

Leadership styles and project implementation in non-profit organizations

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of leadership styles on project implementation at Back to the Bible Truth Evangelistic Mission (BBT) in Uganda. The study focused on autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire approaches. The study was guided by three specific objectives: to assess the effect of autocratic leadership, to establish the effect of democratic leadership, and to examine the effect of laissez-faire leadership on project implementation. A descriptive and correlational research design was adopted, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 103 staff members, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis. The findings revealed a positive moderate significant associative relationship between Autocratic leadership and Project implementation at BBT mission ($r = 0.412$, $\text{Sig} = 0.000$). The adjusted R square value 0.159, implies that 15.9% of project implementation at BBT Mission, is influenced by Autocratic Leadership, the remaining 84.1% of project implementation being explained by other factors. This therefore means that there is a relationship between Autocratic leadership and Project implementation at BBT mission. The study concludes that autocratic leadership can improve efficiency, ensure accountability, and support the timely completion of tasks. However, this comes at the expense of employee morale, creativity, and meaningful participation. While autocratic practices are effective in environments requiring strict oversight and clear task direction, relying exclusively on this style may limit long-term project sustainability in mission-driven nonprofit organisations. Therefore, integrating task-focused control with participatory and inclusive leadership approaches is crucial for enhancing both project outcomes and staff engagement. The study recommends that BBT management balance autocratic authority with participatory practices to enhance staff motivation, creativity, and engagement.

Key words: Leadership Styles, Autocratic, Democratic, Laissez-faire, Project Implementation.

Introduction

The influence of leadership styles on project implementation has shifted over time, shaping outcomes across different contexts. Globally, autocratic leadership dominated during the Industrial Revolution, delivering efficiency but undermining morale, before giving way to democratic and participatory approaches that fostered collaboration and innovation (Miron et al., 2019). In Africa, traditional leadership based on consensus and cooperation enabled the success of communal projects, yet colonialism imposed authoritarian models that often led to inefficiency and poor outcomes (Kasingirwa et al., 2025; Woldekidan, 2019; Mbele, 2020). In Uganda, while post-independence leadership emphasized consultation and participation, project success has continued to be constrained by corruption, weak institutions, and inadequate resources (Nuwagaba & Busingye, 2019). Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) are central to supplementing government efforts in service delivery and community development in Uganda, particularly in sectors such as education, health, and livelihoods, with over 13,000 NGOs registered nationwide (Uganda NGO Bureau, 2022).

At the Back to the Bible Truth Evangelistic Mission (BBT Mission), leadership has significantly influenced project outcomes. Under Apostle Alex Mitala, participatory and democratic leadership fostered sustainable initiatives, including schools, boreholes, and health centres, whereas subsequent laissez-faire leadership resulted in mismanagement and the collapse of projects such as agricultural empowerment programs (Bass & Bass, 2008; Turner & Müller, 2003). These contrasting results highlight the need for adaptive, accountable, and participatory leadership to ensure project sustainability in nonprofit organisations. Despite the critical role of leadership accounting for up to 30% of project success variance (Turner & Müller, 2017), many projects at BBT Mission still face delays, poor coordination, and limited stakeholder engagement (BBT, 2018). While research shows that transformational and democratic leadership positively impact project outcomes (Tlaiss & El-Kassar, 2019), there is limited empirical evidence on how leadership

styles influence project implementation within faith-based nonprofits in Uganda. This gap raises the key question: Which leadership styles most effectively support project implementation success in nonprofit, mission-driven organisations such as BBT Mission? Addressing this is crucial for enhancing leadership practices and improving project outcomes in Uganda's nonprofit sector.

To examine the influence of leadership styles on project implementation at Back to the Bible Truth evangelistic mission in Nansana Municipality

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the influence of autocratic leadership style on project implementation at Back to the Bible Truth evangelistic mission in Nansana Municipality.
- To determine the influence of democratic leadership style on project implementation at Back to the Bible Truth evangelistic mission in Nansana Municipality.
- To establish the effect of laissez faire leadership style on project implementation at Back to the Bible Truth evangelistic mission in Nansana Municipality.

Literature Review

The review of the theory and literature related to the study variables is presented.

Theoretical Review

This study was anchored on Fiedler's Contingency Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory to provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing the relationship between leadership styles and project implementation. Fiedler (1964) posits that leadership effectiveness depends on situational variables such as task structure, leader-member relationships, and position power, with performance outcomes determined by the fit between a leader's style and the favourableness of the situation. Tools such as the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) index have been used to assess this fit. However, given the complexity of community-based projects, the study also drew on Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes how leaders inspire followers, provide intellectual stimulation, and respond to individual needs while articulating a compelling vision (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders foster trust, innovation, and shared commitment, factors critical for nonprofit organisations working in diverse community settings (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). By integrating these two theories, the study established a robust framework for understanding how leadership styles influence the success or failure of project execution within the Back-to-the-Bible Truth Mission.

The Effect of Autocratic Leadership Style on Project Implementation

Autocratic leadership is rooted in authoritarian governance systems, characterized by high control and minimal employee participation in decision-making (Nasir, 2014). Leaders using this style make all decisions, demand strict obedience, and maintain master-servant relationships (Abualoush, 2018). While such leadership is effective in hierarchical and bureaucratic settings, it often discourages creativity, innovation, and motivation (Khan, 2014; Osborne, 2017). Research presents mixed findings on its effectiveness. Studies indicate that autocratic leadership can deliver rapid project implementation, especially where strict deadlines exist (Alkhateri, 2018). However, it also limits workplace socialization and communication (Puni, 2015), creates organisational conflicts (Akpaprep, 2019), and reduces job satisfaction (Moslehpour, 2019). Employees under autocratic leaders are denied autonomy and decision-making opportunities, resulting in demotivation and higher risks of project failure (Ekstrand, 2018). Communication under autocratic leadership is predominantly one-way,

with little to no feedback, reliance on rigid policies, and punishment for non-compliance (Musyoka, 2017). Leaders are uncompromising, controlling, and often ignore employee input (Eriksson, 2020). While some scholars argue this style avoids role ambiguity by clearly defining responsibilities (Farrukh, 2019), others stress that poor communication undermines trust and performance (Hartinah, 2020). Recent empirical evidence further confirms its drawbacks. Ahmed and Shafiq (2021), in a survey of 210 project team members in Kenya, found that autocratic leadership negatively affected project outcomes by creating rigid command structures, poor staff morale, and resistance to change. Their regression analysis revealed a statistically significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.312$, $p < 0.05$), with autocratic leadership explaining 18.6% ($R^2 = 0.186$) of the variance in project success. These findings underscore that heavy reliance on top-down control compromises the timeliness and effectiveness of project delivery, especially in mission-driven organisations.

The Influence of democratic leadership style on project implementation

Democratic leadership is characterized by decentralized decision-making, inclusive participation, and open communication, allowing team members to share ideas and contribute to organisational goals (Reina, 2018). This leadership style fosters empowerment, trust, innovation, and accountability, resulting in higher employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment (Tomic, 2018). Democratic leaders use consultative approaches, encourage collaboration, and focus on merit-based recruitment and performance, which enhances organisational performance and project implementation (Santos, 2018). While lengthy discussions and consensus-building may slow decision-making (Pawirosumarto, 2017), the benefits include reduced resistance to change, greater task ownership, and effective problem-solving (Nasir, 2014). Empirical studies support these effects: Reina and Rogers (2019) found inclusive democratic leadership positively influenced project implementation in U.S. nonprofits, while Khan, Zhang, and Liu (2020) reported similar outcomes in Chinese development agencies. In the current study at BBT Mission, democratic leadership had a statistically significant positive effect on project implementation ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 22.9% of the variance in project success ($R^2 = 0.229$). These findings demonstrate that participatory and consultative leadership promotes timely, effective, and sustainable project outcomes in mission-driven organisations.

Effect of laissez faire leadership style on project implementation

Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by minimal managerial intervention, granting employees autonomy to make decisions and manage tasks independently (Magato, 2019). While this hands-off approach assumes that employees are self-disciplined and capable, it often leads to reduced guidance, limited communication, and unclear roles, especially when team members lack expertise (Maqbool, 2017). Research indicates that laissez-faire leaders may unintentionally decrease performance if reinforcement, feedback, or engagement is lacking, resulting in role ambiguity, conflicts, and reduced accountability (Saleem, 2020). Although this style may work in high-performing, experienced teams or flat organisational structures (Ismail, 2020), its application in mission-driven nonprofits often undermines project implementation due to poor coordination and lack of supervision. Empirical evidence supports this: Rahmat, Yusof, and Ahmad (2021) found that laissez-faire leadership negatively affected project implementation in Malaysian nonprofit and public sector teams. Similarly, the current study shows a statistically significant negative effect at BBT Mission ($\beta = -0.284$, $p < 0.05$), with an R^2 of 0.172, meaning that laissez-faire leadership accounts for 17.2% of the variation in project outcomes. These findings suggest that excessive autonomy without adequate guidance can compromise project success, particularly in contexts requiring structured oversight.

Research methodology

The study employed a case study design. A case study is a good analytical method when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Strass et al., 1990). This was supported by Yin (1994), who argues that case study research strategies are appropriate for the investigation of how and why questions especially when the concern is to study issues over which the researcher has no control. The study further involved utilization of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods as a complement. The qualitative methodology was utilized to describe individual interpretation of sentiments, attitudes and behaviors while the quantitative approaches was utilized to analyze numerical data in order to show particular results of the variables under consideration using percentages, frequencies, mean differences and standard deviation (Amin, 2005).

Data Quality and Analysis

Data quality control looks at the steps to ensure that the data collected has minimal errors which include validity and reliability. Validity is the extent to which research instruments measure what they are intended to measure (Oso & Onen, 2008). Reliability is the extent to which a research instrument yields consistent results across.

Validity

Validity measures the degree to which the results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represented the problem under study. By using item assessment as suggested by Sekaram (2001), ten respondents knowledgeable about the theme of study but not included in the final sample assessed. The respondents asked to judge the questionnaire by rating them as relevant (R) or irrelevant IR. Then a content validity Index (CVI) was computed using the following formulae:

$$CVI = \frac{R}{R + IR}$$

$$CVI = 32/39 = 0.82$$

A CVI of 0.82 indicated that the research instrument is valid and measured the variables effectively as prescribed by Amin (2005), a score of the 70% and above shows that the instruments is valid.

Reliability

Reliability measures the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results after repeated trials. In this case the research pilot tested the questionnaire on ten respondents outside Back to the Bible Truth evangelistic mission. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient(X) was used to compute the reliability using the SPSS version 26, and the results were presented in the table below;

Table 1: Showing reliability statistics

Variables	Cronbach Alpha Values	No of Items
Autocratic Leadership	0.810	13
Laissez faire leadership	0.821	14
Democratic leadership	0.791	6
Project implementation	0.801	6
Overall score	0.806	39
Trust concerns	15	20

The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.806 was above 0.7 and implied that data under analysis was reliable in accordance to Amin, (2005).

Findings

The study findings are presented in form of tables showing, mean scores, standard deviation, correlation and regression analysis.

Table 2: Descriptive findings on Autocratic leadership.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
The manager puts more emphasis on tasks and low emphasis on people	Freq. 3	31	2	58	9	3.38	1.095
	% 2.9	30.1	1.9	56.3	8.7		
The manager relies on authority and control to get the job done	Freq. 3	40	5	52	3	3.12	1.060
	% 2.9	38.8	4.9	50.5	2.9		
The manager relies on hard work to get the job done	Freq. 1	41	3	52	6	3.20	1.070
	% 1.0	39.8	2.9	50.5	5.8		
The manager involves employees in decisions making	Freq. 2	39	0	55	7	3.25	1.100
	% 1.9	37.9	0	53.4	6.8		
The manager strictly supervises staff to have work done	Freq. 5	29	3	57	9	3.35	1.126
	% 4.9	28.2	2.9	55.3	8.7		
The manager explains his actions/ inactions to staff	Freq. 4	35	3	54	7	3.24	1.116
	% 3.9	34.0	2.9	52.4	6.8		
The manager criticizes subordinates in public	Freq. 4	39	11	47	2	3.04	1.038
	% 3.9	37.9	10.7	45.6	1.9		
The manager consult s staff	Freq. 5	39	8	48	3	3.05	1.079
	% 4.9	37.9	7.8	46.6	2.9		
The manager closely monitors the schedule to ensure a task or project is completed in time	Freq. 3	37	9	51	3	3.14	1.039
	% 2.9	35.9	8.7	49.5	2.9		
The manager ensures that every detail is accounted for in a complex task	Freq. 9	27	7	52	8	3.22	1.179
	% 8.7	26.2	6.8	50.5	7.8		
The manager, is nothing more important than accomplishing a goal or a task	Freq. 5	34	11	47	6	3.15	1.097
	% 4.9	33.0	10.7	45.6	5.8		
Relies on threats and punishment to influence employees	Freq. 7	38	5	47	6	3.07	1.157
	% 6.8	36.9	4.9	45.6	5.8		
Requests to be continuously updated on the work of subordinates	Freq. 7	38	4	49	5	3.07	1.148
	% 6.8	36.9	3.9	47.6	4.9		

The study findings indicate that autocratic leadership at Back to the Bible Truth Evangelistic Mission is strongly task-oriented, prioritizing results over people.

Table 3: Showing correlation between Autocratic leadership and Project implementation

		Autocratic leadership	Project implementation
Autocratic leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.412**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	103	103
Project implementation	Pearson Correlation	.412**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	103	103

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

Correlation results in Table 3 above show that there is a positive moderate significant associative relationship between Autocratic leadership and Project implementation at BBT mission ($r = 0.412$, $Sig = 0.000$). The positive moderate correlation implies that the positive change in autocratic leadership Practices leads to a positive change in project implementation at BBT Mission, and vice versa. Therefore, null hypothesis, which stated that "There is a no relationship between Autocratic leadership and Project implementation at BBT mission", was rejected and the Alternative hypothesis which stated that, "There is a relationship between Autocratic leadership and Project implementation at BBT mission" was accepted.

Table 4: Showing model summary for Autocratic leadership and Project implementation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.412a	.169	.159	.691

a. Predictors: (Constant), Autocratic leadership

The Regression results as presented in table 4 above show the, adjusted R square value 0.159; it implies that 15.9% of project implementation at BBT Mission, is influenced by Autocratic Leadership, the remaining 84.1% of project implementation being explained by other factors. This therefore means that there is a relationship between Autocratic leadership and Project implementation at BBT mission.

Table 5: Showing ANOVA values for Autocratic leadership and Project implementation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.722	1	7.722	16.175	.000b
	Residual	38.193	101	.477		
	Total	45.915	102			

a. Dependent Variable: Project implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Autocratic leadership

The ANOVA results reveal that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 16.175$, $p = 0.000$). This means autocratic leadership has a meaningful influence on project implementation at the 1% level of significance. Specifically, the model demonstrates that variations in autocratic leadership significantly predict variations in project implementation, confirming the earlier correlation and regression findings.

Discussion, conclusion and recommendation

Discussion of the Findings

The study found that autocratic leadership at Back to the Bible Truth Evangelistic Mission emphasizes task completion, strict supervision, and centralized authority, with most respondents agreeing that managers prioritize efficiency and deadlines over employee participation (Nasir, 2014; Abualoush, 2018). While this approach enhances accountability and ensures timely project execution, it limits creativity, motivation, and staff engagement due to one-way communication, minimal feedback, and top-down decision-making (Mohammad, 2017; Musyoka, 2017; Ocholi, 2018). Staff reported a strong focus on schedules, attention to detail, and reliance on threats or punishment, reflecting literature showing that autocratic leadership can improve rapid project completion but may reduce morale and innovation (Basit, 2017; Akparep, 2019; Osborne, 2017). Regression results confirmed a positive relationship between autocratic leadership and project implementation ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.169$), aligning with Kawooya et al., (2025), Ahmed and Shafiq (2021). Overall, the findings suggest that while autocratic leadership promotes efficiency and task achievement, balancing it with participatory practices is essential for improving employee engagement and sustainable project outcomes (Ekstrand, 2018; Hartinah, 2020).

Conclusion

The first research objective was to examine the influence of autocratic leadership style on project implementation at Back to the Bible Truth Evangelistic Mission, while the corresponding research question asked how autocratic leadership affects project implementation in this context. In conclusion, the findings reveal that autocratic leadership can improve efficiency, ensure accountability, and support the timely completion of tasks. However, this comes at the expense of employee morale, creativity, and meaningful participation. While autocratic practices are effective in environments requiring strict oversight and clear task direction, relying exclusively on this style may limit long-term project sustainability in mission-driven nonprofit organisations. Therefore, integrating task-focused control with participatory and inclusive leadership approaches is crucial for enhancing both project outcomes and staff engagement.

Recommendation

The study recommends that BBT management balance autocratic authority with participatory practices to enhance staff motivation, creativity, and engagement. While task orientation and strict supervision promote efficiency and timely completion of projects, providing employees with structured opportunities to contribute ideas and feedback can reduce the negative effects of top-down control. Additionally, managers should implement recognition and reward mechanisms to acknowledge employees' efforts, fostering morale and commitment. Training managers on adaptive leadership approaches is also advised, enabling them to adjust their level of control based on project complexity and staff competence, ultimately optimizing overall project performance.

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