



# VISIONARY LEADERSHIP STYLE AND ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTABILITY OF TELECOM SERVICE PROVIDERS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between visionary leadership style and organizational adaptability of telecom service providers in Rivers State, Nigeria. Leaders with high levels of transformational leadership were predicted to be reported as having more effective organizations. A population of 40 managers was gotten from 4 major telecom operators (Airtel, Globacom, MTN, and 9Mobile) and that was adopted as the sample size for the study. Spearman rank order correlation coefficient and regression analysis showed a significant correlation between visionary leadership style and organizational adaptability. Visionary leaders with high leadership skills facilitated the greatest perceived organizational effectiveness in their respective organizations. The study recommends that managers who want to improve organizational adaptability are encouraged to decentralize activities or processes to effectively engage employees by giving active roles or tasks. Visionary leaders develop practices through executive training and development that would hone their skills to significantly impact organizational effectiveness.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Visionary Leader, Leadership Style, Employee Empowerment, Flexibility to Change, Organizational Adaptability*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Though the transformation of the telecom sector was greatly felt after the privatization of Nigeria Telecommunication Limited (NITEL) in 2007, and the influx of privately owned telecommunication companies, otherwise known as Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) such as MTN, Globacom, Airtel, 9Mobile, etc; however, scholars have attributed this transformation to the innovativeness and adaptability of modern technologies of these private telecom firms occasioned by leadership prowess of top management in their bid to compete favorably. Sulaimon, Emmanuel & Bolanle (2016) argued that top management of telecom firms in recent times have realized the strategic importance of empowering and inspiring employees (or subordinates) to have a sense of commitment and sportsmanship to the organization's quest to drive programs that helps achieve the vision of the organization. The telecom market is changing and visionless managers may not be able to lead their organization's enviable heights and survive especially in the long run. That was why Paul (2016) and a host of other telecom authorities are of the view that visionary leadership style is regarded as a fundamental prerequisite for organizations' sustainable survival. Hence, the importance of visionary leadership in contemporary times cannot be deemphasized, especially in a highly dynamic, complex, oligopolistic, and competitive market such as the GSM market.

Essentially, the role of visionary leadership in an organization is crucial in terms of creating a vision and mission; determining and establishing objectives, and designing strategies, policies, and methods to achieve predetermined organizational objectives effectively and efficiently (Xu & Wang, 2008). Visionary leadership such as intellectual stimulation and strategically responding to changes resulting from both the internal and external environment are pertinent to the adaptability of the organization (Harris, 2007). To achieve survival through strategic adaptability to rapid environmental changes, top management must be prepared to continually create an innovative atmosphere for employees to freely take up tasks and encourage job involvement. Hence, visionary leaders are known to inspire subordinates to take up this kind of challenge and improve on the existing job outcomes.



The research focused on visionary leadership style and how it impacts organizational adaptability. Though no one leadership style can fit into all situations, however, visionary leadership in recent years is gaining more momentum and has emerged as a strategic capability that helps organizations, institutions, and even governments achieve predetermined goals and objectives. Its uniqueness stems from some fundamental traits, which include intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, employee empowerment, individual consideration, flexibility, support, etc. Accordingly, many scholars have offered varying definitions/explanations of visionary leadership styles. Paul (2016) in his view expressed that visionary leadership aims to create an inspiring vision and communicate that vision among subordinates so that organizations may experience improvement from good to better. Kas (2016) stated that visionary leadership refers to the capacity of top management to create and communicate a view of the desired state of affairs that clarifies the current situation of the organization and induces commitment to an even better future. Ebrahim (2018) defined a visionary leadership style as one that established goals and objectives for individual and group activities, which define not what we are but rather what we seek to be or do.

Again, extant literature reveals that scholars have developed relatively varying frameworks in measuring visionary leadership as it relates to an organization's outcome, such as survival, performance, competitive advantage, productivity, ROI, etc. However, this research will adopt Shahab, Sobari & Udin (2018)'s employee empowerment and Ogala, Sikalieh & Linge (2017)'s intellectual stimulation and flexibility to change; as dimensions of visionary leadership. In measuring survival, the research will use Chukwudifu & Olori (2020)'s innovativeness and adaptability as measures of survival. Interestingly and by way of further deviating from extant studies, this research introduced technology as a moderating variable into our proposed framework concerning the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational adaptability, and subsequently narrowed it down to the telecommunication industry in Rivers State.

### **Aims / Objectives of the Study**

The study seeks to examine the relationship between visionary leadership style and organizational adaptability of telecom firms in Rivers State thus the specific objectives are to:

- i. Determine the extent to which employee empowerment relates to the organizational adaptability of telecom firms in Rivers State.
- ii. Unravel the extent to which flexibility to change relates to the organizational adaptability of telecom firms in Rivers State.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Visionary Leadership Style**

Leadership has been a fundamental concept and a focal debate among researchers in the field of management right from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Guand-Lu, Liu Pu & Yong, 2012). As a result of this focal debate or interest in leadership, a plethora of leadership behavior, otherwise known as leadership styles have emerged. Arguably, among a few of this prominent leadership behavior, which include; charismatic leadership, transactional and transformational leadership, ethical leadership, etc, visionary leadership stand more popular. In today's competitive business environment, visionary leadership is particularly considered as a requirement for business organizations to strive and achieve remarkable results. Its positive impact on various organizational and employee outcomes has been highlighted by numerous organizational behavior scholars (Almog-Bareket, 2012; Avoli, Zhu, Koh & Bhatia, 2004).

Etymologically, Leaders are required to assist organizations to develop a greater sense of purpose by linking efforts to successful outcomes. According to Bass (1996), hence, visionary leadership assists leaders in creating an atmosphere enhancing follower performance beyond individual self-interest. Koh & Bhatia (2004) argued that visionary leadership is a form of transformational leadership that offers opportunities to foster the capacity of an organization to meet the needs of its constituents. This occurs in creative ways, despite complex and uncertain times, by providing a framework that can become a touchstone for setting goals; determining priorities; aligning structures, policies, and beliefs with principles; and assessing progress. Ultimately, a leader must demonstrate a flexible, adaptive leadership style to address varying levels of change within a situation and the leadership behaviors that are relevant to it (Yukl, 2008).

Extant literature has it those transformational leaders have been found to exhibit behaviors and characteristics that garner follower dedication (Connaughton & Daly, 2004; Yukl, 2006), and it is important to note that visionary leaders utilize transformational behaviors and characteristics. However, according to Sashkin & Sashkin (2002), visionary leaders also display behaviors (i.e, confidence, pro-social power behaviors, and organizational capabilities) that are "necessary for followers themselves to have the knowledge, skills, and abilities" to achieve organizational goals. In addition, visionary leadership theory offers an understanding of an



individual's leadership style as it relates to the organizational context and effectiveness (Sashkin, & Sashkin, 2002). Researchers have examined exceptional or "visionary" leaders who have been accountable for notable growth in the success of their organizations (Luhmann & Eberl, 2007; Martin & Epitropaki, 2001). These studies reported that well-respected leaders were perceived to have the ability to articulate visions or missions to their followers, then inspire and empower those followers to engage in and derive rewards from a change in organizational function and growth. Visionary leadership (Zhu et al., 2005) creates high levels of cohesion, commitment, trust, motivation, and enhanced performance in new organizations. The impact of a leader's effectiveness can be used to measure organizational effectiveness (Hogan, & Kaiser, 2005).

The concept of visionary leadership has been debated for decades now and scholars are yet to come to terms with its definitions. The process of visionary leadership involves the design of the desired future and the motivation of employees in the organization to share it and commit themselves to take personal responsibility for its achievement (Nwankwo, & Richardson, 1996). Similarly, Waldman, Ramirez, House & Puranam, (2001). defined visionary leadership is defined as the ability to create and articulate a clear vision, and provide meaningful and purposeful leadership for the work of an organization. Visionary leaders develop their vision, and thereafter, inculcate it into a shared vision with subordinates. Vision communication is what empowers people to act (Sashkin, 1996). In addition, Colton (1985) defined visionary leadership as an organizational behavior that establishes goals and objectives for individual and group action, which defines not what we are but rather what we seek to be or do. This leadership style is said to stand apart from other forms of leadership in inspiring vision and communicating the vision among employees so that organizations move from good to better (Jul-Chan & Colin, 2004).

### 2.1.1 Employee Empowerment

The concept of empowerment of human resources is usually used with the same meaning as authorizing and assigning responsibility, in other words, as empowering and transfer of authority. It should be noted that this understanding has some deficiencies. It is a need for human resources to empower. However, empowerment has to have some more aspects such as motivation and taking part (David & Lawler, 2000). Employee empowerment starts with high-level managers; and continues with the understanding of the vision, mission, and values of the organization and the applications which enables the employees to feel responsible, free, and competent for the organization. Employee empowerment is also a period that consists of taking risks, development, and change (Quinn & Gretchen, 1997).

The ideology of employee empowerment was introduced in the 1980s and since then, several scholars have advanced the concept to what is today (Suresh & Jaleel, 2015). While the employee empowerment program entails offering more tasks to employees by decentralization decisions, contemporary advocates show that the concept is gaining more momentum. It has been suggested that when employees (followers) are empowered by superior authorities (leaders), it goes a long way to influencing employee commitment and reducing replacement or turnover (David & Lawler, 2000). This is because employees that have confidence, participate in decision-making, and management can eliminate the borderline between management and employee, which causes an increase in productivity, performance, and job satisfaction (Parker & Price, 1994).

In addition, employee empowerment is the leaders' ability to allow their followers to reinforce and develop their constituents by sharing power, giving visibility, and giving credit to their employees (Fernandez & Molgogaziev, 2011) Empowerment of subordinates is a major insight into the development of subordinates by encouraging them to engage in tasks that were hitherto solely left for top management, even at the risk of making mistakes (Blanchard, 1997) The theory of servant leadership emphasizes the importance of empowering employees. This theory stressed that employees should be allowed to express themselves on the job. These actions help them to be committed to the ideals of the organization (Blanchard, 1997). Similarly, as Fernandez & Molgogaziev (2011) mentioned that enabling subordinates to participate in decision-making means developing teamwork by empowering others and this is one of the vital qualities of quality visionary leadership. Furthermore, Avolio & Bass (2004) among the important duties of visionary leaders is to give power to their followers to contribute to organizational performance goals and aims. Wall et al. (2004) insisted that the organizational standpoint of empowerment offers employees the necessary guidance and skills for giving autonomous decisions and their accountability and responsibility for those decisions.

### 2.1.1 Flexibility to Change

In Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, flexibility is defined as "the quality of being capable of responding or conforming to changing or new situations". Of course, this definition says nothing specifically about organizational flexibility; but it is useful as it indicates, in general, we often know intuitively what flexibility should encompass. The concept of flexibility is a multi-dimensional concept-demanding agility and versatility;



associated with change, innovation, and novelty; coupled with robustness and resilience, implying stability, sustainable advantage, and capabilities that may evolve (Bahrami 1992). But its translation concerning flexibility in organizations highlights this ambiguity and suggests that closer examination of these definitions is required to obtain a clearer grasp of the concept (Volberda 1996). A synthesis of thesis and antithesis, by exercising freedom of choice, exhibits systemic flexibility, which is the basis of an evolving paradigm, namely flexible systems management (Sushil 2005) Flexibility has many dimensions; a few representative ones are narrated here.

Organizational flexibility can be defined as when, where, and how people work given flexibility because it is an essential part of creating an effective organization as well as meeting the organization's goals and objectives. According to Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright & Neuman (1999) as further elaborated that flexibility in working arrangements has positive effects on employability which included productivity, job satisfaction, and low absenteeism. Organizational flexibility helps the organization manage the company by recognizing and understanding the various types of flexibility. Teece, Pisano & Shuen (1997), have explained that organization flexibility is a combination of the repertoire of organizational and managerial capabilities that allow organizations to adapt quickly to environmental shifts. In the context of organizations, several flexibilities have been highlighted such as operational flexibilities, structural flexibility, functional flexibility, and wages flexibility.

Organizational flexibility relates to the extent to which organizations may react to their internal and external forces. Organizational reaction toward change-conversant with the underlying problem areas but also the importance of organizational flexibility in driving the organization forward toward sustainable effectiveness (Teece et al., 1997). Organizational flexibility enables the organization to exercise its empowerment, and decision involvement, promote renewal process, innovation, and employee commitment. In recent uncertainty of the global economy, the organization has increasingly sought their awareness to adopt flexibility in decision-making on manpower utilization. Flexibility as a form of leadership progression does indeed break down silo models of management. If an organization were to view itself as a static monolith, it usually ends any form of efficiency that might be created (Baltes et al., 1999).

## **2.2 Organizational Adaptability**

The world is flat and full of complexities and is non-linear in nature. Such sort of complexities, uncertainties, and multi-stability domains apply limits to predictability yet still do not make system features or the dynamics associated with them unmanageable (Levin, 2003). What is important is how much humans and systems adapt. Given the importance of the interconnected global environmental changes, adaptability has become an evenly more important ingredient to pay attention of business organizations (Steffen, Crutzen & McNeill, 2007). Environmental uncertainty represents a constant threat to organizations and it rests on the shoulders of management to adapt to these conditions in ways that put the organization ahead of competitors (Smit & Pilifosova, 2001). Adaptability has also been known to be considered an important response option to environmental uncertainties and worthy of research and assessment.

To remain relevant in the industry, organizations and their employees need to continuously adapt to the different levels of environmental uncertainties (Amah & Baridam, 2012) Because environmental complexity is a vital contingency for organizational structure and internal policies, it is therefore pertinent for an organization to have internal behavior or policies embedded in its core culture, and these, to a great extent encourages adaptive behavior in the event of any adversity emanating from the environment.

According to Dalziell & McManus (2004) adaptability is “the ability of the system to respond to changes in its external environment and to recover from damage to internal structures within the system that affects its ability to achieve its purpose”. An organization’s capacity to adjust relies on its ability to show survival characteristics (Mcmanus, 2007). According to Amah & Baridam (2012), the essence of adaptation is to create advantages over competitors who fail to adapt. This simply means that one can easily link adaptability to competitiveness. Hence, adaptability is the extent to which any organization can change behavior, structures, and systems to continue in the event of any change (Denison, 1990)

## **2.3 Visionary Leadership Style and Organizational Adaptability**

Many studies have been carried out in the area of visionary leadership and various organizational performance outcomes. Arguably one of the leaders of the most important task is to communicate desired end states. Indeed, according to the leadership literature outstanding leadership is reflected in effective communication of visions (cf. House and Shamir, 1993), effective communication of goals (e.g., Berson & Avolio, 2004; Colbert, Kristof-Brown, Bradley, & Barrick, 2008), and in motivating followers through messages infused with values (House, 1996; Shamir et al., 1993). Remarkably, however, it is far from clear





which leader behaviors are conducive to effective communication of desired end states. What is more, research exploring how inspirational communication adds to charisma mainly focuses on the role of leader rhetoric (e.g., Emrich, Brower, Feldman, & Garland, 2001).

There is increasing evidence, however, that leaders can use their emotions to influence how followers think, feel, and behave (e.g., van Knippenberg et al., 2008). Accordingly, in the present study, we explore how leaders' use of emotions may help leaders in successfully communicating visions, goals, and value-laden messages. Although the leadership literature has always acknowledged that "emotions are deeply intertwined with the process of leading" (Gooty et al., 2010), leadership researchers have only recently started to examine how leaders' emotional expressions impact follower behavior (for overviews see Gooty et al., 2010; van Knippenberg et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, studies have generated mixed results regarding the relative effectiveness of positive versus negative leader emotions. To shed more light on this issue, two processes have been identified through which leader emotions may influence followers (e.g., van Kleef, 2009). On the one hand, a leader's emotions may influence followers through the affective reactions they evoke in followers. For example, a leader's positive emotions may through evoking positivity produce higher ratings of charisma than negative emotions (e.g., Bono & Ilies, 2006). On the other hand, leaders' emotions may influence followers through the information they provide regarding follower performance quality. Leaders' negative emotions may, for example, indicate substandard performance, which may result in increased effort among followers (Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The thrust of this study is on the visionary leadership style and organizational survival of telecommunication companies in Rivers State. This study adopted realist ontology and objectivist (scientific) epistemology. However, this study is quasi-experimental, and we adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. The methodological approach adopted in this study is nomothetic which involved the use of a questionnaire. This study was limited to the four major GSM operators who have known and functional operational offices in the City of Port Harcourt, which include; Aitel, Globacom, MTN, and 9mobile respectively. It is pertinent to mention that this research targeted head (or regional) and at least one accessible subsidiary (or connect) offices of these companies due to the nature of the study, as per the involvement of various leadership roles within the top and key functional areas in their organizational hierarchies. Based on the target population size (40) gotten from a selection of 5 regional and 5 subsidiary offices for each of the 5, which is manageable, there was no need for drawing samples. Hence, the research approach/contact personnel occupying those positions of interest with copies of the questionnaire.

Based on this, subjecting the proposed hypothetical statements to test, require an inferential statistical tool, which the research will adopt Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient and Regression Analysis. These tools were adopted to determine whether the dependent variable has a relationship with the dependent variable, and the magnitude and direction (positive or negative) of the relationship. However, descriptive statistical tools such as charts, tables, averages, percentages, etc; were used to analyze the demographic profile of respondents. It is pertinent to mention that all analyses were aided by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

### 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of forty (40) copies of the questionnaire were distributed, however, only thirty-six (36) copies representing 90% were retrieved, hence, four (4) copies representing 10% were not returned. More so, out of the number of copies returned, only thirty-four (34) copies representing 85 %, were completely field and found useful for the study. Only two (2) copies were discarded.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** there is no significant relationship between employee empowerment and organizational adaptability of telecom firms in Rivers State.



**Table 4.1 Correlation Analysis of Employee Empowerment and Organizational Adaptability Correlations**

			Employee Empowerment	Organizational Adaptability
Spearman's rho	Employee Empowerment	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.894**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N		34	34
	Organizational Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.894**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.	
N		34	34	

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

**Decision:** Since the P value (0.000) is less than the alpha value (0.01%) which is the level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

**Coefficient of Determination**

$$r^2 = (0.894)^2$$

$$r^2 = 0.799236 \times 100$$

$$r^2 = 79.9\%$$

The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) is 79.9% meaning that, there is a positive and strong significant relationship between employee empowerment and organizational adaptability of GSM firms in Port Harcourt. Our finding is consistent with the study of Parker & Price (2011) who investigated empowering public sector employees in improving performance and explored the link between various empowerment practices and perceived performance in the area of employee commitment and institutional adaptability of the federal agencies.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the flexibility to change and the organizational adaptability of telecom firms in Rivers State.

**Table 4.2: Correlation Analysis on Flexibility to Change and Organizational Adaptability. Correlations**

			Flexibility to Change	Organizational Adaptability
Spearman's rho	Flexibility to Change	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.871**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N		34	34
	Organizational Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.871**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.	
N		34	34	

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

**Decision:** Since the P value (0.000) is less than the alpha value (0.01%) which is the level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

**Coefficient of Determination**

$$r^2 = (0.871)^2$$

$$r^2 = 0.758641 \times 100$$

$$r^2 = 76.8\%$$

The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) is 76.8%, meaning that, there is a positive and strong significant relationship between the flexibility to change and adaptability of GSM firms in Port Harcourt. This finding relates to that of Bhattacharya et al. (2005) who examined three dimensions of flexibility to change. Research results on functional flexibility generally confirmed its positive and significant relationship with organizational performance and survival.



## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that employee empowerment has been further confirmed to be a reliable management tool to help improve organizational adaptability. Also, the organizational standpoint of empowerment offers employees the necessary guidance and skills for giving autonomous decisions and their accountability and responsibility for those decisions. In line with the research objective we recommend that management of GSM firms who want to improve organizational adaptability are encouraged to decentralize activities or processes to effectively engage employees by giving active roles or tasks. This will make them a sense of belonging, which in turn improves they're committed to not only carrying out their immediate tasks but also, the overall achievement of the goals of the organization. This indicates that management must empower their employees so that they can be motivated, committed, and satisfied and assist the organization in achieving its objectives.

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