

The impact of leadership styles on organizational performance in Tanzania local government authorities: Evidence from Ubungu municipal council

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of leadership style on performance of the organizational level in Tanzania Local Government Authorities (LGAs) in the context of Ubungu Municipal Council. In particular, the study examined the effectiveness of transformational leadership, transactional leadership, democratic leadership and autocratic leadership in improving the performance of the LGAs, the problems that hinder the implementation of these leadership styles, and the most suitable leadership style for improving the performance of the LGAs. The study was designed as a mixed-methods, cross-sectional study with a pragmatic philosophy and a descriptive, comparative analytical orientation, supported by transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership theories. The respondents were selected using purposive and stratified sampling methods and a total of 80 respondents were selected of which 68 responded, giving a response rate of 85 percent. The quantitative data obtained from the structured questionnaires was analysed using descriptive statistics. The results indicated that transformational leadership had the greatest positive impact on performance, which was positively increased in the areas of service delivery ($M = 4.40$), employee inspiration ($M = 4.32$) and innovation ($M = 4.15$). Both aspects of transactional leadership, accountability and efficiency in supervision, centred on higher scores ($M = 4.30$ and $M = 4.25$, respectively), and both aspects of democratic leadership, teamwork and participation, also centred on higher scores ($M = 4.35$ and $M = 4.20$, respectively). Excessive autocratic leadership, however, had a negative effect on employee morale ($M = 4.10$) and decreased participation ($M = 4.25$). The main factors that interfered with the effectiveness of leadership were related to limited financial resources ($M = 4.48$), bureaucratic procedures ($M = 4.32$), rapid population growth ($M = 4.25$) and political interference ($M = 4.20$). Thematic analysis of the interviews yielded seven themes that converged with the survey results, among them vision-driven leadership as a source of employee commitment, participation bounded by hierarchy, directive leadership as a situational instrument, and resource and bureaucratic constraints on leadership agency. The study concludes that none of these styles alone is sufficient and suggests a hybrid, situational leadership style, one that blends transformational and democratic leadership while applying transactional and autocratic methods selectively, alongside enhancing leadership development and council governance and financing.

Keywords: Autocratic Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Leadership Styles, Organizational Performance, Transformational Leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership lies at the heart of organizational performance, particularly in the public sector where institutions are expected to translate policy into tangible services for citizens. Local Government Authorities (LGAs) constitute the frontline of public service delivery, and the manner in which their leaders influence, direct, coordinate and motivate staff shapes the quality of services, the level of accountability, employee morale and overall institutional efficiency (Northouse, 2021). In many developing countries, the effectiveness of decentralised governance depends not only on the availability of resources but also, and often decisively, on the quality of leadership that mobilises those resources toward collective goals. Understanding how different leadership styles affect performance is therefore central to any effort to strengthen local governance.

Organizational performance, the dependent variable in this study, refers to the extent to which an organization achieves its stated objectives with respect to service delivery, efficiency, accountability, employee commitment and innovation. In the context of LGAs, performance is commonly assessed through the timeliness and quality of services such as health, education, water, waste management and infrastructure; the prudent and transparent use of public resources; the level of citizen satisfaction; and the ability to implement development projects within budget and schedule. Because these outcomes are strongly mediated by human effort, the behaviour of council leaders becomes a decisive determinant of whether institutional goals are met.

Leadership style, the independent variable, denotes the characteristic pattern of behaviour a leader adopts when influencing, guiding and motivating followers toward organizational objectives (Northouse, 2021). This study focuses on four widely recognised styles. Transformational leadership inspires and intellectually stimulates followers, articulates a compelling vision and attends to their individual development, thereby raising motivation and moral commitment beyond narrow self-interest (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transactional leadership operates through an exchange logic in which performance is directed by contingent rewards, clear expectations and corrective supervision (Bass, 1985; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Democratic, or participative, leadership emphasises consultation, shared decision making and open communication, fostering ownership, commitment and job satisfaction (Likert, 1967; Gastil, 1994). Autocratic leadership concentrates decision-making authority in the leader and relies on directive control, which can accelerate decisions in urgent situations but may depress morale and participation when overused (De Hoogh et al., 2015; Northouse, 2021).

A substantial body of evidence links these styles to performance outcomes. Meta-analytic research confirms that transformational leadership, and to a lesser extent the contingent-reward component of transactional leadership, is positively associated with individual, team and organizational performance (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011). The strength of these relationships is, however, moderated by organizational and cultural context, implying that a style effective in one setting may be less so in another (Obiwuru et al., 2011; Basit et al., 2017). This context-dependence is particularly relevant to public organizations in developing countries, where bureaucratic structures, resource constraints and political dynamics shape the space within which leaders operate.

In Tanzania, decentralisation by devolution has progressively transferred substantial responsibilities for health, education, water, infrastructure and revenue administration to LGAs, thereby increasing the demands placed on council leadership (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1982; Andrews & Shah, 2003). Councils are expected to deliver quality services, mobilise and account for public resources, and involve citizens in local development. Meeting these expectations requires leaders who can motivate staff, coordinate scarce resources and remain responsive to community needs. Yet the extent to which the prevailing leadership styles in Tanzanian councils actually support performance remains insufficiently examined.

Despite sustained public sector reforms, many Tanzanian LGAs continue to experience weak service delivery, administrative inefficiency, low employee morale and stalled development projects, and successive reports of the Controller and Auditor General have linked poor council performance to weaknesses in management and oversight (CAG, 2021). These persistent challenges raise important questions about how council leadership styles influence performance and which styles are most appropriate for the local government setting. Addressing these questions is significant because it can inform leadership development, governance reform and capacity-building efforts aimed at improving service delivery to citizens.

This study therefore investigated the impact of leadership styles on organizational performance using evidence from Ubungu Municipal Council (UMC), one of the fastest-growing municipalities in the Dar es Salaam metropolitan area. By comparing transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership within a single institution, identifying the challenges that constrain their effective practice, and establishing the most suitable configuration for improving performance, the study provides context-specific evidence to guide leadership and governance reform in Tanzanian LGAs. The following section presents the statement of the problem that motivated the study, followed by the specific objectives that guided it.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Government of Tanzania has invested significantly in local government reforms such as performance management systems, capacity-building programmes and financial management reforms to enhance the performance of local governments. However, audit and performance reports continue to highlight weaknesses in service delivery quality, budget implementation, revenue collection and project implementation at the LGA level (CAG, 2021). Rapid urban population escalation at Ubungu Municipal Council has made service provision more demanding, while personnel numbers and funding have not increased on par, underscoring the importance of effective leadership at all levels of the council.

While the literature on the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance is firmly established internationally (Obiwuru et al., 2011), there is comparatively little empirical evidence from Tanzanian LGAs in three respects. First, few studies focus on leadership within municipal councils rather than central government agencies or the private sector. Second, previous studies mostly assess the impact of a single leadership style, rather than evaluating the performance differences between transformational, transactional, democratic and autocratic leadership within a single institution. Third, little is documented about the institutional challenges, such as financing constraints, bureaucracy and political interference, that condition the effectiveness of leadership in councils. This study was consequently aimed at assessing the impact of leadership styles on organizational performance at Ubungu Municipal Council in order to provide tangible evidence for leadership development and governance reform in Tanzanian LGAs.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To identify the role of leadership styles on organizational performance in Tanzania Local Government Authorities;
- ii. To analyse the challenges faced by leaders in practicing effective leadership styles within Local Government Authorities;
- iii. To determine the best leadership style and practices for organizational performance in Local Government Authorities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory was developed by Burns (1978), who defined leadership as a process of elevating both oneself and others to a higher level of motivation and morality, and was later operationalized by Bass (1985) into four leadership behaviours, namely individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence. Transformational leaders communicate a vision, exemplify ethical behaviour, encourage followers to challenge the status quo and focus on employee development (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In public organizations, these behaviours have been argued to increase commitment, innovation and extra-role effort, which results in better service delivery outcomes (Wang et al., 2011). The theory is applicable in this study because it explains how the leaders of the council can raise the motivation and performance of their employees above the levels possible when relying solely on formal rules and rewards.

2.1.2 Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional leadership theory views the leader–follower relationship as a transaction in which followers do what their leaders ask and are rewarded for their efforts, and may be disciplined if they fail to do so (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2021). Its key mechanisms, contingent reward and management by exception, are appropriate for bureaucratic situations with clearly worked-out roles, procedures and performance expectations. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that contingent-reward leadership is consistently correlated with follower performance and satisfaction (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). The theory is relevant to this study because councils in Tanzania have formal systems of performance appraisal and supervision, including the Performance Evaluation and Performance Management Information System (PEPMIS), which institutionalizes transactional exchanges between supervisors and employees.

2.1.3 Democratic Leadership Theory

According to democratic or participative leadership theory, employee involvement in decision making leads to better decisions, a greater sense of commitment to those decisions and increased job satisfaction (Likert, 1967; Gastil, 1994). Likert (1967) found that employee attitudes and productivity are higher in participative management systems than in either exploitative or benevolent authoritative systems. The decentralisation-by-devolution approach prevalent in Tanzania emphasises citizen participation and accountability at the local level (Andrews & Shah, 2003), which can be seen as a democratic approach. The theory informed the evaluation of the impact of participatory practices, such as consultative meetings, joint planning and open communication, on performance at the council.

2.1.4 Autocratic Leadership Theory

Autocratic leadership theory describes a style in which decision-making power is held by the leader while followers are less involved and are expected only to follow the leader's orders (De Hoogh et al., 2015; Northouse, 2021). Although the style is often linked to lowered morale, creativity and commitment, research shows that its impact is context-dependent; in contexts requiring speed, coordination and strict enforcement, such as emergencies, centralized direction can lead to better team performance (De Hoogh et al., 2015). The theory is relevant because council leaders often face pressing administrative directives, emergencies and public health disasters that demand centralised decision making in the shortest possible time.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 The Role of Leadership Styles on Organizational Performance

Wang et al. (2011), aggregating across 113 primary studies, determined that transformational leadership had a positive relationship with individual-, team- and organization-level performance, and that this relationship was stronger for contextual performance. Similarly, Judge and Piccolo (2004) reported high validities for both transformational and contingent-reward transactional leadership. In Nigeria, Obiwuru et al. (2011) found a significant positive relationship between the transactional dimension of leadership and the performance of small-scale enterprises, while the

transformational dimension had a positive but weaker relationship, highlighting that the effectiveness of transformational and transactional leadership is moderated by context. In a Malaysian company, Basit et al. (2017) concluded that democratic leadership had a positive impact on employee performance while autocratic leadership had a negative impact. These studies generally agree that the impact of leadership styles on performance is dependent on organisational context, but comparative evidence remains limited in the context of African municipal councils.

2.2.2 Challenges Facing Effective Leadership in Local Government Authorities

Research on public sector governance has identified recurring barriers to effective governance in local government. Andrews and Shah (2003) suggest that a high prevalence of concentrated fiscal power and low levels of accountability from local leaders to citizens reduce local leaders' discretion and responsiveness. In Tanzania, the Controller and Auditor General has documented budget deficits, delays in disbursements, procurement delays and weaknesses in human resource management, all of which hinder council functioning (CAG, 2021). The literature also refers to political interference in administrative decision making, the rigidity of bureaucracy and the lack of managerial training as factors that hinder leadership in devolved governments (Andrews & Shah, 2003; Northouse, 2021). Yet the impact of such constraints within a single Tanzanian municipal council, and how they shape the effectiveness of specific leadership styles, has not been sufficiently explored empirically.

2.2.3 The Best Leadership Style for Organizational Performance

Research on leadership styles increasingly questions the notion of a single universally best style, favouring situational and integrative approaches. Drawing on a meta-analysis of 626 correlations from 87 studies, Judge and Piccolo (2004) demonstrated that transformational and contingent-reward leadership are strongly correlated and jointly predict performance, indicating that they are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. This suggests that the ideal configuration for public organizations is a blend of styles: transformational behaviours for motivation and engagement, participative behaviours for accountability and ownership, and directive behaviours for emergencies (De Hoogh et al., 2015). Whether this hybrid pattern characterises effective leadership in Tanzanian councils is an empirical question that this study set out to answer.

2.3 Research Gap

The literature reviewed establishes strong general relationships between leadership style and performance, but three gaps are addressed by this study. First, there is a lack of comparative evidence on the four main styles within a single LGA in Tanzania, because most previous local studies focus on one style or one sector. Second, the literature on the effectiveness of council leadership has not previously related leadership style to the specific institutional constraints, financing, bureaucracy, political interference and workload pressure, under which council leaders work. Third, there has been little empirical evidence on the most appropriate leadership configuration for Tanzanian municipal councils. This study addresses these gaps by examining the role of leadership styles, the challenges to their effective application and the optimal style composition at Ubungu Municipal Council.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study employed a mixed-methods, cross-sectional survey design underpinned by a pragmatic research philosophy, in which theoretically derived expectations about the relationship between leadership styles and organizational performance guided the construction of the instruments and the interpretation of the field data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The orientation of the study was descriptive and comparative rather than confirmatory. The objectives required an account of how the four leadership styles were perceived and practised at the council, of the constraints that limited their exercise, and of the configuration of styles judged most suitable for improving performance. Accordingly, no statistical hypotheses were formulated and no inferential hypothesis testing was undertaken. The quantitative strand summarises perceptions rather than estimating causal effects, and the reported patterns are therefore interpreted as evidence of perceived influence and association rather than of statistically verified causation. A convergent mixed-methods design enabled measurement of leadership perceptions using quantitative methods while also allowing qualitative exploration of leadership experiences, which permitted triangulation and enriched interpretation of the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

3.2 Study Area

This study was carried out in Ubungu Municipal Council of the Dar es Salaam Region. The municipality was chosen because it is one of the most rapidly growing urban councils in Tanzania, characterized by high service demand, ongoing public sector reform and a comprehensive roster of local government departments, making it an information-

rich environment in which to explore the operation of leadership styles under the contemporary pressures of urban governance.

3.3 Target Population

The target population included those actively involved in the leadership, management and service delivery of the council. It comprised local government leaders including the Mayor, Councillors, the Municipal Director and heads of departments; public sector workers at departmental, middle-management and operational levels; and community representatives and stakeholders involved in local governance. These groups were chosen because leaders shape the direction and culture of the organization, employees are directly affected by leadership practices in their work, and community representatives bring an external perspective on service delivery.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Purposive and stratified sampling were used. Key informants holding influential positions in policy formulation and decision making, such as the Mayor, Councillors, the Municipal Director and senior departmental officers, were selected through purposive sampling. To ensure representation of all cadres, employees were sampled using stratified sampling based on hierarchical level, covering departmental heads and middle- and lower-level staff. The sample size was calculated from a target population of 100 stakeholders at a 95 percent confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error using the formula proposed by Yamane (1967), which yielded a sample of 80. Sixty-eight (85 percent) usable responses were received, a rate deemed adequate for analysis.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gather primary data. The questionnaires, completed by employees and leaders, comprised a set of demographic questions together with items on the perception of leadership style and organizational performance, adapted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio & Bass, 2004) and answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, which summarised respondent characteristics and perceptions of organizational performance, of each leadership style and of the challenges facing council leaders. A mean score above 4.00 on the 5-point scale was interpreted as strong agreement, scores between 3.50 and 3.99 as agreement, and scores below 3.50 as moderate or weak agreement. Because the objectives of the study were descriptive and comparative, the quantitative analysis did not extend to inferential hypothesis testing; the relative influence of the four styles was assessed by comparing item and construct means rather than by significance testing.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically following the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the transcripts, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding was carried out manually, initial codes were grouped into candidate themes, and the candidate themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the full data set to confirm their internal coherence and distinctiveness. The final themes were organised according to the three research objectives and were then compared with the questionnaire results, so that the two strands could be interpreted together in keeping with the convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

3.7 Validity, Reliability and Ethical Considerations

The instruments were pre-tested with 15 respondents who shared the characteristics of the target population but did not form part of the final sample; ambiguous items were revised on the basis of their feedback, and content validity was further improved through expert review. Ethical clearance and research permission were granted by the appropriate university and council authorities. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, respondents remained anonymous, confidentiality and privacy were maintained, and the information was used only for academic purposes.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate and Demographic Profile of Respondents

Of the 80 questionnaires issued, 68 were returned, yielding a response rate of 85 percent, which is considered very well for survey research of this kind. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1*Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 68)*

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	40	59
	Female	28	41
Age (years)	20–30	15	22
	31–40	28	41
	41–50	18	27
	Above 50	7	10
Education level	Diploma	20	29
	Bachelor degree	32	47
	Master degree	16	24
Designation	Local government leaders	10	15
	Employees	43	63
	Community representatives	15	22
Work experience	Less than 5 years	14	21
	5–10 years	30	44
	Above 10 years	24	35

The results show fair gender representation (59 percent male, 41 percent female). Most respondents were aged 31–40 years (41 percent), indicating a workforce dominated by active and experienced personnel, and the majority held bachelor degrees (47 percent), suggesting adequate capacity to understand and assess leadership practices. Employees constituted the largest respondent group (63 percent), while 44 percent of respondents had 5–10 years of work experience, lending credibility to their assessments of leadership at the council.

4.2 Descriptive Results for Organizational Performance

Before the influence of the four leadership styles is examined, respondents' assessments of organizational performance, the dependent variable of the study, are presented. Performance was measured by the five items contained in Section C of the questionnaire, which capture the dimensions identified in Section I of this article: the quality of service delivery to citizens, employee motivation and morale, accountability and transparency in the management of public resources, organizational culture, and the efficiency with which projects are implemented. Each item was rated on the same 5-point Likert scale used for the leadership items, and a composite score was computed as the mean of the five items. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Performance (n = 68)*

Statement	1 SD F%	2 D F%	3 N F%	4 A F%	5 SA F%
The current leadership style has significantly improved service delivery to citizens	3 4.4%	8 11.8%	7 10.3%	28 41.2%	22 32.4%
Leadership practices at the council have enhanced employee motivation and morale	3 4.4%	7 10.3%	6 8.8%	29 42.6 %	23 33.8 %
There is a high level of accountability and transparency in managing public resources	4 5.9 %	10 14.7 %	8 11.8 %	27 39.7 %	19 27.9 %
The leadership style fosters a positive and productive organizational culture	9 13.2 %	17 25.0 %	12 17.6 %	19 27.9 %	11 16.2 %

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Source: Field Data (2026)

The findings show a generally favourable but uneven assessment of organizational performance at the council. Respondents most strongly endorsed the motivational and service-delivery effects of leadership, with 76.5% agreeing that leadership practices have enhanced employee motivation and morale and 73.5% agreeing that the prevailing leadership style has improved service delivery to citizens. Endorsement weakened on accountability and transparency in managing public resources (67.6% agreement, with one in five respondents disagreeing), and weakened sharply on organizational culture, where opinion was effectively split (44.1% agreement against 38.2% disagreement). The pattern suggests that leadership at the council is succeeding at the operational and motivational level but has not yet embedded itself at the governance and cultural level, implying that improvement efforts should target transparency mechanisms and deliberate culture-building rather than service delivery, which is already perceived as performing well.

The results in Table 2 provide the baseline against which the influence of the four leadership styles is interpreted in the sections that follow. Because the leadership and performance constructs were measured on the same scale and

reported by the same respondents, the comparisons presented below are comparisons of perceived influence, and they are read alongside the interview evidence presented in Section 4.5.

4.3 The Role of Leadership Styles on Organizational Performance

4.3.1 Transformational Leadership and Organizational Performance

The findings revealed that transformational leadership had a strong positive effect on organizational performance, as shown in Table 3. All items recorded mean scores above 4.00, indicating strong agreement that leaders who inspire, motivate and support employees improve commitment, innovation, teamwork and the quality of services delivered.

Table 3

Effects of Transformational Leadership

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leaders inspire employees	4.32	0.65
Leaders motivate staff	4.28	0.71
Leaders encourage innovation	4.15	0.78
Leadership improves service delivery	4.40	0.60

The pattern of mean scores is instructive. Service delivery recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.60$), with the smallest standard deviation, indicating strong and consistent agreement that transformational behaviours translate directly into better services for citizens. Inspiration ($M = 4.32$) and motivation ($M = 4.28$) were also rated highly, whereas encouragement of innovation, though still strong, attracted the lowest mean and the widest dispersion ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.78$). This suggests that leaders at the council are more effective at inspiring and motivating staff than at consistently converting that motivation into innovative practice, plausibly because innovation also depends on resources and administrative latitude that the institutional environment constrains.

Qualitative evidence corroborated these results. In the administration department in particular, leaders exhibited inspirational motivation by articulating a clear vision that connected employees' daily tasks to community development; individualized consideration by identifying developmental needs and providing coaching and training; intellectual stimulation by encouraging staff to challenge outdated procedures and devise solutions to financial constraints and service delays; and idealized influence by modelling integrity, accountability and professionalism. Departments led in this manner reported higher motivation and commitment, with employees willing to exceed formal job requirements.

These findings are consistent with the four-dimensional model of Bass and Riggio (2006) and with meta-analytic evidence that transformational leadership enhances performance across levels, with a stronger effect on contextual than on task performance (Wang et al., 2011). The prominence of service delivery and inspiration in the present data mirrors this augmentation effect, whereby transformational behaviours add value beyond what rules and rewards alone can achieve.

4.3.2 Transactional Leadership and Organizational Performance

Transactional leadership was widely practiced through structured administrative mechanisms, including performance monitoring under the Performance Evaluation and Performance Management Information System (PEPMIS, formerly OPRAS), adherence to organizational rules and the application of rewards and sanctions. Table 4 presents the descriptive results.

Table 4

Effects of Transactional Leadership

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rewards improve performance	4.10	0.72
Clear supervision enhances efficiency	4.25	0.68
Rules improve accountability	4.30	0.64

The data show that rules improving accountability attracted the highest agreement ($M = 4.30$), followed by clear supervision enhancing efficiency ($M = 4.25$), while rewards improving performance recorded the lowest mean ($M = 4.10$). This ordering is revealing: respondents valued the structuring and monitoring elements of transactional leadership more highly than its reward element. A plausible interpretation, reinforced by the finding that limited financing was the most serious constraint (Section 4.4), is that the council's capacity to offer material rewards is restricted, so employees experience the accountability and supervisory aspects of the exchange more strongly than the reward aspect.

These results are in line with the exchange logic of transactional theory (Bass, 1985) and with evidence that contingent reward is a valid predictor of performance, though weaker than transformational leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Obiwuru et al., 2011). At the same time, respondents indicated that excessive reliance on compliance-oriented leadership constrained creativity and initiative, as employees concentrated on completing assigned tasks rather than proposing improvements. Transactional leadership therefore emerged as necessary for order and discipline but insufficient, on its own, for sustained performance improvement.

4.3.3 Democratic Leadership and Organizational Performance

Democratic leadership was practiced through staff meetings, interdepartmental discussions, joint planning and budgeting, and open communication between managers and employees. Table 5 summarizes respondents' perceptions.

Table 5

Effects of Democratic Leadership

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employees participate in decision making	4.20	0.70
Enhances employee teamwork	4.35	0.66
Enhances job satisfaction	4.18	0.75
Delays decision making	3.60	0.90

Enhancement of teamwork received the strongest endorsement ($M = 4.35$), followed by participation in decision making ($M = 4.20$) and job satisfaction ($M = 4.18$), confirming that consultation makes employees feel respected and strengthens their commitment to organizational goals. Notably, the item "delays decision making" recorded a markedly lower mean ($M = 3.60$) and the widest dispersion ($SD = 0.90$) in the set, signalling both a real and a divided perception: participation is valued, yet a substantial number of respondents recognise that consultation can slow action when speed is required.

This dual pattern is consistent with participative management theory (Likert, 1967; Gastil, 1994) and with Basit et al. (2017), who found a positive effect of democratic leadership on performance, while also illustrating its practical limit. Respondents further noted that the council's hierarchical structure meant final strategic decisions remained with top management, limiting the influence of lower-level staff and tempering the full benefits of participation.

4.3.4 Autocratic Leadership and Organizational Performance

Autocratic leadership was practiced to a moderate degree, mainly in situations demanding rapid decisions, enforcement of regulations and implementation of directives from higher authorities. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6

Effects of Autocratic Leadership

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speeds up decision making	4.05	0.73
Improves efficiency	3.95	0.80
Reduces employee morale	4.10	0.77
Limits employee participation	4.25	0.69

The results reveal a distinctly dual character. On the positive side, respondents agreed that autocratic leadership speeds up decision making ($M = 4.05$), although its contribution to efficiency was more equivocal and the only sub-4.00 mean in this style ($M = 3.95$). On the negative side, the strongest agreement in the set concerned the limiting of employee participation ($M = 4.25$), followed by the reduction of morale ($M = 4.10$). The fact that the adverse effects were rated more highly than the benefits indicates that, in the perception of respondents, the costs of autocratic leadership outweigh its gains except in specific circumstances. This is consistent with contingency evidence that centralized decision making enhances speed and discipline but, when overused, depresses morale, discourages innovation and weakens long-term commitment (De Hoogh et al., 2015). Autocratic leadership therefore appears functional only as a situational instrument rather than as a default style.

4.4 Challenges Facing Effective Leadership at Ubungu Municipal Council

The second objective examined the challenges constraining leadership effectiveness. Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics; all challenges recorded means above 4.00, indicating strong agreement that they undermine leadership and, consequently, organizational performance.

Table 7*Descriptive Statistics of Leadership Challenges*

Challenge	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Limited financial resources	68	4.48	0.58
Bureaucratic procedures	68	4.32	0.66
High workload due to population growth	68	4.25	0.69
Political interference	68	4.20	0.74
Low employee motivation	68	4.10	0.80
Inadequate leadership training	68	4.05	0.78

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Source: Field Data (2026)

The financial resources constraint ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.58$) was the most serious challenge and, with the lowest dispersion in the table, the one on which respondents agreed most consistently. Delayed disbursements from central government and budget shortfalls limited leaders' capacity to fund incentives, allowances, working tools and promotions, as well as development activities such as road maintenance, waste management and rehabilitation of health facilities. Respondents reported that the elimination of the health-sector "Other Charges" funding source in the 2026/2027 financial year had further constrained statutory employee benefits and operational activities, impairing effective service delivery. These results are consistent with audit evidence on the financing constraints of LGAs (CAG, 2021).

Bureaucratic procedures were the second major challenge ($M = 4.32$). Project applications and procurement through the National e-Procurement System of Tanzania (NeST) passed through multiple approval stages, from departments to the Municipal Director's office and higher authorities, and even routine decisions were heavily documented, delaying responses to urgent community needs. Rising workloads driven by rapid population growth placed further strain on staff ($M = 4.25$), since staffing was not scaled up in line with the growing population, leading to burnout and lower-quality health, education, waste management, water and infrastructure services. Political interference ($M = 4.20$) was evident in resource allocation and project prioritisation, with some projects perceived to be selected on political rather than technical or community-need grounds; respondents perceived that fewer projects were implemented in Kibamba Constituency than when it was represented by an opposition Member of Parliament.

This interference was seen to erode administrative autonomy and diminish evidence-based decision making, echoing the decentralisation literature's concerns about the autonomy and responsiveness of local administrations (Andrews & Shah, 2003). Low employee motivation ($M = 4.10$), arising from heavy workloads, limited incentives, remuneration delays and constrained career progression, together with inadequate leadership training ($M = 4.05$) that left some leaders reliant on traditional transactional and autocratic approaches, further limited leadership effectiveness. Taken together, these challenges help explain why the transformational and democratic behaviours valued by respondents were not always fully realised in practice: the enabling conditions for such leadership, adequate financing, administrative flexibility and trained managers, were frequently absent.

4.5 The Best Leadership Style for Organizational Performance

With respect to the third objective, the study found that no single leadership style was sufficient to meet the diverse leadership needs of the council. The combination of transformational and democratic leadership proved most helpful: transformational behaviours motivated employees, encouraged innovation and fostered commitment to organizational objectives, while democratic behaviours promoted open communication and employee participation in planning and problem solving. These styles complemented each other and produced a positive working environment linked to improved service delivery, teamwork, accountability and motivation across departments. This conclusion is grounded in the data, in which transformational items (for example, service delivery, $M = 4.40$) and democratic items (for example, teamwork, $M = 4.35$) attracted the highest agreement of all the styles examined.

Respondents nevertheless recognised the continued need for transactional leadership to maintain structure, discipline and compliance through performance monitoring, supervision and reward mechanisms, viewing it as an important tool for efficient operations. Autocratic leadership was regarded as appropriate only in exceptional situations requiring speed and centralised decision making, such as cholera and COVID-19 outbreaks, floods and other emergencies, when consultation could delay a necessary response. These results confirm situational and integrative approaches to leadership (Fiedler, 1967; Bass & Riggio, 2006), which hold that council leadership must be flexible and combine transformational, democratic and transactional elements, with directive leadership reserved for emergencies. The relative ranking of the mean scores across Tables 3 to 6, transformational and democratic items highest, autocratic adverse effects prominent, provides direct empirical support for this hybrid, situational model.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study establishes a significant influence of leadership style on organizational performance in Tanzania Local Government Authorities. At Ubungu Municipal Council, transformational and democratic leadership motivated employees and fostered innovation, accountability, teamwork and service delivery; transactional leadership maintained administrative control, discipline and policy adherence; and autocratic leadership, although useful for rapid decision making in emergencies, undermined employee morale and participation when used excessively.

At the same time, limited financial resources, bureaucratic procedures, workload pressures from rapid population growth, political interference, low employee motivation and inadequate leadership training substantially restricted leadership effectiveness. Strong performance within an LGA therefore requires a flexible, situational leadership approach that combines inspiration, participation, accountability and administrative efficiency, supported by institutional reforms that address the constraints faced by council leaders.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings give rise to several practical recommendations for Ubungu Municipal Council and other Tanzanian LGAs. Because inadequate leadership training emerged as a notable constraint ($M = 4.05$), the council should strengthen leadership training and continuous capacity-building programmes so that managers acquire the transformational and participative competencies that were found to drive motivation, innovation and service delivery. Given that democratic practices such as joint planning and consultation were associated with stronger teamwork ($M = 4.35$) and participation ($M = 4.20$), the council should institutionalise participatory governance mechanisms that involve employees in planning, budgeting and decision making, while retaining the capacity for swift action when circumstances demand it. Since bureaucratic procedures were identified as a major obstacle ($M = 4.32$), the approval chains governing procurement and project implementation should be streamlined and rationalised so that the council can respond promptly to community needs without compromising accountability.

As limited and unpredictable financing was the single most serious challenge ($M = 4.48$), central and council authorities should improve the adequacy, timeliness and predictability of council funding, thereby enabling leaders to sustain incentives, provide working tools and finance development activities. To address the political interference observed in resource allocation ($M = 4.20$), the council should reinforce merit-based and evidence-based allocation of resources, insulating administrative decisions from undue political influence and grounding project selection in technical and community-need criteria. Finally, because no single style proved sufficient on its own, council leaders should adopt a flexible, situational leadership model that blends transformational and democratic behaviours with transactional mechanisms for structure and discipline, reserving directive, autocratic approaches for genuine emergencies in which speed and centralised coordination are essential. Implemented together, these measures would strengthen both the practice of leadership and the institutional environment in which it operates, and thereby enhance organizational performance at the council.

5.3 Limitations and Areas for Further Research

Three limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting these findings. First, the study was confined to a single municipal council, so the results describe leadership at Ubungu Municipal Council and are not statistically generalisable to all Tanzanian LGAs, although they are analytically transferable to councils operating under comparable conditions. Second, the quantitative analysis was descriptive and comparative rather than inferential; it establishes patterns of perceived influence rather than statistically estimated effects. Future research should apply correlation and regression analysis, or structural equation modelling, to larger multi-council samples in order to quantify the strength of the relationship between each leadership style and organizational performance. Third, both the leadership and the performance measures relied on the perceptions of respondents drawn from within the council, which may be affected by social desirability and common-method bias; subsequent studies could complement self-reports with objective performance indicators such as audit ratings, revenue collection rates and project completion statistics.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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