

INNOVATION AND SERVICE AS INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP VALUES AND STAFF WORK ETHICS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the relationship between institutional leadership values and staff work ethics using a descriptive and correlational research design. Institutional leadership values serve as the independent variable, while staff work ethics represent the dependent variable. The study focuses on teaching and non-teaching staff from three public universities in Rivers State: University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State University (RSU), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), Rumuolumeni. From a total population of 8,111 staff members, a sample of 446 was selected through simple random sampling, representing 5.5% of the total population. Data collection was conducted using two structured questionnaires: the Institutional Leadership Values Questionnaire (ILVQ) and the Staff Work Ethics Questionnaire (SWEQ). The instruments were divided into three sections: demographic information (Section A), institutional leadership values (Section B), and staff work ethics (Section C). A four-point modified Likert scale was used to quantify responses. The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by three experts who are specialist in Educational Management, while the reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach Alpha and the analysis yielded reliability indices of .845 and .901. A total of 412 completed responses were retrieved, reflecting a 92.4% response rate. Data analysis involved mean and standard deviation calculations for research questions, while hypotheses were tested using PPMC with a criterion mean of 2.50. The study provided valuable insights into how institutional leadership values influence staff work ethics, contributing to ongoing discussions in educational management and organizational behavior. The study found that innovation and service as institutional leadership value are significantly related to staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The study concluded that promoting a culture that encourages innovation, creativity, continuous improvement, and a strong sense of service makes university leadership to significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of academic and administrative operations. Recommendations were proffered.

Keywords: Innovation, Service, Institutional Leadership, Values, Staff Work Ethics, Public Universities, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of leadership in shaping the values and work ethics within academic institutions cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Innovation and service have increasingly emerged as essential leadership values that directly

influence the organizational culture and staff performance within these institutions. Public universities, which are expected to produce the next generation of intellectuals, professionals, and leaders, must adapt to the evolving educational landscape by embracing innovative strategies and fostering a service-oriented culture. These two core leadership values, when effectively implemented, create an environment conducive to academic excellence, social responsibility, and staff satisfaction.

Innovation in higher education refers to the development and implementation of new ideas, teaching methods, research approaches, and technologies that improve the quality and efficiency of education (Bresciani & Pugliese, 2018). As the world becomes increasingly globalized, universities are tasked with providing cutting-edge educational experiences that prepare students for the challenges of a dynamic job market (D'Este & Perkmann, 2011). In Rivers State, where public universities are central to the state's development goals, innovation is vital for maintaining institutional relevance and enhancing student learning outcomes.

Service, on the other hand, encompasses a commitment to the welfare of students, staff, and the wider community. It embodies values such as empathy, integrity, accountability, and responsiveness, all of which are integral to effective leadership in public institutions (Bryman, 2011). In the context of public universities, service-oriented leadership influences how leaders engage with their staff, students, and external stakeholders. A service-driven leadership approach cultivates a culture of support and collaboration, ensuring that university operations remain transparent, responsive, and aligned with the needs of all stakeholders (Van der Voet, 2016).

The relationship between leadership values and staff work ethics is particularly crucial in public universities. The work ethics of academic and administrative staff significantly impact institutional productivity, student satisfaction, and overall organizational success. Staff members who operate with high ethical standards, a sense of responsibility, and a commitment to continuous improvement contribute positively to the institutional goals of quality education, research excellence, and community service (Graham, 2017). Leadership that emphasizes innovation and service sets the tone for fostering a work environment where staff members are motivated, engaged, and dedicated to the institution's mission.

In Rivers State, the public universities are expected to play critical roles in shaping the region's socio-economic and cultural landscape. These institutions must address a variety of challenges, including inadequate funding, outdated infrastructures, and the increasing demand for educational services. Leadership that prioritizes innovation and service as core values can drive systemic change, ensuring that these universities adapt to the shifting demands of higher education and the labor market.

The importance of innovation and service as institutional leadership values cannot be understood in isolation from the work ethics of staff. Staff members in higher education institutions are not only responsible for imparting knowledge but also for fostering a culture of research, engagement, and social responsibility. When institutional leaders effectively communicate and model innovation and service, they establish expectations that inspire staff to work ethically and collaboratively toward the institution's goals (Northouse, 2018). This relationship between leadership values and staff work ethics can lead to enhanced job satisfaction, increased organizational commitment, and better overall performance (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Therefore, this study examined the role of innovation and service as leadership values in influencing staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State, and by analyzing the extent to which these leadership values shape staff behavior, this research aims to offer insights into how

institutional leadership can be harnessed to improve work ethics, academic performance, and overall institutional effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Public universities in Rivers State face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to effectively fulfill their academic and administrative missions. Despite the increasing demand for quality education, these institutions often struggle with outdated infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a lack of innovative strategies to address contemporary educational needs. Leadership plays a crucial role in navigating these challenges, yet the impact of leadership values specifically innovation and service on staff work ethics remains underexplored in this context. Institutional leaders who fail to prioritize innovation may miss opportunities to enhance teaching methods, research initiatives, and resource management, while a lack of service-oriented leadership can lead to disengagement, low morale, and ineffective staff performance. Consequently, there is a gap in understanding how innovation and service as core leadership values influence staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. This study seeks to investigate this relationship and provide insights into how leadership can improve staff performance and institutional effectiveness.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study examined the relationship between institutional leadership values and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

- Assess the extent to which innovation as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.
- Examine the extent to which service as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide this study:

- To what extent does innovation as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?
- To what extent does service as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and statistically tested at .05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

George C. Homan's the Social Exchange Theory of 1958

The social exchange theory was developed by George C. Homans in 1958. Homans, a sociologist, proposed that human relationships are based on a type of exchange, where each party gives and receives something of value. This theory applies to all types of relationships, from friendships to business partnerships (van Dijk & Volker, 2013). It is based on the idea that people are motivated by rewards and costs and that they will seek to maximize their rewards while minimizing their costs. One core attribute of the social exchange theory is reciprocity. According to this principle, people are more likely to engage in a relationship if they believe they will receive something in return. This can be demonstrated by the phenomenon of "tit for tat." This means that people may engage in a relationship only because they expect to receive something in return (Gintis, 2009). This can lead to relationships that are based on selfishness and manipulation, rather than genuine affection or care. Another criticism is that the theory does not take into account the role of emotions in relationships. It is argued that emotions play a significant role in how people engage in and maintain relationships, and the social exchange theory does not adequately address this.

Another core attribute of the theory is equity. Equity refers to the idea that people want to receive an equal number of benefits and costs from a relationship. In other words, if one person is giving more than they are receiving, they may feel that the relationship is unfair and may look for another partner who can provide a more equitable exchange (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A third core attribute of the theory is trust. Trust is essential for any relationship, and the social exchange theory suggests that people will be more likely to engage in a relationship if they feel that they can trust the other person.

Some critics have argued that the social exchange theory is too simplistic, and does not adequately account for the complex nature of human relationships. These critics argue that the theory does not consider the role of emotions, power dynamics, the environment, the passage of time, or the impact of technology (Siegel, 2001). These factors can have a significant impact on relationships, and the social exchange theory does not fully address them. However, it is important to note that the theory has been influential in the field of social psychology, and has led to further research and theory development. Another criticism is that the social exchange theory does not account for how power and status can affect relationships. In some cases, one person may have more power or status than the other, which can impact the nature of the relationship (Turner et al., 2010). For example, a boss and employee may have very different expectations and goals in their relationship, based on the power dynamic.

In addition, some critics argue that the social exchange theory does not account for love and altruism, which are important aspects of many relationships. Another criticism of the social exchange theory is that it does not account for the role of culture in relationships. Different cultures have different norms and expectations for relationships, which can impact how people interact with each other. In some cultures, for example, relationships may be based more on obligation and duty, while in others they may be based more on personal choice and independence. The social exchange theory does not address these differences, which can make it difficult to apply in a global context. Finally, the theory has been criticized for its limited focus on individual relationships, rather than considering the role of relationships within larger social structures.

One specific example of this criticism is the role of gender in relationships. The social exchange theory does not consider how gender norms and expectations can influence how people interact with each other. For example, research has shown that men and women often have different expectations for romantic relationships, based on societal norms and gender roles. These differences are not reflected in the social exchange theory, which focuses on individual interactions rather than broader social patterns. This can make it difficult to apply the theory to real-world situations, where gender often plays a significant role. This is a common criticism of the social exchange theory, and there have been attempts to modify the theory to account for these factors. One such attempt is the social capital theory, which considers the role of networks of relationships in society. The social capital theory suggests that relationships have value beyond the individual level, and can have an impact on the wider community. This theory is considered a more complete model of social interactions since it accounts for both individual relationships and the social context in which they occur (Putnam, 2000).

The social exchange theory is highly relevant to the study of institutional leadership values and staff work ethics in public universities. The theory can help to explain how relationships within the university can impact the effectiveness of the institution as a whole. The theory can also help to understand how the relationships between staff and leadership can impact the overall work environment within the university. Furthermore, the theory can be used to understand how the relationships between the university and the wider community can impact the effectiveness of the institution. The social exchange theory can help to understand the relationships between staff and leadership within a public university. The theory added that these relationships are based on a give-and-take exchange of resources, which can include things like time, effort, and support. This exchange can create a sense of obligation, which can impact the way staff members perceive and interact with their leaders. This implies that the social exchange theory is relevant to the study of leadership values because it can help to explain how the quality of relationships within a university can affect the ability of the institution to achieve its goals. For example, if staff members feel that they are not receiving the necessary resources from their leaders, they may be less likely to put forth their best efforts. This can have a negative impact on the overall performance of the university. On the other hand, if staff members feel that they are being treated fairly and are getting the resources they need, they may be more likely to be engaged and productive.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Institutional Leadership Values

Institutional leadership refers to the overall management and direction provided by individuals in positions of authority within an organization or institution (Buller et al., 2014). It deals with establishing and protecting institutional values and character as well as opening up some essential aspects of organizational leadership capability that could be defined as collective ability of leadership to detect and cope with changes in the external environment by maintaining the primary goals of the organization (Walson & Enwereuzo, 2022). In the context of public universities in Rivers State, institutional leadership encompasses the principles, values, and practices adopted by university officials to guide decision-making, promote collaboration, and inspire the achievement of organizational goals. Adiele (2020) asserted that a major responsibility at institutional level is to direct and coordinate the action of the people within the

institution towards the attainment of specific institutional goals and objectives in line with the guidelines establishing such institutions. Effective institutional leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the culture, mission, and vision of public universities. It sets the tone for the entire institution, establishing a framework that guides the behaviour and actions of staff, faculty, students, and other stakeholders. Effective institutional leaders foster an environment built on trust, transparency, accountability, and excellence by providing a clear direction and shared purpose. This implies that effective institutional leaders are always aware of the importance of values and moral principles on their subordinates because they are conscious of quality, competence, and commitment to providing excellent services that embraces strong values, moral standards, as well as discipline and ethical codes (Ololube, 2024).

One important aspect of institutional leadership in public universities in Rivers State is the emphasis on integrity and ethical conduct. Leaders are expected to adhere to a set of values that promote honesty, fairness, and respect for others. They must act as role models and hold themselves to high ethical standards to inspire and motivate those around them. Institutional leaders are responsible for developing and implementing strategic plans that align with the university's mission and vision. They must possess a deep understanding of the higher education landscape and adapt to changing external factors to ensure the institution remains responsive and relevant. Leaders provide a sense of direction and purpose that inspires the university community to embrace innovation, drive student success, and contribute to broader societal needs when they establish clear vision.

In addition to strategic planning, institutional leaders are responsible for effective resource management. They must allocate financial, human, and physical resources in a manner that optimizes the university's ability to achieve its goals. This is why education is planned so that the limited educational resources of the society, financial, human and material resources can be rationally allocated among the various competing educational demands and programmes (Koko & Nwiyi, 2019). In the same vein, Nwankwoala (2021) posited that planning helps institutional leaders to rationalize the use of manpower, finances, time and many other facilities to attain the numerous competing educational needs usually by ranking these needs in order of priority before allocating resources to them so that educational actions tilt towards goal attainment. This entails making difficult decisions about budget allocations, capital investments, and hiring practices, all while ensuring fairness, equity, and sustainability. Another critical aspect of institutional leadership is fostering a culture of collaboration and shared governance (Herman & Riggs, 2013). Leaders must recognize the expertise and contributions of staff, faculty, and students and involve them in decision-making processes. Leaders do not only enhance the quality of decision-making but also empower stakeholders to take ownership of the institution's success through innovation and service.

Moreover, institutional leaders have a responsibility to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity within public universities. They must ensure that policies and practices are in place to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and abilities. Leaders can unlock the full potential of the university community and nurture a vibrant learning and working environment by actively addressing systemic barriers and fostering a sense of belonging (Abt-Perkins et al., 2015). Institutional leadership also involves effectively managing crises and navigating complex challenges. Leaders must be proactive in identifying risks, developing contingency plans, and communicating transparently with all stakeholders during times of uncertainty. They must lead by example, demonstrating resilience, empathy, and agility in the face of adversity.

Institutional leadership values in public universities in Rivers State encompasses the principles, values, and practices that guide decision-making, promote ethical conduct, and inspire excellence through innovation and service. Effective leadership sets the tone for the institution; promote the culture of innovation and service for inclusivity. This process involves strategic planning, resource management, collaboration, and the promotion of diversity and inclusion. Institutional leaders must exhibit innovative and service tendencies, to be able to monster resilience to navigate challenges and drive the institution towards its vision of academic excellence and societal impact.

Innovation in the context of the paper is a value that encourages the pursuit of new ideas, approaches, and solutions to meet evolving challenges and demands. Leaders who prioritize innovation create an environment that embraces change, encourages experimentation, and supports continuous improvement. Through the promotion of innovation, public universities can adapt to technological advancements, remain competitive in a global landscape, and facilitate cutting-edge research and teaching methodologies.

Service in the context of this paper is a key leadership value that emphasizes a commitment to the welfare and development of staff members and the broader community. Leaders who prioritize service ensure that the needs of both staff and students are met effectively. They promote an inclusive and supportive environment that values diversity, equity, and inclusion. Focusing on service will make public universities establish strong relationships with the community, promote social responsibility, and contribute to the development of society as a whole.

Staff Work Ethics

The work ethics of staff in public universities in Rivers State extends to their commitment to students' welfare and success. Staff members are expected to prioritize the needs of students and provide them with a supportive and conducive learning environment. This includes prompt feedback on assignments and examinations, accessibility to academic guidance, mentorship, and counselling services (Nyberg & Weinstein, 2016). Demonstrating compassion, empathy, and a genuine concern for students helps create a positive student experience and contributes towards their academic and personal development. It is worth noting that staff work ethics do not exist in isolation but are influenced by the broader socio-cultural and institutional contexts of Rivers State. These contexts include factors such as innovative government policies, socio-economic conditions, and the historical background of the state. Understanding these contextual factors provides a comprehensive understanding of staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State are shaped by institutional leadership values, such as innovation and services, professionalism, teamwork, academic freedom, intellectual integrity, and a commitment to student welfare. These values define the expectations and behaviours of staff members, which guarantees the effective functioning of public universities and the promotion of a positive work and learning environment for all stakeholders.

Innovation and Staff Work Ethics

Innovation and staff work ethics are essential components of organizational success and effectiveness. Innovation, defined as the introduction of new ideas, products, services, or processes that create value, is a key driver of growth and competitiveness. It allows organizations to differentiate themselves, improve efficiency, and respond to changing market demands. On the other hand, staff work ethics, characterized by qualities such as honesty, integrity, and professionalism, are essential for ensuring that work is completed efficiently and ethically. Organizational culture plays a crucial role in fostering innovation and staff work ethics. A culture that encourages creativity, risk-taking, and continuous improvement is more likely to promote innovation among employees (Amabile, 2018). This type of culture is characterized by open communication, collaboration, and a willingness to challenge the status quo (Duguid, 2020). Leaders play a key role in shaping this culture by setting the tone, providing support, and recognizing and rewarding innovative behavior (Gupta, 2013).

Resources and support are also important factors in fostering innovation. Organizations that invest in research and development, provide training opportunities, and create a supportive environment for experimentation are more likely to innovate. Additionally, organizations that encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among employees are better positioned to generate new ideas and solutions. However, innovation is not without its challenges. One of the biggest challenges organizations faces is overcoming resistance to change (Ololube, 2024). Employees may be reluctant to embrace new ideas or ways of working, especially if they perceive them as threatening or disruptive. To address this challenge, organizations must communicate the benefits of innovation effectively, involve employees in the innovation process, and provide support to help them adapt to change (Scott & Bruce, 2014).

In addition to the promotion of innovation, organizations must also ensure that their staff maintain strong work ethics. This can be achieved by promoting a culture that values and promotes ethical behavior. Organizations that have clear policies and procedures in place, such as codes of conduct and whistleblower protections, are more likely to promote and reinforce ethical behavior among employees. Additionally, organizations that provide a supportive and respectful work environment are more likely to foster strong work ethics among staff members (Barkan, 2012). One of the key factors that contribute to innovation in organizations is leadership. Leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for innovation and encouraging employees to think creatively. Leaders who are open-minded, supportive, and willing to take risks are more likely to foster a culture of innovation within their organizations (Amabile, 2018).

Additionally, leaders must provide employees with the resources and support they need to innovate, such as access to training and development opportunities, funding for research and development, and time to experiment with new ideas (Damanpour, 2021). Another important factor that influences innovation in organizations is the organizational culture. A culture that values creativity, encourages collaboration, and rewards innovation is more likely to foster innovation among employees. Organizations can promote a culture of innovation by encouraging employees to share ideas, providing opportunities for brainstorming and collaboration, and recognizing and rewarding innovative behavior (Gupta, 2013).

Despite the benefits of innovation, organizations may face challenges in fostering a culture of innovation. One of the biggest challenges is overcoming resistance to change (Ololube, 2024). Employees may be reluctant to embrace new ideas or ways of working, especially if they perceive them as threatening or disruptive. To address this challenge,

organizations must communicate the benefits of innovation effectively, involve employees in the innovation process, and provide support to help them adapt to change. Furthermore, fostering a culture of innovation requires organizations to embrace change, take risks, and encourage employees to think creatively. Organizations are able to create an environment that is conducive to innovation and drive sustainable growth and success through investing in leadership, organizational culture, resources and support. Staff work ethics are essential for ensuring that work is completed efficiently, effectively, and ethically. Work ethics can be defined as the set of moral principles and values that guide employees' behavior in the workplace (Trevino & Nelson, 2020). Employees with strong work ethics are more likely to be reliable, productive, and committed to their work, which can have a positive impact on organizational performance. Innovation and staff work ethics are critical for organizational success. Organizations that differentiate themselves, improve efficiency, and achieve their goals promote a culture of innovation and strong work ethics. Leaders play this role in shaping their organizational culture by setting the tone, providing support, and recognizing and rewarding innovative behavior. Organizations that create competitive advantage and drive sustainable growth and success can do so by investing in innovation.

Innovation serves as a powerful source of inspiration and motivation for employees. When employees witness innovative ideas being implemented successfully within the organization, it ignites a sense of pride and accomplishment. This inspires them to maintain high work ethics and strive for excellence in their roles. Innovation demonstrates that the organization values creativity and ingenuity, which can be highly motivating for employees (Ajayi, 2020). Moreover, employees who are inspired by innovation are more likely to exhibit a strong work ethic, as they are driven by the desire to achieve similar levels of success through their own work.

Innovation fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement among employees. Engaging in innovative projects exposes employees to new ideas, technologies, and approaches, encouraging them to expand their knowledge and skills. This continuous learning process not only enhances employees' abilities but also instills a sense of curiosity and a desire for self-improvement. Employees who are committed to continuous learning are more likely to approach their work with diligence and a mindset of constant improvement (Okeke, 2020). Innovation requires employees to think creatively and develop solutions to complex problems. This process of problem-solving helps employees develop critical thinking, analytical, and decision-making skills. Employees who are skilled at problem-solving are more likely to approach their work with a high level of diligence and perseverance, leading to a stronger work ethic. Furthermore, employees who excel in problem-solving are often more confident in their abilities, which can further enhance their work ethics (Adewale, 2019).

Innovation necessitates organizations to be adaptable to change. Employees who are involved in innovative projects are more likely to embrace change and adapt quickly to new circumstances. This adaptability is a key aspect of work ethics, as it demonstrates a willingness to learn and grow in response to new challenges. Employees who are adaptable are more likely to thrive in dynamic work environments and demonstrate a strong work ethic (Nwankwo, 2021). Innovation often involves collaboration and teamwork. Employees who are involved in innovative projects are more likely to work well with others and collaborate effectively. This collaboration fosters a sense of camaraderie and mutual support among employees, leading to a positive work environment. Employees who feel supported by their colleagues are more likely to

demonstrate a strong work ethic, as they are motivated to contribute to the team's success (Ogundipe, 2020).

Above all, innovation can influence ethical considerations within an organization. Employees who are involved in innovative projects are more likely to consider the ethical implications of their work. This consideration for ethics and integrity can lead to a higher level of ethical behavior in the workplace. Employees who are committed to ethical behavior are more likely to demonstrate a strong work ethic, as they strive to uphold the organization's values and reputation (Okonkwo, 2020).

Service and Staff Work Ethics

Service as institutional leadership values can significantly enhance staff work ethics. This is because when service is upheld as a core value by institutional leaders, it sets a positive example for staff members and shapes the overall culture of the organization (Campbell & Göritz, 2014). Service as institutional leadership values can impact staff work ethics and contribute to a more productive and ethical work environment. When service is prioritized as a leadership value, it sends a clear message to staff members that their primary goal should be to serve and meet the needs of others. This emphasis on service fosters a sense of purpose and meaning in the work that staff members do. Rather than viewing their tasks as mere responsibilities or duties, staff members are encouraged to approach their work as an opportunity to make a positive impact on others. This mindset shift can result in increased motivation and dedication to providing quality service to customers, clients, or other stakeholders.

Furthermore, service as a leadership value promotes a culture of empathy and compassion within the organization. When leaders prioritize service, they actively seek to understand the needs and concerns of others, including both internal and external stakeholders (Neill & Meng, 2023). Leaders create an environment where employees feel valued and supported by demonstrating empathy towards staff members. This in turn, contributes to higher job satisfaction and a greater sense of commitment to the organization. When staff members feel cared for and supported, they are more likely to reciprocate those feelings by providing excellent service and going above and beyond in their work. Moreover, service as a leadership value encourages collaboration and teamwork among staff members. When leaders prioritize service, they promote a culture of cooperation and mutual support. Staff members are encouraged to work together towards a common goal, pooling their skills and resources to provide the best possible service to stakeholders. This collaborative environment fosters a sense of camaraderie and belonging among staff members, enhancing their overall work ethic. When employees feel part of a team, they are more likely to take ownership of their work and strive for excellence.

In addition, service-oriented leadership values contribute to the development of ethical work practices. When leaders prioritize service, they also prioritize ethical decision-making and responsible behaviour. This is because service inherently involves considering the well-being and best interests of others. According to Ololube (2024), leaders encourage staff members to act ethically in all aspects of their work, treat others with respect, fairness, and integrity when they promote service. This emphasis on ethical behavior can have a positive influence on staff members' work ethics, as they internalize and apply these principles in their daily tasks. Furthermore, service-oriented leadership values can enhance staff work ethics by promoting a continuous learning mindset. When leaders prioritize service, they recognize the importance of ongoing growth and improvement. They encourage staff members to seek feedback, learn from

mistakes, and pursue professional development opportunities. This culture of continuous learning not only enhances staff members' skills and capabilities but also encourages a proactive and self-driven work ethic. Staff members are motivated to continuously improve their performance and provide better service to stakeholders, contributing to the overall success of the organization.

Also, service as a leadership value can contribute to the overall reputation and success of the organization. When leaders prioritize service, they foster customer loyalty and satisfaction. Satisfied customers are more likely to become repeat customers and refer others to the organization, leading to increased business opportunities (Naeem Mian et al., 2023). This positive reputation not only benefits external stakeholders but also boosts staff members' morale and work ethic. Staff members take pride in working for an organization that is known for providing exceptional service, further fueling their commitment to delivering high-quality work. However, service as institutional leadership values can have a significant impact on staff work ethics.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive and correlational research design to explore the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Institutional leadership values served as the independent variable, while staff work ethics represented the dependent variable. The study targeted a population of 8,111 teaching and non-teaching staff from three public universities in Rivers State: University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State University (RSU), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), Rumuolumeni. A sample of 446 staff members, representing 5.5% of the total population, was selected using a simple random sampling technique.

Data collection was conducted using two structured questionnaires: the Institutional Leadership Values Questionnaire (ILVQ) and the Staff Work Ethics Questionnaire (SWEQ). These instruments were divided into three sections: Section 'A' gathered demographic information, Section 'B' contained 10 items assessing the independent variable, and Section 'C' focused on staff work ethics. Responses were recorded using a four-point modified Likert scale, with numerical values assigned as follows: Very High Extent (VHE) = 4 points, High Extent (HE) = 3 points, Low Extent (LE) = 2 points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1 point.

Three experts that specialized in Educational Management reviewed and refined the questionnaire for validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach Alpha analysis and the result yielded reliability indices of .845 and .901. The researcher, along with three trained assistants, personally administered the questionnaires, achieving a 92.4% response rate (412 valid responses). Data analysis involved mean and standard deviation calculations for research questions, while PPMC was used to test hypotheses, with a decision rule based on a criterion mean of 2.50.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does innovation as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the extent innovation as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
1.	Innovation and strong work ethics are essential components of organizational success and effectiveness	2.6956	1.11013	High Extent
2.	When leaders are innovative it fosters high work ethics among staff	2.5126	1.08949	High Extent
3.	Innovation in leadership influences staff motivation to perform well in their job	2.6689	1.12040	High Extent
4.	When staff members adopt innovative ideas, it promotes a culture of continuous improvement	2.5320	1.13031	High Extent
5.	Leaders play a key role in shaping this culture by setting the tone, providing support, and recognizing and rewarding innovative behaviours	2.5000	1.13879	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.5818	1.11782	High Extent

Table 1 presents analysis of research question one, which states that to what extent does innovation as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State? The table represents the accumulated sum from the respondents indicating the mean score and standard deviation. The first item which ascertained how innovation and strong work ethics are essential components of organizational success and effectiveness, showed a mean score of 2.6956 (SD. =1.11013). The second item opined that When leaders are innovative it fosters high work ethics among staff, the result showed a mean score of 2.5126 (SD. =1.08949). The third item opined that Innovation in leadership influences staff motivation to perform well in their job, the responses had a mean score of 2.6689 (SD. =1.12040). The fourth item revealed a mean score of 2.5320 (SD. =1.13031) which showed that when staff members adopt innovative ideas, it promotes a culture of continuous improvement. Lastly, the item five represents a mean score of 2.5000 (SD. =1.13879), interpreting that when staff members adopt innovative ideas, it promotes a culture of continuous improvement. Therefore, having a calculated grand mean of 2.5818 (1.11782) revealed that majority of the respondents agreed to a high extent that innovation as institutional leadership value significantly improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

Research Question 2: To what extent does service as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2 presents analysis of research question two, which states that to what extent does service as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State? The table represents the accumulated sum from the respondents indicating the mean score and standard deviation. The first item which determined how when service is prioritized as a leadership value, it sends a clear message to staff members, showed a mean score of 2.5126 (SD.=1.12683). The second item discoursed that when leaders prioritize service, they actively seek to understand the needs and concerns of others, including both internal and external stakeholders, the result showed a mean score of 2.5024 (SD.=1.09965). The third item opined that by demonstrating empathy towards staff members, leaders create an environment where employees feel valued and supported, the responses had a mean score of 2.5636 (SD.=1.10787). The fourth item revealed a mean score of 2.5024 (SD.=1.09744) which showed that When staff members feel cared for and supported, they are more likely to reciprocate those feelings by

providing excellent service and going above and beyond in their work. Lastly, the item five depicts a mean score of 2.6806 (SD.=1.10830), interpreting that When leaders prioritize service, they also prioritize ethical decision-making and responsible behaviour. Therefore, having a calculated grand mean of 2.5523 (1.10801) revealed that majority of the respondents agreed to a high extent that service as institutional leadership value significantly improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the extent innovation as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
6.	when service is prioritized as a leadership value, it sends a clear message to staff members	2.5126	1.12682	High Extent
7.	When leaders prioritize service, they actively seek to understand the needs and concerns of others, including both internal and external stakeholders	2.5024	1.09965	High Extent
8.	By demonstrating empathy towards staff members, leaders create an environment where employees feel valued and supported	2.5636	1.10787	High Extent
9.	When staff members feel cared for and supported, they are more likely to reciprocate those feelings by providing excellent service and going above and beyond in their work	2.5024	1.09744	High Extent
10.	When leaders prioritize service, they also prioritize ethical decision-making and responsible behaviour	2.6806	1.10830	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.5523	1.10801	High Extent

Hypotheses Testing

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: PPMC analysis of the relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics

		Innovation as Institutional Leadership value	Staff Work Ethics
Innovation as Institutional Leadership value	Pearson Correlation	1	.421 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.040
	N	412	412
Staff Work Ethics	Pearson Correlation	.421 ^{**}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	
	N	412	412

. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The PPMC analysis in Table 3 revealed a correlation coefficient of .421 between trust as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics, indicating a moderate significant relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics. More so, the probability value (.040) is less than the critical value (0.05), this shows that there is a strong positive relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics.

The findings reject the null hypothesis one as there is a significant positive relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: PPMC analysis of the relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics

		Service as institutional leadership value	Staff Work Ethics
Service as institutional leadership value Staff Work Ethics	Pearson Correlation	1	.645**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.023
	N	412	412
	Pearson Correlation	.645**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	
	N	412	412
. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

The PPMC analysis in Table 4 revealed a correlation coefficient of .645 between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics, indicating a moderate significant relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics. More so, the probability value (.023) is less than the critical value (0.05), this shows that there is a strong positive relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics. The findings reject the null hypothesis two as there is a significant positive relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION

Innovation as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

Hypothesis one of this study stated that there is no significant relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The hypothesis was rejected because there is a significant relationship between innovation as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. From the findings of this research innovation and staff work ethics are essential components of organizational success and effectiveness.

Trevino and Nelson (2020) asserted that organizations that invest in research and development, provide training opportunities, and create a supportive environment for experimentation are more likely to innovate. Additionally, organizations that encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among employees are better positioned to generate new ideas and solutions.

Furthermore, Damanpour (2021) opined that employees with strong work ethics are more likely to be reliable, productive, and committed to their work, which can have a positive impact on organizational performance. Additionally, Ololube (2024) discussed that innovation and staff

work ethics are critical for organizational success. Organizations are able to differentiate themselves, improve efficiency, and achieve their goals through the promotion of a culture of innovation and strong work ethics. Leaders play a key role in shaping this culture by setting the tone, providing support, and recognizing and rewarding innovative behavior.

Amabile (2018) highlighted that to fostering innovation, organizations must also ensure that their staff maintain strong work ethics. This can be achieved by promoting a culture that values and promotes ethical behavior. Organizations that have clear policies and procedures in place, such as codes of conduct and whistleblower protections, are more likely to promote and reinforce ethical behavior among employees. Barkan (2012) opined leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for innovation and encouraging employees to think creatively. Leaders who are open-minded, supportive, and willing to take risks are more likely to foster a culture of innovation within their organizations. Organizations that encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among employees are better positioned to generate new ideas and solutions.

Furthermore, Scott and Bruce (2014) asserted that employees may be reluctant to embrace new ideas or ways of working, especially if they perceive them as threatening or disruptive. To address this challenge, organizations must communicate the benefits of innovation effectively, involve employees in the innovation process, and provide support to help them adapt to change (Scott & Bruce, 2014).

Service as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

Hypothesis two of this study stated that there is no significant relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The hypothesis was rejected because there is a significant relationship between service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. From the findings of this research Service as institutional leadership values can significantly enhance staff work ethics. This is because when service is upheld as a core value by institutional leaders, it sets a positive example for staff members and shapes the overall culture of the organization.

Campbell and Göritz (2014) opined that when service is prioritized as a leadership value, it sends a clear message to staff members that their primary goal should be to serve and meet the needs of others. This emphasis on service fosters a sense of purpose and meaning in the work that staff members do. Rather than viewing their tasks as mere responsibilities or duties, staff members are encouraged to approach their work as an opportunity to make a positive impact on others. This mindset shift can result in increased motivation and dedication to providing quality service to customers, clients, or other stakeholders.

Neill and Meng (2023) posited that service as a leadership value promotes a culture of empathy and compassion within the organization. When leaders prioritize service, they actively seek to understand the needs and concerns of others, including both internal and external stakeholders. By demonstrating empathy towards staff members, leaders create an environment where employees feel valued and supported. This, in turn, contributes to higher job satisfaction and a greater sense of commitment to the organization.

Naeem Mian et al. (2023) asserted that when staff members feel cared for and supported, they are more likely to reciprocate those feelings by providing excellent service and going above and beyond in their work. Moreover, service as a leadership value encourages collaboration and teamwork among staff members. When leaders prioritize service, they promote a culture of

cooperation and mutual support. Staff members are encouraged to work together towards a common goal, pooling their skills and resources to provide the best possible service to stakeholders. Ololube (2019) posited that service as a leadership value can contribute to the overall reputation and success of the organization. When leaders prioritize service, they foster customer loyalty and satisfaction. Satisfied customers are more likely to become repeat customers and refer others to the organization, leading to increased business opportunities. This positive reputation not only benefits external stakeholders but also boosts staff members' morale and work ethic.

Akhtar et al. (2012) discoursed that staff members take pride in working for an organization that is known for providing exceptional service, further fueling their commitment to delivering high-quality work. However, service as institutional leadership values can have a significant impact on staff work ethics. While Denga (2015) opined that by prioritizing service, institutional leaders set a positive example and shape the organizational culture. This emphasis on service fosters a sense of purpose, promotes empathy and collaboration, encourages ethical behaviour, and cultivates a continuous learning mindset

CONCLUSION

This study investigated innovation and service as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. Innovation and service as institutional leadership values play a pivotal role in shaping the work ethics of staff in public universities in Rivers State. Promoting a culture that encourages creativity, continuous improvement, and a strong sense of service makes university leadership to significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of academic and administrative operations. Innovation in teaching methods, research, and resource management can improve the learning environment, increase institutional competitiveness, and drive community engagement.

Likewise, when institutional leaders order service, whether to students, staff, or the wider society, they cultivate an ethos of responsibility, accountability, and professionalism among staff. This promotes a positive work environment where staff are motivated to contribute their best efforts. Furthermore, strong work ethics, nurtured through effective leadership, help to ensure that the objectives of public universities are met with integrity and efficiency. Ultimately, the alignment of innovation, service, and strong work ethics fosters an environment where both staff and students thrive, leading to the overall success and sustainability of public universities in Rivers State. Emphasizing these core values within institutional leadership can thus contribute to academic excellence, staff satisfaction, and societal development, ensuring that the universities remain responsive to the evolving needs of the state and beyond.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made aimed to address the specific challenges related to institutional leadership values and staff work ethics:

- The Ministries of Education should create an environment that supports experimentation, risk-taking, and creativity. Encouraging new ideas and approaches should be encouraged for continuous improvement by implementing innovative programmes.

- The university staff should be service-oriented and focus and they should highlight the importance of serving students, colleagues, and the community, inspiring pride and fulfillment in their work.

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