ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

Relationship Between Leadership Styles and Employee Productivity in the Manufacturing Sector in Malawi: A Case of Candlex Limited

Madalitso Desdrater Banda[1*], Thom-Raphael Bwanali[2]

Malawi School of Government, Kanengo Campus, Lilongwe, Malawi

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2026.15020000085

Received: 16 February 2026; Accepted: 21 February 2026; Published: 19 March 2026

ABSTRACT

Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group towards attaining a specific set of goals. This influence can either be negative or positive depending on the leadership style adopted. This study established the relationship between leadership styles and employee productivity in the manufacturing sector in Malawi, Southern Africa. It used a mixed method approach that included data collected from questionnaires and interviews along with statistical testing using the Spearman's rank correlation in SPSS. Results showed that in the Malawian manufacturing sector, based on employee perceptions, the most prevalent leadership style was the autocratic leadership style and the least prevalent was the Laissez-Faire leadership style. The democratic leadership was considered the most effective style for enhancing productivity, however, only the persuasive leadership style had a positive significant correlation with employee productivity ($r_s = 0.554$, $p < 0.01$). It is recommended that organisations should formulate leadership policies that mix leadership styles such as democratic and persuasive leadership to enhance employee productivity.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Employee Productivity, Manufacturing Sector, Mixed Methods, Malawi, Southern Africa

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, various scholars have studied the concept of leadership with the aim of understanding and improving the inherent benefits of effective leadership, as such several definitions of leadership have emerged. Although the general consensus over time has been that leadership is a difficult concept to define (Winston and Patterson, 2006), however, more recent definitions describe it as "the ability to influence people to willingly follow one's guidance or adhere to one's decisions" (Rue and Byars, 2017) and "the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group towards attainment of a common goal or a set of goals" (Northouse, 2018). There are numerous leaderships styles that exist in workplaces such as persuasive, laissez-faire, autocratic and democratic leadership; they are assumed to have a significant impact on the productivity of employees in an organization. Productivity is directly influenced by labour performance (specifically human labour) which is a key resource in any organization. Effective leadership styles in the workplace have been linked to increased productivity and labour performance along with good individual and group behaviour Leadership is a major element that determines the success of an organizations and/or government as it offers direction and purpose towards achieving the goals of the organization (Beyene et al., 2016).

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee productivity in the manufacturing sector in Malawi, using Candlex Limited as a case study. Specifically, to determine if there is a correlation (either negative or positive) between leadership styles and employee productivity. Related studies in this region have not yet examined how leadership styles influence employee and organizational performance especially in the manufacturing sector. Candlex Limited is a growing, aggressive, and leading manufacturer and marketer of quality home and personal care products (i.e., laundry powder, bathing soaps and cosmetics) that are distributed through independent shops, retail and wholesale chains scattered across Malawi. This manufacturing company has been functioning in Malawi for over 30 years and has significantly contributed to Malawi's

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

economic development and employment creation. Recently Candlex Limited has highlighted that low employee productivity has become a major problem that is due to the application of leadership styles that are not suitable for certain situations/challenges within the organization This has also impacted production targets (creating large financial gaps), employee retention and motivation (Chikhambi and Mafeni, personal communication).

Nowadays, due to major transformation and innovation in the manufacturing sector, concerns regarding appropriate leadership styles (that are aligned with these changes) have been brought forward (Bass et al., 2003). Especially finding effective leadership styles that optimize productivity in all spheres (government, public and private) (Ogbonna and Harris, 2021). According to Bass et al. (2003), positive leadership influences productivity in both the workers and the organization. It is therefore imperative to choose the best and most experienced leaders for management positions; who can apply different leadership styles based on the situation/challenge. An effective leadership style improves employee retention, motivation, and productivity and thus, our study will contribute to theory and practice of leadership in organizations and public policies. It will also recommend a leadership framework for improving employee productivity in the manufacturing sector in Malawi which will be used by students, researchers, academic scholars, managers/ leaders, employees and Malawi government authorities. The Malawi Government has recently expressed "the desire and resolve to be an inclusively wealthy and self-reliant industrialized upper-middle-income country by the year 2063" (Government of Malawi, 2020, p.11) and has recognised manufacturing along with visionary and transformative leadership as key components towards the attainment of Malawi's Vision 2063 (Government of Malawi, 2020). Therefore, this study will make a significant contribution towards the advancement of knowledge to help the country's goal and vision.

The main aim of this study was to establish the relationship between leadership style and employees' productivity in the manufacturing sector in Malawi through a) investigating the prevalent leadership styles b) determining effective leadership styles on productivity based on employee rating and c) assess the relationship between leadership styles and employee productivity. The study will be guided by the following questions pertaining to the manufacturing sector in Malawi:

1. What is the prevalent leadership styles?
2. What is the employees' rating of effective leadership styles on employee productivity?
3. What is the relationship between leadership style and employee productivity?

METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy, Approach and Methodological Choice

This study used the research onion framework which explains pictorially the various aspects of the research to be examined through providing steps to formulate a research design and methodology (Saunders et al., 2019). This study also used ontological assumptions, or "nature of reality" faced in research because assumptions are inevitable as a researcher (Burrell and Morgan, 2019). Additionally, the pragmatism philosophy was used to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative elements of the study. In this instance, the researcher is an objective analyst of the external world; the end-product of research are law-like generalization (Saunders et al., 2019). There are 3 types of research approaches namely, deduction, induction, and abduction approach (Creswell and Creswell, 2017) and this study used the abduction approach. This combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to determine the relationship between the dependent variable "productivity" and the independent variables "leadership styles". A mixed methods approach (using two or more methods of research mainly qualitative and quantitative methods) was also used.

Research Strategy and Time Horizon

The research strategy used in the study was the survey method which is done using questionnaires or structured interviews (Schwedt, 2007). This study also used the cross-sectional time horizon which is a short-term study involving collection of data at a specific point of time. Data was collected in September 2022 (1 month) and the time horizon for the study was from August to October 2022.

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

Study Location

The study was conducted at the Candlex Regional Office in Makata Industrial area Blantyre, Malawi. This organization was selected because it was in convenient and easily accessible for data collection (close to the respondents) within a specified time frame. Candlex has also been reported as a growing, aggressive, and leading manufacturer and marketer of home and personal care solutions that has a long history (over 30 years) of delivering good quality products. Candlex contributes significantly to Malawi's economic development by adding value and creating employment and was therefore ideal for this study.

Study Design

The target population for this study at Candlex included members of staff (both male and female) at different levels (junior and senior) in the production management unit, accountants, senior management, auxiliary staff members and administrators (clerks). They were targeted based on their capacity to provide relevant information concerning leadership styles. Furthermore, "convenience sampling" was applied on senior management and these respondents in leadership roles were contacted telephonically at the researcher's discretion.

Sample Size

A sample size is a subset/sampling unit, or a group chosen from a larger population with the aim of yielding information about the population. According to literature, a good sample size needs to be representative and of adequate or sufficient size to allow for confidence in the stability of its characteristics. For this study, the sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula which is as follows:

$$N$$

$$Sample\ size\ (n) = \frac{N}{1 + Ne_2}$$

Where N is the population of the study and e is the level of significance or margin of error. The researcher considered 10% as the margin of error and 90% confidence level. Candlex Limited has 82 employees that are based at Makata Industrial area which were used as the population size (N). The sample size was calculated as 45.

$$Sample\ size = \frac{82}{1 + 82(0.1)^2}$$

$$Sample\ size = \frac{82}{1,82} = 45$$

Data Collection

Data collection was done using structured questionnaires which are reliable, easy and inexpensive research instruments that consists of a group of questions designated to elicit information from an informant to a respondent (Schwedt, 2007). Questionnaires were distributed to the staff of Candlex Limited to gather information related to the specific objectives of this study. Other documents (books, journal articles, dissertations etc.) were reviewed to obtain further required information and data as part of the "quantitative analysis" aspect of this study. We used a leadership style scale that was adopted from Bass and Avolio (1990) with five-point scale answers and ratings ranging from a minimum of 1.0 (strongly disagree) to a maximum of 5.0 (strongly agree). The employee productivity scale (adopted from Yousef, 2000) was used and employees rated their own productivity from a scale of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high).

Data Analysis

After collection, the data was analyzed descriptively using tables, figures, graphs, diagrams and percentages. A Spearman's rank correlation was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which is used to measure the strength of the relationship between two variables and to compute their association. Basically, a

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

correlation analysis calculates the level of change in one variable due to the change in the other (Duckett and Macfarlane, 2003). A Spearman's rank correlation (denoted as *rs*) is used to evaluate relationships involving ordinal variable correlations, specifically when two variables have been ranked and "causation" needs to be established (i.e. the increase in one variable resulting in an increase/decrease in the other variable). In this study, a Spearman's rank correlation was used to assess the association between leadership styles and employee productivity. The sign of the correlation coefficient indicates the relationship between the variables, while its magnitude indicates the strength of the relationship (Table 1). Spearman's correlation coefficients range from -1 to +1 and the sign of the coefficient indicates whether it is a positive or negative monotonic relationship. To determine multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor values were checked. Multicollinearity happens when more than to predictor or independent variables have a high correlation between them which makes it hard to know the individual influence of the variable/predictor on the dependent variable. The VIF is the proportion of variance (R^2) of the regression minus 1 and this measures how much the variance of a regression coefficient is inflated due to multicollinearity. A VIF value of 1 means there's no multicollinearity while a >10 indicates very high multicollinearity (Allison, 1999; Hair et al., 2010).

Table 1: Correlation coefficients and strength

Correlation Coefficient	Correlation Strength
0.1 – 0.3	Weak correlation
0.3 – 0.5	Moderate correlation
0.5 – 1	Strong correlation

Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was subjected to a rigorous validity test which refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration (Babbie and Rubin, 1989). As such, the questionnaire was tested for credibility, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 2011). We used Cronbach's alpha (α) as a reliability coefficient for the reported scales to determine how consistently each of the parameters on the scale were measuring the same underlying construct (Cronbach, 1951). The coefficient ranges from 0 to 1 and values that are closer to 1 show that the parameters are consistently measuring the same thing while a value closer to 0 shows that there is large variability in measuring the underlying parameter. In our study, the internal consistency of the leadership style and the productivity scales were determined using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was $\alpha = 0.53$ for the prevalent leadership style scale and this indicated a poor internal consistency (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). This means that the questions in the survey may not be measuring the same underlying construct. The reliability coefficient for the employee productivity scale was calculated as $\alpha = 0.69$ which is considered moderate (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The reliability coefficients may have been low because some questions were irrelevant and our sample size was relatively small therefore this weakened the scale.

Before the research was conducted, some preliminary steps were taken to ensure that ethical measures were followed. These included letters of consent for the research to be conducted and support from the university which granted the researcher permission to distribute questionnaires and collect data for academic purposes. The anonymity and confidentiality of each participant was observed, and questions and research findings were devoid of any biases in either language, words, gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnic group, disability, or age. Some research constraints included time, finance (printing, internet bundles, travel expenses) and technical constraints (network failures). A summary of the research methodology is found in Table 2.

Table 2: Research Methodology Summary

Item	Details
Research Type	Descriptive, Correlation Research
Time Horizon	Cross-sectional study design (August 2022-October 2022)

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

Research Strategy & Methodology	Survey Strategy (structured questionnaires adopted from other studies), Mixed Methods (both qualitative and quantitative).
Sampling Technique & Sample Size	Convenience Sampling, 45 respondents from a population of 82 staff members at Candlex.
Data Analysis	Demographic Profile Descriptive Analysis Spearman's Rank Correlation in SPSS

RESULTS

Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics

From the initial sample size of 82 respondents, 45 completed and returned the questionnaires which equated to a 55% response rate. Adequate response rates have been reported as 40% and 50% respectively for descriptive studies (Creswell, 2003; Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Demographic characteristics included gender, age, and educational level (Table 3). Firstly, in terms of gender, 64.4% constituted of male respondents while 35.6% comprised of female respondents. This was mainly because the majority of the staff at Candlex Limited are male thus making the respondents mostly males. In terms of age, most of the respondents (69%) were in the age range of 40-45 years and this was followed by the age range of 25–30 years (11%). Additionally, 79% of the respondents had secondary school education, while 20% obtained bachelor's and 9% had a postgraduate degree (Masters). The findings indicated that most of the respondents had worked between 5 and 10 years, 24.4% had worked for 10–15 years and 26.7% had worked for 0– 5 years (Table 3).

Table 3: **The respondents' demographic profiles (n = 45)**

Demographic Variables	**Description**	**Percentage (%)**
Age (Years)	<25	9
	25-30	11
	31-35	2
	41- 45	69
	>46	9
Gender	Male	64.4
	Female	35.6
Level of Education	High School (MSCE)	71
	Bachelor	20
	Masters	9
Period of Employment (Years)	0-5	26.7
	5-10	48.9
	10-15	24.4

Prevalent Leadership Styles and the Influence of Leadership Style on Productivity.

The first specific objective of the study was to investigate the prevalent types of leadership styles being used in the manufacturing sector in Malawi. Figure 1 showed that respondents perceived autocratic leadership as the most prevalent (25 respondents) and Laissez-Faire leadership was the least prevalent (2 respondents). The second objective of the study was to assess how leadership styles influence employee productivity based on ratings by

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

the employees using a productivity scale (1-5). Democratic leadership was rated as the most effective on their own productivity (3.63) while autocratic leadership was rated as the least effective (2.44) (Figure 2).

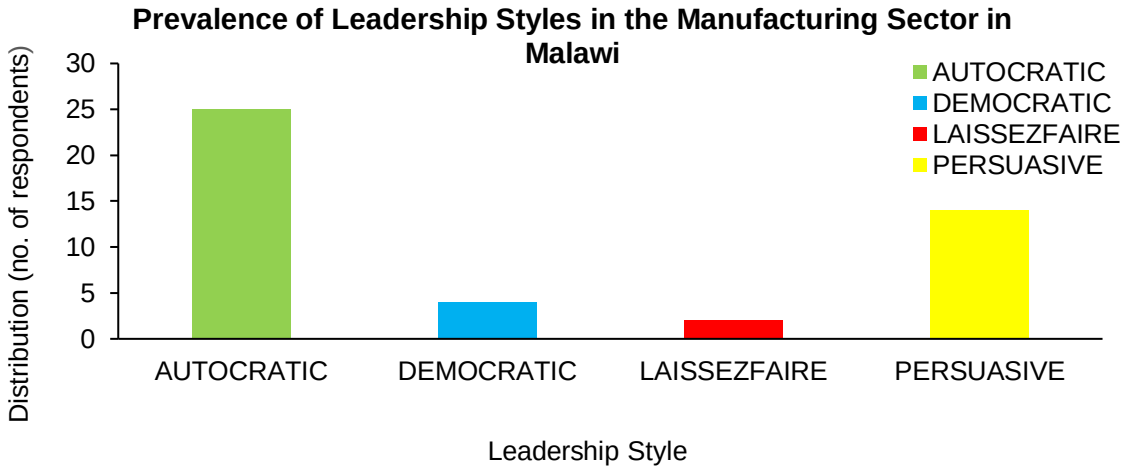

Figure 1: Graph showing the prevalent leadership styles in the manufacturing sector in Malawi based on distribution/respondent scores.

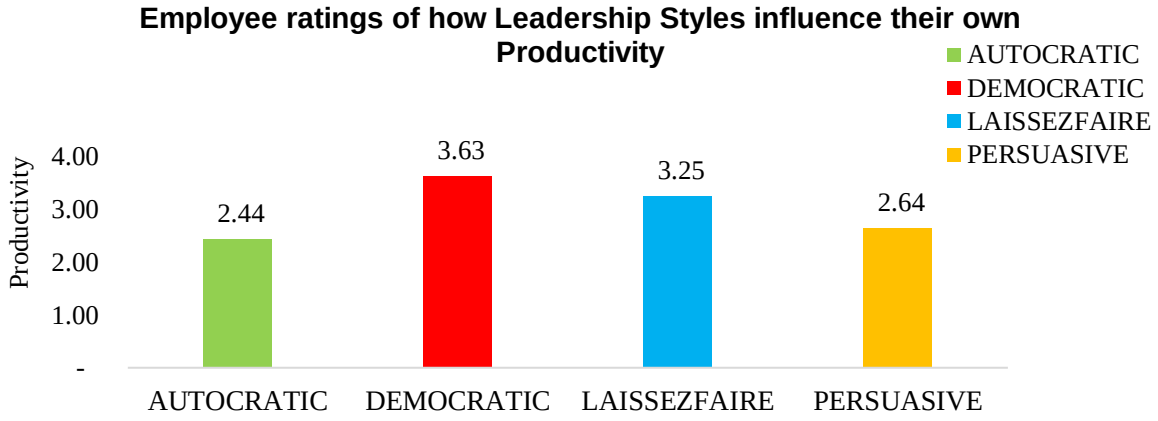

Figure 2: Graph showing how employees rated the influence of leadership style on their own productivity.

The third objective was to determine the relationship between leadership styles and productivity using the Spearman's Rank Correlation analysis. Results of the Spearman's Rank Correlation (Table 4) showed that only the persuasive leadership style had a positive and strong correlation with employee productivity in the manufacturing sector (r_s = 0.554, p < 0.01). An increase in the use of persuasive leadership style results in a strongly positive change in employee productivity levels.

There was a positive, significant but moderate correlation between democratic leadership style and employees' productivity in the manufacturing sector (r_s = 0.304, p < 0.05) (Table 4). Both autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles had a weak, correlation with productivity. The results also showed a very strong positive correlation (r = 0.955, p<0.01) between Laissez-faire and democratic leadership styles which may be indicative of potential multicollinearity between these two leadership styles. Due to this, multicollinearity, diagnostics were done using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

Results showed that democratic and Laissez-faire leadership styles had very high VIF values (> 11) and this was due to a high correlation of r = 0.955. Autocratic and persuasive leadership styles had VIF values that were around 1 thereby suggesting that multicollinearity was not an issue for those variables (Table 5).

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

Table 4: **Spearman's Rank Correlation Analysis results** (** p<0.01 (2-tailed; *p<0.05; n=45).

		Variable				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Employees' Productivity	1				
2	Autocratic	0.236	1			
3	Democratic	**0.304***	-.627**	1		
4	Persuasive	**0.554****	0.278	-0.09	1	
5	Laissez-faire	0.285	-.616**	.955**	-0.085	1

Table 5: Results of the Multicollinearity Test.

Predictor Variable	**VIF**
Autocratic	1.8
Democratic	11.7
Persuasive	1.0
Laissez-faire	11.3

DISCUSSION

Prevalent Leadership Styles used in the Manufacturing Sector in Malawi

The first objective of this study was to identify the types of leadership styles that are most prevalent in the manufacturing sector in Malawi using Candlex Limited as a case study example. The autocratic leadership style was ranked as the most prevalent and laissez-faire as the least prevalent. Based on these results, we assumed that most manufacturing companies in Malawi prefer autocratic leadership; where the leader/ manager controls all the decisions with minimal input from employees.

However, this leadership style is disliked by employees as it has been shown to increase job stress (Harms et al., 2018). Also, autocratic leaders often make decisions independently without consulting employees, this often leads to a disconnect between leader and employee (Jaafar and Zambi, 2021). In contrast to our findings, other studies worldwide have observed that democratic leadership was the most dominant in the manufacturing sector. This is based on the notion that democratic leaders value teamwork and encourage employees to share opinions and ideas that foster creativity and overall engagement (Amiscua et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the democratic leadership style is usually the most prevalent in organizations as it is more "employee-centered" (Setiawan et al., 2021). The prevalence of the autocratic leadership style in the manufacturing sector in Malawi may imply that most employees are possibly excluded from decision-making and cannot openly express their opinions and emotions. This has negative consequences not only on productivity, but also on other workplace dynamics such as conflict resolution, employee involvement, self-confidence and overall quality of work. Employees that are not trusted with important decisions and tasks may question the value they bring to this sector (Harms et al., 2018).

The Influence of Leadership Style on Productivity

The second objective was to determine the leadership style that employees perceived to influence their own productivity the most. The third objective was to assess the relationship between leadership styles and productivity using the Spearman's Rank Correlation. Studies have suggested that businesses in the manufacturing sector should focus on selecting leadership styles based on their correlation with productivity. This is fundamental for creating pleasant work environments that maximize employee productivity and supports overall economic growth in countries (Suprayitno, 2024).

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership was ranked as the style that employees perceived to have the most influence on their productivity (based on the productivity ratings). It also had a positive moderate correlation with productivity based on the Spearman's Rank. This implied that it is a suitable leadership style for employees in the industry even though our earlier findings showed that it is amongst the least prevalent styles. Democratic leadership has been linked to better cohesion amongst employees; where everyone is free to express themselves and is sometimes linked to quick and easy resolution of complex issues (Shanmugam et al., 2020). Other studies which showed a positive correlation between employee productivity and democratic leadership included and Bhargavi and Yaseen (2016) and Oussible and Tinaztepe (2022).

Persuasive Leadership

The persuasive leadership style had the highest, positive and significant relationship with productivity. Persuasive leadership is highly correlated with productivity which can influence employee behaviors and encourage mindset shifts. A persuasive leader is strong and has centralized control (makes decisions for the business) however, they are also open to employee opinions and emotions. Iman and Lestari (2019) suggested that companies should consider implementing the persuasive leadership style as it not only improves employee productivity, but it is also the most trusted style by employees.

Autocratic Leadership

An interesting observation from our study was that autocratic leadership had the lowest productivity rating by employees and had a weak correlation with productivity despite it being the most prevalent style in the sector . However, this is in line with Setiawan et al., (2021) who also found that autocratic leadership had either no effect and/or a negative effect on employee efficiency. Autocratic leaders are often associated with controlling and/or forcing employees into productivity using a lot of incentives and rewards (Gastil, 1994). Similarly, a study done in the Chinese manufacturing industry concluded that autocratic leadership resulted in decreased company performance (Wei and Vasudevan, 2022). Additionally, Peker et al. (2018) noted that autocratic leadership discourages innovation and providing solutions for problems and thus should be avoided to improve company performance. Moreover, a study that was done in Gomal University in Pakistan also showed that autocratic leadership had the least impact on employee output, effectiveness and success in the manufacturing sector (Khan et al., 2023).

Laissez-faire Leadership Style

This leadership style was the least prevalent in the manufacturing industry in Malawi, was rated as ineffective on productivity (by employees) and was not correlated with productivity (based on the Spearman's Rank Correlation). Laissez-faire leaders often fail to guide employees and do not believe in a punishment and/or reward system (Smajlović et al., 2019). The relationship between laissez-faire leadership and company productivity was rejected in a study done in the manufacturing sector in China. They concluded that when the laissez-faire leadership style is applied then the company performance declines (Wei and Vasudevan, 2022)**.** This is mainly because laissez-faire leaders are often viewed as inefficient, unserious and "relaxed" therefore employees underperform and fail to achieve their work goals and targets. This leadership style can be successful in some instances where employees have a clear understanding of their tasks and how to execute them with minimal input and there is trust between employees and leaders (Jony et al., 2019; Hurd, 2020).

The laissez-faire leadership style has become more prevalent after the COVID-19 pandemic which increased remote and hybrid work options (Noor, 2021). Virtual work has been associated with more people adopting this leadership style as employees prefer to work more independently and "freely". The pandemic changed the way businesses operate, prevalent leadership styles and how employees view the relationship between work and well-being (i.e. work life-balance) (Desgourdes et al., 2023). Laissez-faire leadership has been shown to be the least favourable leadership style in the industrial sector generally and is associated with employees who are less engaged in their work and do not reach their goals as shown in as study done in Indonesia (Xuefeng, 2023).

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

In Malawi, this style of leadership is the least practiced in the manufacturing firms as management fears that it gives employees too much freedom without supervision which may lead to confusion, indecision, decreased motivation when executing tasks and ultimately low productivity and under used potential. A suggestion is that industrial companies must incorporate strategies that include empowered leadership and psychological empowerment practices that result in innovation, better motivation, goal attainment and commitment to the organization (Turcotte-Légaré et al., 2023; Suprayitno, 2024).

Study Limitations

The first limitation of this study is that the sample size may have been small and whether the Yamane (1967) formula was inappropriate for determining it. The Yamane formula is most suitable for simple random sampling and may not be appropriate for small populations. In our study the population consisted of only 82 employees so using this formula reduced the sample size even further. Additionally, the study population was heterogeneous (different age groups, gender, education levels) while the formula assumes population homogeneity, therefore , a stratified sampling and the use of a different formula that takes into account variability in the population would have been more suitable.

Furthermore, normally the Yamane formula uses a smaller margin of error (5%) at 95% confidence level but we chose to use 0.1 (for 10% margin of error) at 90% confidence level which resulted in an even smaller sample size which made it less precise and increased the margin of error. Perhaps a better approach would have been to survey all the 82 employees in the organisation as a population census and using a different or more robust formula to the Yamane as our population did not fully meet the assumptions to calculate a subsample making it less precise. For populations that are small, a census is more statistically correct and removes sampling bias (is more generalized). One of our major constraints with a census was limited accessibility to the entire population as well as capacity and time constraints. Therefore, our study should be interpreted as one that shows patterns in a study population and not as a precise estimate. In future these limitations can be addressed by using a larger sample size that includes employees from multiple manufacturers and a apply a different formula where most of the assumptions are met.

Another limitation to this study is the high correlation between democratic and laissez-faire leadership style. This relationship was then confirmed by high VIF values (> 10) that indicated multicollinearity. We chose to keep both these variables in this study even though they had a significant overlap because they are both important. Employees deemed them important determinants of their own productivity so they could not be excluded from the analysis. Not including either style would make the interpretation of the results difficult as they form an important part of the theory. We do acknowledge that high multicollinearity increases the standard errors and makes the regression coefficients less precise and we suggest that the individual effects of democratic and laissez faire leadership styles be considered separately and interpreted carefully. In future, this issue can be refined by using a bigger sample size and using other analysis to refine issues of multicollinearity between leadership styles.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study therefore contributed to expanding the body of knowledge on prevalent leadership styles and their relationship with the productivity of workers in manufacturing sector (based on employee perceptions and statistical testing). We showed that autocratic leadership was the most prevalent leadership style and Laissez-Faire was the least prevalent.

Our findings can help recommend a leadership framework that can improve employee productivity based on the selection of the most suitable leadership style(s). Through the established framework, the study contributed to the theory and practice of leadership in organisations and public policy. It also aimed to close the existing gap in current literature by providing a local case study example from the Southern African region and also compared findings to relevant international studies. The study's first contribution to the theory of leadership is that only democratic and persuasive leadership styles had a statistically significant and positive correlation with employees' productivity in the manufacturing sector in Malawi. Democratic leadership also influenced employee productivity based on the employee productivity scale. Autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles showed no

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

significant correlation with employee productivity. Autocratic leadership may not be correlated with employee productivity as these leaders prefer to make decisions alone and often chose to assign tasks to subordinates without any prior consultation (tasks and methods are imposed on members). Additionally, there is little communication between the leader and the employees resulting in tension, fear and resentment between the two parties.

Results of the study are also relevant to practice of leadership in organizations and suggested that leaders in the manufacturing industry should make use of a combination of leadership styles for better management. From the findings in this study, it can be concluded that supervisors who intend to derive the best out of their employees should try and exhibit characteristics related to mainly democratic and persuasive leadership styles. The se findings were also relevant to public policy in Malawi, especially the realisation of policy goals set by the Government of Malawi in the Malawi Vision 2063 (Government of Malawi, 2020). The country "desires and resolves to be an inclusively wealthy and self-reliant

industrialized upper-middle-income country by the year 2063" (Government of Malawi, 2020, p.11). The Government of Malawi recognises that manufacturing and visionary, transformative leadership as key enablers to attainment of Malawi Vision 2063 (Government of Malawi, 2020). Therefore, on one hand, through manufacturing, Malawi desires to have a "vibrant knowledge-based economy with a strong manufacturing industry driven by productive and commercially vibrant agriculture and mining sectors (Government of Malawi, 2020). On the other hand, visionary and transformative leadership is important in championing mind-set changes (Government of Malawi, 2020, p.17). The study established that democratic and persuasive leadership styles have a statistically significant and positive correlation with employees' productivity in the manufacturing sector in Malawi which is a significant finding for policymakers, capacity building and improved productivity. Therefore, the research on relationship between leadership styles and employees' productivity is significant for the attainment of Malawi Vision 2063 as it will help the manufacturing sector in Malawi become vibrant and effective.

REFERENCES

1. Adiguzel, Z. & Cakir, M. (2021). Examining the effects of moral leadership on employees in the manufacturing sector. Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 20(77), 168-187.
2. Allison, P. D. (1999). Multiple regression: A primer. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
3. Amiscua, M., Fernandez, M., Madanging, J. & Querido, J. (2018). The Impact of Leadership Styles on Employees' Productivity: A Qualitative Study of Employees' Experiences of Motivation in the Workplace. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/requests/attachment/52212945 (Accessed 29/12/18).
4. Ansari, M.A. (1990). Leader behavior and organizational effectiveness: The moderating effect of organizational climate. Organizational research in Indian perspective, 9-35.
5. Auren, U. (2018). Techniques of Leadership. New York: McGraw Hill.
6. Babbie, E. & Rubin, A. (1989). Research Methods for Social Work. California: Wadsworth.
7. Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations. Free Press.
8. Bass, B. M. (1990). Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications. The Free Press google schola, 2, 173-184.
9. Bass, B.M. and Avolio, B.J. (1990). Transformational leadership development: Manual for the multifactor leadership questionnaire. Consulting Psychologists Press.
10. Bass, B.M., Avolio, B.J., Jung, D.I. & Berson, Y. (2003). Predicting unit performance by assessing transformational and transactional leadership. Journal of applied psychology, 88(2), 207.
11. Beyene, K.T., Shi, C.S. & Wu, W.W. (2016). Linking culture, organizational learning orientation and product innovation performance: The case of Ethiopian manufacturing firms. South African Journal of Industrial Engineering, 27(1), 88-101.
12. Bhargavi, S. & Yaseen, A. (2016). Leadership styles and organizational performance. Strategic Management Quarterly, 4(1), 87-117.
13. Burrell, G. & Morgan, G. (2019). Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis: Elements of the sociology of corporate life. Routledge.
14. Chemers, M.M. (1997). An Integrative Theory of Leadership. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

15. Cole, G.A. (2005). Organizational Behavior. Nottingham: TJ International.
16. Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage publications.
17. Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. Psychometrika, 16(3), 297–334.
18. Desgourdes, C., Hasnaoui, J., Umar, M. & Feliu, J.G. (2024). Decoding laissez-faire leadership: an indepth study on its influence over employee autonomy and well-being at work. International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal, 20(2), 1047-1065.
19. Duckett, H. & Macfarlane, E. (2003). Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in retailing. Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 24(6), 309-317.
20. Edward, F.T. (2007). The discourse of leadership and the practice of administration. Journal of Applied Christian Leadership, 2(1), 32-53.
21. Fiedler, F.E. (1972). How do you make leaders more effective? New answers to an old puzzle. Organizational Dynamics, 1(2), 3-18.
22. Fleishman, E.A. (1957). A leader behavior description for industry. Leader behavior: Its description and measurement, 103, 10-119.
23. Gastil, J. (1994). A meta-analytic review of the productivity and satisfaction of democratic and autocratic leadership. Small Group Research, 25(3), 384-410.
24. Gordon, G. E., & Rosen, N. (1981). Critical factors in leadership succession. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 27(2), 227-254.
25. Government of Malawi (2020). Malawi Vision 2063: An inclusively wealthy and self-reliant nation. National Planning Commission, Lilongwe, Malawi.
26. Griffin, M. A., & Mathieu, J. E. (1997). Modeling organizational processes across hierarchical levels: climate, leadership, and group process in work groups. Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior, 18(6), 731-744.
27. Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2014). A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
28. Harms, P.D., Wood, D., Landay, K., Lester, P.B. & Lester, G.V. (2018). Autocratic leaders and authoritarian followers revisited: A review and agenda for the future. The Leadership Quarterly, 29(1), 105-122.
29. Hassan, A.M., Dellow, D.A. & Jackson, R.J. (2009). The AACC leadership competencies: Parallel views from the top. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 34(1-2), 180-198.
30. Hollander, E.P. & Julian, J.W. (1969). Contemporary trends in the analysis of leadership processes. Psychological bulletin, 71(5), 387.
31. Hurd, J.A. (2020). Leadership Styles of Head NASCAR Executives: A Historical Perspective (Doctoral dissertation, East Tennessee State University).
32. Iman, N. & Lestari, W. (2019). The effect of leadership on job satisfaction, work motivation and performance of employees: Studies in AMIK Yapennas Kendari. African Journal of Business Management, 13(14), 465-473.
33. Ivancevich, J.M., Szilagyi, A.D. & Wallace, M.J. (1977). Organisational Behaviour and Performance. Goodyear Publishing Company Inc.
34. Jaafar, S.B., Zambi, N.M. and Fathil, N.F. (2021). Leadership style: Is it autocratic, democratic or laissezfaire. ASEAN Journal of Management and Business Studies, 3(1), 1-7.
35. Jony, M.T.I., Alam, M.J., Amin, M.R. & Jahangir, M. (2019). The impact of autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles on the success of the organization: A study on the different popular restaurants of Mymensingh, Bangladesh. Canadian Journal of Business and Information Studies, 1(6), 2838.
36. Khan, M.I., Fiaz, M. and Taous, M., 2023. An Empirical Analysis of the Nexus between Leadership Styles and Employees' Performance. Open Access Organization and Management Review, 1(2), 38-48.
37. Klath, E., Maxwell, A., & Bob, L. (2017). Human Resource Management. Ohio: Merit Publishing Company.
38. Kolb, D.A. (2014). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. FT press.
39. Lincoln, Y.S., Lynham, S.A. & Guba, E.G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. The Sage handbook of qualitative research, 4(2), 97-128.

ISSN 2278-2540 | DOI: 10.51583/IJLTEMAS | Volume XV, Issue II, February 2026

40. Mintzberg, H. (1973). The nature of managerial work. Haper and Row.
41. Mugenda, O.M. & Mugenda, A.G. (2003). Research methods: Quantitative & qualitative apporaches (Vol. 2, No. 2). Nairobi: Acts press.
42. Noor, S. (2021), February. What is Covid New Normal and its Leadership Requirements?. In SJIM International Conference (Vol. 109).
43. Northouse, P.G. (1999). Leadership: Theory and practice (p. xxiii). Sage.
44. Ogbonna, E. & Harris, L.C. (2021). Leadership style, organizational culture and performance: empirical evidence from UK companies. International Journal of Human Resource Management, 11(4), 766–788.
45. Oussible, N. and Tinaztepe, C.I.H.A.N. (2022). The Effect of Democratic Leadership Style on Organizational Productivity by the mediating role of Employee performance in Turkey. International Journal of Recent Research in Commerce Economics and Management, 9(1), 6-16.
46. Peker, S., İnandı, Y. & Gılıç, F. (2018). The relationship between leadership styles (autocratic and democratic) of school administrators and the mobbing teachers suffer. European Journal of Contemporary Education.
47. Robbins, S., Waters-Marsh, T., Cacioppe, R., Millet, B. (1994). Organisational Behaviour - Concepts, Controversies, and Applications. Prentice Hall Limited. Australia.
48. Rue, L. & Byars, L. (2017). Management: Skills and Application. McGraw-Hill Education.
49. Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2019). Research Methods for Business Students (8th Ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
50. Schermerhorn Jr, J.R. & McCarthy, A. (2004). Enhancing Performance Capacity in the Workplace: A Reflection on the Significance of the Individual. Irish Journal of Management, 25(2).
51. Setiawan, I.G.A. & Sheidu, C.F. (2024). Impact of Leadership Styles on Employees' Performance. International Journal of Economics And Management Review, 2(1),53-62.
52. Setiawan, R., Cavaliere, L.P.L., Navarro, E.R., Wisetsri, W., Jirayus, P., Chauhan, S.,Tabuena, A.C. & Rajan, R. (2021). The impact of leadership styles on employees productivity in organizations: A comparative study among leadership styles. Productivity Management, 26(1), 382-404.
53. Shanmugam, H., Juhari, J.A., Nair, P., Ken, C.S. & Guan, N.C. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in Malaysia: a single thread of hope. Malaysian Journal of Psychiatry, 29(1), 78-84.
54. Smajlović, S., Umihanic, B. & Turulja, L. (2019). The interplay of technological innovation and business model innovation toward company performance. Management: Journal of Contemporary Management Issues, 24(2), 63-79.
55. Smith, D.G. (1964). Pragmatism and the group theory of politics. American political science review, 58(3), 600-610.
56. Sudit, E.F. & Sudit, E.F. (1984). The Productivity Concept: Definition, Measurement and Managerial Importance. Productivity Based Management, 1-17.
57. Suprayitno, D. (2024). Leadership Style and Employee Productivity in Manufacturing Companies In Indonesia. Commercium: Journal of Business and Management, 2(2), 31-46.
58. Turcotte-Légaré, N., Gaudet, M.C. & Doucet, O. (2023). Understanding the effects of empowering leadership on positive and negative performance behaviors: A manufacturing sector study. Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences/Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration, 40(2), 218-231.
59. Wei, L. and Vasudevan, H.L. (2022). Leadership style and company performance in the manufacturing industry. Int. J. Hum. Capital Urban Manage, 7(3),14.
60. Winston, B.E. & Patterson, K. (2006). An integrative definition of leadership. International journal of leadership studies, 1(2), 6-66.
61. Xuefeng, Q. (2023). The effect of leadership style on employee motivation: A case study of manufacturing companies. Journal of Management and Administration Provision, 3(1), 12-16.
62. Yamane, T. (1973). Statistics, An Introductory Analysis, 2nd Ed., New York: Harper and Row; 886.
63. Yousef, D.A. (2000). Organizational commitment: a mediator of the relationships of leadership behavior with job satisfaction and performance in a non-western country. Journal of managerial Psychology, 15(1), 6-24.