Exploring Leadership Inertia and Managerial Performance of Public Organizations in Nigeria

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Abstract
This study explores the phenomenon of leadership inertia and its implications for managerial performance within public organizations in Nigeria. Despite ongoing administrative reforms, many public institutions in the country continue to grapple with bureaucratic stagnation, weak accountability mechanisms, and inconsistent leadership effectiveness. The paper aims to explore how leadership inertia, characterized by resistance to change, indecisiveness, and an inability to adapt, affects managers' capacity of managers to achieve organizational goals, drive innovation, and deliver public services efficiently. Drawing upon established leadership and organizational theories, this study explores the systemic and structural dynamics that foster inertia in Nigeria's public sector. It explores how entrenched bureaucratic norms, political interference, and limited managerial autonomy contribute to stagnation in leadership practices and undermine managerial effectiveness. It also provides a conceptual framework linking leadership inertia to key dimensions of managerial performance, including efficiency and effectiveness. By synthesizing insights from extant literature, the paper offers a theoretical foundation for understanding and addressing leadership-related inefficiencies in public organizations. It recommends that organizations conduct regular performance evaluations for managers and enforce accountability measures.

Keywords: *Leadership Inertia, Managerial Performance, Managerial Effectiveness, Managerial Efficiency.*

Introduction

As organizations seek to harness their vast potential and confront emerging challenges, managerial expertise is of paramount importance in promoting innovation, optimization, adaptability, and resilience. To stay competitive, organizations must build strong teams (Morgan, 2014), foster a positive work culture (Anning-Dorson, 2021), engage in open communication (Nwabueze & Mileski, 2018), recognize and reward achievements (Kpurunee & Nwibaede, 2023), and remain focus on achieving set goals and objectives. Without a doubt, the present economy requires managers to be agile and encourage team collaboration as they derive greater advantages when people with diverse perspectives contribute by bringing together different ideas, pools of knowledge, and approaches to work (Zeb-Obipi & Kpurunee, 2023; Maznevski, & Di Stefano, 2000). Forbes (2022) states that effective managers are empathetic and supportive; love to coach and executing processes, possess strong personal time management skills, can delegate tasks, communicate effectively, provide constructive feedback, hold themselves accountable, remain calm under pressure, listen attentively, and solve problems creatively. These qualities foster seamless, efficient, and productive work processes, which positively impact the performance of both the manager and their team.

Managerial performance is a critical aspect of any business or organization, as managers' performance directly influences the organization's overall success. In today's complex business environment, effective managerial performance can foster a culture of innovation, lead teams to achieve high levels of performance and job satisfaction and adapt to changing market conditions. It can lead to efficient cost management and increased profitability and ensures that products and services meet or exceed customer expectations, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kpurunee, 2023; Shaon & Rahman, 2015). Effective management also ensures that resources are utilized efficiently and effectively, maximizing the organization's productivity and ensuring that goals are met, leading to organizational success and growth (Zeb-Obipi, 2015).

Several studies have established that an organization's creativity and success are chiefly influenced by the activities and actions of a manager (Shafique, Ahmad & Kalyar, 2020; García-Morales, Lloréns-Montes & Verdú-Jover, 2008; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). Accordingly, managers are responsible for setting the vision and direction of their teams, motivating and inspiring their employees, and making decisions that will impact the bottom line. They oversee teams and individuals, and their performance has a significant impact on the productivity and morale of employees. They make critical decisions regarding the allocation of resources, including finances, personnel, and time, and they strike a balance between achieving short-term targets and long-term goals while ensuring the well-being and motivation of workers, and with their techno-managerial capacity, there is proper management of the organization. However, the lack of these attributes can potentially be seen as leadership inertia in the workplace, ultimately impeding public organizations from adapting to change.

Leadership inertia refers to the resistance or slow response to necessary changes within an organization, often due to entrenched leadership practices, beliefs, or structures. A leader's unwillingness to embrace new ideas, technologies, or approaches can stifle creativity and hinder the organization's ability to stay competitive. It can also impede the ability to create a conducive work environment, allocate resources effectively, communicate a clear vision, and maintain a motivated workforce. As a result, it has posed several detrimental effects, including organizational stagnation, decreased competitiveness, inefficient resource utilization, unclear organizational direction, high turnover, and low employee morale. It can also result in a negative organizational culture, customer dissatisfaction, legal and compliance issues, risk of financial loss, reduced innovation, and loss of market share. Kpurunee (2023) and Shadraconis (2013) opine that failing to adapt and meet changing customer needs and market trends can result in a loss of market share to competitors who are more responsive to these changes. Thus, organizations must recognize the importance of promoting proactive leadership, as it can enhance managerial performance and overall success. This paper, therefore, aims to explore the relationship between leadership inertia and managerial performance. To fulfill this aim, the study objectives are to:

i. Examine the relationship between leadership inertia and managerial efficiency.
ii. Ascertain the relationship between leadership inertia and managerial effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework

The study investigates the relationship among two variables. Leadership inertia (predictor variable) and managerial performance (criterion variable) with two dimensions (managerial efficiency and managerial effectiveness). The relationships between these variables are illustrated in the conceptual framework (figure 1.1) as shown below.

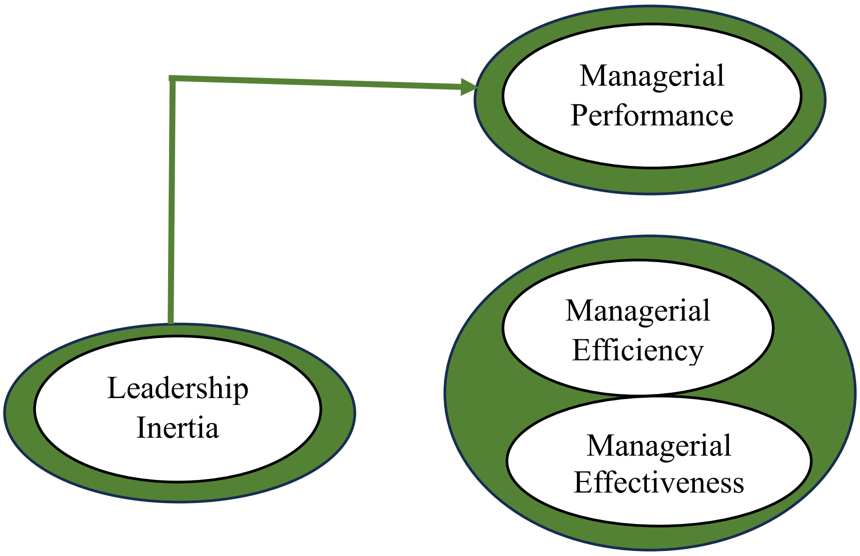

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework on the Relationship between Leadership Inertia and Managerial Performance.
Source: **Conceptualized by the Researchers (2025).**

Literature Review
Theoretical Foundation
This study is pertinent to Kurt Lewin's change management model and John Kotter's eight-step change model, to understand how inertia in leadership affects the successful implementation of change initiatives and, consequently, managerial performance.
According to Hussain, Lei, Akram, Haider, Hussain & Ali (2018), change is a necessity for growing organizations in a highly competitive business environment, and Lewin change management model is widely accepted for implementing change. Kurt Lewin's model stands as one of the initial foundational models for planned change, elucidating the opposing forces that seek to uphold the existing state and those advocating for change (Lewin, 1951). Lewin's change management model describes the process of change in three stages. It is often represented as a three-stage process: unfreezing (creating a sense of urgency for change and motivating self or people to leave the current state of equilibrium); changing (implementing the desired change); and refreezing (stabilizing the new change and making it the new norm). At times in organizations, there is resistance or reluctance among leaders to embrace and drive change initiatives which significantly impact the successful implementation of change and, subsequently, managerial performance. Lewin's model therefore enforces three stages to change. In the unfreezing stage, leaders are required to break down existing mindsets and create a sense of urgency for change; during the changing stage, leaders need to actively champion and implement the proposed changes; and in the refreezing stage, leaders play a crucial role in reinforcing and institutionalizing the changes. Hence, the theory can be used to guide managers through the process of implementing change in a way that is effective and sustainable.
John Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (create a sense of urgency; build a guiding coalition; form a strategic vision and initiatives; enlist a volunteer army; enable action by removing barriers; generate short-term wins; sustain acceleration; institute change**)** provides a systematic approach to managing and leading change initiatives. Kotter emphasizes the importance of establishing a compelling reason for change. This involves creating awareness among stakeholders about the need for change and building a sense of urgency. Forming a coalition of

influential individuals with diverse skills and backgrounds that have the credibility and authority to drive change forward is crucial for leading the change effort. More so, developing a clear and concise vision for the future state of the organization after the change is a necessity. It serves as a guide for decision-making and provides a sense of direction. Kotter puts it that Identifying and eliminating obstacles that may hinder the implementation of the change in an organization is necessary and involves addressing structural, cultural, or procedural barriers that could impede progress. It is also necessary or crucial to celebrate quick wins and achievements to demonstrate progress and build confidence among stakeholders. These victories create positive momentum, boost morale, and reinforce the belief that the change is feasible and beneficial. Hence, it is important to drive change by reinforcing new behaviors, systems, and practices, and as well, make change a permanent part of the organization.

Leadership Inertia

Leadership inertia is a state where leaders are unable or unwilling to adapt, make effective decisions and provide a clear vision for the organization. It leads to organizational stagnation where processes, systems, and structures remain the same despite changing external conditions (Moradi, Jafari, Doorbash & Mirzaei, 2021). Over time, inertia can have long-term negative consequences for an organization as it results in reduced innovation, declining market share, financial instability and poor performance. It can be caused by several factors that include leader overconfidence, the fear of change and organizational culture. Cultures that are resistant to change or that value conformity can make it difficult for leaders to be innovative and to take risks. More so, cultures that do not value learning or that do not reward experimentation can contribute to leadership inertia; and Inertia within an organization results in complacency and a lack of responsiveness to changing market dynamics (Vafeas & Hughes, 2021). When leaders are inertia-prone, they fail to identify and capitalize on new opportunities in the market; and the failure to do so often results in losing a competitive edge, as other organizations seize those opportunities and gain market share. This missed potential for growth and innovation can negatively impact the organization's bottom line. Employees may become demotivated and frustrated when they see their leaders not taking proactive steps to improve the organization. This can lead to decreased morale and productivity within the workforce. It can also lead to a loss of relevance and decreased market share which can eventually impact the organization's financial performance and growth prospects. Huang Lai, Lin & Chen (2013) in research titled “Overcoming organizational inertia for strengthening business model innovation and open innovation perspective”, investigated small and medium-sized enterprises in Taiwan, and one of the findings indicated the adverse impact of organizational inertia on the implementation of open innovation within the organization.

Leadership inertia can erode trust in the management team, as employees and stakeholders may lose confidence in the ability of the leaders to guide the organization effectively. Contemporary research has shown that the perception of threat and opportunity is the optimum drive for organizations to overcome leadership inertia (AlKayid, Selem, Shehata & Tan, 2023; König, Graf-Vlachy & Schöberl, 2021). Perceived threats such as technological disruptions, changes in market dynamics, competitive pressures, or regulatory shifts can create a sense of urgency and necessity for change in the workplace. These perceptions of threat trigger a defensive response, pushing organizations to reevaluate their strategies, structures, and leadership approaches. Therefore, the sure way to overcome leadership inertia within an organization is for leaders to have a clear and compelling vision for the future of the organization, model positive behavior in the workplace, embrace change and believe that it is necessary and urgent, encourage open communication, foster a culture of innovation and be open to new ideas.

Managerial Performance

The concept of managerial performance is central to the success of any organization as it is a crucial aspect of organizational success, encompassing the effectiveness of a manager within an organization. Managerial performance encompasses the skills, behaviours, and outcomes that contribute to a manager's ability to lead effectively and achieve organizational goals. A manager can achieve organizational goals by efficiently and effectively utilizing available resources, making informed decisions, and leading their teams to peak performance. Aguinis, (2013) puts it that managerial performance is the degree to which a manager achieves organizational goals and objectives, while also developing and motivating the employees. Hit, Carnes & Xu, (2016) say it is the degree to which a manager contributes to the overall success of the organization. Tactically, managerial performance is the extent to which a manager uses his resources and skills to achieve organizational goals and objectives, while also maintaining a positive and productive work environment. It can also be regarded as the effectiveness, competence, and achievements of a manager within an organization; and encompasses his ability to strategize, coordinate, lead, and control diverse facets of responsibilities to achieve organizational goals and objectives. At the core of performance, it is expected that managers' abilities align with their efforts and those of their team with the broader organizational objectives. This involves understanding the mission, vision, and strategic goals of the organization and working towards their accomplishment. Critically, managers need to inspire, motivate, and guide their teams by understanding their strengths and weaknesses, fostering a positive work culture, promoting teamwork, and providing the necessary support and resources. This study therefore measures managerial performance by examining dimensions such as managerial efficiency and managerial effectiveness, as discussed in the following sections.

Managerial Efficiency

This is the effectiveness and productivity with which a manager utilizes resources to achieve organizational goals. It involves the ability of a manager to make optimal use of available resources, including time, money, human capital, and technology, to accomplish tasks and objectives efficiently. According to Brogan (2003) and Svirina (2010), managerial efficiency is measured through value-based management which emphasizes that the main measuring instrument is shareholder value. It entails the ability of a manager to achieve organizational goals with minimal resource input. Efficient managers are adept at allocating resources effectively by optimizing the use of financial resources, ensuring that budgets are well-managed, and avoiding unnecessary expenses. They recognize the value of time and strive to use it wisely; they prioritize tasks, set realistic deadlines, and ensure that work is completed promptly, avoiding procrastination, minimizing time spent on non-essential activities, and focusing on high-priority tasks. According to Cho & Lee (2019), managerial efficiency is a measure of how well a manager can use the resources at their disposal (such as time, money, and people) to produce desired outcomes. It is reflected in the ability to achieve high levels of productivity and output. This involves setting clear expectations, establishing efficient workflows, and removing obstacles that may hinder the completion of tasks. Efficient managers aim for optimal output with minimal input. More so, efficient managers understand the importance of delegation, and as such, they delegate tasks to individuals based on their skills and competencies, empowering team members to take ownership of specific responsibilities. A prevailing notion in management for the past century has been that "If you can measure it, you can manage it" (Svirina, 2010). Hence, it is the responsibility of the manager to efficiently manage organizational resources for success.

Managerial Effectiveness

Managerial effectiveness is crucial in organizational success as it plays a pivotal role in optimizing resources, achieving goals, and fostering a positive work environment. It encompasses a range of skills, traits, and practices that enable managers to lead teams effectively and contribute to overall organizational success. According to Sen and Saxena (1999), managerial effectiveness is a product of the collaborative synergy achieved by individual managers within the organization. Effective managers continuously evaluate and streamline processes to eliminate inefficiencies by adopting new technologies, redesigning workflows, and implementing best practices, as these contribute to smoother operations and increased overall efficiency. Effectiveness is perceived as a product that a manager generates by adeptly handling a situation, achieving desired outcomes, and meeting targets across all facets of organizational activities. Enhancing the productivity of any organization entails skillfully managing three dimensions of management: the technical, conceptual, and human aspects.

Extant literature reviewed that managerial effectiveness has been studied with three perspectives that include – traditional/conventional perspectives, organizational level competency-based perspective, and an individual level competency-based perspective (Rastogi & Dave, 2004). The traditional/conventional model emphasizes the ability to set and achieve goals (Bartol & Martin 1999) which implies that managerial effectiveness leads to organizational effectiveness (Rastogi & Dave, 2004). It emphasizes the capacity to establish and attain objectives, suggesting that managerial effectiveness is a precursor to organizational effectiveness. More so, according to the model, the ability of managers to set and achieve goals is considered integral to ensuring the overall effectiveness of the organization.

The organizational-level competency-based model suggests a forward-looking perspective that considers both external and internal factors influencing the organization over the long term. Through these analyses, a vision for the organization's future is formulated, goals are established to realize this vision, and plans are devised or developed to accomplish these strategic objectives. In this process, the organization endeavors to shape the system and environment by leveraging the skills and characteristics of managers, guiding them toward the accomplishment of strategic intents.

The individual competency-based approach to managerial effectiveness centers on the individual rather than the organization. This approach aims to cultivate transferable (generic) management skills that are intended to be versatile and adaptable, capable of being applied in various contexts, both domestically and internationally. By emphasizing the cultivation of transferable skills, managers are equipped with a skill set that is not only effective within the specific organizational environment but also has broader applicability. When organizations employ this approach to managerial effectiveness, several outcomes and benefits including enhanced managerial skills, global competence, versatility and adaptability, and increased organizational agility, may arise. As managers become more adaptable and versatile, the organization can benefit from increased agility; and the ability to respond effectively to changing circumstances is crucial in today's dynamic business environment (Waripanye, Zeb-Obipi & Kpurunee, 2023).

Leadership Inertia and Managerial Performance

Leadership inertia can have a direct impact on managerial performance. In rapidly changing environments, organizations need leaders who can make timely decisions, implement changes, and steer the organization toward success. In contrast, leaders displaying inertia may contribute to a decline in managerial performance, making it difficult for the organization to remain competitive. Several authors agree that leadership inertia contributes to declining performance and can be a key driver for change (Ashok, Al Badi Al Dhaheri, Madan & Dzandu, 2021; Tripsas and Gavetti, 2017). It plays a critical role in resisting necessary changes to business models or strategies. Conversely, successful organizational transformations often involve leaders who recognize the need for change, mobilize support, and overcome inertia to drive performance improvements.

Managers may become entrenched in their leadership styles and methods, fearing that any deviation could disrupt established routines and processes. Perhaps, this resistance hinders the organization's ability to adapt to external changes, such as technological advancements, market shifts, or global economic trends. Inertia also leads to a lack of innovation within the organization; and managers who are resistant to change may be less open to new ideas, technologies, or methodologies that could enhance performance and competitiveness (Moradi, Jafari, Doorbash & Mirzaei, 2021). Gilbert (2005) identified two categories of organizational inertia: resource inflexibility, denoting the organization's inability to modify resource allocation patterns, and routine inflexibility, suggesting a lack of change in organizational processes and the methodologies for utilizing invested resources.

Innovative thinking is crucial in today's dynamic business environment, and leadership inertia can stifle creativity and the pursuit of novel solutions. Many a time, employees in organizations look to leaders for guidance and inspiration (Zeb-Obipi, Nwikiabeh & Kpurunee, 2023). If leaders display inertia, employees may perceive a lack of vision and direction. This, as a result, lowers morale among the workforce and brings about stagnation and a feeling that the organization is not keeping pace with industry trends or addressing emerging challenges. Therefore, every organization desire effective leadership for the growth and sustainability of their firm; and effective leadership requires adaptability and resilience. Thus, managers who are open to change can more effectively guide their teams through challenges, demonstrating a capacity to learn and evolve.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper critically explores the relationship between leadership inertia and managerial performance in public organizations in Nigeria. It reveals that leadership inertia, characterized by resistance to change, a lack of innovation, and delayed decision-making, significantly undermines managerial performance, thereby impeding the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations in Nigeria. Leadership inertia remains a significant barrier to managerial performance in Nigerian public institutions. The persistence of outdated leadership styles, resistance to change, and a lack of accountability have stifled innovation, efficiency, and service delivery. Therefore, this study highlights the urgent need for transformative leadership practices that prioritize strategic vision, responsiveness, and performance-driven management. These are essential for revitalizing the public sector and improving organizational outcomes in Nigeria.

Consequently, it is recommended that organizations should:

i. Conduct regular performance evaluations for managers and enforce accountability.
ii. Encourage openness to change and proactive problem-solving.
iii. Foster a culture of innovation and empower employees.
iv. Invest in continuous leadership development and training.
v. Engage external experts to gain new perspectives and strategic advice.

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