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Leadership Styles and Organizational Performance: A Case Study of Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters

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Abstract

This study sought to examine the impact of leadership styles on organizational performance, particularly in Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters. The objectives were to identify the impact of democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles on organizational performance. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, collecting data from 36 respondents using self-administered questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. The study found a positive and significant relationship between democratic leadership style and organizational performance. Similarly, there was a significant positive correlation between autocratic leadership style and organizational performance, as well as a positive significant relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and organizational performance. Based on these findings, the study recommended that leaders implement regular team meetings, one-on-one sessions, and anonymous suggestion mechanisms, including digital platforms, to encourage employees to share their thoughts without fear of reprisal. Leaders should also foster creativity, innovation, and employee engagement, as an overly autocratic style can stifle creativity, lower morale, and increase turnover. Leadership training programs should equip managers with skills to assess different situations and adapt their leadership style accordingly, ensuring that every team member understands their role, project goals, and expected outcomes.

Key words: Democratic, Autocratic, Laissez faire, leadership style, performance District Local Government.

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Introduction

The role of leaders in ensuring high organizational performance cannot be overemphasized. Effective planning and organization of work are also crucial to organizational success. Some researchers argue that the main problems affecting organizational performance in Ugandan businesses and other institutions are poor work attitudes among the labor force, inefficiency, and ineffective leadership (Goleman, 2000). Another perspective suggests that organizations in Uganda are managed in ways that conflict with typical Ugandan cultural practices. In response, management practitioners in Nigeria and elsewhere have conducted studies to establish the relationship between effective leadership and organizational performance, with some finding a positive correlation while others present differing views (Usoro, 2000).

In the early 20th century, leadership studies focused on trait theory, which emphasized that certain individuals were born to lead. In 1939, Kurt Lewin and colleagues proposed three leadership styles commonly exhibited in organizations: autocratic, where leaders retain decision-making power without consultation; democratic, where leaders adopt a participative approach; and laissez-faire, where leaders have minimal involvement in decision-making. Max Weber proposed charismatic authority, later expanded by House (1976) with the theory of charismatic leadership. Fred Fiedler introduced contingency leadership, arguing that no single leadership style guarantees the best performance, as effectiveness depends on the situation. Rensis Likert (1967) proposed participatory leadership, while Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard developed situational leadership. Robert Greenleaf introduced servant leadership in 1970, James McGregor Burns and Bernard Bass proposed transformational leadership in 1978, and authentic leadership was introduced by Bruce Avolio in 2008.

These leadership styles affect organizational performance differently, depending on how they are applied. Research indicates that the leadership style of administrative supervisors significantly impacts organizational performance (Sun, 2002). This study specifically focuses on Kurt Lewin's three leadership styles autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire and their effects on organizational performance.

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Employees are vital assets of any organization, serving as the "vehicles" through which organizational success is achieved; their active participation in leadership processes is essential (Pulakos, 2004; Denisi & Murphy, 2017). Organizations often use leadership styles to enhance employee performance relative to organizational objectives. At Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters, staff are recruited according to job descriptions and specifications, create performance plans at the start of each assessment period, undergo regular performance monitoring, receive timely appraisals and payments, and participate in periodic training based on individual performance files.

The district's vision is to become a model district with competent workers in Africa by 2025. To achieve this, it aims to provide quality training, accommodation, and transport allowances, as well as collaborate with local and international partners who share the district's vision and mission (Local Council Meeting Report, 2022). However, the district is still far from achieving these objectives. After 15 years, it faces insufficient staffing, low employee performance and motivation, inadequate accommodation, and poor collaboration with partners, all of which hinder service delivery. If these issues are not addressed, the district will struggle to meet its goals and ensure effective employee performance. It is against this backdrop that this study on leadership style and organizational performance; A case study of Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters was conducted.

Objectives of the study

(i) To establish the effect of democratic leadership style on the performance of Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters.

(ii) To establish effect of autocratic leadership style on the performance of Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters.

(iii)To establish the effect of laissez faire leadership style on the performance of Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters.

Literature Review

The democratic leadership style involves a consultative approach, encourages group participation in decision-making, and maintains a collaborative relationship with group members. It

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demonstrates courage, citizen participation, and vision as key characteristics in political, social, and cultural contexts (International Journal on Leadership Studies, 2007). According to Odetay (2007), organizational management must structure work appropriately and encourage cooperation, communication, and meaningful jobs for employees, as performance depends on the organizational context and prevailing norms. A democratic leader motivates group members by exhibiting strong interpersonal skills, such as empathy, active listening, and concern for others, built upon trust, integrity, honesty, equality, openness, and mutual respect. Such leaders foster open communication at all levels, helping employees develop a sense of ownership and commitment, which motivates them to achieve organizational goals (Ojokuku, 2012).

In contrast, autocratic leadership is characterized by a high degree of control, where leaders make all decisions, assign tasks, and maintain a master-servant relationship with subordinates. This style thrives in highly structured, hierarchical environments, such as bureaucratic organizations, and emphasizes authority, discipline, and punishments for noncompliance (Ronald, 2011). Autocratic leadership denies employees autonomy the opportunity to participate in decision-making, goal setting, or assessing their work quality (Odetay, 2007). As a result, employees feel undervalued and demotivated, which negatively affects overall organizational performance. Coercive leaders may create a climate of fear, intimidate subordinates, suspend meetings, and centralize decision-making, leading employees to comply out of fear rather than respect (Nsubuga, 2006; Hughes et al., 1996).

Laissez-faire leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes employee freedom, non-interference, and minimal guidance, allowing workers to determine how to achieve their goals. This approach assumes that employees know their jobs best and, in some political or election-based positions, leaders may avoid exerting control to maintain popularity (Ronald, 2011). While this style can increase employee influence and involvement in decision-making, implement flat hierarchies, job rotation, self-managed teams, and multitasking (Burton et al., 2005), its effectiveness depends on the leader's attitude and oversight. Without guidance, laissez-faire leadership can lead to organizational inefficiencies, uncontrolled processes, and reactive management, ultimately affecting performance negatively (Jorgen, 2011).

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Methodology

Research Design: This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, where data from study participants were analyzed at a single point in time. This design was selected because it allows the researcher to observe current phenomena and gather data from a cross-section of respondents simultaneously. It facilitates collection of data from a wider population and enables inferences about the larger population. The quantitative approach was used to determine the magnitude of the relationship between leadership styles and organizational performance, while the qualitative approach supplemented this by capturing opinions, perceptions, and understanding of supervisors (Heads of Departments and CAO) regarding their influence on employee motivation.

Study Population: The study population comprised staff of Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters, including 36 departmental staff members from Administration, Finance, Production, Health, Education, Natural Resources, Works, Commerce, and Community-Based Services, as well as 1 Chief Administrative Officer (Human Resource Manual, 2023).

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques: The sample size of respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's table (1970), resulting in a total of 36 participants. Purposive sampling was employed to select key informants, including the Chief Administrative Officer and Heads of Departments, due to their strategic roles and expertise. Simple random sampling was applied to departmental staff to reduce bias, ensuring every person had an equal chance of selection.

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Table 1: Sample Size

Respondents	Population	Sample Size	Technique Used
Chief Administrative Officer	1	1	Purposive
Heads of Department	4	4	Purposive
Administration and Management	7	7	Purposive
Finance	3	3	Purposive
Production	4	4	Purposive
Health	3	3	Purposive
Education	3	3	Purposive
Natural Resources Management	2	2	Purposive
Works	4	4	Purposive
Commercial Officers	2	2	Purposive
Community-Based Services	3	3	Purposive
Total	**36**	**36**	

Source: Isingiro District Local Government Employee Human Resource Manual (2024)

Data Collection Instruments: Structured, self-administered questionnaires with closed-ended questions were used to gather quantitative data from departmental staff. This method allowed respondents to provide independent opinions anonymously and enabled the researcher to code data easily for analysis, minimizing errors. Closed-ended questions also facilitated analysis, and respondents could answer at their own pace, covering a wide range of research questions. In addition, an interview guide was used for the Chief Administrative Officer and Heads of Departments. Face-to-face interviews allowed direct collection of information, giving the researcher control over the process and reducing response errors. This approach enabled respondents to share perspectives freely and provided access to information that could not be directly observed, including historical insights. A total of 10 interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, bar graphs, percentages, and pie charts with SPSS version 20. Mean and standard deviation were computed, while graphical analysis helped identify patterns in the data. Pearson correlation coefficient was applied to assess the effects of laissez-faire leadership on organizational performance. Multiple regression analysis tested the three hypotheses collectively, determining their contribution to the dependent variable.

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Results

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of democratic leadership style and Organizational performance

Democratic leadership style	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
A leader who encourages employee participation	3 (8.3%)	6 (16.7%)	1 (2.8%)	7 (19.4%)	19 (52.8%)	4.02
A leader who encourages shared planning	7 (19.4%)	3 (8.3%)	1 (2.8%)	11 (30.6%)	14 (38.9%)	3.23
Administrator who encourages decision making	5 (13.8%)	7 (19.4%)	_	10 (23.8%)	14 (38.8%)	3.52
Sacrifice time to share with you the vision and goals which enables you to contribute to it.	_	3 (4.8%)	3 (4.8%)	18 (50.8%)	12 (33.3%)	4.35
There is delegation of duties and responsibilities to lower staff	20 (55.6%)	9 (25%)	2 (5.6%)	1 (2.8%)	4 (11.1%)	2.41

Source: Field data (2024)

\The findings indicated that leadership styles in Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters significantly influenced employee performance. A majority of respondents (72.2%, mean = 4.02) agreed that leaders who encourage employee participation enhance motivation, foster mentorship, and promote innovative problem-solving. Similarly, 69.5% (mean = 3.23) agreed that democratic leaders who involve staff in shared planning improve team cohesion and organizational goal achievement. Encouragement of decision-making was also positively perceived by 62% of respondents (mean = 3.52), highlighting the role of strategic policies and training in employee development. Leaders who actively share the vision and goals of the organization were supported by 83.3% of respondents (mean = 4.35), demonstrating the importance of guidance and career growth support. However, delegation of duties to lower staff was largely absent, with 80.6% disagreeing (mean = 2.41), suggesting a need for better alignment of individual and organizational goals to enhance performance and employee engagement.

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Table 3: Autocratic leadership style on Organizational performance

Autocratic leadership style	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
Communication from my boss negatively affects the duty performance	10 (27.8%)	23 (63.9%)	_	2 (5.6%)	1 (2.8%)	2.31
The leader applies coercion on task finishing regardless of the employee's social wellbeing	5 (13.9%)	6 (16.7%)	2 (5.6%)	10 (27.8%)	13 (36.1%)	3.26
Management rules are designed by superiors.	9 (14.3%)	11 (17.5%)	1 (1.6%)	25 (39.7%)	17 (26.9%)	3.89
The leader increases creativity and productivity	4 (11.1%)	6 (16.7%)	3 (8.3%)	9 (25%)	15(41.7%)	1.98
Requirements needed are designed according to the council's resolutions.	14 (38.9%	11 (30.6%)	2 (6.3%)	6 (16.7%)	3(8.3%)	1.03
Leaders are expected to know everything	_	3 (8.3%)	3 (8.3%)	17 (47.2%)	13 (36.1%)	4.02
Sacrifice time to share with you the vision and goals which enables you to contribute to it.	15 (41.7%)	11 (30.6%)	2 (6.3%)	5 (13.9%)	3(8.3%)	1.89
Leaders feel they control their own destiny	4 (11.1%)	5 (13.9%)	1 (1.6%)	11 (30.6%)	15 (41.7%)	4.21

Source: Field data (2024)

The findings indicate that communication and leadership practices in Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters significantly influence employee performance. The majority of respondents disagreed that poor communication from leaders negatively affects duties, highlighting the importance of clear guidance and training for leadership roles. Most employees agreed that coercive task enforcement (67.1%), management-designed rules (75%), and expectations that leaders "know everything" (83.3%) are prevalent, while delegation and sharing of vision were less common. Leaders' monitoring, feedback, and support were noted as key for improving productivity, creativity, and alignment with organizational goals, emphasizing that committed leadership and structured oversight enhance employee performance, engagement, and career development.

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According to Key Informant D male aged 52 pointed out that;

> Broadly speaking, leaders who are committed to their organization generally feel a connection with their district, feel that they fit in and feel they understand the goals of the district. The value of such leaders is that they tend to be more determined in their work, show relatively high productivity and are more proactive in offering their support.

In line with Key Informant B female aged 48;

> Committed leaders bring added value to the district through their determination, proactive support, relatively high productivity and awareness of quality. Committed leaders that display positive behaviour within organisations refer the district to contacts and are further adopt the district's vision and goals.

Table 4: The effect of laissez faire leadership style on Organizational performance

laissez faire leadership style	SD	D	U	A	SA	M
The leader gives workers freedom to do their tasks and make their choices which increases organization performance	20 (55.6%)	8 (22.2%)	_	6 (16.7%)	2(5.6%)	1.48
The leaders encourage following the rules and regulations	13 (13.9%)	6 (16.7%)	2 (5.6%)	5 (13.9%)	10 (27.8%)	2.67
The organization follow timetable and repetitive work performance	5 (13.9%)	3 (8.3%)	1 (2.8%)	10 (27.8%)	17 (47.2%)	3.38
The superior gives workers full autonomy in production processes which increase organization performance.	14 (38.9%)	16 (44.4%)	2 (5.6%)	4 (11.1%)	_	1.08
Workers are expected to follow designed directions	11 (30.6%)	15 (41.7%)	_	6 (16.7%)	4 (11.1%)	2.82
Decision are made on our behalf	13 (36.1%)	14 (38.9%)	1 (2.8%)	5 (13.9%)	3 (8.3%)	2.45
Employees are demoralized by the inflexibility and high control levels by our leaders	3 (8.3%)	7 (19.4%)	3 (8.3%)	10 (27.8%)	13 (36.1%)	3.98
No hindrances in our day to day work by the leader which increases our obligation	3 (8.3%)	7 (19.4%)	2 (5.6%)	13 (36.1%)	11 (30.6%)	2.76

Source: Field data (2024)

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The results indicate that employees in Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters have limited autonomy and freedom in performing their tasks, with the majority disagreeing that leaders allow choice or full control in production processes (77.8% and 83.3%, respectively). Most respondents agreed that staff are expected to follow rules, timetables, and designed directions, and decisions are rarely made on their behalf, reflecting structured supervision and adherence to organizational procedures. While high control and inflexibility can demoralize employees, leaders provide opportunities for professional growth through refresher courses or skill development, allowing staff to learn from mistakes and improve performance.

According to Key Informant G male aged 57

> These employees are permanent and pensionable but once they get opportunities that pay much higher that their current position, they can be advised to leave after comparing opportunities. One of the workers in health field wanted to leave because of the salary difference but after comparing other benefits like meals allowance, housing allowance and days worked, he decided to stay because they were not favorable, so it counts much for someone to leave a government job. Therefore workers are allowed to leave their duties whenever they get any engagement that necessitates them to leave.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Coefficient correlations

		laissez faire leadership style	Organizational performance
laissez faire leadership style	Pearson Correlation	1	.887**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	36	36
Organizational performance	Pearson Correlation	.887	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	36	36

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Basing on Table 5, the relationship between laissez faire leadership style on Organizational performance is positive and strong at 0.887 and statically significant at 0.000 since P-values is less

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than 0.05. This shows that there is a very strong association between laissez faire leadership style on Organizational performances

Table 6 Multi Linear Regression for Autocratic, Democratic and Laissez Leadership Style

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.736[a]	.675	.619	.77661
a. Predictors: (Constant), Laissez faire leadership style, democratic leadership style and autocratic leadership style.				

The coefficients of determination (Adjusted R^2 =0.619) indicates that 61.9% variation in Organizational performance.is accounted for by Laissez faire leadership style, democratic leadership style and autocratic leadership style. This implied that there was a good fit between Laissez faire leadership style, democratic leadership style and autocratic leadership style.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.326	3	10.109	16.760	.000[b]
	Residual	209.284	60	.603		
	Total	239.609	63			
a. Dependent Variable: Organizational performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant) Laissez faire leadership style, democratic leadership style and autocratic leadership style						

The P-value of 0.000 shows that there is statistically positive a significant relationship between Laissez faire leadership style, democratic leadership style and autocratic leadership style since P-Value = 0.000<0.05.

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Table 8: Multi linear Regression Model

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.725	.170		16.045	.000
	Autocratic leadership style	.067	.056	.072	1.191	.034
	Democratic leadership style	.205	.054	.243	3.784	.000
	Laissez faire leadership style	.074	.044	.103	1.678	.004
a. Dependent Variable: Organizational performance						

Organizational Performance = 2.725 + 0.067 autocratic leadership style + 0.205 democratic leadership style + 0.074 Laissez faire leadership style

The model showed that without autocratic leadership style, democratic Laissez faire leadership style, Laissez faire leadership style then Organizational performance is 2.725. The P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 implying that the relationship is significant.

The model further shows that variation of 6.7% in Organizational performance is accounted for by autocratic leadership style. The P-value of 0.034 is less than 0.05 implying that autocratic leadership style is insignificant at 5% level of significance hence there is an influence of autocratic leadership style on Organizational performance.

This practically implies that performance at organization improves with a positive Autocratic leadership style. This indicates that autocratic style of leadership focuses on the development of value system of leaders, their motivational level and morality together with the development of their skills and this in the end induces employees to perform as expected. A key informant Female aged 46 was quoted as saying, "*Our leaders are very strict at times and this eventually discourages us from putting in much effort to our work which reduces our performance levels*." Another Key informant A male said, "*Working under tough and strict restrictions and directions makes us lose*

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morale of working and as a result we are not committed to work thus less performance." Elements of Autocratic leadership (total authority and control, independent decision making and little input from subordinates) were regressed against performance and it was found out that independent decision making and total authority and control were contributing more to the performance of the Isingiro District Local Government Headquarters.

The model further showed that a variation of 20.5% in employee performance is accounted for by democratic leadership style. The P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 implying that there is a strong positive significant relationship between democratic leadership style and Organizational performance at 5% level of significance.

Discussion

The findings revealed that most of the participants agreed that their leadership is affected by a leader who encourages employee participation, a leader who encourages shared planning, with administrator who encourages decision making. The results also revealed that is a significant positive correlation between autocratic leadership style and organizational performance. This is in line with Ojokuku R, 2012, who argued that democratic leader foster open communication among all employees at all levels. Under such a working environment the employee will develop organization spirit of ownership, and become part and partial of the organization hence owning it which will motivate them and fight to achieve organization goals at all level .The results are also in agreement with (Odetay, 2007), who propounded that autocratic leadership is demonstrated that organization's management must help to structure work in an appropriate manner and to encourage cooperation, communication and meaningful jobs for the employees. The results are also in agreement with Rehman et al. (2018) who found that decision-making was less creative under authoritarian leadership. They also found that it is more difficult to move from an authoritarian style to a democratic style than vice versa. Abuse of this style is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial. Authoritarian leadership is best applied to situations where there is little time for group decision-making or where leaders are the most knowledgeable member of the group.

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The study found out that communication from my boss negatively affects the duty performance, the leader applies coercion on task finishing regardless of the employee's social wellbeing, leadership rules are designed by superiors, with leaders to be creative and increase productivity, and requirements needed are designed according to the council's resolutions. The results also revealed that there is a very strong association between autocratic leadership style and employee performance. The findings are in line with Ronald, 2011, who asserted that this type of leadership provides almost absolute authority and commands. The autocratic leader usually has a well-defined and controlled disciplinary process with an emphasis on punishments for noncompliance. The findings are also in agreement with Odetay 2007, who argued that autocratic leadership leads to improve the performance of the organization as whole since employees do not have the platform to contribute to the organization in a way of decision making, sharing goal setting and in the end makes them to feel that they are not valued and become de-motivated hence low productive.

The findings shows that employees are expected to follow established directions, employees are expected to total obey our leaders and leaders have the right to punish us. The results also revealed that significant positive relationship between laissez faire leadership style and organizational performance.

This is in agreement with Ronald, 2011, who argued that this leadership style has prompted what is known as hand off form of leadership with such a style. Ronald, 2011, found that laissez-faire leadership style provides basic but minimal information and resources, no participation, involvement, or communication within the workforce and understanding of job requirements, policies, and procedures are generally exchanged from organization to organization. Base on Burton et al, 2005, laissez-faire leaders seldom involved in work. This is in accordance with in Burton et al, 2005) also argued that laissez-faire leaders focuses on increasing employees influence on the business as well as effects the processes, methods, the physical environment, the technology and tools that enhance their work .This is in line with Jorgen, 2011 also argued that laissez-fair style is this form of leadership which empowers employees is important in the process of organization effectiveness/organization performance. This is in agreement with Jorgen, 2011, found that this style of leadership results into misuse of autonomy leading to misuse of organization funds and poor-quality work produced because of lack of supervision, hence the

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overall performance of the district is affected .This is in line with Jorgen, 2011 found that that a leader focuses on group atmosphere, task structure and power, through task orientation and group atmosphere orientation the approach of holistic organization can be implemented.

Conclusions

Most of the participants agreed that that their leadership is affected by a leader who encourages employee participation, a leader who encourages shared planning, with administrator who encourages decision making. However, it was disagreed that sacrifice time to share with you the vision and goals which enables you to contribute to it.

Communication from my boss negatively affects the duty performance, the leader applies coercion on task finishing regardless of the employee's social wellbeing, Management rules are designed by superiors, with leaders to be creative and increase productivity, and requirements needed are designed according to the council's resolutions. The results also revealed that there is a very strong association between autocratic leadership style and organizational performance.

Employees are expected to follow established directions, employees are expected to total obey our managers and managers have the right to punish us. However, it disagreed that there is total respect for rules and regulations, employees must follow routine and repetitive task performance, employees are demoralized by the inflexibility and high control levels by our managers, there is high staff turnover and low performance and decision are made on our behalf.

Recommendations

Democratic leadership should intentionally create channels for open dialogue and demonstrate that all contributions are valued. Implement regular team meetings, one-on-one sessions, and anonymous suggestion boxes or digital platforms to encourage employees to share their thoughts without fear of reprisal.

The researcher's recommendation to leaders to involve employees in the decision-making process is the hallmark of democratic leadership and a direct driver of increased performance. When employees have a say in decisions that affect them, they feel a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the outcomes

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The study recommends that Organizations should invest in training leaders to adopt a flexible, situational leadership approach rather than relying solely on an autocratic style. Research consistently shows that the effectiveness of a leadership style is highly dependent on the situation.

Leaders should be creative, innovative, and employee engagement, an autocratic style is detrimental. It can stifle creativity, lower morale, and increase employee turnover.

Organizations should conduct a thorough assessment of their teams before implementing a laissez-faire leadership approach. This style should be reserved for teams comprised of self-managed, highly skilled, and intrinsically motivated individuals.

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