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SERVANT LEADERSHIP, AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP, AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP STYLES ON EMPLOYEE VOICE BEHAVIOUR, ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT, AND JOB PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between servant leadership, authentic leadership, and ethical leadership and employee outcomes comprising employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance in selected manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. A correlational cross-sectional survey design was adopted, with a sample of 258 employees drawn from eight manufacturing companies using stratified random sampling. Validated instruments were adapted on a 5-point Likert scale. Spearman Rank Correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed. Results revealed that all three leadership styles positively and significantly predicted employee outcomes. The model accounted for 87.4% of variance in employee outcomes ($R^2 = .874$, $F = 285.43$, $p < .001$), with ethical leadership as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .374$). Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Learning Theory, the study concludes that leaders who demonstrate integrity, stewardship, and ethical conduct create environments where employees speak up, commit, and perform at higher levels.

Keywords: *Servant Leadership, Authentic Leadership, Ethical Leadership, Employee Voice Behaviour, Organisational Commitment, Job Performance*

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era characterised by heightened market competition, technological disruption, and workforce diversity, the leadership practices adopted by organisations have come under increasing scholarly and practical scrutiny. Leadership is the fulcrum upon which organisational survival and growth pivot, and the imperative for leaders to cultivate high-performing, committed, and vocal workforces has never been more urgent—particularly in developing economies such as Nigeria, where human capital remains the most potent competitive asset.

Rivers State, as Nigeria's principal oil-producing and industrial hub, hosts a diverse manufacturing sector facing challenges including infrastructure deficits, regulatory uncertainties, and quality-standard pressures. Within this context, leadership approaches determine not only operational efficiency but also the extent to which employees engage in constructive extra-role behaviours. Three contemporary paradigms have gained considerable traction: servant leadership, rooted in Greenleaf's (1977) philosophy of service over self-aggrandisement; authentic leadership, emphasising self-awareness, relational transparency, and internalised moral perspective (Walumbwa et al., 2008); and ethical leadership, focusing on normatively appropriate conduct (Brown et al., 2005).

Despite a growing body of literature in Western and Asian contexts, their combined examination in the Nigerian manufacturing sector remains sparse. This study fills this gap by empirically testing the triadic relationship between these leadership styles and employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance, anchored in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Manufacturing firms in Rivers State continue to grapple with persistent employee disengagement, low organisational commitment, and diminished job performance. Prevailing leadership approaches remain largely transactional, hierarchical, and at times coercive, suppressing employee voice and eroding trust. When leaders fail to prioritise follower well-being and ethical grounding, organisational commitment weakens and job performance across all levels suffers (Bambale et al., 2011; Horsfall, 2026).

While existing studies have explored transformational leadership in Nigerian contexts, the specific roles of servant, authentic, and ethical leadership in shaping employee outcomes in manufacturing firms in Rivers State remain insufficiently theorised and empirically validated. This study therefore provides empirical evidence to guide both scholarship and managerial practice.

3. OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND HYPOTHESES

3.1 Objectives

This study investigates the relationship between servant, authentic, and ethical leadership styles and employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance in manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Specific objectives are: (i) to determine the relationship between servant leadership and the three employee outcomes; (ii) to ascertain the relationship between authentic leadership and the three outcomes; and (iii) to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and the three outcomes.

3.2 Research Questions

(i) What is the relationship between servant leadership style and employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance in manufacturing firms in Rivers State? (ii)

What is the relationship between authentic leadership style and these outcomes? (iii) What is the relationship between ethical leadership style and these outcomes?

3.3 Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between servant leadership style and employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance in manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between authentic leadership style and employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance in manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between ethical leadership style and employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance in manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (adapted from Brown et al., 2005; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2008) positions servant leadership, authentic leadership, and ethical leadership as independent variables influencing the dependent variables of employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance. The framework further integrates the moderating role of organisational context—specifically organisational culture and trust climate—consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Learning Theory. These moderating factors reflect the reality that leadership effectiveness does not operate in a vacuum but is shaped by the prevailing norms, values, and relational dynamics within the organisation.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory (SET): Blau (1964) posits that social behaviour results from an exchange process governed by norms of reciprocity. When leaders demonstrate genuine concern, invest in employee development, and act with integrity, employees reciprocate with increased effort, commitment, and voice behaviour (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Liden et al., 2008).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT): Deci and Ryan (1985) hold that human beings have innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Authentic leaders nurture autonomy; servant leaders satisfy relatedness through empathetic listening; ethical leaders reinforce psychological safety enabling voice (Morrison, 2011; Gagné& Deci, 2005).

Social Learning Theory (SLT): Bandura (1977) argues that people learn behaviours by observing significant others. Ethical leaders transmit moral norms through observational learning; authentic leaders provide behavioural templates; servant leaders model prosocial conduct that employees internalise and emulate (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

4.2 Leadership Dimensions and Employee Outcomes

Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) inverts the traditional hierarchy to serve follower needs through empowerment, humility, and accountability. Empowerment fosters initiative and organisational commitment (Liden et al., 2014); humility creates psychological safety that stimulates voice behaviour (Owens & Hekman, 2012); accountability cultivates high-trust environments that motivate performance.

Authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008) centres on self-awareness, relational transparency, and internalised moral perspective. Leaders who engage in continuous self-

reflection and honest information-sharing strengthen organisational commitment and create predictable, trusting environments that satisfy employees' psychological needs (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ilies et al., 2005).

Ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005) involves the demonstration of moral person qualities—honesty, trustworthiness, integrity—and moral manager behaviours—proactive ethical communication, fair reward allocation—alongside the creation of an ethical climate that reduces cognitive dissonance and enhances commitment and performance (Mayer et al., 2009; Treviño et al., 2000).

Employee voice behaviour is defined as voluntary expression of ideas and concerns intended to improve organisational functioning (Morrison, 2011). Organisational commitment comprises affective, continuance, and normative bonds (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Job performance encompasses task and contextual performance (Borman &Motowidlo, 1993). Evidence links values-based leadership consistently to these outcomes (Horsfall, 2026; Liden et al., 2014).

5. METHODOLOGY

A correlational cross-sectional survey design was adopted (Kerlinger, 1973). The target population comprised 1,580 employees across eight manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error and adjusting for 20% non-response, 380 questionnaires were distributed via stratified random sampling; 258 valid responses were retrieved (effective response rate: 67.9%).

Validated instruments adapted on a 5-point Likert scale included: the Servant Leadership Scale (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; $\alpha = .891$), the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Walumbwa et al., 2008; $\alpha = .912$), the Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005; $\alpha = .928$), Voice Behaviour scale (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; $\alpha = .874$), Organisational Commitment scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990; $\alpha = .903$), and Job Performance scale (Williams & Anderson, 1991; $\alpha = .886$). All scales exceeded Nunnally's (1978) reliability threshold of .70. Descriptive statistics, Spearman Rank Correlation, and Multiple Regression analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS v.26 at $p < 0.01$.

6. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demographic analysis revealed 61.2% male and 38.8% female respondents. Age distribution: 24.8% (18–30 yrs), 43.4% (31–40 yrs), 22.5% (41–50 yrs), and 9.3% (>50 yrs). Educational qualifications: WASC (12.0%), OND/HND (34.9%), B.Sc./B.Tech. (41.5%), and Postgraduate (11.6%). Tenure: under 5 years (31.4%), 5–10 years (38.4%), over 10 years (30.2%).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Servant Leadership	258	3.84	0.621	1.00	5.00
Authentic Leadership	258	3.76	0.583	1.00	5.00
Ethical Leadership	258	3.91	0.597	1.00	5.00
Employee Voice Behaviour	258	3.69	0.664	1.00	5.00
Organisational Commitment	258	3.82	0.611	1.00	5.00
Job Performance	258	3.77	0.629	1.00	5.00

Source: Survey Data (2026)

Table 2: Spearman Rank Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Servant Leadership	1.000	.841**	.793**	.693**	.718**	.671**
2. Authentic Leadership	.841**	1.000	.826**	.714**	.739**	.702**
3. Ethical Leadership	.793**	.826**	1.000	.728**	.751**	.719**
4. Employee Voice Behaviour	.693**	.714**	.728**	1.000	.812**	.784**
5. Organisational Commitment	.718**	.739**	.751**	.812**	1.000	.801**
6. Job Performance	.671**	.702**	.719**	.784**	.801**	1.000

*** Correlation significant at p < 0.01 (2-tailed). N = 258. Source: Survey Data (2026)*

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis (Composite Employee Outcomes)

Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.214	1.082	—	2.971	.003
Servant Leadership	.341	.048	.318	7.104	.000
Authentic Leadership	.387	.052	.361	7.442	.000
Ethical Leadership	.402	.049	.374	8.204	.000

Model Summary: $R = .935$, $R^2 = .874$, Adjusted $R^2 = .872$, $F(3, 254) = 285.43$, $p < .001$. Source: Survey Data (2026)

All three null hypotheses (H_{01}, H_{02}, H_{03}) were rejected at $p < 0.01$. Servant leadership (rho = .693–.718), authentic leadership (rho = .714–.739), and ethical leadership (rho = .719–.751) demonstrated strong, positive, and significant relationships with all three employee outcomes. Multiple regression confirmed that the three styles jointly explained 87.4% of variance, with ethical leadership as the strongest predictor (β = .374), followed by authentic leadership (β = .361) and servant leadership (β = .318).

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results provide robust empirical support for the positive impacts of servant, authentic, and ethical leadership on employee outcomes. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Liden et al., 2014), leaders who prioritise follower development and demonstrate accountability elicit reciprocal voice, commitment, and performance. The role of humility in reducing the social risks of speaking up strongly supports Owens and Hekman (2012), who argued that humble leaders model an openness to learning that signals to followers that upward input is safe and valued. In manufacturing firmswhere hierarchical authority can easily stifle constructive dissentservant leaders who deliberately create space for employee contributions unlock a critical organisational resource.

Findings for authentic leadership corroborate Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Relational transparency and internalised moral perspective create a predictable, trusting environment satisfying employees' needs for autonomy and relatedness (Avolio &

Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). When employees perceive their leaders as self-aware, consistent, and morally anchored, they experience a greater sense of psychological safety that translates into higher levels of proactive voice behaviour and a deeper sense of organisational belonging. This finding reinforces Ilies et al.'s (2005) assertion that authentic leadership represents a foundational form of leadership from which other positive outcomes cascade.

Ethical leadership emerged as the strongest predictor (β = .374), consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; Brown & Treviño, 2006). In manufacturing contexts where operational integrity, worker safety, and fair practices are critical, leaders serving as moral persons and moral managers establish normative clarity that reduces cognitive dissonance, strengthens commitment, and elevates performance (Mayer et al., 2009; Treviño et al., 2000). The trickle-down effect of ethical leadership identified by Mayer et al. (2009) is particularly salient in hierarchical manufacturing environments, where supervisory behaviours set the normative tone for entire work units. The comparatively high Spearman correlations for ethical leadership across all three outcome variables (rho = .719–.751) reinforce this point and underscore the critical importance of character-based leadership in Nigeria's manufacturing sector.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that servant, authentic, and ethical leadership styles are vital drivers of employee voice behaviour, organisational commitment, and job performance in manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Together, these values-based leadership paradigms foster a high-trust, psychologically safe, and ethically aligned workplace culture. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are advanced:

(i) Institutionalise continuous servant leadership training—covering empowerment, humility, and accountability—for operational and executive management in manufacturing firms.

(ii) Implement 360-degree feedback and self-awareness coaching to cultivate authentic leadership qualities and relational transparency across management levels.

(iii) Establish robust ethical climate structures, including transparent reporting mechanisms and moral recognition programmes, reinforcing ethical leadership as a core organisational competency.

(iv) Build formal channels for employee voice and constructive dissent, ensuring that psychological safety translates into operational innovation and sustained competitive advantage.

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