

The Effect of Leadership in Building Employee Relationships and Creativity in Ngos in Zambia: A Case Study of CIDRZ

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Abstract: The study explored the impact of leadership on employee relationships and creativity within non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Zambia, with a specific focus on the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ). The study investigates the leadership styles, strategies, and practices employed by CIDRZ and their influence on fostering positive employee relationships and stimulating creativity. The study explored the leadership styles employed and their influence on employee relationships; it examined the strategies and practices used to build positive employee relationship; it also investigated how leadership stimulates creativity among employees as well as identified the role of employee relationship in fostering creativity within CIDRZ. The study used mixed methods to obtain qualitative and quantitative data using interview guides and questionnaires to 70 employees who were purposively and conveniently sampled. The study adopted a case study design as it focused on one major organization. Findings revealed that the organization adopted transformational leadership styles as indicated by majority participants (52.9%). Further, the strategies and or practices adopted to build positive employee relationship were 'appreciate and reward' was delegation was found to be the most stimulating idea in creativity for most employees at CIDRZ. Collaboration and team work was encouraged as it was the benchmark with which employee relationship fostered creativity among fellow employees. Further research was recommended as it was seen to provide the evidence on relationship between performance and promotion in the organization. This could help to determine whether those who perform better when duties are delegated to them are considered for more challenging roles within the organization. In addition, the need for CIDRZ to increase the visibility of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) among its employees was recommended.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Employee relationship, CIDRZ, Creativity

1. INTRODUCTION

The last decades have witnessed an extraordinary growth in non-governmental organizations (NGO) in all spheres of human activities worldwide, especially in developing countries. NGOs, as an integral part of civil society, concerned with management of a complex and diverse range of activities. They face internal and external management issues. This study provides a critical overview of the major issues involved in positive leadership and building positive employee relationships with an emphasis on NGOs in Zambia. Leadership is getting people to do things they have never thought of doing, do not believe are possible or that they do not want to do (Smith, 2014).

Poor economic and poor governance residents of the country are challenges that affect organizations as funders could not invest their money in an unstable country, politically and economically (Sabir, Rafique, & Abbas, 2019). Therefore, every economy thrives on the government conducive environment for organizations to operate from and yield desired results. We need good organizational leadership on employees motivational and creativity to get through the financial crisis we are experiencing at the moment. Concepts such as leadership and motivational are cardinal in ensuring the success of an organization in both public and private organizations (Gangi & Abdulrazak, 2012).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in addressing social and developmental challenges in many countries, including Zambia. These organizations operate in diverse sectors, such as healthcare, education, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation, to name a few. In Zambia, one prominent NGO working in the field of public health and infectious disease research is the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ). CIDRZ focuses on improving healthcare systems, conducting research, and providing support to communities affected by infectious diseases.

Effective leadership within NGOs is vital for achieving organizational goals, motivating employees, and ensuring the successful implementation of projects and programs. Leadership styles, strategies, and practices can significantly influence employee relationships and organizational outcomes, including creativity. Building positive employee relationships fosters a supportive and collaborative work environment, while encouraging creativity can lead to innovative solutions to complex problems (Northouse, 2021; Lewis, 2014).

Despite the critical role of leadership in NGOs, limited research has been conducted on the specific context of Zambia. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effect of leadership in building employee relationships and stimulating creativity within NGOs in Zambia, with a specific focus on CIDRZ as a case study.

The Researcher's perspective on NGOs management is a subject of great interest for different NGOs, stakeholders including donors, communities, volunteers, managers and policy makers.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The health sector in Zambia and most Southern Africa countries face numerous challenges ranging from resource constraints to a rapidly evolving disease landscape. Effective leadership is crucial for navigating these challenges and ensuring the delivery of high-quality healthcare services (Wendy, 2012; Hough et al, 2021; Mvula, 2023). Leadership styles play a significant role in shaping organizational culture, employee motivation, and ultimately, patient outcomes. Understanding the prevalent leadership styles and their implications is essential for addressing existing gaps and optimizing leadership practices to enhance healthcare delivery (Aboshaiqah, et al, 2015). In the dynamic and often challenging landscape of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Zambia, the role of leadership in fostering positive employee relationships and nurturing creativity is paramount. However, there exists a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which leadership styles influence these critical aspects within the NGO sector. Furthermore, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on leadership styles within the context of NGOs in Zambia. This study aims to investigate the effect of various leadership styles employed within CIDRZ in Zambia on building employee relationships and fostering creativity.

1.2. Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of leadership on employee relationships and creativity in NGOs in Zambia, using CIDRZ as a case study. The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To explore the leadership styles employed by CIDRZ and their influence on employee relationships.
2. To examine the strategies and practices used by CIDRZ to build positive employee relationships.
3. To investigate how leadership within CIDRZ stimulates creativity among employees.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used case study research design as it focused on one specific organization. Using mixed methods approach, the study collected primary data using questionnaires and interview guides from 70 senior leaders, middle management and frontline staff members who were conveniently and purposively sampled. Quantitative data collected were analysed using Microsoft Excel while qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The demographic profiles of respondents were recorded. The study was male dominated as it recorded 70% for males while 30% was indicated for females. Different age groups were indicated with majority (41.4%) being aged between 35 and 44. Those aged between 25 and 34 accounted for 32.9% while those aged between 18 and 24 accounted for 2.9% and those aged 55 and above accounted for 4.3%.

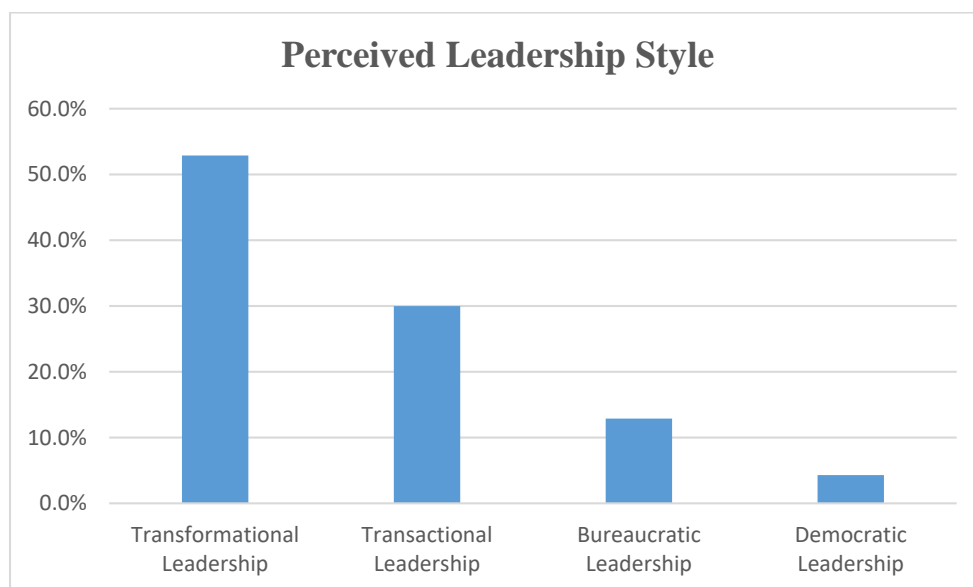
Education qualifications showed domination by bachelor's degree holder who recorded 58.6% followed by diploma holders who indicated 22.9%. Those with master's degree accounted for 2.9%. Years of service revealed that majority (44.3%) had worked between 3 and 4 years while those who worked for 5 years and above accounted for 35.7%. Those with 0 to 2 years' experience were represented by 20% respectively.

Table 1. Below provides a summary of the above information.

VARIABLE		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Gender	Male	49	70%
	Female	21	30%
Age	18-24	02	2.9%
	25-34	23	32.9%
	35-44	29	41.4%
	45-54	13	18.6%
	55 & above	03	4.3%
Education Qualification	Grade 12 school Certificate	11	15.7%
	Diploma	16	22.9%
	Bachelor's	41	58.6%
	Master's	02	2.9%
Years of Service	0-2	14	20%
	3-4	31	44.3%
	5 & above	25	35.7%

3.1. Leadership Style and Its Influence on Employee Relationship

The study revealed that CIRDZ was using transformational leadership style as indicated by majority participants (52.9%). This provides the evidence that CIRDZ leadership has increased employee engagement, motivation, and satisfaction as well as enhanced organizational performance and creativity as all these are linked to transformational leadership.

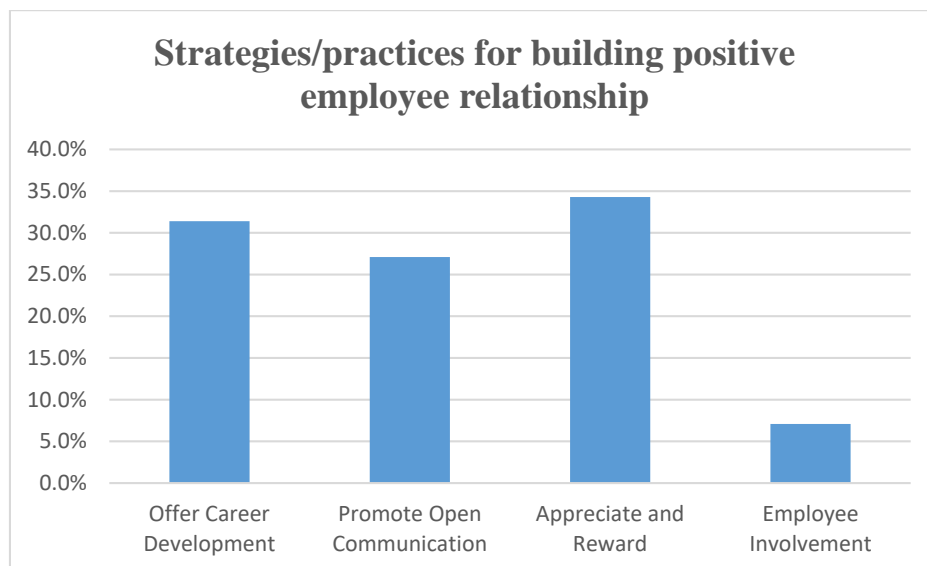


Furthermore, the findings also indicated that this leadership style influenced the organization through ensuring specialization and division of labour (38.6%). The literature on transformational leadership underscores its positive association with various organizational outcomes, including employee satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Judge & Piccolo, 2017). Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to articulate a compelling vision, exhibit individualized consideration towards their followers, stimulate intellectual stimulation, and provide inspirational motivation (Avolio et al., 2009).

Several important conclusions on the use of transformational leadership in the case survey were found in a related study conducted by Bass (2014) on the Impact of Transformational Leadership on Organizational Performance. Strong commitments to communicating a clear and compelling vision, encouraging open channels of communication, and enabling staff members to accept responsibility for their work are shown by leaders. Workers express a strong sense of engagement, devotion to the company's objectives, and job happiness. Moreover, there is proof that transformational leadership practices and a number of performance indicators, such as customer happiness, innovation, and productivity, are positively correlated.

3.2. Strategies and Practices Used to Build Positive Employee Relationship

The study revealed that employees were more impressed by the strategy of ‘*appreciate and reward*’ as indicated by majority participants (34.3%). Appreciation and reward systems in organizations are crucial for boosting employee morale, engagement, and productivity. Harvard Business Review (2022) add that financial rewards remain a significant factor in motivating employees. While non-monetary rewards like recognition and appreciation are important, financial incentives still play a crucial role in driving performance and achieving organizational goals.



Respondents who were interviewed on strategies and practices that CIRDZ management is putting in place to build positive employee relationship urged that,

“Career development is a good strategy in my view. It simply shows that the organization is not only concerned about your input that is benefited by it but it’s an indication that personal growth in knowledge and understanding is also their concern.” [R-10]

Another employee highlighted that;

“In relation to the issue of strategies and practices, I have witnessed (i.e within my department and beyond) all my co-workers (Including me) receiving being appreciated and rewarded for hard work. This has been a good gesture in my career as I look back and be motivated to work extra hard.” [R02]

Furthermore, another employee added that, ‘*employee involvement is outstanding for. I refer to it an engagement or an empowerment in critical decision processes, problem solving and so on. To me, this process fosters a sense of ownership, commitment and loyalty. As a result, there is an increase in organizational performance, innovation and employee satisfaction.*’ [R05]

Positive employee relationships are crucial for organizational success, contributing to employee satisfaction, retention, and overall productivity. This study provides a comprehensive review of the strategies and practices employed by organizations to cultivate positive relationships with their employees. A study by Adams (2019) showed the need for effective communication, training and development opportunity as well as the need for employee well-being initiatives.

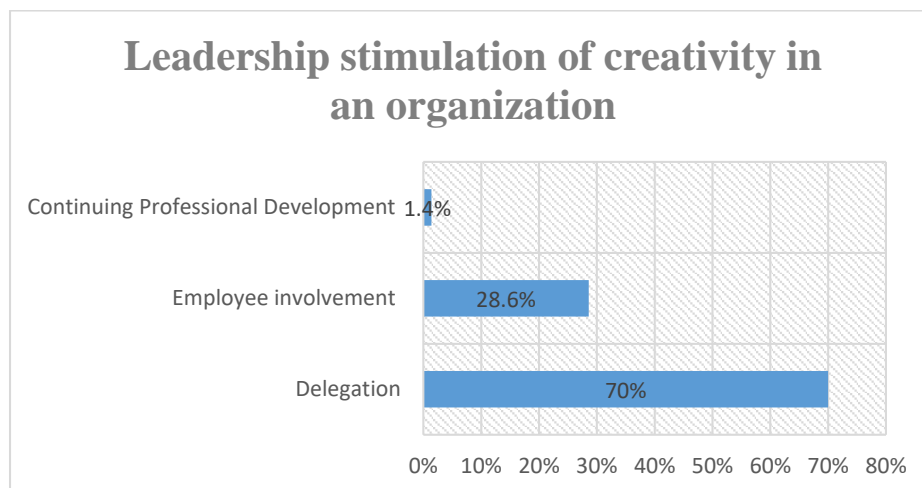
The findings in Adams study compliment the results in that both seem to be emphasized the need for various practices that have a direct impact on employees well-being.

Another study by Van Dierendonck (2011) aimed to provide an overview and synthesis of existing research on servant leadership, a leadership approach that emphasizes serving others as the primary goal of leadership revealed that appreciation of employees is key in creating a workforce that is loyal and disciplined. This study add further to the understanding of how cardinal strategies are in an organization especially those aimed at building positive relationship.

3.3. Stimulating Creativity in the Work Place by Leadership Styles

The study has shown that delegation was the most sought after means (70%) through which employees were provided a platform for creativity. This clearly shows that delegation is a crucial aspect of effective

leadership and organizational management, enabling leaders to focus on higher-level tasks while entrusting others with the execution of more routine or specialized activities.



Respondents who were interviewed on how leadership stimulate as well as foster creative employees highlighted that delegation was one of the ideal process through which employees' creativity is put to use.

One of the employees added,

"It has been observed that assigning tasks to employees fosters a sense of accountability and ownership for their job. People are more likely to feel inspired and empowered to use their creativity to solve problems when they are given the trust to take on tasks and make decisions. Furthermore, assigning responsibilities to various team members promotes a variety of viewpoints and methods for addressing problems. Individual experiences, abilities, and insights are brought to the task by each person, and this might result in more creative solutions." [R14]

Another one added,

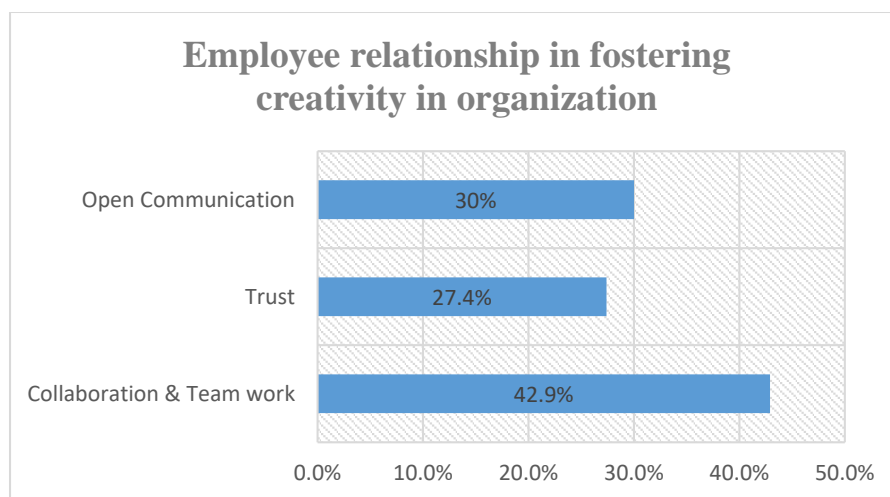
'One of the best ways to encourage creativity is via delegation. When I was given the opportunity to act, I received an award for inventiveness. This demonstrates unequivocally that assigning duties to others creates chances for learning and skill improvement. When given new tasks, employees might need to expand on their current skill set or learn new ones in order to finish the job well. This growing and learning process can inspire originality and creativity. Additionally, I've noticed that assigning duties to others can motivate people to try out new ideas and take cautious risks. Employees are more willing to experiment with novel techniques and solutions when given the freedom to make decisions and put their ideas into practice, which fosters innovation.' [R07]

A similar study by Sendjaya & Sarros (2002) on exploring Leadership Styles and their Impact on Stimulating Creativity in the Workplace: A Literature Review, found that transformational leadership, characterized by vision, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation, can positively influence creativity by empowering employees and encouraging innovation. Transactional leadership, focusing on contingent rewards and corrective actions, may have a mixed impact on creativity, as it can provide incentives but may also stifle intrinsic motivation.

3.4. Employee Relationship in Fostering Creativity in the Organization

The study revealed collaboration and teamwork (42.9%) as a benchmark for fostering creativity among employees in the organization. Building solid relationships among organizations, encouraging innovation, and attaining shared goals all depend on cooperation and teamwork. Both individuals and businesses can experience more success and joy in their pursuits by embracing collaboration and utilizing the different abilities of their team members.

Respondents who were interviewed on how employee relationship fosters creativity in an organization. One employee, in a senior role urged that, *"Strong bonds between coworkers promote cooperation and teamwork. When people with different backgrounds and skill sets get together, they can take advantage of one another's advantages to produce creative solutions and ideas. Collaboration-oriented cultures create a fertile ground for the interchange and blending of ideas that can lead to creative expression."* [R03]



Another employee who had highlighted on open communication stress,

"I think that having efficient means of communication makes it easier for people to share ideas and criticism, which is crucial for fostering innovation. Employees are more likely to provide creative ideas when they believe that their opinions are respected and that they have a platform to express them. Opening lines of communication promotes discussion and the sharing of viewpoints, which can result in creative solutions to organizational problems." [R18]

According to Paulus & Nijstad (2013), collaboration fosters creativity by bringing together diverse perspectives and ideas. When individuals work together, they can generate innovative solutions to complex problems. Thus, working in teams helps individuals develop stronger communication skills, including active listening and articulating ideas effectively.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has illuminated the critical role that leadership plays in developing staff relationships and encouraging innovation within CIRDZ. A positive work environment that fosters creativity and strong interpersonal connections is greatly enhanced by effective leadership, such as transformational leadership. This is demonstrated by an analysis of different leadership styles and their effects on employee engagement, collaboration, and innovative thinking. Leaders who put relationship-building first by encouraging open communication, trust, and support show a remarkable capacity to foster a feeling of community among staff members. This encourages a culture of collaboration where people are encouraged to openly share their ideas because they feel respected, empowered, and valued. Additionally, this kind of leadership creates a psychologically safe environment where workers feel free to experiment and take chances without worrying about criticism or Moreover, the study highlights the relationship currently existing between strong leadership and increased creativity among team members in CIRDZ. Leaders who encourage autonomy, provide resources, and recognize and reward innovative efforts are more likely to inspire their teams to think outside the box and generate novel solutions to challenges. Additionally, leaders who lead by example and demonstrate a willingness to embrace change and experimentation set the stage for a dynamic and innovative organizational culture.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Further research could be done to explore the relationship between performance and promotion in the organization. This could help to determine whether those who perform better when duties are delegated to them are considered for more challenging roles within the organization.
2. There is need for CIRDZ to increase the visibility of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) among its employees.

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