



Employees' Participation, Leadership and Local Government Performance in Nigeria: Evidence from Akoko North East Council

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Abstract

Leadership as a critical determinant of survival of any organisation as its crucial role in organizational activities particularly decision making cannot be overemphasized. Effective performance of a leader is directly proportional to the cooperation of the employee (subordinates), which invariably determine the level of the organizational performance. Of leadership styles, participative leadership tends to promote participation of the subordinates in the making of decisions that directly or indirectly affects organizational objectives. Local government. Local government in Nigeria is a public institution saddled with the responsibility of making decisions that affect the development of local areas. To ensure the achievement of this objective, employees' participation must be encouraged to reduce employees' stress, lack of creativity and low productivity, the study examined the impacts of employees' participation on the performance of Akoko North East local government using descriptive survey design. Both questionnaire and interview methods were adopted to generate the needed data. Data were analyzed using statistical tools like frequency, table, percentage distribution and chi-square. The study observed that employee participation has positive effect on Akoko North East Council. The study showed that employees in the council were greatly involved in council's activities, which has improved the council's performance in the recent time. The study having observed inadequate training and funding as obstacles to employees' participation, recommends regular sensitization, motivation, training and adequate funding for better participation and performance.

Keywords: Employees' Participation, Leadership, Local Government Performance, Nigeria , Akoko North East

Introduction

Employees' participation has over the years become relevant to modern institutions and organizations across the world. Every institution strives to make the right, best and effective decisions in the best circumstances, as a result, managers are careful to ensure that workers irrespective of their status are encouraged and supported to participate in decision making of their organizations', because good and effective decisions are not to make alone (Peng, Zou, Kang & Zhang, 2021).

Effective performance of any organisation is greatly dependent on active participation of members of staff. Therefore, to make effective decision capable of ensuring optimum performance, workers must be consulted for their relevant inputs and contributions (Chan, 2019). In this context, leaders must always work towards the promotion and encouragement of their subordinate in organizational activities, particularly decision-making circle. To encourage this practice, leadership must be participative in nature.

Moreso, every employee feels happy when involved in taking decision that directly or indirectly affects the workers. This not only promote sense of belonging but also improves job satisfaction and retention (Glaser, 2020; Shonk, 2024). This was also corroborated in the study conducted by Wang, Hou & Li (2022) when they opined that workers become more interested and motivated to stay put in an organisation when allowed to participate in decision making. Although, they emphasized the need to ensure that employees are not burdened with heavy loads of responsibilities that have to do with organisation activities to avoid putting more stress on the employees. But essentially, decisions taken via participative method often relies on employees or subordinates feedback (Glaser, 2020).

The development and wellbeing of the people at the grass root is directly connected with the qualities of the decisions and activities embarked on by the local government authority otherwise known as council, as local government in Nigeria remains the constitutionally designed level of government meant to oversee the administration of the grassroots (Mela & Bulamal, 2022). The effective performance of this enviable function will unarguably and largely depend on the type of leadership elected or appointed and style adopted to lead the council. When leaders are not participative in nature, the tendency to fail and debar progress of such organisation becomes so high, particularly when decision making process is monopolized by the leaders. Researchers and scholars on participative management have over the years limited their discussion on leadership without necessarily considering the roles of the employees in organisational activities.

Many organisations have failed as a result of the neglect of employees in decision making process, which had resulted in lack of creativity and innovation, high employee turnover, low productivity and general poor outcome. To this extent, questions have been raised on how to ensure that organisations activities, especially, decision making are not left in the hands of the leaders alone so as to encourage employees to put their best efforts through effective participation for enviable organisational performance. Based on this, the study examines the impactful roles of employees (subordinates) in organisational activities with the support of leaders to ensure effective organisational performance in Akoko North East local

government council in Ondo State, Nigeria. To achieve these, the following research questions have been generated;

- i. What is the level of participation of the employees in council's activities in Akoko North East?
- ii. Has employees' participation in council's activities impacted positively on the performance of Akoko North East local government?
- iii. What are the obstacles to employees' participation in councils' activities in Akoko North East?

Research Objectives

- i. To determine level of participation of the employees in council activities in Akoko North East local government.
- ii. To examine the impact of employees' participation on the performance of Akoko North East local government.
- iii. To identify obstacles to employees' participation in council's activities in Akoko North East.

Research Hypothesis

Ho: Employees' participation in council's activities has no positive impact on the performance of the council.

Hi: Employee's participation in council's activities has positive impact on the performance of the council.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discussion

Wang et al (2002) opine that encouraging workers' involvement in decision making process is an integral part of effective leadership. According to them, workers' participation in organisational activities serve as influential factor for institutions to adjust to the dynamics of their environment and improvement in the efficiency of leaders' decisions. Leadership is very important in the employees' participation in organisational activities especially decision-making process. This is because the leadership style will actually determine the level of participation of employees in organisational activities at any point in time. Arising from the foregoing, leadership has been described as the process of influencing others within a group by a single individual towards ensuring the realization of organisational objectives (Daniru & Modibbo, 2021). The duo views leadership as one way process that allows followers to passively react to what a leader does.

In another, but similar direction, Northouse (2010) described leadership as a process by which individuals direct, guide and influence the behaviour and work of others towards accomplishing specific goals in a given situation. Many scholars of participative management have linked employees' participation to participative leadership style. They argued that effective participation in organisational activities is only achievable through participative leadership. According to Huang, Li & Chang (2021), participative leadership exists in any organisation irrespective of structure, size, category and age, where openness and inclusion of workers in organisational activities is regarded as core features that differentiates it from other leadership styles. In a similar vein, Wang et al (2022), noted that participative leadership is a unique leadership style with special qualities. In their analysis, such qualities ranges from equal footing of leaders and subordinates during the process of decision making; trust between leaders and subordinate to resolution of organisational problems via democratic discussion.

Nyindo (2023), said that employees' participation is a product of participative leadership because participative leadership is a team building that involves the leaders and subordinates. In the work of Shonk (2024), participative leadership is viewed as a subset of democratic leadership, where subordinates are deliberately considered and included in the decision-making process of organisation. According to Shonk as cited in Likert (1961), participative leadership is characterized by basic principles of mutual support, which demonstrate trust and confidence jointly possessed by leaders and subordinate to achieve organisational goals. The second principle is high commitment to group decision making and the principle of set standards which promotes collectiveness and excellence. To this extent, workers' input is deliberately sought and decisions are jointly made. Although, in some cases, both leaders and employees collaborate to discuss sensitive issues that affect organisational goals but the final decision can be taken by the leaders. Therefore, employees' participation can be in any form. Arguing from the same perspective, Myers (2024), sees participative leadership as democratic style, where the members of a team are carried along in the process of decision making.

According to Myers, in this process the inputs of the team members are recognized and valuable. The process promotes communication, collaboration and creativity, because workers are deeply involved in what the organisation does when compared with other styles of leadership. Myers in his analysis, mentioned open mind, good facilitation, good listening, accountability to recognition of team members' skill as features to participative leadership, which makes it different from, and more attractive than other style of leadership.

Myers (2024) further observes that participative decision making can be collective, consensus, autocratic and consultative in nature. According to him, the subordinates and

leaders are responsible for decision made under participative decision making, while the subordinate are solely responsible for decisions made under consensus style. In this style, the leader is not involved in the process. Autocratic decision making according to Myers only surfaces at the concluding stage of the decision making as leaders only allows the subordinates to air their views only, while the leader decides the final choice. Democratic decision making involves both the leader and the subordinates but the leader pronounces the final decisions.

Wang et al. (2022) identified different styles of leadership that are synonymous with participative leadership but actually different. According to them, empowering leadership are not the same with participative leadership. While, empowering leadership is described as the act of empowering subordinates through the process of power sharing between the leaders and employees, directive leadership emphasizes the need to give adequate instruction to subordinates in ensuring that they understand what they are expected to do for the purpose of achieving the objectives and goals of the organisation. But participative leadership hinges on interactions between leaders and subordinates to create the best decisions. Under this arrangement, Usman, Ghani, Cheng, Farid & Igbal (2021) noted that creativity and innovation are significantly encouraged. And job prosperity and mutual assistance of the employees are better promoted

Indeed (2024) explains the various stages of participative leadership process as; discussion, where issues are discussed by leader and group; information sharing, where leader provide important information to the group; idea sharing, which captures a situation of sharing ideas among individuals in the group; processing. This is the presentation of the summary and relevant options for final decision by the leader; decision making, it is stage of deciding the best option earlier presented by the leader via voting; implementation stage, which is the last stage deals with putting decisions into actions by leader and subordinates.

Employees participation has been embraced as the essential tool in organisational management and performance. Winsvold & Vabo (2023) argue that when citizens are involved in the process of decision making, such arrangement enables the decision makers to have valuable information about the decision to be taken. At the organisation level, Kentab (2018) believes that when subordinates are given opportunity to participate in decision making in his organisation, such subordinate are positively affected as satisfaction, self-realization and self-respect are ensured. It is more reliable and advantageous to embrace group decision rather than individual decisions as group decisions appear to be combination of knowledge and collective ideas from many minds. Communication gaps between the senior and the junior officers are also reasonably bridge to an extent, and participation of subordinates in decision making tend to serve as golden opportunity to train the subordinates in the art of making administrative decisions (Kentab, 2018).

Shonk (2024) also contributed to the discussion of the effect of participation of employees in organisational activities. In his opinionated view, Shonk agrees that employees' participation has positive effect on organisations as it tends to improve its performance, create innovation and creativity. Shonk however, noted that employees' participation is capable of reducing efficiency as more people and time are needed before decisions can be taken. But this, according to him does not in any way undermine the significant role of employees' participation in organisational development as participative decisions are more unified and lasting longer than the decisions unilaterally made by the leaders.

Glasser (2020) also believed that when leadership is participative in nature, it tends to expand opportunities for employees to participate actively in organisational activities such as decision making which in turn can improve employees' retention. In similar vein, Myers (2024) observed that participative style cannot be over-emphasized as the voice of employees are heard with high tendency of promoting inclusiveness, dedication, creativity, effective performance and productiveness. This position was also supported by Chan (2019), when he observes that job satisfaction is promoted when employees are engaged in work activities, particularly decision-making activities. Myers (2024), Indeed (2024), also agree with Shonk (2024) that participative decision-making is time consuming and many people with different ideas and opinions are involved in the process which is capable of creating unnecessary delay in decision making. Flowing from the foregoing, active engagement of employees in decision making may not be too applicable to emergency and urgent situations that demands immediate attention. But the benefits therefrom cannot be undermined.

Theoretical Model

Since management research is theory based and its operations are guided by relevant principles of human behaviour, it is necessary to situate this study within the ambit of leaders-member. Exchange theory because it is a study of the positive relationship between leaders and employees (subordinates). Leader-member exchange theory explains the relationship and interactions that exist between leader and other members of the group, which can otherwise be called subordinates. The theory is of the position that such interaction or relationship is capable of enhancing performance and productivity if diligently optimized (Indeed, 2023). Leader-member exchange theory emphasizes the importance of management-employee relationship in the growth and productivity of individual employee. If individual employee is well treated by the leader, such individual (employee) will be ready to put extra effort to contribute to the realization of organisation's goals (Huang, Lun, Liv. Gong,2010).

The theory is hinged on the idea that both leaders and subordinates are capable of influencing one another in terms of behaviour and attitude, which invariably can build trust

between the two parties, parties, particularly when the degree of the relationship is of high quality (Stepaneck & Paul, 2022). Leader-member exchange has high tendency of promoting job performance, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. The theory is relevant to this study because it emphasizes good relationship between leaders and subordinates. This can be aptly described as bottom-up approach to management and decision making. When workers or employees at the bottom echelon of an organisation are allowed to actively participate in the organisational affairs, dedication and commitment is guaranteed and assured for improved performance.

Methods and Data

This study was carried out in Akoko North East local government area of Ondo state, Nigeria. The study adopted sample survey design to ensure adequate presentation of the whole population. The population considered for the study was the staff of the Akoko North East local government council, which included the senior and junior staff with the total number of six hundred and eighty (680) as total population. Simple random and purpose sampling were used to select the participants.

Sixty-eight (68) staff were purposively selected as sample size, which was ten percent (10%) of the total population. Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were employed to generate the needed data for the study. While primary data was generated through structured questionnaire and interview, the secondary data relied on journals, texts, articles, newspapers, magazines, reports and online resource. The data were analyzed using descriptive approach which included tables, figures and simple percentage. And chi-square was employed to test the hypothesis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1- Summary of Respondents' Demographical data	
Age (years)	Frequency (%)
18 – 25	14 (20.6)
26 – 35	26 (38.3)
36 – 60	28 (41.1)
Total	68 (100)
Gender	
Male	38 (55.9)
Female	30 (44.1)
Total	68 (100)
Marital status	
Married	46 (67.7)
Single	22 (32.3)
Total	68 (100)

Education Status	
Primary	5 (7.3)
Secondary	12 (17.7)
Post secondary	41 (60.2)
Others	10 (14.8)
Total	68 (100)

Source: Field report, 2024

Data on table 1, shows that all the age categories were adequately captured. Both young and old staff (employees) were adequately represented. The table also shows that both male and female employees were adequately represented, which indicates gender balance in the study. It is observed that married had the larger percentage than the single. This indicates that larger percentage of respondents were matured and experienced. The table also shows that post-secondary education had larger percentage, which indicates that a greater number of respondents were educated and could participate well in decision making and other organisational activities.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondent's opinion on level of participation of employees in council activities in Akoko North East council.			
Level	Responses		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
Very high	16 (23.6)	52 (76.4)	68 (100)
High	44 (64.8)	24 (35.2)	68 (100)
Moderate	5 (7.3)	63 (92.7)	68 (100)
Low	2 (3.0)	66 (97.0)	68 (100)
Very low	1 (1.4)	67 (98.6)	68 (100)

Source: Field report, 2024

Table 2, reveals that larger number of respondents agreed that employees' (subordinates) participation in council activities was high with 64.8% while 23.6% agreed it was very high. Less than 12% did not believe that employees' participation was high. This implies that over 87% of the respondent agreed that employees' participation was high as against 11.7%, which disagreed. Therefore, the participation of the employees in council affairs was significantly high and impressive. The interview conducted with the respondents also shows that employees were given opportunity to participate in decision making. This was confirmed by one of the Directors in the council when he said that:

The chairman is always giving us the opportunity to provide alternatives to problems when the need arises. Most of the solutions to council's problems were determined through the collaborative efforts of the Directors with the support and inputs of other junior officers. As a matter of fact, larger percentage of the council's decisions were taken using team approach.

Another respondent, who is also one of the union leaders in the council described the head of the council as man of the people. According to him:

Our chairman is one of the few chairmen who were re-appointed for the second term in office by the state Governor. His re-appointment was based on the success recorded through his participatory leadership style. He gives worker opportunity to contribute to decisions and considers their opinions and views as important.

In support of the aforementioned, one of the female respondents explained that:

The council's chairman instituted monthly meeting involving all the workers irrespective of status, where council's affairs were regularly and openly discussed for the purpose of getting inputs of the workers. At every meeting, views are collated and articulated for consideration at the level of committee of Directors headed by the Chairman.

During the interview, one of the personnel officers unconsciously disclosed the appellation of the chairman of the council as "everybody is involved". This simply shows the attitude of the chairman towards the running of the council. Based on the interaction with the respondents, the chairman does not take decision alone. He often relies on the contributions and views of the council's workers. The chairman perceived himself as someone who does not have solution to all problems. To this extent, the leader of the council is a participative leader who embraces employees' participation.

Table 3: Percentages distribution of respondent's opinion on the positive impact of employees' participation on council performance			
Impact	Responses		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
Effective policy implementation	56 (82.3)	12 (17.7)	68 (100)
Prompt treatment of files	61 (89.8)	7 (10.2)	68 (100)
Making of robust and people-oriented decision	49 (72.0)	19 (28.0)	68(100)
Punctuality at work by workers	51 (75.0)	17 (25.0)	68 (100)

Sources: Field report, 2024.

From table 3, it is observed that prompt treatment of files had the highest percentage as positive impact of employees' participation in Akoko North East Council (89.8%), followed by effective policy implementation with 82.3%, punctuality at work by all workers 75.0% and making of robust and peoples-oriented decisions. These indicate, that employees' participation has significantly impacted on workers' productivity and council performance. Interactions with the respondents also show that employees' participation style was the most effective method

employed by the council in the recent time. One of the respondents explained the impact of employees' participation in council performance in this expression:

Most of the policy decision taken by the council in the recent time were people-oriented policies. This is because everyone was involved. Aside this, the implementation of the policies has been effective. For instance, rural roads within the locality are currently being graded by the council. Local government has been pro-active in handling demands of the various groups and communities at large.

Another respondent, who is also Special Assistant to the council boss stated that:

Workers in local government appear more dedicated and committed because they have opportunity to participate actively in decision making. Today, they have a very high sense of belonging as well as job satisfaction. Files are promptly attended to unlike before, there is uninterrupted flow of communication within the departments and unit employees.

It was gathered during the interview that all workers belong to one or two committees that must meet once in a week and give report at the general meeting of all workers on weekly basis. This ideas of involving workers in decision making process has put workers on their toes, ensuring punctually and regularity at work. Employees' participation demands that workers must learn to enable them acquire the necessary skills for future assignments. It is therefore, a kind of on-the-job training for employees.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondent's opinion on the obstacles to the employee's participation.			
Obstacles	Responses		
	Yes %	No%	Total%
Inadequate training of workers	60 (88.2%)	8 (11.8%)	68 (100)
Low motivation of workers	61 (89.8%)	7 (10.2%)	68 (100)
Incessant changes in leadership	63 (92.7%)	5 (7.3%)	68 (100)
Inadequate funding of council	62 (91.1%)	6 (8.9%)	68 (100)

Source: Field report, 2024

Data on the table reveals that the greatest obstacle to employees' participation in council affairs is incessant changes in the leadership, which recorded 92.7%. Inadequate funding of council came second with 91.9% and followed by low motivation of workers on 89.8%. Inadequate training of worker is the last obstacle with 88.2%. the interview conducted was in tandem with the data generated for the table as many of the interviewees believed that incessant changes in leadership has been the major challenge to employees' participation.

The respondents said that changes in political and administrative head from time to time affects participation of employees in decision making and other organisational activities as leaders are not created the same. According to one of the respondents, the council has had more of autocratic leaderships, who do not believe in participation of all. Finance was also identified as another obstacle to employees' participation as funds were not always available to motivate workers.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of respondent's opinion on whether employee's participation have positive impact on local government performance.		
Respondent responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	61	89.8%
No	07	10.2%
Total	68	100%

Source: Field report, 2024

Table 5 shows that larger percentage of the respondent agreed that employee's participation has positive impact on local government performance.

Test of Hypothesis

Ho: Employees' participation has no positive impact on local government performance.

Hi: Employees' participation has positive impact on local government performance.

Table 6: Chi-square table.					
Respondent	O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
Yes	61	34	27	729	21.44
No	07	34	-27	729	21.44
Total	68	68	0	1458	42.88

Source: Field report, 2024

O = Observed value

E = Expected value

$$X^2 = \text{Cal} = \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{1458}{34}$$

Ho: Employees' participation has no positive impact on performance of Akoko North East Local Government.

Level of significance difference = 5% = 0.05

Degree of freedom = K1 = 2-1 = 1

x² Calculated = 42.88

X² tabulated at 0.005 and d.f = 3.84

x² Calculated 42.88 > X² tabulated 3.84

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Decision Rule: Null hypothesis is rejected because calculated value of 42.88 is greater than tabulated value of 3.84 and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Therefore, it is concluded that employees' participation in council activities has positive impact on the performance of the Akoko North East local government

Discussion of Findings

The study found that level of participation of employees in council activities, particularly decision making was high as workers were given opportunity to participate and contribute to the growth and development of the council. This was also revealed in table 2, where respondents agreed that employee's participation was high. Over 87% of the respondents claimed that participation of employees was significantly high. It was further discovered that there was positive relationship between the leader and employees as demonstrated in the theoretical model.

The interview revealed that employee's participation has positive effect on local government performance. Table 3 also corroborated this where more than 89% of the respondent agreed that the council has witnessed progress in the area of policy implementation, prompt treatment of files, punctuality and robust decisions. The interview revealed that positive interactions between leader and subordinate has impacted on the organisation and has improved productivity and outcomes. It was discovered that trust between leader and employees was developed as a result of the high quality of relationship that existed, which further promoted job performance, job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

The findings from the interview revealed that employees' participation is faced with various obstacles that negatively affected its efficiency and effectiveness in the council. Among these were; inadequate funding, incessant changes of leadership and low motivation of workers. The study found that some of the good policies could not be funded as a result of dwindling financial resources. Workers were not adequately motivated to compensate for their dedication and commitment to work. The findings also revealed that the more the changes in leadership, the more the changes in administrative styles and approaches.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that employees' participation was dominant at the Akoko North East local government and workers and the organisation have benefitted tremendously from it. At the level of individual, mental soundness and creativity were acquired, while improvement in performance through collective innovative ideas was obtained at the organisational level. In this sense, it can be inferred from the study that the performance of the council has greatly

improved through active participation and involvement of workers in decision making process and other council activities. Since administrative activities are continuous process, there is practical need to sustain the enviable level of this achievement and improve on identified grey areas for future progress of local government.

Based on this, the following suggestions are canvassed;

- i. Regular sensitization, through workshops, seminars and lectures on the need to improve the skill of the workers in the act of providing workable alternatives to organisational problems,
- ii. Motivation of workers should be prioritized by the chief executive to encourage active participation of all workers in organisational activities, particularly in decision making process.
- iii. The need to emphasis and re-emphasize the necessity of delegation of power as one of the potent strategies for achieving organisational objectives.
- iv. Organisations should avoid the employment or engagement of autocratic leadership when and where necessary.
- v. Every contribution by the subordinates should be acknowledged and appreciated to serve as source of strength and motivation.
- vi. Local government should be adequately funded. The monthly allocation from the federation account should be increased to match its local responsibilities. Also, the collection of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) i.e. rates, levies, fines etc. should be strictly monitored to avoid revenue loss from the collectors and such collections must be effectively utilized.

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