared to transformational factors such as inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation and individual consideration could be more appropriate leadership factors in order to induce high employee perform.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that a highly engaged workforce is the sign of a healthy organization, and having them contribute their best to the organization which is influenced by the way they are led will contribute to the overall success and accomplishments of members within the organization as well as the organization at large. Engagement does not only benefit the organizations but also the individuals within the organization through increased enthusiasm, greater value to the employer, improved physical health, and happiness. Knowing how to manage talent in order to increase engagement is a skill that human resources professionals are encouraging leaders at all levels to have. Knowing how to increase the level of engagement in the workforce is an important talent management skill so as to prevent having a disengaged workforce. Leadership styles helps leaders to display the behaviors, such as supportive management, displaying a vision that is related to increasing employees' level of engagement.

It has been said that with no customers there is no business. However, a disengaged workforce is also inimical to the growth of the business, just as important as the customers are. When engaged workers have higher levels of commitment to their organization, they show more willingness to see the company grown and succeed both in the short run and long run.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends that leadership seminars should be organized for the leaders to orientate them on how to switch to different styles of leadership at different time depending on the people

to be led and the tasks to be done. There should be endeavours by the leaders to maintain a good inter-personal relationship with their subordinate so as to know and understand what style to use at different times with different given situations.

Training programmes within the organization targeted at building employees' beliefs about the organization and their work conditions from within the organization can be created and entrenched in the organization's policies and frameworks. This will ensure that employees are gradually molded and have an all-round, comprehensive understanding of the organization.

Leaders should be diligent and understanding in dealing with their subordinates so that they can get the best from them. They should also allow that the followers work in manners that they (the followers) believe in. The leaders should develop trust in them and allow them to be innovative. The leaders should also be able to help employees display sense of power and urgency, and to show strong desires to meet personal and organizational goals.

This study also recommends that leaders within the Nigerian university should appropriately incorporate cultural values in conjunction with the styles with which they lead people that will promote work environments that fosters positive work engagement among employees. Leadership development practices that is capable of creating a favorable organizational climate in Nigerian institutions should also be prioritized.

The study also recommends that as a suggestion for further research in other sectors or among different sets of workers to examine other factors aside leadership styles that are capable of influencing the engagement of workers in their various workplaces. Factors such as organizational culture, feedback, recognition, job satisfaction, finding meaning and purpose on the job, and career development opportunities inclusive of leadership styles as well, have the tendencies to independently and jointly influence the engagement of employees to their workplace to consider their organizations as an endearing and great place to work.

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