



Effective communication, leadership style, and employee performance: Evidence from the Nigerian civil service

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Abstract

Effective communication and appropriate leadership styles are critical determinants of employee effectiveness and institutional performance, particularly within public-sector organizations characterized by complex administrative structures, bureaucratic procedures, and multiple reporting relationships. This study examined the effect of effective communication on employee performance and assessed the moderating role of leadership style within the Nigerian Civil Service. The study utilized data from 1,200 employees drawn from the Ministries of Finance, Health, Education, Works, Justice, and Information across the Federal Civil Service in Abuja and selected state civil services in Lagos, Rivers, and Kano States. Effective communication was operationalized through downward, upward, horizontal, and information and communication technology-based communication, while leadership styles comprised transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Employee performance was assessed using task performance, contextual performance, service-delivery ratings, and absenteeism. The measurement instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with reliability coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.93. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, hierarchical multiple regression, confirmatory factor analysis, and moderation analysis based on PROCESS Model 1. Findings revealed that effective communication had a significant positive effect on employee task performance, with a one-unit increase in the overall communication index associated with a 0.49-unit increase in task performance ($p < .001$; $R^2 = .31$). Among the communication dimensions, horizontal communication emerged as the strongest predictor of performance ($\beta = .28$), followed by downward communication ($\beta = .20$), ICT-based communication ($\beta = .15$), and upward communication ($\beta = .12$). The findings further revealed a significant positive interaction between transformational leadership and effective communication ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$), indicating that the performance-enhancing effect of communication became substantially stronger under highly transformational leaders. Employees experiencing both high communication effectiveness and high transformational leadership recorded the highest mean task performance ($M = 4.28$), contextual performance ($M = 4.16$), and service-delivery rating ($M = 8.60$), as well as the lowest absenteeism ($M = 0.50$ days per month). Conversely, laissez-faire leadership significantly weakened the relationship between communication and performance ($\beta = -.23$). The study concludes that effective organizational communication generates superior employee outcomes when reinforced by transformational leadership practices. Nigerian civil-service institutions should therefore institutionalize participatory communication systems, strengthen horizontal and upward information flows, expand appropriate digital communication platforms, and develop transformational leadership capabilities among supervisors and senior administrators.

Keywords: Effective communication, transformational leadership, leadership style, employee performance, civil service, service delivery, Nigerian public sector

Introduction

The effectiveness of public institutions is fundamentally dependent on the capacity of their employees to translate government policies, programmes, and administrative decisions into tangible services for citizens. Civil servants constitute the operational machinery through which governments formulate, coordinate, implement, monitor, and evaluate public policies. Consequently, employee performance within the civil service has important implications for administrative efficiency, institutional accountability, public confidence, and national development. Contemporary public administration has therefore moved beyond an exclusive emphasis on formal structures, rules, and procedures toward greater consideration of behavioural and managerial factors that influence how public employees perform their responsibilities. Among these factors, effective communication and leadership style have emerged as

particularly important determinants of employee behaviour and organizational performance.

Communication is the process through which organizational information, instructions, expectations, ideas, feedback, and meanings are transmitted and understood among organizational members. In contemporary organizations, communication is not merely the transmission of messages from management to employees; rather, it represents a multidirectional process involving downward, upward, horizontal, and technology-mediated exchanges. Effective communication enables employees to understand organizational objectives, clarify responsibilities, coordinate activities, resolve workplace problems, exchange knowledge, and provide feedback to decision makers. Where communication systems are weak, employees may experience role ambiguity, information asymmetry, duplication of responsibilities, conflict, delayed decision-making, and reduced commitment. Conversely, well-

structured internal communication can promote trust, cooperation, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and performance (Men, 2014; Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020) ^[15, 21].

The importance of communication becomes particularly pronounced within public-sector organizations because government institutions typically operate through complex hierarchical arrangements characterized by multiple administrative levels, specialized departments, formal reporting structures, and established bureaucratic procedures. Information must therefore move effectively both vertically and horizontally if employees are to coordinate their activities and achieve institutional objectives. Nigerian evidence similarly identifies communication as an important determinant of employee productivity and performance within public institutions (Rabiu *et al.*, 2024; Salami, 2024) ^[18, 19].

Communication within organizations can broadly be categorized into downward, upward, horizontal, and technology-mediated communication. Downward communication involves the transmission of instructions, policies, objectives, performance expectations, and feedback from senior officers to subordinate employees. It provides direction and facilitates employees' understanding of what the organization expects from them. Upward communication, in contrast, allows employees to communicate information, concerns, suggestions, complaints, and operational feedback to supervisors and senior management. Effective upward communication is particularly important because employees who perform operational responsibilities often possess information that senior administrators require for evidence-based decision-making.

Horizontal communication occurs among employees, departments, or units at comparable hierarchical levels and facilitates coordination, teamwork, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving. This communication dimension has become increasingly important as public organizations adopt multidisciplinary approaches to policy implementation and service delivery. Many governmental responsibilities cannot be effectively implemented by isolated departments because contemporary policy challenges cut across administrative boundaries. Effective horizontal communication can therefore reduce departmental silos, accelerate information exchange, minimize duplication, and improve collective problem-solving (Owunna *et al.*, 2024) ^[17]. Technology-mediated communication represents another increasingly important dimension, involving organizational email, intranets, instant messaging platforms, virtual meetings, electronic document-management systems, and other digital channels.

Digital transformation has substantially changed the communication environment of public organizations internationally and within Nigeria. Digital technologies enable faster dissemination of information, remote collaboration, electronic record keeping, knowledge sharing, performance monitoring, and communication between government institutions and citizens. Within the Nigerian Federal Civil Service, digital transformation has increasingly become a major component of administrative reform. Initiatives such as DevsInGovernment, Service-Wise GPT, GOVMail, and the Federal Civil Service Online Academy reflect efforts to use technology to strengthen efficiency, professionalism, and citizen-centred service delivery (Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation

and Digital Economy [FMCIDE], 2024 ^[8]; Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation [FMINO], 2024a) ^[8].

Technological availability, however, does not automatically guarantee effective communication. Employees require appropriate digital competencies, organizational support, leadership encouragement, and institutional infrastructure to utilize communication technologies effectively. The Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR, 2024) ^[13] has emphasized the need for greater adoption of technology in public communication, illustrating the continuing importance of capacity development in Nigeria's evolving digital public sector.

Communication effectiveness must therefore be examined together with the managerial environment within which communication occurs. One of the most important components of this environment is leadership style. Leadership concerns the processes through which individuals influence, motivate, guide, and coordinate others toward accomplishing organizational objectives. Leadership style determines how supervisors communicate expectations, delegate responsibilities, respond to employee suggestions, manage conflict, provide feedback, reward performance, and involve employees in decision-making. Thus, the same communication mechanism may produce different outcomes depending upon the leadership behaviour surrounding it (Yukl & Gardner, 2020) ^[25].

Three leadership orientations are particularly relevant to contemporary organizational research: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leadership involves articulating a compelling organizational vision, inspiring employees, providing intellectual stimulation, recognizing individual employee needs, and motivating followers to pursue performance beyond minimum expectations. Transformational leaders create meaning around organizational goals and encourage employees to identify with the broader mission of their institutions (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994) ^[4, 5]. Recent public-administration evidence continues to associate transformational leadership with favourable employee and organizational outcomes (Bao *et al.*, 2025) ^[3].

Transactional leadership emphasizes clearly defined responsibilities, performance monitoring, compliance, rewards, and corrective actions. In highly bureaucratic organizations, transactional leadership may provide important structure because civil servants operate according to formal job descriptions, rules, performance standards, and reporting arrangements. Appropriate transactional leadership can reinforce accountability and clarify expectations. However, excessive reliance on monitoring and compliance may discourage innovation, employee voice, and discretionary effort.

At the opposite end of the leadership continuum is laissez-faire leadership, characterized by leadership avoidance, delayed decisions, limited supervision, inadequate feedback, and reluctance to intervene when employees require direction. Such behaviour can create communication vacuums because information may not be clarified, employee concerns may remain unresolved, and organizational expectations may become ambiguous. Leadership must therefore be considered not simply as another independent predictor of employee performance but as an organizational condition capable of strengthening or weakening the effectiveness of communication.

This relationship is especially relevant to the Nigerian public service. The Nigerian civil service has historically been expected to provide continuity in governance and translate governmental policies into administrative and developmental outcomes. However, persistent concerns have been expressed about bureaucracy, delayed processes, weak accountability, ineffective service delivery, inadequate motivation, leadership deficiencies, communication bottlenecks, and resistance to organizational change. Current reforms increasingly emphasize performance management, digital transformation, institutional accountability, and improved service delivery (FMINO, 2024b; BPSR, 2026) ^[13, 14].

Empirical Nigerian studies provide further justification for examining communication and leadership simultaneously. Rabiou *et al.* (2024) ^[18], examining communication, job satisfaction, and employee productivity in Nigeria's Federal Civil Service, highlighted communication as an important factor associated with employee productivity. Salami (2024) ^[19], studying civil servants in Ogun State, similarly found that effective communication was significantly associated with employee performance. Adeogun and Nmadu (2025) ^[1], examining organizational communication and leadership styles in the Niger State Board of Internal Revenue, reported substantial relationships among organizational communication, leadership style, and employee performance.

Despite these developments, an important empirical gap remains. Much of the available Nigerian literature examines either communication or leadership as a direct predictor of employee performance. Fewer studies explicitly investigate whether leadership style moderates the communication-performance relationship. This distinction is theoretically and practically significant. Effective communication may improve performance directly, but its influence may be substantially stronger when supervisors demonstrate transformational behaviours such as inspiration, openness, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Conversely, communication may have a weaker performance effect when leaders avoid responsibility, fail to provide feedback, or remain disengaged.

There is also a need for more comprehensive evidence covering multiple dimensions of communication and performance. Employee performance within public institutions cannot adequately be represented by a single indicator. Task performance reflects the extent to which employees effectively perform their formally prescribed duties, whereas contextual performance captures discretionary behaviours such as cooperation, initiative, helping colleagues, and supporting the broader organizational environment. Service-delivery ratings provide an additional assessment of how effectively employees contribute to institutional outputs, while absenteeism offers a behavioural indicator of employee attendance and work engagement.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining effective communication, leadership style, and employee performance among 1,200 civil servants drawn from the Ministries of Finance, Health, Education, Works, Justice, and Information across the Federal Civil Service in Abuja and selected state civil services in Rivers, Lagos, and Kano States. Effective communication is conceptualized through

downward, upward, horizontal, and ICT-mediated communication, while leadership is examined through transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire orientations. Employee performance is evaluated using task performance, contextual performance, supervisor-rated service delivery, and absenteeism.

Accordingly, this study investigates the direct effect of effective communication on employee performance, determines the relative contribution of downward, upward, horizontal, and ICT-mediated communication, assesses the effects of different leadership styles, and examines whether transformational and laissez-faire leadership moderate the relationship between communication and employee performance. By integrating communication and leadership within a moderated performance framework and drawing evidence from both federal and state civil services, the study seeks to extend the literature on public-sector human resource management and organizational behaviour while generating practical evidence for civil-service reform in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

1. Concept of Effective Communication

Communication is fundamental to organizational functioning because virtually every managerial activity—planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, controlling, decision-making, and performance evaluation—depends on the exchange of information. Organizational communication refers to the structured and informal processes through which information, ideas, instructions, attitudes, expectations, and feedback are exchanged among individuals and groups within an organization. Effective communication goes beyond the mere transmission of information; it requires that the intended message is received, understood, interpreted correctly, and capable of eliciting an appropriate response.

Within public-sector organizations, effective communication assumes additional importance because civil servants operate within formal hierarchical structures characterized by rules, procedures, reporting relationships, and differentiated authority. Communication enables employees to understand policy objectives, job responsibilities, performance standards, administrative procedures, and changes in government programmes. Nigerian studies have linked effective organizational communication with job satisfaction, productivity, and employee performance (Rabiou *et al.*, 2024; Owunna *et al.*, 2024) ^[17, 18].

1.1 Downward Communication

Downward communication refers to information transmitted from higher levels of organizational authority to employees at lower levels. It includes instructions, policies, job expectations, performance targets, explanations of procedures, feedback, circulars, directives, and information concerning organizational changes. In the civil service, downward communication traditionally occurs through memoranda, circulars, official letters, departmental meetings, minutes, administrative directives, and increasingly through electronic channels.

Effective downward communication reduces uncertainty and role ambiguity by ensuring that employees understand what is expected of them. It can also enhance accountability because clearly communicated objectives and standards

provide a basis for assessing performance. Salami (2024) ^[19] reported a significant relationship between effective communication and employee performance among civil servants in Ogun State. Nevertheless, downward communication can become ineffective where it is excessively bureaucratic, delayed, ambiguous, authoritarian, or predominantly one-way.

1.2 Upward Communication

Upward communication represents the movement of information from subordinate employees to supervisors and senior administrators. It includes reports, suggestions, complaints, requests, employee feedback, operational information, and recommendations. It provides decision makers with information concerning employee experiences and problems encountered during policy implementation. Upward communication is especially important in government organizations because senior administrators may be operationally separated from frontline service delivery.

Bureaucratic distance, fear of victimization, rigid status differences, and highly centralized leadership can discourage employee voice. Transformational and participative leaders are more likely to create supportive environments in which employees can express concerns and contribute ideas. This illustrates why leadership style may influence whether organizational communication ultimately translates into superior employee performance.

1.3 Horizontal Communication

Horizontal communication occurs between employees, departments, or units operating at approximately the same organizational level. Its major functions include coordination, information sharing, collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution, and knowledge exchange. Horizontal communication has become particularly important because contemporary public administration increasingly requires collaboration across departmental boundaries. Where horizontal communication is weak, departmental silos may produce duplication, contradictory decisions, delays, and inefficient resource utilization. Owunna *et al.* (2024) ^[17] demonstrated that organizational communication significantly influenced employee performance among public regulatory agencies in Rivers State.

1.4 ICT-Mediated Communication

Information and communication technologies have transformed organizational communication. ICT-mediated communication includes email, organizational intranets, electronic document-management systems, instant-messaging platforms, virtual meetings, databases, and collaborative digital applications. These mechanisms can reduce communication delays, improve information accessibility, strengthen documentation, and facilitate collaboration across geographical locations. Within Nigeria's civil service, digital communication is increasingly associated with e-administration and public-sector modernization (FMCIDE, 2024; FMINO, 2024a) ^[13]. ICT should therefore be understood as an enabling communication infrastructure whose performance benefits depend on organizational capacity, digital competence, employee acceptance, and leadership support.

2. Concept of Leadership Style

Leadership refers to the process through which an individual influences others to understand organizational objectives and direct their efforts toward achieving them. Leadership style describes relatively consistent patterns through which leaders exercise authority, communicate, motivate employees, make decisions, resolve problems, and manage performance. Leadership is particularly important in public administration because formal organizational rules cannot anticipate every operational situation. Managers and supervisors interpret policies, allocate responsibilities, provide direction, coordinate employees, and establish the interpersonal climate in which work occurs (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Adeogun and Nmadu (2025) ^[1, 25] found a strong relationship between leadership style and employee performance in the Niger State Board of Internal Revenue.

3. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is based on the ability of leaders to motivate followers beyond immediate self-interest by creating a shared vision and developing commitment to organizational objectives. It is conventionally associated with idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994) ^[4, 5]. Transformational leadership is particularly relevant to public institutions experiencing administrative reforms, technological changes, and increasing demands for citizen-centred service delivery. Bao *et al.* (2025) ^[3], in a large meta-analytic review of transformational leadership research in public administration, found transformational leadership significantly associated with individual-level and organizational outcomes. These findings have particular implications for the current study because transformational leaders may strengthen the benefits of communication. Leaders who articulate clear visions, provide feedback, encourage participation, and demonstrate responsiveness can create conditions in which communication becomes more credible and actionable.

4. Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is based on exchanges between leaders and followers. Employees are expected to achieve established standards, while leaders provide rewards, recognition, monitoring, or corrective action depending on employee performance. Its principal elements include contingent reward and management by exception. Transactional leadership has potential advantages in civil-service organizations because public administration depends substantially on standardized procedures, accountability, compliance, and clearly defined responsibilities. However, excessive monitoring may discourage creativity, employee voice, and discretionary effort.

5. Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership represents an avoidance or absence of active leadership. It is characterized by reluctance to make decisions, inadequate supervision, delayed responses, weak feedback, and limited involvement in employee development. Unlike constructive delegation, which provides employees with autonomy while maintaining accountability, laissez-faire leadership involves failure to provide leadership when intervention is required. Such leadership can be particularly damaging to organizational

communication because messages may not be interpreted, responsibilities may remain unclear, and important feedback may be ignored.

6. Concept and Dimensions of Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to behaviours, activities, and outcomes through which employees contribute to organizational objectives. Contemporary performance literature recognizes that performance extends beyond completing formally assigned duties. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes performance through task performance, contextual performance, service-delivery rating, and absenteeism.

Task performance concerns the effectiveness with which employees perform core responsibilities specified by their positions, including accuracy, timeliness, compliance with procedures, productivity, and completion of assigned duties. Contextual performance consists of behaviours that support the broader social and psychological environment of the organization, such as assisting colleagues, demonstrating initiative, cooperating with teams, and supporting organizational change. Service-delivery performance reflects employees' contribution to the quality, responsiveness, timeliness, and effectiveness of government services. Absenteeism constitutes a behavioural indicator reflecting employee attendance and availability for work.

7. Theoretical Framework

The study is principally anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory and Social Exchange Theory. Transformational Leadership Theory, associated with Burns (1978) ^[7] and subsequently developed by Bass (1985) ^[4], proposes that leaders can elevate followers' motivation and performance by transforming their values, expectations, and identification with organizational objectives. Communication represents a central mechanism through which transformational leadership operates. Leaders communicate vision, provide feedback, stimulate new thinking, and demonstrate individualized consideration through interpersonal interaction.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) ^[6] complements this explanation. The theory proposes that social relationships develop through reciprocal exchanges. Employees who perceive that leaders communicate openly, provide useful feedback, respect their contributions, and support their development may reciprocate through greater commitment, cooperation, attendance, and performance. Conversely, employees who experience poor communication and disengaged leadership may reduce discretionary effort. Together, these theories provide a logical basis for expecting effective communication to improve performance while leadership style alters the magnitude of this relationship.

8. Empirical Review

International empirical evidence generally supports positive relationships among communication, leadership, and employee performance. Research on internal communication has shown that communication channels and leadership behaviour can influence employee satisfaction and organizational relationships (Men, 2014; Men & Stacks, 2014). Bao *et al.* (2025) ^[3, 15, 16] further demonstrated the broad relevance of transformational

leadership to public-sector employee and organizational outcomes.

Within Nigeria, Rabiun *et al.* (2024) ^[18] examined communication as a metric of job satisfaction and productivity within the Federal Civil Service, demonstrating its relevance to employee outcomes. Owunna *et al.* (2024) ^[13] found organizational communication to exert a significant influence on employee performance among public regulatory agencies in Rivers State. Salami (2024) ^[19], based on evidence from civil servants in Ogun State, similarly reported that effective communication significantly influenced employee performance. Adeogun and Nmadu (2025) ^[1] found meaningful relationships between organizational communication, leadership style, and employee performance in the Niger State Board of Internal Revenue.

9. Leadership Style as a Moderator of the Communication-Performance Relationship

A moderator changes the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable. In the present context, leadership style is expected to determine the extent to which effective communication produces improved employee performance. Under transformational leadership, communication is likely to become more effective because employees receive not merely information but also interpretation, encouragement, feedback, and a sense of shared purpose. Conversely, laissez-faire leadership may weaken communication effectiveness because leaders fail to translate information into coordinated action.

10. Gap in the Literature

Although the reviewed literature provides substantial evidence that effective communication and leadership influence employee performance, several gaps remain. Many Nigerian studies have examined communication or leadership primarily as separate direct predictors, while comparatively fewer studies test leadership style as a moderator of the communication-performance relationship. Previous studies also frequently concentrate on single institutions or states, treat communication as a unidimensional construct, or rely on a single general measure of employee performance.

The present study addresses these limitations using evidence from 1,200 civil servants across six ministries and federal and state civil-service institutions. It distinguishes four dimensions of effective communication, examines transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership, and evaluates multiple indicators of employee performance. Most importantly, it explicitly tests whether transformational leadership strengthens—and laissez-faire leadership weakens—the effect of communication on employee performance.

Methodology

1. Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey research design to examine the relationship between effective communication, leadership style, and employee performance in the Nigerian Civil Service. The design was appropriate because the study sought to collect standardized information from a relatively large number of civil servants and statistically determine the direct and moderating effects

among the study variables. The cross-sectional approach enabled data on communication practices, leadership behaviour, employee characteristics, and performance indicators to be obtained within a defined period.

2. Population and Sample

The study focused on employees of selected federal and state civil-service ministries in Nigeria. The participating institutions comprised the Ministries of Finance, Health, Education, Works, Justice, and Information. Respondents were drawn from the Federal Civil Service in Abuja and selected state civil services in Lagos, Rivers, and Kano States. A total analytical sample of 1,200 civil servants was used. Each of the six ministries contributed 200 respondents. Of the respondents, 720 were drawn from the Federal Civil Service and 480 from the selected state civil services. A multistage sampling procedure was applied, combining purposive selection of ministries and administrative contexts with representation across grade levels.

3. Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising five major sections. Section A obtained demographic and employment characteristics. Section B measured effective communication through downward, upward, horizontal, and ICT-mediated communication on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Section C measured transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership using dimensions derived from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire framework. Section D assessed task performance, contextual performance, supervisor-rated service delivery, and absenteeism.

4. Validity and Reliability

Content and construct validity procedures were employed to establish the adequacy of the measurement instrument. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess whether the observed indicators adequately represented their intended constructs. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Downward communication recorded $\alpha = .87$, upward communication $\alpha = .89$, horizontal communication $\alpha = .86$, ICT-mediated communication $\alpha = .84$, and the overall communication index $\alpha = .91$. Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership recorded $\alpha = .93$, $.85$, and $.82$ respectively. Task performance and contextual performance recorded $\alpha = .88$ and $.85$. All coefficients exceeded the conventional $.70$ threshold.

5. Measurement of Variables

The principal independent variable was effective communication, measured both as an overall index and through its four individual dimensions. The moderating variables were transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles. The dependent variables were task performance, contextual performance, service-delivery rating, and absenteeism. Gender and age were included as control variables together with relevant employee characteristics such as grade level, tenure, and education where appropriate.

6. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics summarized

respondent characteristics and major study variables, while Pearson correlation analysis assessed associations among communication, leadership, and performance measures. Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted in four steps: controls, communication, leadership, and interaction terms. Moderation analysis was additionally conducted using PROCESS Model 1. The model was specified as $EP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EC + \beta_2 LS + \beta_3 (EC \times LS) + \beta_k \text{Controls} + \varepsilon$, where EP represents employee performance, EC effective communication, and LS leadership style. Simple-slopes analysis was used to interpret significant interactions. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

7. Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the study was conducted solely for academic purposes. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding personally identifying information from the analytical dataset. Respondents were assured that their responses would be reported only in aggregate form and would not affect their employment status, appraisal, or relationship with their respective ministries.

Results and Discussion

1. Characteristics of Respondents

The study analyzed data from 1,200 civil servants drawn from six ministries: Finance, Health, Education, Works, Justice, and Information. Each ministry contributed 200 respondents (16.7%). Of the respondents, 720 (60.0%) were employees of the Federal Civil Service in Abuja, while 480 (40.0%) were drawn from state civil services in Rivers, Lagos, and Kano States. Regarding grade level, 420 respondents (35.0%) were on GL01-06, 500 (41.7%) were on GL07-12, and 280 (23.3%) were on GL13-17. Respondents had between 0.5 and 28 years of service, with a mean tenure of 8.1 years. Educationally, 150 (12.5%) possessed SSCE qualifications, 360 (30.0%) held OND/NCE qualifications, 480 (40.0%) possessed BSc/HND qualifications, and 210 (17.5%) had MSc/PhD qualifications. Females constituted 638 (53.2%) and males 562 (46.8%), while mean age was 38.7 years.

2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Major Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Downward Communication	3.44	0.88	.87
Upward Communication	2.98	0.94	.89
Horizontal Communication	3.63	0.81	.86
ICT-Mediated Communication	3.31	0.92	.84
Overall Communication Index	3.34	—	.91
Transformational Leadership	3.40	—	.93
Transactional Leadership	3.56	—	.85
Laissez-Faire Leadership	2.68	—	.82
Task Performance	3.61	—	.88
Contextual Performance	3.45	—	.85
Service Delivery Rating	7.02	—	—
Absenteeism Days/Month	1.30	—	—

All multi-item scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from $.82$ to $.93$. Horizontal communication recorded the highest communication mean ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.81$), while

upward communication recorded the lowest ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.94$). The comparatively low upward communication score suggests that employees may experience greater difficulty transmitting feedback, suggestions, or operational concerns to senior management. The overall communication index of 3.34 indicates a moderately favourable communication environment but substantial scope for improvement.

3. Effective Communication and Employee Performance

Regression analysis showed that effective communication was a significant positive predictor of employee task performance. A one-unit increase in the overall communication index was associated with a 0.49-unit increase in task performance ($p < .001$), and the communication model accounted for approximately 31% of the variance in task performance ($R^2 = .31$). These findings demonstrate that communication is not simply an administrative support function but an important determinant of employee effectiveness. The result supports Rabiou *et al.* (2024) and Salami (2024) [18, 19], who identified significant links between communication and employee outcomes in Nigerian civil-service settings.

Table 2: Regression Effects of Communication Dimensions on Task Performance

Predictor	Standardized β	Direction	Rank
Horizontal Communication	.28***	Positive	1
Downward Communication	.20***	Positive	2
ICT-Mediated Communication	.15***	Positive	3
Upward Communication	.12***	Positive	4
Overall Communication Index	.49***	Positive	—

Note. *** $p < .001$.

4. Relative Effects of Communication Dimensions

Horizontal communication emerged as the strongest individual communication predictor of task performance ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), demonstrating the importance of employee-to-employee and interdepartmental coordination. Downward communication was the second strongest predictor ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), indicating that clear instructions, timely feedback, and appropriate communication of policies remain important within hierarchical civil-service structures. ICT-mediated communication was also positively associated with performance ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$), while upward communication had the smallest, although still positive, effect ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$). The relatively weak upward communication finding highlights the need for stronger employee-voice mechanisms.

5. Communication and Transformational Leadership Interaction

Moderation analysis revealed a significant positive interaction between effective communication and transformational leadership ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$). The effect of communication was approximately 2.2 times stronger under conditions of high transformational leadership than under conditions of low transformational leadership. This demonstrates that transformational leadership strengthens the positive relationship between communication and employee performance.

Table 3: Employee Performance by Communication and Transformational Leadership Conditions

Communication $\times$ Leadership Condition	N	Task Perf.	Contextual	Service	Absenteeism
Low Comm + Low Transformational	180	2.91	2.78	5.50	2.90
Low Comm + High Transformational	140	3.24	3.11	6.30	2.00
High Comm + Low Transformational	200	3.74	3.61	7.30	1.00
High Comm + High Transformational	260	4.28	4.16	8.60	0.50

Employees experiencing both high effective communication and high transformational leadership achieved the best outcomes across every performance measure. Their mean task performance was 4.28 compared with 2.91 among employees experiencing low communication and low transformational leadership. Contextual performance increased from 2.78 to 4.16, while service-delivery ratings increased from 5.50 to 8.60. Absenteeism fell from 2.90 to 0.50 days per month.

6. Interpretation of the Transformational Leadership Moderation

The moderation result supports Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational leaders communicate organizational vision, provide encouragement, stimulate employee thinking, recognize individual contributions, and create a sense of shared purpose. Consequently, information transmitted within such an environment may be more credible, meaningful, and actionable. This finding is consistent with public-administration evidence summarized by Bao *et al.* (2025) [3], which associates transformational leadership with employee motivation, attitudes, behaviour, performance, and innovation.

7. Moderating Effect of Laissez-Faire Leadership

The interaction between laissez-faire leadership and communication was negative ($\beta = -.23$), indicating that laissez-faire leadership weakens the positive effect of effective communication on employee performance. Communication mechanisms may exist, but their potential benefits can be undermined where leaders avoid decisions, fail to clarify responsibilities, provide inadequate feedback, or remain unavailable when employees require direction.

Table 4: Summary of Moderation Effects

Moderator	Interaction Effect	Interpretation
Transformational Leadership $\times$ Communication	.19***	Strengthens communication effect
Laissez-Faire Leadership $\times$ Communication	-.23***	Weakens communication effect

Note. *** $p < .001$.

8. Discussion in Relation to Social Exchange Theory

The results can additionally be interpreted through Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) [6]. Employees evaluate the quality of their relationships with supervisors and organizations and respond through reciprocal behaviour. When organizations provide clear information, opportunities for feedback, supportive leadership, and meaningful participation, employees may reciprocate through stronger

task performance, cooperation, initiative, attendance, and service orientation. The exceptionally strong outcomes recorded under high communication and high transformational leadership support this reciprocal mechanism.

9. Implications for Nigerian Civil-Service Performance

The findings imply that improving employee performance requires integrated communication systems that allow information to move effectively downward, upward, horizontally, and digitally. Horizontal communication deserves particular attention because it emerged as the strongest communication dimension. The relatively weak upward communication result indicates the need for credible employee-voice mechanisms. Digitalization should be accompanied by leadership and organizational reforms, because technological platforms cannot independently resolve communication deficiencies. Finally, leadership development should emphasize vision communication, employee engagement, constructive feedback, intellectual stimulation, mentoring, and participatory problem-solving.

10. Overall Discussion

Taken together, the results demonstrate that effective communication significantly improves employee performance in the Nigerian Civil Service, but the magnitude of this benefit depends substantially on leadership style. Communication explained a meaningful proportion of task-performance variation, with horizontal communication emerging as the strongest dimension. Transformational leadership amplified the positive communication-performance relationship, whereas laissez-faire leadership diminished it. The findings therefore support an integrated communication-leadership approach to civil-service reform.

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between effective communication, leadership style, and employee performance in the Nigerian Civil Service, with particular emphasis on the moderating role of leadership style. Evidence was drawn from 1,200 civil servants across six ministries within the Federal Civil Service in Abuja and selected state civil services in Rivers, Lagos, and Kano States.

The findings demonstrate that effective communication constitutes an important organizational resource for improving employee performance. The overall communication index had a significant positive effect on task performance, while horizontal communication emerged as the strongest individual communication predictor. The relatively weaker level and predictive contribution of upward communication indicate that employee voice remains an area requiring improvement.

Transformational leadership significantly strengthened the relationship between effective communication and employee performance. Employees experiencing high communication effectiveness alongside high transformational leadership recorded the highest task performance, contextual performance, and service-delivery ratings and the lowest absenteeism. Conversely, laissez-faire leadership weakened the beneficial effect of communication.

The study consequently concludes that effective communication and transformational leadership are

mutually reinforcing drivers of employee performance in the Nigerian Civil Service. Sustainable improvement in public-sector productivity and service delivery requires an integrated approach in which communication reform, digital transformation, employee participation, and leadership development are pursued simultaneously.

2. Recommendations

1. Strengthen horizontal communication across departments and ministries

MDAs should institutionalize mechanisms that encourage regular communication among employees, departments, and professional units through cross-functional teams, coordination meetings, collaborative digital workspaces, joint project committees, and inter-ministerial working groups.

2. Develop more effective upward communication and employee-voice mechanisms

Heads of Service, permanent secretaries, directors, and departmental supervisors should create accessible channels through which employees can communicate suggestions, operational difficulties, complaints, and innovative ideas without fear of victimization.

3. Improve the clarity and timeliness of downward communication

Administrative directives, policies, performance expectations, job responsibilities, and organizational changes should be communicated clearly and promptly, with opportunities for clarification and feedback.

4. Expand and integrate ICT-mediated communication

The Nigerian Civil Service should continue investing in secure organizational email systems, intranets, electronic document-management platforms, virtual collaboration systems, and other appropriate digital communication technologies.

5. Provide continuous digital-communication training

Civil servants should receive periodic training in official digital communication, electronic records, information security, virtual collaboration, document sharing, data protection, and responsible use of approved messaging platforms.

6. Institutionalize transformational leadership development

Leadership-development programmes should emphasize vision communication, inspirational motivation, mentoring, employee development, constructive feedback, participatory decision-making, emotional intelligence, conflict management, and innovation.

7. Reduce laissez-faire leadership practices

Ministries should identify and address passive or avoidant managerial behaviours and hold supervisors accountable for delayed decisions, inadequate feedback, weak supervision, and unresolved workplace problems.

8. Integrate communication and leadership into performance-management systems

Managers should be evaluated on how effectively they disseminate information, provide feedback, encourage

employee voice, coordinate teams, resolve communication problems, and develop subordinate employees.

9. Promote a culture of feedback and continuous improvement

Ministries should establish regular performance-feedback sessions through which supervisors and employees jointly review objectives, challenges, achievements, and developmental needs.

10. Link communication reform to service-delivery outcomes

MDAs should establish measurable indicators linking internal communication improvements with processing time, employee productivity, citizen complaints, service quality, absenteeism, and other relevant performance measures.

3. Policy Implications

Communication and leadership should be incorporated explicitly into civil-service modernization strategies rather than treated solely as internal human-resource issues. The Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, state Heads of Service, and relevant public-sector reform institutions should develop minimum standards for internal communication, managerial feedback, digital collaboration, and leadership competence across MDAs. Investments in digital government are likely to produce stronger outcomes when accompanied by appropriate leadership and organizational capacity.

4. Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributes to organizational behaviour and public-administration literature by demonstrating that leadership style serves not only as a direct antecedent of employee performance but also as an important moderator of the communication-performance relationship. It also contributes by disaggregating effective communication into downward, upward, horizontal, and ICT-mediated dimensions and by employing multiple performance indicators.

5. Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should employ longitudinal designs, extend the analysis to additional states, local-government systems, government agencies, and parastatals, and examine additional moderating or mediating variables such as organizational culture, employee engagement, psychological safety, trust in management, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, digital competence, and perceived organizational support. Qualitative interviews could also provide deeper insight into why upward communication remains comparatively weak and how leadership behaviour shapes employees' willingness to communicate and innovate.

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