

The influence of leadership styles in enhancing strategic management practice in urban councils in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Strategic management is considered as one of the effective management tools in strengthening organisation performance through effective decision-making and systematic strategic formulation and implementation. However, public sector organisations seem to be struggling in implementing the concept since its inception. In Zimbabwe, the poor performance of urban councils in terms of meeting the expected service delivery precisely supports this perception. Against this background, the study therefore, explored the influential role of leadership styles in enhancing strategic management practice focusing on urban councils in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a quantitative research approach. The population involved all the managers and practitioners in the 32 urban councils in Zimbabwe. A sample of 344 employees was drawn using Krejcie sampling determination method. A questionnaire was used to collect data which was analysed using SPSS software. The results of the study revealed that transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles are relevant for the practice of strategic management in local authorities. As such, for successful strategic management practices in local authorities, managers are encouraged to embrace the three leadership styles. However, further research is recommended to explore the role of each style of leadership at different stages of the strategic management process using a different organisation and a different methodology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic management has been touted as one of the effective management tools in strengthening organisation performance through effective decision making and systematic strategic formulation and implementation. Although strategic management used to be more prevalently adopted in the private sector since its inception, the interest of its use in the public sector is steadily increasing. However, its adoption in the public sector such as local authorities has been done with some challenges. This is evidenced by different levels of service delivery difficulties being experienced by these public sector entities in both developed and developing countries (Slack, 2007; OECD, 2010; Motsi et al., 2023). Poor performance of urban councils, in terms of service delivery, testifies to poor strategic management. For instance, in the Middle East, Jordan, unlike in the private sector, public sector organisations such as municipalities are still struggling to practice strategic management (Taamneh et al, 2020). According to the author, the majority of municipalities in the country do not have long term strategies an indication of weak or absence of strategic management practice. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, most central government agencies are operating without written mission and vision statements (Hashm & Aamery, 2006 in Tamini et al, 2018). In Nigeria serious service delivery challenges being experienced in the country's local authorities are mainly being attributed to lack of skills, lack transparency and lack of accountability, among others (Majekodunmi, 2012 in Kalonda & Govender, 2021). In South Africa, the continuous negative audit reports by the Auditor General on municipalities and increasing service delivery protests by local communities signifies of lack or poor strategic management practices by these key institutions (Auditor-General Report, 2016, & Chikulo, 2016 cited in Nkadameng, 2019). Similarly, in Tanzania, people have suffered varying degrees of inadequate service delivery challenges as a result of poorly executed strategic management practices (Boundless, 2013, in Pandisha, et al, 2022).

Furthermore, in Zambia, strategic planning has not improved service provision by local authorities in the country even after the government had encouraged local authorities to develop strategic plans as a means to improve service delivery responsibilities in their areas of jurisdiction (Taylor et al 2018). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the findings of the Auditor-General's report for the financial year ended December, 31, 2019 on local authorities presented to Parliament in 2021 indicate that the majority of local authorities in the country are operating without key policy documents such as strategic plans. Furthermore, the 2020 Auditor-General's report indicated that the governance and service delivery challenges in local authorities are related to

the perennial absence of key policies, procedure manuals, non-compliance with laws and other regulatory provisions and mismanagement of assets in some of the local authorities. In view of closing the gap, this study, therefore, sought to explore the role of leadership in enhancing strategic management practices focusing on urban councils in Zimbabwe.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Contingency Theory of Leadership

The theory was proposed by an Austrian psychologist Fred Fiedlers in 1946 who found leaders to be motivated by either the task or the relationship at workplace and thus continually influence or manipulate the situation of leadership at hand to achieve their objectives in terms of leading style and amount of control exerted within the situation (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014 in Adoli & Kilika, 2020). It is based on the premise that managers should consider contingent external environmental factors (political, technological, economic, and socio-cultural) in order to make favourable decisions for the organisation. According to the theory, depending on the organisational situations, leaders can adapt leadership styles that best suit the situation at the workplace. The theory contends that there is no best, special or unique leadership style that transcends in all organisational situations as it all depends on both the internal and external factors facing the organization at any particular situation. Basically, contingency theory emphasises that organisations are open systems, which entails that manager should make decisions based on the contextual and environmental circumstances to ascertain the needs of the environment and its subsystems, as well as developing skills that are beneficial to moving the organisation forward.

This theory of leadership posits that management should use diverse approaches to resolving issues that may arise in the work environment. In simple terms, managers should make decisions based on the present need of the surrounding environment. This therefore, implies that what is effective in some circumstances could have no or little effect in others. The theory was found useful in supporting the study because of its assumption that different situations require different problem-resolving mechanisms as no single approach to leadership can fit in managing all uncertainties of the environment. Therefore, managers should consider the contingencies of both the internal and external environment and evaluate the best style of leadership to use in order to achieve the desired results.

2.2 Leadership and Strategic Management

In the ever-evolving landscape of business, the symbiotic relationship between leadership and strategic management practices cannot be over emphasised. The dynamics of the global market, characterised by rapid technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, and dynamic competitive forces, have necessitated a profound re-evaluation of how organisations formulate and execute their strategies (Mircescu, 2023). In this context, the role of leadership as a pivotal determinant in shaping successful strategic management practices has garnered increased attention and scrutiny. Leadership is often regarded as the guiding force steering an organisation towards its objectives. In this case, leadership is therefore, defined as the process of influencing someone or a group of individuals to achieve expected goals (Elhag et al., 2026; Alblooshi et al. 2020). According to Binti Mosbiran et al (2020), leadership styles are critical in achieving and improving organisational leadership success. A leadership style is defined as a set of qualities utilised by leaders to influence subordinates to achieve organisational goals (Chaturvedi, Rizvi, & Pasipanodya, 2019). In other words, Banks et al (2018) define it as a pattern of behaviour and methods that a leader prefers and frequently uses in influencing followers to perform towards achievement of intended goals in an organisation.

On the other hand, strategic management is defined as the process by which an organisation formulates and implements its major goals and initiatives while considering resources and assessing the internal and external environments in which the organisation operates (David et al., 2020). It is perceived as a series of steps covering the tasks of analysing the opportunities and threats that exist in the external environment. Strategic management also involves analysing the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation within the internal environment, identifying agency stakeholders, establishing organisation's mission and goals, formulating strategies by matching the organisation's strengths and weaknesses with the environment's opportunities and threats, implementing the strategies, and finally engaging in strategy control activities to measure the implementation progress and ensure achievement of the stated goals. The external environment can be analysed through environmental scanning and competitive analysis. It involves an analysis of the changes and trends in the political, economic, social, technological, ecological, institutional and the market environment. The analysis of the environment is done for the purposes of identifying opportunities, threats, key success factors and the competitive advantage of the organisation.

While strategic management entails the systematic alignment of the resources of an organisation and actions with its long-term goals, it is the astute leadership that orchestrates these efforts, ensuring a harmonious interplay between vision, execution, and adaptation. This interdependence gives rise to a complex interplay of leadership styles, competencies, and approaches that can either propel an organization to the zenith of success or relegate it to the side-lines of obscurity. As organizations navigate the intricacies of contemporary business landscapes, characterised by uncertainty and turbulence, the importance of effective leadership becomes ever more pronounced. A number of earlier studies (Abujarad, 2020; Ikiara & Kariuki, 2018; Northouse, 2022) have claimed that a leader's style is crucial because it determines how all primary and auxiliary resources are allocated during the implementation of a strategic plan in order to achieve the organization's primary goals. The amount of performance that businesses may accomplish, even in terms of strategic implementations, is directly impacted by the leadership styles that these organizations adopt, according to Robbins (2013). According to Daft (2015), even the most original strategies are useless unless they are successfully implemented, and this requires effective leadership style.

A visionary leader possesses the acumen to identify emerging trends, interpret market signals, and envision transformative strategies that not only secure short-term gains but also fortify the long-term sustainability of the organisation. Moreover, the execution of these strategies necessitates a leadership approach that resonates throughout the organisational hierarchy, inspiring teams, departments, and individuals to align their efforts with the overarching strategic objectives. The construct of leadership strategy therefore, allows effective leadership to permeate at all functional levels and areas in an organisation by identifying five components that organization leaders need to focus on or consider for successful achievement of their strategic choices and future organisation sustainability by ensuring there is to link between leadership strategy and business strategy. Therefore, leadership possesses the potential to catalyse or impede the execution of strategic initiatives.

2.2.1 Transformational Leadership

The transformational style of leadership was first introduced by Burns (1978) and was later developed by Bass (1985) who explained more in depth the psychological mechanisms between transformational and transactional

leadership based on the Multifactor leadership questionnaire (Łukowski, 2017 in Maturire & Nkechi, 2022). This leadership style emphasises on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve exceptional outcomes while fostering their personal and professional development. It therefore, plays a crucial role in fostering organisational resilience by inspiring employees to move beyond self-interest, align with a shared vision, and embrace change. Through behaviours such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, transformational leaders enhance employee engagement, promote adaptive thinking, and foster a positive organizational climate that supports recovery and growth during adversity. These four sub-concepts justify how leaders can affect strategic management. For instance, they can communicate to followers the importance of achieving specific goals which ensures how they can feel intrinsically motivated to work harder to achieve them thus increasing their performance (Ryu & Shim, 2020). In this case, idealized influence refers to leaders acting as role models, earning the trust and respect of their followers. Inspirational motivation involves articulating a compelling vision that inspires and motivates followers. Intellectual stimulation encourages creativity and innovation by challenging assumptions and soliciting new ideas. Individualized consideration entails providing personalized support and mentorship to followers, addressing their unique needs and fostering their development.

Transformational leadership style is prevalent in organizations which aims for significant change, as it promotes a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability. One of the main attentions of transformational leaders is the ownership they give to employees by exploring multiple alternatives to solve problems from different angles. This style of leadership is also crucial for innovation, since it focuses on mentoring and coaching that generate intellectual stimulation and charismatic influence to help followers become more efficient without judging them (Pasamar et al. 2019). When the mentoring is high-skilled and experienced, transformational leadership tends to be effective (Abdullahi et al. 2020). By focusing on the needs and development of followers, transformational leaders can cultivate a committed and innovative workforce. The other strengths of transformational leadership include its ability to foster high levels of employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance.

According to Pasamar et al (2019), with these practices, leaders can empower followers and generate an appropriate climate for innovation, creating better outcomes and achieving competitive advantages. They encourage employees to think outside the box and beyond expectations (Alblooshi et al. 2020). Since transformational leaders promote teamwork by focusing on collective interests and goals, they are, therefore, found in innovative organisations that have flexible work environments (Alblooshi et al. 2020). Transformational style of leadership works well in innovative-oriented organisations than situations requiring quick decision-making or in highly structured environments where adherence to established procedures is critical. One of the main characteristics of transformational leadership is the ability to inspire and motivate employees towards a shared vision. Because of its ability to inspire and motivate employees, encourage innovation, and drive organizational transformation. Transformational leadership is an essential component in the successful implementation of strategic management as it facilitates organizational change and strategic alignment (Ángeles López-Cabarcos et al., 2022). Leaders who demonstrate transformative qualities often articulate a compelling vision aligned with the strategic goals of the organization and fosters a sense of purpose and commitment among employees (Begum et al., 2022). This is especially important in strategic management, where alignment of individual and organizational goals is necessary for successful strategy execution. Gichuki et al (2024) where transformational leadership style was found to have a positive and significant influence on the implementation of strategic plans in devolved governments in Kenya.

Empirically, Hendriks and Reddy (2020) investigated leadership philosophies and strategy implementation at South Africa's National Department of Trade and Industry. Data collection was done through a survey as part of a quantitative research strategy. The study's findings demonstrated that while senior managers with a transactional and transformational leadership style had a positive effect on strategy execution, those with a laissez-faire leadership style had a negative effect. Based on the aforementioned analysis, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership style and the practice of strategic management in organisations.

2.2.2 Transactional Leadership

The concept of transactional leadership can be traced back to the early 20th century when the Sociologist Max Weber introduced bureaucratic leadership concepts. According to Batizani (2024), in the mid-20th century, leadership experts Bernard Bass (1985) and James MacGregor Burns (1978)

refined this approach by highlighting the transactional nature of the leader-follower relationship. Transactional leadership is characterized by how leaders can benefit from employees based on the way followers comply with their leaders in an exchange of rewards (Alblooshi et al. 2020). This leadership style follows when an individual takes the initiative to interact with others to acquire something valued in exchange. These values are essential to the exchange process, such as integrity, responsibility, and reciprocity.

The transactional leadership style is based on the social psychological social exchange theory and is grounded in the contingent reinforcement and performance monitoring. Mutually acceptable goals that are tied to rewards are known as contingent rewards, and these rewards are accompanied by clear expectations, resources that are made available, and performance prizes and standards that are set (Oberfield, 2012 in Maturire & Nkechi, 2022). Its core principles involve clear structures, defined roles, and the use of rewards and punishments to motivate followers. Specifically, this leadership style emphasises task clarity, structured reward systems, and corrective actions, which are essential in environments where precision, efficiency, and accountability are prioritized. Leaders set specific goals and provide explicit instructions, ensuring that followers understand their tasks and the consequences of their performance (Northouse, 2022). In that case, it plays a critical role in promoting organizational stability and goal alignment. Thus, this approach is particularly effective in organizations where tasks are routine and require a high degree of consistency and efficiency.

There are two core elements of transactional leadership which were identified by Bass and Avolio (1994) as cited in Odera (2023). These are the contingent rewards and management-by-exception. The contingent rewards denote that expectations and rewards for undertaking goals are clarified by the leader. According to Xalxo et al. (2024), this component has been empirically associated with improved team functioning and goal attainment. On the other end, management-by-exception (MBE) entails those goals that are specified by the leaders and where progress is monitored (Duguay et al., 2018, Xalxo et al., 2024). Management-by-exception is divided into two categories namely the active form and the passive form. According to Antonakis and House (2014) in Xalxo et al (2024). The active form enhances organisational vigilance by enabling leaders to detect and correct deviations in real time, supporting adaptive responses under pressure (Antonakis & House, 2014). Monitoring work and performance, resolving inconsistencies regarding violations of norms and regulations, and taking remedial action to resolve mistakes are all aspects of active management-by-exception (Oberfield, 2012; Kivasu, 2015 in Oshame & Maureen, 2023). In contrast, passive management-by-exception involves delayed intervention and has been criticized for undermining responsiveness, especially in turbulent settings (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013 in Oshame & Maureen, 2023). Transactional leadership is mainly vital for strategy execution because it places a higher priority on risk avoidance, considers time constraints and efficiency, and maintains control by relying on substantive work performance rather than procedures (Spreitzer, 2014 in Oshame & Maureen, 2023). Its strengths lie in its clarity and predictability. By establishing well-defined expectations and a clear system of rewards and punishments, leaders can effectively manage performance and maintain organisational stability. Thus, this leadership style is mostly effective in large organisations where short-term goals are promptly being sought to be achieved.

However, the weakness of this leadership style is that it stifles creativity and innovation due to its emphasis on routine and adherence to procedures as this discourage employees from exploring new ideas (Alblooshi et al. 2020). Regarding human capital, transactional leaders are more likely to foster specialized human capital by focusing on individual responsibilities instead of teamwork (Pasamar et al. 2019). Additionally, transactional leadership style may not be effective in dynamic environments where adaptability and flexibility are crucial for success. Therefore, the transactional leader focuses on leader-follower trades in benefits, rewards, incentives, and self-interest. If the subordinate does not achieve the goal, this results in punishment (Abdullahi et al. 2020). Empirically, transactional leadership was found to be contributing to organisational resilience through fostering consistent routines, performance discipline, and structured problem-solving during disruptions (Khairy et al., 2023). Furthermore, Desti Febrian et al (2023) and Al-Rjoub et al (2024), assert that these attributes create predictable environments that enhance adaptability and risk mitigation, especially when rapid operational responses are required. By reinforcing a culture of efficiency and control, transactional leadership facilitates timely coordination, which is central to organizational resilience. A quantitative study by Inyang et al. (2018) in Gande and Hlophe (2023) shows that transactional leadership tends to have more positive results in highly competitive environments. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Transactional leadership style positively and significantly influences the practice of strategic management in organisations.

2.2.3 Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

Laissez-faire or passive-avoidant style of leadership was introduced by Bass (1985). This approach to leadership is characterised by minimal intervention and granting substantial autonomy to team members. By definition, the laissez-faire leadership style, comprises of non-commitment, sloth, complacency, evasion, and abandonment of responsibility (Northouse, 2022). According to Avolio and Bass (2014) in Maturire and Nkechi (2022), this kind of management is viewed as chaotic and weak in leadership, and is normally displayed by leaders who are unwilling to make decisions, when required, are unwilling to reward their workers, and make no attempt to meet their requirements. As a result, the subordinates of such leaders lack motivation and empowerment. Laissez-faire leadership is particularly effective in organizations with highly skilled and self-motivated employees, as it allows individuals to use their expertise and creativity to drive results. According to Yukl (2022), laissez-faire style of leadership is most effective when applied to well-functioning, self-motivated teams, though it often struggles in contexts requiring strong direction or coordination. This style of leadership adopts a more hands-off approach, where leaders provide minimal supervision and allow team members to make decisions on their own. In this style, leaders trust their team members to take responsibility for their work and assume a more passive role in managing daily tasks. Thus, the style becomes more effective when employees are highly skilled and motivated which is when it helps employees thrive at work. This style can foster a sense of autonomy and innovation, as employees are given the freedom to approach tasks in their own way. In terms of strategic management, a study by Hemsworth, et al., (2013) in Odera (2023) found that employees who set their own goals, had complete flexibility, and resolved their own work-related issues all contributed to better implementation of strategic objectives.

Additionally, extant literature suggests that laissez-faire leadership style is positively related to commitment (Pahi et al., 2018), employee motivation (Chaudhry & Javed, 2012 in Zhang et al., 2023), trust (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019), organisational learning (Tong, 2020), creativity (Oprea et al., 2022), performance (Jamali et al., 2022) and is beneficial to social capital (Md Rami et al., 2022). However, laissez-faire leadership can be problematic in situations where employees lack direction or require more guidance and support. While this style can empower highly skilled individuals, it lacks oversight which may lead to inefficiencies and accountability issues, especially in larger organizations. Without clear leadership, teams may struggle with accountability, and important decisions may be delayed (Virkus & Salman, 2021). Additionally, this style can lead to confusion regarding roles and responsibilities, particularly in larger organizations or in teams that require close coordination. Therefore, based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis was suggested.

H3: Laissez-faire leadership style has a relative positive and significant impact on the practice of strategic management in organisations.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The investigation explored the influence of leadership styles in enhancing strategic management practices in urban councils in Zimbabwe. The study adopted the quantitative research approach and was grounded on the philosophy of pragmatism. The statistical population of the study involved 344 managers and practitioners of the five selected urban councils in Zimbabwe. A questionnaire was used a data collection instrument and was distributed and collected among the statistical population which was sampled using a cluster sampling technique. The cluster sampling technique was found suitable for this study because it is advantageous in studies whose elements are fragmented over large geographical areas or whose target population is extensively dispersed so as to cut costs and save time (Dornyei, 2007 in Sharma, 2023). Thus, the five selected urban councils which are disbursed across the country were taken as clusters in this study. A multi-layered sampling, which is a probability sampling technique that involves several stages of reducing a sample was then employed. In data analysis, the first step was to check the normality of the data distribution by applying the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. This was followed by the evaluation of the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Reliability of factor loadings (confirmatory factor analysis), Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used for reliability. In factor load analysis, the optimal value and Cronbach's alpha value for composite reliability was considered higher than 0.7 (Nadella et al., 2024). Using SPSS software, the results of factor loadings between research variables were presented in tables. From the 344 participants who were considered for the research, 241 questionnaires were completed and returned resulting in a 70% response rate achievement. This was reasonably high and adequate according to Hendra and Hill (2018), who

assert that a response rate of at least 60% is regarded as somewhat adequate, while any rate less than 60% is regarded as a failure.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The three leadership styles namely transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles were used as variables in evaluating their influence in enhancing the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. The results are as presented on Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on the influence of leadership styles on strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Mean Response	Std. Deviation
Transformational leadership supports SM practices	241	1	5	3.64	Neutral	.693
Transactional leadership supports SM practices	241	1	4	2.50	Neutral	.592
Laissez-faire leadership supports SM practices	241	1	3	2.88	Neutral	.334
Overall	241			2.94	Neutral	.654
Valid N (listwise)	241					

Table 1 above shows that a most of parameters of leadership styles which were transformational style, transactional leadership style and laissez-faire leadership style had a mean score of approximately 3 (neutral) except transformational style which had a mean score of approximately 4 (agree). The overall impression corresponded with neutral implying respondents were neither agreeable nor disagreeable with leadership styles influencing the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. The existence of non-zero standard deviation implied that respondents held varied views on the leadership styles and the extent to which they influenced the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe.

Additionally, a normality test was used (within some tolerance), to check if sample data came from a community with a normally dispersed distribution. A number of statistical analyses, such as the student's t-test and the one-way and two-way ANOVA, necessitated a normally distributed sample group. Normality tests were conducted using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests as well as visualisation QQ plots, and histogram and the results are as shown on Table 2.

Table 2: Normality test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Transformational leadership style supports strategic management	.405	241	.000	.696	241	.000
Transactional leadership style supports strategic management	.336	241	.000	.741	241	.000
Laissez-faire leadership style supports strategic management	.524	241	.000	.372	241	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Furthermore, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's test was carried out to measure the adequacy of the sample. The results are as shown on Table 3 below.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.696
Approx. Chi-Square	1259.599
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	91
Sig.	.000

The results shows that the sample was sufficient and the findings obtained met the criteria required for conducting exploratory factor analysis because the Kaiser Meyer-Olkin measure's likelihood value of 0.696 was 0.000, was significantly less than 0.05 which was the permissible margin of error (Field, 2009).

4.1 Factor Analysis

Factors analysis is a multivariate statistical technique applied to a single set of variables when the investigator is interested in determining which variables in the set form logical subsets that are relatively independent of one another (Tahachnick & Fideli, 2013, in Shrestha, 2021). It is based on the assumption that all variables correlate to some degree. The two main approaches to factor analysis are exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). In this study, the exploratory factor analysis was used since the idea was mainly to check the dimensionality and gathering of information about the interrelationships among a set of

variables (Pituch & Stevens, 2016, in Shrestha, 2021). In other words, exploratory factor analysis was used to explore the data structure, removing problem elements and cleaning of data (Thomas & Brad, 2014). According to Hooper (2012) exploratory factor analysis examines the inter-correlations that existed between a large number of items in questionnaire responses by reducing them in smaller groups or factors. Therefore, in this study, exploratory factor analysis was used by the researcher on elements of the questionnaire as shown on Table 4 below.

Table 4: Construct, Items and Factor loadings

Construct/Variable	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Maximum shared variance
Leadership styles (LS)	LSF1	.840				
	LSF2	.730				
	LSF3	.852	.784	.972	.745	.219

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 21 iterations.

Based on Eigenvalues > 1

Total variance explained = 72.545%

Small Coefficients of less than 0.4 were suppressed

Source: Survey data (2026)

Bagozzi and Yi (1988) suggested that a cut-off value of 0.6 be used for normalized factor loadings. Higher critical ratios were also thought to be appropriate and significant (Bagozzi & Yi, 1981; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In Table 5, the critical ratios (CRs) and adjusted factor loadings (λ) for the categories used to assess convergent validity are shown.

Table 5: Constructs, Items, λ and CR

Construct	Items	λ	CR
Leadership styles (LS)	TLS1	.840	8.123***
	TLS2	.730	10.922***
	LLS3	.852	9.976***

Notes: - CR is fixed; *** significant at $p < 0.001$

Source: Survey data (2026)

4.2 Research Hypothesis testing (H_1 , H_2 and H_3)

In line with Mishra and Alok (2017) and Ragab and Arisha (2017)'s assertions, the researcher tested hypothesis in order to support as true or not support as false, the statements of claim or associations between study variables. Styles of leadership have an influence in enhancing the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. The results of hypothesis are presented on Table 6 below showing in summary the hypotheses which were supported (H_1 , H_2 and H_3). A Standard Regression Weight (SRW), Critical Ratio (CR) and probability (p) were used in the determination. Standard regression weight was used to measure the impact of each predictor variable on the outcome variable. For instance, H_1 had a standardised regression weight of 0.840 which show that a unit improvement of transformational style of leadership is likely to be met by a 0.2-unit improvement in the practice of strategic management and the opposite was true. Similarly, transactional leadership style an SRW of 0.730 which again mirrored the above scenario. Lastly laissez-faire leadership style was found to have SRW of 0.852 which signified a positive association as measured by standardised regression weights. The relationship was holding at the 5% margin of error.

Table 6: Results of hypotheses testing (H_1 , H_2 and H_3)

Hypothesis	Hypothesis	Standardized regression Weight (SRW)	Critical ratios	Remark
H_1	LS $\leftarrow$ TLS1	.840	8.123***	Supported
H_2	LS $\leftarrow$ TLS2	.730	10.922***	Supported
H_3	LS $\leftarrow$ LLS3	.852	9.976***	Supported

Source: Survey data (2026)

Based on the results, (SRW = 0.840, CR = 8.123, $p < 0.001$) shown on Table 6, above, transformational leadership style (hypothesis H_1) was supported. This means that transformational leadership style has a positive influence on the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. The findings confirm the results of similar studies by Angeles López-Cabarcos et al. (2022); Gichuki et al (2024); Hendriks and Reddy (2020) where transformational leadership style was found to have a positive and significant influence on strategic management practices in organisations. Similarly, the findings (SRW = 0.730, CR = 10.922, $p < 0.001$) show that transactional leadership style (hypothesis H_2) was supported. This implies that transactional leadership style has a positive and significant impact on the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. The results of the study confirm the findings of studies by Odero (2023); Batizani (2024) and Inyang et al. (2018) in Gande and Hlophe (2023)

where transactional leadership style was found to be positively and significantly related to strategic management practices in organisations.

Lastly, the results (SRW = 0.852, CR = 9.976, $p < 0.001$) show that laissez-faire leadership style (hypothesis H₃) was relatively supported. The results therefore, imply that laissez-faire leadership style fairly significantly and positively affect the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. These findings confirm those of studies by Hemsworth, et al., (2013) in Odera (2023) where it emerged that employees who set their own goals have a complete flexibility and resolve their own work-related issues, contributes to better implementation of strategic objectives. Additionally, the findings also confirm the assumption of the Contingency theory which states that, depending on the organisational situations, leaders can adapt leadership styles that best suit the situation at the workplace. When it comes to leadership styles in organisations, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Situations and circumstances determine the type of leadership to employ. The findings of the study were summarised in the form of a diagram denoting the relationship between leadership styles and the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. Figure 1 below shows a diagrammatic presentation.

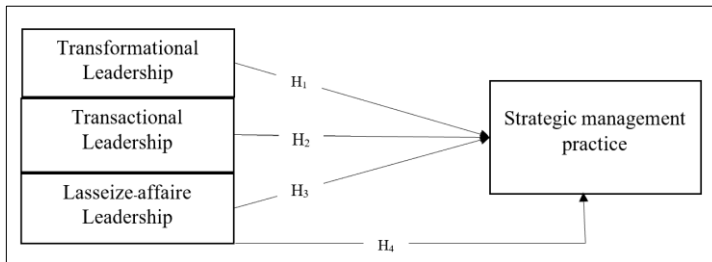


Figure 1: Influence of leadership styles on strategic management practices

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles have a positive and significant influence in enhancing the practice of strategic management in urban councils in Zimbabwe. This means that the application of these leadership styles at all stages of the strategic management process in urban councils in Zimbabwe results in their success which in turn improves their performance. The findings confirm that in the strategic management process, there is no best, special or unique leadership style that transcends in all organisational situations as it all depends on both the internal and external factors facing the organization at any particular situation. This is because, these styles of leadership play different roles, thus can be applied differently along the strategic management process in organisations. Urban councils are therefore, encouraged to adopt all the leadership styles for effective strategic management which subsequently enhances efficient service delivery. However, further research is proposed to explore the role of each style of leadership at different stages of the strategic management process.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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Author Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and manuscript preparation. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study prior to data collection.

Use of Generative AI

The authors confirm that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely for minor language editing and grammatical refinement. These tools did not contribute to the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the intellectual content and conclusions of the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the work.

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