

## IDENTIFYING THE ELEMENTS OF QUALITY LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN NIGERIA.

By

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### Abstract

*Public and private sectors are expected to have meaningful contributions to socio-economic development of a nation like Nigeria that allows the two sectors to co-exist. However, there is a lack of universally recognised yardsticks to measure the leadership performance of public and private sectors in Nigeria comparably. This study anchored on path-goal theory, and contingency theory to identify the elements of quality leadership styles for sustainable performance in public and private sectors in Nigeria. Non-probabilistic survey method was employed through purposive and snowballing to gather quantitative and qualitative data from experts (75 public service, and 75 private companies) in Nigeria. T-test statistical analysis and multiple regression were employed to test the 2 hypotheses of this study, which were all statistically significant at 0.5% level. The findings from the focus group also validated the findings of quantitative data. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that identifying and nurturing the elements of quality leadership styles is crucial for achieving sustainable performance in both the public and private sectors in Nigeria. The study also underscores the importance of a strategic approach to leadership development, integrating both universal principles and sector-specific needs to drive sustainable performance. It is recommended in this study that a collaborative approach involving government, private sector stakeholders, and educational institutions is vital for developing robust leadership initiatives that align with long-term organizational goals and contributes to sustainable development across the nation.*

**Keywords:** Adaptive leadership, transactional leadership, transformational leadership

### 1. Introduction

Nigeria's public and private sectors both serve as the twin engines of national development, yet their leadership challenges and trajectories have diverged sharply. As one of Africa's most populous nations, endowed with diverse cultures and abundant natural resources, Nigeria nonetheless confronts endemic corruption, political volatility, and economic imbalances. Effective leadership is therefore indispensable for harnessing human and material capital, improving governance, and driving business innovation. Since independence in 1960, successive military and civilian regimes have shaped a leadership landscape influenced by colonial legacies, cultural norms, and shifting political philosophies. Public institutions, often hampered by bureaucratic inertia and ethical lapses, have struggled to deliver social services consistently, whereas private enterprises have demonstrated greater resilience and adaptability in responding to market changes. Quality leadership in both sectors is defined by vision, integrity, accountability, and the ability to mobilize stakeholders toward common goals. However, performance metrics differ: public-sector leaders are assessed on policy formulation, implementation, and social welfare outcomes, while private-sector managers are evaluated on entrepreneurial acumen, operational efficiency, and

corporate social responsibility. Recent capacity-building initiatives, such as YouWin, the Nigerian Economic Summit Group Leadership Programme, and the Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme, seek to cultivate ethical, strategic, and innovative leadership. A systematic analysis of sector-specific leadership styles and attributes will inform targeted training, performance appraisal, and policy design. By identifying the core elements of effective leadership in Nigeria's distinct organizational contexts, stakeholders can develop future leaders equipped to enhance operational efficiency, spur socio-economic development, and secure a more sustainable national future.

Public and private sectors are both central to a nation's socio-economic development, yet their leadership approaches often diverge due to distinct structural, cultural, and operational differences. While both sectors aim to serve societal needs, a lack of universally recognized standards for assessing leadership effectiveness in Nigeria hampers consistent evaluation and benchmarking. This absence of common yardsticks may lead to fragmented leadership practices and varying degrees of operational success across sectors. In the public sector, leadership is frequently shaped by political dynamics, including instability and frequent changes in government, which result in inconsistent policies and shifting priorities. Political appointments often prioritize affiliations over merit, leading to the placement of underqualified individuals in key leadership roles. This politicization undermines continuity and impedes long-term planning and institutional development (Bendell & Little, 2015; Fusarelli, Fusarelli & Riddick, 2018). By contrast, the private sector typically adheres to more formalized criteria for leadership selection, grounded in competence, performance, and organizational needs.

The profit-oriented nature of the private sector also drives a stronger commitment to leadership training and development. Private enterprises invest in enhancing leadership capacity to boost productivity and profitability, while public sector institutions, being socially oriented rather than profit-driven, may allocate fewer resources for such initiatives. These disparities extend to attitudes toward leadership training, where private sector leaders tend to place greater value on professional development than their public counterparts (Channing, 2020; Kragt & Guenter, 2018). All these factors affect the leadership structure of Nigeria's public and private sector setup.

Scholars have done much to discuss these challenges, such as Sarwar et al (2023) who did a comparative examination of female leadership styles in public and private universities in Pakistan; Jekelle (2021) on leadership styles dimensions and firm's organizational commitment nexus with evidence from a public sector in Nigeria; and Borst et al (2020) who did a comparative investigation of attitudinal, behavioural, and performance outcomes of work in public, semi-public, and private sectors. Although several studies have explored leadership dynamics across sectors, limited research has systematically compared leadership style elements across Nigeria's public and private sectors for the purpose of informing policy and enhancing leadership practices. This gap highlights the significance of this study, which seeks to address this critical oversight by examining the comparative elements of leadership styles (adaptive, transactional, and transformational) in both sectors.

On this background, the study aims to examine: i) leadership approaches that are prominent among leaders in public and private sectors in Nigeria; ii) the difference in the effect of adaptive leadership on the operational efficiency of public and private sectors in Nigeria; iii) the difference in the effect of transformational leadership on innovation management of public and private sectors in Nigeria; iv) the difference in the effect of transactional leadership on employee effectiveness of public and private sectors in Nigeria; v) the combination of leadership approaches that motivate and encourage workers for better sustainable performance.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

#### **Leadership**

Leadership is the skill of motivating and directing individuals or groups to reach shared objectives (Kemal & Hussain, 2022). It entails establishing a clear vision, inspiring and empowering others, and promoting an atmosphere of cooperation and trust (Chitiga, 2018). Successful leadership combines attributes such as communication, empathy, integrity, and decisiveness (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). By fostering a positive and supportive culture, leaders can enhance innovation, productivity, and overall well-being within their teams (Chitiga, 2018; Zhang, 2024).

#### **Adaptive Leadership and Operational Efficiency**

Adaptive leadership is a practical framework designed to help leaders mobilize people to confront difficult challenges and succeed in complex, rapidly evolving environments (Özen & Yavuz, 2024). It emphasizes the ability to identify and respond to emerging patterns and dynamics within an organization or community (Corazzini et al., 2015). Adaptive leadership style tends to value flexibility, learning, and collaboration, and it necessitates leaders to address not only technical problems but including deeper adaptive challenges, which often involve changes in values, beliefs, and behaviors (Muluneh & Gedifew, 2018). The implication of this is that adaptive leaders do not just pay attention to the external changes, but also empower individuals and teams to develop new capabilities and strategies, capable of promoting resilience, innovation, and sustainable growth towards operational performance of organisations (Muluneh & Gedifew, 2018; Özen & Yavuz, 2024).

#### **Transformational Leadership and Innovation Management**

Transformational leadership is a style that inspires and motivates individuals to prioritize the organization's or community's well-being over their own self-interests (Omamo & Awuor, 2018). It is defined by the leader's ability to craft a compelling vision of the future, communicate it effectively, and nurture an environment that promotes intellectual stimulation and personal growth (Nguyen, Mia, Winata & Chong, 2017; Yaslioglu & Erden, 2018). Transformational leaders are often viewed as charismatic and visionary, capable of fostering high levels of commitment and performance among their team members (Buda & Ling, 2017; Khan et al., 2020). They enhance morale, motivation, and job performance through inspiration, challenge, and support (Al Harbi, Alarifi & Mosbah, 2019). This leadership approach ultimately drives significant organizational change and development by empowering individuals to realize their full potential and align their goals with those of the organization to foster superior performance (Lasrado & Kassem, 2021).

#### **Transactional Leadership and Employee Effectiveness**

Transactional leadership is a style that emphasizes the exchange between leaders and followers, achieving compliance and performance through a system of rewards and punishments (Wahyuni, Purwandari & Syah, 2020). Leaders who adopt transactional approach are expected to set clear structures, policies, expectations, and goals to guarantee tasks are executed in line with the set standards (Kabiru & Bula, 2020; Sané & Abo, 2021). Transactional leaders offer specific rewards for meeting objectives and apply corrective actions or penalties for failing to do so (Karki & Maharjan, 2022). This leadership style is effective in maintaining routine and stability within an organization, focusing on short-term tasks, efficiency, and productivity (Dong, 2023). Transactional leaders excel at managing day-to-day operations and ensuring that team members follow established procedures and policies for effective performance (Thomas, 2021).

The model in Figure 1 demonstrates how elements of quality leadership styles such as adaptive, transformational, and transactional leadership styles interact with sustainable performance of

public and private sectors comparably in Nigeria from the perspective of operational efficiency, innovation management, and employee effectiveness.

## **2.2 Theoretical Review**

### **Path-Goal Theory**

The Path-Goal Theory, originally developed by Robert House in 1971 and later refined in 1996 (Elenwo, 2018), focuses on how leadership behaviors influence follower motivation and performance through the clarification of paths leading to desired goals (Cheng & Osman, 2021; Redžović, 2024). Rooted in Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation (1964) and earlier work by Georgopoulos et al. (1957), this theory underscores the relationship between leadership actions, follower perceptions, and goal attainment (Malik, Hassan & Aziz, 2011).

The theory identifies four key leadership behaviors: directive, achievement-oriented, participative, and supportive (Fabac, Kokot & Bubalo, 2022; Saleem et al., 2021). Directive leadership provides clear instructions and expectations, effective in ambiguous or intrinsically satisfying roles. Achievement-oriented leadership sets high goals and shows confidence in followers' abilities, particularly in performance-driven environments. Participative leadership involves followers in decision-making, especially suitable where employees are highly engaged. Supportive leadership focuses on addressing followers' needs and is particularly valuable in psychologically or physically demanding contexts (Handayanti & Januarty, 2023; Nzeneri, 2020).

The theory is particularly relevant to this study, as it provides a framework for understanding how leaders in Nigeria's public and private sectors articulate and facilitate goal achievement. However, scholars such as Bayar and Kerns (2012) and Khan (2013) have critiqued the theory for its complexity and insufficient attention to contextual variables. These limitations further justify the study's exploration of contingency theory, which emphasizes the situational appropriateness of leadership styles.

### **Contingency Theory**

Contingency Theory, introduced in the 1960s by Austrian psychologist Fred Fiedler (Fiedler, 2015; Shala, Prebreza & Ramosaj, 2021), posits that effective leadership is context-dependent. The theory emphasizes that no single leadership style is universally applicable; rather, a leader's effectiveness is determined by how well their style aligns with the specific circumstances they face (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015; Oc, 2018).

As an adaptive leadership framework, Contingency Theory underscores the need for flexibility in leadership strategies, given the dynamic nature of organizational environments (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974; Shala et al., 2021). Leaders are expected to adjust their methods to suit varying contextual elements such as organizational size, technological infrastructure, employee characteristics, and external business conditions, thereby rejecting a one-size-fits-all model (Cullen, 2015; Martinez, 2019; Shala et al., 2021).

The relevance of Contingency Theory to this study lies in its capacity to explain how leaders in Nigeria's public and private sectors can effectively respond to situational changes. It highlights the importance of adaptive leadership, acknowledging that public and private sector leaders may require distinct approaches to navigate their respective institutional contexts successfully (Aun et al., 2019; Okafor & Afolabi, 2021).

## **2.3 Empirical Review**

In the study of Nebiyu and Kassahun (2021) which examined the effect of adaptive leadership practices on organizational effectiveness within higher education institutions in the Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia. The study employed a descriptive survey and correlational research design with a quantitative approach, and target population of 5,460 deans, directors, and

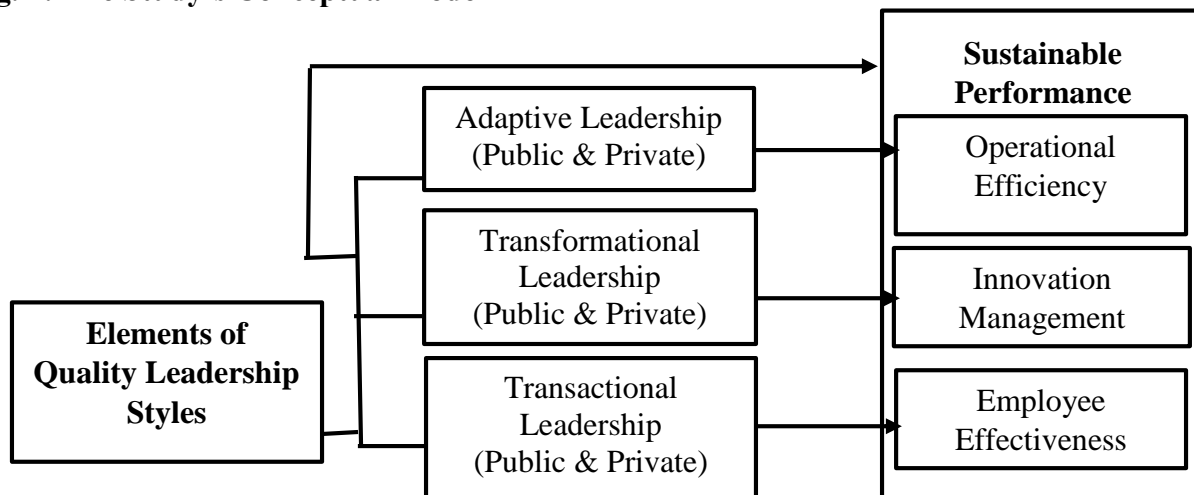
academic staff members. The sample size was calculated to be 620 using a sample size determination formula. Data analysis was conducted using one-sample t-tests, correlation, and regression analysis, and the finding reveals the connection between adaptive leadership and effectiveness of organisations.

Odeh, Azam and Rafida (2021) investigated the impact of transformational leadership on employees' innovativeness and job satisfaction in Kuwait's private sector using a quantitative approach. The study's findings indicate statistically significant relationships between overall transformational leadership, employees' innovativeness, and job satisfaction.

Donkor, Sekyere and Oduro (2022) examined the psychological mechanisms underlying the influence of transformational and transactional leadership on employee performance. Drawing on employee stewardship theory and social exchange theory, the study identified organizational commitment as a key moderating variable. Data were collected from 330 full-time employees across 16 public sector organizations in Ghana. The findings reveal that organizational commitment positively moderates the effect of transformational leadership, but not transactional leadership. Specifically, higher levels of transformational leadership boost organizational commitment, leading to enhanced employee performance, while higher levels of transactional leadership reduce organizational commitment, resulting in diminished employee performance.

Paesen, Wouters and Maesschalck (2019) investigated the relationship between servant leadership and employee deviance (ethical behavior). Data were collected through an online survey conducted in two ministries of the Belgian Federal Government. The analyses utilized confirmatory factor analysis, multiple linear regression, and negative binomial regression. The empirical results indicate that the generic servant leadership scale has the anticipated negative, protective effect on both self-reported and observer-reported employee deviance (ethical behavior).

**Fig. 1: The Study's Conceptual Model**



**Source:** Researchers' Field Survey (2025)

### 3. Methodology.

This study employed a mixed-method approach to identify the elements of quality leadership styles that drive sustainable performance in Nigeria's public and private sectors. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research ensured a comprehensive and rigorous analysis. Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a 7-point Likert scale, distributed to experts in both sectors. A snowball sampling technique was adopted due to the study's specialized population, leveraging existing professional networks to access hard-



to-reach participants and enhance the breadth of the sample. A purposive convenience sampling method was used to administer 150 copies of questionnaire (75 to public sector experts and 75 to private sector experts). This approach ensured that participants possessed relevant knowledge and experience aligned with the research objectives, thereby enriching the data quality.

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for demographic profiling, and inferential techniques including t-tests and multiple regression analyses to test the research hypotheses. To complement the quantitative data, qualitative insights were gathered through focus group discussions and individual interviews. Focus groups were selected to facilitate dynamic interaction and in-depth discussion among participants, allowing for a richer understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and experiences (Gill & Baillie, 2018; Scheelbeek et al., 2020). Individual interviews further explored nuanced views, uncovering underlying motivations and contextual influences on leadership practices (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

The qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes, providing interpretive depth and serving to validate and reinforce the quantitative findings. The integration of both data types enabled a robust investigation of the relationship between quality leadership elements and sustainable performance in Nigeria's public and private sectors.

#### 4. Data Analysis

##### Analysis of correlation among the independent variables of the study

**Table 1.** Correlation matrix for variables

	Var.	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3
1	ADL	150	3.63	0.410	1		
2	TRL	150	3.48	0.436	.561**	1	
3	TFL	150	3.71	0.611	.473**	.465**	1

*Keys: ADB= Adaptive Leadership; TRL= Transactional Leadership; TFL = Transformational Leadership; N= Number of Pparticipants*

Source: Researcher's Field Computation (2025)

Preliminary investigation was carried out in this study to determine the normality of the data set via mean, and standard deviation to measure the interrelationship among independent variables. To examine the mean is relevant in this study, because it represents the central point of a dataset, offering an average value that can capture the overall results. The study also examined standard deviation of the data to measure the extent to which the data used in this study likely digress from the mean. A minimal standard deviation (i.e. close to zero) suggests that data points are tightly clustered around the mean, while a greater standard deviation signifies that the data points are more isolated from the mean. Therefore, table1 indicated a mean between 3.48 and 3.71 which is suitable for a central point within a 5-point likert scale as adopted in this study. The standard deviation between 0.410 and 0.611 has demonstrated good confidence and prescription. The correlation matrix in table 1 does not indicate prediction but to demonstrate the interactions among the independent variables with the use of Pearson correlation statistical analysis at \*\*p< 0.01. Taking consideration of the level of association between independent variables, the study presumed that they are reasonably normal as they floated between -0.01 and .561 which does not create any concerns for multicollinearity.

##### Analysis of Research Objectives

**Table 2:** Regression analysis on differences in leadership approaches to sustainable performance between public and private sectors in Nigeria.

				B (p = < .05)		
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	AdpL	TrfL	TrcL.
Public Sector	.416 <sup>a</sup>	.173	18.193	.262	.385	.324

<b>Private Sector</b>	.558 <sup>a</sup>	.311	28.139	.268	.517	.411
<b>Key:</b> AdpL. = Adaptive leadership; TrfL. = Transformational Leadership; TrcL.= Transactional Leadership						

**Source:** Researchers' Computation (2025)

The result table 2 revealed that leadership approaches had a positive correlation with the public sector ( $R=.416$ ). The R-square adjusted value of .173 indicated that the combination of leadership approaches contributed 17.3% to the variability of public sector's performance. This implies that for every small change in leadership approaches, there is 17.3% change in the public sector in Nigeria. However, in terms of the relative contribution of each leadership approach on public sector in Nigeria, the result demonstrates that transformational leadership is more predominant with a relative contribution of ( $\beta=.385$ ,  $P=<.05$ ).

For objectives 2-4, the outcomes of the study revealed that there are significant differences between public and private sectors in Nigeria across all the parameters measured in this study such as: adaptive leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership with respect to sustainable performance.

**Table 3:** Regression analysis on prominent leadership approaches among leaders in the public and private sectors in Nigeria

				$\beta$ ( $p < .05$ )		
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	AdpL	TrfL	TrcL.
<b>Leadership Approaches</b>	.506 <sup>a</sup>	.256	16.107	.237	.499	.108
<b>Key:</b> AdpL. = Adaptive leadership; TrfL. = Transformational Leadership; TrcL.= Transactional Leadership						

**Dependent Variable:** Workers' Sustainable Performance  $P=<.05$ ).

**Source:** Researchers' Computation (2025)

The result in table 3 revealed that combination of leadership approaches had a moderate positive correlation with workers' sustainable performance ( $R=.506$ ). The R-square adjusted value of .256 indicated that the combination of leadership approaches contributed 25.6% to the variability of workers' sustainable performance. This implies that for every small change in leadership approaches, there is 25.6% change in workers' sustainable performance. However, in terms of the relative contribution of each leadership approach on workers' sustainable performance, the result indicates that all the three predictor variables were statistically significant with workers' sustainable performance. Transformational leadership made the most significant contribution ( $\beta=.499$ ,  $P=.00<.05$ ), followed by adaptive leadership ( $\beta= .237$ ,  $P=.00<.05$ ) and lastly, transactional leadership ( $\beta=.108$ ,  $P=.00<.05$ ) on workers' sustainable performance. This result implies that the combination of leadership approaches significantly motivates workers for better sustainable performance.

### Analysis of Qualitative Data

**Table 3: Summary of the findings of the interview schedules**

Questions	Summary of the findings of the participants
<b>I</b> What do you think are the prominent leadership approaches employed in public services particularly in Lagos?	Inclusive leadership style is prominent in the Nigeria public sector, while private sector practices transformational and adaptive leadership styles.
<b>Ii</b> Can you describe any specific instance whereby you observe a leader either public or private effectively use a particular leadership style?	While Babangida military regime applied inclusive leadership style, Buhari democratic government applied non-inclusive leadership style.
<b>Iii</b> What is the difference in the effect of transformational leadership on innovation management in public and private sector in Nigeria?	Transformational leadership is synonymous to innovation. However, the approaches are different between public and private sectors. While public sector approaches transformation without much

research, private sector carries out a thorough investigation so that profit can be maximized.

<b>Iv</b>	How do transformational leaders in public sector in Nigeria approach innovation management and how do you compare this with your experience in the private sector?	Public management innovation is different from public sector because of differences in resources and scope.
<b>V</b>	What are the challenges that transformational leaders face when trying to foster innovation in public sector in Nigeria?	Bureaucracy serves as a big challenge for transformational leadership in the Nigeria public sector. However, a transformational leader in the Nigeria public establishment needs to apply inclusive and adaptive leadership styles.
<b>Vi</b>	Can you just describe a successful innovative initiation that has been carried out or led by a transformational leader in this country?	Lagos State House of Assembly applied innovative and inclusive leadership styles that even National Assembly borrowed from in the area of bill passing.
<b>Vii</b>	What is the difference in the effect of transactional leadership on employee effectiveness in this organisation?	Transactional leadership to some extent has negative effect on employee's commitment. However, introducing learning and improvement technique can better support transactional leadership style.
<b>Viii</b>	Can you describe a situation where transactional leadership either facilitated or hindered initiative in your organ?	In transactional leadership environment, there is need to consider psychological safety of employees.
<b>Ix</b>	What is the difference in the effect of servant leadership on work ethic in public and private sector in Nigeria?	There is no much difference in the effect of servant leadership on work ethics in public and private sectors. However, servant leadership plays a good role in enhancing work ethics in Nigeria.

**Source:** Researcher's computation (2024)

## 5. Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

This study identified both common and sector-specific elements of quality leadership styles that contribute to sustainable performance in Nigeria's public and private sectors. Core leadership qualities such as vision, integrity, and effective communication were found to be universally significant, as leaders who embody these traits foster trust, commitment, and enhanced organizational outcomes. However, sectoral distinctions emerged in the application of these qualities. In the public sector, effective leadership requires the ability to navigate complex bureaucratic and political structures, whereas in the private sector, leadership success is closely tied to innovation and adaptability to market dynamics.

The findings further revealed statistically significant differences in the dominant leadership approaches between the two sectors, a conclusion reinforced by focus group discussions. This aligns with previous studies by Chitiga (2018) and Zhang (2024), which emphasized the distinct leadership frameworks employed by public and private organizations.

Specifically, the study found notable variations in the impact of adaptive leadership on operational efficiency across sectors. Similarly, differences were observed in how transformational leadership influences innovation management, and transactional leadership affects employee effectiveness.

These findings are consistent with the work of scholars such as Paesen et al. (2019), Nebiyu and Kassahun (2021), Mustofa and Muafi (2021), and Odeh et al. (2021). Accordingly, the study concludes that the deliberate identification and development of sector-relevant leadership elements are essential to fostering sustainable performance in both public and private sectors in Nigeria.

## Recommendations



Quality leadership universally hinges on vision, integrity, and clear communication, yet distinct sectoral contexts demand specialized strategies. In the public sector, leaders must master bureaucratic and political navigation, whereas private-sector leaders should prioritize innovation and responsiveness to market shifts. Consequently, leadership development programs must be tailored to these divergent needs, fostering continuous professional advancement and alignment with each organization's strategic objectives.

Moreover, external enablers, economic stability and effective regulatory frameworks, play a pivotal role in amplifying leadership impact. Coordinated efforts among government bodies, private enterprises, and academic institutions are essential to design and implement comprehensive leadership initiatives. Such collaboration will ensure that development programs not only address sector-specific challenges but also contribute to sustained organizational performance and national development.

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