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Leadership Behaviour and Organizational Effectiveness in The African Airline Industry: An Empirical and Theoretical Investigation

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Abstract

This study explores leadership behaviours that drive organizational performance within the African airline sector. Drawing on Yukl's (2012) taxonomy, which classifies leadership as task, relations, change, and external-oriented, the study examines how these behaviours operate in a highly regulated and risk-sensitive environment. Using qualitative methods, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior executives and managers across public and private airlines in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thematic analysis confirmed the relevance of Yukl's framework while revealing its limitations in explaining context-specific complexities. Empathy, tolerance, discipline, decisiveness and timeliness emerged as additional behaviours essential for promoting trust, adaptability, and operational efficiency. Leaders who balanced all behavioural dimensions were most effective in addressing dynamic environmental and regulatory challenges. The findings underscore the need for culturally and industry-sensitive leadership models and training that integrate both established and emergent behaviours.

Originality/Value: This study extends Yukl's framework by identifying new contextually grounded behaviours that enhance leadership effectiveness in African aviation.

Keywords: Leadership Behaviours, Organizational Effectiveness, African Airline Sector, Behavioural Taxonomy, Contextual Leadershp

Introduction

The African aviation industry plays a crucial role in the continent's socio-economic development by promoting regional integration, supporting trade and tourism, and connecting geographically dispersed populations. Though of strategic significance, the sector is marked by relative underperformance to its international counterparts and faces a range of challenges from poor infrastructure and market fragmentation to weak corporate governance and management (Martini *et al*, 2024; Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Njoya, 2016; Mhlanga, 2017). Against this context, leadership has not only emerged as the primary driver of organizational performance but also as a potential driver of transformational change in African aviation (Amankwah-Amoah, 2018). Leadership as a construct resists one definition but is generally valued as a process of influencing others toward shared goals (Northouse, 2017; Torrington *et al*., 2018). The last five decades have witnessed an explosion of leadership theories from the behaviour and trait school to contingency, transformational, and servant leadership theories (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Greenleaf, 2003; Yukl, 2008). Although such theories have yielded valuable contributions, most of them have been based on Eurocentric epistemologies and managerial contexts and thus could not possibly speak to the socio-cultural and institutional dynamics at work in African societies (Abebe *et al*., 2020). Leadership in Africa, Zoogah and Nkomo (2013) argue, is not a matter of simply transposing Western ideas into new geographies but one of recognizing indigenous systems, collective norms, and unique organizational ecologies.

African leadership scholarship's research performance lags global trends. There is below 1% continental scholarly contribution of overall leadership research but with immense need for localized knowledge (Duermeijer *et al*., 2018). The gap is even more serious in the private sector where empirical research on leadership effectiveness is scarce (Fourie *et al*., 2017; Nkomo, 2017).

As poor leadership has repeatedly been found to be a significant cause of African airlines' inefficiency and volatility (Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Mhlanga, 2017), the need for contextually grounded leadership theories is more urgent than ever. Behavioural leadership theory is as good a place as any to begin to take this agenda to an advanced level. As far back as the mid-20th century, theories of leaders' behaviour have moved focus away from traits to action, humorously suggesting that effective leadership may be learned, practiced, and replicated (McGregor, 1957; Herzberg, 1976; Behrendt *et al*., 2017). While these theories constituted influential leadership thought, most studies concentrated on broad categories of behaviour, without regard for the specificity and interplay of individual action (Bracht *et al*, 2024). Yukl (2012) hierarchical taxonomy avoids this limitation by separating leadership behaviour into four general dimensions.

This study employs Yukl's taxonomy to examine African airlines' leadership practice, a context rarely explored in traditional behavioural leadership scholarship. The aviation sector in Africa is not only under-researched but also highly multidimensional, vulnerable to political interference, financial instability, skill shortages, and under-developed infrastructures (Amankwah-Amoah & Debrah, 2013). In this context, leadership effectiveness has to be evaluated not only based on universal best practices but on behaviours that address situation-specific challenges like regulatory uncertainty, stakeholders' misalignment, and operational bottlenecks.

Nonetheless, even though Yukl's taxonomy is robust, context-based adjustments hold the promise for this research. Initial results from the African aviation industry point to leadership behaviours that are not adequately explained through existing taxonomies but are regarded by practitioners as being fundamental. Moreover, the study offers methodological rigor in applying thematic qualitative analysis, which builds robust contextualization and room for novel findings that are not accounted for through quantitative frameworks (Parry *et al*., 2014). Voices of seasoned African airline leaders, most of whom have navigated a complex operating environment prevail in this analysis, and rich experiential data bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Lastly, the purpose of the research is twofold. In the first place, it seeks to further theory on leadership by extending and applying Yukl's behavioural taxonomy to an under researched environment. In the second place, it seeks to derive actionable results that could be transferred to African airlines for optimizing leadership development, succession planning, and organizational effectiveness. Along the way, the research also decolonizes leadership studies by centering on African thought, and operating conditions. Based on Yukl's (2012) model and incorporating African aviation professionals' perspectives, the study presents an evidence-based, nuanced picture of how successful leadership in one of the world's most challenging yet strategically most critical sectors appears. If African airlines are to become competitive globally and commercially sustainable, the acquisition of the right leadership behaviours might be the most certain way to unleash their potential.

Statement of the Problem

Despite leadership function being a vital in deciding the performance of airlines, the African air transport industry continues to lag behind, grappling with inefficiencies in management practices, service deficits, and understaffed human resource development (Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Mhlanga, 2017). Internal weaknesses persist alongside external threats in the guise of regulatory constraints, infrastructural inadequacies, and market protectionism, all which in totality detract from the competitive prowess of African airlines (Njoya, 2016; Megersa & Kincaid, 2018). At the heart of these efficiencies of operation is a leadership crisis often promoted by the lack of context-based models of leadership appropriate to the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the African continent.

Leadership models traditionally employed in the African setting are more likely to originate from Western paradigms that fail to consider local expectations of individuals, and norms (Alemu, 2024). As such, leadership development programs within the continent are more likely to be misguided according to real African airline leaders' needs. This disconnect impedes the development of effective leaders who can operate in high-stakes settings characterized by volatility, limited resources, and constantly changing market demands (Abebe *et al*., 2020; Mukhezakule & Tefera, 2019). While there has been growing interest across African leadership scholarship, empirical private sector contributions are weak, with African leadership studies still adding less than 1% of global scholarly output (Duermeijer *et al*., 2018; Fourie *et al*., 2017).

Further, of the few leadership frameworks that exist, they tend to be unclear regarding abstract types of behaviour, such as transformational or transactional leadership, without being explicit about the concrete, real things that constitute effective leadership in a given context (Yukl *et al*., 2019). This renders them not applicable in environments like the African aviation industry, where leaders must juggle complex stakeholder interests, exert operational discipline, and foster staff commitment simultaneously (Behrendt *et al*., 2017). Scholars have called for more theoretical studies in this area, particularly in the under-researched private sector (Amayah & Haque, 2017; Nkomo, 2017; Fourie *et al*., 2017). Addressing this research gap is crucial, as ineffective leadership can hinder the performance of African employees and organizations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Literature Review

Theoretical Background: Evolution of Leadership Thought

Leadership theory has developed significantly, progressing from early trait-based theories to contemporary behavioural and contingency theories. Early theories of traits presumed that effective leadership was a function of stable personal characteristics such as intelligence, confidence, and charisma presumed to be consistent across situations (Northouse, 2017). But the failure of trait theories to reliably predict leadership success across contexts brought about the emergence of behavioural approaches in the mid-20th century with the work of researchers like McGregor (1957), and Herzberg (1976) among others.

Behavioural theories of leadership redirected the emphasis from enduring personality characteristics to observable, learnable behaviours. Unlike transformational or transactional leadership, which comprise behavioural and trait-based aspects (Bass, 1985; Avolio *et al*., 1999), behavioural approaches contend that the effectiveness of leadership can be developed and learned (Banai *et al*, 2024).

As such, focus turned to what leaders do, rather than who they are. Yukl's (2012) hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behaviour is one of the most comprehensive frameworks in this field, classifying behaviour into four meta- categories: task-oriented, relations-oriented, change-oriented, and external-oriented behaviour. This framework provides a systematic method of identifying and developing effective leadership behaviours in various organizational contexts.

Theoretical Framework: Yukl's Behavioural Taxonomy

This study adopts Yukl's (2012) hierarchical taxonomy as its theoretical basis, using its broad framework to study effective leadership behaviour in the African airline industry. Yukl's taxonomy offers 15 component behaviours within four categories:

Table 1: Taxonomy of Leadership Behaviours

Task-oriented	Relations-oriented	Change-oriented	External
Clarifying	Supporting	Advocating change	Networking
Planning	Developing	Envisioning change	External monitoring
Monitoring operations	Recognizing	Encouraging innovation	Representing
Problem-solving	Empowering	Facilitating collective learning	

Source: Yukl (2012), p. 68

This taxonomy is most appropriate for the current study due to its potential to reduce conceptual overlap, consolidate similar behavioural theories, and bring different findings into a single, cohesive, actionable model (Behrendt *et al*., 2017; Yukl *et al*., 2019). It also circumvents the limitations of traditional leadership models that have a tendency to focus on a narrow set of generalized behaviours, like transformational, transactional, and servant leadership (Wickert *et al*, 2024). By applying this taxonomy onto the African airline context, the study explores extant behaviours that reflect the socio-cultural and operational complexities of African aviation leadership.

Empirical Literature: Leadership Behaviour and Effectiveness

Behavioural leadership theories are generally seen as effective in predicting managerial performance and organizational outcomes (Alsarrani *et al*., 2021). Effective leaders demonstrate behaviours that enable goal achievement, employee motivation, and organizational learning. Wickert *et al*. (2024) emphasize competencies such as developing a compelling vision, setting high-performance expectations, and leading through emotional and social intelligence. Similarly, Banai *et al* (2024) infer that effective leadership comprises mastery of various domains, i.e., task, social, emotional, and metacognitive skills.

Some researchers argue that relationship-oriented leadership may be more effective and important than task-oriented leadership (Cserhati & Szabo, 2014), while others emphasize situational leadership's role in achieving goals effectively (Henkel *et al*., 2019). The conceptualization of situational leadership acknowledges that task-oriented and relation-oriented behaviours are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive approaches (Poelmans & Duijnisveld, 2023). Some behaviours may vary in their effectiveness depending on specific objectives (Borgmann *et al*., 2016), and the nuances of leadership situations may influence which behaviours are most relevant. Therefore, this study investigates the most critical leadership behaviours in the African airline sector, where leadership has been identified as a significant factor affecting performance (Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Mukhezakule & Tefera, 2019).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory also emphasizes the relational dynamics between leaders and subordinates and links high-quality exchanges with employee creativity, engagement, and citizenship behaviour (Kapil & Rastogi, 2020; Ogunja *et al*., 2025; Cevik, 2025). These relational behaviours fall into Yukl's (2012) relations-oriented category and suggest that effective leadership is as much about how leaders interact with others as it is about what leaders do.

Most leadership styles are often imprecise in behavioural aspects and fail to capture the full scope of task, relational, change, and external behaviours (Borgmann *et al*., 2016). In response, Yukl (2012) and follow-up research (Behrendt *et al*., 2017; Yukl *et al*., 2019) advocate for more fine-grained, taxonomy- based leadership research strategies, which are sensitive to behavioural nuances and contextual applicability.

Leadership in the African Context: The Case for Localized Models

African leadership scholarship is still in its nascent stages and is prone to lacking locally grounded theoretical frameworks (Nkomo, 2017; Sabbah, 2024). Much leadership scholarship in Africa heavily borrows from Western models, which may fail to reflect the socio-cultural and institutional contexts (Eyong *et al*., 2019; Abebe *et al*., 2020). For example, Western leadership theories assume individualism, high uncertainty avoidance, and low power distance, whereas African societies tend to have collectivism, acceptance of ambiguity, and hierarchical power structures (Zoogah & Nkomo, 2013). Work by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and Duermeijer *et al*. (2018) refers to the urgent need to place leadership studies within African ontologies and epistemologies. The literature suggests that African leaders are likely to work within two systems: the formal corporate system, with its compliance with global norms and strategic imperatives, and the informal community-based system, with its emphasis on social obligations, consensus, and relational leadership (Eyong, 2019). Such double expectations create a paradoxical leadership situation requiring behaviours that balance authority and compassion, responsiveness to community.

In highly regulated sectors like aviation, where safety standards and operational efficiency are critical, leadership failures stem not only from institutional constraints but also from behavioral issues such as lack of accountability, hesitation in decision-making, and poor collaborative communication (Samunderu, 2024). Specific-context studies of effective leadership behaviour in African aviation are thus needed to inform leadership development initiatives and sectoral performance improvement.

Leadership in African Airlines: Current Challenges and Opportunities

Africa's aviation industry is underperforming compared to worldwide standards, and the majority of intercontinental traffic is handled by non-African carriers (Amankwah-

Amoah, 2018). While macroeconomic determinants like regulation, infrastructure, and financing are typically cited as overarching obstacles (Megersa & Kincaid, 2018; Njoya, 2016), growing emphasis is being placed on that intra-organizational issues namely, leadership failure are a determining factor for the industry's stagnation (Samunderu, 2024). Martini *et al*. (2024) further argues that state-owned airlines, in particular, are plagued by bureaucratic inefficiencies, managerial incompetence, and leadership behaviours that frustrate strategic implementation. These calls for proactive, adaptive, and responsive leadership behaviours are further amplified by the dynamic and risky nature of the aviation sector. The current study heeds these appeals in ascertaining key leadership behaviours that propel operational performance within African airlines. These findings contribute to both theoretical development as well as applied leadership development.

Critique of Existing Frameworks: Gaps and Opportunities

While Yukl's taxonomy is a dense behavioural taxonomy, there are several limitations in its application and validation. Firstly, while dense, there are comparatively few studies that have operationalised the full taxonomy, especially in non-Western economies or in specific industries like aviation (Behrendt *et al*., 2017; McClesky, 2014). Secondly, the taxonomy assumes a relatively stable organisational context, which may not be accurate for risky or volatile industries like aviation in emerging economies (Dinh *et al*., 2017). Moreso, researchers studying taxonomy design quality have identified common issues: too much overlap, lack of clear distinctions, and limited adaptability (Tan *et al*, 2025). Finally, Yukl's model under-emphasizes some behaviour that has become crucial in contemporary leadership, such as emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and participatory decision-making (Andersen, 2016; Cote, 2015). A 2016 meta-analysis confirmed its utility but also flagged that it still lacks robust empirical validation of its full taxonomic breadth (Borgmann *et al*, 2016).

Towards a Contextually Leadership Framework

The leadership challenges of African airlines illustrate the need for multi-dimensional frameworks capable of capturing the nuances of operating in resource-poor, high-regulation environments. As argued by Unterkalmsteiner & Abdeen (2022), practitioners should identify, evaluate, compare and select the most suitable taxonomy for their specific tasks and environment. The extension of Yukl's taxonomy by empirical findings from African aviation leaders contributes to the evolution of behavioural leadership theory. With the inclusion of more context-relevant behaviours, the suggested model provides a more comprehensive picture of leadership effectiveness. The position taken here is consistent with contingency and situational theories of leadership, which hold that leadership effectiveness is not a universal phenomenon but depends on organizational, cultural, and environmental factors (Holm *et al*., 2025). Recent studies affirm that Behavioural Leadership factors such as task and relations-oriented behaviour exhibit strong correlations with leadership performance, yet many such studies have analyzed but Western or Asian contexts (Javali & Madhu, 2025; Khaola, 2025; Banai *et al*, 2024).

The model developed in this study has significant implications for leadership development programs in African organizations. It also offers a foundation for future research for testing behavioural dimensions across different sectors and regions in Africa. Yukl's (2012) taxonomy provides a valuable structure for understanding effective leadership behaviours, yet its application in African contexts remains limited. This study extends the theoretical and practical boundaries of the framework by incorporating qualitative insights from African airline leaders, thereby proposing a more inclusive and contextually relevant model. In doing so, the research addresses longstanding gaps in both leadership theory and practice, highlighting the need for nuanced, sector-specific behavioural taxonomies.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative, exploratory research design to investigate the leadership behaviours within the African aviation industry. Given the minimal available research in this context, particularly on behavioural leadership theory in aviation management, employing a qualitative research method was deemed appropriate to yield nuanced, contextual findings. Exploratory research is best suited to uncover phenomena that are not yet sufficiently understood (Hair *et al*., 2009). As Bryman (2004) observes, qualitative research allows for the accumulation of in-depth understanding of social matters, especially if it is the intention to study participants' daily life and contextual specifics.

To register leadership behaviours' richness and complexity as displayed in real contexts, semi- structured interviews were utilized. The method facilitated a balance between consistency across interviews and the provision for following up on emergent themes. It allowed interviewees to elaborate on their experiences, observations, and interpretations of leadership behaviours in their organizations more. Questions were worded following Yukl's (2012) behavioural taxonomy starting from task-oriented, relations-oriented, change-oriented, to external-oriented behaviours and also with a consideration of leaving room for exploring further on some expression of behaviour, decision, or outcomes that were raised by the respondents. This open but focused approach provided the structure necessary to enable comparison among participants' responses without restricting the opportunities to establish new themes beyond Yukl's original framework. It was, in this sense, theory-informed but inductively open, thus adhering to best qualitative leadership research practice (Parry *et al*., 2014).

Sampling

Purposive and snowball sampling were employed to obtain information-rich participants (Sukmawati & Salmia, 2023). The purposive design ensured the invitation of respondents who had specific attributes including: (1) a minimum of ten years of experience in the airline industry and (2) a minimum of five years of experience within a leadership or executive capacity. These attributes ensured that the participants were extensively exposed to the industry and capable of providing detailed information on leadership behaviours over time and across varying operating conditions. Their exposure allowed them to leverage a variety of situations spanning crises, strategic change, and decision-making in operations, thereby making the dataset richer.

Snowball sampling allowed for enlarging access to a population traditionally hard to reach and that could be reluctant to reply because corporate leadership discourses are sensitive. Referrals from existing participants helped to achieve trust-based access to other qualified participants, thereby enhancing the richness and size of the sample. Although snowball sampling has been faulted on the basis of possible bias (Parker *et al*., 2019), its application in exploratory, qualitative research with elite or specialist groups is established.

The final sample was 14 from private and public airlines across Sub-Saharan Africa. The gender distribution was indicative of the industry at large with 85% male and 15% female representation. Roles of the respondents covered CEO, operations, commercial strategy, compliance, safety, and systems administration giving an all-round perspective of leadership.

Table 2: Sample Profile of Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Position	Years of Experience	Airline Type
BPN1	Female	Systems Administrator	12	Private
BPN2	Male	Chief Operating Officer	15	Private
BPN3	Male	Director of Commercial	14	Private
TPN1	Female	Head of Commercial in Ground Handling	10	Private
MPN1	Male	Director of Information Security and Compliance	11	Private
UPN1	Male	Compliance Manager	13	Public
SPN1	Male	Regional Director	17	Public
EPN1	Male	CEO	20	Private
DPN1	Male	Operations Officer	12	Private
SPN2	Male	Quality Auditor	15	Public
APN1	Male	Senior Commercial Finance Manager	16	Private
DPN2	Male	Director of Commercial and Ground Operations	18	Private
CPN1	Male	CEO	22	Public
CPN2	Male	Head of Quality	14	Public

Data Collection

Data was collected through virtual interviews. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were recorded using the participants' consent. All the recordings were transcribed verbatim in order to capture the depth of the data. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured by assigning each participant a pseudonym. Interview guide was Yukl's taxonomy aligned but left sufficient room for emergent themes. Respondents were also requested to describe particular behaviours they practiced, observed, or valued in others and to connect such behaviour to organizational outcomes such as employee motivation, performance, compliance, or innovation. The open-ended character of the interviews left room for discovering emergent behaviour and contextual nuances that can be lost using more structured data collection techniques.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data, drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding generation, (3) identification of themes, (4) review of themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing up. NVivo program provided support for data management and organization, enabling effective coding, retrieval, and comparing of interview extracts for cases and themes. Initial coding was theory-driven, drawing from the pre-existing categories of behaviour in Yukl (2012) taxonomy. Inductive coding was also used to provide leeway for new behaviour and trends that were not within the framework. Certain factors of behaviour emerged as overriding themes throughout interviews, and hence there was adaptive reaction to coding and categorization.

To enhance analytical depth, codes were progressively developed through peer debriefing among the research team. Through this intersubjective approach, consistency in theme interpretation and researcher bias were avoided. Second-order coding was applied wherever necessary to group related yet distinct behaviours into broad conceptual categories. Triangulation was also employed as a method to reinforce the validity of research outcomes. This helped ensure consistency and relevance of identified behaviours. Moreover, an interpretivist strategy was adopted in the analysis, with emphasis on meanings drawn by the participants themselves from their experience and behaviours. This stance is particularly suitable in leadership studies, where behaviour is often context-dependent and situated and socially constructed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Participants were notified of the voluntary status of participation. Informed consent was elicited, and participants were assured of the right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were strictly maintained through data anonymization and safe storage of data. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their own leadership behaviour and experience rather than having them give socially desirable answers. This managed to bring out genuine and diverse testimonies on what effective leadership in the African airlines sector entails.

Results

The following section explores the leadership behaviours that participants perceived as contributing to effective airline performance. The data was based on four thematic categories: task-oriented, relations-oriented, change-oriented, and external-oriented behaviours.

1. Task-Oriented Behaviours

Communication

Participants highlighted effective communication as central to successful leadership.

BPN1 emphasized listening and nonverbal cues:

"You must be able to listen… watch body language too."

CPN2 stressed tone and audience awareness:

"A strong tone scares employees… the aim is for your message to be accepted."

DPN1 noted:

"Open communication keeps everyone on the same page… an inclusive approach is critical to safety."

Such insights reflect the role of inclusive communication in fostering psychological safety and creativity (Aguinis *et al*., 2016; Ge, 2020). Low expressiveness, commonly associated with respect for authority, was noted to be prevalent in society; however, attentiveness to body language proved useful in addressing this communication barrier. A soft-spoken style was linked to building trust (Cote, 2015), while clear communication was seen as key to alignment and safety. Managers who use active listening with the team are perceived to be better at establishing psychological safety, enabling upward communication, and identifying operational blind spots. Oral and written clarity eliminate misunderstandings, enable procedural adherence. These findings are consistent with Kanki (2019), wherein he states that communication competence is a strong predictor of flight deck coordination and overall safety. In the same vein, Cote (2015) highlights that emotional intelligence is the foundation of effective communication as it enhances the capability of a leader to perceive and respond to others' emotions.

Timeliness

Time management was identified as effective leadership behaviour. DPN1 stated.

"As a business, there are objectives that you must meet and meeting them means you must respect the minimum of standards that you need to do; respect your timelines and your roadmap".

Time-conscious behaviours proved to be critical to attain operational standards. Leaders who set transparent expectations regarding punctuality, project timelines, and procedure adherence are perceived to be more able to hold teams accountable. Participants described how they use tools for performance monitoring and formalized feedback loops to implement time awareness, which positively influences organizational dependability. Timeliness is a core element for airline service quality and competitiveness because it directly affects customer satisfaction (Law *et al*, 2022).

DPN2 highlighted that inefficiency in time management can result in financial losses:

"There is no time for lapses because it leads to losses. On time performance is a key practice and our key selling point. We have a target of 95% on time performance...One reason that killed Air Afrique was poor on time performance."

By exemplifying time-aware behaviour, leaders not only shape employee habits but also convey the importance of organizational values such as accuracy and dependability.

Coaching and Guidance

Guidance and coaching were expressed as complementary behaviours.

In an industry as competitive as ours, where customer experience is paramount, the calibre of our workforce can make all the difference. By investing in our employees' development, we not only attract top talent but also retain our most valuable asset. Ultimately, a well-coached and guided team translates into better service delivery, higher customer satisfaction, and ultimately, a competitive edge in the market. (TPN1)

Though 'monitoring', a task-oriented behaviour proposed by Yukl (2012) was not majorly emphasized, guidance and coaching could be seen as antecedent behaviours to monitoring and synonymous with the 'development' relation-oriented component of Yukl's taxonomy and developmental tasks such as coaching and career facilitation (Yukl *et al*., 2002). Individualized consideration improves employee attitudes, career success, and commitment (Bal *et al*., 2015). Participants viewed it as an ongoing responsibility that positively influences airline performance, especially given the regional shortage of skilled aviation personnel (Park & Lee, 2023). Enabling employees to identify areas for growth and leveraging their strengths will cultivate a more skilled and resilient workforce to navigate challenges and drive success (Alafeshat, 2021). Following this was an extensive emphasis on the importance of training in the sector to ensure regulatory compliance and competitive services (Gibbs *et al*, 2017; Alola & Alafeshat, 2021).

Accountability

Business leaders face growing pressure to be accountable (Hall *et al*, 2017) as failures in leadership accountability have been associated with corporate scandals (Melo *et al*, 2020).

"Holding ourselves accountable for our actions and results drives better results. (BPN2)
The reason we have KPIs is to ensure that everyone is answerable." (BPN1)
"Be it positive or challenging, you must make it a point of duty to accept mistakes. This is a behaviour we expect." (BPN3)

These statements collectively underscore the importance of accountability within the organization (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019). Enforcing accountability on self and across the organization is crucial for corporate ethics (Melo *et al*, 2020). BPN1 further reinforced BPN2's statement by stating that *"Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) serve as a mechanism to ensure accountability",* indicating the importance of setting clear expectations and metrics for performance evaluation (Aithal & Aithal, 2023).

Discipline and Decisiveness

CPN1 discussed the importance of airline leadership staying focused on realizing tasks and projects.

> *"Discipline is the silver bullet for the aviation industry. Discipline in execution and planning is critical. I have been to almost 30 airlines and in my recent capacity, I have visited many countries and the only common reasons why airlines in those respective geographies were not successful was lack of discipline. So, they draw plans to implement a strategy and do not ensure that the strategy is well documented, well researched or followed up to make sure it is implemented. They put a strategy in place because it is a feel-good factor."*

CPN1's statement underscores findings by Mero *et al*. (2014), indicating that increased managerial oversight of task performance and facilitation of interpersonal interactions results in enhanced accountability for both task execution and interpersonal dynamics, yielding positive outcomes.

Participants further shared:

> *"It is needful to be straight when it comes to safety issues and meeting targets. You need to take action to serve as some deterrent to ensure staff are of good behaviour."* (SPN1)

> *"As a leader you must have emotional control to be able to get your message across without raising negative sentiments."* (MPN1)

Discipline was demonstrated not only in planning and execution but also in leaders' self-control in their interactions and their adherence to work ethics to uphold standards (Razak *et al*, 2018). This accords with High Reliability Organization (HRO) literature research, where discipline is correlated with crisis preparedness and dependable results (Stralen *et al*., 2024; Looser, 2024). This attribute encompasses not only planning, a key task-oriented behaviour highlighted by Yukl (2012) but also the determination to see plans to fruition. It was also insinuated that decisiveness provides clarity and direction by enabling timely decisions in addressing emerging challenges or capitalizing on favourable business environments (Kerns, 2016; Marx, 2020).

2. Relations-Oriented Behaviours

Empathy

Empathy was reflected in the consideration given to employees' well-being, including both professional and personal challenges. TPN1 noted,

> *"The moment you understand your employees' work settings and their family lives you make them have confidence in you."*

EPN1 added,

> *"If you look after your staff, they will look after your clients. I keep telling my executives that no matter how small a problem is, respect them for what they are going through".*

DPN2 highlighted,

> *"Empathy is the one I really felt due to Covid because if we weren't empathetic with staff during that period a lot of them would've left by now."*

Leaders' emotional intelligence and empathy significantly impacts employee engagement (Amah, 2023). Service provision relies on relationship management within organizations, emphasizing the importance of treating employees well to enhance customer service experience (Halinen, 2012; Hollensen, 2015). Previous research also links leadership behaviours to service quality (Riggi, 2017; Qiu *et al*., 2019). However, one participant mentioned the importance of addressing empathy selectively:

> *"If their feelings are out of place and not reasonable, I definitely will be less concerned about that. Some employees could be disgruntled over nothing. But if their feelings are justifiable, I try to be understanding yet ensure results are achieved at the end of the day. That is why we are here."* SPN1

This reflects a nuanced approach to managing employee emotions, balancing empathy with a results-driven mindset (Andersen, 2016). Evans *et al*. (2021) support that an interpersonal-focused culture is favoured among African leaders.

Collaboration

The aviation industry operates within a complex, interconnected ecosystem where departmental synergy is crucial. Weekly meetings were frequently mentioned as essential for cross-functional updates and idea sharing. BPN1 noted,

> *"No function is isolated from the other. We create a conducive environment for that through our meetings."*

APN1 also shared the same opinion, while BPN2 stated,

> "*We have it paramount to ensure safety and security. There is no way we can achieve this if we do not work as a team, we will miss information that could have irreversible negative consequences."*

DPN1 added,

"You need to be able to identify who is good at what and who has what limitations. It is important that employees complement each other."

The increasing time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities reflects its significance (Cross *et al*., 2014). Knowledge sharing enhances creativity (Kremer *et al*., 2019) and effective crisis management. SPN1 highlighted that some leaders promote a culture of individualism, control, or siloed leadership rather than one of teamwork, and shared responsibility stating,

> *"Some leaders hardly collaborate among themselves and even others. They prefer to be indispensable."*

Effective interdepartmental collaboration was deemed the key in a safety-critical environment. This lack of collaboration can create challenges in managing conflicts and coordinating efforts. Effective decision-making relies on gathering diverse viewpoints (Sonmez Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020), and sharing information facilitates problem-solving and innovation (Charterina *et al*., 2018; Estrada *et al*., 2018; Teixeira *et al*., 2018). Van der Stap (2024) equally stresses the strategic value of collaborative behaviours, particularly for complex systems where silo decision-making risks might lead to operational inefficiencies and safety threats.

Culture Role Modelling

Participants emphasized the importance of demonstrating exemplary behaviour and guiding employees through actions and decisions.

> *"When it comes to leadership behaviour, there is one aspect that I advocate and that is setting an example in upholding the airline's culture. Our culture is the foundation upon which everything else rests. It shapes how we interact with each other, how we serve our customers, and ultimately, how successful we are as a company. By doing so, we not only inspire our teams to do the same but also ensure that our collective efforts are aligned with our overarching mission and vision."* (SPN1)

Organizational culture develops through the gradual assimilation of principles and extends to attitudes, emotions, and actions (Lee, 2019). By prioritizing culture, leaders influence organizational citizenship behaviours, customer interactions, and overall success (Ameer, 2017; Mohsen *et al*., 2020; Metz *et al*., 2020). Modelling desired cultural values and behaviours sets a standard for others to follow, enhancing organizational cohesion and effectiveness. Leaders who embody brand values motivate employees to align their attitudes accordingly, contributing to a sustainable competitive advantage (Adeniyi *et al*, 2024).

Integrity

One participant highlighted the importance of fair treatment and non-discrimination:

> *"You can pay your employees well but if you treat your employees badly, you discriminate, are tribalistic, you will always lose your respect as a leader. When it comes to your customers and partners, same applies. It is easy to lose a good image when you cannot be trusted." (EPN1)*

Integrity fosters trust between leaders and subordinates, as it influences how employees and customers are treated (Issah, 2018), strengthening customer loyalty as they view the organization as dependable. This trust enhances employees' confidence in raising concerns (Amah, 2023) and promotes effective collaboration. Leaders are perceived as more effective when they build relationships based on trust and respect (Cote, 2015). Leadership is a reciprocal process of influence toward achieving shared organizational goals (Awashreh *et al*., 2024).

Merit-based decisions were seen as promoting a culture of meritocracy, offering equal opportunities for growth and advancement. BPN3 illustrated this by stating:

> *"Whenever we have job openings, we will encourage our employees to apply if they found themselves able to perform the job and we usually prioritize them if we find they have the capacity to work in the said position."*

Effective leadership depends on how followers perceive and respond to their leaders (Evans *et al*., 2021). Recognizing contributions and creating clear career paths fosters motivation and equality. As BPN1 explained:

> *"We believe everything has to be practicalized so your experience in the company and attitude to learning could take you up the career ladder."*

Fairness was further emphasized by BPN2, who noted:

> *"Discrimination is a motivation killer."*

Balancing ethics and effectiveness is a key leadership challenge (Ciulla, 2020). Being ethical but ineffective or effective but unethical can both be damaging. Trust plays a central role in preventing negative work experiences, with both leaders and followers responsible for maintaining it (Soderberg & Romney, 2022).

3. Change-Oriented Behaviours

Continuous Learning

Participants consistently highlighted the importance of continuous learning as a key leadership trait in the airline industry. SPN2 reflected this sentiment, stating,

> *"As a leader you are supposed to know everything but not do everything."*

BPN2 reinforced the value of staying informed, noting,

> *"I strongly believe in a habit of continuous learning… Staying informed about industry trends is crucial for the success of every airline."*

Similarly, BPN3 emphasized proactive learning practices, sharing,

> *"You have to develop the attitude to always stay informed, not just in the company. This is one of the reasons we engage in market research yearly."*

Such perspectives underscore the belief that ongoing learning empowers leaders to make informed decisions and remain agile in a dynamic sector. This aligns with industry insights, such as Herb Kelleher's acknowledgment that knowledge and continuous education contributed significantly to his leadership success in Southwest Airlines (Fawcett, 2018). Supporting this, Naqshbandi and Jasimuddin (2018) argue that knowledge-oriented leadership enhances knowledge management, while Onyango *et al*. (2022) link it to improved innovation and employee engagement.

Tolerance

Participants emphasized the significance of tolerance in fostering a learning and development culture, even when

plans do not always turn out as expected. EPN1 mentioned,

> *"Sometimes you may take a few wrong decisions to take one right one. What we like to do is ensure that when a staff makes a mistake, we do not sack them. We ask them what they learn for them to realize where they went wrong. Everybody makes mistakes and, in that process, you learn and do better work. However, they know that safety must never be compromised."*

While recognizing the need for tolerance to encourage expression and creativity, participants also noted the importance of accountability. They acknowledged that excessive tolerance might lead to complacency, which can negatively impact performance and safety. Eyong (2019) notes that a high degree of tolerance among African leaders is often associated with flexibility and a conciliatory attitude towards conflict resolution. However, this approach must be balanced with discipline and accountability to prevent potential negative effects on performance.

4. External-Oriented Behaviours

Synergistic Networking

External behaviours were associated with external collaboration and networking with industry players. MPN1 noted,

> *"Alliances are important as well as industry events. It keeps us on the loop of what is happening, gives us an idea on who we should partner with to improve our services… partnerships help us in handling certain challenges better which otherwise would have been costlier doing so ourselves".*

TPN1 added,

> *"Another behaviour I deem essential is developing strong relationships with regulatory authorities and government stakeholders. Given the complex regulatory environment and infrastructural challenges in many African countries, establishing trust and collaboration with these bodies is paramount for ensuring compliance and facilitating operational efficiency."*

Alliances and industry events are vital for staying informed about industry trends and developments, aligning with continuous learning. Proactive relationships with regulatory bodies and stakeholders are crucial for compliance and operational efficiency (Zakaria & Zakaria, 2024) including the benefits of antitrust immunity (Lykotrafiti, 2023). Airline alliances enhance bargaining power with institutional elements, strengthening their position (Nakanishi, 2020). These external behaviours encompass representing, monitoring, and networking (Yukl, 2012).

Collectively, these findings substantiate the multi-faceted aspects of strong leadership in aviation and other such highly complex sectors. Task, relational, change, and external-oriented behaviour each possess a unique and interconnected role to play in airline performance.

Table 3: Findings from the Data on Effective Leadership Behaviours

Task-Oriented	Relations-Oriented	Change-Oriented	External
Communication	Empathy	Continuous Learning	Synergistic Networking
Timeliness	Collaboration	Tolerance	-
Coaching and Guidance	Culture Role Modelling	-	-
Accountability	Integrity	-	-
Discipline and decisiveness		-	-

Discussion

The findings of this study present empirical support for Yukl's (2012) leadership behaviour taxonomy and the validity of task-oriented, relations-oriented, change-oriented, and external- oriented behaviours in promoting the effectiveness of leadership as discussed by Breevaart & Zacher (2019). However, the study also shows the limitation of existing taxonomies in fully capturing the African airline industry's leadership complexities. Though Yukl's model is still a useful starting point, it does not cover a number of emergent behaviours, specifically empathy, tolerance, and timeliness that were found to be crucial in this case. These behaviours are reflective both of cultural norms and industry-specific requirements, highlighting the need to broaden current models with contextually relevant factors.

Task behaviours were necessary for operational efficiency and safety performance drivers in the airline industry. Their impact was significantly enhanced when accompanied by relationship-oriented behaviours. Being open to others and showing empathy, for example, were singled out severally by participants as crucial in fostering trust, building psychological safety, and limiting turnover. In a sector where human frailty can have drastic implications, leaders' responsiveness to worker welfare was a sensible benefit, rather than a moral virtue alone. These results also complement research highlighting emotional intelligence and supportive leadership as indispensable determinants of enhancing service quality and team harmony (Amah, 2023).

Change-oriented behaviours, particularly continuous learning and tolerance were critical in enduring the dynamic and fluid nature of the aviation sector. Leadership emphasized the necessity of being up to date with regards to industry trends and the spirit of experimenting and learning, including in the context of failure. Tolerance was not equated with leniency but rather defined as a deliberate tolerance for growth through error, an increasingly valuable commodity in a region beset by talent shortages and system problems. Such actions confirm the presence of leaders organizations require who have to be tough and adaptable.

Of great relevance were also external-facing behaviours, which were essential due to bureaucratic and infrastructural hindrances often observed within African countries. Leadership highlighted networking and harmonious relationships with regulatory agencies. Unlike in environments of higher deregulation, where inner operations claim leadership attention, African airline leaders must navigate externally to secure compliance and operate on an ongoing basis. These external actions were pivotal to the

acquisition of resources, management of stakeholder expectations, and political legitimation in intricate political environments.

Collectively, the findings highlight the need for leadership models that not only sound theoretical but also empirically adaptable. The unforeseen emergence of behaviours unexplained by Yukl's model suggests that taxonomies cannot remain constant and thus may lack flexibility in diverse settings. Leadership training programmes must therefore be industry- dependent and culture-adaptive, integrating both established and emergent behaviours. This work encourages a contextual, adaptive leadership knowledge that modifies itself in accordance with environmental requirements and is based on the facts of leaders functioning in certain regions like Sub-Saharan Africa.

Conclusion

The study accordingly makes a valuable contribution to knowledge concerning the dynamics of successful leadership within African airlines, calling for a balanced application of task- oriented, relations-oriented, change-oriented, and external-oriented leadership behaviour. By applying and critically evaluating Yukl's hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behaviour within the distinct context of African aviation, the study reaffirms the utility of this framework but also acknowledges considerable contextual nuances that require adjustment.

Particularly, the addition of empathy, tolerance, and decisiveness as extra behavioural attributes encapsulates the specific cultural, socio-political, and operational environments in which African airlines have to operate. For example, empathy was found to strengthen relational leadership by constructing trust, cooperation, and psychological safety among colleagues in stressful and resource-constrained settings. Similarly, tolerance assisted in both relational and change-focused behaviors, enabling leaders to handle complex interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships patiently and with an open mind. Timeliness, though, emerged as being important in task performance and coordination because lateness in decision making often has multiplier effects in the aviation sector.

The African air transport sector, with its infrastructural limitations, regulatory ambiguity, and cultural diversity, necessitates a more integrated leadership approach that, in addition to examining what leaders do, also addresses how and when they do it. The introduction of new behaviours into the leadership framework is therefore both a theoretical advance and a practical imperative.

Besides, the study offers concrete implications for leadership development and training programs in African carriers. Companies in this sector ought to take it upon themselves to build leaders who are not only technically equipped but also emotionally intelligent and contextually sensitive. Leadership modules ought to include simulation and case study that reflect realistic challenges relevant to the African aviation environment to allow future leaders to acquire the soft skills and sense of judgment required to be effective leaders.

From a policy perspective, the research indicates there is a case for organizational cultures and structures that enable inclusive, responsive, and adaptable forms of leadership. This may be achieved through revisiting performance measurement criteria to include consideration of the relational and adaptive nature of leadership or by implementing mentorship schemes that bring early-stage leaders together with experienced practitioners who model these wider behavioural skills.

This study contributes to the overall leadership discourse by asserting the need for context sensitivity among leadership models. It encourages researchers to re-evaluate existing models and consider the integration of new behaviours to better reflect industry-specific complexities.

Limitations and Future Research

The study's small, non-random sample limits generalizability. Future research should adopt a mixed-methods approach and include a broader demographic. Cross-sector comparisons could validate whether the extended framework applies to other industries in similar contexts.

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