

## **The role of Team-based leadership in averting groupthink and enhancing institutional productivity: A Study of Federal Tertiary Institutions in Adamawa and Taraba States of Nigeria.**

Shadrach Brandford Adams<sup>1</sup>Soguna MacDonald Daniel<sup>2</sup>

*Federal Polytechnic Bali, Taraba State- Nigeria*

*Federal Polytechnic Bali, Taraba State- Nigeria*

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**Abstract:** This study examines the role of team-based leadership styles in averting groupthink and enhancing institutional productivity with focus on federal tertiary institutions in Adamawa and Taraba states of Nigeria. It only focused on democratic and transformational leadership styles. It maintained that these team-based leadership styles can curtail the effect of groupthink leading to institutional productivity. Thus, the study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods of obtaining data. The primary data for analysis was obtained through the instrumentality of self-designed questionnaire while secondary sources of data was equally relied upon for literature review. The target population of the study was both academic and non-academic staff of the five (5) selected federal institutions. stratified random sampling was used to administer questionnaire to the respondents and their responses was retrieved and analyzed with the aid of excel software for statistical analysis. The results were determined using percentage and bar chart. The findings of the study showed significant manifestation of the antecedent conditions of groupthink like organizational structural faults and cohesion in the institutions studied thereby undermining institutional productivity. It also showed that team-based leadership can avert groupthink in those institutions. Finally, the study concludes that a team-based leadership style that engages the employees in the decision-making process, allows divergent views, tolerate constructive criticism, uncompromisingly build and maintains a culture and atmosphere for debating ideas and create a platform where creativity is rewarded can avert the trend of groupthink leading to enhanced institutional productivity.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Institutional productivity and effective performance are the impetus for growth and development in this age of globalization. This growth and development is driven by effective leadership that is able to harness both material and human resources to achieve set goals. Studies have shown that leadership is crucial in influencing organisational process and results (Anderson, 2016; Nye 2010). Leadership and leadership styles remain fluid areas of academic discourse, where experts have established that there is strong link between leadership styles and impacts, effectiveness and efficacy (Sadeghi and Pihie, 2012, Nielsen and Daniel, 2012, Chou et al 2013, Sudha et al 2016). These impacts, effectiveness and efficacy are functions of choices, actions and decisions which leaders or the top management teams take in the day-to-day running of their organizations. Unfortunately, the decision making process can be undermined if Janis's (1982) precedent conditions of groupthink which are cohesion, organizational structural faults and situational factors are inherent in these organizations. But a study by Choi and Kim (1999) shows that team-based activities spurred by leadership have a stronger impact on institutional performance than groupthink. In the same line of reasoning, Ukaidi (2016) corroborates that leadership leads to more productivity and profitability, but the extent of success depends on the style of the leader and the systematic environment created for staff functionality.

Nigeria's public sector, especially the tertiary institutions have over the years been plagued by a silent menace called groupthink which is a concurrence-seeking tendency that can impede collective decision-making processes and lead to poor decisions. It beclouds group members' sense of judgement in a bid to preserve harmony and to avoid argument that will threaten relationships and group cohesion. It suffocates creative ideas from the employees who don't speak out in a bit to maintain institutional harmony and social security. The rippling effect of groupthink on organizations cannot be quantified but its manifestations may undermine institutional productivity thereby hampering growth. Leadership is the central theme in the list of anti-groupthink remedies provided by Janis (1982) and other researchers. Consequently, this study will examine how the trend of groupthink can be averted through team based leadership to enhance institutional productivity.

## **II. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study which is a mixed of both quantitative and qualitative methods examines the effect of groupthink on institutional productivity. It focused on five Federal tertiary institutions in Adamawa and Taraba States of Nigeria. Thus, data was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. It adopted survey research design in obtaining data for the study. Survey research design was used data was obtained through questionnaire. The questionnaire adopted a five step Likert Scale which consist of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Strongly Disagree, Disagree options. Likert Scale which according to Likert (1932) is used to gauge attitudes, values and opinions is consistent with the survey research design which this study adopted. The target population for the study was both the academic and non-academic staff of federal tertiary institutions of learning in Taraba and Adamawa states. As at the time of this study, their total number was approximately put at 11,039 according to institutional data from federal ministry of education. The sample size for the study was 980 respondents. Krejcie & Morgan (1970) believes that the efficient method of determining the sample size needed to be representative of a given population. The study was conducted between January, 2019 to December, 2019. It adopted stratified random sampling. Results was determined using bar chart and percentage with the aid of excel software for statistical analysis.

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Leadership is the central theme in the list of remedies for groupthink provided by Janis (1982) and other researchers. Hankook (2012) opined that leadership is the act of influencing, inspiring, motivating, and coercing followers to act rightfully to realize organizational objectives. Mitonga-Monga and Coetzee (2012) consider leadership as the pattern associated with managerial behavior, which is designed to integrate the organizational or personal interest and effects for achieving particular objectives. In today's ever changing digital age, globalization has made the subject of leadership more crucial by injecting new ideas and debates as it calls for diversity and multi-culturalism, because modern companies operate across cultures and race, therefore, the need for dynamic leadership that respect cultures and backgrounds is imperative (Sadler, 2010). Scholarship on leadership evolved through three distinct areas; traits, behaviour and contingency and are regarded as three approaches to leadership (Chemer, 2000; Yulk, 2006).

Accordingly, studies have shown that leadership traits and behavioural paradigm of the top management affects organisational performance (Argyris, 1995; Mahoney et al 1960). In other words, organisational performance is to some greater extent determined by the leadership style practiced. The quality and attributes of leaders have significant influence on either success or failure of the organisation (Zeb et al, 2015, Luthans, 2008, Parthac, 2005, Rowe 2001, Fieldler, 1996, Etzion, 1956 in Ukaidi, 2016). In addition, leadership style influences the culture of the organization which, in turn, influences the organizational performance (Al kwajeh, 2018). This is corroborated by Klient et al (2013) who used the four factor theory of leadership along with the data collected from 2,662 employees working in 311 organizations. They conclude that organizational culture and performance are related to the type of leadership style. Therefore, the leadership styles deployed by institutions or organisation is one of the principal factors which enhances or undermines and ultimately leads to better or poor performance.

Therefore, leadership style is viewed as a combination of different characteristics, traits and behaviors that are used by leaders as they interact with their subordinates to run the affairs of their organizations (Mitonga-Monga & Coetzee, 2012). Additionally, Harris et al (2007) also postulated that leadership style can be defined as the kind of relationship that is used by an individual so as to make people work together for a common goal or objective. A lot has been written on modern leadership styles and there is no consensus on their exact number as they are being postulated as the trends unfolds, for instance, leadership style ranges from: democratic or participative style, autocratic style, transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, culture based leadership, laissez-faire style, Pace-setter style, servant-leader style, charismatic leadership, Contingency or situational style, and visionary leadership (Cowen, 2018, Harris, et al., 2007, Nwachukwu, 1988 in Ukaidi, 2016).

### **Team-based Leadership styles and groupthink**

Research has shown that that leaders who are dispose to deploying democratic or participatory leadership style appeared more successful compared with managers that adopted autocratic or laissez faire leadership style of management (Elenkov, 2002, Bowers and seashore, 1966 in Ukaidi, 2016). This is a leadership style in which the decision-making is decentralized and is shared by all the subordinates. In the democratic leadership style, the potential for weak execution and poor decision-making is high (Tannenbanum and Schmidt 2012). Thus, democratic leadership style is a bulwark against groupthink. To Sushmita (2010) groupthink happens when groups strive for extreme consensus at the cost of effective decision making. They are more concerned with maintaining the unity of the group than with making the best decision. In such cases, independent thinking of group members is frowned upon and alternate suggestions are overridden in a bid to

attain concurrence. The group members in such a situation holds an unquestioned belief and have over confidence in the group's competence and morality, so much so that they may not question even ethically dubious decisions and actions of the group. Maintaining groups loyalty becomes more important than putting forth one's own. In the same vein, Chris (2007) opined that in an environment of groupthink, minimizing conflict becomes the primary goal rather than producing concrete results or achieving true consensus. Janis (1982) gave three types of antecedent conditions that feeds groupthink phenomenon: (i) cohesion of the group, (ii) organizational structural faults, and (iii) situational factors. For organizational structural faults, Janis provided four examples: insulation of the group, lack of impartial leadership, lack of methodical procedure group norms, and homogeneity of group members. Example of situational factors include high stress from external threats and temporary low self-esteem, induced by recent failures, excessive difficulties, or moral dilemmas. Although group cohesion is not always a bad thing.

Even though studies on the effect of group cohesiveness is still inconclusive in literature (Mullen, Anthony, Salas, & Driskell, 1994, Choi & Kim, 1999). Marvin Shaw's (in Janis, 1982) hypothesis opined that high cohesive groups are more effective than low-cohesive groups in achieving their goals. But Janis (1982) added a caveat that 'superglue' of solidarity that bonds group together can undermine their effectiveness by causing their mental process to get stuck in a bit to preserve institutional harmony. Consequently, groupthink will replace independent critical thinking. Therefore, structural fault within organization is another antecedent conditions of groupthink which among others includes lack of impartial leadership and lack of methodical procedure group norms, situational factors high stress from external threat and low self-esteem induced by recent failure or moral dilemmas are manifestations of groupthink phenomenon in organizations. The foregoing undermines institutional productivity.

The leaders who deploy democratic leadership style contrast with those who at all times deploy autocratic and authoritarian style in which one person or few individuals control the decision-making process of the organization with no inputs from the employees. According to Nwachukwu (1988) cited in Ukaidi, (2016), the worst style of leadership is autocratic and authoritarian leadership style which gives rise to high labour management conflicts. This is also a potential fertile ground for groupthink phenomenon. Another leadership style which focuses on leader effectiveness is the contingency model or situational sensitive which is anchored on the leader's ability to analyze the situation at hand and appropriately adopting a suitable approach which best suites the circumstance (Fredler 1967 in Ukaidi, 2016 ; House 1971; Vroon and Yelton 1974).

Another example of a team based leadership style is transformational leadership which according to Bass and Avolio (1994), occurs when the leaders broaden or elevate the interest of the employees. it focuses particularly on developing the overall value system of the employees, development of moralities, skills and their motivation level. The transformational leadership acts as a strong bridge between the followers and leaders, to develop clear understanding associated with the motivational level, values and interests (Al Kwajeh, 2018). Bass (1997) stated that, transformational leaders enhance the subordinates' interests, build awareness and acceptance among employees. They motivate workers to work beyond what is required of them which creates teamness and better performance. In an equivocal expression by Avolio and Bass (1995), corroborated by Rehman (2015), they believed that the most important components of transformational leadership such as idealised influence (motivation through influence) serves as a role model for the group members through which leadership creates share vision for the future. Thus, organisations adopting this leadership style are more profitable, sustainable, result oriented and achieve high performance.

Therefore, Neck and Manz (1994) opined that a leadership that is geared toward creating a constructive thought pattern in self-managing work teams can be able to establish a synergetic team-thinking and problem solving mechanism that is team-based. This will serve as a bulwark against groupthink syndrome. Therefore, teams are essential part of the ever-dynamic 21<sup>st</sup> century organizational setting. Using the system theory approach, Ancona & Roberts (2004-2006) averred that teams are dynamic living systems with potentials for creative ideas and can perform beyond expectations; thus, applying system theory to Kantor's (2012) four player model they believe that an effective organization is the one that works as a team with each of the four players reinforcing each other's role as domination by any player can hamper or undermine the health of the team. Therefore, leaders have to maintain a healthy atmosphere of divergent thinking that steers the team away from premature convergence (Small 2010). In addition to creating an environment of trust and openness, in which team members are encouraged to speak up and critique ideas and opinions without fear of being reprimanded. Managing Nigeria's tertiary institutions must conform to global best practices where no one person or small group of persons run the show. Leadership style is plays a pivotal role in determining the success, productivity as well as the effectiveness of an organization (Bass, Riggio, 2006; Drucker, 2007, cited in the Bucharest University of Economics Studies 2015, Yahaya, 2016). Therefore, a team based leadership where all employees are involved or allowed to interrogate ideas and contribute creatively will improve institutional productivity. For instance, Kinley (2015) believes that top management of an institution should encourage a culture of effective debate in its decision- making process by putting into place a mechanism for getting a feedback from the

employees on any action, in what he called a capability solutions focus more on improving team members' ability to give opinions and articulate challenge. This will help leaders to have deep insight into their decisions and how it impact on others. Equally, a study by Choi and Kim (1999) shows that team-based activities spurred by leadership have a stronger impact on institutional performance than groupthink.

Perhaps the evolutionary process of many public institutions in Nigeria possibly aligned with some aspects of Tuckman's (1965) group development model; **forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning**. The formative stages of most tertiary institutions are determine by the prerogatives of chief executives who are probably given the mandate to assemble their management teams including recruitment of the employees. Impliedly, in some cases recruitment, appointment, placement, posting and promotion of employees are possibly influence by patronage, kin-ship and other in-group relationships like the triangular divisive factors of religion, region and ethnicity. In some cases, these are done with no regard for merit. When these institutions finally take-off, the employees and other members of the management teams feel indebted to the chief executive such that dissenting and creative ideas challenging the status-quo or the way the institution is run are seen as an act of ingratitude or confrontation. Thus, the absence of cross-fertilization of creative ideas or Tuckman's (1965) 'storming stage' where ideas are interrogated and the best ones implemented tend to undermine the productiveness and effectiveness of the institution such that an institution cannot grow beyond the vision of the chief executive.

Lastly, Janis (1982) and other researchers have identified remedies to groupthink which applies not only to micro but also macro groupslike teams, committees, units, departments and the entire institution or organization. These are briefly stated below;

- I. That every member of the group should be a critical evaluator of the group 's course of action; an atmosphere or open climate of giving and accepting criticism should be created or encouraged. This implies that leaders should encourage authentic dissent, conflict in team is not always a bad thing. By encouraging authentic minority dissent in teams, leaders can stimulate a search for more information on all sides of the issue leading to the detection of issues that could have otherwise gone unnoticed (Nemeth etal 2001). Though in many organizations dissenters are disliked and treated unfairly. Leaders should initiate or establish procedures to protect these alternative viewpoints (Thompson 2008) and protect minority dissenters from backlash and being relegated to out-group status.
- II. Leaders should be impartial and refrain from stating personal preferences at the outset of group discussion; they should limit themselves initially to fosteringopen inquiry.
- III. Establish multiple groups with different leaders to work the question in parallel. Diversity should be encouraged in groups, this often facilitate group performance and also reduces group cohesiveness which in turn increases diverse perspectives (Greitmeyer et al 2008). Research indicates that when there are many sources of diversity within a team, it becomes difficult for team members to form homogenous subgroups (Rink and Ellemers 2010). But while diverse groups are good at generating more ideas, overall task performance is higher in homogenous groups (Thompson 2008). Equally, each member of the group should privately discuss current issues and optionswith trusted associates outside the group and report reactions.
- IV. From time to time, bring in outside experts to challenge the views of the core members. when an expert is present, groups with directive leaders make better decisions than groups with non-directive leaders (Smith 2004). Better training of leaders in the use of experts could be vital to the decision making process. The presence of an expert can reduce the insulation of the group from the outside world.
- V. There should be one or more 'devil 's advocates' during every group meeting. Studies have proved that group's using the Devil's advocacy approach significantly outperformed those that didn't (Chen etal 1996). The Devil's advocate role is that of a person who takes a position for the sake of fostering argument and conflict and is one of the oldest tools that can be used to mitigate the groupthink bias.
- VI. In an event of conflict, extra time should be devoted to interpreting warning signals from rivals and to constructing alternative scenarios of their intentions. Reconsider the decision in second chance meetings before going public. Refrain from setting opinion: the leader should hold back his personal opinions on the outcome and encourage the team members to openly air theirs. This engenders an atmosphere of open inquiry and impartiality (Northouse 2013).

#### IV. RESULTS

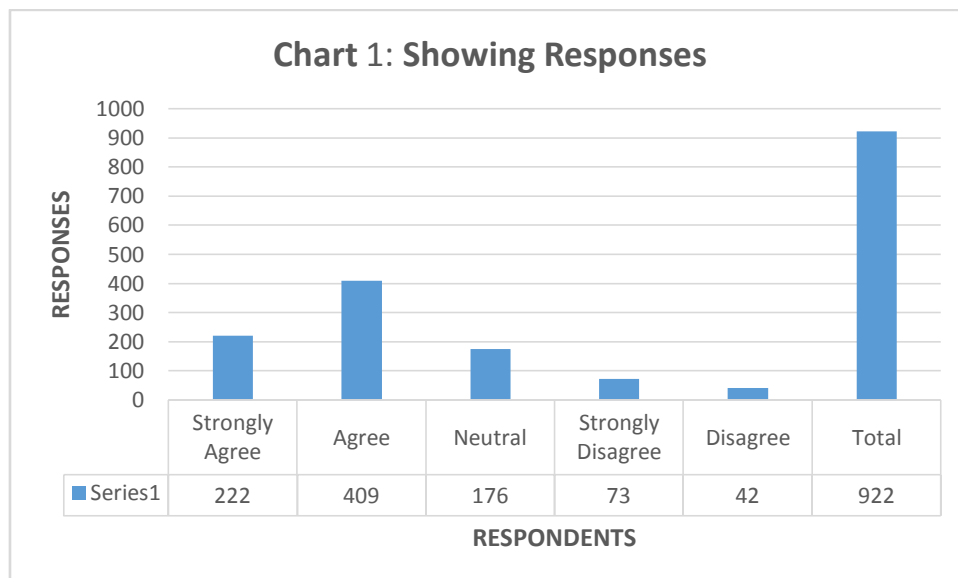
##### Question 1:

The leadership style of the chief executive does not give room for the employees to have their say or interrogate the status quo ideas in running the organization.

**Table 1:** Distribution of responses and their percentages

QUEST. No	TOTAL	SA	%	A	%	NAD	%	SD	%	D	%
Quest. 9	922	222	24%	409	44%	176	19%	73	8%	42	5%

Source: Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)



Source: Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)

From the table and chart above, it can be seen that majority of the respondents constituting 44% agree that the leadership style of the chief executive does not give room for the employees to their say or interrogate the status quo ideas running the organization. When the number of those who strongly agree (24%) is added, it shows that 68% of the respondents responded in the affirmative. In the same vein 19% of the respondents remained undecided, while 13% put together either strongly disagree or disagree responded in the negative. Therefore, it can be said that the leadership style of most chief executives in tertiary institution does not encourage employees to have their say or interrogate status quo ideas running their institutions.

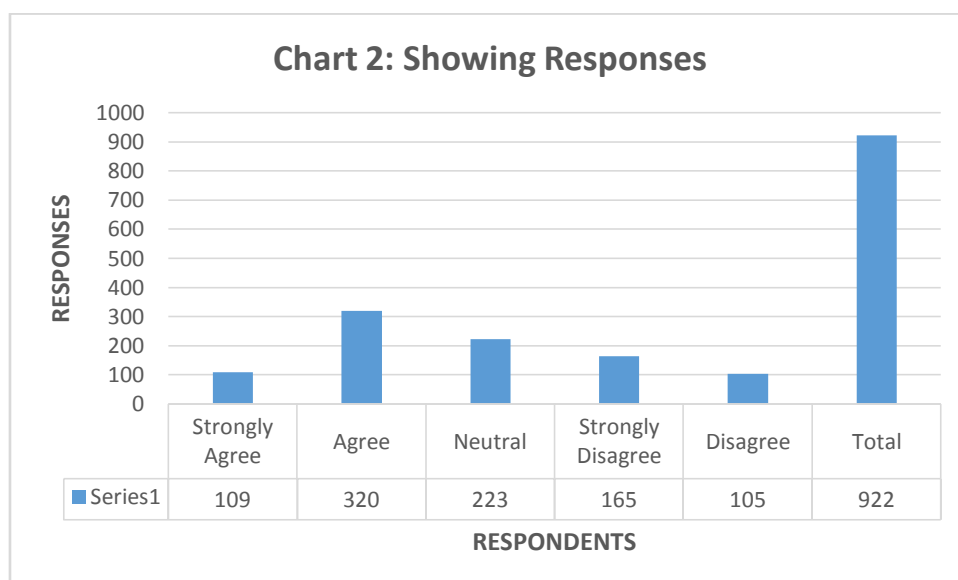
**Question 2**

Employees are not carried along in the day to day running of your institution, their inputs are not reflected in all decisions taken by the top management.

**Table 2:** Distribution of responses and their percentages

QUEST. No	TOTAL	SA	%	A	%	NAD	%	SD	%	D	%
Quest. 10	922	109	12%	320	35%	223	24%	165	18%	105	11%

Source: Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)



Source: Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)

As the table and the bar chart aboveshow, majority of respondents constituting 35% agree that employees are not carried along in day to day running of the institution and their inputs are not reflected in many decisions taken by the top management. When the 12% strongly agree response is added to this it mean that 47% of respondents responded in the affirmative. While 24% of the respondents remained neutral, 29% put together of strongly disagree (18%) and disagree (11%) responded in the negative. Hence, it can be said that many employees in these institution are not carried along in the day to day running or the institutions and their inputs are not reflected in many decisions taken by their top management.

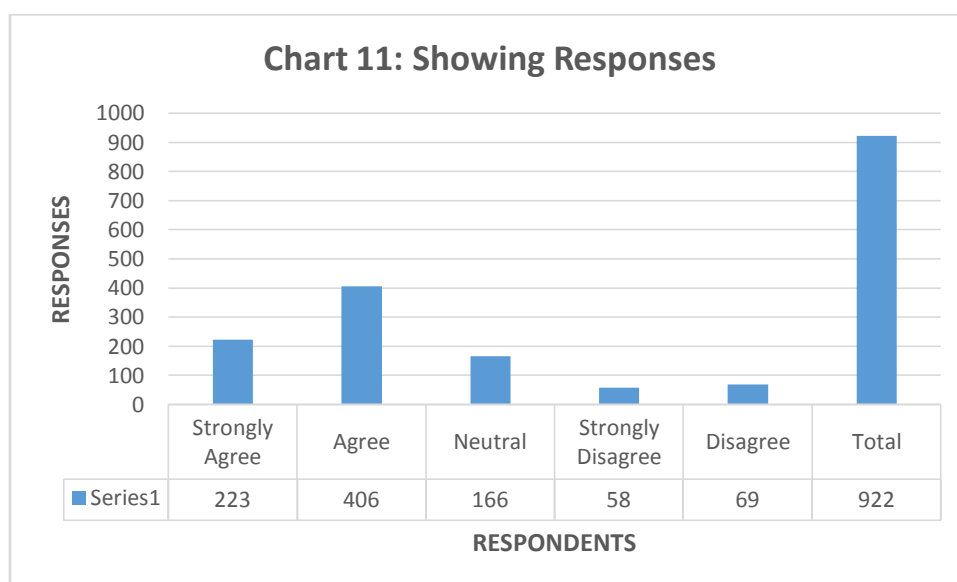
**Question 3:**

Employees will freely contribute creative ideas and interrogate actions of the top management without any fear of being victimize if team based leadership style is adopted and mechanisms of protection are put in place.

**Table 3:** Distribution of responses and their percentages

QUEST. No	TOTAL	SA	%	A	%	NAD	%	SD	%	D	%
Quest. 11	922	223	24%	406	44%	166	18%	58	6%	69	8%

Source: Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)



Source: Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)

The table and the chart above shows that majority of the respondents constituting 44% agree that employees will freely contribute creative ideas and interrogate actions of the top management without any fear of being victimize if team based leadership style is adopted mechanisms of protection are put in place. When the 24% strongly agree respondents are added to this, it will mean that 68% of the respondents responded in the affirmative. While 18% remained undecided, 14% put together either strongly disagree or disagree. Therefore, it can be said that many employees will freely contribute creative ideas and interrogate actions of the top management without any fear of being victimize if team based leadership style is adopted by tertiary institutions.

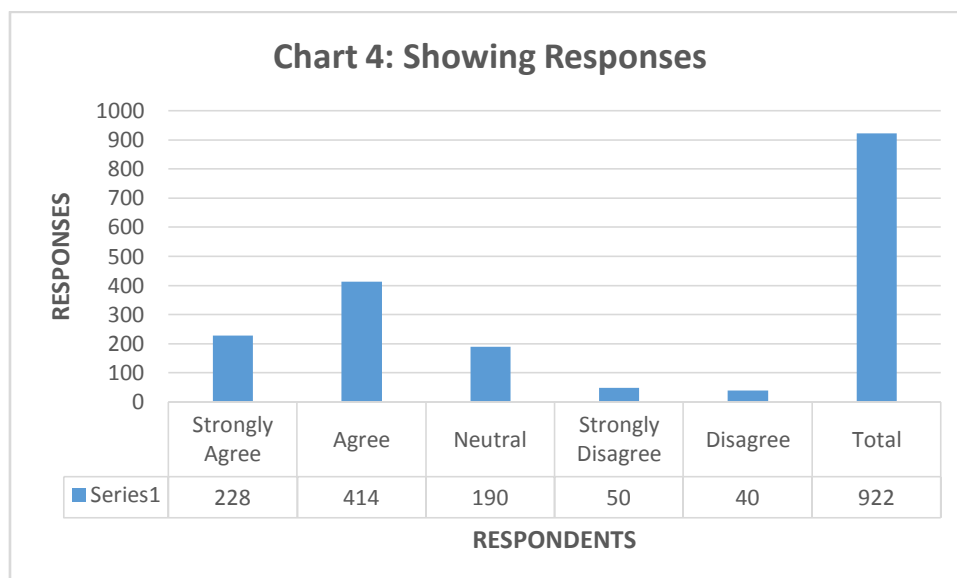
**Question 4:**

Adopting team base leadership can prevent groupthink and lead to institutional productivity.

**Table 4:** Distribution of responses and their percentages

QUEST. No	TOTAL	SA	%	A	%	NAD	%	SD	%	D	%
Quest. 12	922	228	25%	414	45%	190	21%	50	5%	40	4%

Source: Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)



**Source:** Brandford & McDonald, 2019 (Excel analysis)

The table and the chart above shows that majority of the respondents which constitute 45% of the population agree that adopting team base leadership in tertiary institutions can prevent groupthink and enhance institutional productivity. When 25% of respondent who strongly agree is added, it will mean that 70% of the respondents responded in the affirmative. While 21% remained neutral or undecided, 9% put together either strongly agree or disagree. Therefore, it can be said that adopting team base leadership in tertiary institutions can prevent groupthink and enhance institutional productivity.

## V. DISCUSSION

The majority of the respondents agree that they don't criticize or interrogate ideas, actions, programme, direction or the way their institutions are been administered in order not to be seen as opposing the members of the top management or the chief executive. This is a manifestation of groupthink phenomenon. Research has shown that institutions where ideas are interrogated, other points of view allowed and encouraged, options are considered and weighed accordingly are likely to be more effective, efficient and productive than those which discourage dissent and criticism (Kingly, 2015; Brandford, 2019). This is also corroborated by Small (2010) who averred that leaders must maintain a healthy atmosphere of divergent thinking that steers the team away from premature convergence. In addition to creating an environment of trust and openness, in which team members are encouraged to speak up and critique ideas and opinions without fear of being reprimanded. Several points could explain the foregoing; one, in these institutions some members of the top management team and in most cases the employees are recruited along kin-ship line and other parochial consideration. Thus, many employees don't speak out in a bid to maintain institutional harmony or feels interrogating the status-quo ideas and contributing result- oriented creative ideas might be seen as challenging the members of the top management or the chief executives who many see as benefactors. Perhaps in some cases, many don't want to be seen as ingrates because they were recruited or employed based on their kin-ship ties or any other in-group considerations by the chief executive/ some members of the top management and not necessarily based on merit. Second, this possibly relates to Kozan's (1997) harmony model which is typical of associative or in Hofstede's term 'collectivist cultures' to which Nigeria belong, where emphasis is placed on interdependence and harmony as against confrontational model.

In Nigeria, religion, tribe and regional sentiments are a very sensitive triangular fault lines that in many cases underscore official actions including recruitment, employment and posting. This nepotistic tendency spills into the work places, and in some cases, not been recruited based on merit and in a bid to accommodate them, these employees are always posted to departments and units which may be unrelated to their areas of specialization or in some cases they may not even have the requisite competence to effectively discharge their duties as required of them. Hence having '*square peck in a round hole*'. This affects institutional productivity.

In addition, the leadership style of most chief executives of the institutions studied does not encourage employees to have their say, contribute creatively and interrogate status quo ideas running the institutions. This is typified by the fact that overwhelming number of respondents say they are not carried along in the day to day running of the institution and their inputs are not reflected in many decisions taken by their top management. For instance, most if not all the institutions studied have no functional and elaborate feedback mechanism for aggregating and articulating inputs from employees. This possibly suggest an autocratic style of leadership.

Equally, majority of the respondents agree that they will freely contribute creatively, interrogate ideas to strengthen and maximize institutional productivity if team base leadership style is adopted by the leadership of their institutions. The foregoing position reinforces the fact that team base leadership in tertiary institutions can prevent groupthink and enhance institutional productivity thus, the opposite of groupthink is team-think. This is consistent with findings in literature.

Lastly, majority of the respondents agree that adopting team base leadership can prevent groupthink and lead to institutional productivity. Leadership style plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness as well as the productiveness of an organization. Where you have an autocratic or authoritarian style of leadership which is typical in high power distance societies like Nigeria. This is consistent with findings in literature, research has shown that leaders who are disposed to deploying democratic or participatory leadership style appeared more successful compared with managers that adopted autocratic or laissez faire leadership style of management (Elenkov, 2002, Bowers and seashore, 1966). This is a leadership style in which the decision-making is decentralized and is shared by all the subordinates. In the democratic leadership style, the potential for weak execution and poor decision- making is high (Tannenbanum and Schmidt 2012). Thus, democratic leadership style is a bulwark against groupthink.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, the central theme of literature and the findings of this study on the antidote to groupthink revolves around leadership styles. This is because Leadership style plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness as well as the productiveness of an organization. team-based leadership styles like democratic, transformational styles among others are bulwarks against institutional slide to destructive groupthink tendencies. As the study shows, groupthink has the capacity to undermine institutional productivity. But as a remedy, effective team-based leadership that allows (tolerate) divergent views, tolerate constructive criticism, uncompromisingly build and maintains a culture and atmosphere for debating ideas and create a platform where creativity is rewarded, a leadership style in which the decision- making is decentralized and is shared by all the subordinates can avert the trend of groupthink leading to enhanced institutional productivity. This implies that leaders should encourage authentic dissent. By encouraging authentic minority dissent in teams, leaders can stimulate a search for more information on all sides of the issue leading to the detection of issues that could have otherwise gone unnoticed. Though in many organizations especially the ones studied, dissenters are disliked and treated unfairly in several aspects. They are seen as ingrates, enemies of progress, stumbling blocks and trouble makers. But as the study shows, constructive disagreement and criticisms are healthy ingredients for sound decision making in organization. Chief executives and leaders should initiate or establish procedures to protect these alternative viewpoints and protect minority dissenters from backlash and being relegated to out-group status. Equally, there should be an elaborate mechanism for getting feedback from the employees. This also applies to not only the macro level of the institutions at the top but also at the micro levels which consist of departments, units, teams or committee system which are common in tertiary institutions.

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