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INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION MANAGEMENT IN SELECTED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract
The need to adopt innovation management in the public sector cannot be overemphasised, as Nigeria is in dire need of novel approaches in surmounting the numerous limitations of public service delivery. Moreover, inclusive leadership has been identified by numerous scholars as a critical factor in driving innovation and improving organisational performance, through entrenching diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices. This study examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovation management within the Nigerian public sector, focusing on selected government agencies in Lagos State. A descriptive survey research design was employed, with a sample size of 400 respondents drawn from the Lagos State Civil Service population. Multi-stage sampling was applied, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. The findings rejected all three null hypotheses. Diverse representation had a significant positive effect on competitive drive ($\beta = 0.125$, $p = 0.014$). Participatory decision-making significantly enhanced external stakeholder collaboration ($\beta = 0.352$, $p = 0.000$). Leadership development was significantly effective in fostering an innovative culture ($\beta = 0.122$, $p = 0.016$). It is concluded that inclusive leadership is a veritable tool for transforming the Nigerian public sector. Recommendations include institutionalising merit-based, diverse recruitment, formalising collaborative mechanisms with stakeholders, and investing in merit-based leadership development programmes, which enables innovation climate.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, Innovation Management, Government Agencies, Diversity, Collaborations

1. Introduction

Leadership is globally recognised as a decisive administrative function in guiding organisations towards the actualisation of long- and short-term goals and objectives. More specifically, an inclusive approach towards leading people is advanced as the pivotal catalyst required to break the cycle of stagnation and unlock the sector's latent innovative potential. As espoused by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), inclusive leadership is a leadership style characterised by "words and deeds

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exhibited by leaders that invite and appreciate others' contributions." Hewlett, Marshall & Sherbin (2013) recognised inclusive leadership as a crucial factor in creating an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and ideas. Hence, inclusive leadership promotes a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by encouraging equal access to opportunities and resources, giving a sense of belonging, recognizing the importance of diverse perspectives, promoting accountability and transparency, and empowering diverse individuals to take on leadership roles (Carter & Wagner, 2011; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Kalev et al., 2006; Bell & Nkomo, 2001).

More so, inclusive leadership enhances participatory decision-making in organisations through the cultivation of psychological safety, which Edmondson (2018) perceived as "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking". Conversely, a psychologically unsafe environment causes employees to be hesitant in contributing ideas, especially new or dissenting ones, for fear of being humiliated, ostracised, or victimised. Rozovsky (2015) asserted that psychological safety is the number one factor underpinning effective team performance, precisely because it enables the free exchange of ideas necessary for innovation and sound, participatory decision-making, which inclusive leadership represents. Additionally, inclusive leadership acts as a veritable mechanism for enhancing leadership development and succession in organisations. Inclusive leaders nurture an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and ideas (Hewlett et al., 2013). When leaders prioritise DEI environments, they cultivate a culture where individuals of diverse backgrounds feel valued and respected, leading to increased representation of diverse groups in leadership positions (Kalev et al., 2006). Consequently, diverse leadership teams are better equipped to drive and manage organisational innovation, which in turn, drives organisational effectiveness and growth.

In the unique socio-cultural context of Nigeria, with its formidable diversity across ethnic, religious, generational, and regional lines, the practice of inclusive leadership takes on an elevated degree of significance and complexity. Historically and administratively, the Nigerian public sector is perpetually tasked with the critical mandate of driving national development, implementing government policies, and delivering essential services to over 200 million citizens. However, for decades, the sector has been characterised by a complex contradiction. On the one hand is the immense human and natural resource potential that has been underutilised; on the other hand, there is the perpetual system of persistent inefficiency, bureaucratic inertia, and a glaring deficit in qualitative service delivery (Adegboye, 2021; World Bank, 2022). This performance gap has significantly contributed to the nation's developmental quagmire, including infrastructure decay, economic volatility, and widespread public discontent.
One of the significant challenges bedevilling the Nigerian public sector is the lack of competitive drive. This issue is a deeply embedded pathology resulting from broken institutions, perverse incentives, lack of investment in human capital development, and a corrosive political culture. It is a primary bottleneck to the nation's development. The lack of accountability and consequence management also contributes

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to this problem. Without a robust system of checks and balances, public servants are not held accountable for their actions, leading to inefficiency and corruption (Adebowale, 2012).

A critical impediment to its effectiveness is the pervasive lack of meaningful collaboration with external stakeholders (such as citizens, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, academia, and international development partners). This deficiency is not merely an operational oversight but a deeply ingrained characteristic of a bureaucratic system rooted in colonial administration, post-independence centralisation, and a patrimonial culture that views power as a zero-sum game (Ibrahim, 2020; Okeke, 2019). Instead of leveraging the immense resources, expertise, and grassroots connectivity of these external entities, the public sector frequently defaults to a top-down, "government-knows-best" approach. This isolation leads to poorly designed policies, inefficient resource allocation, failed projects, and a profound disconnect between public services and the needs of the people they are meant to serve, ultimately stunting socio-economic progress and eroding public trust (Adegboye, 2018; World Bank, 2018). This critical dysfunction within the Nigerian public sector perpetuates inefficiency, policy failure, and public alienation (Adegboye, 2018).

The lack of an innovative culture in the Nigerian public sector is another critical barrier to the sector attaining its goals. This deficit is not merely an absence of new ideas but a deeply entrenched systemic aversion to change, risk-taking, and creative problem-solving. This problem stems from a complex web of institutional inertia, misaligned incentives, and political instability (Olannye, 2006; Ibrahim, 2020; Adeyemi, 2019; and Jega, 2007). In an era defined by rapid technological advancement and complex socio-economic challenges, this stagnation is particularly detrimental. While the global public sector is increasingly embracing innovation labs, digital governance, and data-driven decision-making, Nigeria's bureaucracy remains largely wedded to outdated, manual processes and a rigid, rule-bound operational model. This lack of innovation manifests in chronic inefficiency, poor service delivery, wasted resources, and an inability to effectively address the needs of a growing and dynamic population. The consequence is a vast gap between governmental potential and its actual performance, a gap that stifles national progress and perpetuates a cycle of underdevelopment (Adegboye, 2018; World Bank, 2018).

The prevailing design of public sector leadership in Nigeria, largely inherited from colonial structures and perpetuated by post-independence patrimonial systems, calls for urgent reassessment. It is within this context of a pressing need for transformative change that the concept of inclusive leadership is considered a necessity for driving innovation management for revitalising the Nigerian public sector and aligning it with the demands of the 21st century. Therefore, the goal of this study is firmly rooted in the identified chasm between the urgent, existential need for innovation in the Nigerian public sector and the prevailing leadership culture that systematically constrains it. While considerable scholarly attention has been paid to leadership in Africa (such as Ayee, 2013) and to public sector innovation in Western contexts (for example, Fatile & Adejuwon, 2017; and Osborne & Brown, 2013), there is an

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apparent sparseness of evidence-based research that meticulously investigates the symbiotic relationship between the behaviors of inclusive leadership and the effective management of innovation within the unique, complex, and often challenging environment of the Nigerian public service. It was based on the prevailing gap in the literature that the study was set out to fill. The main objective of the study is to examine the significant relationship between inclusive leadership and innovation management in the Nigerian public sector by researching selected government agencies in Lagos State. The specific objectives are to:

i. Investigate the significant effect of diverse representation on competitive drive in the public sector.
ii. Examine the significant effect of participatory decision-making on external stakeholder collaboration in public service delivery.
iii. Assess the extent to which leadership development in the public sector is significantly effective on innovative culture.

2. Literature Review

The phenomena of globalisation, remote jobs and persistent emphasis on social justice in the 21st century have brought about a fundamental redefinition of the quality of leadership in the workplace (Senge, 1990; Spillane, 2006). No longer is it sufficient for leaders to be merely directive, charismatic, or strategically astute. The best practice, backed by an overwhelming body of evidence, is inclusive leadership, which has been repeatedly defined by various authors from different viewpoints. Prime and Salib (2014) opine that "inclusive leadership is about leveraging and integrating the thinking of diverse individuals and groups for better business results. It is manifested through practices that enable individuals to voice their perspectives, feel a sense of belonging and value, and contribute their talents to achieve collective goals". The definition emphasises the tangible outcome of "better business results" and focuses on the leader's role in creating conditions for voice, belonging, and value.

Bourke & Dillon (2018) noted that "inclusive leaders are individuals who are aware of their own biases and actively seek out and consider different perspectives to inform their decision-making and collaborate more effectively with others. They are characterised by six signature traits: Commitment, Courage, Cognisance of bias, Curiosity, Cultural Intelligence, and Collaboration." This is a practical, trait-based definition that provides a clear framework for development, which emphasises self-awareness and the active pursuit of different perspectives. Still from the perspective of personal attributes, Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon & Ziv (2010) observed that inclusive leadership is a leadership style that "manifests itself through specific leader behaviours that signal to followers that they are valued for their unique characteristics and are encouraged to fully participate in the group. It is positively associated with team psychological safety, which is, a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking". The most compelling argument for inclusive leadership lies in its direct impact on an organisation's bottom line and competitive advantage. Dixon-Fyle et al. (2023) opined that companies in the top quartile for executive team gender diversity are 39% more likely to outperform their peers on profitability, while those in the top quartile for ethnic diversity are 76% more

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likely to do so (Gartner, 2021). This reinforces the argument that a diverse workforce, coupled with inclusive leadership, creates an environment where diverse perspectives are heard, integrated, and leveraged.

Also, inclusive leadership serves as a veritable tool for fostering an innovative climate and resilient decision-making. Delizonna (2017) revealed in a study that diverse teams with high psychological safety demonstrate a greater capacity for experimentation and learning, which are the bedrocks of innovation. Unlike homogeneous groups, which often fall prey to "groupthink," often leading to poor decisions, inclusive leaders actively combat this issue by cultivating an atmosphere of shared belief that encourages the use of individual initiatives, which creates a culture where employees feel safe to propose risky, creative ideas. Furthermore, inclusive leadership has become a decisive factor in attracting, retaining, and engaging top-tier employees as organisations engage in aggressive talent retention strategies. The modern workforce, particularly younger generations like Millennials and Gen Z, increasingly expects their employers to demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusivity. Emmott (2021) embarked on a study which consistently showed that employees who feel a strong sense of belonging report higher levels of discretionary effort, stronger commitment to the organisation's goals, and a significantly lower intent to leave.

Finally, leading a team spread across different countries, time zones, and cultural differences requires a high degree of cultural intelligence and empathy, which an inclusive leader exemplifies. Gartner (2022) posits that an inclusive leader proactively implements equitable practices, such as ensuring remote participants are heard in hybrid meetings and that career-advancing opportunities are distributed fairly, thereby maintaining team cohesion and performance regardless of physical location. The importance of inclusive leadership in the contemporary workplace cannot be overstated. It is the critical bridge that connects a diverse workforce to effective organisational performance, groundbreaking innovation, and unwavering employee loyalty (Williams & Multhaup, 2018). As a form of leadership characterised by traits such as humility, courage, empathy, and cultural intelligence, inclusive leadership has emerged as a critical new-age lever that directly fuels innovation, resilience, talent retention, and financial performance, making it a non-negotiable component of sustainable business success.

The Concept of Innovation Management

From time immemorial, the survival of human civilisation has always been dependent on man's ability to be innovative in the face of external threats. Atairet (2022) upholds this assertion by noting that new ideas and things have regularly been introduced in all spheres of human endeavours, which further indicates the dynamic nature of the human race. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the need to theorise innovation as a notion and practice became necessary to many authors and organisations all over the world. The concept of innovation has been conceived, defined, interpreted and understood in different ways. From organisation to organisation, different approaches were applied towards innovation mechanisms that differed from company to company, which made it difficult for organisational and management theorists to arrive at a generally agreed-upon methodology for

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effectively adopting innovation (Fedulov and Pobedin, 2021). This suggests that there is no one acceptable definition of innovation. This has led to a significant number of definitions of innovation from across different fields in academia, industry, government and service provision. Thus, different definitions of innovation in the literature have been put forward to establish an understanding of the components that make up the concept of innovation. Oluwuo (2021) sees innovation as "the introduction of something new to the market; the usage of new ideas or methods to improve the quality of a product or process. Innovation uses platforms already invented to create a successful product or process in a commercial quantity which will at the end satisfy a market need". Thus, innovation refers to something new that brings benefit for an organization and human society. Fedulov and Pobedin (2021) viewed innovations to mean the "new processes, ideas, services and products designed to improve the functioning of the organization's structural units, reduce costs and improve quality overall". According to Drucker (in Dieter, 2018), there are four basic types of innovation, namely:

i. **Incremental Innovation**: This means doing more of the same things you have been doing with somewhat better results.
ii. **Additive Innovation**: This type of innovation relies on fully exploiting already existing resources, such as product line extensions, and can achieve good results. These opportunities should rarely be treated as high priority eff orts. The risks should be small, and they should not take resources away from complementary or breakthrough opportunities.
iii. **Complementary Innovation**: This type of innovation is about offering something new and changing the structure of the business.
iv. **Breakthrough Innovation (Radical Innovation)**: This refers to changing the fundamentals of the business or creating a new industry and new avenues for extensive wealth creation.

Before discussing innovation management, it is important to briefly examine the concept of management. Management deals with the coordination of human and material resources for the achievement of organisational goals. For Oluwuo (2021), management is the process of planning, organising, directing, and controlling resources to achieve organisational goals. The responsibilities of managers in an organisation are summarised by 5 Ms, which (Oluwuo, 2021) names as: men, machines, methods, materials and money. Also, the task areas of educational management are: finance, curriculum and instruction, physical facilities, student personnel administration, staff personnel administration and school-community relationships. Management is therefore key to the achievement of organisational goals.

When it comes to setting up the foundations for innovation management as a practice, Joseph Schumpeter, an acclaimed Austrian political economist, could be credited as the brains behind it through his study of "creative destruction" (Hörlesberger et al., in Bayhan and Korkmaz, 2021). Innovation and management of innovation are important factors in keeping up with the changing world. With technological advances and the development of new teaching methods, organisations are

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executing innovation and change to catch up with the pace of the digital age and to provide a very competitive organisational environment (Ekşi, Özgenel and Aksel, 2021).

Managing innovation in organisations was the core of crafting a body of knowledge on the concept. Simply put, innovation management is the management of the innovation process. However, there are some definitions of innovation management that are worth noting. Oluwuo (2021) again viewed innovation management as "the process of introducing new things to develop the business or the market". He also added that it is "a way of managing an organisation's innovation procedure starting from the initial stage of ideation to its final stage of successful implementation, encompassing the decisions, activities and practice of devising and implementing innovation strategies. Innovation management drives a sustainable innovation process and helps in creating positive change and culture within an organisation. Furthermore, it is the promotion of innovations in an organisation, and this includes tasks of planning, organisation, management and controlling, dealing with all measures to promote and support innovation in an organisation to reap the maximum benefit".

Matzler et al. (2015 in Sherstobitova, Shmatko and Krayneva, 2019) see innovation management as representing "the mix of managing innovative processes and novel approaches to chain management and offer approaches and tools that enable managers and subordinates to work on common goals, which might be of great help here". According to Ofondu (2018), "Innovation management refers to both product and organisational innovation. Innovation management describes the decisions, activities and practices that move an idea to realisation for the purpose of generating business value. It is managing the investment in creating new opportunities for generating customer value that are needed to sustain and grow the business or company". When it comes down to implementing an innovation management system in an organisation, it requires a major effort of involving organisational and cultural change. Innovation management capabilities assessment, strategy development, and top management commitment are key for implementing an innovation management system (Inngage Consulting AB, 2020). Implementing innovation management comes in four phases, namely: prepare, implement, scale and maintain, and evaluate and improve (Inngage Consulting AB, 2020).

i. **Prepare**: This stage starts by assessing the current innovation management capabilities, including mapping of ongoing innovation activities and other existing management systems. Another important activity is to understand the innovation opportunities and challenges facing the organisation, including new user needs, technology trends, competitor moves, and other changes in society and the environment. The phase ends with deciding the intention, purpose and aim of the innovation for the organisation.
ii. **Implement**: The next phase is to develop an innovation strategy and policy that describes the areas of opportunity for the organisation, the types of innovations that will be focused on, the resources that will be allocated to pursue the opportunities, the people and teams that will be involved, and how results will be measured and followed up. It commences with simple innovation initiatives, with frequent communication, creation of awareness, and recognition of

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achievements. Also, there is a need to focus on competence development and on providing (digital) tools and methods for innovation managers, facilitators, and coaches.

iii. **Scale and maintain**: Next is to build momentum by reinforcing top management commitment, forming innovation portfolios, and by measuring and communicating progress, good examples, and results in the organisation. Also, innovation activities should be broadened by inspiring and engaging more people in the organisation, as well as external partners and collaborators. There should be support for all leaders in the organisation to foster a culture that promotes innovative activities. The value which is realised for the organisation, users, and other stakeholders is key in this phase.

iv. **Evaluate and improve**: This stage starts with analysing and evaluating the performance of the entire innovation management system with all its elements. There is a need to note the most significant innovation opportunities. Also, enquiries should be made to find out if innovation objectives have been achieved. In addition, it should be determined if the right organisational culture is being established. Based on the evaluation, the gaps should be prioritised, and there must be improvement in the system by adjusting the innovation strategy, improving the understanding of the context, reallocating resources, involving partners, improving innovation measurements, and so on.

The Leadership Challenge in Driving Nigerian Public Sector Innovation and the Need for Inclusive Leadership

The Nigerian society stands on the precipice, with daunting challenges like a rapidly growing population, immense infrastructural deficits, security challenges, and rising citizen expectations. This quagmire demands an urgent need for innovative solutions like never before, especially from the public sector, which is often characterised by a pervasive inaction and a resistance to change that suffocates creativity and efficiency. At the heart of this stagnation lies a profound and multifaceted leadership challenge which is deeply entrenched in structural, cultural, and systemic constraints.

To begin with, the Nigerian public administration is largely built on a colonial-era, hierarchical model that prioritises procedure over outcomes, adherence to rules over problem-solving, and seniority over merit. This creates an environment of “red tape”, where the use of initiatives is systematically discouraged, stifling innovation. As Aiyede (2018) notes in his analysis of governance in Nigeria, “The public service is often constrained by rules and regulations that were designed for control and accountability but have become impediments to efficiency and creativity.” A leader in this system must therefore spend immense political and social capital not on innovating itself, but merely on navigating the bureaucracy to create the permission to innovate.

Compounding this bureaucratic bottleneck in the public sector is the scenario whereby civil servants, especially the high-ranking ones, operate at the whims of political appointees to the detriment of the greater good. The frequent changes in ministerial leadership, driven by political calculations rather than performance, lead to policy discontinuity and the abandonment of promising innovative initiatives. This creates a vicious cycle of starting over, whereby civil servants have to adopt the safest course of action by maintaining the status quo, since any initiative they champion may be scrapped with the next

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change in administration, and possibly put their careers in peril. This environment makes it nearly impossible for leaders to build the trust and long-term commitment necessary for meaningful innovation.

Furthermore, the perennial problem of financial resource constraints poses a clear barrier that affects everything from technology acquisition to training, leading to the depletion of human capital. As a result of this lingering issue, the public sector has suffered from a "brain drain" for decades, with many of its most talented and creative professionals lured away by better remuneration and more dynamic environments in the private sector and abroad. As highlighted by the World Bank (2022), the public servants who remain are often overworked, underpaid, and demoralised, with limited access to the modern skills required for innovation, such as data analytics, digital literacy, and design thinking. Furthermore, decades of corruption, nepotism, and poor service delivery in the Nigerian public sector have bred deep-seated mutual distrust among citizens and public servants. On the part of the citizens, they are often sceptical of any new government initiative, viewing it as a potential avenue for graft rather than genuine improvement. This makes it difficult to pilot new programs that require citizen participation and feedback. From the purview of civil servants, a culture of mistrust prevails where subordinates are unwilling to propose novel ideas for fear that they will be stolen by superiors or that they will be held solely accountable for any failure. This strangles innovation at its source.

Despite this daunting landscape, a path forward exists. Ultimately, driving innovation in the Nigerian public sector is the ultimate test of transformative leadership. It requires leaders who are not only technically competent but also politically astute, culturally sensitive, and exceptionally resilient. They must be architects of new systems, champions of their people, and relentless advocates for the citizen (Osborne, 2010). This calls for a new approach to public sector leadership that is down-to-earth, inclusive, to overcome the challenges of bureaucratic, political, and cultural impediments and set the Nigerian society on a path of renewal and effective service delivery for the 21st century. The challenge of fostering innovation within Nigeria's public sector is often framed as a problem of resources, such as a lack of funding, technology, or technical expertise. While these are significant constraints, this perspective overlooks a more profound and potentially transformative asset: the collective intelligence and creativity of Nigeria's diverse populace and its own public servants. The prospect of managing public sector innovation through inclusive leadership offers a paradigm shift that moves the solution from a top-down, resource-centric model to a collaborative, human-centric one. The foundational prospect of inclusive leadership in Nigeria's public sector lies in its ability to enhance problem identification and solution design through proximity and lived experience, while also building legitimacy, trust, and collective ownership of reforms. Inclusive leadership, marked by curiosity and collaboration, bridges the gap of inefficient service delivery by actively soliciting input from frontline employees and citizens. The low-level administrative staff who process daily demands from the public understand systemic bottlenecks better than external consultants and liaise with end-users. Thereby, the inclusive leadership aligns with "New Public Governance" principles, which stress service provider–user collaboration (Osborne, 2010).

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An inclusive leader would establish citizen advisory panels, design-thinking workshops, and safe channels for civil servants to report inefficiencies without reprisal, generating practical and impactful innovations. At the same time, a history of top-down, failed initiatives has bred deep public cynicism in Nigeria. Inclusive leadership counters this by fostering shared ownership: when community members see their ideas reflected in local initiatives or civil servants co-design workflows, they become champions of change. This builds the social capital and trust essential for sustainable innovation. As Ogunleye (2021) argues in the African Journal of Public Affairs, "The legitimacy of public sector reforms in Nigeria is contingent upon their participatory nature… inclusivity is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic one for sustainable development."

Furthermore, inclusive leadership mitigates elite capture and ensures equitable outcomes by deliberately creating platforms for women, youth, people with disabilities, and minority groups. It translates public sector innovation into a mechanism for social equity, as a result, aligning the Nigerian administrative structure with the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 16) on inclusive institutions. It also taps into Nigeria's demographic dividend and digital ecosystem, notably the vibrant tech scene in "Yabacon Valley." An inclusive leader builds bridges with tech hubs, universities, and innovation labs, creating public challenges and fellowships that bring young tech talent into government for short-term projects. This "government-as-a-platform" model (O'Reilly, 2013) allows the public sector to leverage external creativity and agile methods without fully overhauling its internal structure.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories were adapted in exploring the subject matter of this study. The Adaptive Leadership Theory serves as the primary theoretical basis because it offers a powerful framework for understanding how to lead diverse groups in a manner that fundamentally requires inclusiveness. Developed primarily by Ronald Heifetz and his colleagues at Harvard University, adaptive leadership provides a practical methodology for mobilising people to confront their most difficult problems and to thrive amidst uncertainty (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). The foundational pillar of this theory is the critical distinction between technical challenges and adaptive challenges, a dichotomy that serves as the linchpin of the entire framework. While technical challenges are clearly defined problems solvable with existing organisational expertise or procedures, adaptive challenges demand genuine learning, where the leader's role is not to provide answers but to mobilise people to do the work of learning and adapting themselves.

Given this distinction, the primary function of an adaptive leader is not to act as a heroic problem-solver but rather as a facilitator of a collective learning process, employing a set of deliberate and often counter-intuitive practices. First, the leader must "get on the balcony," a metaphor encouraging one to step away from the immediate pressures of daily operations to gain a broader, systemic perspective from which patterns and dynamic interactions become visible (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Second, the leader must diagnose the system by identifying the core adaptive challenge, the various

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stakeholders involved, and the competing values and loyalties at stake, which requires deep listening and probing questions rather than jumping to quick solutions. Third, and most crucially, the leader must regulate distress, recognising that adaptive change is inherently stressful as it forces people to relinquish familiar ways and confront uncomfortable truths; this involves creating a "holding environment" where conflict and disequilibrium can be productively contained and worked through without causing a dysfunctional meltdown.

A central and often painful dynamic of adaptive leadership is orchestrating productive conflict and allowing people to experience the full reality of the challenge, resisting the temptation to restore equilibrium quickly by smoothing over conflict or providing technical fixes to adaptive problems (Heifetz, 1994). Instead, the adaptive leader brings conflict to the surface, gives the work back to the people, and exposes the gap between the organisation's stated values and its current reality, forcing a collective confrontation with the need for change. This process necessarily involves loss, as Heifetz (1994) explains that adaptive work demands people make sacrifices, letting go of cherished practices, long-held beliefs, or entrenched privileges. The leader must acknowledge this loss and create conditions for people to mourn the past before embracing an uncertain future, requiring immense emotional fortitude as the leader inevitably becomes a target for the frustration and anxiety that the adaptive process generates.

When this framework is applied to the Nigerian public sector, it becomes evident that traditional technical leadership approaches have consistently failed to produce the sustained innovation and inclusive governance the nation desperately requires. Viewing the public sector's core problems as deep-seated adaptive challenges can show why inclusive leadership is the essential response and why innovation management must be a collective, learning-oriented process rather than a top-down mandate. The primary utility of adaptive leadership theory in this context lies in its foundational distinction: barriers to inclusion and innovation in Nigeria, such as entrenched hierarchical cultures, systemic risk-aversion, and deep-seated public distrust, are not solvable by a simple fiat from the Head of Service but are instead rooted in people's values, beliefs, loyalties, and long-established work habits. As Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) argue, "The most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems," and the chronic ineffectiveness of many public sector reforms in Nigeria stands as a testament to this misdiagnosis, where the adaptive work required is a fundamental shift in the ethos of public service, from procedure and compliance to service, accountability, and collaborative problem-solving. Within this context, inclusive leadership emerges not as a "nice-to-have" HR policy but as the core strategic practice for doing adaptive work, as an inclusive leader instinctively performs adaptive functions by deliberately seeking out perspectives from junior staff, frontline officers, and diverse citizens, thereby "getting on the balcony" through the lived experiences of others (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

However, the application of this theory is riddled with profound perils, as the leader who challenges the status quo, surfaces value conflicts, and redistributes voice and power inevitably becomes a target;

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in a system where patronage and seniority are deeply entrenched, such a leader will face significant "work avoidance mechanisms" ranging from passive resistance and bureaucratic foot-dragging to active sabotage and political maneuvering to have the leader removed (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Adaptive leadership theory prepares leaders for this reality by advising them to "manage their hungers" and "anchor themselves" to avoid being taken out of the game by the system's immune response (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), and the high turnover of reform-minded public servants in Nigeria starkly illustrates this dynamic. In conclusion, adaptive leadership theory does not merely describe the challenges of the Nigerian public sector but provides a robust and explanatory framework for action, compellingly arguing that sustainable innovation and genuine inclusion cannot be achieved through technical quick-fixes but rather require the courageous, deliberate, and politically astute practice of adaptive leadership—rejecting the comfort of technical remedies and embracing the messy, conflict-laden, yet transformative process of mobilizing people to tackle their toughest problems together.

The social exchange theory, which is rooted in the work of Blau (1964) and Homans (1958), was also adopted in this study. The theory posits that relationships are formed through a process of cost-benefit analysis, where individuals reciprocate positive treatment with loyalty, commitment, and discretionary effort. When leaders demonstrate trust, support, and inclusivity, employees respond with organisational citizenship behaviors and enhanced performance. This postulation is significant because when leaders actively involve employees and stakeholders in decision-making processes, they create a psychological contract wherein participants feel valued and respected. As noted by Hewlett et al (2013), inclusive leaders "create an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and ideas. However, the theory is limited in the fact that it oversimplifies public sector relationships, where extrinsic motivators, such as job security and pension benefits, rather than relational exchange, dictate behavior.

Finally, the collaborative governance theory as espoused and articulated by Ansell and Gash (2008) and Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) was applied in this study. It explains how public agencies can achieve collective outcomes through formal and informal partnerships with non-state actors. However, this is based on conditions such as trust-building, principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action, through the creation of an enabling environment for collaboration. Yet, the Nigerian context is plagued by decades of corruption, nepotism, and poor service delivery, which have bred deep-seated mutual distrust among citizens and public servants.

Conceptual model

The conceptual model visually and narratively outlines the proposed relationships between the indicators of the main constructs.

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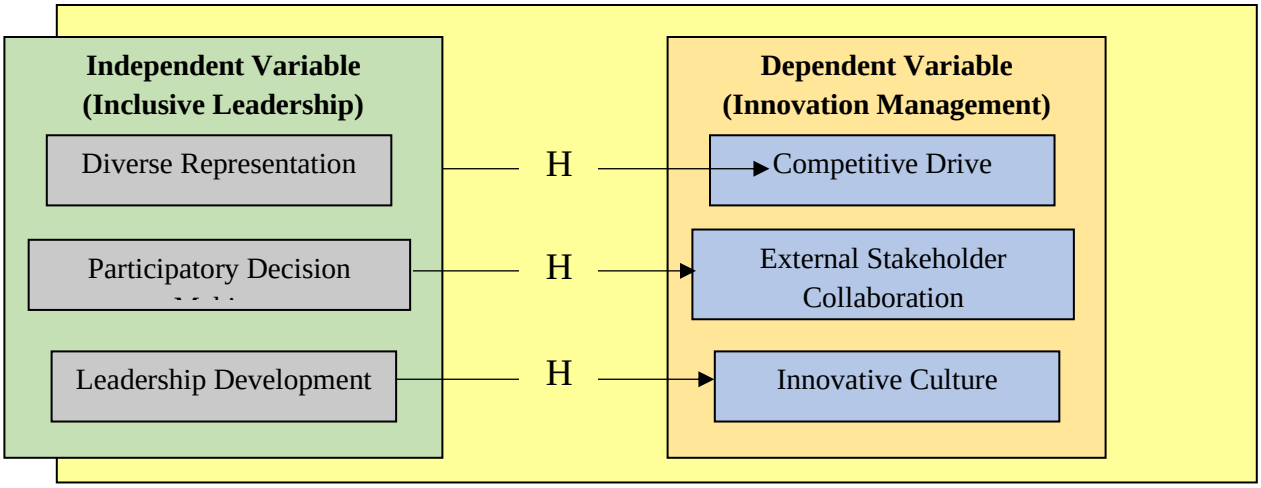
Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Relationship between Inclusive Leadership and Innovation Management.



Source: Author's Idea (2025).

This model posits that inclusive leadership, as a latent construct, is manifested through three key indicators: diverse representation, participatory decision-making, and leadership development. Similarly, innovation management is manifested through its indicators: competitive drive, external stakeholder collaboration, and innovative culture.

The model tests the specific, discrete relationships between these indicators as defined by your hypotheses. The use of null hypotheses (H_0) is a formal way of stating that the testing is conducted for the presence of a significant effect.

Empirical Review and Research Gap

The empirical review examines recent research in light of the indicators identified in the core concepts of the study, primarily in the Nigerian context.

To begin with, some authors have embarked on studies to capture diverse representation on competitive drive in organisations. A study conducted by Abdulkareem et al. (2025) on local government staff in Kwara State, Nigeria, revealed that inclusive leadership significantly impacts employee performance, with innovative work behaviour serving as a key mediator. The study demonstrated that inclusive leaders foster an environment where employees feel valued and empowered, leading to increased competitiveness that enhances overall performance. Thus, diverse representation boosts competitive drive by ensuring that multiple approaches to problem-solving, thereby mitigating rigidity which usually plagues rule-based settings like the Nigerian public sector. As opined by Aiyede (2018) that Nigerian public service has historically been constrained by rules and regulations that impede efficiency and creativity; diverse representation offers a pathway to disrupt this stagnation.

Participatory decision-making, as an indicator of inclusive leadership, by default, involves the systematic inclusion of employees and relevant stakeholders in the policy-making cycle. Awolola (2024) buttressed this point by noting that inclusive leadership boosts team performance and motivation

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by creating an environment of psychological safety. This allows team members to feel valued and empowered to contribute unique ideas, leading to better problem-solving and decision-making. Yet, this approach stands in deliberate contrast to the traditional, hierarchical decision-making model that has historically characterised the Nigerian public sector. As Adegboye (2018) observed, the Nigerian public sector frequently defaults to a top-down, "government-knows-best" approach instead of leveraging the resources, expertise, and grassroots connectivity of external entities.

Leadership development, as the third indicator of inclusive leadership in this study, proposes a systematic process for developing leaders who foster innovation and drive organisational change. Addai's (2025) research on AI leadership and talent management among public service employees in Ghana reveals the transformative potential of polishing leaders who foster innovative organisational cultures within public service organisations.In the Nigerian public sector context, findings from Olakunle et al. (2025) focusing on Nigeria's public sector found that innovative leadership (e.g., digital transformation, participatory management) can improve service delivery, though its effectiveness is significantly hampered by systemic barriers like bureaucratic inertia, limited funding, and weak leadership capacity. This underscores the importance of sustained leadership development efforts that address not only individual leader capabilities but also the systemic barriers that constrain innovation. Despite the established importance of these concepts, a critical gap persists in the literature. There is a lack of evidence that wholly examines these critical indicators of inclusive leadership in light of their influence on the processes and outcomes of innovation management in Nigeria .The present study aims to fill this gap by empirically testing the relationships between these indicators of inclusive leadership (diverse representation, participatory decision-making, leadership development) and those of innovation management (competitive drive, external stakeholder collaboration, innovative culture) within selected government agencies in Lagos State.

3. Methodology

This researcher employed the descriptive survey research design, which allows for the collection of robust statistical data to generalise findings. The approach provides a broad overview of the perceptions and interactions within the quadruple helix model. The study was conducted in selected ministries in the Lagos State Civil Service, Alausa, Lagos, Nigeria. They include: the Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs, the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation. The target population for this study comprises all employees in the Lagos State Civil Service. Based on official statements from the Lagos State Government, the staff size of the Lagos State Civil Service is approximately 120,000 employees. This figure was explicitly stated by the Lagos State Head of Service, Mr Hakeem Muri-Okunola, in 2022 (Guardian Nigeria, 2022).

Applying the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula to the population of the study, the study arrived at a sample size of 400 respondents from the aforementioned ministries. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, which includes purposive sampling, stratified sampling and simple random sampling. The primary mode of data collection (the questionnaire) was administered directly to the

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selected respondents. The data from the questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and charts) were adopted in summarising the data. The inferential statistics of multiple regression analysis were applied in testing for significant differences in perceptions and experiences across the different helices and local government areas.

4. Findings and Discussion

The data supplied by the respondents that relates directly to the research hypotheses were analysed in this section. In the context of this research, regression analysis is used to test hypotheses and examine the relationships between inclusive leadership and innovation management. The results of the regression analysis are interpreted in terms of the coefficients and p-values (significance level). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 was used in conducting the regression analysis in this study. The rule in regression analysis is that, if the significance level is less than 0.05, then the model is statistically significant, and if it is greater than 0.05, then the model is statistically not significant, which means the independent variable does not significantly affect the dependent variable.

Hypothesis one

$H0_1$: There is no significant effect of diverse representation on competitive drive in the public sector.

Table 1: Linear Regression Coefficients of Hypothesis One

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.110	.113		27.463	.000
	diverse representation	.098	.040	.125	2.463	.014
a. Dependent Variable: competitive drive						

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The table above shows a p-value or significance level of 0.014, which is less than 0.05. This means that the model for the hypothesis is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and an alternative hypothesis is generated. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between diverse representation and competitive drive in the public sector. Furthermore, the table shows a standardised coefficient value (0.125) indicating that for every unit increase of the independent variable (diverse representation), the dependent variable (competitive drive) increases by 0.125 or 12.5%.

Hypothesis Two

$H0_2$: There is no significant effect of participatory decision-making on external stakeholder collaboration in public service delivery.

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Table 2: Linear Regression Coefficients of Hypothesis Two

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.587	.139		11.415	.000
	participatory decision-making	.361	.049	.352	7.371	.000
a. Dependent Variable: external stakeholder collaboration						

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The table above shows a p-value or significance level of 0.00, which is less than 0.05. This means that the model for the hypothesis is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and an alternative hypothesis is generated. This indicates that there is a significant effect of participatory decision-making on external stakeholder collaboration in public service delivery. Furthermore, the table shows a standardised coefficient value (0.352) indicating that for every unit increase of the independent variable (participatory decision-making), the dependent variable (external stakeholder collaboration) increases by 0.352 or 32.5%.

Hypothesis Three

$H0_3$: Leadership development in the public sector is not significantly effective on innovative culture.

Table 3: Linear Regression Coefficients of Hypothesis Three

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.123	.110		28.348	.000
	leadership development	.094	.039	.122	2.421	.016
a. Dependent Variable: innovative culture						

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The table above shows a p-value or significance level of 0.016, which is less than 0.05. This means that the model for the hypothesis is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and an alternative hypothesis is generated. This indicates that leadership development in the public sector is significantly effective on innovative culture. Furthermore, the table shows a standardised coefficient value (0.122) indicating that for every unit increase of the independent variable (leadership development), the dependent variable (innovative culture) increases by 0.122 or 12.2%.

The analysis of data from selected government agencies in Lagos State provides compelling evidence that dismantles the traditional hierarchical model of public administration, thus positioning inclusive

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leadership as a critical enabler of innovation and performance. The confirmation of all three hypotheses offers a coherent narrative: a public sector that is representative, participatory, and development-oriented is fundamentally better equipped to navigate the complexities of the 21st century.

The finding that diverse representation significantly enhances competitive drive ($\beta = 0.125$, $p = 0.014$) underscores a paradigm shift in how public value is created. Teams with heterogeneity in gender, ethnicity, generation, and professional background generate a wider spectrum of ideas and solutions. This result resonates strongly with Adaptive Leadership Theory, which posits that adaptive challenges cannot be solved through technical fixes alone but require mobilising diverse perspectives to confront entrenched problems (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Furthermore, the finding aligns with the work of Abdulkareem et al. (2025), who demonstrated that inclusive leadership significantly impacts employee performance in Nigerian local governments, with innovative work behaviour serving as a key mediator. is particularly significant in the Nigerian public sector, which Aiyede (2018) characterized as historically constrained by rules and regulations that impede efficiency and creativity; diverse representation offers a pathway to disrupt this stagnation.

The significant effect of participatory decision-making on external stakeholder collaboration ($\beta = 0.352$, $p = 0.000$) signifies a decisive move from a closed bureaucratic model to an open, networked ecosystem of public service delivery. This finding confirms that inclusive leadership, manifested through shared decision-making processes, is the primary mechanism for building the relational capital necessary for effective collaboration. The core tenets of Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2018; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012) validate this result, which emphasizes that genuine collaboration is built on trust, mutual legitimacy, and shared commitment, which are cultivated through participatory processes. Awolola (2024) further buttressed this point by noting that inclusive leadership boosts team performance and motivation by creating an environment of psychological safety, which allows team members to feel valued and empowered to contribute unique ideas, leading to better problem-solving and decision-making.

The confirmation from the third finding that leadership development is significantly effective in fostering an innovative culture ($\beta = 0.122$, $p = 0.016$) highlights a fundamental truth, which is that innovation is not a random event but a cultural outcome that must be intentionally architected and nurtured. This finding posits that targeted investment in developing public sector leaders is the most critical lever for shifting organisational culture from compliance to creativity. Again, Adaptive Leadership Theory lends support to this notion by emphasising the leader's role in regulating distress and creating a "holding environment" where adaptive work can occur (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Moreover, these findings challenge ad-hoc training approaches, supporting Knies et al. (2018) that leadership development must be viewed as a strategic, systemic intervention aimed at building organisational capacity.

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5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirmed that inclusive leadership serves as a fundamental strategic lever for transforming the Nigerian public sector, moving beyond outdated bureaucratic models toward more dynamic and innovative governance. The study's findings show that diverse representation significantly enhances competitive drive by tapping into a workforce's intellectual and cognitive capital, which helps agencies better understand and meet the needs of a diverse citizenry while building public trust. Furthermore, participatory decision-making was found to significantly improve external stakeholder collaboration, breaking down institutional walls and fostering the shared ownership essential for tackling complex challenges like urban transportation and housing shortages.

Inclusive leadership development also proved highly effective in cultivating an innovative culture, as leaders trained in emotional intelligence, change management, and risk tolerance create the psychological safety needed for experimentation and continuous learning. Together, these three pillars (diverse representation, participatory decision-making, and leadership development) form an interdependent model that builds the human, social, and institutional capital necessary for a resilient and adaptive public sector focused on creating lasting public value.

Recommendations

The outcomes of this study necessitate deliberate and systematic responses, moving from academic insight to tangible improvement within the Nigerian public sector. Given the significant effect of diverse representation on competitive drive, it is imperative to move beyond passive non-discrimination policies toward active strategies that build a truly reflective workforce. This involves institutionalising merit-based, transparent recruitment through blind techniques, diverse selection panels, and clear competency frameworks, while also implementing targeted talent sourcing via partnerships with varied educational institutions and structured internship programmes for underrepresented groups.

The proven link between participatory decision-making and effective external collaboration necessitates the creation of formal and informal mechanisms for inclusive engagement. Internally, organisations should mandate cross-functional project teams, institute digital suggestion systems, and delegate meaningful authority to middle managers. Externally, they must formalise structures for co-creation by establishing permanent stakeholder advisory boards, piloting design thinking workshops with citizens, and leveraging digital collaboration platforms for ongoing dialogue and real-time feedback on service delivery.

The critical role of leadership development in fostering innovation calls for strategic, long-term investment in building a cadre of change-oriented public sector leaders. A competency-based framework should focus on innovation-specific skills such as strategic foresight, risk management, and emotional intelligence, delivered through blended experiential learning methods. Furthermore, creating an institutional environment that rewards innovation requires establishing dedicated innovation funds and regulatory sandboxes for safe experimentation, publicly celebrating successes, and formally reframing well-intentioned failures as valuable learning opportunities rather than grounds for sanction.

To ensure these targeted recommendations are effective, they must be supported by synergistic, organisation-wide initiatives. Inclusive leadership should be integrated into performance metrics for

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all managers, while top-level political commitment from the Head of Service and Commissioners must provide resources and consistent messaging signalling a permanent strategic shift. With these recommendations implemented, the Lagos State public sector can systematically build capacity for innovation from within, transforming government agencies from slow-moving bureaucracies into agile, collaborative institutions capable of delivering exceptional public value and regaining citizen trust.

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