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Examining the Effectiveness of Leadership Styles on Project Performance: A Case Study of Road Development Agency (RDA)

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine the effectiveness of leadership styles on project performance within the context Road Development Agency (RDA). The research aimed to establish the types of leadership styles affecting project performance, examine the influence of leadership styles on project performance, and lastly investigate the challenges faced by project managers in applying leadership styles affecting project performance at RDA. The research leaned on explanatory research design and employed non- random sampling to select participants. The research employed a mixed method approach; data was collected using a self-administered questionnaires and review of relevant documents. The sample size for this study was approximately 60 project team members and leaders at RDA. The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 31 and then the researcher produced descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percent, mean and standard deviation. The research considered ethical factors during data collection methods. Every respondent that was involved in the study was entitled to the right of privacy and dignity treatment. The findings of this study revealed that leadership styles significantly influence project performance at Road Development Agency (RDA). Key leadership styles namely,

transformational, transactional and democratic leadership style were found to have a direct and measurable impact on project performance and employees. Transformational and transactional leadership style had high influence on project performance followed by democratic leadership style. Transformational leadership had 78% influence, transformational had 80% influence while democratic leadership style had 66% influence on project performance. Furthermore, the study revealed a positive correlation between effective leadership style, employee job satisfaction, and organizational goals alignment. This suggests that the presence of strong leadership not only enhances performance but also fosters a professional environment conducive to personal and institutional growth. The challenges in implementing leadership styles were; political interference, inadequate resources to carry out projects, communication breakdown, project scope creep, tight deadlines to complete projects and ineffective time management skills. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were proposed; capacity building and training of staff, mentorship and coaching, performance appraisal and adequate resource allocations -developed and well communicated budget.

Keywords: Project Performance, Leadership Styles, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Autocratic Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Laissez-Faire Leadership

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Leadership has been widely recognized as a critical success factor in project management across different industries and geographies. Leadership is simply “the art of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the achievement of goals” Igbaekemen, (2014) ^[22]. In both public and private sectors, leadership is a fundamental determinant of project success. The success or failure of these projects often hinges on the quality and style of leadership exhibited by project managers and organizational leaders. According to the British Standard (BS 6079, 2000) a project is a unique set of coordinated activities, with definite starting and finishing points, undertaken by an individual or organization to meet specific objectives within defined schedule, cost, and performance parameters. Globally, various leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire have been studied for their influence on project outcomes. Transformational

leadership, characterized by vision, inspiration, and innovation, has been linked to higher project performance, particularly in environments marked by change and complexity (Turner and Müller, 2005) ^[47]. Transactional leadership, on the other hand, which emphasizes rules, structure, and reward systems, is often effective in routine and procedural project settings (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Project management bodies such as the Project Management Institute (PMI) have emphasized the importance of leadership competency as a core element in their talent triangle, highlighting its relevance to successful project delivery (PMI, 2017) ^[41]. Despite this, there is no universally “best” leadership style; effectiveness often depends on the project environment, team dynamics, and cultural context (Geoghegan and Dulewicz, 2008) ^[16].

In Africa, leadership in project execution tends to be influenced by socio-cultural norms, hierarchical structures, and institutional capacity. Studies suggest that leadership styles in African public institutions are frequently autocratic or transactional due to centralized decision-making and bureaucratic control (Nzelibe, 1990) ^[30]. While such styles can be effective in achieving short-term compliance, they often limit team engagement, innovation, and adaptive problem-solving, which are crucial in complex infrastructure projects. Hersey and Blanchard (1982) define leadership style as a “consistent pattern of behavior that a leader uses when working with and through people”. According to Mawoli and Babangida, (2013) “Leadership style is the relatively consistent pattern of behavior that characterizes a leader.” Thus, Leadership style plays an important role in shaping the behavior and attitude of the members of an organization (Prince, 2013) ^[42].

In Zambia, the Road Development Agency (RDA) plays a central role in implementing road infrastructure projects that are critical to national development. These projects are essential for economic diversification, rural connectivity, and cross-border trade (RDA Annual Report, 2015). However, the RDA, like many public agencies in developing countries, faces persistent challenges related to project delays, cost inflation, and suboptimal quality issues often linked to leadership inefficiencies (Auditor General Report, 2020) ^[4].

Leadership within RDA has historically been characterized by top-down management styles, with limited decentralization and employee empowerment. A study by Chileshe *et al.* (2021) ^[11] on public infrastructure in Zambia indicated that rigid hierarchical leadership contributed to low morale, slow decision-making, and reduced project responsiveness. Conversely, where project leaders adopted participatory and goal-oriented leadership approaches, projects reported improved stakeholder engagement and timely delivery. Moreover, Zambia's institutional framework, influenced by political appointments and resource constraints, affects the consistency and effectiveness of leadership in project delivery. Building local leadership capacity in areas such as strategic planning, team management, and ethical governance is increasingly recognized as a key lever for enhancing performance in public infrastructure projects (Chileshe *et al.*, 2021) ^[11]. Given the significant public investment in Zambia's road sector and the strategic importance of RDA in national development, examining the effectiveness of leadership styles on project performance is therefore both timely and essential. Understanding how different leadership

approaches influence project outcomes will inform policy reforms, capacity development, and improved project governance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The success of an organization is anchored on leadership; this is because leadership is the engine that drives the organization (Kassahun, 2021) ^[25]. Many researchers have studied this phenomenon, but there is no consensus definition of what leadership is, no dominant paradigm for studying it, and little agreement regarding the best strategies for developing and exercising it and give leadership as that kind of direction, which a person can give to a group of people under him in such a way as these will influence the behavior of another individual, or group (Kassahun, 2021) ^[25]. Peris (2012) perceives leadership to be a reciprocal of social influence, in which leaders and subordinates influence each other in order to achieve organizational goals. Several researchers posited that there is a direct relationship between the manager's leadership style and project performance (Tabassi *et al.*, 2014). Depending on the situation, leaders may apply an appropriate leadership style to direct individuals and teams to achieve a common goal. Currently, transformational and transactional leadership styles are the most recognized leadership styles (Tabassi *et al.*, 2014). Despite the importance of effective leadership, there is limited understanding of the effects of leadership styles on project performance at RDA. There exist few local literatures done on public agencies in Zambia on the effects of leadership styles on project performance. Hence, there is need for more research to be conducted on government agencies in Zambia.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to effectiveness of leadership styles on project performance at RDA.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives of the Study

1. To establish the types of leadership styles affecting project performance.
2. To examine the influence of leadership styles on project performance at RDA.
3. To investigate the challenges faced by Project managers in applying leadership styles affecting project performance at RDA.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What types of leadership styles are affecting project performance?
2. How do leadership styles influence project performance at RDA?
3. What are the challenges project managers face in applying leadership styles affecting project performance at RDA?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 Transactional Leadership Theories

Transactional theories are exchange theories of leadership; it is characterized by a transaction is made between the leader and the followers. In fact, the theory values a positive and mutually beneficial relationship. For the transactional theories to be effective and as a result have motivational value, the leader must find a means to align to adequately reward (or punish) his follower, for performing leader-

assigned task. In other words, transactional leaders are most efficient when they develop a mutual reinforcing environment, for which the individual and the organizational goals are in harmony (Gill, 1999). Transactional leaders applied leadership by exception and contingent reward. Waits until problem arise and react to solve it. Gill, (1999) says, "Appear to be strongly directive and they tend not to use the consultative, participative or delegate styles to any significant extent" Bass, (1996;) and Bass and Avolio, (1990) [6] say, "Transactional leadership includes contingent reward behavior, passive management by exception, and active management by exception".

1.5.2 Transformational Leadership Theory

The Transformational Leadership theory states that a person interacts with others and is able to create a solid relationship that results in a high percentage of trust, that will later result in an increase of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in both leaders and followers. The main objective of transformational theories is that leaders transform their followers through their inspirational nature and charismatic personalities. Rules and regulations are flexible, guided by group norms. These attributes provide a sense of belonging for the followers as they can easily identify with the leader and its purpose. (Burns, 1978) [9]. Transformational leadership theory shows a balance of motivation and structure influences outcomes like innovation, efficiency, and timely delivery.

1.5.3 Contingency Theories

The Contingency Leadership theory argues there is no single way of leading and any leadership style should be based on certain situations, which signifies that there are certain people who perform at the maximum level in certain places; but at minimal performance when taken out of their element, in a certain extent contingency leadership theories are extensions of the trait theory, in the sense that human traits are related to the situation in which the leaders exercise their leadership. It is generally accepted within the contingency theories that leader is more likely to express their leadership when they feel that their followers will be responsive. (Yukl G, 2002). The contingency theory highlights the importance of aligning leadership style with project context for instance, complexity, risks, or team expertise.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership Styles

2.1.1 Transformational Leadership

This leader style motivates leader to be effective and efficient. Communication is the base for goal achievement focusing the group in the final desired outcome or goal attainment. This leader is highly visible and uses chain of command to get the job done. Transformational leaders focus on the big picture, needing to be surrounded by people who take care of the details. The leader is always looking for ideas that move the organization to reach the company's vision (Burns, 1978) [9] According to Bass (1990); transformational leadership consists of four behaviors or components: individual concern, intellectual stimulation, inspiring motivation, and charisma. Vision and a feeling of purpose, inspiring pride in and among the group, and earning respect and trust are characteristics of charisma, or idealized influence or traits (Bass, 1990).

2.1.2 Transactional Leadership

According to House and Aditya (1997) [20], the purpose of a transactional leader is to guarantee that internal actors understand the road to goal attainment, remove any possible barriers inside the system, and inspire the actors to achieve the planned goals. Leaders that practice transactional leadership exhibit both proactive and reactive actions. A corrective dimension incorporates management by exception, whereas constructive conduct involves contingent incentive. Clarifying the labor necessary to receive rewards and using incentives and contingent rewards as a means of persuasion are both aspects of contingent reward. It takes into account what followers should anticipate from them and gives praise when objectives are met. Individuals and organizations should perform at expected levels if goals and objectives are made clear and acknowledgement is given when goals are reached (Bass, 1985). When a leader establishes the parameters for acceptable behavior and ineffective performance, they are engaging in active management by exception. This type of leadership entails keeping a watchful eye out for deviations, faults, and blunders and acting promptly to address them when they arise (Bass, 1985).

2.1.3 Democratic Leadership

Democratic leaders include employees in the decision-making process even though they have the last say (Amanchukwu *et al.*, 2015) [2]. They see feedback as a tool for employee coaching (Robbins and Coulter, 2012). Democratic leadership fosters creativity and innovation among staff members, which benefits the company (Mwenje, 2015). Workers are also free to express their opinions and make recommendations (Khan *et al.*, 2017) [27]. Democratic leadership is ideal for dealing with complicated issues that call for several points of view (Mwenje, 2015).

2.1.4 Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leader has power to make decisions alone without seeking input from its subordinates. Under this leadership, employee participation is prohibited (Khan *et al.*, 2017) [27]. This leadership style is good for employees that need close supervision to perform certain tasks. Most of the time, they are severe and closely monitor staff members, making sure that protocols are adhered to. It has been discovered that they are self-assured and at ease with the responsibility for making decisions (Iqbal, Anwar and Haider, 2015) [23]. Autocratic leadership is effective, on the plus side (Amanchukwu *et al.*, 2015) [2]. Decisions are taken quickly, and implementation may start as soon as one is made.

2.1.5 Laissez-Faire Leadership

This is a type of leadership style where leaders allow their team members to work with minimal supervision and are able to make their own decisions. Laissez-faire leadership style is considered relatively modern as it gives employees the freedom to complete tasks as they see fit. Employees under laissez-faire leadership have total autonomy to decide for themselves and set their own deadlines (Amanchukwu *et al.*, 2015) [2]. This is due to the leaders' self-esteem on their ability to lead and oversee the workforce. (Rauf, 2014).

2.2 Leadership Styles on Project Performance

Tabassi and Bahar (2010) [44] conducted research among 220 respondents in contracting firms to establish relationship

between leadership style and project implementation in Iranian construction industry found transformational leadership style as mostly preferred in Iranian construction sector. The study was done in large construction companies and its findings were not consistent with Becher and Huselid (1998) suggest that project manager tend to have high relationship behavioral characteristic when the task given is less intricate. Furthermore, the study was conducted among project contractors leaving out the project personnel perspective. Gebrehiwet and Luo (2017) pointed out that out of 52 factors, the top five most important causes of delay in Ethiopian construction projects are corruption, unavailability of site utility, inflation, lack of quality material and late design. The findings also showed that time and cost overruns were the two most common effects of delay, the paper like the aforementioned ones, did not consider the leadership's role on the construction sector's performance.

According to Thwala, et, al, (2015) ^[46] examined the influence of leadership style on performance of project that conducted among 110 respondents comparing construction management in the construction industry of South African region and the relationship between transactional leadership style and performance of projects was higher than other leadership styles. Some study found no significant influence of laissez-faire and autocratic style on construction performance of project. This study however only targeted project managers in construction and did not include project team members and hence may be subject to single source bias.

Kariuki (2015) assessed the influence of leadership style, team commitment project characteristics on the project implementation the study was conducted among project managers and project team members from 102 water and sanitation projects in Kenya. The study findings show that transactional leadership style accounted for 12 percent variance in project time performance and therefore the study encourage adoption of transformational leadership style which have tendency to lead to higher level of project performance. The result was consistent to findings of Kibuchi (2012) ^[28] that found a significant relationship between human psychological factors and performance of project in housing construction project in Kenya. Kariuki (2015) study was based on construction project in the water sector hence need to undertake study in the housing construction sector.

2.2.1 Transformational Leadership and project performance

Effective performance by an organization, project team or individual is dependent on leadership by an individual with the ability to determine the accurate and correct path and stimulate other individuals to follow the same path. In a number of transformational leadership theory editions, there is a main, essential and fundamental hypothesize that a leader that is effective will manipulate his or her subordinates to put outstanding effort and make self-surrender in order to high levels of performance of projects (Hasan *et al*, 2019). Sunindijo (2015) denoted that transformational leadership has an impact that is positive on performance of projects in research and development. According to his research findings, transformational leadership affects the quality of a project more than transactional leadership because it is more powerfully associated with the short-term and long-term performance of

a project. The hypotheses indicated that there could be an association and significant correlation between the three factors leadership styles by project managers as professed by the readiness and eagerness of the project team members to put more effort and the readiness of project managers to enhance leadership effectiveness on performance of projects. As much as transactional leadership does present effectual leadership, an extra exertion of superiority, contentment and usefulness are achievable with the use of transformational leadership. Both the style of transactional leadership and the style of transformational leadership can be used in the project management environment in order to encourage the project team members to carry out and build up their efforts further than just typical anticipations and expectations (Charles, 2021).

2.2.2 Transactional Leadership and project performance

Aga (2016) along with his colleagues began the experimental exploration of the two styles of leadership that is to say transactional and transformational leadership three decades ago. They projected that transactional leadership has got three elements and transformational leadership has got four elements and that there exists a supplementary leadership type which is the laissez-faire type of leadership. The MLQ (multifactor leadership questionnaire) has been expanded on so as to explore all these elements with transformational leadership being associated with positive effects on project performance. There is not much that has been done on evaluating the elements of transactional leadership and laissez-fear leadership and their impact on project quality performance. Considering the findings and results of the study conducted by Ceri-Booms *et al*. (2017), it has been revealed that transformational leadership is positively and significantly connected with the self-reported perception of subordinates concerning the efficiency of their leaders 'style of leadership. The perception concerning the leadership effectiveness of laissez-faire and transactional styles of leadership is negative.

2.2.3 Laissez-Faire Leadership and Project performance

Laissez-faire leadership could be useful in building autonomous teams, which is essential for IT leadership for both co-located and remote teams. Iftikhari and Ali (2018) inform that the style of leadership of laissez-faire correlates negatively with other more active leadership styles. Their study provides results showing a negative association between laissez-faire leadership style and the performance of subordinates in projects. The passive management by exception and laissez-faire leadership dissimilarity when examining experimental data is not obvious. Just as Avolio and Bass (2018) describe passive management by exception and laissez-faire leadership, reveal a high factor order in his research data. In addition, another research conducted by Mugenda (2019) also revealed that passive management by exception and laissez-faire leadership positively correlated with one another and correlate negatively with other dimensions of leadership. The laissez-faire style of leadership influences performance of project negatively. When managers of projects are highly rated in these leadership styles by their followers and more effort put by the followers, job satisfaction and leadership effectiveness concerning performance of projects are low.

2.2.4 Democratic Leadership style and project performance

Democratic leaders are famous to motivate employees which help them to perform better and their views and

opinion matter (Hilton *et al.*, 2021) ^[19]. The democratic leader encourages team member in decision-making, where workers' ideas and thoughts will be collected, the leader decides on behalf of everyone, and numerous benefits acquired from the democratic style such as innovative and new ideas are the trigger. The strategy outlines the four basic principles of democratic leadership, which include mobilizing workers, developing staff, delegating authority, enforcing control mechanisms, and granting employees greater autonomy and the ability to speak up (Oussible *et al.*, 2022). Employees engage in organizational activity and involvement in decision-making that makes an employee feel a sense of belonging and try their best to achieve the organizational objective (Sane *et al.*, 2021). Manager with the democratic leadership style establishes a better relationship with the staff by giving freedom and reducing the work tension, which leads to directing their subordinates toward their thoughts and ideas regarding establishing ability to achieve the objective (Kabore *et al.*, 2021).

According to the study done by Liphadzi, Aigbavboa and Thwala (2015) on the Relationship between leadership styles and project success in the South African construction industry, it was observed from the findings, that the Pearson correlation shows a weak correlation between democratic leadership and project success ($r = 0.34$; $p < 0.01$). This suggests that there is a low relationship between democratic leadership and project success in the construction industry. This means that democratic leaders are less likely to have project success in the South African construction industry.

2.2.5 Autocratic Leadership and Project performance

Autocratic leaders as leaders who do not have much trust in their employees (Al Khajeh, 2018). Autocratic leaders define the undertakings, practices, and strategies that support staff should use and demands that they use them as stipulated (Katsaros *et al.*, 2020) ^[26]. Such leaders only foster one-way communication and rarely advocate for creativeness, a practice that negatively influences the enthusiasm and gratification of their employees. Autocratic leaders increase organizational conflicts, which negatively influence firm performance. They restrict workplace communication and interactions, which are important precursors to firm performance. In the short run, autocratic leaders are effective and can thus positively influence firm performance. The autocratic leadership style is effective whenever firms implement short-term projects that need to be completed within specified time limits. Autocratic leadership becomes useful whenever execution of actions requires speed such as emergency response, and in times when specific actions would lead to securing a business deal or losing it altogether (Katsaros *et al.*, 2020) ^[26]. It however results in complaints by organizational members and should only be used judiciously.

Basit *et al* (2017) ^[5] who found autocratic leadership to exert a negative influence on the performance of employees in the private sector in Asia. Similarly, Lumumba *et al* (2021) in their study on the effect of autocratic leadership on the performance of Primary Teacher Training Colleges (PTTCs) found a negative effect between autocratic leadership and the performance of PTTCs. Autocratic leaders make decisions without involving their support staff (Dyczkowska and Dyczkowski, 2018) ^[15]. They institute stringent rules, regulate processes, and prefer to endure official professional interactions with employees. Autocratic leaders do not

create time for consultation with employees making the leader miss out on follower contribution to the firm exposing the firm's risks to competitors. In an autocratic leadership style, the leader does not allow employees to learn and use their abilities to improve the firm's services to the clients.

On the contrary, Amegayibor (2021) obtained a positive connection between autocratic leadership and the performance of enterprises in Ghana in their study to establish the effect of leadership styles on the performance of employees in a family-owned manufacturing company in Ghana. Similarly, Amoah- Mensah and Darkwa (2020) established a positive correlation between autocratic leadership and employee performance in a study on the impact of autocratic leadership on employee performance in Ghana. Similarly, Al Khajeh (2018) found a positive connection between autocratic leadership and the performance of enterprises. In the same manner, Oyugi and Gogo (2019) in their study on the effect of the principals' leadership styles on the performance of students in high schools found a positive connection between autocratic leadership and students' performance in schools in Awendo, Sub- County, Kenya. Autocratic leaders ensure that employees are guided to carry out their functions in a specific manner and that in the context employees only focus on wanting to make sure their work is done as prescribed.

Katsaros *et al* (2020) ^[26] claim that autocratic leaders set forth the tasks, procedures, and tactics that support employees are expected to follow and then enforce their strict application. Such leaders only foster one-way communication and rarely advocate for creativeness, a practice that negatively influences the enthusiasm and gratification of their employees. Autocratic leaders increase organizational conflicts, which negatively influence firm performance. They restrict workplace communication and interactions, which are important precursors to firm performance (Nyamota, Kiambi and Mburungu, 2024) ^[35].

2.3 Challenges Faced by Project Managers in the use of Leadership Styles

There are numerous challenges facing project managers today, some are new and some are old, but effective leadership should be one of the priorities in overcoming these challenges (Liphadzi, 2014) ^[30]. Businesses today face several challenges to operate efficiently and sustain competitive advantage, and it is often incumbent upon company leadership to provide the proper direction to help their teams navigate these challenges and adapt appropriately. Without a steady pipeline of skilled individuals with the knowledge, skills and experience to step into leadership roles, or an effective process to identify high-potential employees and give them the needed training to be effective leaders, organizations will be unprepared to handle the changes and challenges of the future (Jarad, 2012) ^[24].

Curphy, (2014) ^[14]. Cited the following challenges affecting leadership development amongst organizations; balancing long-term and short-term business requirements, lack of opportunity, lack of a formal structure, Inconsistent buy-in across the organization, lack of support from senior leadership, lack of self-confidence by managers, lack of accountability for the application of new skills and knowledge to the job. Furthermore, (Curphy 2014) ^[14] stated

that there is a need to have context and relevance when planning for leadership development. Similarly, Todd Macey, president of Vital Learning, says the challenge to leadership development is the fact that organizations do not focus on outcomes or the returns of the development strategy. According to Gleeson, (2016) ^[18]. There is a lack of awareness of the leadership development programs that are accessible. Moreover, the process for being considered for a leadership role is often ad hoc and nontransparent.

In addition, the lack of alignment between business strategy and the leadership development strategy of the organization. The essence of the challenge with leadership development is that organizations invest heavily in leadership development, but do not necessarily see a real or justifiable return on the investment. Curphy (2014) ^[14] further simplified the challenges in Leadership Development as; the evaluation problem, definition problem, the people problem and the content problem. In relation to the evaluation problem, he stated that it is vital for the Leadership Development programs to be evaluated consistently, whereby the outcomes focus on the skills, behaviors, competencies and collaboration. Sadly, over the years, researchers have found that Leadership and Development programs for leadership development are missing the mark. In the 2016 State of Leadership Development report, 75 % of respondents said more significant innovation was needed in learning techniques used in leadership development programs. Lastly, Gleeson, (2016) ^[18]. Denoted that organizations no longer have a leadership challenge but a developmental challenge.

2.4 Personal Critique on Literature Reviewed

Limited research has been conducted on the effects of leadership styles on project performance at RDA. Despite RDA Annual Reports providing insights into the agency's project performance and leadership challenges, a few local studies have investigated the effects of leadership styles on project performance in Zambia. This literature review has examined the existing research on the effects of leadership styles on project performance. While there is a growing body of research, there are still several gaps in existing research that need to be addressed such as;

Limited Generalizability: Many studies have been conducted in specific industries or context, limiting their generalization to RDA in Mufulira District.

Lack of Longitudinal Studies: Few studies have investigated the effects of leadership styles on project performance over time

Insufficient Attention to Moderating Factors: More research is needed to understand the moderating factors that influence the effects of leadership styles on project performance at RDA in Mufulira District.

3. Methods and Procedures

3.1 Research Design

This research leans towards explanatory research design because it focuses on attempting to examine the effectiveness of leadership styles on performance of project. According to Churchill and Iacobucci, (2005) ^[13] a research design is a blueprint for research to be followed in order to successfully implement the research. Furthermore, McDaniel and Gates (2013) ^[32] say that a research design is a plan for a study that provides specification of procedures to be follow by the researcher in order to achieve the

research objective.

3.2 Target Population

The target population is the total collection of elements about which the researcher wishes to make some inferences (Okiro and Ndungu, 2019) ^[37]. According to Orodho, and Kombo (2002) ^[38]. "The target population should fit a certain specification which the researcher is studying." This study was conducted on RDA project managers, project team members, RDA employees, and project contractor that participate to constructing and maintenance of roads and bridges in Mufulira District.

3.3 Sampling Design

The study employed non-random sampling to select participants. Non-random sampling strategies enable the researcher to select respondents who have the required information and more knowledgeable. This technique also increases representativeness, which enables the collection of a cross-section of data. (Amin, 2005) ^[3]. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants from Top Management and Heads of Departments at RDA.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample size for this study was approximately 60 project team members and leaders at RDA.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

This research utilized self-administrated questionnaire to collect primary data. The researcher used both open-ended and closed ended questionnaires. Closed-ended questions provided quantitative data for statistical analysis. On the other hand, open-ended questions generated qualitative data for content analysis. The questionnaire design followed the objectives of the research. Secondary data was derived from review of published literature and archival records.

An interview guide was also be used to interview RDA administrators mainly the managers and supervisors to supplement findings from the questionnaires. The choice of interview schedules for the collection of data is justified by the fact that an interview is the single best tool to be used for its flexibility and ability to probe and obtain opinions from respondents. According to Amin (2005) ^[3], interviews are necessary in securing clear and detailed information that would have been left out in the questionnaires.

3.6 Data Analysis

According to Kothari (2004) ^[29], data analysis includes comparison of the outcomes of the various treatments upon the several groups and the making of a decision as to the achievement of the goals of research. In order to ensure completeness and logical consistency of responses, data editing was carried out each day by the researcher. Identified mistakes and data gaps was corrected as soon as possible. Once editing the data, the data was be analyzed using quantitative techniques. The data which was collected by the researcher was analyzed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 and then the researcher produced descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percent, mean and standard deviation. The analysis of the study also used inferential statistics like Pearson's correlation and multiple regressions. The correlation analysis was employed to find out the strength of a relationship between two variables; leadership

style and project performance. Likewise, the regression analysis was used to establish the effect of leadership style related to project Performance. The data which was collected through open-ended questionnaire was analyzed qualitatively and logically interpreted by the researcher in a way to solve the research problem.

3.7 Triangulation

The study employed a mixed method approach to data collection from interview with participants, and review of relevant documents.

3.8 Limitation of the Study

The study was limited to the availability of accessing updated information regarding leadership styles influencing project performance at RDA, as there is not much research done on government agencies in Zambia; moreover, there exist few literatures online regarding the subject matter. The study covered only one government agency; hence the findings will not be generalized to other government projects and private sectors.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Research ethics is appropriate behavior of a researcher relative to the norms of society (Zikmund, 2010, p. 56). This research considered ethical factors during data collection methods. Every respondent that was involved in the study was entitled to the right of privacy and dignity treatment. The information obtained was held in strict confidentiality by the researcher. All assistance, collaboration of others and sources from which information was drawn was acknowledged. Furthermore, ethical consideration such as Fairness, openness intents, discloser of methods, respect or the integrity of individuals was be adhered to.

4. Presentation of Findings

4.1 Gender

The study sought to find out the gender of those who participated in the study. The figure below shows that 47% respondents were females, while 53% were males.

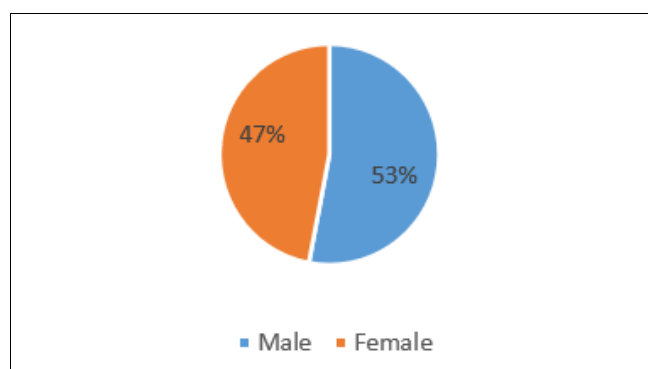


Fig 4.1: Gender

4.2 Age

The researcher sought to find out the age groups of the participants who took part in the survey. The results below shows that those aged between 20 and 29 accounted for 52% and were majority. Those aged between 30 and 39 recorded 37% while those who were 40 and 49 accounted for 8%, lastly those aged between 50 and 59 represented 3%

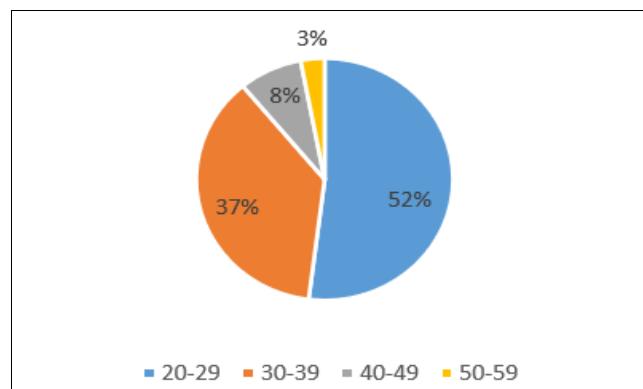


Fig 4.2: Age group of respondents

4.3 Qualifications and level of education

The researcher sought to find out the qualifications and level of education of those who took part in the survey. Findings below show that those who had certificates/diplomas accounted for 55% and were the majority. Those who obtained bachelors in recorded 35% while those who obtained masters accounted for 10%.

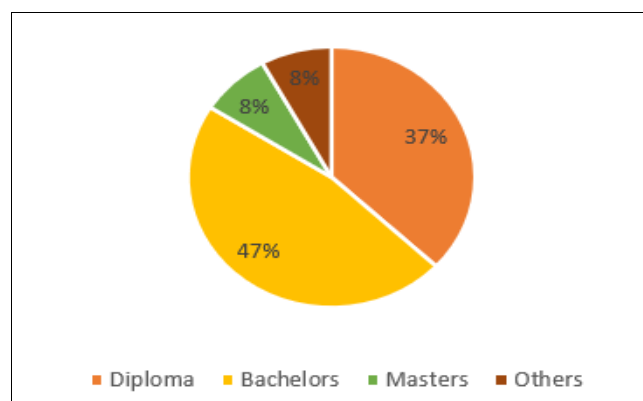


Fig 4.3: Qualifications and level of education

4.4 Employment type of respondents

Figure 4 shows the employment type of respondents. 58% of respondents were RDA staff members with a frequency of thirty-five (35), 15% were of respondents were consultants with a frequency of nine (9) respondents. Lastly 27% fell in the category of other with a frequency of sixteen (16).

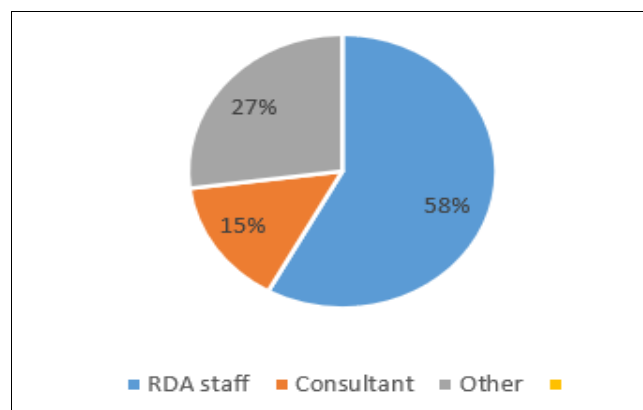


Fig 4.4: Employment type of respondents

4.5 Years in Service

Figure 5 showed the number of years in service of respondents that took part in research. Five (5) respondents

had experience of less than 1 year representing 8% response turnout. Forty (40) respondents had 1-5 years work experience representing 67%, seven (7) respondents had 6-10 years of work experience, representing 12% response turnout. Lastly eight (8) respondents had more than 10 years of work experience representing 13% response turnout.

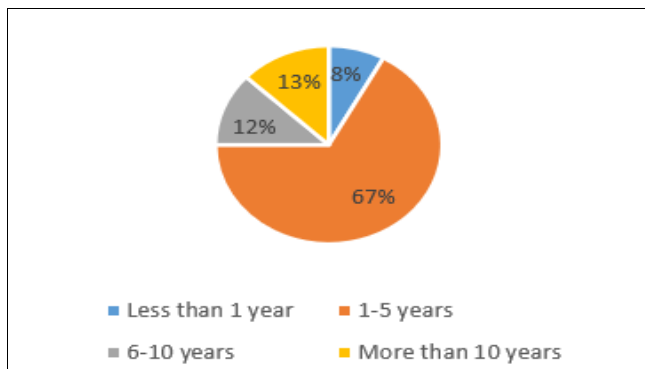


Fig 4.5: Years in Service

Current role on the project

Figure 6 showed the role on the project for each respondent. 13% of respondents fell in the category of Project Managers with a frequency of eight (8), 15% of respondents were Resident Engineers with a frequency of nine (9), 33% respondents were site supervisors with a frequency of twenty (20) respondents. In addition, 15% of respondents were in Finance/ Administration with a frequency of nine (9), lastly 23% fell in other category with a frequency of fourteen (14) respondents.

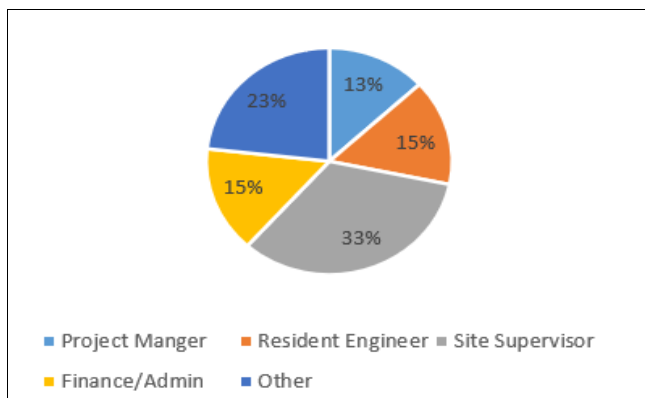


Fig 4.6: Current role on the project

Leadership Styles affecting project performance

Transformational Leadership Style

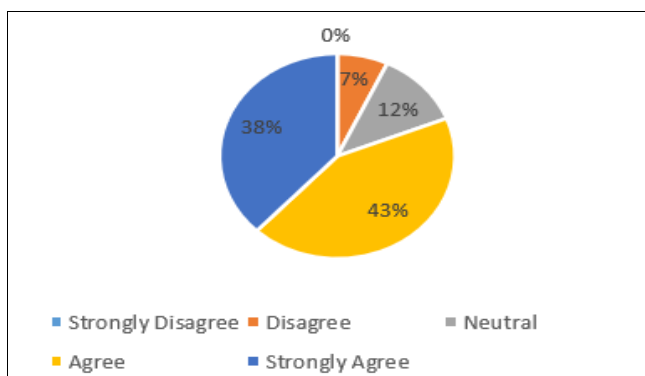


Fig 7: Vision of project communicated by the leader

Figure 7 showed the view of respondents on the vision of the project being communicated by the leader 7% disagreed while 12% of respondents were neutral, 43% agreed statement, lastly 38% of respondents strongly agreed giving a total percentage turnout of 100%.

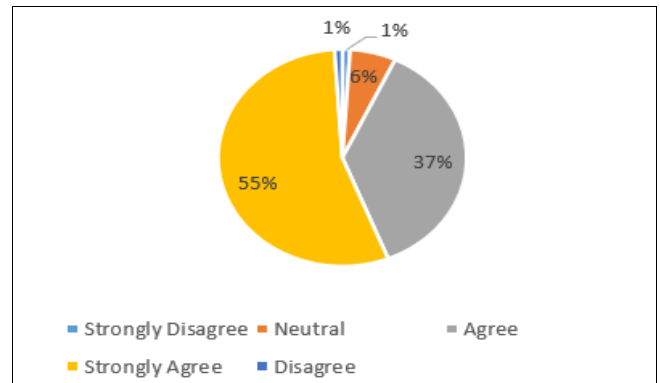


Fig 8: The leader inspires to go beyond expectation

1% of the respondents disagreed that their leader inspires them to go beyond what is expected. 1% strongly disagreed. 6% of respondents were neutral, 37% of respondents agreed to the statement, lastly, 55% of respondents strongly agreed as shown in figure 2 above.

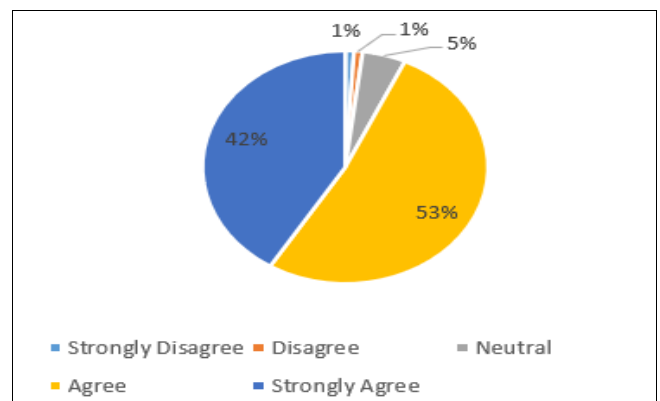


Fig 9: Encouragement of new ideas for solving site problems

Figure 9 showed the respondents view on whether their leader encourages new ideas for solving site problems. 53% of the respondents agreed, while 42% strongly agreed, and 5% of the respondents were neutral. 1% of respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.

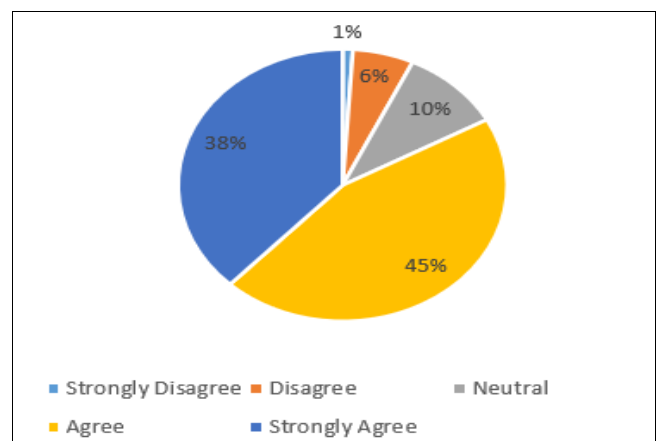


Fig 10: Leader acting as role model for ethical behavior

The 45% of the respondents in figure 10 agreed that their leader acts as a role model for ethical behavior, 38% strongly agreed, while 10% of respondents were neutral, 1% strongly disagreed, lastly 6 % respondents disagreed.

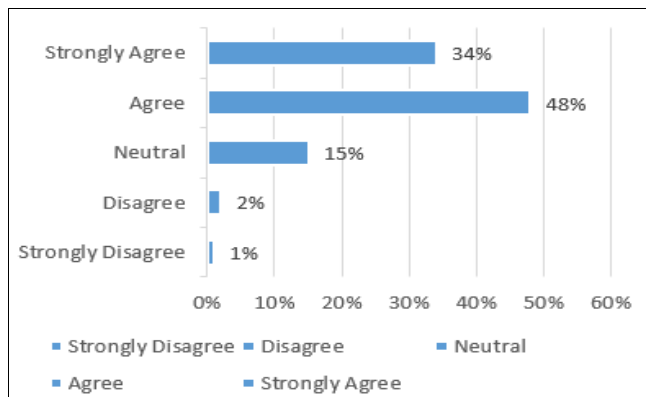


Fig 11: Team members being treated as individual with unique needs

Figure 11 above showed the respondents who thought their leaders treated team members as individual with unique needs under transformational leadership style. 48% of respondents agreed, while 34% respondents strongly agreed, 15% of respondents were neutral and 2% of respondents disagreed.

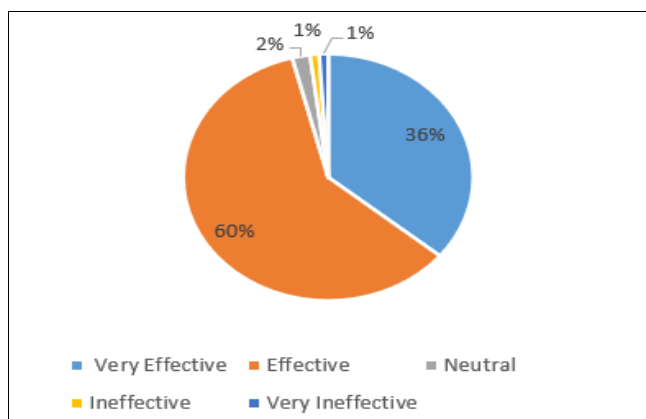


Fig 12: Setting clear performance standards and expectations

Figure 12 showed respondents view on setting clear performance standards and expectations by their leader. 60% agreed that their leader was effective, while 36% of respondents strongly agreed to be very effective and 2% were neutral.

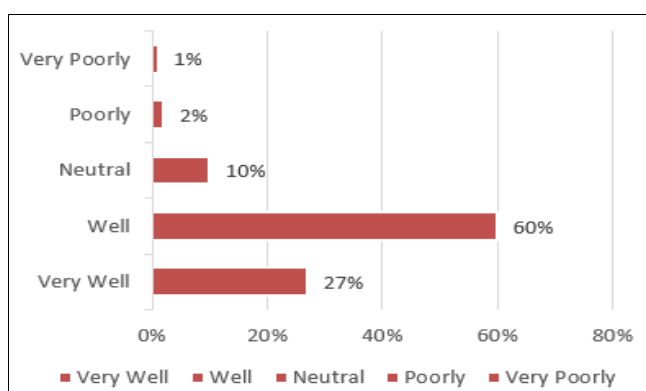


Fig 13: Clarifying responsibilities and deliverables for each role

Figure 13 showed the respondents view on whether their leader clarifies responsibilities and deliverables for each role, 60% agreed to responsibilities and roles being well clarified, while 27% of respondents believed responsibilities and roles were very well clarified and 10% were neutral.

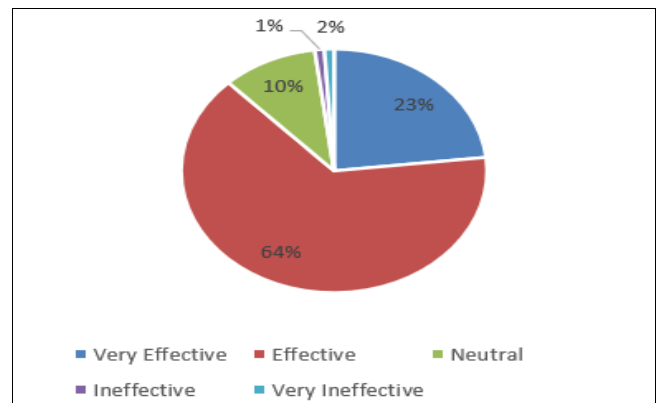


Fig 14: Monitoring progress closely against schedule and budget

Figure 14 showed the response turnout of respondents on leaders monitoring progress against schedule and budget. 64% of the respondents agreed that leaders effectively monitor progress closely against schedule and budget, while 23% of respondents agreed to be very effective and 13% of respondents were neutral.

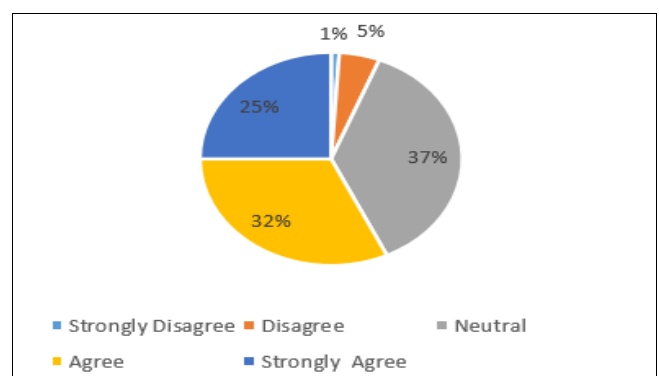


Fig 15: Non-compliance is addressed promptly and fairly

38% of the respondents were neutral to the assertion that non-compliance is addressed promptly and fairly by their leaders, while 32% of respondents agreed, 25% of respondents strongly agreed to the statement and 5% of respondents disagreed as shown in figure 15 above.

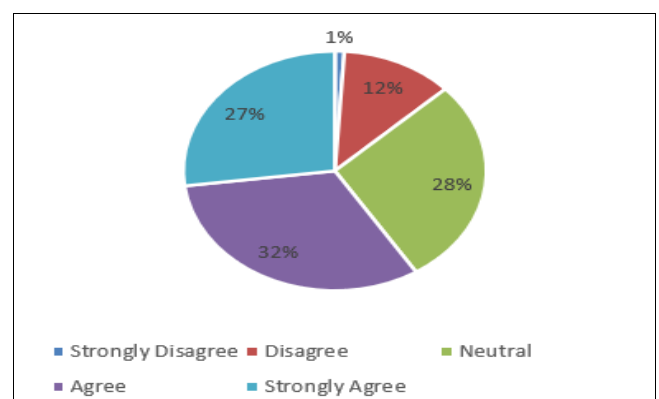
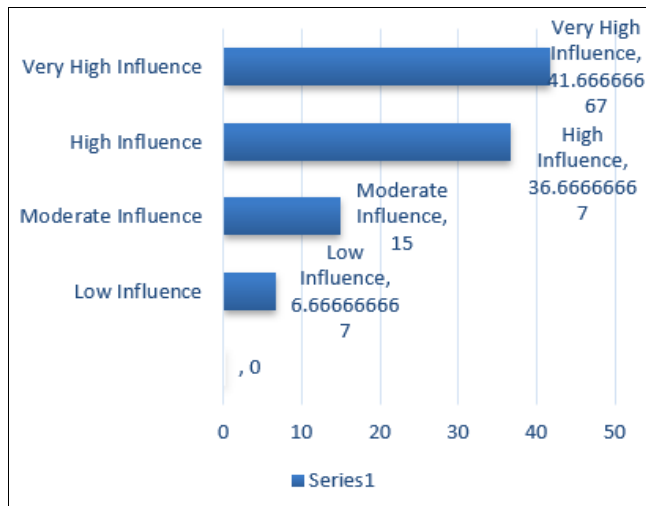


Fig 16: Rewards (bonuses, recognition) are tied to achieving milestones

32% of the respondents agreed that rewards (bonuses, recognition) are tied to achieving milestones, while 28% of respondents were neutral, 27% of respondents strongly agreed and lastly 13% of the respondents disagreed to the statement as shown in figure 16.

Transformational Leadership style had a very high influence of 42%, and a high influence of 36% giving a total of 78%. This suggest that Transformational leadership style had a high impact on project performance at RDA.



Transactional Leadership Style

Transactional Leadership style had a very high influence of 35%, and a high influence of 45% giving a total of 80%. This suggest that Transactional leadership style had a high impact on project performance at RDA.

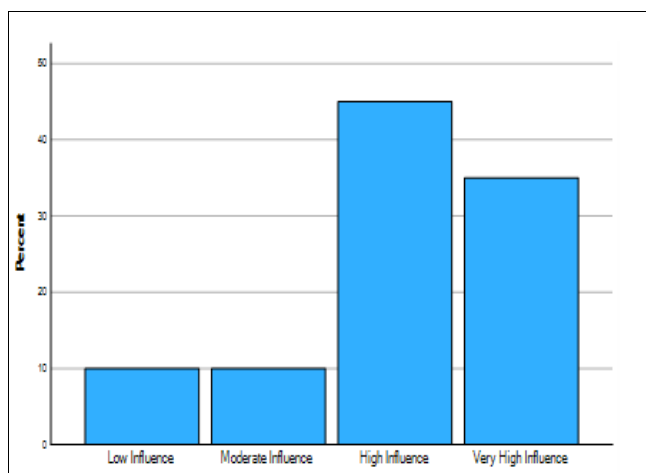


Fig 18: Transactional Leadership Style

Laissez- Faire Leadership Style

Laissez-faire leadership style had a very high influence of 5%, and a high influence of 13% giving a total of 18%. This suggest that Laissez-faire leadership style had minimal impact on project performance at RDA.

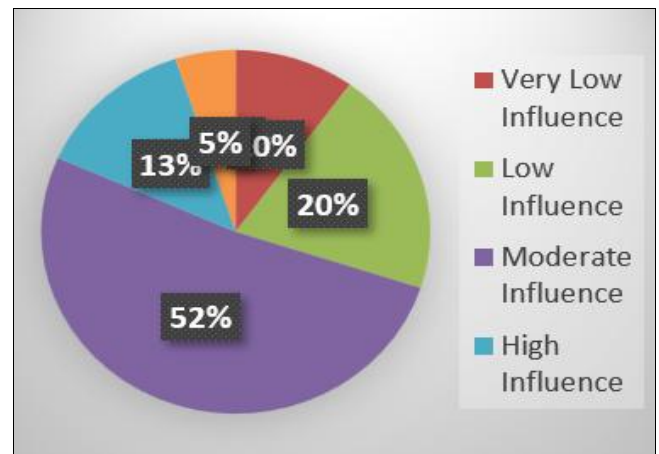


Fig 19: Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

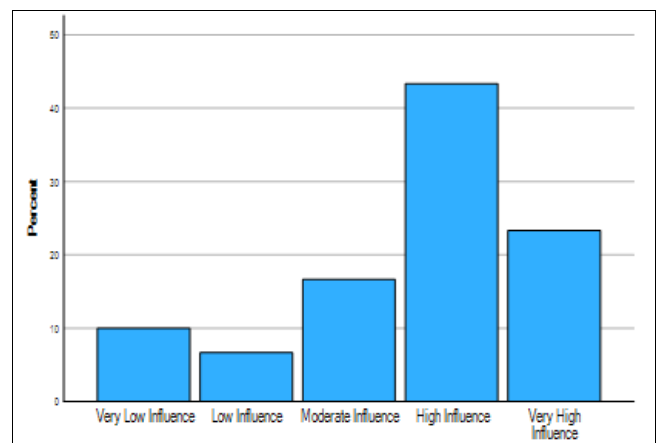
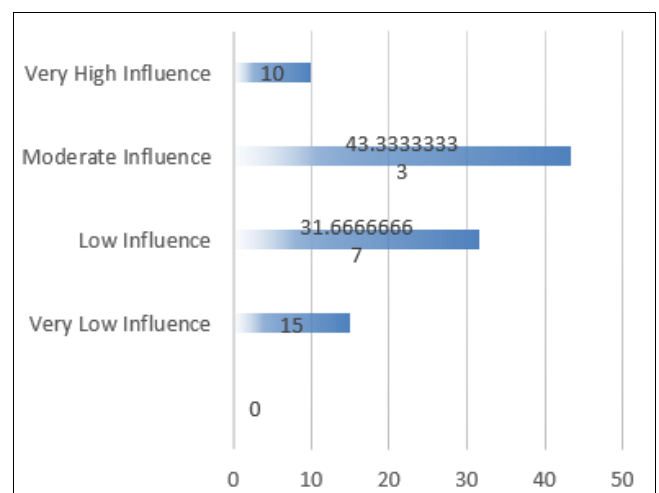


Fig 20: Democratic Leadership Style

Democratic Leadership style had a very high influence of 23%, and a high influence of 43% giving a total of 66%. This suggest that Democratic leadership style had a high impact on project performance at RDA.

Autocratic leadership style had a very high influence of 10% and a moderate influence of 43% giving a total of 53%. This suggest that Autocratic leadership style had minimal impact on project performance at RDA.



5. Discussions

The demographic characteristic and background of respondents in figure 1 showed a total of sixty (60) respondents from Road Development Agency (RDA). Out of sixty respondents, thirty-two (32) were male which represented 53.3% and twenty-eight (28) were female representing 46.7%. The data suggests that male were more involved in study compared to women. figure 2, showed the age group of respondents, The study reveals that 51.7% of respondents were in the age group of 20-29 years, while 36.7% of respondents were in age group of 30-39 years old. figure 3 showed the qualifications of respondents. 46.7% of respondents had Bachelors, while 36.7% of respondents had Diplomas this revealed that they were more staff possessed bachelors. figure 4 showed the employment type of respondents. 58.3 % were RDA Staff, 15% were consultants, and 26.7% fell in the category of other. This entails that the majority of respondents were RDA Staff.

Figure 5 showed the years in service of respondents. The data revealed that 66.7% of respondents had 1-5 years work experience, 13.3% had more than 10 years work experience, 11.7% of respondents had 6-10 years work experience, lastly, 8.3% of respondents had less than 1 year work experience. Figure 6 showed the current role on the project of respondents. 33.3% of respondents were site supervisors, 23.3% fell in the category of other, while 15% of respondents were in finance/Administration, 13.3 % of respondents were project managers, lastly 15% of respondents were resident engineers.

Figure 7 showed the view of respondents on the vision of the project being communicated by the leader 7% disagreed while 12% of respondents were neutral, 43% agreed statement, lastly 38% of respondents strongly agreed giving a total percentage turnout of 100%. The data thus suggests that project managers were communicating the vision of the project to respondents. In figure 8, 1.7% of the respondents disagreed that their leader inspires them to go beyond what is expected. 6.7% of respondents were neutral, 36.7% of respondents agreed to the statement, lastly, 55% of respondents strongly agreed. This entails that leaders were inspiring team members to go beyond what is expected. Figure 9 showed the respondents view on whether their leader encourages new ideas for solving site problems. 53% of the respondents agreed, while 40% strongly agreed, and 7% of the respondents were neutral. A total 93% of respondents agreed that their leaders encourage new ideas for solving site problems. In figure 10, 45% of the respondents agreed that their leader acts as a role model for ethical behavior, 38% strongly agreed, while 10% of respondents were neutral, lastly 7 % respondents disagreed. Figure 11 showed the respondents who thought their leaders treated team members as individual with unique needs under transformational leadership style. 48% of respondents agreed, while 35% respondents strongly agreed, 15% of respondents were neutral and 2% of respondents disagreed. Figure 12 showed respondents view under transactional leadership style, on setting clear performance standards and expectations by their leader. 60% agreed, while 37% of respondents strongly agreed and 3% were neutral. Figure 13 showed the respondents view on whether their leader clarifies responsibilities and deliverables for each role, 60% agreed, while 28% of respondents strongly agreed and 12% were neutral. Figure 14 showed the response turnout of respondents on leaders monitoring progress against schedule

and budget. 64% of the respondents agreed that leaders monitor progress closely against schedule and budget, while 23% of respondents strongly agreed and 13% of respondents were neutral. 38% of the respondents were neutral to the assertion that non-compliance is addressed promptly and fairly by their leaders, while 32% of respondents agreed, 25% of respondents strongly agreed to the statement and 5% of respondents disagreed as shown in figure 15 above. 32% of the respondents agreed that rewards (bonuses, recognition are tied to achieving milestones, while 28% of respondents were neutral, 27% of respondents strongly agreed and lastly 13% of the respondents disagreed to the statement as shown in figure 16.

Figure 17 shows the influence of transformational leadership style on project performance. The figure showed that transformational leadership had a very high influence on project performance. Figure 18 showed that transactional leadership style had a high influence on project performance. Figure 19 showed the influence of laissez-faire leadership style on project performance. Laissez-faire leadership style was found to have a moderate influence on project performance. Figure 20 showed the influence of democratic leadership style on project performance. It was found out that democratic leadership style also had a high influence on project performance. Figure 21 showed the autocratic leadership style on project performance. The figure showed that autocratic leadership style also had a moderate influence. It can be concluded that transformational leadership style had a high influence project performance followed by transactional and democratic leadership style which had high influence. Laissez-faire leadership and autocratic leadership had moderate influence.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that leadership styles significantly influence project performance at Road Development Agency (RDA). Key leadership styles namely, transformational, transactional and democratic Leadership style were found to have a direct and measurable impact on project performance and employees. Furthermore, the study revealed a positive correlation between effective leadership style, employee job satisfaction, and organizational goals alignment. This suggests that the presence of strong leadership not only enhances performance but also fosters a professional environment conducive to personal and institutional growth.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Capacity Building and Training:

Project managers should undergo regular professional development in leadership skills, particularly focusing on decision-making, communication, and people management.

Mentorship and Coaching Programs:

Establish mentorship programs at RDA, where experienced leaders mentor new or less experienced administrators and managers.

Performance Appraisal Systems:

Introduce structured performance evaluation tools that assess both leadership effectiveness and employee output, helping identify gaps and strengths.

Resource Allocation

Provide adequate financial and material support to enable Project managers implement leadership strategies effectively.

7. Acknowledgements

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