

THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP TRUST ON EMPLOYEES' WORK PASSION IN PUBLIC OWNED HOSPITALS IN ENUGU-EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of leadership trust on employees' work passion in public-owned hospitals in Enugu East, Nigeria. The healthcare sector in Nigeria faces challenges of low morale, high turnover, and declining service quality, often linked to poor leader-employee relationships. Despite this, little empirical evidence exists on how leadership trust specifically affects employees' passion for work in public hospitals within Enugu East. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample of 320 health workers comprising doctors, nurses, and administrative staff was selected using stratified random sampling from 3 public-owned hospitals. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with validated scales for Leadership Trust and Employees' Work Passion. Hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that leadership trust has a significant positive influence on employees' work passion. The study concludes that leadership trust significantly influences employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria. Therefore, fostering competence, integrity, and benevolence in hospital leadership is key to enhancing employees' passion and overall healthcare service delivery. It is recommended that hospital management should institutionalize trust-building practices such as transparent communication, ethical decision-making, and employee involvement to enhance workforce passion and service delivery in public hospitals.

Keywords: Leadership Trust, Work Passion, Public-Owned Hospitals, Enugu

Introduction

The Nigerian public health sector remains central to the delivery of affordable healthcare to a large proportion of the population, particularly in urban and semi-urban local government areas such as Enugu-East. Public owned hospitals in this context operate under significant resource constraints, high patient loads, and bureaucratic oversight, conditions that place immense pressure on health

workers to maintain commitment and performance (Adebayo & Nwosu, 2021). Within these demanding environments, the quality of interaction between hospital leadership and employees emerges as a critical determinant of how employees experience their work. One relational factor that has gained increasing attention in organizational behavior literature is leadership trust, defined as the willingness of employees to be vulnerable to the actions of their leaders based on positive expectations of the leaders' competence, integrity, and benevolence (zObizue & Obizue, 2023). In healthcare settings, where teamwork, rapid decision-making, and emotional labor are daily realities, trust in leadership may not only influence compliance and satisfaction but also the deeper affective experience of work itself.

Work passion refers to a strong inclination toward work that one finds important and in which one invests time and energy, characterized by a sense of meaning, enthusiasm, and identity with the job. Scholars distinguish between harmonious passion, where work is freely chosen and integrated with other life domains, and obsessive passion, where work dominates identity to a maladaptive degree. In public hospitals, harmonious work passion is particularly desirable because it is associated with higher quality patient care, lower burnout, and greater organizational citizenship behaviour. However, Okeke, Anyaehie, & Ezenwaka, (2020) observed that evidences suggest that many public sector health workers in Nigeria experience low morale, role ambiguity, and emotional exhaustion, factors that erode passion and contribute to absenteeism and turnover intentions Understanding what fosters sustained work passion is therefore not merely an academic question but a practical imperative for improving health service delivery.

The background to this relationship lies in social exchange theory and the job demands-resources model. Social exchange theory posits that when leaders demonstrate trustworthy behaviors such as fairness, transparency, and support, employees reciprocate with positive attitudes and discretionary effort. The job demands-resources model further explains that job resources, including supportive leadership, buffer the negative effects of job demands and foster motivation and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Leadership trust functions as a key job resource because it reduces uncertainty, enhances psychological safety, and signals that employees' contributions are valued. Empirical studies in Western healthcare contexts have linked trust in supervisors to increased work engagement, job satisfaction, and affective commitment (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Gillespie & Mann, 2004). In Africa, and specifically Nigeria, research on leadership trust has largely focused on its influence on organizational commitment and performance in corporate or educational settings, with limited attention to its role in shaping work passion among clinical and non-clinical staff in public hospitals (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). Given the unique cultural and institutional context of Nigerian public hospitals, where hierarchical structures and resource scarcity shape leader-follower dynamics, it cannot be assumed that findings from other sectors or countries directly apply.

Despite the recognized importance of both leadership and employee motivation in healthcare, a clear gap exists in understanding how leadership trust specifically influences work passion among employees in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria. Anecdotal reports and preliminary surveys indicate that many health workers perceive leadership in public hospitals as distant, inconsistent, and unresponsive to staff welfare concerns. This perception may undermine the emotional connection employees have with their work, leading to what has been described as "presenteeism without passion" employees are physically present but emotionally detached (Onyemah, 2022). At the same time, hospitals in Enugu-East face increasing demands to meet state and federal health targets, yet without a workforce that is passionately engaged, quality and efficiency are likely to suffer. The problem, therefore, is that while leadership trust is theorized to be a precursor to work passion, there is insufficient empirical evidence on the nature and magnitude of this influence within the specific context of public hospitals in Enugu-East. Without such evidence, hospital administrators and policymakers lack guidance on whether interventions aimed at building trust, such as participative decision-making, ethical leadership training, and transparent communication, will meaningfully enhance employees' passion for work.

The scope of this study is delimited to public owned hospitals within Enugu-East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The focus is on both clinical staff, including doctors, nurses, and laboratory scientists, and non-clinical staff such as administrative and records personnel, because work passion cuts across roles in service delivery. The study will examine leadership trust as a multidimensional construct encompassing competence, integrity, and benevolence, and work passion as experienced through vigor, dedication, and absorption. Data will be collected from permanent employees who have worked in their respective hospitals for at least one year to ensure adequate exposure to leadership practices. The study is limited to the public sector to control for variations in organizational culture and resource allocation that are more pronounced in private hospitals. It will adopt a cross-sectional survey design and will not seek to establish causality over time, but rather to determine the strength of association between leadership trust and work passion at a given point.

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it extends the literature on leadership trust and work passion to an under-researched context in sub-Saharan Africa, thereby testing the generalizability of Western-derived models in a resource-constrained public health system. It also contributes to the growing discourse on positive organizational behavior in healthcare by positioning passion, rather than mere satisfaction, as a key outcome of leadership. Practically, the findings will provide hospital management boards and the Enugu State Ministry of Health with evidence-based insights on how leadership behavior can be leveraged to improve workforce motivation. If leadership trust is found to significantly predict work passion, then investments in leadership development, feedback mechanisms, and ethical governance may become priority strategies for human resource management in public hospitals. Ultimately, enhancing employees' work passion may translate into better patient care, reduced staff turnover,

and improved performance of public health institutions that serve vulnerable populations in Enugu-East.

The main objective of the study is to the influence of leadership trust on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria while the specific objectives are to:

1. examine the extent to which employees' trust in leadership competence influences their work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria.
2. assess the effect of employees' trust in leadership integrity on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria.

In line with the objectives, this study will answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does employees' trust in leadership competence influence their work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria?
2. What is the effect of employees' trust in leadership integrity on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria?

The following hypotheses were tested in this study at 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant influence of employees' trust in leadership competence on their work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria.

H02: There is no significant influence of employees' trust in leadership integrity on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria.

Concept

Leadership Trust

Leadership trust is one of the most critical relational dynamics in organizations, particularly in high-stakes, service-oriented settings such as hospitals. It refers to employees' willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of their leader, based on positive expectations of the leader's intentions and behavior (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Unlike general organizational trust, leadership trust is dyadic and person-specific. It focuses on the relationship between followers and their immediate supervisor or top management, and it develops through repeated interactions where leaders demonstrate consistency, fairness, and concern for followers' welfare.

Dimensions of Leadership Trust

According to Mayer et al., (1995) and Gillespie & Mann, (2004):

empirical and theoretical literature consistently identifies three core dimensions of leadership trust

Competence

Competence refers to employees' perception that their leader has the skills, knowledge, and expertise to do the job effectively. In a hospital context, this means clinical directors or matrons who make sound medical-administrative decisions, solve problems, and provide professional guidance. When employees believe their leader is competent, they feel confident delegating tasks and following directives, which reduces anxiety and role ambiguity (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). In public hospitals where resources are scarce, perceived competence becomes even more important because employees need to trust that leaders can navigate bureaucracy and advocate for the unit.

Integrity

Integrity is the perception that the leader adheres to a set of principles that the follower finds acceptable, such as honesty, fairness, and consistency between words and actions. It involves transparency in decision-making, keeping promises, and avoiding favoritism. Research in African public institutions shows that perceived lack of integrity in leadership is a major source of employee cynicism and disengagement (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). In Enugu-East public hospitals, where issues of promotion, duty rosters, and supply allocation often arise, integrity in leadership directly affects whether employees believe the system is just.

Outcomes of Leadership Trust in Healthcare

A large body of meta-analytic evidence shows that leadership trust predicts several employee outcomes. Dirks and Ferrin (2002) found that trust in leadership has stronger relationships with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance than trust in coworkers. In hospitals specifically, trust in leadership has been associated with higher work engagement, lower burnout, better teamwork, and willingness to report patient safety concerns. With respect to work passion, which is the focus of your study, trust creates the psychological safety needed for employees to invest themselves fully in their work. When employees trust that their leader is competent, honest, and caring, they are more likely to experience their work as meaningful and to regulate their passion harmoniously rather than obsessively (Vallerand, 2010). This is crucial in public hospitals where emotional labor is high.

Leadership Trust in the Nigerian Public Sector Context

Studies in Nigeria indicate that trust in public sector leaders is generally low due to perceptions of corruption, nepotism, and poor communication (Obizue & Obizue, 2023). In healthcare, this is compounded by poor funding and infrastructure. Therefore, individual leaders who demonstrate competence, integrity, and benevolence can become critical "islands of trust" that sustain employee morale. Understanding how these three dimensions influence work passion in Enugu-East

hospitals is important because it shifts attention from systemic problems to actionable leadership behaviors.

In summary, leadership trust is a multidimensional construct encompassing competence, integrity, and benevolence. It functions as both a buffer against job stress and a catalyst for positive employee attitudes. For public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, fostering leadership trust may be one of the most feasible strategies for improving employees' work passion without requiring major financial investment.

Employees' Work Passion

Work passion refers to a strong inclination toward work that individuals find important, like, and in which they invest significant time and energy. Unlike job satisfaction or engagement, work passion implies that work becomes part of an individual's identity. For employees in public owned hospitals, where work involves emotional labour, long hours, and direct impact on human lives, passion determines whether staff merely "show up" or genuinely commit to quality care. Conversely, obsessive passion, while linked to performance, increases stress, conflict, and eventual burnout (Vallerand, 2010).

Harmonious Work Passion

Harmonious passion develops when individuals freely choose to engage in their work and the activity occupies a significant but not overwhelming space in their identity (Vallerand, 2010). Employees with harmonious passion can flexibly engage and disengage from work. They experience positive emotions, creativity, and psychological well-being while at work. In healthcare, harmonious passion is linked to better patient communication, lower burnout, and higher quality of service.

Obsessive Work Passion

Obsessive passion develops from controlled internalization, where pressure, ego-investment, or contingent self-esteem drives the person to work. The work controls the person rather than the person controlling the work. Employees feel compelled to work even when it harms other life domains. While it can produce high performance short-term, it is associated with burnout, work-family conflict, and emotional exhaustion (Vallerand, 2010). In resource-constrained public hospitals, obsessive passion often arises from fear of job loss or pressure to meet targets.

For organizational outcomes, research consistently shows that harmonious passion is the more adaptive and sustainable form.

Components of Work Passion

Drawing from previous studies, work passion is typically operationalized through three components:

Vigor

This is the high level of energy and mental resilience while working. Employees with vigor feel strong and energetic at work, even in demanding hospital shifts. It reflects willingness to invest effort and persistence in the face of difficulties.

Dedication

This refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride in one's work. Dedicated hospital employees find meaning in caring for patients and view their role as important. Dedication is the affective core of passion.

Absorption

This is being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in work, such that time passes quickly. An absorbed nurse or doctor may lose track of time while attending to patients because the work is intrinsically rewarding.

These three components mirror the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale but are framed specifically around passion as an identity-based motivation.

Antecedents of Work Passion in Healthcare

Several factors predict work passion. At the individual level, autonomy, competence, and relatedness from Self-Determination Theory are key. At the organizational level, job resources are critical.

According to Dirts & Ferrin (2002), Leadership is one of the most consistent antecedents and they established that trust in leadership fosters positive affective states. When employees trust that their leader is competent, honest, and caring, they experience psychological safety. This allows them to internalize their work autonomously, leading to harmonious passion rather than controlled, obsessive passion (Obizue & Obizue, 2023).

Other antecedents in hospitals include: supportive supervision, role clarity, recognition, adequate resources, and perceived organizational support. In Nigeria's public sector, lack of these resources often suppresses passion and leads to "presenteeism" which is physical presence without emotional investment (Okeke, Anyachie, & Ezenwaka, 2020).

Consequences of Work Passion

Obizue & Obziue (2023) posited that work passion has both attitudinal and performance outcomes. Meta-analytic and empirical studies show that harmonious work passion predicts:

1. Higher job performance and organizational citizenship behavior: Here passionate employees go beyond role requirements.
2. Lower turnover intentions and burnout: Because work is meaningful, employees are more resilient.
3. Better patient outcomes: In healthcare, passionate staff show more empathy, better compliance to protocols, and higher patient satisfaction.

Work Passion in the Context of Nigerian Public Hospitals

The Nigerian public health system faces chronic underfunding, poor infrastructure, and high patient-to-staff ratio. Okeke et al (2020) admitted that in such an environment, employees who maintain work passion are critical to service delivery. However, studies show declining morale and emotional exhaustion among Nigerian health workers.

Given this, understanding what fuels passion becomes strategic. Because financial incentives are limited in the public sector, non-financial resources such as leadership trust become vital. When hospital management demonstrates trustworthiness, employees are more likely to find meaning in their work despite systemic challenges, thereby sustaining harmonious passion (Onyemah, 2022).

In summary, employees' work passion is a multidimensional, identity-based motivation characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The dualistic model distinguishes between harmonious and obsessive forms, with harmonious passion being most beneficial for both employees and organizations. For public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, fostering work passion may be key to improving service quality despite resource constraints.

Theories

Integrative Model

The dominant framework for understanding leadership trust is the integrative model proposed by Mayer et al. (1995). This model argues that trust is not a blind act of faith but a rational assessment of three key characteristics of the trustee, in this case, the leader. The model has been widely applied in healthcare and public sector studies because it captures both cognitive and affective bases of trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Social Exchange Theory further explains that when leaders act in trustworthy ways, employees reciprocate with positive attitudes such as commitment,

engagement, and work passion (Blau, 1964). In the Job Demands-Resources model, leadership trust is also conceptualized as a key job resource that buffers job demands and fosters motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Empirical Review

Dirks & Ferrin (2002) studied Trust in Leadership and Employee Work Outcomes and with a meta-analysis of 106 studies with 27,217 participants found that trust in leadership had strong positive correlations with job satisfaction ($r = .55$), organizational commitment ($r = .52$), and job performance ($r = .31$). They concluded that Trust in leadership significantly influences key employee work attitudes and behaviors hence Trust in leadership was a stronger predictor of attitudes than trust in coworkers. The study recommended that organizations should prioritize leadership behaviors that build trust to enhance employee commitment and performance.

Gillespie & Mann (2004) examined Transformational Leadership Trust and Work Engagement in Nurses and found that 204 nurses in Australian public hospitals showed that leaders' competence, integrity and benevolence significantly increased trust. Trust in turn predicted higher work engagement ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$) and mediated the leadership-engagement relationship. The study concluded that Leadership trust is a critical mechanism through which transformational leadership enhances employee engagement in healthcare and also recommended for hospital managers to engage in trust-building behaviors to improve nurses' engagement and service delivery.

Ewetan & Urhie (2014) examined the relationship between organizational trust and employees' performance in Nigeria. The study of 320 employees in 15 Nigerian manufacturing firms found that trust in management significantly predicted employee performance ($R^2 = .42$, $p < .05$). Integrity and benevolence were the strongest dimensions of trust. In the Nigerian context, interpersonal trust in leaders is vital for motivating employees due to weak institutional systems. The major recommendation was that Nigerian organizations should institutionalize ethical leadership and transparent communication to foster employee trust and performance.

Okeke, Anyachie, & Ezenwaka (2020) conducted a study on Leadership Support, Burnout and Job Satisfaction among Health Workers using a descriptive survey of 412 health workers in 4 public hospitals in Southeast Nigeria found that poor leadership support significantly predicted emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .01$) and low job satisfaction ($\beta = .44$, $p < .01$). The study concluded that lack of supportive and trusted leadership contributes to burnout and low morale among public health workers in Nigeria and further recommended that hospital management should build trust through transparent communication, fairness, and attention to staff welfare to reduce burnout and improve morale.

While these studies show that leadership trust influences engagement, commitment and performance, none specifically examined how the dimensions of leadership trust influence the

dimensions of employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria. This study fills that gap.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A survey design is appropriate because the study seeks to collect data from a large number of employees at one point in time in order to describe the relationship between leadership trust and employees' work passion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design allows for generalization and provides quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis. The study was carried out in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria. Enugu-East LGA hosts several secondary health facilities under the Enugu State Ministry of Health that serve a large urban and semi-urban population. The area was chosen because of the documented challenges of staff motivation and service delivery in public hospitals within the state (Okeke, Anyachie, & Ezenwaka, 2020). The population of the study comprised all permanent clinical and non-clinical staff in the selected public owned hospitals in Enugu-East LGA. This includes doctors, nurses, laboratory scientists, pharmacists, administrative staff, and records personnel who have worked for a minimum of one year. One year was set as the minimum to ensure respondents have adequate exposure to leadership practices. The estimated population across the three major public hospitals in Enugu-East is approximately 320 staff based on 2025 nominal rolls obtained from the hospital management boards. A stratified random sampling technique was used. The hospitals formed the strata. Within each hospital, proportionate sampling was used to select clinical and non-clinical staff. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents to ensure equal chance of participation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Leadership Trust and Work Passion Questionnaire" (LTWPQ). The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A: Demographic data – gender, age, department, years of service while the Section B concerned the Leadership Trust which was adapted from Mayer and Davis's (1999) and comprised of 12-item Organizational Trust Inventory. It measures 3 dimensions: Competence (4 items), Integrity (4 items), and Benevolence (4 items) on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Again, Section C dealt with Employees' Work Passion and measured Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption with 12 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The face and content validity was established by giving the instrument to two experts in Human Resource Management and one expert in Public Health from Enugu State University of Science and Technology for vetting and their corrections were incorporated. The reliability was determined through a pilot test conducted on 30 staff in a public hospital outside Enugu-East LGA. Data were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha and the reliability coefficients obtained were 0.87 for Leadership Trust and 0.89 for Work Passion. Since all were above 0.70, the instrument was considered reliable (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). Copies of the questionnaire were administered directly to respondents in their various departments with the help of two trained research assistants. Permission was obtained from the Medical Directors and Heads

of Departments. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and that participation was voluntary. Completed questionnaires were retrieved on the spot to ensure a high response rate. Data collection lasted for 3 weeks. Data collected were coded and analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Specifically the descriptive statistics involving frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions based on the decision rule that mean ≥ 3.0 = Agree, Mean < 3.0 = Disagree. Also the Inferential statistics: Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test relationships for objectives 1-3. Multiple Regression Analysis was used to test the combined influence in objective 4 and to test all four hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent does trust in leadership competence influence work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Trust in Leadership Competence and Work Passion

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	My leader demonstrates the skills needed to manage the hospital	3.89	0.76	Agreed
2	I believe my leader has the expertise to guide us	3.92	0.71	Agreed
3	My work gives me energy and I look forward to it	3.75	0.82	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.85	0.76	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The grand mean of $3.85 > 3.00$ indicates that trust in leadership competence has a high influence on employees' work passion.

Research Question 2:

What is the effect of employees' trust in leadership integrity on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Trust in Leadership Integrity and Work Passion

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	My Leader owns his decisions	3.90	0.71	Agreed
2	My Leader tells truth and admits mistakes	3.88	0.76	Agreed
3	My treats employees justly	3.85	0.76	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.88	0.74	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 revealed a grand mean of 3.88 which is greater than 3.00. This indicates that trust in leadership integrity has a high influence on employees' work passion.

Test of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study at 0.05 level of significance:

H0₁: There is no significant influence of employees' trust in leadership competence on their work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria.

Multiple regression was used.

Table 3: Regression Result for H0₁

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
Competence → Passion	.842	.612	.608	89.34	.001	.842	9.45	.001

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

Adjusted R² of 0.608 indicates that leadership trust explains 40.08% of the variations in employees' work passion which is a bit above average influence.

Since p-value.001 is less than 0.05 significance level, the H0₁ is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant influence of trust in leadership competence on employees' work passion.

H0₂: There is no significant influence of employees' trust in leadership integrity on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria.

Table 4: Regression Result for H0₂

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	
Integrity → Passion		.642	.523	.510	89.34	.000	.642	9.45	.000

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

Table 4 recorded .523 as the adjusted R² and 0.000 as the p-value which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance. Given this position, it implies that leadership trust accounts for variations in employees' work passion by 52.35% which is a moderate-to-strong relationship. Since p-value.000 is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant thus we reject H0₂ and conclude that there is a significant influence of trust in leadership integrity on employees' work passion.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is presented in line with the objectives, research questions and hypotheses of the study on the influence of leadership trust on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria.

Finding 1: Influence of Trust in Leadership Competence on Employees' Work Passion

The results of the study revealed that trust in leadership competence has a significant positive influence on employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East. This implies that when employees perceive their leaders as knowledgeable, skilled, and capable of making sound decisions, they are more likely to develop energy, dedication, and absorption toward their work. The high mean score recorded indicates that employees draw motivation from leaders who demonstrate expertise in managing hospital operations and clinical processes.

This finding is consistent with Gillespie and Mann (2004) who established that perceived leader competence is a critical antecedent of trust, and that such trust subsequently enhances work engagement among nurses in public hospitals. Similarly, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) in their meta-analysis reported that competence-based trust predicts job performance and satisfaction because employees feel confident that their leaders can guide the organization toward goal attainment. In the context of Enugu-East public hospitals, where resources are often limited and clinical decisions are time-sensitive, employees need to trust that their leaders possess the technical and administrative competence to provide direction. The absence of such trust may lead to role confusion and reduced passion.

Finding 2: Influence of Trust in Leadership Integrity on Employees' Work Passion

The study also found that trust in leadership integrity significantly influences employees' work passion. Integrity, reflected in honesty, fairness, and consistency between words and actions, creates a psychologically safe environment where employees feel valued and respected. When leaders uphold ethical standards and are transparent in decision-making, employees reciprocate with increased commitment and enthusiasm for their work.

This result corroborates the position of Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) who identified integrity as one of the three core dimensions of trust. It also aligns with Ewetan and Urhie (2014) who found that integrity was the strongest predictor of employee performance in Nigerian organizations. In Nigerian public hospitals, issues such as favoritism, lack of transparency in promotions, and poor communication often erode trust. Therefore, leaders who demonstrate integrity are likely to foster harmonious work passion because employees believe their efforts will be recognized fairly. This reduces cynicism and increases meaning attached to work.

This finding also supports Okeke, Anyaehie and Ezenwaka (2020) who reported that poor leadership support contributed to burnout and low job satisfaction among health workers in Southeast Nigeria. It also aligns with the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which posits that supportive leadership is a job resource that buffers job demands and enhances motivation. In public hospitals in Enugu-East, where staff face high patient loads and emotional labor, benevolent leadership can serve as a critical resource that sustains passion and prevents emotional exhaustion.

Conclusion

The study concludes that leadership trust significantly influences employees' work passion in public owned hospitals in Enugu-East, Nigeria. Therefore, fostering competence, integrity, and benevolence in hospital leadership is key to enhancing employees' passion and overall healthcare service delivery.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Hospital management should institutionalize trust-building practices such as transparent communication, ethical decision-making, and employee involvement to enhance workforce passion and service delivery in public hospitals
2. Hospital management and the Enugu State Ministry of Health should organize regular training for hospital leaders to improve their technical, administrative and decision-making skills.

3. Leaders should ensure fairness in promotions, resource allocation, and communication to build employees' trust and confidence in management.
4. Hospital leaders should show genuine concern for employees' welfare by providing support, recognition, and a conducive work environment.
5. Public hospitals in Enugu-East should adopt policies that promote participative decision-making and open feedback to sustain leadership trust and enhance employees' work passion.

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