

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA: EXAMINING LEADERSHIP CHANGE AND EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION.

Aderonke Arowosafe, Akeem Adewale Bakare, Friday Iyaji Isah, Ekenta Roseline Ugochi,
Adeniyi Oyabambi

¹ Department of Business Administration, Nile University of Nigeria. Abuja, Federal Capital
Territory, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This research empirically examines the effect of leadership change on the satisfaction of North-Central Nigeria private university employees based on leadership succession, rearranging governance, policy reforms, and administrative rearranging. A descriptive survey research design collected the data from 551 respondents from seven private universities using a structured questionnaire. Multiple regression was used to determine the effect of the change variables of leadership on employee satisfaction. Findings indicate that the change in leadership strongly influences employee satisfaction ($\beta = 0.235$, $p = 0.022$), suggesting that effective transition leads to institutional stability and worker morale. Governance Reconfiguration influences employee satisfaction to a very large extent ($\beta = 0.322$, $p = 0.015$), reflecting the role played by formal leadership structures towards ensuring efficiency and trust. Policy Shifts also have a very high positive correlation ($\beta = 0.356$, $p = 0.010$), reflecting that transparent and equitable policy reforms have an impact on fairness and job security. Administrative Reconfiguration also has a positive impact on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.341$, $p = 0.001$), showing how organizational streamlining can play a positive role in working lives. The model accounts for 70.1% of difference in employee satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.701$, $F = 18.838$, $p < 0.001$), substantiating that work experiences are highly influenced by leadership transition. These results are in line with Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, highlighting the impact of leader-follower relationships on employee attitudes toward organizational change. The research recommend that private universities should adopt systemized leadership transition, encourage participative management, practice open policy revision, and improve administrative practice to keep employees' satisfaction regardless of leadership change.

Keywords: Leadership Change, Employee Satisfaction, Leadership Succession, Governance Reconfiguration, Policy Shifts, Administrative Reconfiguration, Private Universities, North-Central Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving academic landscape, universities are in a perpetual need to react to internal and external pressures to maintain institutional effectiveness and labor force stability. Leadership succession is central to shaping organisational culture, decision-making, and staff morale. Governance reconfiguration, policy shifts, or external regulatory imperatives that can have a strong impact on workers' job satisfaction are likely the causes of leadership change, especially in private universities. Transformational and transactional leadership create varying levels of workforce commitment, leading to differences in employee commitment to leadership change (Iyaji et al., 2025; Ngwama & Ogaga-Oghene, 2022). However, miscommunicated or non-inclusive leadership changes create uncertainty, resistance, and dissatisfaction among staff. Oyewobi (2024) also highlights that leaders' capability to offer stability during transitions determines how dedicated workers are to the institution and further reaffirms the significance of formalized succession planning for leaders.

Effects of leadership change on employees' satisfaction can be gigantic and include the intensity of expectation from work, motivation, and organizational loyalty. Onyeneke and Abe (2021) believe that there must be proper management of the leadership change to gain employees' attitudinal acceptance of projected organizational alteration. In contrast, Abubakar and Ahmed (2021) identified that transformational leadership behaviors positively affect employees through the creation of a culture of trust and transparency, which subsequently results in greater satisfaction and institutional loyalty. Changes in leadership leading to extreme policy reforms without consultation with employees destabilize the work environment and diminish job satisfaction (Alade, 2022). Successful leadership transitions should thus emphasize participatory decision-making, fairness in appointments, and institutional values compatibility to ensure worker morale.

Policy recasting and reorganization of the administration after change in leadership also influence employee satisfaction at universities. According to Maheshwari (2022), success in change of leadership is a question of how best new policy fits within current institutional values and worker ambitions. Sudden changes in governance, policy amendments on tenure, or re-writing faculty performance evaluation can give rise to employment insecurity, influencing staff and faculty satisfaction. Additionally, Mugira (2022) adds that poorly managed leadership changes therefore lead to increased workplace tension, communication failures, and institutional decay. Quek et al. (2021) also posit that distributed leadership in which decision-making is collective minimizes dissatisfaction as the employees feel consulted regarding governance and operational adjustments.

Private university leadership in Nigeria has been under constant change, often due to political, economic, or accreditation-related problems, and these have, in turn, generated volatility among employees' experiences. According to Olayisade and Awolusi (2021), leadership changes should be designed with strategic employee

participation practice inputs in a bid to reduce resistance and dissatisfaction. Igudia (2021), on the other hand, asserts that there are several universities that do not engage employees in change, and this results in increased turnover rates and reduced institutional commitment. In the case of issues related to leadership succession of private universities, there is a growing critical need to examine how leadership succession influences employee satisfaction, particularly in workplace stability, motivation, and organizational trust.

The current study seeks to empirically examine the effect of leadership change on employee satisfaction in North-Central Nigeria private universities. The research will contrast the impact of leadership succession, governance reconfiguration, policy shift, and administrative reconfiguration on employees' satisfaction. The empirical findings from this study will offer insight to university managers on how university managers can most effectively carry out successful leadership transitions with a view to attaining a satisfied and committed workforce. The research is structured as follows: literature review, and relevant theoretical and empirical research; methodology, explaining data collection and analysis; findings and discussion, highlighting significant results; and conclusion and recommendations, outlining the best way to enhance employee satisfaction amidst leadership transition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Change

Leadership transition is a vital component of organizational change, impacting employees' morale, productivity, and institutional stability. Different scholars have examined leadership transition from different perspectives, highlighting its complexity and importance in organizational success. Ngwama and Ogaga-Oghene (2022) describe leadership transition as the shift of power and authority in an organization, which can be planned or sudden, impacting employees' level of commitment and overall performance. Correspondingly, Abubakar and Ahmed (2021) note that leadership succession, especially in higher learning institutions, plays a pivotal role in shaping the strategic direction, innovation, and administrative effectiveness of universities. Leadership succession can, however, trigger uncertainty and opposition unless effectively managed. Leadership transition, thus, is not merely a procedural change but a change process that needs planning and execution with the highest precautions to prevent negative impacts on worker satisfaction and organizational stability.

The most apparent school of thought is focused on the transactional and transformational leadership role in effective change management. Maheshwari (2022) argued that transformational leadership improves employee commitment and innovation with the development of a common vision and empowerment in

making choices. The special focus on systematic oversight accompanied by reward and compliance as theoretical underpinnings of transactional leadership (Oyewobi, 2024) might offer stability to ensure leadership change. And operational stability requires transactional leadership, although transformational leadership is typically associated with positive employee satisfaction outcomes. A balance between the two types of leadership is necessary otherwise you can get too much chaos or a lock up during times of change. The inability to apply the combination of the two may result in resistance, lower motivation, and poorer job performance.

A second theoretical conceptualization of leadership transition is its psychological effect on employees. Zhou et al. (2021) discuss how the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory affects the attitudes of workers towards leadership transition. Optimal LMXs, with trust, communication, and respect, are likely to cause smooth transition with less resistance. On the contrary, lackadaisical decisions without relevant communication may lead to job insecurity, stress, and lower job satisfaction (Hussain & Khayat, 2021). Additionally, Quek et al. (2021) argue that distributed leadership structures, which divide power among multiple leaders, can counter the impact of leadership turnover by fostering continuity and joint accountability. Results emphasize strategic communications and relationship management so that employees in organizations adjust to the leadership change.

Scholars dissect the organizational culture role in employees' reactions to leadership change. Olayisade and Awolusi (2021) affirm that where institutions have robust, adaptive cultures, employees are likely to adapt and embrace new leadership styles effortlessly. Organizations with rigid hierarchical frameworks oppose leadership changes, and thus resistance and discontent follow. Igudia (2021) also adds that bureaucratic organization leadership successions in universities have to be followed or preceded by structural adjustments in order to transition into evolving models of governance. Leadership change in the absence of a change-oriented culture will produce institutional mission-goal and employee-expectation mismatches that translate to productivity and morale declines.

Success in leadership transition also lies in the communication approach and employee involvement. Archibang and Ibrahim (2021) recognize the use of participative leadership in which the employees are explicitly involved as decision-makers when it comes to succession. Transparent communication within succession planning in leadership reduces guesswork, builds trustworthiness, and increases job satisfaction. Notwithstanding, Alade (2022) criticizes most organizations for not having defined lines of communication during leadership succession out of office, resulting in miscommunication, stress, and insubordination among workers. Succession planning for leadership should thus be a formal process that involves collecting inputs from workers to facilitate smooth transitions as well as continuous organizational stability.

Succession of leadership is a complex process that has direct effects on employee morale, organizational culture, and effectiveness. Leadership succession in succession perhaps is the most important aspect of succession of leadership and decides an institution's stability and direction for the future. Organizational leadership requires formal succession because it ensures continuity, reduces instability, and increases employees' confidence (Ngwama & Ogaga-Oghene, 2022). However, succession at many private universities is typically characterized by abrupt changes in leadership, interference from vested political interests, and inadequate succession planning, even as such events can undermine institutional morale and staff stability.

In this regard, Abubakar and Ahmed (2021) point out that in higher educational institutions where policy, funds and employee welfare are led by leadership, poorly managed succession brings about resistance, instability and low job satisfaction. Also, bad succession planning creates power vacuums, where institutions often have to bear interim leadership boxes that are devoid of the vision and legitimacy needed to cause the kind of cognitive discontentment that causes higher employee grievance and disrespect to leadership.

A second core component of the leadership change is the change of governance – reform of institutional decision-making, administrative organization and hierarchical regulation. Governance reconfiguration is established, taking cognizance of the need for improved efficiency, enhanced accountability, and a framework that will bring universities in tune with global or international standards and best practices of universities (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021) While governance reconfiguration aims at reforming the way institution's function, employees read it as a power grab rather than a step towards inclusiveness. According to Maheshwari (2022), such changes in governance that curtail academics autonomy and add unnecessary bureaucratic levels, lead to frustration and disengagement among employees. In addition, governance reconfiguration has a tendency to affect the roles of academic and non-academic staff, sometimes creating unrealistic performance expectations, work overloads, and compromised participatory decision-making (Archibong & Ibrahim, 2021). Therefore, governance reforms must be achieved through collective involvement where employees' views are considered to prevent resistance and resentment.

Closely related to governance reconfiguration is policy change, e.g., employment contract modification, academic accreditation policy, performance management system, and institutional mandate. Policy changes, as argued by Olayisade and Awolusi (2021), where they are institutionally strategic, enhance institutional performance and job satisfaction. Policy change, on the other hand, where it occurs without sufficient consultation, leads to confusion, resentment, and fear of job loss on the part of the employees. Igudia (2021) discovered that universities that implement policy changes without the involvement of employees will have more

resistance, decreased productivity, and a higher attrition rate. This is especially the case when policy changes entail new tenure programs, promotion policy, or funding models since these have a direct effect on employment security and career advancement. Additionally, policy choices for cost-cutting measures, like decreasing faculty salaries or modifying workload assignments, have the effect of decreasing employees' trust and commitment, which in turn leads to institutional inefficiencies (Quek et al., 2021).

Lastly, administrative reconfiguration is another primary indicator of leadership change, involving the transformation of university operational structure, digitalization of university services, and administrative unit restructuring. Although administrative reconfiguration is normally motivated by the quest for efficiency and modernization, it also brings with it challenges associated with workers' adaptability, resistance to change, and job displacement (Zhou et al., 2021). Organizations that implement administrative reforms without training and support structures face the risk of alienating staff, work-related stress, and job dissatisfaction (Mugira, 2022). Also, administrative reforms that result in the consolidation of roles, intense surveillance, and strict performance management systems face the risk of creating cultures of mistrust and fear within the staff (Hussain & Khayat, 2021). Therefore, administrative restructuring should be followed by open communication, staff capacity-building programs, and clear change management initiatives so as to reduce resistance and disgruntlement.

Overall, leadership change—through leadership succession, governance reconfiguration, policy shifts, and administrative reconfiguration—has significant implications for employee satisfaction in private universities. But when managed poorly, such changes can cause disruptions, lead to uncertainty and incurs resistance amongst employees, even though many if not most of those changes are being made for the purported purpose of improving institutions. Such institutions that enjoy high levels of employee engagement and organizational stability have clear mandates for transparent leadership transitions, inclusive governance mechanisms, participatory policy-making, and comprehensive administrative reforms. But top-down authoritarian leadership change, made without consideration to staff, can greatly damage institutional job satisfaction, employee morale, and institutional performance.

Employee Satisfaction

The comprehensive understanding of employee satisfaction and its importance as a fundamental element of organizational studies has inspired numerous scholars to develop theoretical frameworks on the subject. Rabiou et al. (2024) describe employee job satisfaction as an organization's effort to create a supportive

atmosphere that addresses employees' overall well-being concerning their internal and external role requirements. By identifying the elements influencing satisfaction and implementing strategies for enhancement, organisations can boost motivation, achievement, and productivity. Nurudeen et al. (2021) characterise employee satisfaction as an emotional reaction to the work environment, salary structures, and organisational relationships, deeming it an affective experience. Conversely, Bah et al. (2024) take a more expansive, multidimensional perspective, proposing that satisfaction arises from both intrinsic motivators—such as career development and job autonomy—and extrinsic benefits like pay, organizational culture, and recognition initiatives. This aligns with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which asserts that job satisfaction is derived from motivational factors such as achievement and personal growth, while dissatisfaction is associated with hygiene factors like inadequate supervision or poor working conditions.

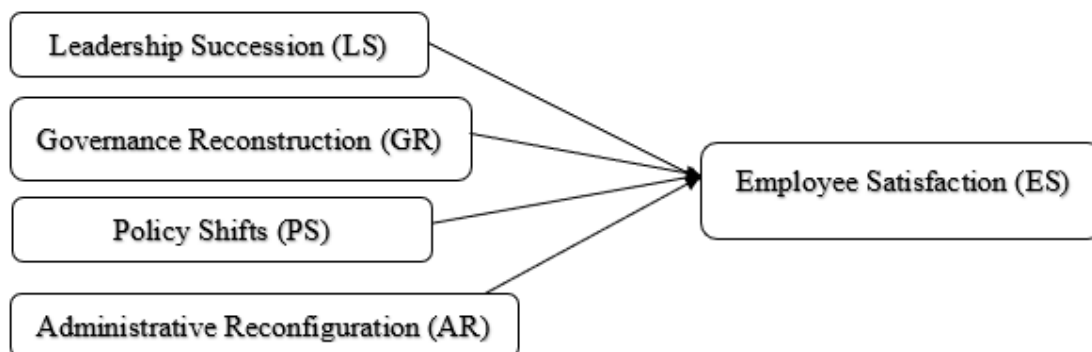
However, these assumptions have been criticized for reductionism on job satisfaction issues since they do not consider individual differences, career aspirations, and changing workplace settings (Popoola & Fagbola, 2023). Okolocha (2021) further challenges the notion of satisfaction is static, claiming it is a context-dependent, dynamic construct that is subject to variation due to organizational development, change in leadership, and economic developments. This viewpoint emphasizes that worker satisfaction is constantly negotiated between organisational policy and personal expectation, and as a result, very vulnerable to change in structures and procedures. Another notable approach relates worker satisfaction to the psychological contract involving the employer-employee relationship wherein motivation and dedication depend on perception of fairness, reciprocation, and satisfaction of expectations.

Another significant perspective ties employee satisfaction to the psychological contract between employees and their employers, wherein motivation and commitment are influenced by perceptions of fairness, reciprocity, and fulfilled expectations. Valentine et al. (2024) argue that satisfaction is primarily a function of whether employees believe their psychological contract—comprising elements like job security, career advancement, and respect in the workplace—has been fulfilled or compromised. This opinion is reinforced by Nwachukwu et al. (2022), who argue that the match of the employee's abilities and values with the demands of the organization (which they describe as the person-role fit) has a positive influence on job satisfaction. The people whose skills fit well with their employment are more engaged and satisfied, while the opposite — a misfit — is ending disengagement and unhappiness. Employees who fit with their jobs in terms of their skills are more engaged and satisfied, and those whose skills are not a fit are more likely to be disengaged and dissatisfied.

Okolocha et al. 2021) and Majekodunmi, Olajide-Arise (2024) contend that the impact of the workplace structure outweighs that of the organizational culture on

employee satisfaction, particularly in organizational systems with rigid hierarchies where autonomy and creativity are stifled. Conversely, Agubosim et al. (2023) also state that organizational culture, not structure, predicts satisfaction more than any other factor in the workplace, and leadership behavior, managerial communication, and willingness to receive employee input seem to have the most impact on the overall work environment. These competing views underscore how workplace design and management practices, when integrated with institutional policies, can shape whether employees feel empowered and engaged or constricted and demoralized.

Nonetheless, Rahi et al. (2022) noted that mass-production technological change can also facilitate job insecurity, opposition to new employment arrangements, and increased stress levels with mixed results in staff satisfaction. Vlachopoulos (2021) highlights job design as critical, arguing that staff with more autonomy, task variety, and career opportunity experience greater satisfaction compared to those working in repetitive or narrowly bounded jobs. These results show that satisfaction is not merely a function of pay or employment security but is deeply ingrained in employees' experience, decisional autonomy, and institutional support systems. Thus, within the context of this study, leadership changes such as leadership succession, governance reconfiguration, policy shift, and administrative reconfiguration can influence employees' satisfaction in North-Central Nigerian private universities.



Source: Researcher's concept, 2025

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

LMX Theory, built by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), is the term that denotes the kind of leader-employee relationships with a focus on the impact of leadership change on organisational behaviour. The theory holds that leadership directly impacts organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and employee engagement since new leaders must form bonds with employees in the interest of institutional stability (Fein & Tziner, 2021). At private universities, leadership succession gets in the way of current leader-member relationships, and employees are forced to recreate their trust and adjust to new managerial expectations. As leaders develop high-quality exchanges with staff, ones grounded on respect, trust, and professional help, workers have greater job satisfaction and allegiance (Yuan et al., 2023).

Leader-Member Exchange Theory is utilised as the theoretical framework to examine the impact of change in leadership on employees' satisfaction with private universities of North-Central Nigeria. The theory offers a theoretical model for examining how change in leadership, by extension, change in leadership succession, governance remodelling, policy redesign, and administration remodelling, impacts the quality of leader-employee relationships and thereby workplace morale, commitment, and job satisfaction. Leadership succession, for example, breaks up established leader-member relationships, forcing employees to adjust to different leadership styles, expectations, and organizational priorities. How governance reconfiguration occurs matters; decision-making structures and hierarchies that open up leadership and the decision-making power that comes with it leads to increased employee trust in leadership, while structures that close off leadership decision-making power leads to decreased employee trust. Equally, policy changes and administrative restructuring will impact career development prospects and job security, as well as the perceived justice of organizational procedures, all critical motivators for worker satisfaction.

Using LMX Theory enables this research to compare the impact on employees' reactions to leadership change of high-quality leader-member relationships (marked by respect, trust, and communication) and low-quality relationships (marked by uncertainty, exclusion, or favoritism). If leadership transition results in better interpersonal relationships, clear role definitions, and participative management, employees will be likely to feel more job satisfaction. But if new leadership generates distance, disrespect for employee concerns, or capricious and secretive administrative and policy decisions, job dissatisfaction and resistance to change will be the consequences. This research will evaluate empirically these forces in North-Central Nigeria private universities, whether leadership change is a force behind effective workplace engagement or a cause of confusion and dissatisfaction for administrative and academic staff.

Empirical Review

Ngwama and Ogaga-Oghene (2022) looked at the impact of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employees' commitment in a Nigerian private Christian mission university. The study used a survey research design. The target population was 774 full-time employees of the university. The Taro Yamane formula was used to determine 89 respondents as a sample, consisting of faculty and non-teaching staff. Instruments for data collection included the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the correlation coefficient and simple regression analysis. The study found that transformational and transactional leadership styles had significant effects on employees' commitment. It was implied in the findings that transformational and transactional leadership behaviours in the organization promote the relationship between attachment and the social and economic exchange relationship of the company, which creates emotional attachment and urges employees to be dedicated to organizational goals. The study suggested that leaders of organizations should deliberately construct workplaces that foster employee trust and responsible, productive behaviours.

Oyewobi (2024) examine the relationship between leadership styles, job satisfaction, grade of organizational commitment with respect to private-practice quantity surveyors in the Nigerian construction industry. This study utilized a quantitative research approach and was undertaken through questionnaires survey to 127 quantity surveying consultancy firms in Abuja. The data were analysed by partial least square structural equation modelling. It was found that the relationship between leadership styles and organizational commitments is indirectly and positively related and job satisfaction acts as a partial mediator. Employee commitment towards a task can be greatly influenced through the level of job satisfaction in that person, as also discovered through importance-performance map analysis, which is an important factor for management to prioritize remedial actions. Unit managers/principal agents must explore the influence of an overall understanding of leadership types in increasing job satisfaction and friendly interaction in the work setup in improving the commitment of employees operating in quantity surveying consultancy firms.

Oladimeji et al. (2020) examined the influence of change management on employee satisfaction in Nigeria's banking sector, namely its influence on change implementation and change communication. Through the survey research approach and regression analysis through SPSS version 23, the authors established that both aspects significantly influenced employee satisfaction. The joint influence of the said change components explained 47.6% variance in employee satisfaction, with a clear assertion of the significance of properly managed change processes for organizational stability. However, Kumolu-Johnson et al. (2021) compared the influence of technological and structural change on the performance of employees in selected banks in Lagos. Descriptive survey research design was employed with 161 employees, and results indicated that there were significant effects exerted by

technological ($B = 0.654$, $p < 0.05$) and structural change ($B = 0.673$, $p < 0.05$) on performance. The research concluded that effective change management behavior, such as communication and participatory leadership, is important for employee performance and flexibility.

Further, Archibong and Ibrahim (2021) evaluated change management and worker performance at Nile University of Nigeria, using the Burke-Litwin Model. The regression test indicated that organizational structure alterations enhanced service delivery, while changes in leadership significantly influenced employee engagement. Open communication and leadership engagement were proposed to be used in mitigating resistance to changes by the study. Also, Eyanuku (2022) examined change technology, restructuring, and change communication in Nigerian banks. Findings indicated that employee performance was affected by change communication and technology change ($p < 0.05$) and not organizational restructuring ($p > 0.05$). The implication here is that while change in technology and effective communication inspire performance, mere structural adjustments without more might be insufficient to generate productivity.

Also, Mgbemena et al. (2022) carried out research on structural, policy, and leadership change among Awka, Nigeria hotels. In a multiple regression analysis, results showed that leadership, structure, and policy changes had positive impacts on employee performance. The research suggested strengthening leadership transitions, structural realignments, and policy reforms to make employees more motivated and productive. Shuaibu and Daniel (2023) researched change management among private universities within the Federal Capital Territory and Nasarawa State, Nigeria. It was found from the research that organizational structural change, leadership change, changes in operations, and changes in the environment highly contributed to employee satisfaction. Variation in the change outcome among academic staff and non-academic staff with an emphasis on enforcement of individualized change management plans was evidenced. Investment in leadership capacity, using technology, and good administrative procedures was recommended for boosting employee satisfaction and efficiency of institutions.

The preceding empirical reviews affirm the existence of empirical studies on leadership change in Nigeria. However, there are no much published works on it vis-à-vis employees' satisfaction in Nigerian private universities. Consequently, this leaves an empirical gap and a void in knowledge that this study is poised at addressing.

METHODOLOGY

The current research utilised a descriptive survey study design to investigate the impacts of leadership change on employee satisfaction within selected private

universities in North-Central Nigeria. The target population consisted of 3,315 workers across seven chosen private universities, including 1,411 academic staff and 1,904 non-academic staff. Cochran's (1997) equation was applied to estimate a sample size of 600 respondents, and Browler's proportional allocation formula was used to ensure balanced representation. The distribution techniques for research tools included simple random and convenience sampling, while a structured Likert scale questionnaire was utilised for large-scale data collection at an economical cost. A pilot study conducted at a university in Nasarawa State validated construct validity through Pearson correlation analysis and showed strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.951. The effects of leadership succession, governance reconfiguration, policy shift, and administrative reconfiguration on employee satisfaction were assessed using multiple regression analysis, with pre-estimation tests, including correlation analysis, establishing relationships between variables. Hypothesis testing at a 0.05 level of significance provided statistical accuracy in determining whether leadership change contributes to employee satisfaction in private universities.

Model Specification

A multiple regression model was employed to statistically estimate how leadership change affect employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria. In the model, there is interaction of employee satisfaction (dependent variable) and the leadership change variables: leadership succession, governance reconfiguration, policy shift, and administrative reconfiguration (independent variables). The model is specified below:

$$ES = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LS + \beta_2 GR + \beta_3 PS + \beta_4 AR + \varepsilon \text{ -----(I)}$$

Where:

- ES = Employee Satisfaction (Dependent Variable)
- β_0 = Intercept (Constant Term)
- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ = Regression Coefficients
- LS = Leadership Succession (independent variable)
- GR = Governance Reconfiguration (independent variable)
- PS = Policy Shift (independent variable)
- AR = Administrative Reconfiguration (independent variable)
- ε = Error Term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the descriptive and inferential statistics of the responses obtained from the 551 out-of-the 600 administered questionnaires.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
LS	551	0.79	1.17	0.9531	0.06550
GR	551	0.85	1.16	1.0955	0.06913
PS	551	0.82	1.24	1.0749	0.07574
AR	551	0.81	1.21	0.9819	0.07296
ES	551	0.77	1.22	0.9773	0.06874

Source: Author's Computation, 2025

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 illustrate the results of the descriptive statistics revealing the distribution of leadership change variables and their impact on employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria. Leadership succession (LS), with an average of 0.9531 and a standard deviation of 0.06550, indicates a consistent perception of leadership transition among survey participants. Governance Reconfiguration (GR) recorded the highest mean value of 1.0955 and a standard deviation of 0.06913, suggesting that governance change was viewed as a more significant factor affecting employees. Policy shift (PS) had a mean value of 1.0749 and the highest standard deviation of 0.07574, indicating that changes in institutional policies varied more among respondents. With respect to adjusting their operations, the mean for AR (administrative reconfiguration) was 0.9819 (SD= 0.07296), showing moderate variability in responses. Employee satisfaction (ES) resulted in a mean of 0.9773 and a standard deviation of 0.06874. The results imply that while leadership changes influence employee satisfaction, there are variations in how different aspects of leadership transformation are perceived across universities.

Table 2. Correlation

	ES	LS	GR	PS	AR
ES	1.000				
LS	0.675	1.000			
GR	0.790	0.631	1.000		
PS	0.746	0.612	0.604	1.000	
AR	0.720	0.773	0.794	0.637	1.000

N = 551

Source: Author's Computation, 2025

Correlations between ES and four leadership change variables – LS, GR, PS, and AR – are statistically significant. Governance reconfiguration (GR) positively influences the scope of employee satisfaction (ES) with a strong $r = 0.790$ relationship, indicating that with the right structure of governance changes, employees feel good about their stability and engagement. The PS (Policy shift) also has a strong positive

correlation with ES ($r = 0.746$), which suggests that effective policy shifts and clear communications leading to those shifts are part of employees' satisfaction. Leadership succession (LS) is moderately correlated to ES ($r = 0.675$), indicating that leadership positions can impact employee morale, but it also relies on a smooth transition from past to future to avoid excessive uncertainty. Similarly, AR has a statistical relationship with ES of 0.720, with adjustments in administrative flow potentially inflating or deflating satisfaction and being either a benefit or cost depending on implementation. As such, these results suggest that effective leadership transition, governance change, and policy modification would enhance employees' contentment at private schools in general.

Regression Analysis

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.733	0.701	0.684	1.025

Predictors: (Constant), LS, GR, PS, AR

Dependent Variable: ES

There is a good relationship of leadership change variables with employee satisfaction in private universities as per regression equation is given in the model summary. The R-value of 0.733 indicates a stringent correlation between independent variables i.e., LS, GR, PS, and AR with ES. Higher the R-Square value means more variations are explained by that phenomenon, so, R-Square value of 0.701 translates to 70.1% of employee satisfaction's variations are explained by leadership change, which is quite huge. As the Adj R-Save was recorded at 0.684 (slightly lower than the R-Square), the efficiency of multiple predictors suggests that adding new ones would not improve the explainability of the model Results. This is shown in the standard error of estimate (1.025) which measures how far on average the observations are from the predictions. In conclusion, the results imply that in the private university sector, leadership changes affect employee satisfaction, and stresses the importance of effective change management and the need for governance reforms.

Table 4. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	777.093	4	194.273	18.838	.000
Residual	5631.046	546	10.313		
Total	6408.139	550			

Dependent Variable: ES

Predictors: (Constant), LS, GR, PS, AR

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant in explaining the relationship between leadership change variables and private university employee satisfaction. The F-statistic is 18.838, and the p-value is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a good fit for the overall model. The independent variables (LS, GR, PS, AR) demonstrate joint significance on employee satisfaction (ES), implying that LS, GR, PS, and AR significantly impact employee satisfaction. The proportion of variance attributable to leadership change factors, as indicated by the ratio of the regression sum of squares (777.093) to the total sum of squares (6408.139), confirms a substantial effect of these variables on employee satisfaction. This suggests that while leadership change is a strong predictor of employee satisfaction, other unaccounted factors may also be important. Overall, the results confirm that changes in leadership structures within private universities play a crucial role in shaping employee morale and satisfaction levels.

Table 5. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.213	0.212			0.000
LS	0.235	0.048	0.342	4.896	0.022
GR	0.322	0.033	0.428	9.756	0.015
PS	0.356	0.032	0.259	11.125	0.010
AR	0.341	0.073	0.278	4.671	0.001

Dependent Variable: ES

Results of the coefficient further indicate that all four predictors of leadership change (LS, GR, PS, and AR) significantly affect ES in private universities in North-Central Nigeria. In addition, PS attracts the largest beta coefficient ($B = 0.356$) with a t-value of 11.125 ($p = 0.010$), suggesting that institutional policy change is an important predictor of employees' job satisfaction. With $B = 0.322$ and $t = 9.756$ ($p = 0.015$), GR follows, emphasizing that the reconfiguration of institutional governance frameworks and decision-making is essential for maintaining employee satisfaction. Moreover, AR contributes significantly ($B = 0.341$, $t = 4.671$, $p = 0.001$), supporting the notion that transformations in operational structures affect employees' work states. There is a minimal but still statistically significant effect of leadership succession (LS), represented by the coefficients $B = 0.235$ and $t = 4.896$ ($p = 0.022$), which implies that this factor of leadership transition, though having a clear impact on job satisfaction, may not affect it as immediately as governance, policy, or bureaucratic changes do. This shows that if these events are not managed correctly, they will cause disturbances that can endanger all the values of an organisation, not to mention willing employees.

Testing Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses (H_0) are formulated to examine the effect of leadership change on employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria:

H₀₁: Leadership succession has no significant effect on employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria.

The outcomes of the regression analysis indicated that leadership succession had a B coefficient of 0.235, a t -value of 4.896, and a p -value of 0.022. The p -value is ($p < 0.05$); hence, we reject the null hypothesis. This means that leadership succession has a positive effect on employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria. This indicates that how leadership succession is handled can have a direct impact on morale, expectations, and overall job satisfaction of employees.

H₀₂: Governance reconfiguration has no significant effect on employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria.

For governance reconfiguration, it has $B = 0.322$, t -value = 9.756, $p = 0.015$. As the p -value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis can be rejected ($p < 0.05$). The reconfiguration of the governance has a noticeable impact on employee satisfaction. Governance adjustments, whether hierarchical in making decisions or implementing changes in administrative procedures, can also affect the optimism level of people in the organization – or organizations in general – positively or negatively depending on how they are brought to life and communicated to employees.

H₀₃: Policy shift has no significant effect on employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria.

The B coefficient for policy shift is 0.356, the t -value for beta is 11.125, and $p = 0.010$. Since the p -value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that changes in policy can have a major effect on employee satisfaction. There can be direct effects on employees' feelings of security, expectations, and motivation, as well as on their satisfaction if there is a change in institutional policies (e.g., tenure regulations, performance appraisals, and employment terms).

H₀₄: Administrative reconfiguration has no significant effect on employee satisfaction in private universities in North-Central Nigeria.

The results show administrative reconfiguration, with a B coefficient of 0.341, a t -value of 4.671, and a p -value of 0.001. As the p -value is much lower than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This confirms that administrative restructuring greatly impacts employee satisfaction. This will affect work efficiency, the different roles of employees, and the overall stability of the workplace, which directly influences employees and their overall satisfaction.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Likewise, the results on reshaped governance have a strong association with employee satisfaction, suggesting that the stepwise reforms of the governance structures can bring to the table enhanced job commitment, involvement, and performance among employees, along with participative leadership. In contrast, justifying governance changes to employees in a transparent manner and allowing them to participate in the process is essential to reduce the loss of trust and stability in the university. But government reconfigurations that add more bureaucratic complexity, favoritism and hierarchical inefficiencies could cause frustration, role ambiguity and lower job satisfaction for academic and non-academic staff.

According to the study, changes in policy affect employee happiness as well. Well-designed, well-communicated, well-implemented policies have a positive impact on employee engagement and institutional loyalty. Universities that seek the input of employees in the creation of policy and provide adequate resources during transitions to new regimes are best positioned to retain a satisfied work force. On the contrary, precipitous or unevenly applied policies (e.g. last-minute alterations of employment contracts, tenure qualifications, performance reviews) can create confusion, demoralization, and lower levels of commitment to the organization. Changes in policy that do not address employee concerns can breed resistance, demotivation and present a threat to the functioning of the institution as a whole.

Overall, the data indicates that reframing of administrative structures makes work more efficient, papers move more effectively and job description is better clarified. Workers generally respond well to bureaucratic changes that improve efficiency and provide clear guidance about workplace standards. But, too many administrative alterations, without sufficient training, technological backing, or employee Engagement, could create confusion, increased workload, and lowered job satisfaction. It can also invoke pushback from employees who resist changes in their reporting hierarchy, as well as the flaws in the evaluation and operational standards of their departments.

These results support the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory stating that the quality of relationships between a leader and employees are the most important consideration in determining job satisfaction. This study emphasizes that all of these factors related to higher education—leadership succession, governance reconfiguration, policy shifts, and administrative reconfiguration—affect trust, communication, and role clarity directly within private institutions of higher education. Furthermore, when transitions ensure inclusive decision-making and strategic continuity, they create high-quality leader-member exchanges which bolster employees' satisfaction. Similarly, governance structures focusing on collaborative leadership and employee engagement, foster a climate of fairness and trust, increasing exchange dynamics between leaders and staff. Not only do clearly articulated policy reforms equitably applied foster employee morale, but administrative reconfigurations that offer role clarity and support systems also quell dissatisfaction. Transparent, participative, and effectively managed leadership

change increase the quality of leader-employee relationships in universities, mitigate any resistance to change and lead ultimately to reinforce institutional stability. The above findings have implications for engaging workforce sustainability in private universities in North-Central Nigeria, in that vertical trust, vertical communication and perceived vertical justice-related concerns will intercede to a significant impact in private organizations whose operative empowerment strategies are on the ways of leadership strategies that limit consideration for the dichotomy across officers and workforce.

Given the conclusions, this study recommends that:

- i. Private universities should put structured succession plans in place that give more focus towards stability in leader-member relationship which helps in making people, vision, trust and employee engagement sustainable.
- ii. The governing structures should create supportive leader-member exchanges: with transparency, participatory decision-making and equity that encourages redundancy that maintains commitment and morale among the employees.
- iii. To enhance powerful leader-member relations, private university institutions should ensure that policy changes are co-created with employees, communicated transparently and enforced equitably to minimise uncertainty and dissatisfaction.
- iv. IV. Reorganising will support staff buy-in through clear delineation of roles, training, and inviting participation; these steps foster productive interactions between leaders and employees and support commitments to the organisation and to job satisfaction.

REFERENCES

1. Abubakar A, Ahmed S. The effect of a transformational leadership style on the performance of universities in Nigeria. *Pak J Educ Res Eval*. 2021;2(1):221-34.
2. Alade AO. The effects of leadership styles on organizational behavior and performance in some selected organizations in Nigeria. *J Public Aff*. 2022;22(3):e2544.
3. Alam A. Institutional theory: Relevance to supply chains. *Am J Manag*. 2022;22(2):203-14.
4. Alhaderi SM. Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model for employees' intentional, cognitive, and emotional readiness for change and developing regional economy in Saudi banking sector's role of homologous communication, learning demand, and job involvement. *J Legal Ethical Regul Issues*. 2021;24:1-18.

5. Bah MOP, Sun Z, Hange U, Edjoukou AJR. Effectiveness of organizational change through employee involvement: Evidence from telecommunications and refinery companies. *Sustainability*. 2024;16(6):2524.
6. DiMaggio PJ, Powell W. The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *Am Sociol Rev*. 1983;48(2):147-60.
7. Fein EC, Tziner A. The future of the leader-member exchange theory. *Front Psychol*. 2021;12:736710.
8. Graen GB, Uhl-Bien M. Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *Leadersh Q*. 1995;6(2):219-47.
9. Hussain MK, Khayat RAM. The impact of transformational leadership on job satisfaction and organizational commitment among hospital staff: A systematic review. *J Health Manag*. 2021;23(4):614-30.
10. Igudia PO. Evaluating organizational change and employee productivity in Nigeria: A case study of Union Bank, Plc. *Eur Sci J*. 2021;17(19):208-29.
11. Iyaji FI, Bakare AA. Impact of leadership styles on employee performance sustainability in selected small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in North-Central Nigeria. *Educ Adm Theory Pract*. 2023;29(4):3646-58. doi:10.53555/kuey.v29i4.8193
12. Kang SP, Chen Y, Svihla V, Gallup A, Ferris K, Datye AK. Guiding change in higher education: An emergent, iterative application of Kotter's change model. *Stud High Educ*. 2022;47(2):270-89.
13. Kauppi K. Institutional theory. In: *Handbook of Theories for Purchasing, Supply Chain and Management Research*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing; 2022. p. 320-34.
14. Khalil M. Responsiveness to quality assurance implementation: An institutional theory perspective. *Qual Assur Educ*. 2021;29(1):41-52.
15. Kotter JP. *Leading change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press; 1996.
16. Laig RBD, Abocejo FT. Change management process in a mining company: Kotter's 8-step change model. *J Manag Econ Ind Organ*. 2021;5(3):31-50.
17. Maheshwari G. Influence of teacher-perceived transformational and transactional school leadership on teachers' job satisfaction and performance: A case of Vietnam. *Leadersh Policy Sch*. 2022;21(4):876-90.
18. Mukwenda H. Kotter's eight-step change process model and students' attitudes towards fees payment policies in public universities in Uganda. *J Sci Sustain Dev*. 2022;9(1):1-13.
19. Muhdar HM, Maguni W, Muhtar M, Bakri B, Rahma ST, Junaedi IWR. The impact of leadership and employee satisfaction on the performance of vocational college lecturers in the digital era. *Front Psychol*. 2022;13:895346.

20. Ngwama JC, Ogaga-Oghene JO. Leadership change and employee commitment. An empirical study of transformational and transnational leadership style in a university. *Int J Econ Behav.* 2022;12(1):101-21.
21. Omilion-Hodges LM, Ptacek JK. What is the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory? In: Omilion-Hodges LM, Ptacek JK, editors. *Leader-Member Exchange and Organizational Communication: Facilitating a Healthy Work Environment.* Cham: Springer; 2021. p. 3-25.
22. Onyeneke GB, Abe T. The effect of change leadership on employee attitudinal support for planned organizational change. *J Organ Change Manag.* 2021;34(2):403-15.
23. Olayisade A, Awolusi OD. The effect of leadership styles on employee productivity in the Nigerian oil and gas industry. *Inf Manag Bus Rev.* 2021;13(1):47-64.
24. Oyewobi LO. Leadership styles and employee commitment: The mediating role of job satisfaction. *J Facil Manag.* 2024;22(5):737-57.
25. Potosky D, Azan W. Leadership behaviors and human agency in the valley of despair: A meta-framework for organizational change implementation. *Hum Resour Manag Rev.* 2023;33(1):100927.
26. Quek SJ, Thomson L, Houghton R, Bramley L, Davis S, Cooper J. Distributed leadership as a predictor of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intention in UK nursing staff. *J Nurs Manag.* 2021;29(6):1544-53.
27. Rabi MM, Bakare AA, Lamino AH, Akinbode OJ, Oyelude OO. Employee job satisfaction and employee productivity in Nigeria's federal civil service: An empirical examination of communication as metric for job satisfaction. *Int J Prof Bus Rev.* 2024;9(3):e04328. doi:10.26668/businessreview/2024.v9i3.4328
28. Rahi S, Alghizzawi M, Ahmad S, Munawar Khan M, Ngah AH. Does employee readiness to change impact organization change implementation? Empirical evidence from an emerging economy. *Int J Ethics Syst.* 2022;38(2):235-53.
29. Robertson J, Dowling M, Washington M, Leopkey B, Ellis DL, Smith L. Institutional theory in sport: A scoping review. *J Sport Manag.* 2021;36(5):459-72.
30. Shah GM, Memon NA, Tunio G, Joyo AS. Revamping higher education: Unleashing the power of John Kotter's eight-step change model for enhanced performance. *Russ Law J.* 2023;11(5):613-23.
31. Vlachopoulos D. Organizational change management in higher education through the lens of executive coaches. *Educ Sci.* 2021;11(6):269-71.
32. Willie MM. Leader-member exchange and organizational performance: A review of communication, biases, and personality challenges. *Golden Ratio Hum Resour Manag.* 2025;5(1):120-32.
33. Yuan Z, Sun UY, Effinger AL, Zhang J. Being on the same page matters: A meta-analytic investigation of leader-member exchange (LMX) agreement. *J Appl Psychol.* 2023;108(9):1540-51.

34. Zhou X, Rasool SF, Yang J, Asghar MZ. Exploring the relationship between despotic leadership and job satisfaction: The role of self-efficacy and leader-member exchange. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021;18(10):5307.