

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCEFULNESS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between empowering leadership and employee resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Empowering leadership was conceptualized as a unidimensional construct while employee resourcefulness being the criterion variable was conceptualized using three measures such as affective, intellectual and behavioural resourcefulness. Relevant literatures were reviewed from the study. This study anchored on two theories which are social exchange theory and the social capital theory. This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study was six thousand three hundred and forty-eight (6348) academic staff from the public universities in Rivers State with a sample size of 378 determined by using Taro Yemene to determine it. The data were gathered by a quantitative research method through a Structured questionnaire. Inferential statistics using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical tools was used to analyze the data with the aid of SPSS. The study found that empowering leadership significantly influences employee resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, employees who experienced empowering leadership exhibited higher emotional resilience, intellectual adaptability, and proactive workplace behavior. The study concludes that empowering leadership is a critical driver of employee resourcefulness, as it fosters a psychologically safe environment where staff feel confident to take initiative, solve problems and support their colleagues. Based on these findings, the study recommends that university management should (1) adopt participative leadership approaches to enhance emotional engagement, (2) promote intellectual autonomy by encouraging innovation and knowledge-sharing, and (3) cultivate a supportive work environment that encourages risk-taking and self-leadership without fear of punitive consequences.

Keywords: Empowering leadership, affective resourcefulness, intellectual resourcefulness, behavioural resourcefulness, employee resourcefulness

INTRODUCTION

In today's complex and dynamic world, organizations are increasingly compelled to foster resourcefulness among employees to remain competitive and adaptable. Scholars such as Basadur (2004) and Baryniene and Dauknyte (2015) highlight that organizational success hinges on creative and initiative-driven behavior exhibited by employees. Resourcefulness, therefore, is not limited to the routine fulfillment of duties but encompasses proactive problem-solving, customer service excellence and innovation in addressing emergent workplace challenges. Employee resourcefulness, as described by Rod and Ashill (2009), adds value not only through task execution but also through the depth of interpersonal engagement and the ability to influence peers positively. Despite its significance, limited scholarly attention has been given to the organizational mechanisms and leadership behaviors that cultivate this attribute, especially in highly structured environments such as public universities.

The current body of literature on human resource development provides models focusing on generic training, mentoring, and career development opportunities (Desimone, Werner & Harris, 2002), yet falls short of addressing context-specific developmental needs tied to real-time market demands or innovation gaps. This disconnect reveals a scholarly and practical void concerning how organizations can purposefully structure developmental programs that foster unique service capabilities and innovative thinking among employees. Additionally, while the relevance of empowering leadership in motivating employees has been generally acknowledged, its direct relationship with employee resourcefulness remains underexplored. Empowering leadership characterized by delegation of authority, encouragement of autonomous decision-making, and the provision of support systems has the potential to ignite employee initiative and foster a workplace culture that values ingenuity and ownership (Qian et al., 2018; Aboramadan et al., 2022).

Given the hierarchical and rigid organizational structure of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, employees often operate in environments that stifle initiative and creativity. Empowering leadership, with its emphasis on trust, shared decision-making, and enabling support, offers a transformative approach for these institutions. It facilitates the emergence of a resourceful workforce capable of navigating challenges, proposing novel solutions, and enhancing institutional effectiveness. This study was carried out to bridge these gaps by examining the nexus between empowering leadership and employee resourcefulness within public universities in Rivers State, contributing significantly to leadership literature and the discourse on employee development in higher education.

Therefore, the following specific objectives were:

- i. To examine the relationship between empowering leadership and affective resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- ii. To examine the relationship between empowering leadership and intellectual resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iii. To examine the relationship between empowering leadership and behavioural resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

The study conceptual model takes a linear relationship between the predictor variable on the left-hand side and the criterion variable at the right-hand side. Empowering leadership as predictor variable while the criterion variable which is employee resourcefulness and was measured with affective, intellectual and behavioural resourcefulness.

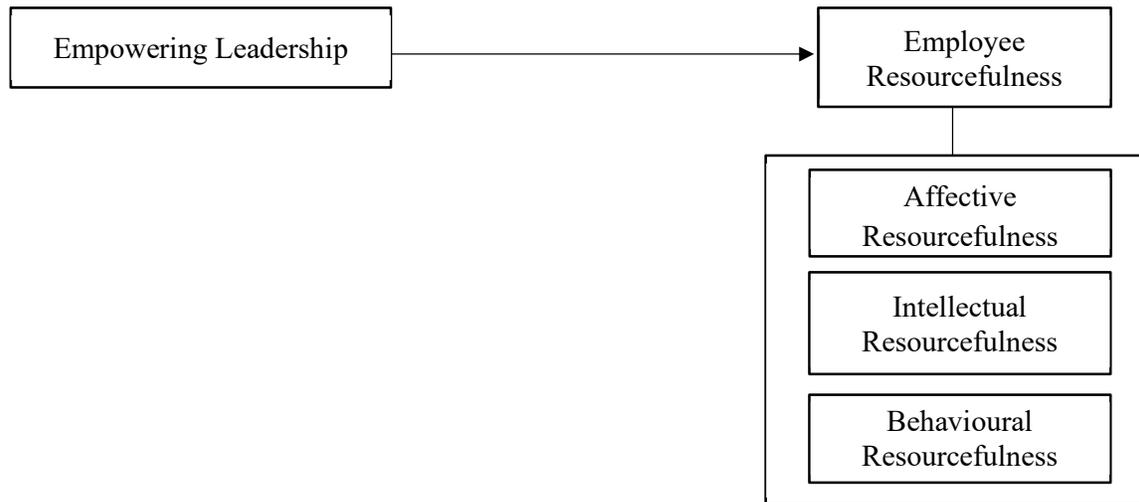


Figure 1: Relationship between Empowering leadership and Employee Resourcefulness.

Source: Desk Research (2025) with Dimensions of Relational Leadership adopted from the works of Uhl-Bein (2006) and measures of employee resourcefulness adapted from the works of Dogan and Sahin (2011).

Research Questions

The following research questions were put up in addressing the relationship between empowering leadership and employee resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. These are stated as follows:

- i. What is the relationship between empowering leadership and affective resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between empowering leadership and intellectual resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the relationship between empowering leadership and behavioural resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Statement of Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between empowering leadership and affective resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H02: There is no significant relationship between empowering leadership and intellectual resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H03: There is no significant relationship between empowering leadership and behavioural resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The Social Exchange Theory (SET), as propounded by George Homans (1958) and elaborated by scholars such as Molm (2000) and Cropanzano et al. (2002), offers a compelling framework

for understanding the dynamics between empowering leadership and employee resourcefulness. Central to SET is the principle of reciprocity where individuals engage in social exchanges based on perceived fairness, rewards, and mutual benefits. In the context of organizational life, this implies that employees are more likely to respond positively through proactive behaviors, initiative-taking, and creative problem-solving when they perceive their leaders as supportive, empowering, and invested in their development. Empowering leadership practices such as autonomy granting, participatory decision-making, and emotional support function as positive transfers within the exchange relationship, stimulating a sense of obligation and loyalty in employees, which in turn fosters resourcefulness in fulfilling their roles and solving work-related problems innovatively.

Applying this theory to the present study on public universities in Rivers State, it becomes evident that empowering leadership does not only influence employee attitudes but significantly shapes behavioral outcomes like resourcefulness. When leaders demonstrate trust by delegating authority and including employees in decision-making processes, it nurtures a psychological climate of respect and value, encouraging staff to go beyond routine responsibilities. This aligns with the view of relational leadership, which values the worker's contribution and supports the development of their problem-solving capabilities (Graen, 2006; Fairhurst, 2009). Thus, SET helps explain why in organizational settings marked by empowering leadership, employees are more likely to develop and express resourceful behavior—responding to challenges with creativity, adapting swiftly to change, and contributing meaningfully to institutional growth.

Conceptual Review

Empowering Leadership

Empowering leadership (EML) is a promising strategy for leaders to constructively shape employee behaviors and attitudes, including work engagement, and other positive work outcomes (Juyumaya, 2022). According to Ahmed et al. (2022), empowering leaders share power with their followers, giving them the authority to decide. They also prompt confidence in employees' abilities to accomplish their jobs autonomously. Leader actions that promote empowerment include letting workers participate in decision-making, stressing the value of their work, showcasing their abilities, and getting rid of bureaucratic roadblocks (Juyumaya, 2022). Employees who perceive autonomy, significance, competence, and good influence in their work also experience psychological empowerment. According to Ahmed et al. (2022), empowering leaders share power with their followers, giving them the authority to decide. They also prompt confidence in employees' abilities to accomplish their jobs autonomously.

Employee Resourcefulness

Along with the growing intensity of competition in the corporate environment, managerial expectations have evolved, encapsulated in the widely adopted maxim "Produce more with less" (Harris, Artis, Waters, & Licata, 2006). In response, employees are increasingly expected to demonstrate resourcefulness, effectiveness, and efficiency across all levels of organizational operations. Job or employee resourcefulness, as defined by Licata et al. (2003), refers to the ability to cope with job-related obstacles through optimal utilization of available resources. This concept is shaped through the alignment between employee traits and the work environment (Ashill, Rod, Thirkell, & Corruthers, 2009; Rod & Ashill, 2009). Resourceful employees are capable of navigating complex work situations, sustaining output through

adaptive reasoning and strategic self-management. Karatepe and Ağa (2013) identify job resourcefulness as a vital personal asset that enables employees to handle job stressors, reduce emotional exhaustion, and manage demands effectively, thus reinforcing its role as a psychological buffer and performance enhancer.

Measures of Employee Resourcefulness

Affective Resourcefulness

Affective resourcefulness, as the first dimension of resourcefulness, refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage and utilize their emotions to navigate challenges and attain personal objectives. It involves understanding emotional responses, regulating negative feelings, and leveraging positive emotions to enhance resilience and adaptability in the face of stress. Individuals with high affective resourcefulness demonstrate strong awareness of their emotional states and apply strategies to modulate these emotions constructively, thereby promoting psychological well-being and effective problem-solving (Rosenbaum, 2020). This concept aligns closely with emotional intelligence theory, which underscores the importance of emotional processes in shaping behavior, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Through affective resourcefulness, individuals harness emotional experiences to guide responses to external stressors, contributing to greater emotional balance and mental health.

Intellectual Resourcefulness

Intellectual resourcefulness, the second dimension of resourcefulness, refers to an employee's capacity for intelligent and sensible decision-making within the workplace context (Harris et al., 2006). It encompasses a comprehensive understanding of job demands, evolving organizational expectations, and the broader implications of one's actions, all of which inform rational and thoughtful choices (Licata et al., 2003). This form of resourcefulness extends beyond simply possessing knowledge; it involves applying information in effective, efficient, and sometimes unconventional ways to solve problems and exploit emerging opportunities. Intellectual resourcefulness also embodies the readiness to take calculated risks and the ability to integrate ideas across diverse fields to spur innovation. Studies suggest that interdisciplinary collaboration significantly enhances intellectual resourcefulness, enabling individuals to merge varied perspectives and expertise, thereby fostering more creative and robust solutions to workplace challenges (Smith & Brown, 2021).

Behavioural Resourcefulness

Behavioral resourcefulness refers to the attitudes and interpersonal behaviors of employees in managing workplace challenges, particularly in their interactions with coworkers and in meeting customer-related expectations (Licata et al., 2003). This dimension focuses on the effectiveness of employee actions in resolving complaints and facilitating productive exchanges that advance organizational goals. Behavioral resourcefulness underscores the need for flexibility in both actions and thought processes when navigating difficulties, encouraging systematic problem-solving and adaptive strategies in response to uncertainty. Such adaptability becomes increasingly crucial in dynamic environments where rigid approaches may prove ineffective. Within this framework, the behavioral aspect, as informed by American behaviorism (Hacker, 2005), views individuals as reactive to external stimuli, with behavior shaped and reinforced by consequences positioning employees as responsive agents molded through environmental interactions rather than purely internally driven actors.

Empirical Review

The empowerment of employees, according to Uhl-Bein (2006) builds on the imperatives of enriching the workers experiences through the enabling of increased control and responsibility for the turnout of their functions or roles. Empowering leadership provides for a more collaborative workplace wherein workers are encouraged to make decisions within clearly specified parameters or frameworks that ensure coherence with the organization's objectives and goals. Research suggests that through empowerment, workers are able to effectively apply themselves in the pattern and form they want – expressing their creativity and resourcefulness in their responsibility. Tsui and Wang (2002) opined that empowerment allows the worker increased meaningfulness based on their capacity to coordinate and address their responsibilities in a way suited to their capacities.

Vuong, and Hieu (2023) research was carried out to investigate how empowering leadership (EL) could promote employees' knowledge sharing (KS) and innovative work behavior (IWB), which, in turn, improve their job performance (JP). Besides, the moderating role of power distance orientation (PDO) will be considered as well. This study employed a self-reported questionnaire from 460 frontline employees at Vietnamese commercial banks and the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) via the SmartPLS 3.0 to test the hypotheses. The findings showed that there was a positive influence of EL on JP; this was mediated partially through KS and IWB. Additionally, the first research was the one that revealed that employees with high PDO dampened the positive effects of EL on KS and IWB.

Li, Wang, and Hu, (2024) study investigated the relationship between empowering leadership and innovative job performance, with challenge stress and hindrance stress acting as parallel mediators. Additionally, the study examines how promotion focus and prevention focus moderate these dual processes. A two-wave survey was employed to validate the theoretical model, gathering data from 449 employees across various industries in Mainland China with a convenience sampling method. The results demonstrate that empowering leadership enhances employee innovative job performance by increasing challenge stress and reducing hindrance stress, highlighting the moderating role of regulatory focus. Specifically, a high promotion focus strengthens the positive relationship between empowering leadership and challenge stress, while a high prevention focus weakens the negative relationship between empowering leadership and hindrance stress. The moderated mediation effect of regulatory focus is also verified.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey as its design for investigating the relationship between the study variables. The population of this study was six thousand three hundred and forty-eight (6348) academic staff (excluding non-academic staff) from the public universities in Rivers State. The sample size for the study was 376 which was determined using the Taro Yamane's 1970 formula. The data were collected through a survey questionnaire method that is widely used for data collection. Data collected from the field was cleaned to ensure consistency of responses. Data generated was arranged and coded according to values and then fed into the data editor section of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 27.0). Analysis of bivariate relationships was undertaken using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the dimensions

of the predictor variable and the measures of the criterion variables as well as to test the hypotheses which was stated in the null form.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Bivariate Data Analysis

The secondary data analysis employed the use of bivariate inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation tool which was used at a 95% confidence level. Specifically, the tests covered hypotheses H₀₁ to H₀₃ which were bivariate at all, stated in the null manner. The study relied on the Spearman Rank Order Correlation tool to carry out the analysis thus the probability criterion of 0.05 significance level was adopted for accepting the null hypotheses at (P> 0.05) or rejecting the hypotheses at (P<0.05).

Empowering Leadership and Employee Resourcefulness Measures

Table 1 shows the result of correlation matrix obtained for empowering leadership and employee resourcefulness measures. Also displayed in the table is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes us able to answer our research question and generalize our findings to the study population.

Table 1: Correlations for Empowering Leadership and Employee Resourcefulness

		Empowering Leadership	Affective Resourcefulness	Intellectual Resourcefulness	Behavioural Resourcefulness
Empowering Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.864**	.812**	.834**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	359	359	359	359
Affective Resourcefulness	Pearson Correlation	.864**	1	.892**	.853**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	359	359	359	359
Intellectual Resourcefulness	Pearson Correlation	.812**	.892**	1	.832**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	359	359	359	359
Behavioural Resourcefulness	Pearson Correlation	.834**	.853**	.832**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	359	359	359	359

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between empowering leadership and affective resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

The analysis of Research Question 1 examined the relationship between empowering leadership and affective resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation revealed a very strong positive relationship with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.864$, indicating that increases in empowering leadership significantly enhance employees' affective resourcefulness—specifically their emotional intelligence, ability to manage emotions, and sustained enthusiasm at work. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.747$) suggests that 74.7% of the variance in affective resourcefulness can

be attributed to empowering leadership, underscoring its substantial influence in cultivating emotional resilience among staff. Furthermore, the test of significance ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) confirmed that this relationship is statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{O1}). Therefore, the study concludes that empowering leadership has a significant and positive impact on affective resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between empowering leadership and intellectual resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

The analysis of Research Question 2 revealed a very strong positive relationship between empowering leadership and intellectual resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, as shown by a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.812$. This indicates that higher levels of empowering leadership characterized by delegation, support for autonomy, and encouragement of innovation—are significantly associated with enhanced employee capacity for critical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of innovative approaches to work. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.659$) suggests that 65.9% of the variation in intellectual resourcefulness can be explained by differences in empowering leadership, emphasizing its crucial role in stimulating cognitive development and intellectual engagement among staff. The statistical test of significance ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) confirmed the relationship to be significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{O2}). Consequently, the study affirms a significant and positive relationship between empowering leadership and intellectual resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between empowering leadership and behavioural resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

The analysis of Research Question 3 revealed a very strong positive relationship between empowering leadership and behavioural resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.834$. This suggests that as empowering leadership increases—through practices such as delegating responsibilities, encouraging autonomy, and providing constructive feedback—employees' behavioural resourcefulness, characterized by proactive, adaptable, and goal-oriented actions, also significantly improves. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.696$) indicates that 69.6% of the variation in behavioural resourcefulness can be explained by empowering leadership, underscoring its pivotal role in enhancing employees' practical engagement and effectiveness in the workplace. The statistical test of significance ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) confirmed the relationship to be statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{O3}). Hence, the study concludes that empowering leadership has a significant positive influence on behavioural resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Empowering Leadership and Employee Resourcefulness in Public Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria

The findings of this study revealed a significant and positive relationship between empowering leadership and employee resourcefulness in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Empowering leadership—marked by autonomy, participative decision-making, and delegated authority—substantially enhanced affective resourcefulness by fostering emotional resilience, enthusiasm, and stronger psychological alignment with institutional goals among staff. Employees trusted with responsibilities and whose judgment was respected demonstrated heightened morale and readiness to manage workplace challenges. Additionally, empowering

leadership strongly influenced intellectual resourcefulness, as it encouraged adaptability, creativity, and innovation through open dialogue and freedom to explore new ideas, thereby promoting a proactive learning culture. Behavioural resourcefulness was also positively impacted, with empowered employees showing greater initiative, resilience, and task ownership. Leadership practices such as clear communication, recognition, and trust not only boosted confidence and accountability but also inspired staff to contribute meaningfully beyond their formal duties, reinforcing institutional performance and cohesion.

These findings are consistent with the work of Vuong and Hieu (2023), who found that empowering leadership fosters knowledge sharing and innovative work behavior, ultimately improving job performance though moderated by employees' power distance orientation. Likewise, the study by Li, Wang, and Hu (2024) supported this by demonstrating that empowering leadership enhances innovative job performance through increased challenge stress and reduced hindrance stress, with regulatory focus acting as a moderator. The current study's results are further explained by social exchange theory, which posits that when employees feel trusted and valued through empowering leadership, they reciprocate with greater commitment and resourcefulness. Additionally, human capital theory supports the notion that empowering leadership nurtures employee capabilities and knowledge, unlocking their potential and driving organizational performance. Together, these theoretical and empirical findings affirm the critical role of empowering leadership in enhancing affective, intellectual, and behavioural dimensions of employee resourcefulness in higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study establishes that empowering leadership significantly fosters employee resourcefulness in public universities by cultivating autonomy, competence, and psychological safety. Leaders who entrust staff with decision-making authority, provide supportive feedback, and encourage risk-taking without fear of retribution create an environment where innovation and self-leadership thrive. As a result, empowered employees are more inclined to drive constructive change, tackle complex challenges, and support the development of their colleagues, thereby enhancing overall institutional effectiveness and resilience. Based on the study's findings, the following three brief recommendations are proposed:

1. University management should promote leadership styles that delegate responsibility and involve employees in decision-making to enhance affective resourcefulness through emotional engagement and commitment.
2. Academic leaders should support intellectual freedom and provide platforms for staff to share innovative ideas, experiment with new approaches, and solve problems collaboratively, thereby strengthening intellectual resourcefulness.
3. University administrators should create a culture where staff feel safe to take initiative and learn from failure without fear of punitive consequences, which is essential for developing behavioural resourcefulness and proactive job performance

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