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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF GOVERNMENT PARASTATALS IN RIVERS STATE.

By

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Abstract

This study explores the association between strategic leadership and operational performance of government parastatals in Rivers State, Nigeria. The dimensions of strategic leadership in the study were visionary leadership and relationship management, while operational performance was measured by resource utilisation and service delivery efficiency. The population comprises 495 civil servants. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table, 217 respondents were chosen as the sample, and 202 of those responses (93.5%) were valid and analysed. Data was gathered by structured questionnaires and evaluated with Spearman's rank-order correlation, facilitated by SPSS version 25. Visionary leadership has a strong association with service delivery efficiency and resources utilisation. Relationship management was strongly linked to the resource's utilisation and service delivery efficiency. The study concludes that there is a positive correlation between strategic leadership and the operational performance of government parastatals in Rivers State. The study recommends the enhancement of visionary leadership and relationship management to achieve effective operational performance.

Keywords: Strategic leadership, Visionary leadership, Relationship management, Operational performance.

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1.0 Introduction

Government parastatals are the instruments for policy implementation, regulation control, service, employment creation, research development and economic development. The services they provide make them an important sector in the nation's economic development. However, despite their vital roles in carrying out government policies, they often have problems with poor implementation of services as a result of bureaucratic inefficiency, poor compliance with rules, poor funding, and corruption (Oluwagbade et al., 2024). Their efficiency and goal achievement lie in performance, which has a direct effect on national development and the quality of public services. This unit efficiency determines optimal usage of resources and government reliability in the provision of public services.

High-performing government parastatals drive economic growth by generating revenue, facilitating trade, and enhancing industrial development. Many of the government agencies, such as NNPC, Customs, and FIRS, are the organs for generating revenue through profits from services, taxes, and royalties, and these are used to support government budgets. However. The efficiency of these agencies in providing services depends on their ability to reduce waste and corruption that are common in government offices, as well as to build trust and confidence between the agencies and the people they represent (Ariyo-Edu & Afolabi, 2024; Rashid et al., 2025). When government agencies fulfil their obligations by achieving operational excellence through efficiency, it becomes easier for the nation to grow, reach its goals, and expand the economy; as a result, society also flourishes.

Parastatals' accountability and transparency in operations reflect the efficiency of their operational performance. When work is executed effectively, wise, smart choices are made, resources are well managed, policies are well implemented, and there is better service delivery (Oluwagbade et al., 2024). When this agency's operational performance improves, it enhances innovativeness, flexibility, and responsiveness in adapting to changing environmental requirements, which in turn boosts operational performance—an important factor in achieving the nation's sustainable development goals and building trust and loyalty among the public. According to Ariyo-Edu & Afolabi (2024), poor funding of the budget, lack of transparency, and inadequate accountability are attributed to poor performance in the government agencies. Urgent attention is necessary to explore the elements responsible for the poor operational efficiency of government parastatals, as pinpointing opportunities for change and advancement will help the agencies identify their weaknesses and the opportunities they can leverage to enhance their efficiency.

For government parastatals to reach their goals, they need to embrace strategic leadership, carry out appropriate implementation of policies and service delivery, and improve approaches to work. The inefficiency in task execution has made it difficult for many agencies to execute their primary functions of implementing state policies, stimulating economic growth, and providing essential services. Owotemu's (2024) study posits that an agency with strategic leadership styles gains results, which impact organisational outcomes. However, examining inappropriate bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource distribution, and ineffective leadership is crucial for enhancing job performance. This study necessitates the importance of having strategic leaders who can address the reoccurring challenges and improve performance in a dynamic, changing environment.

Strategic leaders foresee the better ways of achieving goals and objectives, make decisions, maintain flexibility, and adapt to changing political and economic situations. envision strategic thinking, initiating viable changes to propel the agencies towards accountability,

efficiency, and better service delivery, irrespective of societal changes, bureaucracies, and political pressures. These leadership styles affect a leader's ability to operate efficiently. Using the best style is necessary in enhancing transparency, a culture of responsibility, and efficiency in government institutions. Despite several changes made in Nigeria over the last few years to improve the performance of the public sector through restructuring, reducing costs, and encouraging public-private partnerships (Reuters, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025), much progress has not been recorded.

Even with these efforts, there is still a lot of disagreement about how well strategic leadership can drive these changes and achieve the required results. It is critical to know how strategic leadership affects operational performance in government parastatals so that policies and administrative practices can be better. Despite several studies on strategic leadership (Ariyo-Edu & Afolabi, 2024; Reuters, 2024; Owotemu, 2024) and operational performance (Fayyaz et al., 2025; Oluwagbade et al., 2024; Rashid et al., 2025), a gap in knowledge exists on the influence ofstrategic leadership and operational performance of government parastatals inRivers State. This study will fill the observed gap in knowledge by investigating the influence of strategic leadership on the operational performance of government parastatals in Rivers State, aiming to offer insights for enhanced performance within these vital institutions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Government agencies in Rivers State are facing several challenges in executing their job roles, which has affected their operational performance. Many of these agencies are inefficient because leadership appointments are often based on political considerations rather than on competence; as a result, accountability in job roles has significantly decreased, leading to abandoned projects, poor resource utilisation, and slow administrative processes that hinder timely decision-making and service delivery. Adue's (2024) study has shown the relevance of administrative control to staff productivity in Rivers State parastatals. The findings in this study show a strong positive correlation, indicating that for the agency to be effective, administrative management is relevant, as any oversight could lead to lower performance.

Some other problems that affect the government agency performance are corruption, mismanagement, political interference, inadequate funding, bureaucracy and red tape that slow administrative processes in timely decision-making and service delivery, and poor strategic leadership, as many agencies lack visionary leaders who can set goals, inspire staff, and drive reforms. There are also weak accountability mechanisms, overstaffing and ghost workers, resistance to change, low employee motivation in the form of poor remuneration, delayed promotions, weak reward systems, lack of transparency, inadequate use of technology, poor maintenance culture, duplication of functions, legal and policy gaps, and external debt and financial pressure. Some of these agencies struggle under debt burdens, limiting their effectiveness.

The consequences of inefficiency in operational performance are mismanagement of public funds, not meeting targets, failing to meet the developmental goals, eroding public trust, and poor service delivery, which makes social and economic problems worse and makes people lose faith in government programmes. Furthermore, these parastatals may not be able to grow or change to meet new governance needs since they don't have competent leaders or a clear plan. Ojogiwa (2021) emphasised strategic leadership in the transformation of public sector operations to reduce inefficiencies, which might likely continue without visionary leadership.

Several efforts have been made to address the poor conditions of Nigerian government parastatals, including changes in the approaches used to run programmes aimed at enhancing people's skills. Unfortunately, the approaches that have been used lack the strategic planning and coordinated implementation necessary for long-term improvement. Onu (2021) emphasised the need for strategic leadership in public sector management to enhance performance. The expected improvement in operational performance did not materialise, despite the efforts to improve operational efficiency. This highlights the necessity of enhancing strategic leadership to improve the operational performance of government parastatals in Rivers State. Having a clear vision, ensuring an organization's goals match its resources, and encouraging creativity and responsibility will assist in achieving efficiency.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between strategic leadership and operational performance of government parastatals in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the link between visionary leadership and service delivery efficiency of the government parastatals in Rivers State.
2. Investigate the association between visionary leadership and resource utilisation of the government parastatals in Rivers State.
3. Examine the relationship between relationship management and service delivery efficiency of the government parastatals in Rivers State.
4. Determine the relationship between relationship management and resource utilisation of the government parastatals in Rivers State.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between visionary leadership and service delivery efficiency of the government parastatals in Rivers State?
2. How does visionary leadership relate to the resource utilisation of the government parastatals in Rivers State?
3. How does relationship management relate to the service delivery efficiency of the government parastatals in Rivers State?
4. What is the relationship between relationship management and resource utilisation of the government parastatals in Rivers State?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

This study established and tested the following research hypotheses:

H_{o1}: There is no significant relationship between visionary leadership and service delivery efficiency of the government parastatals in Rivers State.

H_{o2}: There is no significant relationship between visionary leadership and resource utilisation of the government parastatals in Rivers State.

$H_{o3:}$ There is no significant relationship between relationship management and service delivery efficiency of the government parastatals in Rivers State.

H_{o4}: There is no significant relationship between relationship management and resource utilisation of the government parastatals in Rivers State.

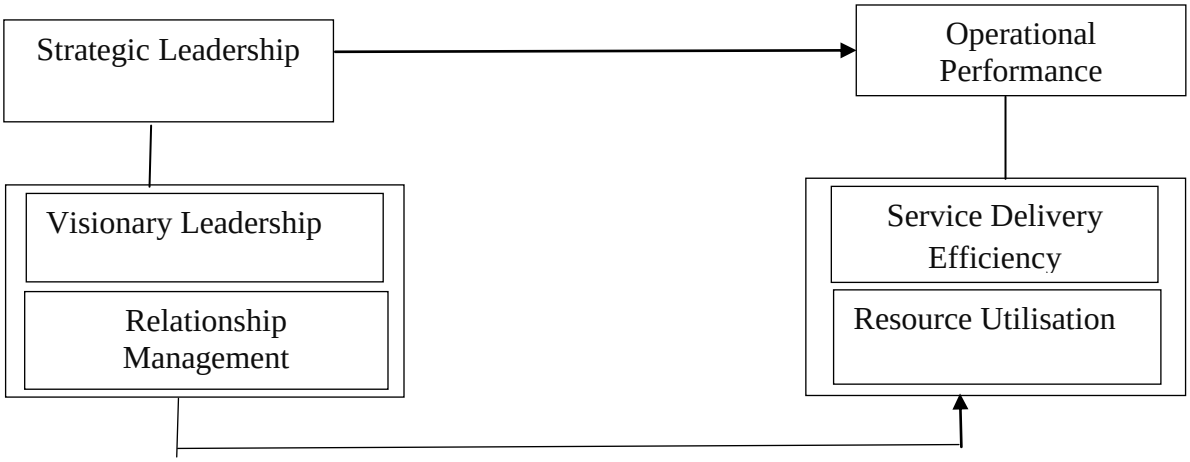


Figure 1: A conceptual framework of strategic leadership and operational performance

Source: Adapted from Hitt et al. (2020) and Oluwagbade et al. (2024).

2.0 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Strategic Leadership

The ability of leaders to set clear goals is crucial for the nation's development. The process involves successfully translating government policies into actionable programs. A strategic leader must be flexible, transparent, and accountable, and they must have the ability to allocate financial, human, and technological resources efficiently by giving out power to make the strategic changes that are needed to achieve the organisation's goals (Hitt et al., 2020). Strategic leaders foresee problems, inspire and empower workers to take advantage of opportunities, improve commitment and performance, and make sure that the organisation runs smoothly and stays in business. Strategic leadership also makes organisations more resilient by fostering a culture of accountability, innovation, and continuous development. Leaders who are strategically orientated help with decision-making, make operations run more smoothly, and create a culture of high performance to improve service delivery and the overall efficacy of the institution (Salam & Khan, 2021).

Visionary Leadership

Visionary leadership is when leaders can come up with and convey a powerful vision that motivates workers to work towards common goals. In government parastatals, visionary leaders are crucial for getting employees to work diligently, making sure that everyone is working towards the same goals, and pushing for changes that make the organisation run more smoothly (Kuratko et al., 2020). A strong vision gives you direction, sets performance goals, and a way to measure success in service delivery and growth within the organisation. Visionary leadership also encourages new ideas and the ability to change, which is important in public institutions because policies, rules, and social requirements are constantly changing. Visionary leaders set a forward-looking agenda that helps staff become ready for problems, come up with new ideas, and keep up high levels of performance. This makes the parastatal more relevant and impactful (Al-Swidi et al., 2021).

Relationship Management

In organisational leadership, relationship management means being able to build, keep, and use beneficial contacts with both internal and external stakeholders. In government parastatals, effective relationship management makes sure that they work well with other

agencies, private partners, and citizens, which improves coordination and operational efficiency (Wang & Ahmed, 2020). Strong relationships with stakeholders make it easier to share information, cut down on disagreements, and facilitate resources moving to help the institution reach its goals. Furthermore, managing relationships helps keep employees engaged and committed to the company.

2.2 Operational Performance

Operational performance refers to how efficiently and effectively a firm utilises its resources to achieve goals and objectives and carry out the expected tasks and services in the organisation. These resources could be in the form of people, technology, money and processes. In government parastatals, operational performance refers to how well the government utilises resources within these agencies to fulfil their mandates, which include generating revenue, managing infrastructure, delivering public services, and meeting the needs of stakeholders while achieving results (Ariyo-Edu & Afolabi, 2024). The efficiency of a government parastatal's use of funds, staff, and time determines its operational performance, ensuring maximum output and minimal waste. They must also ensure efficiency by using all resources to achieve the set targets, objectives, policies, and goals. Oluwagbade et al. (2024) suggest measuring operational performance through the agencies' service delivery, compliance, innovation, adaptability, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Service Delivery Efficiency

Service delivery efficiency is the ability of the government agency to provide cost-effective, reliable, timely, and high-quality services regularly to the society in a manner that reflects a reduction of unnecessary waste. This service must be rendered appropriately in relation to the resources used. According to NUPRC (2024). Service delivery efficiency shows how well government agencies realise goals and the expectations of the public. Service delivery efficiency in an organisation dimension are timeliness, which has to do with the speed of service provision, accessibility, cost-effectiveness reliability and transparency in processes. An organisation whose services are efficient will minimise bureaucratic delays, reduce operational waste, and ensure optimal utilisation of resources.

Service delivery efficiency could also be measured by service processing time, service coverage, the public perception of fairness, reliability, quality, error rate and the degree of resource utilisation. However, improving service delivery efficiency in any of the government agencies requires adequate strategic planning, process improvement, and performance monitoring. Prioritising efficiency enables the government agencies to respond swiftly to public needs, foster trust, and strengthen institutional legitimacy (Ariyo-Edu & Afolabi, 2024).

Resource Utilisation

Resource utilisation is the optimal use of available resources the organisation possesses to achieve organisational goals effectively and efficiently. These resources could be human, financial, material, and technological. Government agencies enhance most of their resources by efficiently ensuring that staff, budgets, infrastructure, and technology are used to make operations more efficient (Oluwagbade et al., 2024). The available resources in the government agencies are human resources represented by the civil servants, technical staff, and management teams; financial resources; material resources (infrastructure, equipment, machinery, and vehicles); technological resources; and speed and timeliness in executing

tasks. Accountability, sustainability, and effective services depend on the optimal use of these resources.

2.3 Resource-Based View (RBV) theory.

The RBV is a strategic management theory developed by Wernerfelt (1984) and expanded by Barney (1991). The core ideal of this theory is that an organization's resources and capabilities are the key drivers of its sustained competitive advantage and higher performance. The theory asserts that to be competitive, an organisation must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. RBV suggests that human resources should be skilled and motivated employees, who are critical for delivering quality services. The institution's financial resources should be adequate and well utilised to enhance sustainable funding; the use of technological resources will boost service efficiency, and there should be strong leadership, accountability structures, and an innovation culture that will make the agencies more effective. RBV makes the agencies focus on their internal strengths rather than blaming external factors. Look for sustainable ways to improve performance and encourage investment in human capacity, technology, and innovation.

2.4 Empirical Studies

Udomkijmongkol(2025) study investigates the impact of strategic leadership on the operational efficiency of administrative districts in Thailand. The survey study comprises 254 employees as its sample; the study uses multiple regression for the analysis. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between strategic leadership and operational effectiveness. The study was carried out within the provincial administrations of Thailand, emphasising the need for similar research in governmental parastatals in other nations to improve generalisability.

Habeeb & Eyupoglu (2024) examine strategic planning and transformational leadership for achieving the organisational performance of higher education institutions in Nigeria. This sample consists of 388 staff from 48 state universities in Nigeria. The findings reveal that strategic planning positively correlates with transformational leadership and organisational performance. The study concludes that strategic planning and transformational leadership have a positive and significant relationship with the organisational performances of higher education institutions in Nigeria.

Korir & Moronge (2016) examine the drivers of the implementation of corporate strategic plans in government parastatals in Kenya. The target population comprises 327 employees of PCK, while the sample comprises 176 employees. Questionnaires were used to collect data and analysed using SPSS (s. A pilot study was conducted to pretest the validity and reliability of instruments for data collection. The study findings reveal that leadership strategies have a positive relationship with the implementation of corporate strategic plans.

Haule (2024) explores the effect of strategic leadership techniques on the performance of the Kigamboni Municipal Council in Tanzania. A quantitative cross-sectional design was used for the study. The sample comprises 61 councillors and staff. Statistical tools were used for data analysis. The findings reveal that strategic leadership correlates with organisational performance.

3.0 Methodology

The cross-sectional survey was used in this study. The accessible populations comprise 495 employees of government parastatals in Rivers State. A sample of 217 was derived using the

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. The primary data was obtained using a well-structured questionnaire. The independent variable, strategic leadership, was operationalised using two dimensions: visionary leadership and relationship management. Each construct was measured with a set of five items. For instance, visionary leadership was assessed with items such as "The leader clearly communicates a compelling vision for the parastatal." Similarly, relationship management was measured with items such as "The leader maintains effective and supportive relationships with employees and stakeholders." The criterion variable, operational performance, was measured using two dimensions: service delivery efficiency and resource utilisation. Service delivery efficiency was assessed with items such as "Public services are delivered promptly and meet quality standards." Resource utilisation was also measured with items such as "Resources are allocated and used efficiently to achieve organisational goals." Face and content validity were used to determine the validity of the instrument used in this investigation. The reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's Alpha reliability level of 0.7 was used in the investigation. Values above 0.7 are considered to indicate composite reliability. Spearman's rank correlation analyses were used for the analysis.

4.0 Results and Discussion

217 questionnaires were distributed, but only 202 (93.5%) copies were returned, and this constitutes the valid questionnaire. The hypothesis test is undertaken at a 95.5% confidence interval, and the decision rule is stated below.

Where $P < 0.05$ = Reject the null hypotheses

Where $P > 0.05$ = Accept the null hypothesis

Table 1: Correlations Between Visionary Leadership and Dimensions Of Operational Performance

			Visionary Leadership	Service Delivery Efficiency	Resource Utilisation
Spearman's Rho	Visionary Leadership	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.765**	.755**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Service Delivery Efficiency	Correlation Coefficient	.765**	1.000	.735**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Resource Utilisation	Correlation Coefficient	.755**	.735**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	202	202	202

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2025.

Visionary Leadership and Service Delivery Efficiency: As shown in Table 1, the Spearman's rho value is 0.765 ($p = 0.000$), which is less than the significance threshold of 0.05. The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 0.585, indicating that approximately 58.5% of the variation in service delivery efficiency can be explained by visionary leadership. Based on these results, the null hypothesis (Ho_1) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (Ha_1) is accepted. This indicates a significant andpositive relationship between visionary leadership and service delivery efficiency.

Visionary Leadership and Resource Utilisation: Table 1 reveals a Spearman's rho value of 0.755 (p = 0.000), which is also below the alpha level of 0.05. The r^2 value of 0.570 suggests that 57.7% of the variance in resource utilisation is attributable to visionary leadership. Consequently, the null hypothesis (Ho_2) is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This confirms a strong and positive relationship between visionary leadership and resource utilisation.

Table 2: Correlations between Relationship Management and the Dimension of Operational Performance

			Relationship Management	Service Delivery Efficiency	Resource Utilisation
Spearman's rho	Relationship Management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.795**	.775**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Service Delivery Efficiency	Correlation Coefficient	.795**	1.000	.740**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	202	202	202
	Resource Utilisation	Correlation Coefficient	.775**	.740**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	202	202	202

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2025.

Relationship Management and Service Delivery Efficiency: According to Table 2, the Spearman's rho value is 0.795 (p = 0.000), which is below the significance level of 0.05. The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 0.632, indicating that 63.2% of the variation in service delivery efficiency is explained by relationship management. Given this result, the null hypothesis (Ho_3) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (Ha_3) is accepted. This observation demonstrates a strong and significant positive relationship between relationship management and service delivery efficiency.

Relationship Management and Resource Utilisation: As shown in Table 2, the Spearman's rho value is 0.775 (p = 0.000), which is less than the 0.05 significance level. The r^2 value is 0.601, indicating that relationship management accounts for 60.1% of the variation in resource utilisation. Based on this evidence, the null hypothesis (Ho_4) is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This suggests a strong, significant, and positive relationship between relationship management and resource utilisation.

Discussion of Finding

The data in Table 1 shows that visionary leadership has a strong, positive effect on both aspects of operational success. The Spearman's rho value of 0.765 (p = 0.000) between visionary leadership and service delivery efficiency, along with a coefficient of determination (r^2) of 0.585, indicates that visionary leadership accounts for about 58.5% of the variation in service delivery efficiency. The correlation between visionary leadership and resource utilisation, indicated by a rho value of 0.755 (p = 0.000) and an r^2 value of 0.570, signifies

that 57.0% of the variation in resource utilisation can be attributed to visionary leadership. This study's results indicated that visionary leadership has a big and important positive effect on how well government parastatals in Rivers State deliver services. This result conforms with Akinwale and George (2022), that visionary leadership correlates with service quality and efficiency in Nigerian public sector organisations. The findings also agrees with Ene and Chukwu's (2023) conclusion that visionary leaders have a significant relationship with organisational performance.

Table 2 further shows that relationship management has a strong link to operational performance. The association between relationship management and service delivery efficiency is correlated with 0.795 ($p = 0.000$) and $r^2 = 0.632$. This means that effective relationship management accounts for 63.2% of the differences in service delivery efficiency. Similarly, relationship management is positively correlated with resource utilisation (rho = 0.775, $p = 0.000$, $r^2 = 0.601$), indicating that 60.1% of the variance in resource utilisation can be attributed to effective relationship management. The findings of this study underscore the imperative for government parastatals in Rivers State to allocate resources towards leadership development programmes that enhance visionary competencies and relationship management skills. These kinds of interventions are particularly important for improving public services, getting the most out of resources, and keeping operations running smoothly. This observation is in line with what Onuoha and Eze (2021) found: that relational leadership makes government-owned businesses more committed and attentive to customers. In the same way, Adeleke and Yusuf (2022) found that relationship management has a big effect on how quickly public institutions respond and how happy customers are.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examines the bond between strategic leadership and operational success in government parastatals in Rivers State. Visionary leadership and relationship management were used as the dimensions of strategic leadership, while the criterion variable (operational performance) was measured with service delivery efficiency and resource utilisation. The findings revealed a strong and significant association between the dimensions of strategic leadership and operational performance. Visionary leadership substantially correlates with service delivery efficiency and resource utilisation, with 58.5% and 57.0% variances, respectively. Moreover, relationship management has a significantly positive association with service delivery efficiency and resource utilisation, accounting for 63.2% and 60.1% of the variances, respectively. This study concludes that strategic leadership has a significant and positive relationship with the operational performance of the government parastatal in Rivers State. The study suggests that government parastatals should enhance robust visionary and relationship management skills for superior service delivery outcomes and efficient resource utilisation to improve their performance effectively and sustainably.

6.0 Recommendations

1. The government agencies should provide leaders with excellent visionary leadership skills to propel all workers towards providing excellent service through regular strategy discussions, offering leadership development programmes, and setting up performance-based accountability structures.
2. The leaders should be educated to use vision in their approaches in achieving long-term goals and when they manage and distribute resources. Effectively. Digital resource-tracking systems and performance-based budgeting could help achieve these objectives.
3. The agencies should build strong personal and professional ties to improve the quality of services and encourage collaboration, teamwork, and stakeholder participation.

4. The parastatal government should enhance stronger networks and collaborations, both inside and outside the organisation, for efficient use of resources.

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