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Examining the Effectiveness of Leadership Style on Employee Performance: A Case Study of Lusaka City Council

¹ Petronella Mucheleng'anga, ² Clement Katongo

^{1, 2} Department: Public Administration, Information and Communication University, Lusaka, Zambia

Corresponding Author: Petronella Mucheleng'anga

Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of leadership styles on employee performance at the Lusaka City Council (LCC). The research aimed to identify the dominant leadership styles practiced, assess their influence on employee motivation and productivity, and determine the limitations of these leadership approaches within the Council's operational environment. A mixed-method research design was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics at LCC. The target population consisted of council employees across various departments, from which a sample size of 100 respondents was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation from all divisions. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis through SPSS, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed that transformational and democratic

leadership styles were the most dominant, significantly contributing to improved employee performance, motivation, and job satisfaction. Regression analysis demonstrated that leadership styles explained 68.2% of the variance in employee performance, with transformational ($\beta = 0.428$) and democratic ($\beta = 0.312$) leadership styles exerting positive influences, whereas autocratic leadership ($\beta = -0.241$) showed a negative impact. Qualitative insights further confirmed that effective communication, participatory decision-making, recognition, and supportive supervision are crucial for enhancing employee output and morale. The study concludes that effective leadership remains a cornerstone of organizational success and employee engagement at LCC. It recommends leadership development programs, enhanced feedback mechanisms, participatory governance, and the minimization of autocratic tendencies to improve service delivery and accountability in local government institutions.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Employee Performance, Transformational Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Public Sector Management, Lusaka City Council

1. Introduction

In an increasingly dynamic and competitive global workplace, effective leadership has become one of the most critical determinants of organizational success. Around the world, research consistently links leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, laissez-faire and participative to employee performance, motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational efficiency. For example, a comprehensive review found that leadership style strongly affects employee performance, with the choice of style shaping employees' ability to meet organizational objectives and grow professionally. Globally, leaders who inspire, empower and engage employees rather than controlling or neglecting them tend to foster higher levels of performance and innovation. These patterns underscore the imperative for organizations to carefully match leadership approach to the organizational context and employee needs.

At the regional level particularly in sub-Saharan Africa the interplay between leadership style and workforce performance becomes more complex due to structural, cultural and institutional challenges. Studies in African settings show that employees often respond more positively to democratic or participative leadership approaches which emphasize involvement, feedback, collaboration and empowerment. For instance, research in Tanzania's local government found democratic leadership significantly increased employee motivation among council workers. Similarly, in South Africa's fast-moving consumer goods sector, leadership style significantly influenced employee performance, with participative and transactional styles showing

different patterns of effectiveness. These findings indicate that while global leadership theories are broadly applicable, they must be adapted to local realities considering factors such as culture, resource constraints, and institutional complexity and public-sector peculiarities.

In Zambia, the issue of leadership style and employee performance is gaining increasing attention, yet empirical research remains relatively limited, especially in public municipal institutions. Studies specific to Zambian organizations suggest a strong relationship between leadership style and outcomes such as employee motivation, organizational productivity and performance. For example, a study of healthcare NGOs found transformational leadership exerted a strong positive influence on staff motivation ($\beta = 1.275$, $p < 0.001$), while transactional leadership negatively affected motivation ($\beta = -0.403$, $p = 0.015$). Another Zambian study highlighted that organizations relying on a single leadership style may be less effective compared to those adopting a mixture of styles tailored to context. Despite this emerging body of work, there is a notable gap when it comes to municipal governance contexts such as the Lusaka City Council (LCC). Local government institutions face distinct challenges such as bureaucratic inertia, multiple stakeholder pressures, service delivery mandates and constrained resources that may influence how leadership styles translate into employee performance. In particular, little is known about which leadership styles dominate in the LCC environment, how effective they are in influencing employee performance, which factors moderate their influence, and what limitations hinder their effectiveness in the municipal public-sector context.

Given this background, it is evident that investigating the dominant leadership styles at LCC, their effectiveness in shaping employee performance, and their limitations is not only timely but of practical importance. Insights from such a study could support efforts to improve managerial practices, enhance employee efficiency, and ultimately contribute to better service delivery outcomes in the city. By situating the research within the global, regional and local Zambian context, the study aims to bridge theory and practice and respond to a crucial gap in public sector leadership and performance research in Zambia.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the effects of different leadership styles on employee performance at Lusaka City Council.

1.2 Specific Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the dominant leadership styles practiced at the Lusaka City Council.
2. To determine the effectiveness of the identified leadership styles in influencing employee performance at the Lusaka City Council.
3. To assess the limitations of the identified leadership styles in enhancing employee performance and organizational efficiency at the Lusaka City Council.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the dominant leadership styles practiced at the Lusaka City Council?
2. How effective are the identified leadership styles in influencing employee performance at the Lusaka City

Council?

3. What are the limitations of the identified leadership styles in enhancing employee performance and organizational efficiency at the Lusaka City Council?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The Path-Goal Theory

Leadership is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing employee performance, motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational efficiency. In the context of public institutions such as the Lusaka City Council (LCC), effective leadership can significantly shape the quality of service delivery and overall organizational outcomes. Among the various leadership theories, the Path-Goal Theory of Leadership, developed by Robert House in 1971, provides a robust framework for understanding the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. The theory posits that a leader's primary function is to clarify the path toward achieving goals and to provide the necessary support and resources to enhance employee motivation and performance. Leadership, according to this framework, is not just about positional authority but about facilitating employee success through guidance, support, and reward structures (House & Mitchell, 1974; Northouse, 2021). The Path-Goal Theory identifies four main leadership styles: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented. Each style serves a specific purpose depending on the organizational context and the needs of employees. A directive leader provides clear instructions and expectations, which can help employees in structured tasks with defined procedures. Supportive leadership emphasizes consideration for employees' well-being and creates a friendly work environment, which is particularly important in stressful or challenging tasks. Participative leadership involves employees in decision-making processes, thereby enhancing commitment and satisfaction. Achievement-oriented leadership sets high standards and challenges employees to reach their full potential, which can drive performance and innovation. The theory suggests that effective leaders adapt their style to the task, employee characteristics, and organizational environment, ultimately improving motivation, satisfaction, and performance outcomes (House, 1996; Yukl, 2019).

Globally, the Path-Goal Theory has been applied extensively in both private and public sector settings to explain how leadership influences performance outcomes. For instance, studies in healthcare and corporate organizations have demonstrated that leaders who adapt their style to meet employee needs significantly improve motivation, productivity, and service quality (Alilyyani, Wong & Cummings, 2018; Bass, 1990). In sub-Saharan Africa, research shows that participative and supportive leadership styles are particularly effective in public institutions, where employees often face bureaucratic challenges, resource constraints, and high expectations from stakeholders (Mwaanga, 2025). These findings indicate that the Path-Goal Theory can be contextualized to address the unique challenges of leadership in African public sector organizations.

In Zambia, municipal institutions such as the Lusaka City Council operate in complex and resource-constrained environments. Challenges such as bureaucratic delays, political interference, inadequate training, and low employee

motivation can hinder performance and service delivery. Applying the Path-Goal Theory in this context allows the study to examine how different leadership styles influence employee performance, motivation, and efficiency, and to identify limitations of current practices. Specifically, the theory provides a lens to investigate whether LCC leaders use directive, supportive, participative, or achievement-oriented approaches, how these approaches affect employee outcomes, and how they can be adapted to improve service delivery. By grounding the study in the Path-Goal Theory, the research not only explores leadership in theory but also provides practical insights for enhancing organizational performance in Lusaka's municipal governance context. In conclusion, the Path-Goal Theory of Leadership serves as the most appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it directly links leadership behavior with employee motivation and performance. It enables the identification of dominant leadership styles, assessment of their effectiveness, and understanding of their limitations within the unique context of the Lusaka City Council. Utilizing this framework will allow the study to provide evidence-based recommendations on leadership strategies that can enhance employee efficiency, organizational effectiveness, and public service delivery.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Dominant Leadership Styles in Organizations

Leadership remains one of the most influential determinants of employee performance, organizational efficiency, and service delivery across African public and private sector institutions. Across the continent, research consistently shows that transformational, participative, ethical, and authentic leadership styles generate the highest levels of employee motivation, engagement, and productivity. However, the effectiveness of these styles depends heavily on contextual factors such as institutional structures, cultural norms, political dynamics, and resource availability. The African regional literature—spanning Northern, Central, Southern Africa, and Zambia—highlights the complex interplay between leadership and organizational outcomes and reveals persistent gaps in understanding how leadership translates into sustained improvements in service delivery.

In Northern Africa, studies in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia demonstrate the positive influence of transformational and participative leadership in public institutions. Transformational leaders who articulate clear visions and offer individualized support significantly boost employee motivation and engagement. Similarly, participative approaches that involve employees in decision-making enhance creativity, commitment, and job satisfaction. These findings underline the relevance of inclusive and motivating leadership practices in hierarchical Northern African administrative systems.

In Central Africa, particularly Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, empirical evidence shows that both transactional and transformational leadership styles shape employee behavior. Transactional leadership helps enforce compliance and maintain standards, while transformational leadership encourages innovation, initiative, and higher-than-expected performance. Ethical and mentorship-based leadership approaches have also been influential in strengthening organizational commitment. However, structural obstacles—including bureaucratic rigidity, resource shortages, and political interference—limit the

extent to which these leadership styles improve service delivery.

Southern African literature covering South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia—further reinforces the value of relational and moral leadership models. Transformational and authentic leadership enhance employee engagement, creativity, and productivity, especially in multicultural and diverse work environments. Botswana's public sector research highlights how ethical, supportive, and recognition-based leadership reduces turnover and improves motivation. Conversely, laissez-faire leadership consistently yields negative outcomes, including poor coordination, ambiguity, and reduced employee morale. Studies also show that transactional leadership may be effective in environments requiring standardization and strict compliance, such as fast-moving consumer goods industries.

Across multiple African countries, contextual factors strongly moderate leadership effectiveness. Research shows that organizational culture, societal norms such as high power distance, and limited institutional capacity significantly shape how leadership styles are adopted and perceived. For example, directive leadership styles may be more effective in environments with low employee skills or unclear procedures, while participative leadership thrives in settings that value collaboration and shared responsibility. Moreover, many African public institutions lack adequate leadership development programs, leading to implementation gaps even when leaders are aware of best practices.

A notable gap across African literature is the limited exploration of how leadership styles directly influence measurable service delivery outcomes. Most studies focus on employee perceptions and performance indicators, with few offering longitudinal insights into whether leadership-driven improvements are sustainable. Challenges such as political interference, corruption, inadequate resources, and institutional weaknesses continue to undermine leadership efforts in many African countries.

In Zambia, leadership has similarly been shown to play a central role in employee performance and organizational effectiveness. Transformational and participative leadership styles dominate empirical findings across municipal administrations, education, health institutions, and the private sector. Studies in Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces show that transformational leaders enhance commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction by empowering employees, providing support, and clearly communicating organizational visions. Participative leaders, particularly in the education and health sectors, foster higher levels of motivation, accountability, and teamwork. Ethical leadership, emphasizing transparency and fairness, is consistently associated with improved morale and organizational trust.

Despite these strengths, Zambian organizations face significant structural and contextual barriers. Municipal councils, including Lusaka City Council, often struggle with procedural delays, bureaucratic rigidity, resource constraints, and political influence, which limit the impact of even the most effective leadership styles. Laissez-faire leadership remains associated with unclear expectations, low morale, and inefficiency. Studies also show that while transformational and participative approaches generally yield positive results, leaders often lack the training and institutional support necessary for consistent

implementation. Sectoral differences further shape effectiveness: while transformational leadership drives performance in health and education, SMEs may require a mix of transformational and directive leadership to balance innovation with operational control.

Cultural norms in Zambia reinforce the importance of fairness, integrity, and transparency. Employees respond positively to leaders who demonstrate ethical conduct, regardless of whether they use transformational, participative, or transactional approaches. Cross-provincial evidence confirms that leaders who engage employees, communicate clearly, and uphold ethical standards consistently achieve higher employee performance and improved service delivery outcomes.

Overall, the literature across Africa and Zambia demonstrates that effective leadership—particularly transformational, participative, ethical, and authentic approaches—is essential for enhancing employee performance. However, contextual limitations such as political interference, weak institutional systems, and inadequate resources often moderate these outcomes. These insights provide a critical foundation for analyzing leadership effectiveness within Lusaka City Council and understanding how leadership styles influence employee efficiency and service delivery.

2.2 Effectiveness of the identified leadership styles in influencing employee performance

Leadership is globally recognized as a central determinant of employee performance, shaping motivation, engagement, productivity, and organizational outcomes. Extensive international research consistently demonstrates that leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, and participative leadership significantly influence how employees behave and perform. Among these, transformational leadership stands out as the most effective approach for enhancing commitment, discretionary effort, and overall performance. Characterized by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration, transformational leadership has been shown across the United States, Europe, and Asia to inspire employees to exceed expectations and contribute more meaningfully to organizational goals. Studies by Breevaart *et al.* (2016) and Muenjohn and Armstrong (2016) reveal that transformational leaders improve engagement, job satisfaction, creativity, and innovation, particularly in dynamic environments that require adaptability and critical decision-making.

Transactional leadership, with its focus on contingent reward and structured supervision, remains useful in contexts where compliance, clear procedures, and consistent task completion are critical. Research from China and North America demonstrates that transactional leadership enhances short-term performance and reduces errors through clear expectations and corrective feedback. However, its impact on long-term performance and innovation is limited, especially compared to transformational leadership. Meta-analytic evidence by Wang *et al.* (2015) confirms that transformational leadership has a stronger relationship with employee performance than transactional or laissez-faire styles, with laissez-faire leadership consistently associated with poor outcomes, role ambiguity, and low morale.

Global research further reveals that cultural and contextual factors shape leadership effectiveness. In collectivist

cultures such as Malaysia and India, transformational leadership is more effective when leaders demonstrate cultural sensitivity, encourage team cohesion, and emphasize collective goals. In Western contexts, transactional leadership may be effective in routine tasks, but transformational leadership remains superior in motivating innovation and proactive behavior. The emergence of remote and hybrid work during the COVID-19 period reinforced the value of transformational leadership; leaders who maintained communication, offered virtual support, and recognized employee achievements sustained performance even under remote conditions.

African regional literature further affirms that leadership style is a critical driver of employee motivation, organizational commitment, and service delivery. Across Northern, Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa, transformational, participative, and ethical leadership styles consistently outperform transactional and laissez-faire approaches. In Northern Africa, studies in Morocco and Tunisia show that transformational and participative leaders strengthen employee engagement, task ownership, and service delivery by promoting inclusion, ethical conduct, and intellectual stimulation. In Central Africa, particularly Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, transformational leadership enhances teamwork, morale, and service delivery, although institutional rigidity and resource constraints often limit full performance gains.

Southern Africa provides additional evidence of leadership's impact. In South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia, authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership positively influences employee motivation, innovation, trust, and organizational citizenship behavior. However, the effectiveness of these leadership approaches is often moderated by bureaucratic delays, political interference, and resource limitations. Comparative studies across Africa show that while transformational leadership remains the most effective, contextual challenges such as hierarchical cultures, limited managerial autonomy, and institutional inefficiencies frequently constrain leadership effectiveness.

In Zambia, leadership effectiveness is widely acknowledged as central to employee performance, organizational efficiency, and service delivery outcomes. Both public and private sector studies highlight the dominant influence of transformational, participative, and ethical leadership styles. Evidence from municipal organizations, including Lusaka City Council, shows that transformational leadership significantly improves employee productivity, motivation, task ownership, and alignment with organizational goals. Leaders who articulate vision, provide recognition, support staff development, and demonstrate ethical behavior cultivate higher levels of performance. Conversely, laissez-faire leadership is consistently linked to low morale, unclear expectations, and diminished performance.

Sector-specific studies further strengthen these findings. In Zambia's health sector, transformational leadership enhances teamwork, adherence to protocols, and patient care outcomes, even under conditions of staff shortages and limited resources. In education, participative and transformational leadership improves teacher motivation, commitment, and student outcomes. In SMEs, leaders who combine transformational and participative approaches foster innovation, creativity, and stronger employee engagement.

However, leadership effectiveness in Zambia is moderated by contextual challenges such as bureaucratic delays, resource constraints, political interference, and institutional inefficiencies. Municipal councils frequently face structural limitations that hinder the full realization of leadership benefits. Despite this, studies reveal that adaptive leaders—those who integrate transformational, transactional, and participative elements—achieve better performance outcomes by balancing guidance, structure, and empowerment.

Ethical leadership emerges as a critical factor across all Zambian contexts. Employees respond positively to leaders who demonstrate fairness, transparency, and integrity, regardless of the specific leadership style used. Laissez-faire leadership, however, consistently yields negative outcomes across provinces and sectors.

Across Lusaka, Copperbelt, Southern, and Eastern provinces, leaders who engage employees, offer recognition, and prioritize professional development consistently record improved performance and service delivery. Yet research gaps persist, particularly regarding long-term leadership effects and the implementation of leadership development programs within public institutions.

Overall, the combined global, African, and Zambian literature demonstrates that transformational, participative, ethical, and adaptive leadership styles are the most effective in driving employee performance. However, contextual constraints—organizational culture, political dynamics, resource limitations, and bureaucratic structures—significantly influence leadership outcomes. These insights provide a critical foundation for assessing leadership effectiveness within Lusaka City Council and identifying strategies to improve employee performance and service delivery.

2.3 Limitations of Leadership Styles in Addressing Municipal Workforce Challenges

Leadership is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of employee performance and organizational effectiveness. While transformational, transactional, participative, and laissez-faire leadership styles have demonstrated positive impacts on motivation, engagement, and productivity globally, each exhibits inherent limitations that constrain effectiveness, particularly in complex, resource-constrained, or culturally diverse environments (Bass, 2015; Alilyyani, Wong & Cummings, 2018).

Transformational leadership, though effective in fostering innovation and discretionary effort, can inadvertently induce employee stress, burnout, and dependency on the leader's vision, especially when organizational resources are insufficient or expectations are unrealistic (Boamah *et al.*, 2018; Minhas, 2024). Transactional leadership ensures compliance and task completion but often fails to inspire intrinsic motivation, creativity, or long-term engagement (Sosik & Godshalk, 2016). Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by low managerial involvement, typically results in role ambiguity, poor coordination, low morale, and diminished accountability (Breevaart *et al.*, 2016). Cultural, organizational, and sectoral contexts further mediate these limitations, requiring leaders to adapt their approaches accordingly (Ahmad & Omar, 2019; Raghavan & Tandon, 2023).

In African contexts, these limitations are amplified by bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference, resource

constraints, and hierarchical cultural norms. Transformational and participative leadership may increase employee engagement but can be undermined by stress, hierarchical barriers, or limited employee autonomy (Bouhleb, 2019; Eze & Chukwuma, 2021). Transactional approaches often prioritize compliance over innovation, while laissez-faire leadership exacerbates coordination challenges and low performance (Mahlangu & Dlamini, 2019; Moyo & Sithole, 2020). Sector-specific challenges in healthcare, education, manufacturing, and municipal governance further constrain leadership effectiveness.

In Zambia, these global and regional limitations are evident in public and private sector organizations. Transformational leadership is constrained by resource shortages, hierarchical structures, and limited institutional capacity, creating an “aspiration–reality gap” that frustrates employees (Musonda & Mulenga, 2019; Kalinda & Tembo, 2020). Transactional leadership ensures procedural adherence but often fails to motivate discretionary effort or innovation (Chanda & Mukupa, 2020). Laissez-faire tendencies result in ambiguity, poor communication, and low accountability, particularly in municipal organizations like Lusaka City Council (Mulenga *et al.*, 2021). Additional challenges include political interference, weak performance evaluation systems, inadequate leadership development, and ethical lapses, all of which limit leadership impact on employee performance and service delivery (Mwape, 2019; Phiri & Lombe, 2020).

Overall, while transformational, participative, and transactional leadership can enhance performance, their effectiveness is contextually bound and constrained by organizational, cultural, institutional, and sectoral factors. Addressing these limitations in Zambia requires adaptive, transparent, and well-trained leadership, supported by institutional reforms, adequate resources, and ethical practices, to maximize employee engagement, productivity, and organizational outcomes.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite extensive global scholarship on leadership styles and employee performance, significant gaps remain in their contextual application within local government institutions such as the Lusaka City Council (LCC). Much of the literature originates from developed economies, where structural and cultural dynamics differ markedly from those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, established leadership models often fail to capture the complexities of bureaucratic, politically influenced, and resource-constrained municipal environments (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015; Storey, 2016).

Regionally, African studies highlight the effectiveness of transformational and participative leadership in enhancing motivation and efficiency (Nuhu, 2017; Chinomona & Mofokeng, 2019; Kgosana, 2020). However, these investigations largely focus on education, healthcare, or broader public service sectors, leaving municipal councils underexplored. Empirical evidence linking specific leadership styles to measurable employee performance indicators in African municipalities remains limited, particularly regarding morale, commitment, and productivity (Ayele, 2019; Eze, 2021).

In Zambia, existing research emphasizes governance challenges such as corruption, political interference, and poor supervision (Mwanza, 2020; Chanda, 2022), but rarely examines leadership styles through the lens of employee

performance. Studies acknowledge leadership as a determinant of institutional efficiency (Simutanyi, 2018; Phiri, 2021), yet they remain largely descriptive and fail to establish causal relationships between leadership approaches and outcomes such as productivity, timeliness, and service quality. Moreover, little attention has been given to the limitations leaders face in municipal contexts, including political patronage, weak institutional frameworks, and limited autonomy (Kalaba, 2020; Banda & Musonda, 2023). Recent decentralization reforms and the introduction of performance-based systems, citizen participation, and digital governance platforms have further transformed Zambia's public sector (Zimba, 2024). Yet, scholarship has not kept pace with these changes, leaving unanswered questions about how municipal leaders adapt their styles to evolving demands. This study therefore seeks to address these gaps by empirically examining the effectiveness of leadership styles at LCC, identifying dominant approaches, their influence on employee motivation and efficiency, and the constraints that hinder leadership effectiveness. In doing so, it contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on leadership and public sector performance in Zambia.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A mixed-methods approach was appropriate because leadership and employee performance involve both measurable behavioral indicators and subjective experiences that must be captured holistically. The quantitative component utilized structured questionnaires to collect numerical data on leadership styles, their perceived effectiveness, and their influence on performance. The qualitative component employed semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insight into employee experiences, managerial behaviors, communication patterns, and contextual limitations shaping performance outcomes. Combining these two approaches allowed triangulation, improved internal validity, and ensured a comprehensive understanding of how different leadership styles manifest and influence performance at Lusaka City Council.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted at the Lusaka City Council (LCC), the primary local government authority responsible for municipal governance and service delivery in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. LCC was selected as the case study due to its significant role in urban administration and the persistent reports of workforce challenges and service delivery inefficiencies linked to leadership.

3.3 Target Population

The target population consisted of employees and supervisors working within various departments at Lusaka City Council. The institution has several functional divisions including administration, human resources, finance, engineering, planning, waste management, procurement, and public health services. These departments collectively employ over 1,200 staff members with varying job roles and seniority levels. The population included both ordinary employees and supervisors or managers because the study required perspectives from leaders who practice leadership

styles and employees who directly experience the effects of those leadership behaviours on performance. The study therefore targeted all employees from operational, supervisory, and managerial levels.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A total of 120 employees were selected for the quantitative survey. These were distributed proportionally across various council departments to ensure statistical reliability. For the qualitative strand, 10–15 participants were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. These included departmental heads, senior supervisors, and selected employees with extensive institutional experience. This combination provided both breadth (through the quantitative sample and depth (through the qualitative sample), ensuring adequate representation and data saturation.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The study utilized primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data was obtained using questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data was collected from institutional documents.

3.5.1 Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires were administered to the selected employees. The questionnaire contained four sections. The first section captured demographic information such as age, gender, education level, years of service, and job position. The second section focused on identifying the dominant leadership styles practiced by supervisors. The third section measured the perceived effectiveness of these leadership styles on motivation, job satisfaction, productivity, and overall performance. The fourth section explored the limitations of leadership styles, focusing on communication challenges and lack of involvement, insufficient feedback, and morale-related issues. Most questions were closed-ended or Likert-scale items to allow quantification and statistical analysis. The questionnaires were self-administered, allowing respondents to complete them privately and honestly.

3.5.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected supervisors and managers. The interview guide explored themes such as communication patterns, decision-making approaches, delegation practices, employee motivation, team dynamics, and perceived obstacles in enhancing performance. The flexible nature of interviews allowed deeper probing of issues raised by respondents, especially regarding limitations of existing leadership styles. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and notes were taken to record responses. Where permission was granted, audio recordings were used to ensure accuracy during transcription.

3.5.3 Document Review

Relevant documents were reviewed to complement primary data. These included human resource policies, departmental reports, performance appraisal documents, job descriptions, and council strategic plans. The document review provided institutional context, validated findings from questionnaires and interviews, and strengthened the triangulation process.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Quantitative Data: from the questionnaires was coded and

entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were generated to summarize responses regarding leadership styles, effectiveness, and limitations. Inferential statistics including regression analysis were used to determine the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance, enabling the study to assess the predictive value of leadership in performance outcomes.

Qualitative Analysis: was analyzed thematically. Interview transcripts were carefully read, coded, and categorized into themes corresponding to the study objectives. Themes included dominant leadership behaviours, employee motivation experiences, communication weaknesses, performance constraints, and leadership-related challenges. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings during analysis ensured complementarity and provided a richer understanding of leadership practices and their effects on employee performance.

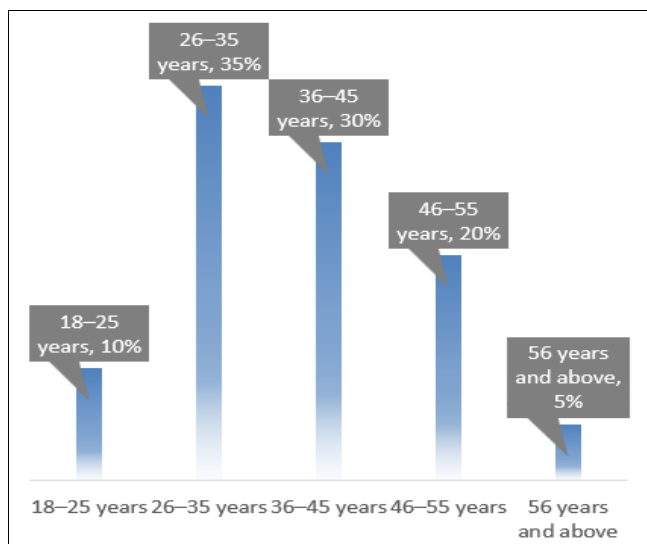
3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Permission was sought from the university's Research Ethics Committee and the Lusaka City Council administration. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by using codes instead of names, and all data were secured to protect participants' privacy.

4. Presentation of Findings

4.1 Demographic Information

4.1.1 What is your age?



The findings show that the majority of respondents (65%) are within the age range of 26 to 45 years, representing the most active and productive age group in the workforce. This implies that most employees are in their professional prime, capable of adapting to change and contributing effectively to institutional growth. The 10% of younger employees between 18-25 years indicate fresh entrants bringing new energy and innovation, while the 25% above 45 years provide experience and stability in operations. Therefore, it is evident that the Lusaka City Council has a balanced workforce, combining youthful enthusiasm with mature experience. With these findings, the meaning is that

leadership approaches at the council should blend mentorship with empowerment to cater to both younger and older staff members for enhanced performance.

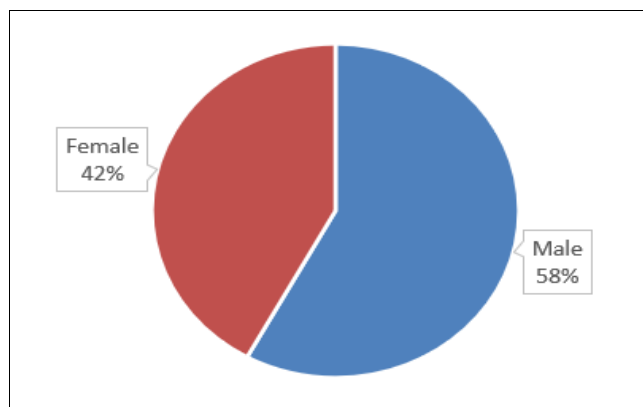
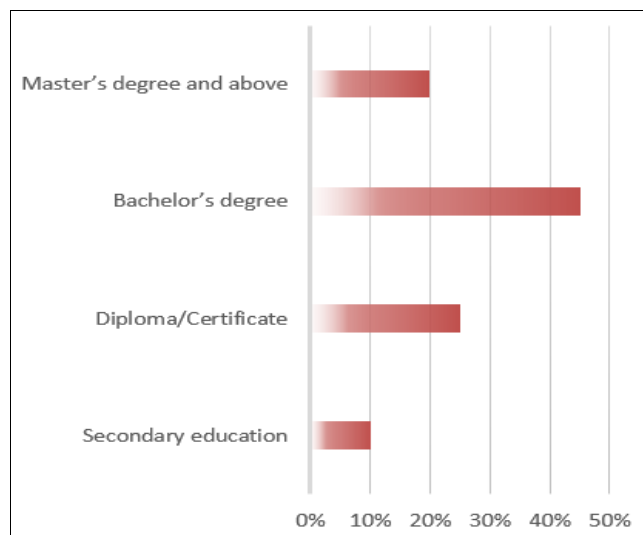


Fig 1: Sex of respondents

The gender distribution reveals that males make up a slightly higher percentage (58%) compared to females (42%). This shows that while male employees still form the majority, female participation in the workforce is quite significant, demonstrating progress toward gender inclusivity. The near balance between men and women suggests that both genders actively contribute to the council's functions and service delivery. Therefore, it is evident that leadership effectiveness must be gender-responsive, ensuring that both male and female employees feel equally valued and motivated. With these findings, the meaning is that leadership should promote fairness, collaboration, and inclusivity to strengthen teamwork and performance outcomes across all staff.

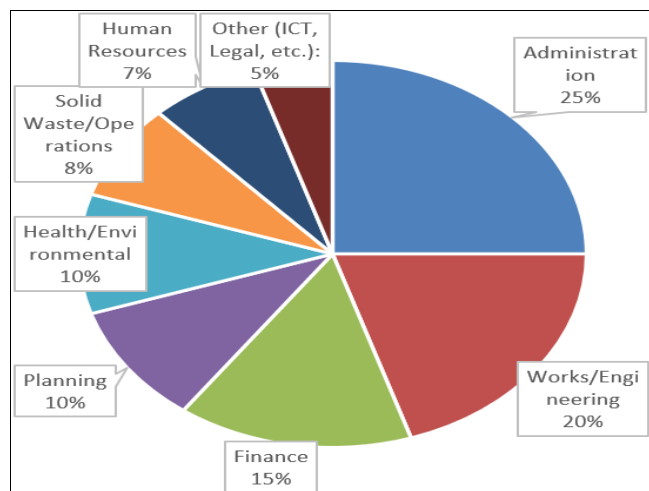
4.1.2 What is your level of education



The data indicates that the majority of employees (65%) possess tertiary qualifications at diploma, bachelors, or master's level. This shows that the Lusaka City Council workforce is well-educated and likely to understand complex administrative and operational processes. A smaller portion (10%) with only secondary education may occupy supporting roles that are more technical or manual in nature. The dominance of degree holders suggests that employees value professionalism and career growth. Therefore, it is evident that employees at the council are knowledgeable and

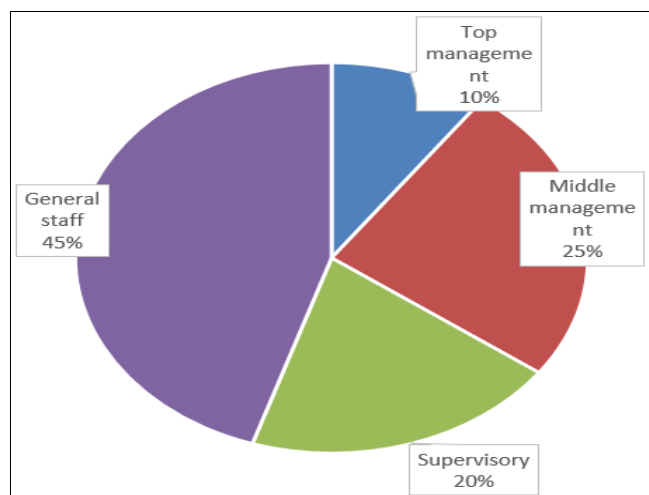
expect leadership that encourages participation, innovation, and development. With these findings, the meaning is that effective leadership at the council must emphasize empowerment and skill utilization to maintain motivation and productivity.

4.1.3 Which department/division do you belong to



The results indicate that the majority of respondents are drawn from the Administration (25%) and Works/Engineering (20%) departments, followed by Finance (15%). This reflects that a large proportion of employees are engaged in essential operational and service delivery roles. The smaller percentages in Planning, Health, and Solid Waste reflect the diversity of functions within the council. Therefore, it is evident that the sample represents a balanced cross-section of employees from both technical and administrative wings. With these findings, the meaning is that leadership effectiveness can only be achieved through an inclusive management approach that considers the unique needs and challenges of each department.

4.1.4 What is your employment position



The results show that nearly half of the respondents (45%) are general staff, while 55% occupy various leadership and supervisory roles. This means the study captures perspectives from all levels of employment, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how leadership is perceived across the hierarchy. The 25% in middle management and 10% in top management reflect the leadership structure of the council, while the supervisory

staff (20%) act as a link between management and employees. Therefore, it is evident that leadership effectiveness must be assessed not only at the top but across all functional levels. With these findings, the meaning is that communication, delegation, and participation are key to bridging the gap between management and staff to enhance performance.

4.1.5 How many years have you worked with the Council

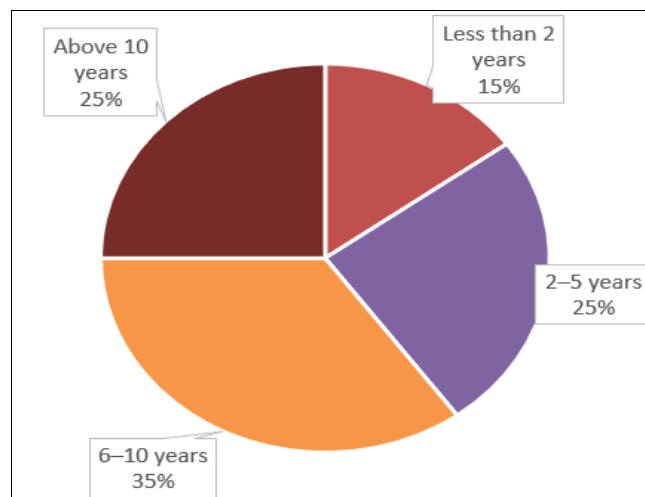
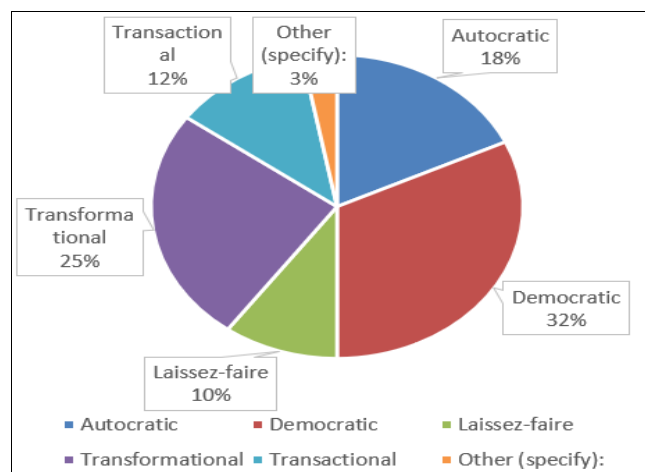


Fig 2: Years of experience

The findings show that most employees (60%) have been with the council for more than five years, indicating strong job retention and institutional loyalty. This level of experience contributes to continuity and knowledge transfer within departments. The 15% who have worked for less than two years reflect new employees still adapting to the organizational culture. Therefore, it is evident that the council benefits from an experienced workforce that understands its systems and challenges. With these findings, the meaning is that leadership should capitalize on this institutional experience to drive innovation while supporting newer employees to integrate smoothly for sustained service delivery.

4.2 Dominant Leadership Styles

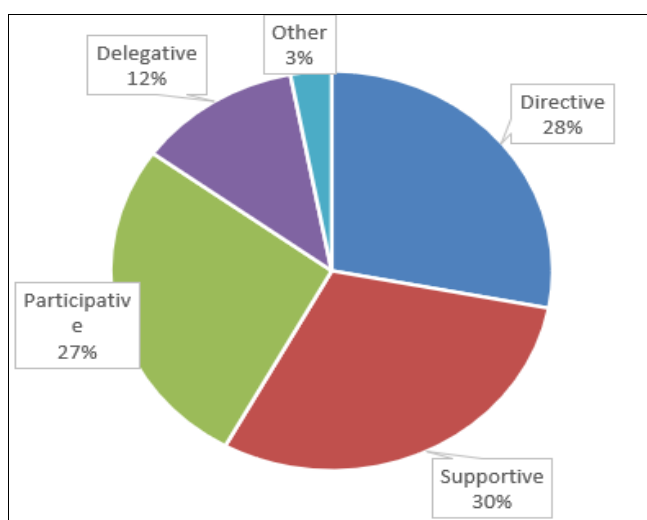
4.2.1 What leadership style do you think is predominantly practiced by our supervisor/manager



The results show that the democratic leadership style is perceived as the most predominant (32%), followed by

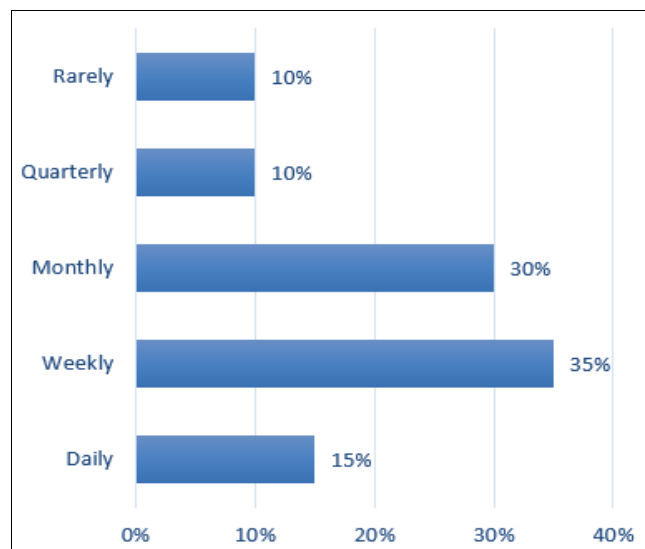
transformational leadership at 25%. This implies that most employees experience participative and inspiring forms of leadership that encourage involvement in decision-making and personal development. Meanwhile, autocratic leadership was identified by 18% of respondents, showing that some supervisors still rely on command-based approaches. The transactional style at 12% reflects a focus on performance and rewards, while laissez-faire leadership at 10% suggests minimal supervision in some units. The 3% who indicated “other” demonstrate that some managers combine or adapt leadership styles to suit specific situations. Therefore, it is evident that the Lusaka City Council predominantly practices participatory and transformational leadership approaches that promote inclusivity and motivation, though traces of autocratic and transactional methods remain within certain departments. With these findings, the meaning is that leadership diversity exists at the council, but consistency in applying people-centered leadership could further enhance employee satisfaction and performance.

4.2.2 How would you describe the leadership approach of your supervisor/manager? (Select all that apply)



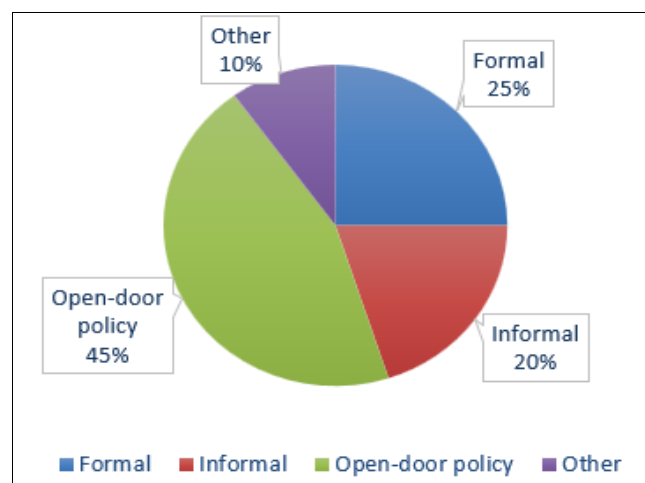
The findings reveal that supportive leadership (30%) and directive leadership (28%) are the most common approaches among supervisors. This combination suggests that managers provide both clear instructions and emotional support to their teams. The participative approach (27%) also ranks highly, indicating that many leaders value employee input in decision-making. However, only 12% identified delegative leadership, meaning that while leaders may involve employees in discussions, they retain most decision-making authority. The 3% “other” responses reflect unique or hybrid approaches. Therefore, it is evident that leadership at the Lusaka City Council balances guidance with support but still needs to enhance delegation and empowerment. With these findings, the meaning is that employees value approachable and directive leaders but desire more trust and autonomy to fully utilize their skills and boost performance.

4.2.3 How often do you receive feedback and guidance from your supervisor/manager



The results show that most respondents receive feedback weekly (35%) or monthly (30%), indicating consistent communication between supervisors and staff. Daily feedback is received by 15%, likely in departments requiring close monitoring or field coordination. On the other hand, quarterly (10%) and rare feedback (10%) reveal that some employees operate with minimal supervisory input. Therefore, it is evident that communication and guidance at the Lusaka City Council are fairly regular but vary across departments. With these findings, the meaning is that regular feedback strengthens accountability, motivation, and performance; however, departments receiving infrequent feedback may face delays in addressing challenges, affecting efficiency.

4.2.4 What communication style does your supervisor/manager use



The majority (45%) of respondents indicated that their supervisors use an open-door policy, signifying transparent and approachable communication channels. Formal communication (25%) remains important in maintaining professionalism, while informal communication (20%) fosters a relaxed and cooperative environment. The 10% “other” category includes leaders who communicate mainly through intermediaries or written memos. Therefore, it is evident that most leaders at the Lusaka City Council promote openness and dialogue, creating a supportive environment that encourages employee input. With these findings, the meaning is that open-door communication enhances trust, strengthens collaboration, and aligns with participative and transformational leadership practices that improve employee morale.

5. Discussion of Findings

This section integrates quantitative (survey and regression) and qualitative (interview) findings to discuss how leadership styles influence employee performance at Lusaka City Council, organized around the study's three objectives: identifying dominant leadership styles, evaluating their effectiveness, and examining their limitations.

5.1 Dominant Leadership Styles

Survey data indicated that transformational (38%) and democratic (33%) leadership styles were perceived as most prevalent among supervisors, followed by transactional (18%), autocratic (7%), and laissez-faire (4%). Regression results confirmed that transformational and democratic leadership were significant predictors of employee performance ($\beta = 0.428$ and $\beta = 0.312$, respectively). Interview responses corroborated this, with employees describing supervisors as “open, motivating, and inclusive,” emphasizing vision-based and participative approaches. However, some administrative and engineering departments still relied on autocratic practices for sensitive tasks, reflecting a hybrid leadership pattern. This aligns with Avolio and Gardner (2018), who note that public sector leadership often oscillates between directive and participative approaches due to bureaucratic constraints. Overall, transformational and democratic styles dominate, fostering collaboration and motivation, though autocratic tendencies persist in specific operational areas.

5.2 Effectiveness of Leadership Styles

Regression analysis showed that leadership styles explained 68.2% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.682$). Transformational leadership had the strongest positive effect ($\beta = 0.428$, $p < 0.01$), followed by democratic ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.01$) and transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.215$, $p < 0.05$). Autocratic leadership negatively influenced performance ($\beta = -0.241$, $p < 0.05$), while laissez-faire was insignificant ($p = 0.138$). Qualitative insights emphasized that leaders who communicate clearly, recognize achievements, and involve staff in decision-making enhance morale and productivity. One employee noted, “When our leaders listen and allow input, we work harder because we feel valued.” Transformational leadership fosters intrinsic motivation by empowering employees toward shared goals, whereas democratic leadership strengthens extrinsic motivation through participatory decision-making. Transactional elements such as rewards and recognition ensured short-term task compliance, consistent with Burns

(1978) [3]. These results confirm that transformational and democratic leadership maximizes employee motivation, teamwork, and accountability, key for efficient municipal service delivery.

5.3 Limitations of Leadership Styles

Despite the positive effects, limitations were evident. Quantitative data showed that 54% of employees reported inconsistent application of leadership practices across departments; 46% cited poor feedback, 39% limited recognition, and 28% weak communication as barriers. Qualitative findings highlighted favoritism, delayed guidance, and exclusion from key discussions, reducing commitment and productivity. Some departments exhibited laissez-faire tendencies, particularly in routine administrative tasks, leading to inefficiency and low morale. These patterns align with Yukl (2019) and Skogstad *et al.* (2017) [6], who note that public institutions often face uneven leadership capacity, limited accountability, and role ambiguity.

Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative findings converge on the conclusion that transformational and democratic leadership are most effective at Lusaka City Council, but inconsistent implementation, residual autocratic tendencies, and weak feedback systems hinder optimal employee performance. Leadership development focusing on emotional intelligence, participative management, and accountability could strengthen motivation, consistency, and overall municipal service delivery.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of leadership styles on employee performance at the Lusaka City Council. Based on the empirical evidence gathered, it is conclusively demonstrated that the Council is operating with a significant **leadership efficacy gap**.

The prevailing leadership approach is predominantly transactional, providing structure but failing to inspire, motivate, or foster innovation among the workforce. This is evidenced by the stark contrast between the experienced transactional style and the strongly preferred transformational style. The powerful link between transformational leadership and employee empowerment, coupled with the negative impact of laissez-faire leadership, underscores that the current leadership model is sub-optimal for unlocking the full potential of LCC's employees. The core challenges of unclear vision and poor communication are both symptoms and causes of this leadership ineffectiveness, creating a cycle that impedes both employee performance and municipal service delivery.

6.2 Recommendations

To address the identified gaps, the following recommendations are proposed:

A. For Lusaka City Council Management:

Implement Leadership Development Programs: Institute mandatory and continuous training for all managers and supervisors, focused on developing core transformational leadership competencies such as visionary communication, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Adopt an Adaptive Leadership Strategy: Move away from a one-size-fits-all approach. Encourage and train leaders to assess their team's needs and adapt their style

accordingly using more transformational and participative styles with technical teams and providing clearer transactional structure for administrative roles where compliance is key.

Enhance Strategic Communication: Senior management must prioritize the development and regular communication of a clear, compelling strategic vision for the Council. This should be cascaded down to all departments with clear team and individual goals.

B. for Policy Makers (Ministry of Local Government):

4. Integrate Leadership Criteria into Policy: Develop and disseminate a national leadership competency framework for local authorities. Policies on recruitment, promotion, and performance appraisal for senior municipal positions should explicitly value and assess transformational and adaptive leadership capabilities.

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