



Full length article

# Assessing the Effect of Leadership on Employee Motivation and Organisational Productivity: Lessons from Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

The role of leadership in driving employee motivation and employee productivity still largely remains as an unexplored area in many developing countries. This paper assesses the effect of leadership on employee motivation and organisational productivity and draws lessons from selected middle-tier Banks in Zambia. The study highlights the themes in leadership that drive employee motivation and organisational productivity. The research study was undertaken through qualitative research and four themes emerged, quality of leadership, quality of performance management, growth and development opportunities and organisational culture. To collect the research data, six semi-structured interviews, a qualitative questionnaire and direct observation were employed. The study results have implications for leadership in organisations as the study brings out some of the key issues that organisational leadership has an impact on in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity.

## 1. Introduction

Leadership, employee motivation and employee productivity have long been recognised as key pillars for organisational growth and productivity. However, the role of leadership in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity still largely remains as an unexplored area in many developing countries. These factors are also particularly important for developing countries such as Zambia as the world today is one global village and globalisation continues to shape the world in different ways. According to Toma, et.al., (2020), leadership is as old as human civilization. Bass and Bass (2009); as cited by Toma, et.al., (2020) also note that the early written principles of leadership can be found in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs for leadership, leader and follower, and instruction of Ptah-Hotep, followed by the Chinese works of Confucius and Lao-tzu and the classical Greek and Roman writers, such as Plato and Marcus Aurelius.

According to Roßnagel (2016), there is no “grand unified theory” of work motivation that has been proposed but that several core theoretical perspectives can be identified, that in principle give leaders a sophisticated set of tools to promote their employees’ motivation. Cowley and Smith (2014); and Cheng (2015), also note that the concept of motivation within organisations is one that has generally being recognised by management but is often not addressed in practice. Generally, also issues of motivation and productivity in developing countries

are such that these countries are argued to have low levels of motivation and low productivity which is despite the heavy capital inflows and technology investments that have been acquired from the developed countries. With the high unemployment rates in most developing countries and Zambia not being an exception, ensuring job creation and that the citizens have decent jobs to earn a livelihood once jobs are created remains a key priority.

Kuranchie-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2016), note that work, whether in the formal or informal sector, paid or unpaid, plays a meaningful role in the lives of people across the world and that through work, men and women define themselves and their characters in society. This research study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge by bringing out key themes in leadership in how it has an effect in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity. The study notes that there are several studies that examine leadership and employee motivation and organisational productivity in the developed countries but there are very few studies in developing countries. This study therefore envisages to bring out critical information for organisational leaders and for policy makers to consider not only at organisational level but also at country level if practicable in developing countries. There are also several theories on employee motivation, but this study does not focus on these theories but focuses on leadership and its influence in employee motivation and organisational productivity

## **2. Literature Review**

The workplace is becoming more and more diverse than ever, owing to the impact of the worldwide economic integration, also known as globalisation, which has now made the world a global village (Inegbedion, et.al., 2020). While organisational performance is dependent on several factors, one of its key drivers is the human capital which is undoubtedly the major resource. However, for the human capital to deliver on the organisational goals, leadership plays a fundamental part in that relationship. There are several groundbreaking theories on motivation which provide a link to organisational productivity and among these include Skinner's reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1953); Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954); Fredrick Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959); Theory X and Theory Y (McGregor, 1960); McClelland's theory of needs (McClelland, 1961); Equity Theory (Adams, 1963); Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) and Goal Setting Theory (Locke, 1968). According to Armstrong, and Taylor (2014), the above theories helped build on the understanding of motivation and are underpinned by the motivation theories which they classify as the instrumentality theory, content theory, and process theory.

Mullins (2016), notes that there are many ways of looking at leadership and many interpretations of its meaning, and that leadership might be interpreted in simple terms, such as 'getting others to follow' or 'getting people to do things willingly', or interpreted more specifically, for example as 'the use of authority in decision-making'. Ejimabo (2015) also notes that having the appropriate leadership and experience is an instrumental approach, to linking the organisation to collaborate successfully with their workers. Harris et al (2007); as cited by Khajeh (2018), define leadership style as the kind of relationship that is used by an individual to make people work together for a common goal or objective. Robbins and Judge (2024) define motivation and productivity as the processes that account for an individual's intensity, direction, and persistence of effort towards accomplishing a goal and that productivity indicates a concern for both effectiveness and efficiency respectively.

Leaders in organisations will have different leadership styles and Harris et al (2007); as cited by Khajeh (2018), identified five (5) modern leadership styles, and these include, the transformational leadership style, the transactional leadership style, culture-based leadership, charismatic leadership, and visionary leadership. Depending on the leadership style adopted by the leadership in the organisation, this will have an impact on their employee's motivation and productivity in that organisation. Amanchukwu, et al., (2015) therefore note that before suggesting a leadership style for organisations, researchers should identify the most efficient approach and illustrate that a specific leadership style is beneficial for organisations. Amanchukwu, et al., (2015) further note researchers must complete research to determine an effective and statistically significant relationship between the type of leadership style and how to implement the goals of the organisation to the employees.

Effective leadership in organisations can therefore embody several special characteristics that are unique, and these can include decision making abilities, the ability to inspire and drive the team as well as motivate them and being role models to the rest of the organisation. Judge and Robbins (2024), assert that through the Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), the effectiveness of any leadership style depends on the situation and tasks involved. It has also been shown in earlier research that leadership has an impact on workers' job outcomes, including satisfaction, dedication, civic behaviour, and creativity (Le and Lei, 2017; Hassi, 2018; Al-Baidhani and Alsaqqaf, 2023). Therefore, good leaders will lead their teams but will also be accountable to their teams and will not take credit for themselves but will acknowledge their teams' efforts. Another unique attribute is their ability to grow their teams and subordinates, and the confidence and unwavering courage is always predominant among effective leaders. For example, Judge and Robbins (2024) assert that charismatic leadership has a positive effect on follower outcomes as such leaders can enhance follower task performance and reduce follower turnover and stressors.

Xu and Wang (2008); as cited by Al-Baidhani and Alsaqqaf (2023) also assert that the role of leadership in an organisation is crucial in terms of creating a vision, mission, determination and establishment of objectives, designing strategies, policies, and methods to achieve the organisations objectives effectively and efficiently along with directing and coordinating the efforts and organisational activities. Having in place quality leaders is therefore essential if organisations are to achieve their mission and vision and achieve their organisational growth. Toma et.al., (2020) further note that by reviewing the leadership theories Northouse (2013); identified the following four common themes in leadership, firstly leadership constitutes a process, secondly, leadership involves influence, thirdly leadership appears in a group context and fourthly, leadership implies goals attainment. The role of leadership in driving employee motivation and productivity in organisations is therefore key.

Leaders, however work through people and understanding what motivates their employees is important. Nabi, et.al., (2017) note that motivation is a combination of factors that operate within each and requires a combination of approaches and in a general sense, motivation can be referred as a combination of motive and action. Nabi, et.al., (2017), further note that, research reveals that an employee's ability only partially determines his output or productivity and that the major determinant is the motivation level of the employee. Understanding issues of motivation in employees and how to motivate them is therefore essential for organisational growth. According to Al-Baidhani and Alsaqqaf (2023) there is a considerable impact of the leadership styles on organisational performance as the leadership style influences the culture of the organisation which, in turn, influences the organisational performance.

### **3. Data and Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The research study was undertaken through semi-structured interviews, direct observation and a qualitative questionnaire. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with the country human resource leads and union representatives, and direct observation employed from the participating organisations. A qualitative questionnaire was also administered which collected information on the participants biographical information in Part A and in Part B collected qualitative information on the subject matter. A total of fifty-nine (59) questionnaires were collected from the participants who included both management and non-management employees to achieve data saturation. Patton (2015) asserts that qualitative research studies explore a specific issue by focusing on what, how, when, and where. The researcher chose this study approach as it was more suitable to the nature of the study and was the most appropriate to bring out the issues related to the study.

#### **Methods of Data Collection**

In terms of the data collection, face-to-face detailed in-depth interviews are the most common sources of data in qualitative case study research as noted by Merriam, 1998, 2009; Meyer, 2001; Easterby-Smith, et al., 2009; Yin, 2009, 2012; Creswell, 2013b; and Hyett, et al., 2014; as cited by Gaya and Smith (2016). Direct observation was also employed and a review of organisational documents undertaken. The research questionnaires included closed and open-ended questions. The closed ended questions collected the biographical data of the participants, while the open-ended questions collected qualitative data from the respondents by allowing them to provide information in their own words. The research study was also guided by McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) who assert that another factor to be analysed before determining which research methodology is most suitable relates to the objective of the study. The research study therefore focused on the primary sources of data because they provided the study with the required empirical data.

#### **Data Analysis**

To analyse the research data, thematic analysis was employed as it was deemed to be the most appropriate method. The researcher was able to group similar information together and with the aid of NVivo 14, a popular CAQDAS software package was able to analyse the interview transcripts while Microsoft excel was used for the analysis of the data from the questionnaires using the Braun and Clarke (2006) model. Braun and Clarke (2006) as cited by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) provide a six-step approach for thematic analysis, which includes firstly, becoming familiar with the data, and secondly, generating initial codes, thirdly, searching for themes, fourthly, reviewing the themes, and in step five, defining the themes and finally in step six, doing the write-up.

#### **Reliability Test**

This research study aimed to come up with results that were not subjected to any biases and errors. Drost (2011), defines reliability as the extent to which measurements are repeatable when different people make the measurement at a different time, under different conditions, supposedly with alternative instruments which measure the same construct. While Leung (2015), notes that the essence of reliability for qualitative research lies with consistency. To ensure validity and reliability of the research study results the researcher shared the interview questions with the interview participants in advance which allowed them to go through and prepare for the interview. The researcher endeavoured to also avoid any ambiguities and observed standardisation during interviews, direct observation and the administration of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were also

left with the respondents and collected later after which the researcher went through to check that the questions were properly answered. The researcher also ensured that data collection only stopped when the research study had reached data saturation. The use of the above instruments facilitated content validation and triangulation because the researcher was able to cover adequately the important information needed in the study from all the respondents.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The research study sought to assess the effect of leadership on employee motivation and organisational productivity and was carried out in Lusaka, Zambia in three selected middle-tier Banks. The study’s findings and discussion are presented below, and the biographical data is presented first, and then the thematic analysis and the emerging themes. Th biographical data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Biographical Data Presentation**

<i>Characteristics (N = 59)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	56
Male	44
<b>Highest Qualification</b>	
Master’s degree	31
Degree	59
Diploma	10
<b>Age Group of Participants</b>	
20-29 Years	24
30-39 Years	51
40-49 Years	17
Above 50 Years	8
<b>Work Experience Participants</b>	
1-5 Years	32
6-10 Years	36
11-15 Years	19
16 Years and Above	14
<b>Level in the organisation</b>	
Unionised	46
Middle Management	41
Senior Management	13

#### Leadership, Employee Motivation and Organisational Productivity

The objective of the study was to derive from research the effect of leadership in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity. Using the thematic analysis approach and following vigorous review of the research data, and the patterns and themes that emerged, it is evident that leadership influences employee motivation and productivity in organisations. The views of the Interview Participants (IP) and the Research Respondents (RR) are captured below in the findings and discussion from the themes that emerged.

### **Theme One: Quality of Leadership**

This theme centres on the quality of leadership and understanding how leaders influence employee motivation and organisational productivity. The research study results point to the quality of leadership as being pivotal in organisations. It must also be noted that the leadership in any organisation are responsible for the human capital and this resource requires motivation to drive organisational performance. The views from the research findings are below.

*Absolutely.....a supervisor is key to the employee's performance. I would recommend training on supervisory skills, so they become better Managers. (IP2).*

*I feel that Managers and supervisors affect job productivity. Managers influence productivity through coaching, mentoring or training and recognising employee's efforts either at group level or individual level. Hence how a manager influences employee engagement or lack of it has an impact on job productivity (RR47).*

Based on the findings above, the leadership in organisations can make or break the organisation, as employees require motivation, and the quality of leadership is key. Samanya and Komuhendo (2023), noted in their research study that motivation has a positive relationship on the employees' performance, and recommended that more motivation schemes should be put in place by management to improve the employees' performance. Generally, also employees want leaders whose work ethic is good, inspires them and leadership that embodies the qualities of empathy, honest feedback, ensuring that the vision, mission and organisational strategy are clear and that the employees know their contribution to the organisational goals. Nethi (2020) states that leaders motivate persons to follow a participative design of work in which they are responsible and get it together, which make them accountable for their performance.

### **Theme Two: Quality of Performance Management**

This theme focuses on the quality of Performance Management (PM) which is driven by the leadership in an organisation as a key pillar in the management and development of employees. PM if properly implemented and managed in an organisation can have a high return on investment to the organisation as through this process the leadership continuously focus on the people and developing them to deliver on the organisational goals. Aguinis (2005), as cited by Armstong and Taylor (2014) defines performance management as a continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing the performance of persons and teams and aligning their performance with the strategic goals of the organisation. The study notes some of the views of the research findings below.

*Managers directly affect employee productivity. This is why as a Head of Department I have, to have Key Performance Indicators delivered accordingly. I must also treat the Managers below me with dignity and ensure that performance appraisals are carried out professionally and that monitoring and assisting of subordinates to achieve their Key Performance Indicators accordingly is happening (IP1).*

*Managers affect productivity because the energy the supervisors and managers have to the employees does affect the job productivity. The supervisors and managers should treat their employees equally to create a conducive environment for all workers. If one staff is in the wrong and that staff has to be corrected, I can simply call the person to my office and talk to the person not calling out the staff in front of the other staff (RR58).*

The role of leadership in PM is essential as through this process the leaders in an organisation can drive employee motivation and organisational productivity. It was this study's conclusion that where PM is properly implemented and the leaders are consistently working towards offering opportunities for growth and development as well as providing regular feedback to their teams, issues of low motivation and low productivity can be easily addressed. On the other hand, where PM is not properly implemented, it is possible that grievances could arise and generally the employees could lose confidence in the whole system. Deogaonkar, et.al., (2020), in their research study note that the Performance Management System (PMS) has a significant role in contributing towards employee motivation to work. The study specifically notes that if an organisations' goal is to enhance motivation of their employees through the PMS, then it is its execution that immediately caught attention.

### **Theme Three: Growth and Development Opportunities**

Growth and development emerged as a theme focusing on growth and development of employees as a role that leaders play in organisations. Employees need opportunities for growth and career development which can be in the form of skills development or academic pursuits to allow employees to upgrade their current qualifications and to better position them for higher roles in the organisation. The study notes the views below from the research findings.

*Organisations need to ensure that they put in place opportunities for growth and development of their employees as providing training and career advancement opportunities will keep employees motivated and engaged (IP4).*

*By coming up with strategies that can directly influence and align the performance of the employees such as identifying what the employee is good at and where they need help so that they can better motivate them (RR52).*

*To drive employee motivation and productivity employees would like to see more employee engagement activities, training opportunities and career growth opportunities (IP5).*

Shkoler and Kimura (2020), in their study also note that to achieve a competitive advantage, organisations need to develop organisational learning, which can be achieved by acquiring learning persons. Corrales-Herrero and Rodríguez-Prado (2018); in their study as cited by Shkoler and Kimura (2020), have also stated that it is getting more essential for workers to learn continuously to enhance and maintain their employability and that the number of people engaging in lifelong learning has significantly increased. Bawa (2017) also asserts that employee training and development is another indispensable motivator in the workplace. It was this study's conclusion that employees in organisations require opportunities that allow them to continue to up skill and obtain new skills that are relevant to the market. This is also particularly important as the world is now one

global village and for employees to be competitive, they are seeking for more learning and development opportunities and ultimately growth in their jobs.

#### **Theme Four: Organisational Culture**

Organisational culture emerged as a theme focusing on the impact that leadership has on culture in organisations in driving employee motivation and productivity. Organisational culture has a profound impact on employee motivation and productivity and its impact is quite high. Leaders that foster a culture that supports employees to thrive and be productive, are evidently also leaders of organisations that successful as culture plays a very important role in employee motivation and organisational productivity. The research study also notes as below.

*Having a favourable work environment is important for driving and maintaining employee motivation and productivity and the managers play a critical role in fostering a positive and inclusive culture that is not toxic or an overly stressful environment that would lead to dissatisfaction and disengagement of employees (IP6).*

*I would advocate for a system that awards employees on merit. Employees should be awarded according to their roles and input (IP1).*

*To drive for higher productivity there is need for building culture that supports productivity and the organisations strategy which would in turn drive employee motivation (IP3).*

In their research study Sappe, et.al., (2016), aimed to identify and assess the significance of leadership on worker performance mediated by organisational culture, work commitment and work motivation as contributing factors of employee performance improvement. The study results showed that good leadership does improve employee performance, when factors are in place such as organisational culture, work commitment and motivation. The study results further pointed to the fact that strengthening of organisational culture and high employee commitment could lead to increased motivation. The importance of culture as underpinned by strong leadership tenets is therefore critical in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The role of leadership in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity remains as one of the key challenges in many organisations and this is generally the case for most of the developing countries. This study provided insights in understanding the role of leadership in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity and concluded that the leadership in any organisation are primarily responsible for ensuring that they motivate their employees and are therefore responsible for driving employee motivation and ultimately organisational productivity which they achieve through their teams or human capital. The same is also true where, if the employees are not motivated then the chances that productivity would be low in the organisation are also high. This study has implications for organisational leaders and policy makers as the research study shows that employee motivation is key in achieving organisation productivity, but leadership plays a key role.

The emerging themes from the study should therefore be taken into consideration by organisational leaders as they are key in the drive for productivity in developing countries. In terms of the first emerging theme on quality of leadership in organisations, it is vital that organisations put in place measures to ensure that organisational

leaders have the requisite skills to drive employee motivation and productivity. In relation to the quality of performance management, this has long been identified as a key factor in driving employee productivity in organisations and consequently having in place policies that guide as well as systems to support the policy framework cannot be over emphasized in organisations. Growth and development opportunities are also key for employees in organisations for them to drive or push for organisational productivity. Therefore, in terms of understanding and supporting the growth and development aspirations of employees, it is an essential element in today's organisations that employees continually strive to better their educational and professional qualifications as they continue to aspire for higher roles and growth in their fields as the labour market is constantly changing. Finally, organisational culture remains as a critical factor in employee motivation and organisational productivity and therefore the leadership in organisations need to ensure that the culture that they promote, and drive is one that supports organisational development.

In conclusion, while this research study's findings have highlighted factors that are key to leadership in driving employee motivation and organisational productivity using its case study focus area. There is need for more research to be conducted in the other sectors or areas to continue to build on theory as this study was conducted in only part of a sector. Further, it is critical that similar studies are undertaken in the mining sector as this continues to be the main stay of the Zambian economy. Finally, the role of leadership in any organisation must be looked at as being critical whether in government or the private sector, as it is the leadership that are responsible for motivation in their teams and consequently achieving organisational productivity.

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