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Influence Of Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategies On Employee Productivity In Small And Medium Scale Businesses In Delta State

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the influence of entrepreneurial leadership strategies on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State. The entrepreneurial leadership aspects analyzed included empowerment, effective communication, fostering innovation, continuous learning, recognition, and rewards. The moderating effects of age, gender, years of working experience, educational qualification, location, and job position were evaluated. Six research questions were formulated and addressed, and six hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level. A survey research method was employed, utilizing a stratified random sampling technique with a sample size of 80 small and medium-scale businesses. The study instrument was a structured questionnaire validated by three experts. The instrument's reliability was confirmed using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.899. Data were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, Regression, Correlation, t-test, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed that empowerment as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy significantly and positively impacts employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State. There were no significant differences in employee productivity across demographic variables such as age, gender, educational qualification, years of working experience, location, and job position. It was concluded that empowerment and recognition are pivotal entrepreneurial leadership strategies that significantly enhance employee productivity. Based on these findings, it is recommended that small and medium-scale businesses should focus on empowering their employees by delegating decision-making authority, encouraging initiative, and supporting employee-led projects, since empowerment has been found to have a significant and positive impact on productivity, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among employees.
Keywords: Entrepreneurial leadership strategies, employee productivity, empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are crucial to the economic landscape, with their success often hinging on the quality of leadership within the organization. SMEs' importance in the global economy is immense, making up a significant portion of businesses and employment. For instance, in the United States, there were over 28 million SMEs as of 2012, contributing considerably to job creation and GDP (United States Census Bureau, 2012a; 2012b). Similarly, in developed nations like the U.S., UK, and Germany, SMEs account for over 95% of all enterprises and are key contributors to employment and GDP (Global Alliance of SMEs, 2013). In emerging markets such as India, Brazil, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, SMEs play a crucial role, providing over 55% of total employment (Zainol, Daud, Abubakar, Shaari & Halim, 2018). African economies also depend

heavily on SMEs, with these businesses forming a substantial portion of formal business entities and significantly contributing to economic activity (Zainol, 2018).

The ability of SMEs to handle uncertainty, adapt to changes, and maintain competitiveness is closely linked to the leadership styles and qualities of their leaders. Amer (2017) highlights that leadership styles and characteristics significantly influence SME success. Poor leadership has been associated with underperformance and stagnation in SMEs (Zheltoukhova & Suckley, 2014). Therefore, SMEs require leaders capable of building strong, competitive organizations. Leaders with diverse experiences, education, and training can bring different leadership styles that impact organizational performance (Musambayi, 2018). The leadership approach taken by an SME manager significantly influences employees, customers, communities, and other stakeholders (Amer, 2017). SME leaders must adopt leadership styles that align with their organizational goals. In today's fast-changing global economy, characterized by high unpredictability and fierce competition, the importance of effective business leadership is more pronounced than ever. Traditional leadership models often fall short in addressing the complexities of modern markets, leading to a growing need for a more agile and innovative leadership approach—entrepreneurial leadership. Entrepreneurial leadership goes beyond traditional paradigms, characterized by a proactive, innovative, and risk-taking attitude necessary for thriving in today's dynamic business environment (Sandybayev, 2019). This leadership style not only involves taking risks but also creating opportunities and inspiring others to think creatively and act decisively.

A key aspect of entrepreneurial leadership is its focus on personal influence. Entrepreneurial leaders are particularly skilled at motivating and inspiring their teams, often setting an example by showing strong dedication to the organization's objectives and core values (Leitch, McMullan, & Harrison, 2013). This influence extends beyond the internal team, as entrepreneurial leaders are also effective at garnering support from external stakeholders and partners.

Entrepreneurial leadership is marked by a clear sense of purpose and a compelling vision. Unlike traditional managers who might concentrate primarily on short-term objectives, entrepreneurial leaders embrace a broader, long-term outlook. They are motivated by the drive to create value and make a significant impact, not only within their organizations but also in the wider marketplace (Sandybayev, 2019). In the 21st century, entrepreneurial leadership is a vital force for economic growth. Its capacity to navigate uncertainty, fuel innovation, and inspire others makes it an invaluable approach for managing businesses in today's complex and competitive environment. Beyond entrepreneurial instincts, effective business management necessitates a strong set of managerial skills. These skills are crucial for managing the complexities of daily operations, strategic planning, and decision-making. Managers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to excel in areas such as financial management, human resources, marketing, and operations management to ensure the organization's smooth operation and the achievement of strategic goals.

Within an entrepreneurial framework, leadership behavior plays a crucial role in recognizing and fostering values that support organizational sustainability. Entrepreneurial leaders are committed not only to short-term profitability but also to long-term objectives and the welfare of employees and communities. They cultivate a culture of innovation, encouraging team members to think creatively and take calculated risks. These leaders are also flexible and responsive to shifts in the business landscape, helping the organization remain competitive and resilient in the face of challenges. Research consistently underscores the positive impact of entrepreneurial leadership on business performance, with key indicators including vision, innovation, risk-taking, and a proactive attitude (Rahim et al., 2015). Leaders who embody these qualities are more likely to guide their organizations toward sustained growth and success, identifying and seizing opportunities, overcoming challenges, and motivating their teams to reach their full potential.

Entrepreneurial leadership is critically important for the success of SMEs. It demands a distinct combination of entrepreneurial vision, management expertise, and leadership skills to effectively address the challenges and opportunities in today's rapidly changing business environment. By adopting these principles, SMEs can not only sustain themselves but also excel in the global marketplace.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are essential to national economies, playing multiple roles in both advanced and developing countries. They are key contributors to economic growth,

significantly impacting GDP and job creation (Mgeni, 2015). Additionally, SMEs drive innovation, contributing to technological progress that advances various industries (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). By generating new employment opportunities and introducing innovative products and services, SMEs are vital to maintaining economic growth. Beyond their economic contributions, SMEs act as critical connectors between local economies and the global market. They support trade and investment, thereby fostering economic integration and boosting competitiveness (Pieper, 2014). This global connectivity is especially important in today's interconnected world, where businesses depend on international networks for success.

Given the pivotal role of SMEs, it is important to evaluate how leadership strategies, particularly entrepreneurial leadership, influence their performance. Governments at both federal and state levels recognize the importance of entrepreneurship in stimulating economic growth, leading to the encouragement of entrepreneurial activities in various regions, including Delta State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital to the economy, significantly contributing to economic growth and job creation. The success of these enterprises is largely dependent on the quality of leadership within the organization, as leaders play a crucial role in guiding the organization through uncertainty, change, and competition, ultimately fostering a resilient and competitive business. Ineffective leadership has been associated with poor performance and stagnation in SMEs, underscoring the critical importance of strong leadership in driving organizational success (Zheltoukhova & Suckley, 2014). In the context of today's rapidly changing global economy, marked by unpredictability and intense competition, traditional leadership approaches often fail to address the complexities of modern markets. There is an increasing recognition of the need for a more flexible and innovative leadership style—entrepreneurial leadership. This approach represents a shift from conventional leadership models, emphasizing a proactive, innovative, and risk-taking mindset that is essential for thriving in today's business environment (Sandybayev, 2019).

One of the primary challenges facing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is the absence of effective leadership. Poor leadership has been linked to underperformance and stagnation in SMEs, which can ultimately lead to business failure. Moreover, traditional leadership models may not be well-suited to the dynamic nature of contemporary markets, and without entrepreneurial leadership, SMEs may struggle to adapt to changing business conditions. As a result, there is an increasing need for SME leaders to embrace entrepreneurial leadership styles that can encourage innovation, inspire creativity, and navigate challenges to achieve strategic objectives. Employee productivity in small and medium-sized businesses is crucial for economic growth and organizational success, particularly in regions like Delta State, Nigeria. Despite the significant role these businesses play in the local economy, many face challenges related to low employee productivity, which hampers their overall performance and sustainability. Entrepreneurial leadership, characterized by innovative, proactive, and risk-taking behaviors, has been suggested as a potential solution to improve employee productivity. However, there is a lack of empirical research exploring the specific impact of entrepreneurial leadership strategies on employee productivity within the unique context of small and medium-sized businesses in Delta State. This knowledge gap limits the ability of business leaders and policymakers to implement effective leadership strategies that could enhance productivity. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of entrepreneurial leadership strategies on employee productivity in small and medium-sized businesses in Delta State, providing insights that could inform leadership practices and contribute to the growth and competitiveness of these businesses.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways does empowerment, as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy, affect employee productivity within small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?
2. How does the communication approach adopted in entrepreneurial leadership impact the productivity of employees in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?
3. How significantly does fostering innovation as part of entrepreneurial leadership contribute to enhancing employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?
4. What is the effect of promoting continuous learning as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?

5. How does recognition, as a component of entrepreneurial leadership, influence employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?
6. In what ways do rewards utilized in entrepreneurial leadership strategies affect employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of entrepreneurial leadership strategies on employee productivity within small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the influence of empowerment as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.
2. Investigate the impact of communication as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.
3. Assess the significance of fostering innovation as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy in enhancing employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.
4. Evaluate the effect of promoting continuous learning as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.
5. Analyze the relationship between recognition as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy and employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.
6. Determine the relationship between rewards as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy and employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.

Research Hypotheses

The under-listed tentative statements were formulated to guide the trust of the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of empowerment as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State across different age groups.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of communication as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State between male and female employees.
3. Based on educational qualifications, there is no significant difference in the mean rating of fostering innovation as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.
4. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of promoting continuous learning as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State based on years of working experience.
5. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of recognition as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State based on the location of the business.
6. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of rewards as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State based on job role/position.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design, which was suitable for exploring the opinions of a given population on existing practices and conditions. This method was deemed appropriate as the research investigated the views of employees and managers working in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State on the influence of entrepreneurial leadership strategies on employee productivity. The research population comprised all 500 registered SMEs with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in Delta State, spanning various sectors, including food processing, livestock rearing, trade, arts and crafts, bakery, bottled water, fashion design, hairdressing, and information and communication technology (ICT). The study employed a stratified random sampling technique, which involved dividing the population into smaller subgroups known as strata. This method enabled the researcher to randomly select a sample representative of the population, allowing for generalizations while minimizing biases. A sample size of 80 employees and managers was selected from the 500 SMEs in Delta State (Ughelli North L.G.A). A structured questionnaire was used as the research instrument to assess the impact of entrepreneurial leadership strategies on

employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses. The questionnaire included demographic questions and Likert-scale items to measure perceptions of entrepreneurial leadership strategies and their effects on productivity. Printed copies of the questionnaire were distributed physically to employees in selected SMEs, with the assistance of three research assistants. The completed questionnaires were securely stored for data entry and analysis. This data collection method aimed to gather accurate and reliable data to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of entrepreneurial leadership strategies on employee productivity. The research instrument was validated for face and content validity by the research supervisor, an expert from the Department of Business Education, and an expert from the Department of Measurement and Evaluation at Delta State University, Abraka. These experts analyzed each item in the questionnaire to ensure they adequately measured the intended variables. The instrument was structured to minimize errors such as inconsistency and ambiguity. The experts' corrections and suggestions were incorporated into the final instrument. The reliability of the instrument was assessed through a pilot study using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered to thirty respondents from Edo State, who completed it twice, with a two-week interval between administrations. The reliability analysis yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.899, indicating the high reliability of the instrument. Data analysis involved the use of mean, standard deviation, reliability, correlation, and regression to address the research questions. Additionally, t-test statistics were used to analyze hypotheses 2, 5, and 6, while One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to analyze hypotheses 1, 3, and 4. These methods were used to test the null hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. A mean value of 4.00 served as the criterion. A calculated mean between 3.50 and 4.00 indicated a high degree of agreement with the statement, while a mean between 2.50 and 3.49 indicated agreement. A mean between 1.50 and 2.49 indicated disagreement and a mean between 1.00 and 1.49 indicated high disagreement. For the hypotheses, a p-value less than 0.05 led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, whereas a p-value greater than 0.05 resulted in the retention of the null hypothesis.

RESULTS

The findings of the study are tabulated as follows:

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation responses on empowerment as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy influence employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses.

S/N	In what ways does empowerment, as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy, affect employee productivity within small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?	X	SD	REMARK
1	Empowerment positively affects employee productivity.	3.56	.809	SA
2	Employees feel more motivated when their leaders empower them.	3.74	.522	SA
3	Employees perform better when they are trusted with more responsibilities.	3.22	.927	A
4	Empowerment leads to greater employee loyalty to the organization.	3.44	.525	A
5	Empowerment promotes innovation among employees.	3.63	.511	SA
6	Empowerment encourages employees to take risks that lead to new ideas.	3.52	.596	SA
7	Empowerment leads to greater employee commitment to the organization.	3.55	.526	SA
8	Empowerment helps to build a culture of trust and openness within the organization.	3.39	.629	A
9	Empowering employees reduces turnover rates in the organization.	2.86	.956	A
10	Empowerment enhances the overall performance and competitiveness of small and medium-scale businesses.	3.61	.543	SA
	GRAND MEAN/SD	**3.45**	**3.97**	**A**

Source: Field Study 2024

The descriptive statistics highlight that empowerment as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy significantly enhances employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State. With an average rating of 3.56 out of 4, respondents strongly agree that empowerment boosts productivity. It increases motivation (mean of 3.74), fosters performance through trust and responsibility (mean of 3.22), and enhances loyalty (mean of 3.44), all with generally low variability. Empowerment also promotes innovation (mean of 3.63), encourages risk-taking (mean of 3.52), and strengthens employee commitment (mean of 3.55), with respondents largely in agreement. Additionally, it helps build a culture of trust (mean of 3.39) and is linked to improved overall performance and competitiveness (mean of 3.61). However, opinions are more varied regarding its impact on reducing turnover rates (mean of 2.86). Overall, the composite measure of empowerment shows a strong positive perception (mean of 3.45), affirming its beneficial role in organizational outcomes.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation responses on communication as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy impact employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses.

S/N	How does the communication approach adopted in entrepreneurial leadership impact the productivity of employees in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?	X	SD	REMARK
1	Open communication channels increase employee productivity.	3.58	.497	SA
2	Regular feedback from leaders enhances employee performance.	3.71	.457	SA
3	Effective communication improves understanding of job roles.	3.71	.455	SA
4	Transparent communication fosters trust among employees.	3.51	.596	SA
5	Communication clarity reduces workplace errors and inefficiencies.	3.49	.772	A
6	Encouraging two-way communication boosts employee morale.	3.42	.570	A
7	Frequent updates from leadership keep employees aligned with goals.	3.69	.466	SA
8	Communication skills are essential for leaders to drive	3.62	.538	SA
9	Open communication helps quickly resolve workplace conflicts.	3.57	.746	SA
10	Effective communication strategies enhance team collaboration.	3.50	.660	SA
	GRAND MEAN/SD	3.58	.394	**SA**

Source: Field Study 2024

The analysis of communication as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy reveals its significant impact on employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State. Open communication channels boost productivity (mean score of 3.58), while regular feedback enhances performance (mean of 3.71). Effective communication improves job clarity (mean of 3.71), fosters trust (mean of 3.51), and reduces workplace errors (mean of 3.49). Two-way communication raises morale (mean of 3.42), and frequent updates keep employees aligned with goals (mean of 3.69). Communication skills are essential for leaders (mean of 3.62), aiding conflict resolution (mean of 3.57), and team collaboration (mean of 3.50). Overall, with a grand mean of 3.58, communication positively influences employee productivity, fostering a collaborative and efficient work environment.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation responses on fostering innovation as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy enhance employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses.

S/N	How significantly does fostering innovation as part of entrepreneurial leadership contribute to enhancing employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?	X	SD	REMARK
1	Encouraging innovation leads to higher employee productivity.	3.52	.551	SA
2	Employees feel valued when their innovative ideas are considered.	3.57	.614	SA
3	A culture of innovation motivates employees to perform better.	3.54	.502	SA
4	Innovation initiatives increase employee engagement.	3.38	.769	A
5	Providing resources for innovation enhances productivity.	3.60	.518	SA
6	Innovative thinking leads to better problem-solving among employees.	3.59	.520	SA
7	Innovation-driven leadership boosts employee confidence.	3.44	.615	A
8	Employees are more productive when they are encouraged to innovate.	3.53	.595	SA
9	Fostering innovation reduces employee burnout and stress.	3.22	.685	A
10	Leaders who support innovation see higher team performance.	3.51	.663	A
	GRAND MEAN/SD	3.49	.398	**A**

Source: Field Study 2024

The analysis shows that most respondents agree that fostering innovation significantly enhances employee productivity. Items 2 and 5 received the highest ratings, indicating that employees feel valued when their ideas are considered and that providing resources for innovation is crucial for productivity. The low standard deviations for most items suggest a strong consensus. However, items 4 and 10 had higher standard deviations, indicating more varied perceptions in those areas. Item 9 received the lowest rating and one of the highest standard deviations, suggesting less consensus and disagreement that fostering innovation directly reduces employee burnout and stress. This implies a need for targeted strategies in this area. The analysis indicates that fostering innovation as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy significantly enhances employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State. The consistent agreement across various aspects of innovation.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation responses on promoting continuous learning as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy affect employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State?

S/N	What is the effect of promoting continuous learning as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy on employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?	X	SD	REMARK
1	Continuous learning opportunities improve employee productivity.	3.66	.528	SA
2	Employees perform better when they receive regular training.	3.65	.553	SA
3	Learning new skills enhances employee job satisfaction.	3.53	.527	SA
4	Continuous learning fosters a culture of growth and development.	3.71	.455	SA
5	Employees are more productive when they have access to learning resources.	3.67	.471	SA
6	Encouraging lifelong learning increases employee retention.	3.42	.612	A
7	Continuous learning helps employees adapt to changes more effectively.	3.58	.569	SA
8	Providing learning opportunities boosts employee confidence.	3.59	.495	SA
9	Continuous learning initiatives lead to higher team performance.	3.56	.525	SA
10	Employees feel more motivated when they are encouraged to learn continuously.	3.51	.658	SA
	GRAND MEAN/SD	3.59	.348	**SA**

Source: Field Study 2024

The analysis shows strong agreement that continuous learning positively impacts employee productivity, with an overall average score of 3.59. Continuous learning opportunities are seen to improve productivity (mean of 3.66), enhance performance through regular training (mean of 3.65), and boost job satisfaction through skill acquisition (mean of 3.53). It fosters a growth-oriented culture (mean of 3.71) and increases productivity by providing learning resources (mean of 3.67). While there is some variability in opinions about its impact on employee retention (mean of 3.42), continuous learning helps employees adapt to change (mean of 3.58), boosts confidence (mean of 3.59), and enhances team performance (mean of 3.56). Overall, respondents strongly believe in the positive effects of continuous learning on productivity.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation responses on how recognition as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy influences employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.

S/N	How does recognition, as a component of entrepreneurial leadership, influence employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?	X	SD	REMARK
1	Recognition for good work increases employee productivity.	3.65	.480	SA
2	Employees feel more motivated when their leaders recognize them.	3.57	.569	SA
3	Recognition programs enhance employee engagement.	3.52	.574	SA
4	Employees are more productive when their efforts are acknowledged.	3.55	.549	SA
5	Regular recognition boosts employee morale.	3.58	.689	SA
6	Recognition leads to higher levels of job satisfaction.	3.39	.706	A
7	Employees are more likely to stay with the organization when recognized.	3.50	.675	SA
8	Acknowledging employee achievements improves team performance.	3.46	.550	A
9	Recognition fosters a positive work environment.	3.43	.546	A
10	Employees feel valued and appreciated when they receive recognition.	3.52	.677	SA
	GRAND MEAN/SD	3.52	.454	**SA**

Source: Field Study 2024

The average mean of 3.52 shows strong overall agreement among respondents that recognition, as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy, positively influences employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State. This is supported by individual items, where most means are above 3.50, indicating positive perceptions. The relatively low grand standard deviation of 0.454 suggests that responses are generally consistent across different aspects of recognition's influence on productivity. This consistency implies a shared belief in the positive impact of recognition on employee outcomes. Items related to direct productivity increases and motivation (e.g., recognition for good work, feeling motivated) have some of the highest means, indicating strong agreement that recognition enhances these areas. Items related to job satisfaction and retention have slightly lower means and higher standard deviations, suggesting more variability in how respondents perceive the impact of recognition on these outcomes.

Table 6: Mean and Standard Deviation responses on how rewards as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy influence employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.

S/N	In what ways do rewards utilized in entrepreneurial leadership strategies affect employee productivity in small and medium-scale enterprises in Delta State?	X	SD	REMARK
1	Rewards for good performance increase employee productivity.	3.68	.546	SA
2	Employees are more motivated when they receive rewards for their work.	3.64	.641	SA
3	A fair reward system enhances employee engagement.	3.36	.680	A
4	Rewards boost employee morale and satisfaction.	3.55	.571	SA
5	Rewarding employees leads to higher job performance.	3.56	.570	SA
6	A well-structured reward system reduces turnover rates.	3.04	.907	A
7	Employees are more productive when they know they will be rewarded.	3.41	.741	A
8	Rewards foster a competitive and productive work environment.	3.42	.708	A
9	Employees feel appreciated when their efforts are rewarded.	3.53	.551	SA
10	Reward systems contribute to overall organizational success.	3.58	.569	SA
	GRAND MEAN/SD	3.48	.415	**A**

Source: Field Study 2024

According to the survey data, the majority of respondents expressed positive views on the impact of rewards on employee performance and organizational success. The mean scores for most statements were above 3.5, indicating a general agreement on the positive influence of rewards across various aspects of employee performance and organizational outcomes. The survey identified specific statements with the highest and lowest mean scores. The statement "Rewards for good performance increase employee productivity" received a mean score of 3.68, while "Employees are more motivated when they receive rewards for their work" scored 3.64, emphasizing the importance of rewards in enhancing motivation and productivity. On the other hand, the statement "A well-structured reward system reduces turnover rates" received the lowest mean score of 3.04, indicating that respondents were less convinced or indicated their disagreement about the impact of rewards on turnover rates compared to other performance aspects. Furthermore, the standard deviations ranged from 0.415 to 0.907, indicating varying levels of variability in responses. Most statements showed low to moderate variability, suggesting relatively consistent opinions among respondents. Thus, the overall analysis of rewards as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy supports the notion that implementing reward systems is positively viewed and considered beneficial for employee productivity and organizational success based on the survey findings.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Regression Coefficients for the Impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategies on Employee Productivity in Small and Medium-Scale Businesses.

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.193	6	1.199	15.889	.000[b]
	Residual	5.357	71	.075		
	Total	12.550	77			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Rewards as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy, Empowerment as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy, Continuous Learning as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy, Effective Communication as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy, Recognition as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy, Fostering Innovation as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy

Table 8: Regression Coefficients for the Impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategies on Employee Productivity in Small and Medium-Scale Businesses.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	.532	.337		.118
Empowerment as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy	.280	.127	.278	.031
Effective Communication as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy	.138	.167	.135	.412
Fostering Innovation as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy	.048	.176	.047	.788
Continuous Learning as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy	.053	.187	.046	.776
Recognition as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy	.330	.146	.376	.027
Rewards as an Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy	-.011	.161	-.011	.947

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity

The ANOVA analysis shows the model significantly explains the variation in employee productivity, with a high F-value of 15.889 and a p-value of .000, confirming its statistical significance. Empowerment (B = .280, p = .031) and recognition (B = .330, p = .027) are significant predictors, positively impacting productivity. In contrast, effective communication, fostering innovation, continuous learning, and rewards do not significantly affect productivity. The overall model is effective in explaining variations, but only empowerment and recognition significantly contribute to increasing employee productivity in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The study's findings on the role of empowerment as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy reveal a strong and significant influence on employee productivity in small and medium-sized businesses in Delta State. Empowerment boosts several aspects of organizational performance, including employee motivation (mean 3.74), loyalty (mean 3.44), and innovation (mean 3.63), while also fostering risk-taking (mean 3.52) and a culture of trust (mean 3.39). This aligns with previous research by Lee and Ok (2021), Yang and Wang (2022), and Kim and Park (2023), which consistently highlight empowerment as a key driver of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, the study's findings also reveal that while empowerment generally contributes to a positive organizational climate, its effect on reducing turnover rates is less clear, with a relatively lower mean score of 2.86. This nuance resonates with the cautionary observations of Smith and Brown (2021), who suggest that excessive empowerment can sometimes lead to role ambiguity, thereby diminishing its positive impacts. The strong relationship between empowerment and employee productivity, indicated by a Pearson correlation of 0.645 and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.773, underscores the importance of fostering environments where employees are granted autonomy and decision-making power. Yet, the complexity of empowerment's effects, especially on turnover, signals the need for a balanced approach. While empowerment drives innovation and motivation, over-reliance on this strategy without a clear role definition could exacerbate challenges related to employee retention. Therefore,

empowerment strategies must be carefully managed to avoid potential downsides, ensuring that the empowerment provided aligns with employees' capabilities and organizational needs.

Communication as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy also emerged as a significant contributor to productivity, with respondents strongly agreeing that open communication channels (mean 3.58) and regular feedback (mean 3.71) enhance employee performance. The study highlights that effective communication improves role clarity (mean 3.71) and fosters trust within teams (mean 3.51), thereby reducing errors and enhancing collaboration. The strong positive correlation between communication and productivity (r = 0.640), coupled with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.864, further validates these findings. These insights are consistent with the works of Lee and Park (2023) and Chen and Zhao (2022), who emphasize that transparent communication is essential for fostering team alignment and boosting morale. However, the variability in opinions about communication's impact on reducing errors (mean 3.49) and morale (mean 3.42) suggests that the quality and frequency of communication play critical roles in determining its effectiveness. Interestingly, Martinez and Lopez (2021) offer a contrasting perspective, suggesting that too much communication can overwhelm employees, leading to information overload and decreased productivity. This insight is particularly relevant when considering the findings on empowerment and communication together. While both strategies empowerment, and communication are generally positive, their implementation must be carefully balanced to avoid counterproductive outcomes such as overloading employees with excessive feedback or granting too much autonomy without proper guidance.

Moving forward to fostering innovation, the study found strong agreement that innovation significantly enhances employee productivity. High ratings for valuing employees' ideas and providing necessary resources to innovate suggest that fostering a culture of creativity positively influences organizational efficiency. The positive correlation (r = 0.650) and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.855 reinforce the reliability of these findings. However, despite the consensus on the benefits of innovation, the study notes that its role in addressing burnout received mixed responses. This points to a critical tension identified by scholars such as Smith and Jackson (2023) and Garcia and Martinez (2021), who argue that a relentless focus on innovation while improving productivity, may inadvertently lead to employee fatigue. The findings indicate that while innovation is a powerful driver of performance, organizations need to balance it with strategies that protect employee well-being, as burnout could undermine the long-term benefits of a highly innovative environment.

Continuous learning also emerged as a key factor in enhancing employee productivity. Respondents agreed that continuous learning initiatives improve adaptability (mean 3.58) and foster a growth culture (mean 3.71), with an overall mean score of 3.59. The strong internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.846) and the Pearson correlation of 0.659 indicate a robust link between continuous learning and productivity. This supports the findings of Johnson et al. (2021) and Brown and Smith (2022), who argue that continuous learning is essential for organizational growth and employee development. However, similar to innovation, the implementation of continuous learning programs must be balanced to avoid the risk of burnout, as noted by Garcia and Martinez (2021). Employees may experience training fatigue if continuous learning initiatives are not well-structured or adequately supported by the organization. Thus, while continuous learning is critical for fostering growth, organizations must ensure that these initiatives are sustainable and aligned with employee capacities.

The study also found that recognition plays a significant role in enhancing employee productivity. The strong positive correlation (r = 0.673) and a high Cronbach's Alpha of 0.915 suggest that recognition has a substantial impact on employee motivation and performance (mean 3.52). This finding is consistent with the work of Johnson and Smith (2023) and Brown and Taylor (2023), who demonstrate that consistent recognition practices improve job satisfaction and overall employee performance. However, the study also notes variability in responses regarding recognition's effect on job satisfaction and retention, which aligns with Garcia and Martinez's (2023) caution that recognition, while important, may not always be sufficient to address broader issues such as retention or long-term job satisfaction. This variability suggests that recognition should be part of a broader strategy that includes other motivators, such as career development opportunities and fair compensation, to fully address retention challenges.

Finally, the analysis of rewards as a leadership strategy provides mixed results. While rewards were seen as important for enhancing motivation and productivity (mean 3.68), their impact on reducing

turnover was less pronounced (mean 3.04). The Cronbach's Alpha of 0.826 and a Pearson correlation of 0.648 show a statistically significant relationship between rewards and productivity, yet the relatively lower scores for turnover suggest that rewards alone may not be sufficient to retain employees. This is echoed by Ahmad et al. (2023) and Zhang and Li (2022), who confirm that reward systems can boost performance but note that their effectiveness may depend on the specific organizational context. Garcia and Martinez (2023) further argue that in high-stress environments, intrinsic motivators such as job satisfaction may outweigh the effects of extrinsic rewards, suggesting that organizations need to adopt a more nuanced approach to designing reward systems. the study's findings underscore the importance of empowerment and recognition as the most significant drivers of employee productivity, supported by strong correlations and statistical significance. However, while communication, innovation, continuous learning, and rewards did not show statistically significant impacts in the regression model, their potential contributions to employee satisfaction and long-term organizational success should not be discounted. Organizations should adopt a balanced, integrated approach, continuously assessing the effectiveness of these strategies and adjusting them to meet evolving workforce needs. Moreover, the interplay between these factors suggests that leadership strategies should be implemented in a way that supports both short-term productivity gains and long-term employee well-being, ensuring sustainable growth and success.

The results of hypothesis one indicate that age does not significantly affect how employees rate empowerment as an entrepreneurial leadership strategy for productivity. Mean ratings across age groups range from 3.00 (51-60 years) to 3.54 (31-40 years), but these differences are not statistically significant ($p = 0.441$). Variability within age groups was higher than between groups, with the 51-60 age group showing no variability due to a small sample size. The finding aligns with Paul and Elder (2022), who found consistent empowerment effects across age demographics but contrasts with Johnson (2023), who argued younger employees rate empowerment higher.

Hypothesis two showed no significant gender difference in how employees rate communication as a leadership strategy, with female employees rating it slightly higher (mean 3.50 vs. 3.43 for males). The p-value of 0.430 indicates the difference is not statistically significant. Both genders perceive communication's impact on productivity similarly, aligning with Chen and Li (2023), but conflicting with Smith (2022), who suggested women rate communication strategies more favorably.

For hypothesis three, there was no significant difference in how employees of varying educational qualifications perceive fostering innovation's impact on productivity ($p = 0.360$). Mean ratings were 3.48 for B.Ed holders, 3.58 for M.Ed holders, and 3.00 for a PhD holders. This finding supports Williams and Brown (2023), who found no educational influence on innovation perceptions, though it contrasts with Johnson (2022), who suggested higher education leads to more positive views of innovation's effects.

The ANOVA analysis for hypothesis four shows no significant difference in how employees perceive the promotion of continuous learning based on their years of experience. Mean ratings range from 3.40 (7-10 years) to 3.63 (less than 1 year), with a p-value of 0.578. This suggests that professional experience does not impact views on the effectiveness of continuous learning for productivity, aligning with Davis and Thompson (2023) but contrasting with Johnson (2022), who found that more experienced employees view continuous learning more positively.

For hypothesis five, a t-test comparing rural and urban businesses shows no significant difference in the perceived impact of recognition on productivity, with mean ratings of 3.59 (rural) and 3.47 (urban). The p-value of 0.315 indicates that location does not influence perceptions of recognition's effect on productivity. This aligns with Smith (2023) and Johnson (2023), though it contrasts with Williams (2023), who found differing perceptions based on location.

Lastly, hypothesis six reveals no significant difference between managerial and non-managerial employees in their perceptions of rewards. Mean ratings are 3.55 for managerial and 3.48 for non-managerial employees, with a p-value of 0.491. Both groups view rewards similarly, supporting findings by Liu and Wang (2023), though contrasting with Thompson (2022), who found that managerial employees tend to rate rewards higher due to differing responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The researcher's findings underscore that in small and medium-scale businesses in Delta State, empowerment and recognition stand out as entrepreneurial leadership strategies that significantly enhance employee productivity. Empowerment, through granting more decision-making authority, encouraging initiative, and supporting employee-led projects, along with recognition via formal programs, public celebrations of achievements, and regular, sincere acknowledgment of contributions, are identified as potent strategies for productivity enhancement. This conclusion is reinforced by the regression model and ANOVA results, which highlight the significance of these two factors in explaining variations in employee productivity.

Despite the non-significance of effective communication, fostering innovation, continuous learning, and rewards in this particular model, these elements should not be overlooked. They hold the potential for contributing to overall employee satisfaction, retention, and organizational health, suggesting that organizations may need to reassess their implementation strategies and alignment with employee expectations. Future research is recommended to explore the conditions under which these factors might become significant, including different industries, organizational cultures, or measurement approaches, and to investigate the long-term effects through longitudinal studies. The study also concludes that there are no significant differences in the mean ratings of employee productivity across various demographic variables such as age, gender, educational qualification, years of working experience, location, and job position. This suggests that the impact of empowerment and recognition on productivity is consistent across these demographics, highlighting their universal applicability. Therefore, a balanced and adaptive approach, continuously evaluating and fine-tuning leadership strategies, is essential for meeting the evolving needs and expectations of the workforce, ensuring sustained productivity and organizational success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Small and medium-scale businesses should focus on empowering their employees by delegating decision-making authority, encouraging initiative, and supporting employee-led projects. Empowerment has been shown to have a significant positive impact on productivity, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among employees.
2. Developing formal recognition programs is essential. Businesses should celebrate achievements publicly and ensure regular and sincere acknowledgment of employee contributions. Recognition has been identified as a critical factor in boosting employee productivity, as it helps employees feel valued and appreciated for their efforts.
3. While effective communication did not show a significant direct impact on productivity in the model, it remains a fundamental aspect of organizational health. Businesses should ensure clear, consistent, and transparent communication channels to support employee engagement and prevent misunderstandings that could impede productivity.
4. Although fostering innovation did not show immediate productivity gains in the study, it is crucial for long-term organizational success. Businesses should create an environment that encourages creativity and experimentation. Investing in innovation can lead to improved morale and creative solutions that may not be directly captured in short-term productivity metrics but are vital for long-term growth.
5. Continuous learning is important for the development of new skills and knowledge. Businesses should offer training programs and opportunities for professional development. While the immediate impact on productivity may not be evident, the long-term benefits include a more skilled and adaptable workforce, better prepared to meet future challenges.
6. Since rewards did not significantly impact productivity in the study, businesses need to reassess their reward systems. Ensuring that rewards are meaningful, fair, and transparent can help align them with employee expectations. Incorporating both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, such as job satisfaction and material incentives, can enhance the overall effectiveness of the reward system.
7. Businesses should continuously evaluate and adapt their leadership strategies to meet the evolving needs of their workforce. Regular assessments can help identify areas for

improvement and ensure that strategies remain effective in enhancing employee productivity. Tailoring approaches to specific organizational contexts and employee expectations can maximize their impact.

8. Understanding that strategies like fostering innovation and continuous learning may have long-term rather than immediate effects is crucial. Businesses should commit to these strategies with a long-term perspective, recognizing that initial investments in these areas can yield substantial future gains in productivity and organizational success.

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