



Leadership Styles and Organizational Change in Nigeria's Public and Private Sectors: A Study of Delta State University and PremiumTrust Bank

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Publication Date: 2025/11/28

Abstract

Leadership significantly influences organizational transformation in Nigeria, as both public and private sectors encounter socio-economic, political, and technological challenges. This research investigates the impact of leadership styles on organizational change at Delta State University (DELSU) and PremiumTrust Bank during the period from 2021 to 2025. Influenced by New Public Management and Contingency Theory, the study employs a qualitative comparative case study framework, examining secondary data from institutional reports, policy documents, peer-reviewed research, and reliable media outlets through thematic content analysis. Results show that DELSU utilizes transformational and participative leadership styles, fostering employee involvement and incremental cultural shifts within bureaucratic limitations. In contrast, PremiumTrust Bank, led by Dr. Emmanuel Efe Emefienim, employs transformational, adaptable, and digitally-focused leadership, facilitating swift technological adoption, structural changes, adherence to regulations, and competitive advancement. The research emphasizes that the effectiveness of leadership relies on its context, affecting how quickly and in what way change occurs. Suggestions involve promoting participatory-transformational leadership in public sectors and adopting adaptable, digitally-focused leadership in private entities to boost innovation and improve operational effectiveness. This study enhances comprehension of how leadership influences organizational change in Nigeria by offering a sector-specific comparative view, stressing the importance of harmony between leadership style, institutional setting, and environmental requirements.

Keywords: *Leadership Styles, Organizational Change, Transformational Leadership, Public and Private Sectors, Digital Leadership, Delta State University & PremiumTrust Bank.*

Introduction

Leadership serves as a key catalyst for organizational change in Nigeria, where institutions function amid unstable socio-economic environments, political influence, and growing pressures for technological integration. Nigerian research indicates that transformational leadership, especially via personal attention and cognitive encouragement, boosts employee dedication and organizational flexibility (Ohaegbulem et al., 2024; Nwibere, 2023). In manufacturing companies, leadership style influences the effect of digital transformation on worker productivity, highlighting the importance of leaders who merge technological insight with people-oriented strategies (Laoye, 2025). Likewise, research on the reorganization of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) into NNPC Limited indicates that

democratic and transformational leadership styles are essential for enhancing transparency, accountability, and operational effectiveness amid significant reforms (Igwe, Orovwiro & Okwurume, 2025; Laguo et al., 2021). In the public sector, obstacles like bureaucratic stagnation, insufficient institutional capacity, and inadequate leadership development continue to hinder sustainable change (Abasilim, Durojaiye & Gberville, 2022).

Even with these contributions, there remains a lack of comparative analysis regarding how leadership influences organizational change in Nigeria's public and private sectors. Public organizations frequently encounter limitations due to established bureaucracy and political influence, whereas private companies experience fierce market rivalry and a drive to innovate. Current studies often

analyze each sector separately, resulting in a lack of insight into how leadership practices vary, intersect, or may be applied across different areas. This research tackles that gap by thoroughly analyzing leadership styles—especially transformational and digital leadership—within public and private sectors in Nigeria, emphasizing how contextual factors influence change processes and pinpointing avenues for encouraging lasting organizational transformation.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. explore how leadership styles shape organizational change processes in Delta State University and PremiumTrust Bank between 2021 and 2025.
2. analyze the similarities and differences in leadership practices influencing employee commitment and institutional transformation across Nigeria's public and private sectors.

Research Questions

1. How do leadership styles shape organizational change in Delta State University and PremiumTrust Bank during 2021–2025?
2. What are the similarities and differences in leadership practices affecting employee commitment and institutional transformation in Nigeria's public and private sectors, and what ways can these be improved?

Scope, Delimitation, and Justification

This research explores leadership and organizational transformation at Delta State University (DELSU) and PremiumTrust Bank from 2021 to 2025. DELSU demonstrates leadership in a bureaucratic, policy-oriented setting, whereas PremiumTrust Bank, a rapidly expanding private organization, exemplifies how transformational leadership fosters digital innovation and expansion. The emphasis is on how leadership approaches—especially transformational, distributed, and digital—impact reforms, technology adoption, employee engagement, and organizational culture. This research is restricted to these two organizations and does not encompass all universities, banks, or national economic strategies. The selection is supported by their differing contexts: DELSU offers perspectives on leadership in public higher education, whereas PremiumTrust Bank emphasizes leadership in a competitive private industry. Combined, they provide a comprehensive perspective on how leaders navigate change in Nigeria's shifting socio-economic and technological environment.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Leadership and Organizational Change

Leadership and organizational change are intricately connected, with leadership serving as a key factor in influencing organizational direction, employee conduct, and institutional flexibility. Worldwide, leadership is characterized not just by the use of authority but as a relational process that inspires individuals to work towards common objectives in dynamic situations (Bourne, 2017). Nigerian scholarship supports this view, highlighting that leadership is crucial for organizational success, particularly when socio-political factors and institutional shortcomings hinder managerial results (Mukoro, 2021). In this regard, leadership is both situational and fluid, necessitating harmony between approach, context, and organizational requirements.

Organizational change, conversely, is viewed as the intentional alteration of structures, processes, cultures, or technologies within organizations to address internal demands or external disruptions. Researchers like Okereka and Okolie (2022) observe that in Nigeria's public sector, change typically relates to reforms intended to tackle inefficiency, whereas in private companies, it is associated with innovation, competitiveness, and survival in unstable markets. Change can be gradual—small enhancements in processes—or transformational, entailing profound alterations in culture and strategy. In both instances, leadership influences whether change initiatives are accepted or opposed.

Significantly, in Nigeria, the understanding of leadership and change cannot be separated from the country's institutional context. The public sector, characterized by bureaucracy, political influence, and restricted accountability, frequently undergoes gradual change that depends significantly on consensus and authoritative directives (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021). On the other hand, the private sector flourishes through agility, with leaders required to embrace innovative and transformative strategies to maintain growth in the face of intense competition, especially in technology-focused fields such as banking and telecommunications (Okereka & Denedo, 2023). Therefore, leadership and organizational change, although universal concepts, appear distinctly in Nigerian settings, highlighting the necessity of sector-specific evaluation.

Leadership as the Independent Variable

Leadership, as the independent factor, significantly influences the direction and effectiveness of organizational change. Leadership theories emphasize various styles, yet their applicability frequently relies on the context. Transformational leadership, highlighting vision, inspiration, and motivation, has been broadly acknowledged as essential for fostering commitment and innovation throughout change processes (Peng et al., 2020). In

Nigeria, Okereka and Denedo (2023) empirically illustrated this at Delta State University, Abraka, revealing that transformational leadership practices greatly improve employee productivity, organizational commitment, and behavioral alignment—elements that are essential for effective change.

In addition to transformational leadership, participatory and distributed approaches have gained more support within Nigeria's public administration research. Mukoro (2021) posits that collective accountability and collaborative decision-making enhance institutional responsiveness, especially in bureaucratic environments where centralized control frequently hampers innovation. In a similar vein, Okereka and Aliogo (2022) noted that engaging employees in leadership decisions in the Delta State Public Service enhanced organizational productivity and diminished resistance to change efforts. These results correspond with global views, like the distributed leadership model by Jones and Harvey (2017), yet are unique to the Nigerian setting where hierarchical frameworks frequently obstruct widespread involvement.

An additional facet of leadership that is becoming more significant in Nigeria is digital and adaptive leadership. Due to the emergence of fintech, cashless policy changes, and digital transformation post-COVID, leaders in the private sector—especially within banking—must demonstrate agility, digital competence, and ethical awareness in driving change (Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023). PremiumTrust Bank, which received its license from the Central Bank of Nigeria in December 2021 and began operations in April 2022, illustrates this reality as a newcomer facing fierce competition and technological changes in the banking sector (Independent, 2022). Its rise demonstrates that leadership must strike a balance between regulatory adherence, swift innovation, and customer-centric strategies to stay competitive. This illustrates Mark and Erude's (2023) contingency assertion that effective leadership in change management relies on matching leadership strategies with situational requirements.

Grasping leadership in Nigeria acts as a driving force for organizational transformation, with research indicating that transformational, participatory, and adaptive approaches improve change results in various sectors. However, difficulties continue when leadership is transactional or authoritarian, frequently leading to pushback, weak commitment, and less than ideal change results. Comprehending leadership as the independent variable necessitates not only acknowledgment of leadership theories but also appreciation of Nigeria's unique institutional characteristics and changing socio-economic environment.

Leadership and Organizational Change in Nigeria

Leadership continues to be crucial in influencing the results of organizational change within Nigeria's public and private sectors. Contingency theorists contend that the effectiveness of leadership hinges on the match between organizational circumstances and management approaches, particularly in environments characterized by uncertainty and intricacy (Mark & Erude, 2023). In Nigerian universities, transformational leadership has been associated with staff dedication and institutional efficiency, emphasizing the significance of visionary leadership in facilitating lasting change (Okereka, 2021). Likewise, Mukoro (2017) highlights that participatory leadership enhances responsiveness and accountability, allowing institutions to adjust to changing governance and management challenges.

In the banking sector, Adeosun (2020) shows that leadership style greatly affects innovation and employee performance, with transformational leadership being especially potent in fostering adaptive capacity. Onyeneke and Abe (2021) additionally demonstrate that leadership focused on change improves employee acceptance of reforms, bolstering organizational preparedness for transformation. In contrast, transactional leadership has faced criticism for securing immediate compliance while failing to promote lasting transformation (Leo & Wickenberg, 2013). The increasing importance of digital leadership demands consideration as well. Eneh (2022) notes that Nigerian banks are progressively depending on leaders who possess technological foresight and the ability to adapt in order to manage digital transformation. This corresponds with international research indicating that artificial intelligence and digital technologies are transforming leader-follower relationships (Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023). PremiumTrust Bank, launched in April 2022, has established itself as a tech-focused institution, leveraging innovation and strategic leadership to enhance market entry and expansion (Independent, 2022). These findings strengthen the claim that leadership approaches and tactics directly affect the effectiveness of organizational change, especially in Nigeria's fast-paced banking and higher education sectors.

The Leadership–Change Nexus

Leadership is a critical factor in how organizations manage, execute, and uphold change. In Nigeria, where government bodies frequently face bureaucratic inflexibility and private firms function in intensely competitive settings, leadership approaches greatly affect staff preparedness,

dedication, and the enduring success of change efforts (Mark & Erude, 2023).

Leadership Influence on Organizational Change

Transformational leadership, characterized by an inspiring vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, has repeatedly been linked to enhanced employee motivation and successful organizational change (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021). In contrast, transactional and authoritarian approaches, while effective for securing prompt compliance, often impede creativity and the sustainability of change over time (Leo & Wickenberg, 2013). Strategies for distributed and participatory leadership that foster inclusion and shared decision-making reduce resistance and increase ownership of change, particularly in bureaucratic settings (Mukoro, 2017).

Case Study: Delta State University (DELSU) and PremiumTrust Bank

Transformational and participatory leadership approaches at Delta State University (DELSU) have played a crucial role in fostering institutional change in a bureaucratic setting. Okereka (2021) discovered that leaders who effectively communicate visions and engage staff in decision-making boost employees' sense of ownership regarding reforms, diminish resistance, and improve commitment. Participatory frameworks at DELSU have demonstrated enhancements in responsiveness, productivity, and overall institutional efficiency (Okereka & Aliogo, 2021). In the private sector, PremiumTrust Bank demonstrates the influence of leadership in a fast-changing, competitive environment. With Dr. Emmanuel Efe Emefienim at the helm, the bank has reached significant milestones, such as timely adherence to the Central Bank of Nigeria's ₦200 billion minimum capital threshold, swift asset expansion, and noteworthy profit surges (Alagbe, 2025; Premium Times, 2025; BusinessDay, 2025). Dr. Emefienim's leadership merges transformational, adaptive, and digital-focused strategies, prioritizing strategic vision, operational efficiency, innovation, and employee involvement (Eneh, 2022; Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023). This demonstrates that leadership needs to be customized to specific industry contexts to successfully facilitate organizational change.

Leadership and Organizational Culture

Both DELSU and PremiumTrust Bank illustrate that the effectiveness of leadership is strongly linked to the culture of the organization. At DELSU, promoting involvement, interaction, and communication within bureaucratic limitations has improved employees' preparedness for both gradual and transformative reforms (Okereka, 2021;

Onyeneke & Abe, 2021). At PremiumTrust Bank, fostering a culture of responsibility, teamwork, and technological flexibility has facilitated swift change and competitive advantage, highlighting the significance of culture-aligned leadership in private entities.

Comprehending the experiences of DELSU and PremiumTrust Bank supports the tenets of contingency theory: the efficacy of leadership relies on the interaction among organizational context, sector demands, and the characteristics of change initiatives (Mark & Erude, 2023). Transformational and participative leadership styles are successful in managing bureaucratic public entities, while transformational, adaptive, and digital-focused strategies—like those demonstrated by Dr. Emefienim—are crucial for attaining swift, sustainable progress in private sector companies. Collectively, these instances highlight the essential importance of leadership in influencing organizational preparedness, dedication, and sustained success amid times of transition.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes New Public Management (NPM) and Contingency Theory to analyze leadership and organizational transformation in Nigeria's public and private sectors. NPM, based on reforming public administration, highlights the importance of efficiency, accountability, decentralization, and incorporating private-sector methods within public organizations (Adebayo, 2014; Ezeani, 2015). Its significance is in elucidating current reform initiatives in Nigerian universities like Delta State University, where bureaucratic limitations require more results-driven leadership. Simultaneously, the concepts of NPM align with private entities like PremiumTrust Bank, where competitiveness, customer orientation, and outcome-focused strategies are essential for ongoing success and expansion.

Alongside NPM, Contingency Theory argues that the effectiveness of leadership relies on the alignment between leadership style, organizational culture, and situational requirements (Fiedler, 1967). In Nigeria, Mark and Erude (2023) suggest that contingency theory offers a useful perspective for comprehending how institutional environments influence leadership results, especially in contexts with differing objectives and resources like universities and banks. Through the integration of NPM and Contingency Theory, this research places leadership within the frameworks of reform and efficiency as well as the contextual factors that shape leaders' impact on organizational change. This twofold framework enables an equitable comparative evaluation of DELSU and PremiumTrust Bank from 2021 to 2025.

**Conceptual Framework: Leadership and Organizational Change in Nigeria
(NPM + Contingency Theory)**

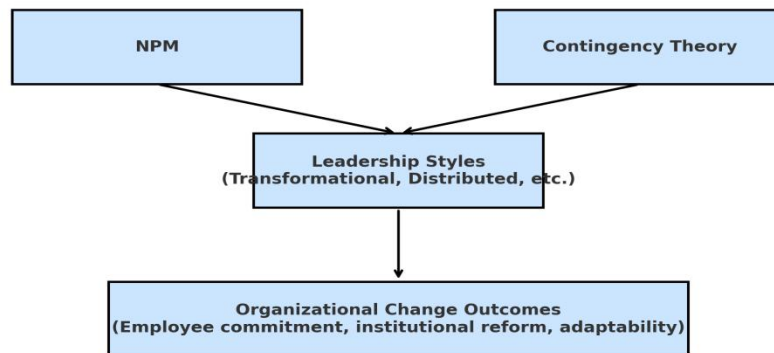


Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Leadership and Organizational Change in Nigeria (NPM & Contingency Theory). *Authors design.*

Gaps in the Literature

Although the current literature offers important perspectives on leadership and organizational change in Nigeria, there are still significant gaps, especially concerning the comparative dynamics of public and private sectors. The majority of Nigerian research emphasizes only public entities, including universities and ministries (e.g., Okereka, 2021; Okereka & Aliogo, 2021), or private sectors, like banks (Eneh, 2022; Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023). There is a scarcity of empirical studies that concurrently investigate both sectors to pinpoint similar and different patterns of leadership impact on change results. Limited research has focused on the timeframe of 2021–2025, which holds particular importance because of post-COVID recovery, digital transformation, and regulatory changes. This time has experienced significant changes in organizational frameworks, technology integration, and employee involvement strategies, but the research has not adequately addressed how leadership approaches have evolved in response to these developments. Despite the individual examination of transformational, transactional, distributed, and digital leadership styles (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021; Eneh, 2022; Mukoro, 2017), research connecting particular leadership styles to quantifiable change outcomes in various institutional settings in Nigeria remains limited. The significance of digital leadership in driving swift change in private sector banks such as PremiumTrust Bank is well established, yet equivalent comparative evaluations in public institutions are mostly lacking. Current research frequently focuses on structural or procedural elements of change management, while paying little regard to psychological factors like employee attitudes, readiness, and commitment (Okereka,

2021; Onyeneke & Abe, 2021). These human factors are essential, particularly in bureaucratic public organizations where opposition to change is a frequent issue.

Research Method

This study utilizes a qualitative, comparative case study approach to analyze the impact of leadership on organizational change within Nigerian public and private sector entities, concentrating on Delta State University (DELSU) and PremiumTrust Bank. It depends solely on secondary sources such as organizational reports, policy documents, published research, and trustworthy media reports to investigate leadership practices, institutional culture, and outcomes of change (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data are examined through thematic content analysis, pinpointing essential patterns and themes concerning leadership styles and their influence on organizational change. A comparative perspective emphasizes variations and commonalities across sectors, especially in how transformational, participatory, and digital/adaptive leadership methods either promote or hinder change efforts. The research maintains rigor and reliability by utilizing peer-reviewed sources and official institutional documents to create a cohesive, evidence-driven comprehension of the leadership–change relationship in Nigeria (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings and Discussion

The examination of secondary data from Delta State University (DELSU) and PremiumTrust Bank uncovers clear trends in the influence of leadership styles on organizational change in both public and private sectors in Nigeria. Through thematic content analysis, three key themes were identified:

leadership approaches, results of organizational change, and sectoral differences.

Leadership Strategies and Practices

At DELSU, leadership mainly focuses on transformational and participatory approaches, highlighting teamwork, communication, and staff engagement in decision-making activities. Okereka (2021) along with Okereka and Aliogo (2021) suggest that these methods enhance employee dedication, lessen opposition, and facilitate gradual changes within the limits of bureaucratic frameworks. Conversely, PremiumTrust Bank represents a blend of transformational, adaptive, and digitally-focused leadership guided by Dr. Emmanuel Efe Emefienim. Reports suggest that Dr. Emefienim's strategic vision, focus on technology integration, and people-oriented management have propelled swift operational changes, ensured regulatory adherence—including satisfying the CBN ₦200 billion capital requirement—and improved organizational competitiveness (Eneh, 2022; Premium Times, 2025; Alagbe, 2025). This comparison highlights that the effectiveness of leadership depends on the sectoral context, in line with contingency theory (Mark & Erude, 2023).

Organizational Change Outcomes

The results show that the style of leadership directly influences the character and effectiveness of organizational change. At DELSU, participatory and transformational leadership enabled gradual and cultural changes, enhancing staff involvement and responsiveness despite institutional constraints. In contrast, the leadership at PremiumTrust Bank encouraged swift structural and technological transformations, nurturing agility, innovation, and trust among stakeholders. These results demonstrate the relationship between leadership behaviors and organizational culture, emphasizing that successful leadership needs to adjust to institutional limitations and market requirements (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021; Eneh, 2022).

Sectoral Differences and Consequences

The comparison shows distinct differences among sectors. Public sector entities, limited by red tape and political supervision, depend on inclusive, people-focused leadership to implement lasting change. Private sector companies, encountering competitive and regulatory challenges, gain from strong, adaptable, and digitally proficient leadership to facilitate swift transformation. These findings strengthen the idea that leadership cannot be one-size-fits-all; its effectiveness relies on the context, necessitating harmony with organizational objectives, employee anticipations, and external influences (Mukoro, 2017; Mark & Erude, 2023)

Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

Combining these insights with existing research indicates that leadership style is not only procedural but also strategic and psychological, affecting both structural reforms and employee perceptions of change. Transformational and participatory leadership foster ownership and preparedness in bureaucratic settings, whereas adaptive and digital-focused leadership allows for competitive agility in changing conditions. Collectively, these perspectives foster a detailed comprehension of the leadership–change connection in Nigeria, filling voids in comparative sector research and offering empirical backing for contingency-oriented leadership theory.

Conclusion

Leadership plays a crucial role in driving organizational change within Nigerian institutions. Transformational and participatory leadership at DELSU improved employee involvement and supported gradual reforms, whereas transformational, adaptive, and digitally-focused leadership at PremiumTrust Bank allowed for swift, technology-led changes and adherence to regulations. These results emphasize that the effectiveness of leadership relies on the context (Mark & Erude, 2023; Onyeneke & Abe, 2021).

Recommendations

The following are policy recommendations for the study:

1. Public Sector: Cultivate leaders possessing transformational and participatory abilities to enhance employee involvement and decrease bureaucratic opposition.
2. Private Sector: Embrace flexible and digital-driven leadership to foster innovation, responsiveness, and adherence in competitive landscapes.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study offers comparative perspectives on leadership and organizational transformation in Nigeria, illustrating how leadership styles specific to sectors influence the effectiveness of change efforts and highlighting the necessity of aligning leadership approaches with organizational context.

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