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CREATIVE LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATIVE THINKING AS CATALYSTS FOR JOB PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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Abstract

The need for enhanced job performance and service delivery remains a significant challenge within Nigeria's dynamic local government landscape. This study explores how innovative thinking and creative leadership can enhance organizational effectiveness and public service outcomes. Creative leadership fosters an environment that encourages innovative ideas, effective problem-solving techniques, and adaptable approaches to effectively navigate the complexities of local administration. Furthermore, creative thinking promotes a culture of continuous development, empowering employees to devise and implement solutions that align with community needs. This essay examines key strategies and real-world examples where innovative leadership has led to improvements in performance and service delivery within the local government system. The findings indicate that cultivating a leadership style that prioritizes innovation and creativity not only bolsters employee motivation and productivity but also facilitates more responsive and effective governance structures. By implementing these strategies, Nigerian local governments could significantly enhance their capacity to achieve developmental goals and meet citizens' expectations.

Keywords: Creative leadership, innovation, transformation, local government, service delivery

Introduction.

Leadership is essential for the success and efficiency of any organization, influencing resource allocation, employee performance, and goal achievement (Adebayo, 2010). Various leadership styles motivate and guide employees to improve performance, with creative leadership emerging as a modern approach that fosters innovative thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. As the demand for adaptability and continuous improvement grows, leaders who promote creativity are better positioned to meet their objectives. Adewale & Fasasi (2023) note that creative leadership thrives in developed nations like the United States and the United Kingdom, where it drives economic growth and social advancement. This style encourages embracing new ideas, risk-taking, and teamwork, empowering teams to think beyond traditional boundaries and contribute to organizational success. By nurturing creativity, these leaders help teams collaborate effectively, leading to enhanced service delivery and high performance. However, despite the success of creative leadership in developed countries, its implementation in many African nations, particularly Nigeria, remains limited. Leadership styles prevalent in Nigeria, especially within local governments, often lack an emphasis on innovation and creativity. Adewale & Fasasi (2023) argue that local governments, as products of decentralization, cannot deliver satisfactory services without proper power division among government levels. Consequently, Nigerian leaders struggle to instill the creative thinking necessary for addressing local service delivery challenges. The failure to apply creative leadership strategies has led to a decline in service quality and hindered overall local development. Local governments play a critical role in the socio-economic growth of their communities by providing essential services such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education (Aina, 2015). However, ineffective leadership hampers their ability to respond to community needs. Creative leadership offers a promising solution by encouraging innovation and motivating government workers to enhance their performance and service delivery. This paper explores how creative leadership and innovative thinking can improve job performance and service delivery within Nigerian local governments.

Statement of the Problem

In developed countries, creative leadership drives innovation, improves productivity, and ensures effective service delivery. Leaders adopting this approach create environments that promote collaboration and innovative problem-solving. In Nigeria, particularly at the local government level, the implementation of creative leadership is still limited. This gap in leadership styles has resulted in a lack of innovative thinking, poor performance, and inadequate service delivery. While local governments hold potential for significant socio-economic development, many leaders in Nigeria face challenges in applying effective strategies that promote creativity. This shortfall negatively impacts job performance, employee morale, and service quality within local government entities. Therefore, it is crucial to explore ways to introduce and foster creative leadership in Nigerian local governments and to understand its impact on improving service delivery and enhancing the effectiveness of grassroots government workers.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptualizing Creative Leadership

Creative leadership is defined by Smith (2022) as a leadership style that nurtures innovation, adaptability, and critical thinking within organizations. Unlike traditional leadership, which often focuses on established processes and strict hierarchy, creative leadership aims to inspire new ideas, promote autonomy, and cultivate a culture of experimentation. This leadership approach is especially vital in dynamic environments like local governance, where complex problems require innovative solutions.

Characteristics of Creative Leadership

Aina (2015) identifies key attributes that characterize creative leadership, driving innovation and fostering a positive organizational culture. Vision and inspiration are central to this leadership style.

Creative leaders can articulate a compelling vision that motivates and aligns their teams. This vision often challenges the status quo, urging employees to think beyond conventional boundaries and embrace new possibilities. Encouraging innovation is another significant aspect of creative leadership. These leaders create an atmosphere that supports experimentation, allowing teams to explore new approaches without the fear of failure. In such environments, creative ideas are not only valued but also actively rewarded, thereby nurturing imaginative thinking. Adaptability and resilience are also essential traits of creative leaders, as posited by Smith (2022). These leaders exhibit flexibility, adjusting their strategies in response to changing conditions. By encouraging their teams to embrace change, they help members view challenges as opportunities for growth and learning, fostering resilience within the organization. Empowerment plays a crucial role in creative leadership as well. By delegating authority and encouraging autonomy, these leaders enable employees to take initiative and make decisions. This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among team members, enhancing engagement and commitment to shared objectives. Moreover, collaboration is fundamental to creative leadership. By breaking down silos and promoting teamwork across departments, creative leaders facilitate diverse perspectives. This collaborative environment is essential for sparking innovation, as varied viewpoints often lead to groundbreaking ideas. Overall, creative leadership combines vision, empowerment, resilience, and collaboration to create a dynamic and innovative workplace (Adewale & Fasasi, 2023).

Theoretical Foundation

Multiple influential theories underpin the concept of creative leadership, articulating how effective leadership fosters creativity in organizations.

Transformational Leadership: According to Aina (2015), transformational leadership emphasizes the significant influence leaders have in motivating their teams to achieve and surpass goals. Effective leaders inspire through enthusiasm and commitment, going beyond mere task management. A vital aspect of transformational leadership is promoting intellectual engagement. Leaders who embody this trait encourage team members to think critically, question norms, and explore innovative ideas. By fostering a culture that embraces inquiry and challenges existing beliefs, transformational leaders empower their teams to seek creative solutions, leading to breakthroughs and improvements. Additionally, these leaders excel in communicating a compelling vision that resonates with team members, uniting them in the pursuit of common goals. By providing individual support, recognizing achievements, and encouraging professional growth, transformational leaders promote both personal and collective advancement. This approach not only fosters creativity and innovation but also cultivates a motivated and high-performing workforce capable of overcoming challenges and striving for excellence. Ultimately, transformational leadership enhances organizational success and supports the development of each team member, leading to a robust and proactive team (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Componential Theory of Creativity: Introduced by Teresa Amabile in 1998, the Componential Theory of Creativity offers insights into how creativity flourishes in organizational environments. This theory posits that creativity is not merely an innate ability but results from the interplay of three essential components: intrinsic motivation, domain-relevant skills, and creativity-relevant processes.

Intrinsic Motivation: refers to the internal drive that encourages individuals to engage in creative activities for the enjoyment and satisfaction they derive from them. When people are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to generate original ideas and solutions. Organizations can foster this motivation by creating an environment where individuals feel a sense of ownership over their work and are encouraged to pursue their passions.

Adeyemi and Ogunleye (2013) affirm that Domain-Relevant Skills entail the knowledge and expertise individuals possess within a particular field or discipline. Creative leaders can enhance their team's domain-relevant skills through ongoing training, professional development, and opportunities for collaboration. When team members are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge, they are better positioned to think creatively and tackle complex challenges.

Popoola (2014) affirms that Creativity-Relevant Processes involve the cognitive and social processes that influence creative thinking. This includes encouraging a mindset open to new ideas, experimentation, and collaboration. Creative leaders can promote such processes by creating a supportive environment where teams feel safe to share their thoughts, engage in brainstorming sessions, and reflect on their experiences to continuously learn and adapt.

The Complexity leadership theory emphasizes that creativity is a dynamic interplay of motivation, skills, and processes, and effective leadership can cultivate these elements to enhance creativity within organizations. Understanding creative leadership can significantly enhance organizational performance.

By integrating the characteristics of creative leadership outlined above, organizations can become more adaptable, innovative, and resilient. Investing in training and development programs focused on nurturing the traits of creative leaders can benefit organizational culture and performance. Aina (2015) posits that to implement creative leadership effectively, organizations should prioritize creating environments that encourage innovation. This can be achieved by promoting open communication, fostering collaboration across teams, and allowing for an agile decision-making process. Organizations should also implement reward systems that recognize and celebrate innovative ideas, further motivating members to contribute creatively. Furthermore, organizations can embrace flexibility in their processes, allowing teams to adapt to changing circumstances swiftly. This adaptability will enhance resilience, enabling organizations to navigate uncertainties with confidence. In conclusion, creative leadership is crucial for fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability in organizations. By cultivating the attributes of vision, empowerment, resilience, and collaboration, organizations can unlock the full creative potential of their teams. Through the theoretical foundations established by transformational leadership and the Componential Theory of Creativity, organizations can develop practical strategies to nurture creativity and drive success in today's dynamic landscape. (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

Importance in Local Government Context

According to Adebayo (2010), local governments play a vital role in connecting citizens with state authority and are fundamental in the delivery of essential services that directly impact the quality of life in communities. In Nigeria, local governments are tasked with a broad range of responsibilities ranging from education and healthcare provision to infrastructure development, waste management, and public safety. However, these governments often encounter significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness. One of the most pressing issues faced by local governments in Nigeria is inefficiency. This can manifest in various forms, such as delays in project implementation, inadequate service delivery, and resource misallocation. According to Olowu & Wunsch (2004), when bureaucratic structures and processes become cumbersome, they can slow down vital services that citizens depend on, leading to frustration and a lack of trust in government institutions. Corruption is another pervasive challenge that undermines the integrity of local governance in Nigeria. Instances of misappropriation of funds, bribery, and nepotism create an environment where resources intended for public use are diverted for personal gain. This not only exacerbates poverty and inequality but also erodes public confidence in government entities. Aina (2015) posits that when citizens perceive their leaders as corrupt, it diminishes civic engagement and the willingness to participate in governance processes. Additionally, the lack of accountability contributes significantly to the inadequacies of local governments. When leaders are not held responsible for their actions or for the outcomes of their policies, the cycle of negligence and unresponsiveness continues. Citizens may feel disempowered and disengaged, believing that their voices and needs are overlooked. The traditional hierarchical leadership styles commonly adopted within these local governments, characterized by rigid procedures and centralized decision-making, have often proven inadequate for effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges they face. Such systems can stifle innovation and responsiveness, as they do not allow for the flexibility and adaptability needed in dynamic environments. To improve local governance in Nigeria, there is a growing recognition of the need for more participatory and decentralized structures. Encouraging community involvement in decision-making, fostering transparency, and implementing accountability measures can help rebuild trust and enhance service delivery. Furthermore, adopting modern management practices and technologies can facilitate more

efficient operations, helping local governments better meet the needs of their constituents. (Oyewale , Adeymo, Ogunleye, 2013)

The Role of Leadership in Innovation within Nigerian Local Governments

Popoola (2014) affirms that leadership is essential for driving innovation, especially in the public sector. In Nigerian local governments, leadership significantly influences the advancement or stagnation of innovation. Effective leaders can spearhead meaningful reforms, enhance service delivery, and foster community involvement, whereas ineffective leadership may result in ongoing inefficiencies. This discussion delves into the various roles that leadership plays in promoting innovation within Nigerian local governments, backed by scholarly research.

1. **Visionary Leadership and Strategic Direction:** Innovative leadership is rooted in a clear and motivating vision. Leaders define the strategic path by pinpointing long-term objectives and aligning resources and efforts to attain them. In Nigerian local governments, visionary leadership is vital for addressing complex socio-economic issues and facilitating transformative change. (Bass and Riggio (2006) suggest that transformational leaders convey a future-oriented vision that inspires and energizes employees. This visionary perspective is crucial for nurturing innovation since it provides a guide for change and encourages creative thinking. Local government leaders who establish and communicate a well-defined vision for development can motivate personnel to seek innovative solutions to chronic challenges such as infrastructure shortfalls and inefficiencies in service delivery. For instance, a leader envisioning e-governance can spearhead digital transformation strategies that optimize administrative processes and promote transparency.

2. **Fostering an Innovation-Friendly Culture:** Leadership influences organizational culture, which in turn affects innovation capacity. An innovation-supportive culture fosters openness, collaboration, and a readiness to take calculated risks. Amabile et al. (2004) emphasize that leaders who create an encouraging environment where employees feel secure to experiment and share ideas are more likely to achieve innovative results. Cultivating psychological safety, where failure is perceived as an opportunity for learning, is essential. Many Nigerian local governments operate under rigid bureaucratic structures that constrain creativity. Transformational leaders can shift this by fostering a culture of experimentation and ongoing learning. For example, establishing innovation hubs or suggestion platforms within local government offices can empower staff to propose and test new ideas without the fear of negative repercussions.

3. **Empowering and Inspiring Employees:** Employees who feel empowered are more inclined to engage in innovative endeavors. Leadership is vital in distributing authority, supplying resources, and acknowledging contributions, which all enhance a sense of ownership and drive. Conger and Kanungo (1988) stress that empowerment is key to fostering innovation. When employees feel trusted and appreciated, they tend to be more committed to the organization's objectives and are more likely to propose innovative ideas. In many local governments in Nigeria, decision-making is often centralized, which restricts the innovative potential of frontline employees. By decentralizing these decisions and empowering staff at every level, leaders can unleash the creative capabilities of their teams. For example, allowing local health officials the freedom to create health initiatives tailored to their communities can result in improved service delivery.

4. **Promoting Capacity Building and Ongoing Learning:** Innovation necessitates a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Leaders must prioritize training and development to enhance their teams' capabilities and ensure they possess the skills needed to innovate. Damanpour and Schneider (2006) argue that ongoing learning is vital for innovation, especially in public sector organizations. Leaders who emphasize capacity building cultivate an environment where employees are prepared to address complex challenges. Local government leaders can drive innovation by introducing regular training sessions and workshops that focus on problem-solving, technology adoption, and creative thinking. For instance, leadership development programs centering on innovation management can equip mid-level managers with the abilities to inspire change within their departments.

5. **Promoting Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement:** Innovation frequently arises from collaboration and the exchange of varied viewpoints. Leaders are instrumental in dismantling silos and encouraging partnerships both internally and with external partners. Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) underline the significance of complexity leadership, which entails facilitating interactions and nurturing networks that stimulate innovation. Collaborative leadership promotes the flow of information and ideas across different sectors. Nigerian local government leaders can enhance innovation by forming partnerships with community organizations, private sector entities, and non-profits. For example, working alongside technology firms to create digital solutions for service delivery can lead to new, efficient, and transparent approaches.

6. **Addressing Bureaucratic Hurdles:** A significant obstacle to innovation in Nigerian local governments is bureaucratic inertia. Effective leaders must navigate these hindrances and establish pathways for innovation to thrive. Ugwulashi (2018) points out that bureaucratic frameworks often resist change, and overcoming this challenge requires leaders willing to question established norms and advocate for reform. Transformational leaders are crucial in breaking down these barriers and promoting a more agile, responsive organization. Leaders focused on innovation can initiate reforms that minimize bureaucratic obstacles and simplify decision-making processes. For instance, implementing performance-based evaluations can redirect the focus from strict compliance to results, fostering innovative practices.

7. **Promoting Accountability and Transparency:** Innovation is intrinsically linked to accountability and transparency. Leaders who advocate for ethical behavior and open communication create an atmosphere conducive to successful innovative ideas. Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, and Strange (2002) highlight that ethical leadership and transparency are essential for building trust and encouraging innovation. When employees feel that their contributions will be recognized fairly, they are more driven to innovate. In Nigerian local governments, advancing transparency through open data initiatives and feedback mechanisms from citizens can nurture a culture of accountability and innovation. For example, utilizing digital platforms to monitor and report on project progress can enhance public trust and stimulate innovative solutions.

Challenges to Creative Leadership and Innovation in Nigerian Local Governments

According to Ndulasi&Iftikhar(2012), Creative leadership and innovation are vital for improving service delivery and governance in Nigerian local governments. However, these initiatives encounter several challenges that impede their effective execution. Understanding these challenges is essential for formulating strategies to foster a culture of creativity and innovation. Below are the primary obstacles, supported by scholarly references and contextual analysis.

1. **Bureaucratic Inertia and Rigid Structures:** A key challenge to fostering creative leadership in local governments in Nigeria is bureaucratic inertia. The inflexible hierarchical systems, strict adherence to established protocols, and resistance to change create an environment that suppresses creativity and innovation. Ugwulashi (2018) notes that traditional bureaucratic organizations are naturally inclined to resist change because they prioritize control, predictability, and minimize risk. Such systems discourage employees from suggesting or applying new ideas. Additionally, local governments in Nigeria often have centralized decision-making, concentrating authority at the top. This setup restricts frontline workers from introducing or trying out innovative solutions. As a result, even small changes may go through protracted approval processes, reducing the drive for innovation.

2. **Corruption and Lack of Accountability:** Corruption is a widespread issue in public administration in Nigeria, including local governments. It hampers the adoption of innovative practices by misallocating resources and fostering an environment lacking transparency and accountability. Adebayo (2010) points out that corruption damages public trust and obstructs developmental efforts. In such settings, creative ideas frequently meet resistance if they threaten established interests or reveal corrupt activities. Innovative endeavors often depend on transparent procurement processes and proper resource allocation. However, corrupt behaviors can skew priorities, leading to improper use of funds and resources, which discourages creative leaders and demotivates employees wishing to bring about meaningful change.

3. **Resource Constraints:** Local governments in Nigeria regularly encounter financial and infrastructural challenges that impede innovation. Budget limitations, insufficient funding, and substandard infrastructure restrict their ability to invest in new technologies or training initiatives that promote creative leadership. Damanpour and Schneider (2006) argue that public organizations require significant investments in resources and capacity-building for innovation to thrive. Without adequate funding, even the most innovative leaders find it hard to put their ideas into practice. Restricted resources typically result in local governments prioritizing essential service delivery over innovative pursuits, thus hindering long-term transformative projects. Furthermore, poor infrastructure, such as unreliable internet access, complicates efforts to implement modern technology-driven solutions.
4. **Resistance to Change:** Resistance to change is prevalent in any organization, but it is particularly strong in public sector institutions. Employees and officials familiar with traditional operational methods may approach innovative initiatives with doubt or apprehension, particularly if they fear job loss or an increased workload. Kotter (1996) identifies resistance to change as a principal barrier to innovation, suggesting that successful leadership must address the fears and concerns of staff. In Nigerian local governments, innovative changes often necessitate adjustments to established routines and processes. Without effective change management, employees may reject new initiatives, seeing them as disruptive or unnecessary. Moreover, political dynamics and vested interests can complicate attempts to drive reform.
5. **Lack of Training and Capacity Development:** The absence of sufficient training and capacity-building programs presents a significant hurdle to innovation. Creative leadership relies on a skilled workforce capable of implementing and maintaining innovative practices. Amabile et al. (2004) underline the need for ongoing learning and development to promote innovation. A workforce lacking the required skills and knowledge is less inclined to engage in creative problem-solving. Many employees in Nigerian local governments have limited access to professional development opportunities, leading to a skills gap that prevents them from adopting new technologies or approaches to enhance service delivery. Additionally, leaders without training in innovation management may struggle to cultivate a culture of creativity.
6. **Political Interference and Instability:** Political elements greatly influence local governments' ability to encourage innovation. Frequent leadership changes, political meddling, and short-term political objectives can disrupt the continuity of long-term innovative efforts. Olowu and Wunsch (2004) note that political interference in local governance undermines the consistency and stability needed to sustain innovative projects. In Nigerian local governments, political leaders may favor projects that deliver immediate visibility or electoral rewards over those that support long-term innovation. Moreover, shifts in administration often lead to the discontinuation of ongoing projects, resulting in wasted resources and discouragement among employees.
7. **Limited Engagement with Citizens:** To effectively innovate in local government, input and feedback from citizens are essential. However, many Nigerian local governments lack structured methods for engaging the community, which hampers the co-creation of solutions tailored to local needs. Fung (2006) emphasizes the importance of participatory governance in driving public service innovation. When citizens are involved in decision-making, the innovations tend to be more relevant and impactful. Unfortunately, citizen engagement in many Nigerian local governments is often minimal or superficial. This disconnect restricts the exchange of ideas from the community, diminishing the efficacy and relevance of innovative efforts. Establishing trust and fostering collaboration with citizens is vital to tackle this issue.
8. **Insufficient Infrastructure and Technology Utilization:** Innovation frequently hinges on robust infrastructure and technology. However, many local governments in Nigeria face challenges due to inadequate infrastructure—such as poor road conditions, unreliable power supply, and limited technological access—that obstruct the execution of innovative solutions. Ndubisi and Iftikhar (2012) stress that the right technological infrastructure is crucial for enabling innovation. Without it, even the most innovative concepts may not be realized. For example, attempts at implementing e-governance or digital service delivery are often thwarted by poor internet access or a lack of technical skills. Thus, investing in infrastructure is essential for promoting innovation within local governance.

Methodology

The study relied solely on qualitative data collected from secondary sources, including scholarly peer-reviewed journals, government reports, the Nigerian Constitution, and relevant online materials. The data were analyzed using the content analysis method and presented thematically, with subheadings to highlight key conceptual areas. Additionally, the issues were organized in alignment with the research objectives.

Discussion of Findings

How creative leadership is missing in Nigerian local government

Creative leadership plays a vital role in effective governance, but within the Nigerian local government context, it is often lacking. (Adewale&Fasasi, 2023). The failure to adopt innovative leadership approaches can impede progress, limit problem-solving abilities, and hamper community development. A significant challenge is that many local government officials tend to favor traditional methods over creative solutions. This resistance to change can lead to unresolved local issues, including inadequate infrastructure, poor healthcare services, and limited educational resources. Creative leadership entails not only thinking differently but also having the courage to take calculated risks and explore new ideas that may offer improved outcomes for communities. Additionally, the bureaucratic nature of local governance can suppress innovation, as rigid processes and hierarchical structures often deter individuals from suggesting creative solutions or taking initiative. In environments that prioritize conformity over creativity, the possibilities for innovative leadership are significantly restricted. (Bass& Reggio, 2006). Furthermore, a lack of collaboration and partnerships across sectors can stifle creativity in local governance. Engaging various stakeholders, such as the private sector, civil society, and community members, can generate fresh ideas and collective approaches to complex challenges. Unfortunately, when local governments function in isolation, they miss out on the benefit of diverse perspectives that could lead to innovative strategies. Moreover, insufficient funding frequently limits the capacity of local governments to pursue creative initiatives. When budgets are constrained, leaders may hesitate to invest in innovative programs or technologies that could enhance service delivery or community involvement. This financial limitation can create a cycle where a shortage of resources suppresses innovation, perpetuating existing challenges. To bridge this gap, it is essential to cultivate a culture of creativity within local government. This can be accomplished by offering training and development opportunities that enhance leaders' critical thinking and innovative skills. Promoting an open-minded environment where officials feel free to propose and experiment with new ideas can also foster creative leadership. (Oyewale, Adeyemo& Ogunleye, 2013).

How innovative thinking is missing in Nigerian local government

Creative thinking is vital for the effective operation of local governments globally; however, it is noticeably lacking in many local government councils in Nigeria. This deficit in innovative practices undermines both the efficiency and effectiveness of governance, leading to various socio-economic issues that impact the communities they serve.(Adewale& Fasasi, 2023). A key area where innovative thinking is particularly deficient is in problem-solving approaches. Decision-making often relies on traditional methods, resulting in inadequate solutions to modern challenges. For example, critical issues such as waste management, urban planning, and infrastructure development demand creative solutions that consider local contexts and the needs of the population. Unfortunately, local government officials frequently depend on outdated strategies that do not tackle the complexities of these issues, leading to unsatisfactory results. Additionally, the absence of innovation hinders citizen engagement. Local governments often fail to effectively use technology to enhance communication with their constituents. Digital platforms could improve engagement by allowing citizens to express their concerns, take part in decision-making, and hold officials accountable. However, many local governments in Nigeria have yet to adopt these technological advancements, which restricts public participation and creates a gap between the government and the community. Resource management is another crucial area lacking innovative thinking. Local governments often encounter financial constraints and insufficient budget allocations, which could be mitigated through inventive funding strategies. Exploring partnerships with the private sector, utilizing public-private partnerships, or seeking alternative revenue sources could improve financial viability. Nevertheless, many local governments resist adopting such innovative

funding solutions and stick to conventional budgeting practices that frequently fail to meet community needs.(Aina, 2015). Moreover, there is often a shortage of innovative policies and programs tailored to local issues. Local governments can significantly impact areas such as education, healthcare, and youth empowerment by implementing targeted interventions that reflect their communities' unique characteristics. However, the reluctance to embrace innovative practices hinders the development of customized strategies that could enhance outcomes in these critical sectors. Fostering a culture of innovation within local government institutions is also essential. This involves not only promoting new ideas but also creating a climate where experimentation and learning from failures are encouraged. Training and capacity building for local government officials can help shift their mindsets, enabling them to adopt innovative approaches and strategies that can lead to meaningful change. In summary, the lack of innovative thinking in Nigerian local governments significantly limits their ability to tackle urgent challenges facing their communities. To achieve real progress, a transformational shift is needed—one that prioritizes creativity, technology, and community involvement. By cultivating a culture of innovation, local governments can improve their effectiveness and develop sustainable solutions that align with the needs of their constituents. This transformation is essential not just for governance but also for the overall development and well-being of Nigerian communities.(Aina, 2015)

Imperative of creative leadership and innovative leadership to local government efficiency.

According to Naidu and Marikana(2015), the imperative of creative leadership and innovative leadership in local government efficiency is becoming increasingly recognized as essential for effectively addressing the complex challenges faced by modern communities. As local governments strive to meet the needs of their constituents while operating within tight budgets and limited resources, the adoption of creative and innovative approaches is critical. Creative leadership refers to the ability to inspire and encourage new ideas and solutions among team members. This type of leadership fosters an environment where staff are empowered to think outside the box, explore new possibilities, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. By embracing creative leadership, local governments can tap into the diverse experiences and insights of their employees, leading to enhanced service delivery and improved community engagement. On the other hand, innovative leadership focuses on the implementation of new methods, technologies, and processes that can significantly improve operational efficiency. This includes leveraging advancements in digital technology, data analytics, and social media to enhance communication with citizens, streamline operations, and deliver services more effectively. According to Olowu and Wunsch (2004), Innovative leaders are willing to take calculated risks and explore untested avenues to find more effective solutions to longstanding problems. Together, these leadership styles are pivotal in driving local government efficiency. For instance, when leaders encourage creativity within their teams, they create a culture that values experimentation and adaptability. This responsiveness is vital in addressing emerging community issues swiftly and effectively. Moreover, innovative leadership supports the integration of best practices and cutting-edge solutions that can transform local governance. Additionally, fostering a partnership between creative and innovative leadership can help local governments navigate the complexities of today's societal demands. It encourages public involvement and accountability, leading to more transparent decision-making processes and stronger community trust. By prioritizing these leadership approaches, local governments can not only enhance their operational efficiency but also build resilient, thriving communities equipped to handle future challenges. In summary, the integration of creative and innovative leadership is not merely advantageous but imperative for local governments striving for efficiency and effectiveness. It opens pathways for groundbreaking ideas and practices that can redefine how local governance operates and engages with its constituents, ultimately leading to improved quality of life and civic satisfaction.

Conclusion

Creative leadership and innovative thinking are key factors for improving job performance and service delivery in Nigerian local governments. Given systemic issues like bureaucratic inertia, corruption, and resource limitations, nurturing a culture of creativity and innovation becomes essential rather than optional. Transformational leadership, marked by vision, empowerment, and adaptability, can motivate

local government staff to innovate solutions that meet specific community challenges. By moving away from traditional hierarchical structures and adopting a more dynamic and inclusive governance approach, creative leadership can enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen satisfaction. The benefits of innovative thinking reach beyond mere process enhancements to promote comprehensive organizational transformation. Leaders who advocate for open communication, acknowledge contributions, and foster a culture of continuous learning create an environment conducive to innovation. Addressing obstacles to creative leadership, such as political interference and poor infrastructure, is vital for sustainable progress. Ultimately, embracing creative leadership and innovative thought will not only improve service delivery but also rebuild public trust and engagement in local governance.

Recommendations

Local governments should allocate resources for training programs centered around creative and transformational leadership. These initiatives should prepare leaders to foster innovation, manage change, and inspire their teams, possibly through collaborations with academic institutions and leadership organizations. Frameworks that support creativity, such as innovation hubs, suggestion platforms, and recognition programs for new ideas, should be established.

Leaders need to cultivate a psychologically safe atmosphere where employees are encouraged to propose and test new solutions without fear of failure. Robust anti-corruption measures should be implemented, along with promoting transparency via open data initiatives and mechanisms for citizen feedback. Transparent governance helps build public trust and creates a conducive environment for innovation. Regular training and development opportunities for local government employees should focus on problem-solving, technology adoption, and creative thinking. Additionally, improving infrastructure—like internet connectivity and IT systems—will bolster digital innovations in service delivery. Empowering front-line employees and departmental leaders with decision-making authority is essential. A decentralized governance model allows for quicker responses to community needs and fosters ownership and accountability among staff. Local governments should build partnerships with private sector entities, non-profits, and community organizations to co-create solutions while integrating new perspectives and resources that promote innovation. Lastly, structured platforms for community involvement in decision-making should be established. By engaging with citizens, local governments can ensure that innovations are pertinent and cater to the genuine needs of the community, thereby nurturing a sense of collective ownership and responsibility.

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