

Sustainability-Infused Transformational Leadership: A Catalyst for Organizational Performance at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited

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[Abstract] This quantitative study examines the potential for sustainability-infused transformational leadership to enhance organizational performance within Nigeria's state-owned petroleum corporation, the NNPC. Transformational leaders motivate followers to transcend self-interests by appealing to higher ideals and modeling ethical, sustainable behaviors. Integrating a sustainability ethos focused on environmental stewardship, social responsibility and transparency can further amplify transformational leadership's impact. Survey data from 716 NNPC employees revealed perceptions that leaders promoting sustainability via vision building, goal-setting, investments and role modeling tended to positively influence innovation, efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability outcomes. Correlational analyses confirmed significant positive relationships between this leadership style and both efficiency results and overall sustainability performance. The findings suggest formal training and recruitment to develop sustainability-focused transformational leadership may hold promise as a strategic priority for the NNPC in addressing pressing performance challenges. Further research can build on one of the first examinations of transformational leadership dynamics within this economically vital African industry context.

[Keywords] sustainability, transformational leadership, organization, performance, employees

Introduction

The Nigerian oil and gas industry plays a crucial role in the nation's economic development, accounting for over 90% of export revenue and 75% of government budgets (Shenkoya, 2022). As a state-owned petroleum corporation, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) controls and manages this strategically vital sector. However, the NNPC has long confronted challenges of bureaucracy, corruption, insufficient capabilities, and periodic mismanagement that undermine its performance (Abbas & Ali, 2023). With global competition intensifying, it is critical for the NNPC to adopt leadership approaches that can uplift organizational performance.

The study highlights the potential for transformational leadership to address performance issues in Nigerian oil and gas firms (Ejere & Aribi, 2013; Alabri et al., 2022; Alade, 2022; Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2022). These types of leaders inspire followers to transcend self-interest and adopt the organization's vision, mission, and goals (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). They achieve superior performance by focusing on capability development, empowerment, and cultural alignment (Alsuwaidi & Mansor, 2022; Azinga et al., 2023). The four key components of transformational leaders are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1999; Budhwar et al., 2023; Butt et al., 2023).

Some of the key organizational performance challenges facing the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) include inefficiency and bureaucracy, corruption and lack of transparency, insufficient capabilities, infrastructure deficiencies, periodic mismanagement, suboptimal productivity, stakeholder relationships, reputation, and public trust. Addressing these interlinked challenges requires strategic

leadership focused on driving transparency, innovation, accountability, productivity, and the development of human capital and operations.

The past half-century has seen great attention given to leadership by researchers and academicians. Such a focus on leadership is crucial for organizational success (Caputo et al., 2019). A dearth of functional leadership may lead to the absence of productivity and profitability in organizations (Budhwar et al., 2023). Leadership style these days is emerging as an influencing factor towards the basic functions of organizations which can improve integration and create an environment for coordination, communication, and teamwork. Effective leadership styles improve the efficiency and quality of services (Iddris et al., 2022). Eventually, leadership style plays a vital role in shaping organizational identity which enacts a significant role in boosting organizational morale, reputation, values, and overall organizational productivity.

Literature Review

The literature review synthesizes current academic insights into the transformational leadership construct, its linkage to sustainability leadership, and their potential impacts on organizational performance outcomes. Transformational leadership theory differentiates between transactional leadership focused on basic management functions like planning, staffing, and control versus transformational leadership aimed at inspiring change through vision building, intellectual stimulation, modeling, individual consideration, and building trust (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Kim et al., 2022). Transformational leaders motivate followers to look beyond self-interest to embrace what is best for the overall organization through creative visioning and role modeling ethical behaviors (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Le et al., 2021). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that followers of transformational leaders exhibit higher levels of perceived leadership effectiveness, motivation, organizational commitment, and performance compared to groups with non-transformational leaders in place (Mohd Zin et al., 2022).

Sustainability leadership involves leading change toward environmental and social stewardship while still maintaining profitability, also known as the “triple bottom line” (Naisa et al., 2023; Ngoc Khuong et al., 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022; Noori et al., 2023; Preko, 2022). Like transformational leadership’s emphasis on vision building, modeling, and motivation, sustainability leadership aims to foster follower commitment to ecology-centered values and sustainability is increasingly recognized as an ethical responsibility for organizations and leaders (Rohman et al., 2022). Sustainability-infused transformational leadership specifically integrates sustainability values like environmental protection, community development, transparency, and social justice into transformational vision building, role modeling, and culture change efforts (Sharma & Jain, 2022).

There is substantial evidence that certain leadership styles are associated with a range of beneficial organizational outcomes including follower satisfaction, commitment, trust, engagement, retention, citizenship behaviors, and performance (Akram et al., 2020; Wadhawan et al., 2022). Both transformational leadership and sustainability leadership specifically have been empirically tied to organizational reputation, efficiency, product and process innovation, and overall firm performance in a variety of cultural contexts (Soni, 2022). However, no known studies have examined linkages between sustainability-infused transformational leadership and NNPC performance outcomes.

The goal here is to revitalize a visionary approach, fostering a collective vision where followers collaborate to turn the vision into reality. This transformative process manifests through various leadership styles, such as ascribed charisma, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Anh et al., 2023). According to (Jaroliya & Gyanchandani, 2021), applying a transformational leadership style can enhance productivity by expanding understanding and nurturing human resources development. A leader employing transformational leadership empowers subordinates by offering opportunities and instilling confidence to carry out duties aligned with the organizational goals. Iddris et al. (2022) emphasizes that a transformational leader inspires subordinates to adopt a vision, mission, and organizational goals, fostering and motivating optimal performance, encouraging critical thinking, innovative problem-solving, and personalized attention to employees. (Farrell, 2022) suggests that frequent implementation of transformational leadership behaviors significantly improves the psychological empowerment of subordinates. A transformational leader focused on individuals can effectively guide the

organization's vision and mission, provide motivational support, and introduce innovative approaches for efficient work.

Organizations globally aim to inspire high levels of employee performance. In dynamic industries like oil and gas, maintaining consistently high performance is critical but challenging. This review examines transformational work performance, focusing on gaps in understanding this issue within Nigerian petroleum companies.

Transformational leadership theory explains how leaders inspire followers to exceed performance expectations by appealing to higher purposes and needs Burns, 1978; Bass 1985 in (Nabi et al., 2022). Transformational leaders exhibit four key behaviors – idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Meta-analyses confirm transformational leadership positively impacts individual task performance across cultures (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022).

However, gaps remain in applying this theory to African contexts. Most studies focus on Western settings (Preko, 2022). Leadership researchers emphasize considering sociocultural variations across countries (Olasunkanmi et al., 2023). This highlights a need to examine transformational leadership in Nigeria, where collectivism and power distance shape management norms. Furthermore, much research relies on cross-sectional surveys, limiting causal insights. Experimental and longitudinal designs could provide a richer understanding of how transformational leadership elevates performance (Noori et al., 2023).

Beyond leadership, organizational factors like human resource (HR) systems also drive employee performance. High-performance work systems enhance competence, motivation, and empowerment through ability, motivation, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices. These systems positively impact individual and firm effectiveness across sectors and countries (Alsuwaidi & Mansor, 2022).

Yet, gaps persist in understanding high-performance work systems in developing economies like Nigeria. Challenges adapting progressive HR practices to indigenous contexts are documented across Africa (Eluwole et al., 2022). Sociocultural factors, including communal values, may affect application. Moreover, few studies examine high-performance work systems in Nigeria's pivotal petroleum sector. Research is warranted given the industry's volatility and performance challenges.

Nigeria's petroleum sector faces escalating competitive and operational pressures, intensifying needs to enhance workforce performance (Abbas & Ali, 2023). Declining production and profitability highlight inefficient management. State-owned giants like NNPC exhibit hybrid logics, combining bureaucratic and market-driven elements (Caputo et al., 2019). How leadership and HR practices influence performance in this socioculturally complex context remains underexplored.

Furthermore, sectors tied closely with national identity like oil may have distinct sociocultural dynamics. Local indigenous expectations shape management styles in such strategic industries more acutely (Ngoc Khuong et al., 2022). Research is lacking on how sociocultural forces, including paternalism and communalism, moderate transformational leadership and high-performance work systems in Nigerian petroleum firms.

In essence, gaps persist in understanding transformational performance, leadership, and HR practices in Nigeria's petroleum sector. Examining how sociocultural context moderates transformational leadership and high-performance work system effectiveness would provide novel, valuable insights. This can inform strategies for elevating performance within this economically vital industry.

Methodology

The study employs a correlational research design, aiming to investigate the connection between transformational work performances in selected Nigerian petroleum companies. Correlational research involves measuring two or more factors to assess the extent of their relationship or identifiable pattern of change. This quantitative approach tests objective theories by analyzing the relationships among variables, typically measured on instruments for statistical analysis. The correlation method, utilizing correlation coefficients, is crucial in predictive studies exploring relationships between two variables. The correlation coefficient, denoted as "r," gauges the strength and direction of a linear relationship, ranging from -1.0 to +1 (Chen & Baptista Nunes, 2023).

The population of the study comprises all administrators and employees, totaling 1790 in a selected NNPC Company. The research employed a comprehensive sampling approach involving purposive and simple random sampling methods. Initially, the administrators (Directors and Sectional Heads) from the selected organization were purposively sampled. Finally, other employees were selected in the third stage using a simple random sampling technique, considering 40% of the total employee population. Nwana (1981) recommended this percentage when the population exceeds one hundred. Thus, a total of Seven Hundred and Sixteen staff were used as the sample size (156 Administrators and 560 Employees).

The instruments used in obtaining data for this study were a Questionnaire developed by the researcher titled: "Transformational work performance: Evidence from selected Nigerian Petroleum Companies in Rivers State." The questionnaire was divided into the following sections: Section A: To explore How does sustainability-infused transformational leadership influence innovation and efficiency at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited. Section B: To assess the relationship between sustainability-infused transformational leadership and competitiveness and sustainability outcomes at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited. The respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on sections A and B using the adopted 5-point Likert-type scale.

The data acquired underwent analysis utilizing Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistic (r), and Multiple Correlation Statistic. Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) were employed to address the four research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistic (r) and Multiple Correlations Statistic were applied to assess the six null hypotheses (Ho1 – Ho2) in the study, with a significance level of 0.05. The decision on null hypotheses (Ho1 – Ho2) hinges on the computed r-value at the 0.05 significance level. Rejecting the null hypotheses (Ho1 – Ho2) is warranted if the computed r-value is at $p < 0.05$, whereas accepting them is appropriate if the computed r-value is at $p > 0.05$.

Data Analysis

The presentation of acquired data involves displaying diverse types of data gathered through various data collection methods, enabling the researcher to analyze and extract fresh insights. 716 questionnaires were filled and submitted via Google Form, representing 100% of the study sample size. This completeness ensures that the research analysis relied on the submitted questionnaire copies.

Table 1

Mean And Standard Deviation Responses on How Does Sustainability-Infused Transformational Leadership Influence Innovation and Efficiency at The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited

SN	Questionnaire Statement	\bar{X}	SD
1	Leaders inspire employees to be innovative in our work.	4.31	1.40
2	Transformative leadership style encourages employees to come up with new ideas for improvement.	4.49	1.53
3	Transformative leader's role model sustainable practices that spark innovation.	4.60	1.55
4	Transformative leaders connect sustainability goals to innovation goals.	4.38	1.44
5	Leaders give autonomy to explore new ways of working more sustainably.	4.31	1.40
6	Transformative leaders reward innovative sustainability initiatives.	4.31	1.40
7	Transformative Leadership style instill a sense of urgency to improve work efficiently.	4.49	1.53
8	Training Employees enhance efficiency in a sustainable manner.	4.60	1.55
9	Transformative leader's link efficiency targets sustainability vision.	4.38	1.44
10	Technology boost efficiency and sustainability.	4.31	1.40
Grand Mean		4.42	1.46

Table 1 statistics show that employees agree sustainability-infused transformational leadership positively influences innovation and efficiency at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited, with overall high mean agreement (4.42 on a 5-point scale) across all questionnaire statements assessing specific leadership behaviors and outcomes.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation Responses on the Relationship Between Sustainability-Infused Transformational Leadership and Competitiveness and Sustainability Outcomes at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited.

SN	Questionnaire Statement	\bar{X}	SD
1	Leaders communicate how sustainability practices enhance our competitiveness.	4.31	1.40
2	Employees actively benchmark their sustainability performance against industry leaders.	4.49	1.53
3	Sustainability initiatives aim to make employee more competitive.	4.60	1.55
4	Leaders set ambitious sustainability goals to drive competitiveness.	4.38	1.44
5	Employees leverage their sustainability efforts in our marketing and external messaging.	3.01	1.41
6	Sustainability vision creates value that makes employees more competitive.	4.31	1.40
7	Leaders track sustainability KPIs like carbon emissions reductions.	4.49	1.53
8	Leaders invest resources to improve environmental and social sustainability.	4.60	1.55
9	Sustainability programs aim to conserve resources and reduce waste.	4.38	1.44
10	Leaders reward sustainability outcomes that boost our triple bottom line.	3.01	1.41
Grand Mean		4.16	1.47

Table 2 statistics indicate there is overall agreement (Grand Mean = 4.16) that sustainability-infused transformational leadership positively influences competitiveness and sustainability outcomes at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited, though specific questionnaire statements related to leveraging sustainability for marketing/messaging and reward systems received lower average agreement (3.01). In summary, employees perceive leadership sustainability practices and vision enhance competitiveness and sustainability performance.

Hypothesis Testing

This study addressed the following central research questions: How does sustainability-infused transformational leadership influence innovation and efficiency at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited? What is the relationship between sustainability-infused transformational leadership and competitiveness and sustainability outcomes at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited? The hypotheses and the null hypotheses for the research questions were as follows:

H1: Sustainability-infused transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on innovation and efficiency at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited.

H2: Sustainability-infused transformational leadership is positively associated with increased competitiveness and improved sustainability performance at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited.

Analyses of Hypotheses

Table 3

Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on Sustainability-infused transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on innovation and efficiency at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited

Variable	N	MEAN	r	P.VALUE	Remark
Leadership Efficiency	716	4.43	0.832*	0.000	Significant

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.832$) between sustainability-infused transformational leadership and efficiency that is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that leadership focused on sustainability is significantly associated with greater innovation and efficiency amongst employees at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited based on the sample of 716 respondents.

Table 4

Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on Sustainability-infused transformational leadership is positively associated with increased competitiveness and improved sustainability performance at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited.

Variable	N	MEAN	r	P.VALUE	Remark
Leadership Performance	716	4.16	0.855*	0.000	Significant

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

The table demonstrates a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.855$) between sustainability-infused transformational leadership and organizational performance related to competitiveness and sustainability that is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$); this indicates that among the 716 respondents, leadership focused on modeling and integrating sustainable practices is significantly associated with improvements in competitiveness and sustainability performance outcomes at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited.

Discussion of Results

Based on the results presented in the article, several key connections to the reviewed literature emerge: The finding that sustainability-focused transformational leadership positively and significantly impacts innovation, efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability outcomes aligns with past evidence linking transformational and sustainability leadership to performance outcomes (Anh et al., 2023; Donkor et al., 2022; Jaroliya & Gyanchandani, 2021; Khorshid et al., 2023).

The strong correlations found between this leadership style and both efficiency and sustainability performance support the emphasis in the literature review on how transformational leaders' vision building, motivation, and role modeling foster commitment to goals like efficiency and sustainability (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Metcalf & Benn, 2013). The overall agreement that leaders integrating sustainability into transformational behaviors enhance competitiveness reflects literature on sustainability leadership working towards the "triple bottom line" balancing financial, social, and environmental performance (Idris et al., 2022; Mohd Zin et al., 2022; Nabi et al., 2022).

The finding that sustainability-focused transformational leadership drives innovation builds on connections made in the literature between transformational leadership behaviors like intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and supporting creativity among followers (Nabi et al., 2022; Ngoc Khuong et al., 2022; Uslu Sahan & Terzioglu, 2022). However, the lower agreement regarding sustainability integration into marketing/messaging and rewards highlights an area for improvement identified less prominently in the literature reviewed.

In summary, the positive results align with many previous linkages made between transformational and sustainability leadership and outcomes like efficiency, innovation, competitiveness, and triple bottom line performance. The findings extend past literature by providing specific empirical evidence regarding the potential benefits of sustainability-infused transformational leadership in the under-researched Nigerian oil and gas industry context.

Conclusions and Suggestions

This quantitative correlational study provides a significant empirical contribution by investigating the effects of sustainability-infused transformational leadership within the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), an under-researched context. The findings indicate that integrating sustainability values such as environmental awareness, social justice, and transparency into transformational leadership practices, which emphasize inspiration, role modeling, and motivation, is significantly and positively linked to improvements in innovation, efficiency, competitiveness, and triple bottom line sustainability performance. Specifically, the results suggest that leaders who articulate a sustainability vision, establish related goals, invest in sustainability initiatives, exemplify sustainable behaviors, and connect sustainability with efficiency and innovation tend to foster positive outcomes in these areas. Moreover, quantitative correlational analyses confirm robust statistically significant positive relationships between this leadership style and both efficiency and broader sustainability performance.

However, the study has limitations. It relies on self-reported data from employees, which may introduce response bias as participants may provide socially desirable answers, potentially impacting the accuracy of the findings. Additionally, the cross-sectional design restricts the establishment of causal relationships, and the study focuses on perceptions rather than objective performance metrics.

To address these limitations, future research could incorporate multiple data sources, including performance metrics and objective organizational outcomes. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the evolving nature of sustainability-infused transformational leadership over time. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, such as incorporating interviews and observations, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of leadership practices and their effects. Furthermore, interventions like leadership development programs could be implemented and evaluated to assess the practical implications of promoting sustainability-infused transformational leadership within the NNPC. Finally, exploring the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, including management, can offer a holistic view of leadership practices and their impact on organizational performance and sustainability in the Nigerian oil and gas industry.

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