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COLLABORATION AND INTEGRITY AS INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP VALUE AND STAFF WORK ETHICS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated Collaboration and integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The study utilized a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The target population for the study included 8,111 teaching and non-teaching staff from three public universities in Rivers State. A sample of 446 staff members was selected, representing 5.5% of the total population. The sampling method used was simple random sampling to ensure a fair representation of staff from the three universities. Data was collected using the "Collaboration and Integrity as Institutional Leadership Value and Staff Work Ethics in Public Universities Questionnaire" (CIILVSWEQ). Three experts in the Department of Educational Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education validated the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach Alpha, and the results yielded a reliability coefficient of .870, indicating high internal consistency. Mean and standard deviation, were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was applied to test the hypotheses. The study found that collaboration and integrity as institutional leadership value are significantly correlated to staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The study concluded that collaboration and integrity as institutional leadership values play important role in shaping staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. Recommendations were proffered.

Keywords: Collaboration, Integrity, Institutional Leadership, Value, Staff Work Ethics, Public Universities, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership in higher education institutions plays a fundamental role in shaping the values, work ethics, and overall organizational culture. Public universities, particularly in Rivers State, Nigeria, face growing pressures to enhance academic standards, improve institutional outcomes, and address complex social issues. Within this context, the values of collaboration and integrity as part of institutional leadership have gained considerable importance. These values not only influence the decision-making processes and operational strategies of university leaders but also affect the behavior and performance of staff members. As public universities are central to societal development, fostering a culture of collaboration and integrity can significantly enhance the work ethics of staff, thereby improving institutional effectiveness and achieving organizational goals.

Collaboration in the context of higher education leadership refers to a cooperative approach where stakeholders, including academic staff, administrators, students, and external partners, work together toward common goals. Effective collaboration promotes the sharing of knowledge, resources, and expertise, fostering an environment of collective responsibility. Research indicates that collaboration enhances problem-solving capabilities, facilitates innovation, and creates a sense of belonging and commitment within an institution (Drucker, 2007). In public universities in Rivers State, where limited resources often hinder progress, collaboration is vital for overcoming institutional challenges, such as outdated infrastructure and insufficient funding (Naylor, 2011). A collaborative leadership approach encourages an inclusive environment where ideas are exchanged, and collective action leads to improved academic delivery and community engagement.

On the other hand, integrity, as a core leadership value, underscores the importance of ethical conduct, transparency, accountability, and honesty in all institutional dealings. Integrity in leadership ensures that decisions are made with fairness, responsibility, and respect for established rules and regulations. In the university context, integrity is essential for building trust among staff, students, and stakeholders (Northouse, 2018). When leaders demonstrate integrity, it sets a standard for the entire institution, fostering an environment where ethical standards are upheld in both academic and administrative practices. Moreover, integrity influences the behavior and work ethics of staff members, encouraging them to act responsibly and in alignment with the institution's values (Bryman, 2011). In Rivers State, where public universities are entrusted with the responsibility of shaping the next generation of leaders, maintaining high standards of integrity is crucial for the credibility and success of these institutions.

The values of collaboration and integrity are directly linked to staff work ethics. Work ethics in higher education institutions encompass a range of attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the efficiency, productivity, and success of an organization. Staff members who demonstrate strong work ethics are committed to their responsibilities, engage in continuous professional development, and prioritize the welfare of students and the institution (Graham, 2017). A leadership style that prioritizes collaboration and integrity can significantly influence the work ethics of staff by promoting a positive organizational culture based on mutual respect, accountability, and shared goals. Research has shown that when leaders foster collaboration and act with integrity, it creates a work environment where staff are more likely to be engaged, productive, and satisfied with their roles (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). This, in turn, leads to improved performance, enhanced student outcomes, and increased institutional success.

Public universities in Rivers State, such as the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU), are expected to play a significant role in addressing regional challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. To meet these challenges, university leadership must be able to harness the power of collaboration and integrity. Collaborative leadership can lead to more effective decision-making, resource allocation, and problem-solving, while integrity ensures that the university operates ethically and transparently. Together, these values not only improve staff work ethics but also align the institution's operations with its core mission of promoting knowledge, research, and societal development.

However, despite the potential benefits of collaboration and integrity in shaping staff work ethics, there is limited research on how these leadership values specifically influence public universities in Rivers State. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how institutional leadership can impact staff behavior, performance, and institutional effectiveness. This study aims to explore the role of collaboration and integrity as leadership values and their influence on staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State, providing valuable insights for improving leadership practices and institutional outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to effectively achieve their academic and administrative goals. Among these challenges are limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and the growing demand for quality education. Leadership in these institutions plays a crucial role in addressing these issues, and values such as collaboration and integrity are essential in guiding institutional progress. However, the influence of these leadership values on staff work ethics remains underexplored in this context.

Collaboration is necessary for overcoming institutional limitations by fostering collective problem-solving and resource-sharing, yet its role in shaping staff behavior and productivity in public universities is not well understood. Similarly, integrity as a leadership value is fundamental for ensuring ethical decision-making, transparency, and accountability, but its impact on staff work ethics and overall institutional effectiveness has not been adequately studied.

This study seeks to investigate the relationship between collaboration and integrity as institutional leadership values and the work ethics of staff in public universities in Rivers State. Understanding this dynamic can provide valuable insights for improving leadership practices, staff performance, and the overall effectiveness of these institutions.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study examined the relationship between institutional leadership values and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

- Determine the extent to which collaboration as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.
- Ascertain the extent to which integrity as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide this study:

- To what extent does collaboration as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?
- To what extent does integrity as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and statistically tested at .05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework (Edward Freeman's The Stakeholder Theory of 1984)

The stakeholder theory was first introduced in 1984 by R. Edward Freeman in his book, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. The theory is based on the idea that businesses should not only focus on their shareholders, but also on all of their stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and the community (Freeman in Schwab & Vanham, 2021). The core tenets of the theory include the idea that businesses should create value for all stakeholders and should engage in open communication and dialogue with all stakeholders. According to the theory, businesses should create value for all of their stakeholders, not just shareholders. This means considering the needs and interests of all stakeholders when making decisions.

It also means engaging in open and honest communication with all stakeholders and being transparent about the decisions that are being made. The theory places a strong emphasis on ethical behaviour and argues that businesses should always act in a way that is fair and just. The theory also emphasizes the importance of long-term thinking and encourages businesses to take a long-term view when making decisions. However, critics of the stakeholder theory argue that its broad scope can make it difficult to implement in practice (Wood, 2015). They argue that it is difficult to balance the needs and interests of so many different stakeholders and that this can lead to conflicting priorities.

Another criticism of the stakeholder theory is that it can be difficult to measure and assess its effectiveness. Since the theory takes into account a wide range of factors, it can be hard to determine whether or not it is leading to positive outcomes (Little, 2018). Some argue that there is a lack of concrete metrics or indicators that can be used to assess the success of the theory. Despite these criticisms, the stakeholder theory remains a popular and influential approach to business management. It has been adopted by many schools and continues to be debated and developed by academics and practitioners. One specific criticism of the stakeholder theory is that it can be difficult to prioritize the needs of different stakeholders. For example, if a

company is deciding whether or not to lay off employees, it might need to weigh the interests of the shareholders (who want the company to be profitable) against the interests of the employees (who want to keep their jobs). In this situation, it can be hard to determine which stakeholder group should take priority. This can lead to conflicts and uncertainty about the best course of action.

Another criticism is that the theory can be too idealistic and not practical enough. Some argue that the emphasis on long-term thinking and ethical behaviour is unrealistic in the fast-paced, competitive business world. They argue that organizations need to focus on short-term profits and efficiency to survive and succeed. A related criticism is that the stakeholder theory can be too expensive to implement. Focusing on the needs of all stakeholders can require companies to make significant investments in areas like employee training, ethical supply chains, and community engagement. These investments can be difficult to justify when a company is focused on short-term profits.

The stakeholder theory is relevant to the study of institutional leadership values and staff work ethics in public universities in several ways. First, the theory emphasizes the importance of considering the needs of all stakeholders, including staff and students. This is important for public universities, which have a responsibility to serve the public and provide quality education. Secondly, the theory emphasizes ethical behaviour, which is essential for any institution of higher education. Thirdly, the theory places a strong emphasis on long-term thinking, which is important for universities that are planning for the future. Finally, the theory encourages open communication and dialogue, which is essential for any institution that is trying to create a positive work environment for its staff. The stakeholder theory can help public universities create a culture of ethics and long-term thinking, which can lead to better outcomes for all stakeholders. It can also help to improve communication and collaboration within the university and to create a more positive and supportive work environment for staff. In short, the stakeholder theory is highly relevant to the study of institutional leadership values and staff work ethics in public universities. It can provide a valuable framework for improving the way these institutions are run.

Institutional Leadership Values

Institutional leadership values refer to the shared values of a public university, as expressed by its leadership. These values can include things like honesty, integrity, accountability, and service to the community. Institutional values like integrity, morals, effectiveness, competence, honesty, accountability and fairness usually determine how an institution function (Ololube, 2024). The institutional values of a university can have a significant impact on the behaviour of staff and the overall performance of the institution (King & Bartunek, 2017). For example, if a university values integrity, likely, its staff will be committed to behaving with integrity. Similarly, if a university values accountability, its staff will be more likely to be accountable for their actions. The institutional values of a university can have a profound impact on the behaviour of its staff and the performance of the institution as a whole. These values can shape everything from the way decisions are made to the overall learning environment. For example, a university that values diversity may have a more dynamic and rich learning environment.

Likewise, a university that values collaboration may have a culture that encourages interdisciplinary research and a sense of community. Finally, a university that values innovation may have a culture that promotes creativity and new approaches to teaching,

research, and service (Evans, 2017). In addition to shaping the internal culture of a university, institutional values can also have an impact on the relationship between the university and the outside world. For example, a university that values service to the community may be more likely to engage in community outreach and partnerships. Similarly, a university that values transparency may be more likely to share information with the public and engage in open dialogue. These external relationships can have a significant impact on the reputation and success of the university (Jaskyte, 2013).

Institutional values refer to the principles and beliefs that guide the actions, decisions, and behaviours of an organization. These values form the foundation of the organizational culture and shape how the institution operates and interacts with its stakeholders. In the context of public universities in Rivers State, institutional values play a crucial role in shaping the leadership and work ethics of staff members (McGinn, 2017). These values provide a framework for creating a conducive and harmonious environment that supports teaching, research, and overall institutional development. One of the key institutional values in public universities is integrity. Integrity entails being honest, ethical, and transparent in all actions and decisions. It involves upholding high moral standards and demonstrating a commitment to fairness, truth, and accountability. In the context of leadership, integrity in public universities means that leaders prioritize the well-being of the institution and its stakeholders over personal interests. Leaders with integrity inspire trust and respect among staff, students, and the wider community (Werth, 2017).

Another important institutional value is excellence. Public universities in Rivers State strive for excellence in all aspects of their operations, including teaching, research, and community engagement. Staff members are expected to strive for personal and professional growth and to continuously enhance their skills and knowledge. Leaders in these institutions emphasize the importance of quality education and research, setting high standards and providing necessary resources to facilitate excellence (Elsen et al., 2016). Diversity and inclusivity are also significant institutional values. Public universities in Rivers State recognize and appreciate the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of their staff and students. They promote an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported. Leaders in these institutions encourage collaboration and ensure fair and equal opportunities for all, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, or social background.

Public universities play a critical role in the development and progress of any nation's higher education system. These institutions serve as catalysts for the growth of knowledge, advancement of research, and the nurturing of future leaders and professionals. Within the framework of public universities, institutional leadership values and staff work ethics serve as the foundation for fostering an atmosphere of excellence, innovation, and accountability (Ismail et al., 2015). In Rivers State, located in the southern part of Nigeria, public universities are key drivers of higher education. These institutions, namely the Rivers State University (RSU), University of Port Harcourt and the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), are entrusted with the responsibility of providing quality education, conducting cutting-edge research, and producing highly skilled graduates who contribute to the socio-economic development of the state (Attama, 2019).

Effective institutional leadership values are essential for the success of these universities. Leadership in public universities in Rivers State involves a complex web of roles and responsibilities, including setting strategic directions, promoting transparency and accountability, and ensuring the efficient utilization of resources. The state government, governing boards, vice-

chancellors, and academic administrators all play pivotal roles in shaping the institutional culture and fostering a conducive environment for learning and growth (Eze, 2016). The establishment of clear leadership values is crucial for the effective functioning of public universities in Rivers State. These values may encompass principles such as integrity, inclusiveness, meritocracy, and ethical conduct. When these values are embraced and practised by university leaders, it helps to build trust, instil confidence, and promote a shared sense of purpose and commitment among the university community.

Institutional values in public universities in Rivers State provide a guiding framework that shapes leadership and work ethics. These values include integrity, excellence, diversity and inclusivity, innovation and adaptability, and community engagement. When leaders embrace good values, their institutions create a positive work environment that can effectively fulfill their roles in promoting educational growth, knowledge creation, and societal development. Leaders with integrity inspire trust and respect among staff, students, and the wider community (Ololube, 2024). Innovation and adaptability are additional institutional values that public universities in Rivers State prioritize. With the rapidly changing global landscape, these institutions aim to foster a culture of innovation and creativity among their staff. Leaders promote a proactive approach to addressing challenges and encourage continuous improvement and learning. They embrace new technologies and methodologies to enhance teaching, research, and administration (Udobi & Kanu, 2017). Community engagement and social responsibility are also fundamental institutional values. Public universities in Rivers State recognize their role as agents of positive change in society. They actively engage with the local community, contribute to its development, and address societal challenges through research and outreach initiatives. Leaders in these institutions encourage staff members to be actively involved in community service and to apply their knowledge and expertise for the betterment of society.

Equally important in the functioning of public universities is the adherence to a strong work ethic among staff members. Work ethics refers to the moral principles and values that guide individuals in performing their duties and responsibilities. In the context of public universities in Rivers State, staff members, which include academic and non-academic personnel, have a collective responsibility to uphold high standards of professionalism, dedication, and productivity. The staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State are instrumental in ensuring the effective delivery of academic programs, student support services, and research activities. Nonetheless, staff members contribute in creating a conducive teaching and learning environment, promote a culture of continuous improvement, and upholding the reputation and credibility of the institutions when they maintain a strong work ethic (Ogbonna, 2014).

However, the challenges faced by public universities in Rivers State cannot be overlooked. These challenges may include inadequate funding, infrastructural deficiencies, inefficient bureaucratic processes, and occasional conflicts within the university community. Nevertheless, by embracing strong institutional leadership values and promoting a culture of work ethics, public universities in Rivers State can overcome these challenges and thrive as centres of excellence in higher education. Institutional leadership values and staff work ethics are critical elements in the functioning and success of public universities in Rivers State (Owolabi, 2016). The establishment of clear leadership values, coupled with the adherence to a strong work ethic among staff members, helps to foster an atmosphere of excellence, innovation, and accountability.

Institutional values in public universities in Rivers State provide a guiding framework that shapes leadership and work ethics. Institutional values in public universities in Rivers State provide a guiding framework that shapes leadership and work ethics. These values include integrity and collaboration, innovation and adaptability, and community engagement. Institutions can create a positive work environment and effectively fulfil their roles in promoting educational growth, knowledge creation, and societal development if they embrace and embody core values (Ololube, 2024). Nurturing the core values of collaboration and integrity, public universities can fulfill their mandate of providing quality education, conducting impactful research, and shaping the future leaders of Rivers State and beyond.

Collaboration in the context of this article is a critical value that promotes teamwork, synergy, and cooperation among staff members. When leaders foster a collaborative environment, it encourages knowledge sharing, idea generation, and problem-solving. In public universities, collaboration is pivotal in facilitating interdisciplinary research, promoting student-centred learning, and establishing partnerships with external stakeholders.

Integrity in the context of this paper is an essential value that underpins ethical behavior and promotes accountability within public universities. Leaders who uphold integrity set high standards of conduct, honesty, and fairness, inspiring trust among staff members and ensuring ethical practices. Integrity in leadership helps maintain the reputation of the institution, fosters a culture of compliance, and supports ethical decision-making processes in areas such as financial management, recruitment, and student affairs.

Staff Work Ethics

Institutional leadership values in public universities emphasize the importance of teamwork and collaboration. Effective teamwork enables staff members to work together towards common goals, share knowledge and resources, and support each other's professional growth. This collaborative spirit fosters a positive work environment, enhances productivity, and promotes innovation and creativity. In addition to institutional leadership values, public universities in Rivers State place a strong emphasis on academic freedom and intellectual integrity (Bennett et al., 2016). Academic freedom allows staff members to pursue knowledge, engage in research, and express ideas freely without fear of reprisal. Intellectual integrity requires staff members to conduct research and disseminate knowledge with rigour, honesty, and objectivity. Upholding academic freedom and intellectual integrity ensures that the public universities in Rivers State are spaces for open inquiry, critical thinking, and intellectual growth.

Another fundamental institutional leadership values is integrity. Integrity is the adherence to high moral and ethical principles in all aspects of work. In a public university setting, it translates to honesty, transparency, and accountability in academic and administrative practices (Watson et al., 2019). Indeed, integrity is a crucial value in any institution, particularly in a public university where it has far-reaching implications for the institution's credibility and trustworthiness. In addition to personal integrity, there is also a need for institutional integrity, where the organization upholds the highest ethical standards and abides by ethical codes and regulations. Staff members are expected to ensure transparency in financial transactions, research activities, and admissions processes, among others. Upholding integrity fosters trust within the university community and promotes a healthy work environment. Another critical institutional leadership value is professionalism. Professionalism encompasses a range of attitudes and behaviours, such as competence, reliability, punctuality, and respect for colleagues. In public

universities, staff members are expected to demonstrate expertise in their respective fields, stay up-to-date with advancements in their disciplines, and continuously improve their skills (Schwartz & Tran, 2018). Professionalism also entails treating colleagues, students, and stakeholders with respect and courtesy, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and upholding ethical standards in interactions and communication.

Collaboration and Staff Work Ethics

Collaboration as a dimension of institutional leadership value plays a crucial role in enhancing staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. It fosters a culture of teamwork, mutual respect, and shared responsibility among staff members. This ultimately leads to increased productivity, job satisfaction, and a positive work environment. To understand the impact of collaboration on staff work ethics, it is essential to examine its meaning and significance in the context of institutional leadership values. Collaboration refers to the process of working together towards a common goal. It involves individuals pooling their knowledge, skills, and resources to achieve desired outcomes (Bedwell et al., 2012). In the realm of public universities, collaboration finds its expression in various ways, including interdisciplinary research, shared decision-making, and cooperative problem-solving.

One way in which collaboration enhances staff work ethics is by promoting open communication and transparency. When leaders encourage collaboration, they create an atmosphere where staff members feel comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns, and feedback. This open dialogue allows for a deeper understanding of different perspectives, fosters trust, and establishes a sense of ownership among employees. As a result, staff members become more engaged and committed to their work, leading to improved work ethics. Furthermore, collaboration as an institutional leadership value encourages knowledge sharing and continuous learning. When staff members collaborate, they have the opportunity to work with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and expertise. This interdisciplinary approach enables the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices. As a result, staff members can expand their skill set, acquire new knowledge, and stay updated with the latest research and developments in their field. This continuous learning fosters a culture of professional growth and development, which positively impacts staff work ethics.

Collaboration also has a direct impact on staff work ethics by promoting accountability and shared responsibility. When individuals work collaboratively, they are accountable not only to themselves but also to their team members. This shared responsibility creates a sense of accountability and ensures that all team members contribute their best efforts to achieve the common goal. Additionally, collaboration allows for increased problem-solving capacity as multiple perspectives are considered, leading to more effective and ethical decision-making (Graesser et al., 2018). Moreover, when collaboration is embraced as an institutional leadership value, it results in the development of cohesive and supportive teams. Through collaboration, staff members have an opportunity to build strong relationships, foster trust, and establish a sense of camaraderie. These cohesive team dynamics positively impact staff morale and job satisfaction, leading to improved work ethics. When individuals feel valued, supported, and respected by their colleagues and leaders, they are more likely to demonstrate strong work ethics and a commitment to achieving the university's goals. Collaboration as a dimension of institutional leadership value plays a vital role in enhancing staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. It promotes open communication, knowledge sharing, and

continuous learning. It fosters accountability, shared responsibility, and ethical decision-making. Additionally, collaboration contributes to the development of cohesive and supportive teams. Therefore, public universities should prioritize collaboration as part of their institutional leadership values to create an environment that nurtures strong work ethics among staff members.

Integrity and Staff Work Ethics

Institutional leadership values play a crucial role in shaping the overall work ethics of staff members in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. One particularly important dimension of leadership value is integrity. Integrity, as a fundamental core value, sets the tone for ethical behaviour and creates a sense of trust and accountability within the organization. Integrity in leadership emphasizes honesty and truthfulness. When leaders display integrity, they set an example for their staff members to follow (Bauman, 2013). A leader's commitment to integrity guides their decision-making processes, ensuring that they act ethically and transparently. This dedication to honesty and truthfulness creates a sense of trust among staff members, fostering effective communication, collaboration, and teamwork. When employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to be motivated, loyal, and committed to their work, resulting in high-quality output and a positive work environment.

Integrity also promotes accountability within the organization. Leaders who prioritize integrity hold themselves and their staff members responsible for their actions and outcomes. This commitment to accountability ensures that individuals take ownership of their work and strive for excellence. When leaders consistently demonstrate their integrity, they establish a culture of responsibility, where staff members understand the importance of delivering their best efforts and upholding high ethical standards. This accountability not only leads to improved individual performance but also contributes to the overall success and reputation of the institution. Furthermore, integrity in leadership helps in the preservation of organizational values and ethical standards. Leaders communicate their alignment with the established values of the institution, making it easier for staff members to understand and embrace these values by acting with integrity. When leaders consistently uphold ethical standards, they create a culture where unethical behaviour is not tolerated. This, in turn, fosters an environment where staff members feel respected, valued, and empowered to prioritize their work ethics. Institutional values serve as a guiding compass for employees, leading them to make ethical decisions and behave in a manner consistent with the organization's mission and vision (Brinkley, 2013).

Integrity also plays a significant role in promoting fairness and equal treatment within institutions. When leaders uphold integrity as a core value, they ensure equal opportunities, rewards, and recognition for all staff members. Leaders create a sense of trust and respect among the employees when they treat every employee fairly and impartially (Ololube, 2025). This leads to improved job satisfaction, which in turn enhances staff morale and productivity. Staff members who witness their leaders' treat others with integrity are more likely to adopt similar values and behaviours, contributing to a harmonious and inclusive work environment. Moreover, integrity is closely linked to transparency. Leaders who value integrity make a conscious effort to communicate openly and honestly with their staff members. This transparency ensures that employees are well-informed about institutional policies, decisions, and changes. Transparent leaders encourage feedback, suggestions, and concerns from their staff, creating a better understanding of the organization's direction and objectives. This fosters a sense of inclusion and

collaboration, where staff members feel valued and empowered to contribute their ideas and expertise (Kilag et al., 2023). Transparency in leadership ultimately strengthens the bond between leaders and employees, promoting trust, loyalty, and a sense of shared purpose.

Interestingly, integrity as a dimension of institutional leadership value enhances staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. Leaders who prioritize integrity set an example for their staff by acting with honesty, accountability, and fairness. This commitment to integrity creates a culture of trust, professionalism, and excellence, where employees feel valued and empowered. When integrity is ingrained in the leadership values, it leads to improved job satisfaction, enhanced morale, and increased productivity among staff members. Therefore, public universities in Rivers State should strive to cultivate and uphold integrity as a fundamental value to promote a positive work environment and foster a culture of ethical behaviour and high performance.

METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. In this context, institutional leadership values serve as the independent variable, while staff work ethics is the dependent variable.

The target population for the study included 8,111 teaching and non-teaching staff from three public universities in Rivers State: University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State University (RSU), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) in Rumuolumeni. A sample of 446 staff members was selected, representing 5.5% of the total population. The sampling method used was simple random sampling to ensure a fair representation of staff from the three universities.

Data was collected using the "Collaboration and Integrity as Institutional Leadership Value and Staff Work Ethics in Public Universities Questionnaire" (CIILVSWEQ). The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section 'A' gathered demographic information, Section 'B' included 10 items related to the independent variables, and Section C focused on staff work ethics. The instrument used a four-point modified Likert scale for responses, ranging from Very High Extent (VHE) to Very Low Extent (VLE).

To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed and modified by three experts in Educational Management from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach Alpha analysis and the result yielded a reliability coefficient of .870, which indicates high internal consistency.

The instrument was administered by the researcher and three trained assistants. After three weeks, 412 valid questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 92.4%, which was deemed sufficient for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was applied to test the hypotheses. The criterion mean for interpretation was set at 2.50.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does collaboration as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the extent collaboration as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
1.	When leaders encourage collaboration, they create an atmosphere where staff members feel comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns, and feedback	2.5097	1.13875	High Extent
2.	Collaboration as an institutional leadership value encourages knowledge sharing and continuous learning	2.6699	1.15165	High Extent
3.	When staff members collaborate, they have the opportunity to work with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and expertise	2.5461	1.12278	High Extent
4.	Collaboration allows for increased problem-solving capacity as multiple perspectives are considered, leading to more effective and ethical decision-making	2.5728	1.12353	High Extent
5.	when collaboration is embraced as an institutional leadership value, it results in the development of cohesive and supportive teams	2.5170	1.09953	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.5631	1.12724	High Extent

The Table 1 presents analysis of research question one, which states that to what extent does collaboration as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State? The table represents the accumulated sum from the respondents indicating the mean score and standard deviation. The first item which determined when leaders encourage collaboration, they create an atmosphere where staff members feel comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns, and feedback, showed a mean score of 2.5097 (SD.=1.13875). The second item asserts that when collaboration as an institutional leadership value encourages knowledge sharing and continuous learning, the result showed a mean score of 2.6699 (SD.=1.15161). The third item opined that when staff members collaborate, they have the opportunity to work with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and expertise, the responses had a mean score of 2.5461 (SD.=1.12278). The fourth item revealed a mean score of 2.5728 (SD.=1.12) which showed that collaboration allows for increased problem-solving capacity as multiple perspectives are considered, leading to more effective and ethical decision-making. Lastly, the item five shows a mean score of 2.5170 (SD.=1.09953), interpreting that when collaboration is embraced as an institutional leadership value, it results in the development of cohesive and supportive teams. Therefore, having a calculated grand mean of 2.5631(1.12724) revealed that majority of the respondents agreed to a high extent that collaboration as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

Research Question 2: To what extent does integrity as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State?

The Table 2 presents analysis for research question two, which states that to what extent does integrity as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State? The table represents the accumulated sum from the respondents indicating the mean score and standard deviation. The first item which determined how When leaders display integrity, they set an example for their staff members to follow, showed a mean score of 2.5825 (SD.=1.09433). The second item discoursed that When employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to be motivated, loyal, and committed to their work, resulting in high-quality output and a positive work environment, the result showed a mean score of 2.6223 (SD.=1.11887). The

third item assert that Integrity also plays a significant role in promoting fairness and equal treatment within institutions, the responses had a mean score of 2.5291 (SD.=1.14055). The fourth item revealed a mean score of 2.6383 (SD.=1.10640) which showed that Staff members who witness their leaders' treating others with integrity are more likely to adopt similar values and behaviours, contributing to a harmonious and inclusive work environment. Lastly, the item five depicts a mean score of 2.5680 (SD.=1.13889), interpreting that Transparency in leadership ultimately strengthens the bond between leaders and employees, promoting trust, loyalty, and a sense of shared purpose. Therefore, having a calculated grand mean of 2.5880 (1.11984) revealed that majority of the respondents agreed to a high extent that integrity as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the extent integrity as institutional leadership values improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
6.	When leaders display integrity, they set an example for their staff members to follow	2.5825	1.09433	High Extent
7.	When employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to be motivated, loyal, and committed to their work, resulting in high-quality output and a positive work environment	2.6223	1.11887	High Extent
8.	Integrity also plays a significant role in promoting fairness and equal treatment within institutions.	2.5291	1.14055	High Extent
9.	Staff members who witness their leaders' treating others with integrity are more likely to adopt similar values and behaviours, contributing to a harmonious and inclusive work environment	2.6383	1.10640	High Extent
10.	Transparency in leadership ultimately strengthens the bond between leaders and employees, promoting trust, loyalty, and a sense of shared purpose.	2.5680	1.13889	High Extent
Grand Mean		2.5880	1.11984	High Extent

Test of Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 3: PPMC analysis for the relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics

		Collaboration as Institutional Leadership value	Staff Work Ethics
Collaboration as Institutional Leadership value	Pearson Correlation	1	.782**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	412	412
Staff Work Ethics	Pearson Correlation	.782**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	412	412

. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The PPMC analysis in Table 3 revealed a correlation coefficient of .782 between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics, indicating a moderate significant relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics. More so, the probability value (.014) is less than the critical value (.05), this shows that there is a strong positive relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics. The findings rejected the null hypothesis one because there is a significant positive relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: PPMC analysis for the relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics

		Integrity as Institutional Leadership value	Staff Work Ethics
Integrity as Institutional Leadership value	Pearson Correlation	1	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	412	412
Staff Work Ethics	Pearson Correlation	.611**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	412	412

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The SPSS output on Table 4 revealed a correlation coefficient of .025 between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics, representing a moderate significant relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics. More so, the probability value (.611) is less than the critical value (0.05), this shows that there is a strong positive relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics. The findings reject the null hypothesis (H0₄) as there is a significant positive relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Collaboration as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

Hypothesis one of this study stated that there is no significant relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The hypothesis was rejected because there is a significant relationship between collaboration as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. From the findings of this research collaboration as a dimension of institutional leadership value plays a crucial role in enhancing staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. It fosters a culture of teamwork, mutual respect, and shared responsibility among staff members. This ultimately leads to increased productivity, job satisfaction, and a positive work environment.

collaboration finds its expression in various ways, including interdisciplinary research, shared decision-making, and cooperative problem-solving. One way in which collaboration enhances staff work ethics is by promoting open communication and transparency.

Bedwell et al. (2012) opined that when leaders encourage collaboration, they create an atmosphere where staff members feel comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns, and feedback. This open dialogue allows for a deeper understanding of different perspectives, fosters trust, and establishes a sense of ownership among employees. As a result, staff members become more engaged and committed to their work, leading to improved work ethics. Additionally, Graesser et al., (2018) asserted that collaboration contributes to the development of cohesive and supportive teams. Therefore, public universities should prioritize collaboration as part of their institutional leadership values to create an environment that nurtures strong work ethics among staff members. Furthermore, collaboration as an institutional leadership value encourages knowledge sharing and continuous learning. When staff members collaborate, they have the opportunity to work with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and expertise. This interdisciplinary approach enables the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices. As a result, staff members can expand their skill set, acquire new knowledge, and stay updated with the latest research and developments in their field. This continuous learning fosters a culture of professional growth and development, which positively impacts staff work ethics.

Gupta (2013) opined that through collaboration, staff members have an opportunity to build strong relationships, foster trust, and establish a sense of camaraderie. These cohesive team dynamics positively impact staff morale and job satisfaction, leading to improved work ethics. When individuals feel valued, supported, and respected by their colleagues and leaders, they are more likely to demonstrate strong work ethics and a commitment to achieving the university's goals. Furthermore, Brinkley (2013) asserted that collaboration also has a direct impact on staff work ethics by promoting accountability and shared responsibility. When individuals work collaboratively, they are accountable not only to themselves but also to their team members. This shared responsibility creates a sense of accountability and ensures that all team members contribute their best efforts to achieve the common goal.

Integrity as institutional leadership value improve staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State

Hypothesis two of this study stated that there is no significant relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The hypothesis was rejected because there is a significant relationship between integrity as institutional leadership value and staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. From the findings of this research integrity in leadership emphasizes honesty and truthfulness. When leaders display integrity, they set an example for their staff members to follow (Bauman, 2013).

Brinkley (2013) opined that a leader's commitment to integrity guides their decision-making processes, ensuring that they act ethically and transparently. This dedication to honesty and truthfulness creates a sense of trust among staff members, fostering effective communication, collaboration, and teamwork. When employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to be motivated, loyal, and committed to their work, resulting in high-quality output and a positive work environment. Additionally, Amabile (2018) asserted that when employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to be motivated, loyal, and committed to their work, resulting in high-quality output and a positive work environment. Leaders who prioritize

integrity hold themselves and their staff members responsible for their actions and outcomes. This commitment to accountability ensures that individuals take ownership of their work and strive for excellence.

Trevino and Nelson (2020) asserted that when leaders consistently demonstrate their integrity, they establish a culture of responsibility, where staff members understand the importance of delivering their best efforts and upholding high ethical standards. This accountability not only leads to improved individual performance but also contributes to the overall success and reputation of the institution. Furthermore, integrity in leadership helps in the preservation of organizational values and ethical standards.

Armenakis and Harris (2022) opined that by acting with integrity, leaders communicate their alignment with the established values of the institution, making it easier for staff members to understand and embrace these values. When leaders consistently uphold ethical standards, they create a culture where unethical behaviour is not tolerated. This, in turn, fosters an environment where staff members feel respected, valued, and empowered to prioritize their work ethics. According to Kilag et al., (2023), integrity also plays a significant role in promoting fairness and equal treatment within institutions. When leaders uphold integrity as a core value, they ensure equal opportunities, rewards, and recognition for all staff members. By treating everyone fairly and impartially, leaders create a sense of trust and respect among the employees. This leads to improved job satisfaction, which in turn enhances staff morale and productivity

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted the significant role that collaboration and integrity, as institutional leadership values, play in shaping staff work ethics in public universities in Rivers State. The findings underscored the importance of promoting collaborative environment that encourages collective problem-solving and the sharing of resources, which enhances staff engagement and productivity. Similarly, the study emphasized that integrity in leadership promotes ethical decision-making, transparency, and accountability, thereby setting a standard for staff behavior and strengthening organizational culture. By prioritizing these values, university leadership can improve staff performance, academic outcomes, and overall institutional effectiveness. The results of this study provided valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educational leaders in Rivers State, offering practical strategies for enhancing leadership practices that can positively influence staff work ethics and contributes to the growth and development of public universities. Future research could explore other factors that may further enhance the relationship between leadership values and work ethics.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- Stakeholders and community leaders should encourage collaboration among staff through teamwork, cross-departmental projects, and shared goals should be a priority. They should create a culture that values and promotes collaboration.
- Education authorities should model ethical behavior and uphold high standards of integrity, being honest, fair, and consistent in decision-making. Integrity is essential for building trust and credibility.

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