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The Impact of Leadership Skills on Information Technology Project Success in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Short Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of the IT industry in Lagos State, Nigeria often referred to as "Africa's Silicon Valley" has revealed how crucial strong leadership is to the accomplishment of projects. Notwithstanding the extensive study on leadership styles, little is known about the precise effects of leadership skills in the IT sector, especially in Lagos' complex and rapidly expanding environment. This study fills this knowledge gap by investigating how important leadership abilities affect the results of IT projects. 206 IT professionals working for the Lagos State Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology. Data was collected through structured surveys and analyzed using quantitative techniques to evaluate the relationship between leadership skills and project success. Decision-making and adaptability are essential for navigating Lagos' unique challenges, while

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communication and emotional intelligence are crucial for team cohesiveness and efficient problem-solving. This study aims to evaluate the influence of leadership skills on IT project outcomes in Lagos State. The study validates the impact of leadership skills on IT project performance in Lagos State, demonstrating a significant relationship with a p-value of 0.01 at a confidence level of 95%, using regression analysis to analyse the data. The research offers valuable insights for IT professionals, organizations, and policymakers, enriching the understanding of leadership abilities needed to drive IT projects in Lagos, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge. These findings can guide leadership training programs and policy formulations to enhance project outcomes in Lagos' IT sector.

Keywords: Project outcomes; IT sector leadership; IT project management; leadership skills; Lagos State; emotional intelligence; communication; adaptability; decision-making.

1. INTRODUCTION

Global organisational operations have been significantly impacted by the rapid expansion of information technology (IT), which has made IT projects essential for fostering creativity, efficiency, and competitive advantage. Often referred to as "Africa's Silicon Valley," Lagos State, Nigeria, is currently one of the active participants in the global tech ecosystem and a driving force behind this change. The success of IT projects in Lagos is critical to the state's economic and technological progress. However, technical proficiency alone is not enough to ensure the success of these projects; strong leadership is also necessary. Bass & Riggio (2006) emphasizes that transformational leadership fosters innovation and commitment by inspiring followers to transcend their self-interest for the greater good of the organization.

In IT projects, leadership is more than just task management; it also involves encouraging teamwork, overcoming obstacles, and inspiring groups to reach shared objectives (Northouse, 1999). It is becoming more widely acknowledged that leadership abilities including decision-making, communication, emotional intelligence, and flexibility are crucial in determining the success of IT projects (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Goleman (2020) also argues that emotional intelligence, particularly self-awareness and empathy, remains a critical determinant of leadership effectiveness in navigating complex organizational challenges. These skills assist Lagos State IT project managers in overcoming regulatory obstacles, infrastructure constraints, and the intricacies of the Nigerian business climate.

This study examines the particular leadership abilities that help IT initiatives in Lagos succeed, offering insightful information to corporations, legislators, and IT professionals alike.

2. DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

In organisational studies, the contrast between management and leadership has long been a crucial subject because it reveals subtle variations that influence each job in an organisation. Leadership, according to Jahan (2023), is essentially about motivating and influencing people to work toward a common goal, whereas management is about planning, organizing, and managing resources to accomplish particular goals. Surbhi (2018) shares this opinion, arguing that management is concerned with stability and carrying out effective procedures, but leadership is linked to innovation, change, and fostering a growth-oriented culture.

Bolden et al. (2023) highlight the disparate methods and techniques that are inherent in each function in order to better elucidate this duality. Emotional intelligence, communication abilities, and team motivation are frequently cited as traits of leaders, who frequently use transformational approaches that inspire and engage. Managers are more likely to use transactional approaches, on the other hand, which place an emphasis on following established protocols and finishing tasks. Surbhi (2018) also points out that management is inward-focused, concentrating on procedures and reaching predetermined goals, whereas leadership is outward-looking, emphasizing connections and creating a sense of belonging among team members. According to Jahan (2023), management success is assessed on the basis of efficiency and short-term goal achievement, but leadership success is judged through engagement, innovation, and long-term cultural effect.

Table 1. Differentiation between managers and leaders

Manager	Leader
Focuses on the implementation of the vision.	Focuses on the vision on the organisation
Orientated to adapting to change, not taking the initiative.	Orientated towards driving change, and anticipating environmental changes
Concerned more with techniques; sometimes with maintaining order and the status quo. Adapting to the culture.	Concerned with dynamics of a situation, on how to leverage or shape; concerned with setting or changing the culture.
Concerned with being empowered.	Empowering people.
Sees a more limited web in terms of relationships in terms of immediately adjacent areas.	Sees relationships as opportunities for growth; personal goals are in alignment with organisational goals.
Tends to avoid risk for self-protection; and hence growth is more limited.	Understands personal strengths and weaknesses, and is willing to learn from mistakes and grow.

Source: Van Zyl, E (2009)

2.1 Leadership Skills in IT Project Management

In IT project management, leadership requires a blend of social (soft) and technical (hard) skills. While technical know-how is required to manage resources and comprehend project deliverables, soft skills like decision-making, communication, and emotional intelligence are crucial to team cohesiveness and project success (Müller & Turner, 2010). Project managers may manage expectations, clearly state objectives, and make sure team members are aware of their roles when they communicate effectively. Avolio et al. (2019) assert that effective communication is one of the most important leadership abilities in IT project management since it promotes team alignment and allows information to flow freely.

Another crucial leadership skill for IT initiatives is emotional intelligence (EI). According to Goleman (2020), project managers that possess a higher EI are more adept at relationship management, team member empathy, and creating a happy work atmosphere. Conflict resolution, which is frequently required in high-pressure IT projects, is another area in which emotional intelligence is crucial (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). In the IT industry, emotional intelligence is therefore seen as a major factor in motivating and enhancing team performance.

Decision-making abilities are essential for handling the complexity of IT projects. According to Turner and Müller (2010), project managers are more likely to guide their projects to success if they can make well-informed judgments quickly. Furthermore, leadership style and strategy need to be flexible; a key competency in handling the unpredictability of IT projects is the capacity to modify both in response to shifting project conditions.

2.2 IT Project Leadership in the Global Space

Project leadership in the global IT landscape is confronted with unique challenges: rapid technological advances, increased project complexity, and evolving customer demands. IT projects are often characterized by high uncertainty and the need for constant adaptation. In this context, the role of leadership in IT project success has undergone a remarkable shift, with more flexible, collaborative and innovation driven leadership styles becoming more significant (Müller & Turner, 2010). Global IT project leaders have to manage a team of people that are diverse, sometimes geographically far apart, and they need to have strong cross cultural communication and collaboration skills.

A growing trend in global IT project leadership is the growing adoption of agile methodologies. Agile project management stresses the need for the approach to be flexible, customer centric and iterative, and therefore must foster open communication, flexibility and quick decision making (Serrador & Pinto, 2015). Studies by Müller et al. (2019) suggests that global IT project managers who practice agile leadership styles embody continuous learning and innovation in their teams are most likely to succeed. The Agile approach often offers the benefits of more efficient, transparent workflows and the management of changing project requirements. Moreover, emotional intelligence

(EI) and transformational leadership have become increasingly important in the global IT space. Emotionally intelligent leaders are more ethically sensitive and are better able to motivate and inspire others, manage stress, create an environment conducive to innovation and problem solving (Goleman, 2020). Transformational leaders in particular are good at driving change and getting their teams to work toward a shared vision, which is critical in the fast-paced world of IT, where projects must often adjust to new technologies and market shifts (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Agile approaches have transformed project management by promoting adaptability, teamwork, and incremental development. Scrum, Kanban, and SAFe are a few examples of frameworks that enable leaders to react quickly to shifting client and project demands. Agile is excellent at increasing stakeholder engagement, team performance, and delivering consistent value, according to studies like Serrador and Pinto (2022). Incorporating Agile also helps to promote innovation in IT projects by moving the emphasis from a strict hierarchy to shared accountability (Chukwunweike & Aro, 2024).

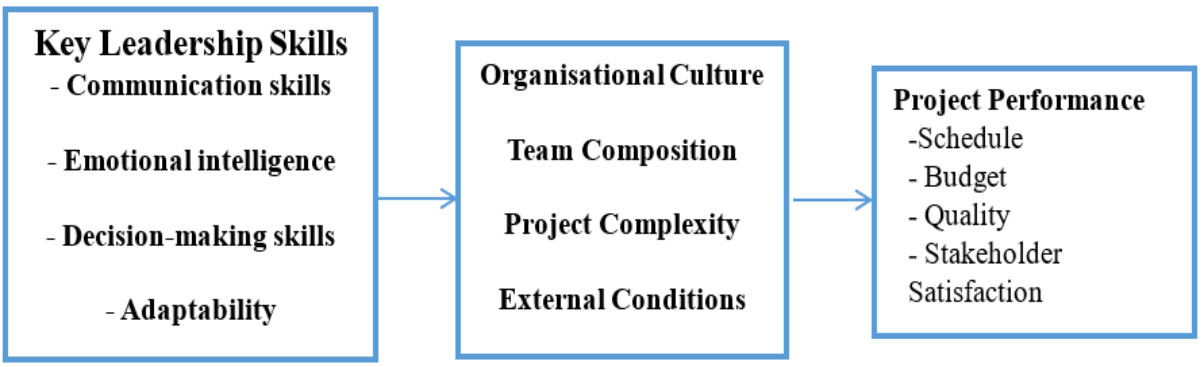
Global IT project leaders also face the challenge of leading a diverse team of people from across different time zones and cultures. The research by Lee-Kelley & Sankey (2008) highlights the role of cultural intelligence and inclusive leadership in global IT projects. Leaders successful in delivering high quality project outcomes have the ability to navigate cultural differences and create an inclusive team environment (Heikkilä, 2024). Thus, global IT project leadership has become increasingly dependent on technical as well as advanced interpersonal, cross-cultural and strategic leadership capabilities.

2.3 Leadership in the Nigerian IT Sector

The IT industry in Nigeria is confronted with a number of difficulties, such as resource limitations, regulatory challenges and inadequate infrastructure. These challenges require IT project managers not only to be technical experts but to also possess strong leadership skills (Chete et al., 2014). IT innovation has become a focal point for the tech industry in Lagos State. However, project managers in Lagos state have to adjust to the rapidly changing business environment while keeping the project timelines and budgets (Ogunde & Fagbenle, 2013).

Adegunle (2017) research highlights the significance of leaders' adaptability in the Nigerian IT sector to the unpredictable external variables like power outages, regulatory delays and shortage of funding. In this challenging environment, success is more likely to be a function of leaders who can adjust their decision making processes and work effectively with diverse teams. Chukwuma and Adeola (2021) further emphasize that emotional intelligence and communication are pivotal in managing teams and navigating these challenges in order to ensure that project goals are met even in the face of adversity.

Theoretical Framework



Source: *Adapted from (Müller & Turner, 2007), Matching the project manager's leadership style to project type*

Table 2. Stratified sample size

Job Role	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Brand & visual	4	2
Copywriter	22	10.7
Data analyst	4	2
Designer (UI/UX)	26	12.6
Digital Marketer	24	11.7
Embedded system	4	2
Intern	2	1
IT Team Lead	24	11.7
Project Manager	22	10.7
Software Developer	68	33
Support Practitioner	6	3
Total	206	100

Authors computation, field survey 2024

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Data for this study was collected from 206 IT professionals employed by the Lagos State Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology using structured surveys and a quantitative research approach. The research adopted a cross-sectional survey design and the data was analysed using SmartPLS. Assessing the leadership abilities thought to be critical to the success of IT projects was the goal of the survey, which placed special emphasis on decision-making, communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.

3.2 Population and Sample Size

Professionals working on IT projects in Lagos State made up the study population. In order to present a thorough analysis of leadership techniques in the IT industry, a sample of 206 respondents was chosen from a population of 439 IT professionals. To guarantee participation from different levels of IT project, stratified random sampling was used to choose the sample.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through structured questionnaires, which included items on leadership competencies such as communication, emotional intelligence, decision-making, adaptability, and team building. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the leadership skills prevalent in the sample, while inferential statistics, including correlation analysis, were employed to explore the relationships between these skills and IT project outcomes.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 The Role of Communication in IT Project Success

The survey results indicated that 91.6% of the respondents perceived Communication as the most crucial leadership ability for IT project managers with a 4.58 mean rating. Team members are certain to be in agreement with project objectives, schedules, and individual duties when there is effective communication. Additionally, communication is crucial for controlling stakeholder expectations and promoting the efficient exchange of information among project team members at all levels (Müller & Turner, 2010). Since effective communication minimizes misunderstandings and enhances collaboration, project managers with strong communication skills are more likely to complete projects successfully.

4.2 Emotional Intelligence as a Key Driver of Team Cohesion

A crucial leadership ability that has a strong correlation with team cohesion and motivation is emotional intelligence with a mean rating of 4.28 as suggested by 85.6% of the respondents. High-pressure situations are common in IT projects, and project managers who can relate to their team members and effectively control their emotions tend to create happier, more productive workplaces (Goleman, 2020). Additionally, emotional intelligence facilitates conflict resolution, preventing team disagreements from

getting out of hand and derailing the project (Imam & Zaheer, 2021).

4.3 The Impact of Decision-Making and Adaptability on Project Performance

In Lagos State, where project managers frequently have to make snap decisions in reaction to outside obstacles like resource limitations or regulatory changes, decision-making abilities were shown to be essential for handling the complexity of IT projects with a rating of 4.31 by 86.2% of the respondents. Strong decision-making skills increase the likelihood that project managers will reduce risks and maintain project momentum.

Project success was also found to be significantly influenced by adaptability, or the capacity to modify leadership tactics in response to shifting project conditions. Project managers that are adaptable in their approach have a higher chance of achieving good results in a setting like Lagos, where IT projects may be impacted by changing client needs and infrastructure constraints.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

The study's conclusions are consistent with international research on the value of leadership abilities in IT project management. Similar research has emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence and communication in project success, especially in complex and quickly evolving situations. According to Connelly (2024), executives that possess emotional intelligence are better equipped to lead high-achieving teams, which in turn promotes motivation and output. According to Abbas and Ali (2023), leaders' flexibility is especially crucial in dynamic IT project environments because project managers have to react to changing customer needs and unforeseen obstacles. These conclusions are supported by this study, which highlights the importance of flexibility and prudent judgment in handling the particular difficulties faced by IT project managers in Lagos State.

IT initiatives in Lagos State, Nigeria, require strong leadership abilities, especially in the areas of communication and emotional intelligence. The importance of these abilities in overcoming project obstacles, encouraging teamwork, and guaranteeing project completion on schedule is highlighted in this study. By enabling managers to negotiate the dynamic and frequently unpredictable character of the IT industry, decision-making and flexibility also help IT projects succeed.

5.2 Implications for IT Project Management in Lagos

Infrastructure constraints, inconsistent regulations, and a competitive IT environment are some of the particular difficulties that IT project managers face in Lagos State. Navigating these obstacles requires leadership abilities including flexibility and judgment (Chete et al., 2014). According to the study's findings, leadership development programs that emphasize these qualities would help IT project managers in Lagos better handle the complexity of the local IT ecosystem.

5.3 Recommendations

For IT project managers, organisations in Lagos State should provide top priority to leadership development programs that emphasize adaptability, communication, and emotional intelligence. In order to guarantee that IT professionals are prepared to tackle the difficulties of overseeing extensive projects in a quickly changing technical environment, legislators should also create frameworks that promote ongoing leadership development.

Relevance to Existing literature: The results of this study are consistent with other research that highlights the significance of communication, emotional intelligence (EI), and adaptability in the success of IT projects. The study's identification of effective communication as a key leadership ability supports Müller and Turner's (2010) findings that communication guarantees objective clarity and improves stakeholder participation. Similar to this, Akintoye et al. (2021) emphasize that effective communication lowers miscommunication and enhances teamwork, especially in high-context environments like Nigeria. Goleman (2020) asserts that emotional intelligence promotes motivation and conflict resolution in dynamic IT environments, and this is supported by the fact that emotional intelligence is recognized as a critical driver of team cohesion. In line with the findings of the study, Imam and Zaheer (2021) also noted that emotionally knowledgeable leaders improve workplace harmony.

Furthermore, the study supports the findings of Abbas and Ali (2023), who found that adaptability and decision-making are essential for handling unpredictability in IT projects. According to Chete et al. (2014), these qualities are essential in Lagos, where changing client needs and infrastructure limitations are prevalent. This study further adds to the discourse by contextualizing the global emphasis on adaptability to Lagos's unique challenges, such as inconsistent regulations. This study adds important insights into the leadership abilities needed to traverse Lagos's changing IT landscape by addressing local issues and complementing earlier research.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study may not adequately represent the viewpoints of the private sector or the Information Technology ecosystem beyond Lagos because it mainly focused on IT professionals working for the Lagos State Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology. There also exists the possibility of biases in self-reported data. Furthermore, the use of quantitative surveys may have provided little insight into the complex perspectives of IT executives. For a more thorough grasp of leadership dynamics, future studies could use a mixed-methods approach that includes qualitative interviews. A more thorough understanding of good IT leadership would be possible by comparing Lagos with other Nigerian locations and broadening the sample to include professionals from the private sector and start-ups.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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