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FROM LEADERSHIP DEFICITS TO SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE: A 5C LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR STRENGTHENING NIGERIAN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT
The leadership deficit that exists in Nigeria's public institutions continues to be one of the greatest challenges to achieving sustainable governance, despite years of administrative and civil service reforms. In this conceptual paper, we examine the disconnect between leadership theories that have largely been developed in the context of Western, high-capacity environments and how they may be implemented within resource-scarce and insecure public institutions in Nigeria. The paper is a qualitative, non-systematic literature review of literature accessed via purposive searching of Scopus and Google Scholar. Peer-reviewed articles form the core of our arguments, whereas official statistics, policy documents, and media reports serve to provide the context of practice and are cited as such. Based on Transformational Leadership Theory and Institutional Theory, the 5C Leadership Framework: Character and Competence as individual-level inputs, Capacity (individual and institutional), and Consistency as enablers, and Credibility as the earned outcome that loops back into the other four is suggested. Our synthesis reveals that leadership problems in Nigeria are not merely the result of personal ethical deficiencies, but rather an organizational issue with insufficient institutionalization, poor succession planning, patronage hiring practices, and wrong recruitment and retention strategies. Each dimension is operationalized, and the framework is discussed in relation to existing models. Six recommendations include responsible institutions, timelines, and key indicators. They include integrity and merit-based appointment to directorate positions through profile and asset declaration verification; statutory tenure and a written succession plan for appointment and succession protection; and five-dimension leadership evaluation with Credibility assessed independently through feedback from staff and citizens. Others deal with the development of leadership skills and diagnostics of institutional capacity, and empirical validation.

Keywords: leadership deficit, sustainable governance, 5C leadership framework, public
institutions, institutional theory, Nigeria

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Introduction

Leadership has been noted repeatedly in the scholarly literature on why governance reforms work or fail. The studies on public sector reforms mention leadership development and political will as some of the conditions upon which reform is contingent (Jilani et al., 2026), whereas cross-sectional analyses of well-performing agencies in difficult circumstances have shown that effective and committed leadership alone is insufficient without political cover (Roll, 2011, 2014). In Nigeria, despite more than sixty years of independence and numerous attempts at civil service reform, continuous service delivery failures, poor financial management and low levels of public trust indicate the presence of a deeper leadership problem. On the Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria is listed as number 142 of 182 countries in 2025, with a score of 26 out of 100 (Transparency International, 2026). According to the 2022 Afrobarometer Survey conducted among 1,600 adult Nigerians, 59% consider most or all of the people working for the Office of the Presidency to be corrupt, 44% believe that civil servants are corrupt and just 15% believe that they can somewhat or a lot of trust the police (Afrobarometer, 2023). These indicators reflect a larger problem: that the country's leaders fail to develop the necessary competences and institutional arrangements for proper governance.

The 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance ranks Nigeria as the 33rd country among 54 in 2023 data and lists it as one of the eleven countries whose governance has deteriorated since 2014, with the deterioration getting worse since 2019 (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024). Governance indicators measure performance and perceptions, not leadership, so they are considered in this paper as the context rather than as evidence of a leadership gap. The relationship between governance and insecurity is reciprocal: poorly functioning institutions, corruption and complicity of the elites give rise to opportunities for banditry and kidnappings (Turaki et al., 2024), and insecurity undermines the capabilities of the state.

The most common explanation for Nigeria's governance problems is its lack of institutionalization rather than the character of the country's leaders. Political economy studies of Nigeria describe persistent mismanagement as a result of prebendal, clientelistic political culture where public office represents a valuable resource (Joseph, 1987; Ekeh, 1975; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997), and the work on "pockets of effectiveness" of the Nigerian federal agencies by Roll (2011, 2014) demonstrates that even well-led agencies are fragile, because they rely on political cover. Therefore, any solution to the problems in Nigeria must necessarily involve both addressing leaders' personal traits and their institutional environment.

However, the leadership theories that serve as a basis for training programs, reforms and scholarly analysis in Nigeria are predominantly based on Western experience and characterized by the presence of high-capacity administrative institutions. Blunt and Jones (1997) analyzed the limitations of Western leadership theories in East Asia and Africa, and Nkomo (2011) warns against both uncritical transplantation and the essentialization of the "African" alternative. Mangaliso (2001) and Eyong (2019) resort to Ubuntu, yet Eyong's study of 12 councils in Cameroon and Nigeria revealed the tensions between Ubuntu philosophy and practices, and Zvavahera and Svongoro (2024) promote human-centric leadership for the public sector of Zimbabwe. These studies prove the importance of contextualization, but they mostly focus on cultural and relational aspects of the problem without considering leadership's institutional environment (capacity, consistency of the rules and pressure of patronage) as a part of the leadership problem. This paper seeks to provide the answer to the challenge and proposes the 5C Leadership Framework (Character, Competence, Capacity, Consistency and Credibility) as an

integrated and Nigeria-specific framework based on Transformational Leadership and Institutional Theories of Leadership.

This paper seeks to achieve three objectives: to analyze critically the literature related to the problem of leadership deficits and sustainable governance in Nigeria's public institutions; to develop the 5C Leadership Framework, a conceptual model based on Transformational and Institutional Leadership Theories that would explain the individual and structural dimensions of the problem; and to develop practical recommendations for public sector recruitment, training and performance management. Section Two provides the review of the literature and development of the framework, Section Three discusses the synthesis of the findings, and Section Four gives recommendations.

Review method

The study is conceptual, not empirical. For that reason, an integrative and non-systematic qualitative narrative review of secondary literature has been employed as appropriate for this theoretical contribution. Searches have been conducted in Scopus and Google Scholar databases, in addition to publisher sites and webpages of official data custodians (Transparency International, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the National Bureau of Statistics and Afrobarometer). Search terms have included: ("leadership deficit" OR "leadership failure" OR "public sector leadership") AND (Nigeria OR Africa); ("sustainable governance" OR "good governance") AND "public institutions"; "institutional theory" AND "public administration"; "ethical leadership" AND "public sector"; "pockets of effectiveness" AND Nigeria; ("civil service reform" OR "public sector reform") AND leadership; and "state-owned enterprises" AND board AND Nigeria.

The inclusion criteria were (a) peer-reviewed articles, books and chapters on leadership, ethics, governance, institutions or reform in public sector settings published between 2018 and 2026, focusing on Nigeria and other African contexts but accepting non-African examples only when they provided evidence on a particular framework dimension; (b) foundational theoretical works regardless of date; (c) older Nigeria-specific studies where no recent equivalent could be found; (d) official statistics and survey results from their official custodians; and (e) a limited number of institutional, policy and press texts that describe practice. Only English language sources have been considered. Exclusion criteria include opinion pieces cited as supporting evidence for an empirical claim, sources whose full bibliographic details could not be found, and secondary sources where primary data were available from the data custodian.

Since the search strategy has been purposive and iterative, no count has been kept of records that have been screened in a way required by PRISMA. Thus, none is reported. The final sample of sources includes 45 works: 21 peer-reviewed journal articles, 11 books and chapters, one conference paper, 8 official statistical, institutional and program documents, and 4 press or practitioner commentaries. The grey literature has three limited uses: description of context based on official statistics, description of design of certain programs in official documents that have no scholarly peer-review process, and description of practitioner views. Following Adams et al. (2017), who justify the role of grey literature in management studies as practices change faster than academic journals can publish, we acknowledge their limitations: such sources provide designs, intentions and activities but not confirmed outcomes, none of the sources in this study provides outcome evidence, and each source use is labeled in text.

Literature review

This section reviews the relevant literature on the key concepts underpinning the study.

Conceptual review

Leadership deficit and leadership failure are distinguished in this paper. In the authors' own working definition, leadership failure refers to a singular event, such as corrupt practices or policy decisions, while leadership deficit refers to a systemic and ongoing lack of leadership competences and values, and of the institutional setting enabling sustainable governance. According to Turaki et al. (2024) qualitative content analysis of secondary data, weak governance, weak accountability and elite complicity are associated with banditry, kidnappings and other forms of insecurity and imply that corruption persists in Nigeria since 1999; in the case in question, it would be better described as a systemic deficit rather than as disconnected mistakes. The distinction redirects the focus of intervention from the moral encouragement of individual officials to institutional reform.

Sustainable governance is also used as the authors' own working definition in this paper – a style of public administration in which the institutions provide services equitably and responsibly, maintain them during political transitions and periods of shortage of resources and ensure the sustainability of the process for the following administrations. It is informed by the good governance literature linking the quality of public administration to such concepts as accountability, transparency, the rule of law, participation and responsiveness (Addink, 2019), and introduces an additional criterion of sustainability during the changes in leadership. Without a stable institutional framework, multiyear long investments in infrastructure, public finances and regional integration will not survive the transition to the next administration, thus making it essential to pay attention to both personal traits of leaders and the institutional framework that can remain unchanged despite the transition.

Public institutions in Nigeria refer to the formalized governmental structures at the federal, state and local government levels (ministries, departments, agencies, parastatals, and state-owned enterprises) responsible for implementing policies and providing corresponding services. The composition of boards and the management of these public institutions represents one of the manifestations of the leadership deficit. Nolas-Alausa (2026), the director-general of Chartered Institute of Directors Nigeria, states in The Guardian (Nigeria) that many state-owned enterprise boards consist of politically appointed members, and no transparent criteria of the selection process are available. It is an expert opinion rather than a study; it partially confirms the results of Nwafor et al. (2020), who conducted a survey among 30 state-owned enterprises in Imo State and interviewed 30 top managers about the factors affecting corporate governance, and identified political influence among the six significant factors. Both sources are quite limited and there is very little evidence on board appointments, thus it should be researched further. The political bias in appointments undermines the independence of the supervision and control process, therefore the politicization of appointments is addressed within Consistency (Section 2.4.4).

Leadership frameworks specify the traits, behavior and competencies of successful leaders and provide a common language for recruiting, training and assessing officials. The UK Civil Service Success Profiles describe nine behaviors of leaders, such as Leadership, Seeing the Big Picture, and Working Together (Cabinet Office, 2025); the U.S. Office of Personnel Management provides proficiency levels for leadership competencies (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.); the California Department of Human Resources develops competency and leadership competency models (California Department of Human Resources, n.d.). They all

show how useful it is to group the leadership requirements in dimensions, as it is done in the 5C Framework. However, unlike the 5C Framework, these frameworks presuppose the stability and meritocratic nature of the public service.

Empirical review

Research on the relationships among leadership weaknesses, insecurity and underdevelopment in Nigeria is increasingly abundant but inconsistent in terms of quality. This literature review therefore categorizes primary research data, scholarly peer-reviewed studies and program cases that provide illustrative, but not empirical, evidence.

According to the Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey 2024 conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria covering the period from May 2023 to April 2024, 2,235,954 kidnapping incidents occurred in Nigeria; 65% of kidnapped households paid ransom estimated at ₦2.7 million per incident, and the total ransom payment is ₦2.23 trillion (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024; News Agency of Nigeria, 2024). The statistics are national estimates from a household survey rather than crime reports. According to Dataphyte (2024), about ₦9.17 trillion were allocated to seven security-related federal units between 2020 and 2024. The figures are not comparable because one relates to a single year of recorded incidents while another to five-year allocations, and neither identifies leadership as the reason. The figures are consistent with the notion that significant budgeting has not been accompanied with adequate security results, and with the argument presented by Turaki et al. (2024) that corrupt practices and the involvement of elites impede security institutions. Here insecurity is viewed as a symptom of institutional and leadership deficiencies rather than evidence thereof.

In terms of institutional arrangements, prebendal politics in Nigeria are described by Joseph (1987), and the general model of neopatrimonialism on the continent is illustrated by Bratton and van de Walle (1997). Comparative study of the Nigerian federal organizations is presented by Roll (2011, 2014), which is the closest case in point. Studying agencies like NAFDAC and NAPTIP, Roll (2011) concludes that both capable and committed pioneer leaders mattered, yet leadership led to a pocket of effectiveness only where certain political factors were present: the president's interest in the agency's activity, protection from any kinds of interference, and negotiated independence and resources. Such agencies remain vulnerable and rely on the political backing of the president. It is the strongest evidence of one of the key premises of the 5C Framework: leadership does matter but is dependent on the political and institutional conditions and is not sustainable.

Comparative African evidence is limited in scope and mostly descriptive. Leadership Excellence in Africa's Public Sector (LEAPS) program launched by the African Capacity Building Foundation in Harare on 5 November 2024 consists of a curriculum related to self-leadership, team building, organization strategy and financial management and coaching from experienced African leaders and plans expansion into Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal (African Capacity Building Foundation, n.d.). In Nigeria, program director of the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation says that the partnership of the foundation with the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford has provided 34 public servants with the Master of Public Policy degree and has trained 306 public sector leaders since 2021, and that the 2024 scholar who completed the program is now at the Nigeria Revenue Service and applies his knowledge to internal reforms (Olowu, 2026). Neither source provides outcome data, and the second is an interview of the program director himself. Both sources are used only as examples of designs focused on individual capability but not as evidence of their success.

Evidence on ethical leadership, related to Character, comes almost exclusively from outside Nigeria. Using the survey data collected from U.S. federal agencies, Kim (2023) demonstrates that ethical leadership reduces the amount of unethical behaviors of public workers and that the impact is partially mediated by ethics programs. Applying multidimensional model of ethical leadership, Reddick et al. (2025) examine the issue with a survey of U.S. local government managers, while using Q methodology, Jilani et al. (2026) conduct stakeholder interviews in Bangladesh and demonstrate that ethical governance, depoliticized recruitment based on merit and professional development rank among the priorities for the reforms. Eyong (2019) is the only source that includes Nigeria, but the study is qualitative. The findings may not necessarily apply to Nigeria, but are used to illustrate that ethical leadership can be conceptualized and measured in public organizations. The sources are very diverse in terms of quality and very few actually test the effect of leadership on institutional effectiveness, so the convergence is illustrative rather than decisive.

Theoretical framework

The paper is guided by two complimentary theories. The first is the Transformational Leadership Theory, formulated by Burns (1978) and later developed by Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1994). The theory states that transformational leaders inspire followers to rise above their individual interests and pursue common goals using means of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Avolio et al. (2009) identify the theory as one of the most empirically solid leadership theories as it encompasses relational and developmental elements of influence. It is applicable to Nigeria as it helps to explain why some agencies function successfully in unfavorable governance conditions: according to Roll (2011), there were motivated pioneer leaders who created an organizational mission and negotiated its autonomy and resource base.

Transformational Leadership Theory fails to explain why inspiring leaders of Nigeria's public sector make little difference once leaving office. This gap can be filled by Institutional Theory, advanced by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and North (1990). It suggests looking at organizations through the prism of rules, norms and coercive, mimetic and normative forces. Organizations facing uncertainty tend to conform to the formal structure of legitimate entities (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and when formal structure is adopted without internalizing the functions, it becomes decoupled from practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Nigerian public sector frequently uses the structure of reforms, for instance, establishes anti-corruption departments and service charters but continues behaving the same way. Path dependence stressed by North (1990) helps to understand why leader-induced reforms return back once the leader leaves office, as well as Roll's (2011) findings about the dependence of pockets of effectiveness on continued political protection.

Two theories operate at different levels and they are combined on that basis. Character and Competence are individual level constructs, and they correspond to the individual focus of Transformational Leadership Theory (idealized influence and intellectual stimulation). Consistency is an institutional level construct and it corresponds to Institutional Theory. Capacity can be described at both levels: at the individual level it includes intellectual capabilities, education and experience of the leader, while at the institutional level it implies resources, systems and power of the organization. Credibility cannot be attributed solely to any of the two levels, as it is a relational variable, the trust and legitimacy bestowed on the leader and the institution by followers, citizens and other stakeholders. Followers' trust in the leader is the

key response in transformational leadership, and legitimacy bestowed on the entity by various audiences is the key element in Institutional Theory.

The 5C leadership framework

The 5Cs model of leadership comprises five interconnected dimensions: Character, Competence, Capacity, Consistency and Credibility. Four of these dimensions are antecedent: they are qualities of leaders and features of organizations that can be measured, resourced and developed. The fifth one, Credibility, is an output dimension: it is acquired from other people and cannot be bestowed through training or nomination.

The 5Cs are sequential in terms of their process and recursive in terms of consequences. Character and Competence are personal inputs to the model. Capacity (individual and organizational) is the platform through which these inputs translate into service delivery and which they themselves facilitate building up. Consistency crystallizes this capacity in rules and practices that continue beyond the change of leaders. Credibility emerges from others' observation of Character, Competence, Capacity and Consistency over time. The recursion is a feedback loop, rather than a cycle returning to the beginning: the acquired credibility makes an organization more legitimate and protected, thus increasing its Capacity, while it increases the reputational risks for a leader to depart from Character. The agencies from Roll (2011) are an example of the process, as successful leaders could bargain for more autonomy and resources to deliver even more successfully.

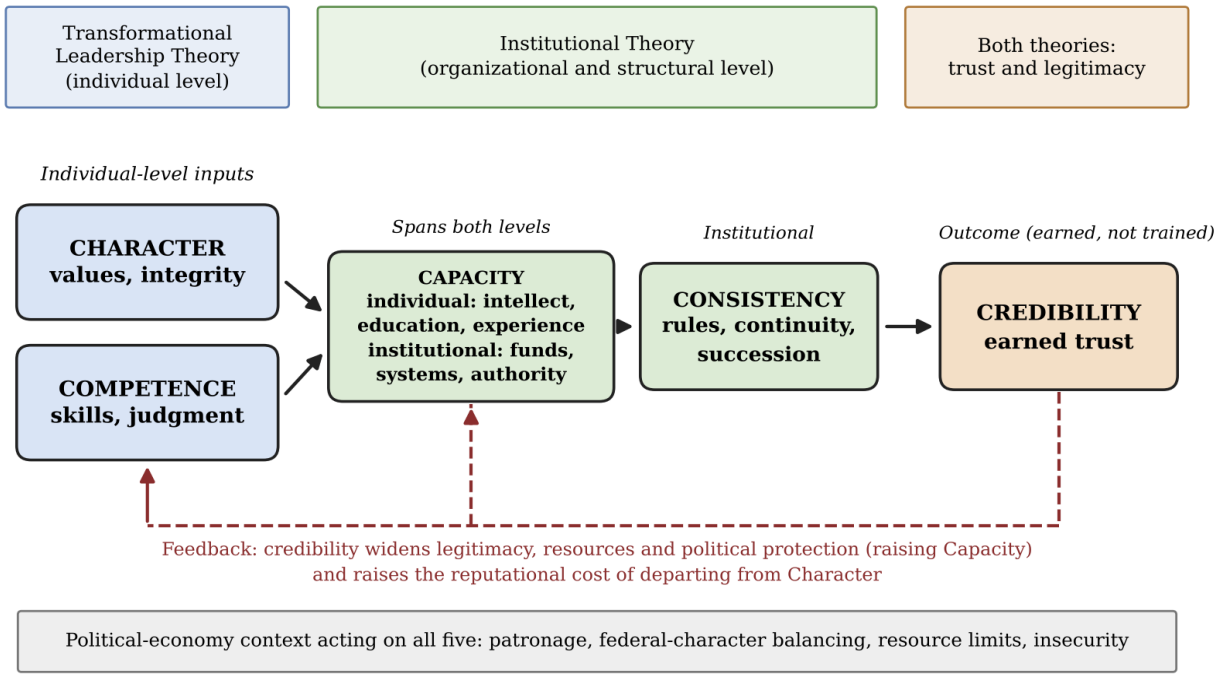


Figure 1. *The 5C Leadership Framework: levels, sequence and feedback.*

There are three boundaries that separate dimensions that overlap. Character and Credibility differ in locus and judge: Character is an internal disposition of the leader, based on conduct and screening; Credibility is an attribution made by others, and the two may be different, as in a situation where a leader of good character leads an organization that has lost its credibility, or a situation where the leader is credible to the followers due to his ability to distribute patronage. Competence and individual Capacity differ in kind: Competence is a skill exhibited by the leader in the exercise of office, and judged on performance, whereas individual

Capacity is an endowment of intellect, education and experience from which the competence is derived. Capacity and Consistency differ in that Capacity is a stock, the ability to act (the ability, including but not limited to physical, mental and emotional), whereas Consistency is a pattern, the rule-governed predictability of actions over time and successive leaders; an organization may be well-resourced and use its resources inconsistently, or consistent at a low capacity.

Character

Character is the ethical basis of the framework: the internalized values of honesty, integrity and serving the public interest that make the leader sacrifice personal or narrow parochial interests for the public good. Ethical leadership is normatively appropriate conduct and its promotion among the followers, according to Brown et al. (2005); Lawton and Páez (2015) describe it as a framework combining the personal moral character of the leader with active promotion of ethics among the followers. The model of Kim (2023) and Reddick et al. (2025) distinguish between the moral person dimension (integrity) and moral manager dimension (promotion and enforcement of standards), and suggest that ethical leadership can be measured in public organizations, even if not in Nigeria so far. The commentary on politically-appointed boards (Nolas-Alausa, 2026) and findings about the influence of politics on state-owned enterprise governance in Imo State (Nwafor et al., 2020) are consistent with an environment where integrity is subordinate to political loyalty. The evidence is limited and this is a hypothesis for testing. Should it prove correct, Character should be an explicit criterion for appointment through integrity screening, asset declaration and assessment.

Competence

Competence is the skill exhibited by the leader in translating intentions into performance. Where Character is concerned with the will to serve the public interest, Competence is about the ability to do so. The competency models of the UK Civil Service (Cabinet Office, 2025), the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (n.d.) and the California Department of Human Resources (n.d.) demonstrate that competence can be defined, evaluated and assessed and does not have to be assumed from seniority. There is indirect Nigerian evidence: Roll (2011) found that appointing qualified and motivated pioneer leaders was one of the conditions under which agencies become pockets of effectiveness, suggesting that Competence is necessary but not sufficient, and Aig-Imoukhuede and LEAPS programs (Olowu, 2026; African Capacity Building Foundation, n.d.) demonstrate structured investment in public servants' skills without reporting on the results.

Capacity

Capacity is the stock of abilities and means needed to translate intentions into results, and it exists at two levels. At the individual level it is the intellectual capability, education and experience that determine the set of problems a leader can comprehend and address. At the institutional level it is budget, manpower, system and delegated powers. The two levels complement each other: an experienced, educated leader will have difficulty delivering in an organization whose budget is not allocated, whose systems are poor or whose powers are not delegated, and a well-resourced institution with inexperienced leaders will waste its resources. Individual capacity can be developed through education and experience and evaluated at appointment. Institutional capacity is based on structural endowments that none of the leaders control individually, although leaders with Character and Competence can negotiate, protect and build them. Roll's (2011) directors negotiated with the president for better legislation and greater autonomy, fought for budget lines, generated revenue and sought international support, provided the political environment allowed that. Turaki et al. (2024) ascribe weak response to insecurity to

the lack of institutional capacity as well as corruption, meaning that sound decisions are not implemented where implementing organizations are poorly resourced. Thus interventions that focus on developing leaders and neglect parallel institutional development are unlikely to produce sustainable results.

Consistency

Consistency is the predictability and rule-based nature of leadership decisions, standards and practices. It is based on Institutional Theory: North's (1990) path dependence and DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) isomorphism demonstrate that organizations are shaped more by rules and incentives than individual intentions, and decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) describes formal appointment and succession rules that exist but are not followed. If Nolas-Alausa (2026) and Nwafor et al. (2020) are representative, the standards of appointments and governance are shaped more by preferences of particular administrations than by stable rules, which is what prebendal accounts of Nigerian politics would lead us to expect (Joseph, 1987). Roll's (2011) pockets of effectiveness demonstrate the cost of that approach: they persist only as long as political support is sustained, and the employees tied to a departing leadership may find themselves endangered. Improvements in individual character and competence are thus insufficient unless anchored in codified standards that survive transitions, such as succession plans, performance criteria and transparent, merit-based appointments.

Credibility

It is the aggregate level of trust granted by followers, citizens and stakeholders in a leader and institution based on demonstrated Character, Competence, Capacity and Consistency. Kouzes and Posner (2017) posit that credibility is the bedrock of leadership since the follower accepts the vision of the leader in exchange for integrity, competence and ability to inspire trust. According to Posner and Kouzes (1988) who surveyed 998 subordinates, trustworthiness, expertise and dynamism correlate with certain behaviors that demonstrate leadership and this supports the idea of Credibility as an independent outcome. This is a short paper in 1988 that focused on a western sample, and there is no study of the application of the credibility model in Nigerian public organizations for further research. Credibility as an outcome will therefore be assessed and not trained. Instead, the four antecedents and the behaviors that earn credibility can be developed, for example, keeping promises and transparency of decision-making.

Loss of credibility impacts negatively on the citizen's motivation to obey and collaborate. Governance and corruption indices do not assess performance and perceived corruption, but rather trust, hence the survey data. Only 15% of Nigerians in the 2022 Afrobarometer survey trusted the police moderately or very much. In addition, majorities thought that most or all of the officials in the Office of the Presidency (59%), members of Parliament (64%), local government councillors (54%) and tax officials (51%) were corrupt, and 44% considered civil servants to be corrupt (Afrobarometer, 2023). Perceived corruption is not the same as distrust, but it could serve as a good proxy for the latter. The literature on political trust connects trust in institutions with voluntary obedience and support for policies (Levi & Stoker, 2000); therefore, distrust is expected to increase governance costs and reduce support for reforms.

Operational definitions and indicators

Table 1 contains the operational definitions and indicators of each dimension with their level, illustration and possible sources of data. The indicators are suggestions and not validated measures. Instruments used in other places, such as the ethical leadership dimensions of Brown et al. (2005) and Reddick et al. (2025) would require adaption and validation in Nigeria.

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Table 1. ***Operational definitions and illustrative indicators of the five Cs.***

Dimension	Level	Operational definition	Illustrative indicators	Possible data source
Character	Individual	Internalized commitment to place the public interest above private or parochial interest, shown in conduct.	Verified asset declarations; absence of sustained misconduct findings; conflict-of-interest disclosures; scores on adapted ethical leadership scales.	Integrity screening records; 360-degree surveys.
Competence	Individual	Skill demonstrated in the exercise of office: technical, managerial and policy-analytical.	Rating against a published post profile through structured assessment; completion of accredited leadership development; 360-degree ratings on strategic and financial management.	Assessment scores; training records; 360-degree surveys.
Capacity	Individual and institutional	Individual: intellectual capability, education and experience. Institutional: funds, people, systems and delegated authority.	Individual: qualifications and years of relevant experience against the post profile; assessed analytical ability. Institutional: share of approved budget released and utilized; vacancy rate in critical posts; working financial and personnel systems; documented delegation of authority.	Appointment files; budget execution and establishment records; annual capacity diagnostic.
Consistency	Institution	Rule-governed, predictable decisions and standards that persist across time and changes of leadership.	Share of board and top appointments made against published criteria; share of officeholders completing statutory tenure; active succession plans; continuity of policies after a change of head.	Appointment records; legal instruments; compliance reviews.
Credibility	Relational outcome	The trust followers, citizens and stakeholders place in the leader and institution as competent and principled.	Staff trust index; stakeholder satisfaction; citizen trust and perceived-corruption items; voluntary compliance and complaint rates.	Staff and stakeholder surveys; national surveys.

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Position relative to existing models

The framework does not serve as a replacement to the other existing models. The similarities and differences between it and other models can be seen in Table 2. Neither its individual dimensions, nor even any two of them together, have not been described before. But the configuration and the problem the framework is constructed around are novel. First, organizational capacity and institutional continuity are regarded as elements of leadership here; therefore, the effectiveness of leadership is judged through the capabilities and sustainability of institutions rather than qualities of individuals who lead them. Second, the framework is constructed around the patronage problem, which is the key issue in Nigerian political economy (Joseph, 1987; Ekeh, 1975; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997); the answer to it is Consistency, which refers to rule-governed appointment and succession and clearly differentiates this framework from the models presented in Table 2. Third, Credibility in this framework is treated as an achievement in conditions of low public trust (Afrobarometer, 2023). Fourth, the conditionality of leadership described in it is based on Nigerian evidence (Roll, 2011, 2014). The majority of evidence supporting individual dimensions of the framework is non-Nigerian, and the framework itself is a hypothesis to be tested.

Table 2. ***The 5C Framework compared with existing leadership models.***

Model	Core focus	Limitation in Nigerian public institutions	What the 5C Framework adds
Credibility model (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Posner & Kouzes, 1988)	Credibility as the foundation of leadership.	Leader-centered; assumes an enabling organization; Western samples.	Keeps Credibility as an outcome of conduct and institutional conditions, assessed by others.
Ethical and servant leadership (Brown et al., 2005; Lawton & Páez, 2015; Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck, 2011)	Moral conduct, service to followers, stewardship.	Leader- and follower-centered; silent on capacity, continuity of rules and appointment politics.	Uses them as the basis of Character; adds Capacity and Consistency as conditions under which character can matter.
Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985)	Inspiring followers beyond self-interest.	Explains individual influence but not why change fades when leaders leave.	Pairs it with Institutional Theory to explain both levels.
Ubuntu and human-centric models (Mangaliso, 2001; Eyong, 2019; Zvavahera & Svongoro, 2024)	Communal, people-centered, culturally grounded leadership.	Mainly cultural and relational; Eyong (2019) found a gap between ideals and practice.	Treats the institutional conditions behind that gap as part of leadership.
Competency frameworks (Cabinet Office, 2025; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.)	Assessable behaviors and proficiency levels.	Assume a stable, merit-based service.	Backs competencies with Capacity and protects them from patronage through Consistency.

The framework does not serve as a replacement to the other existing models. The similarities and differences between it and other models can be seen in Table 2. Neither its individual dimensions, nor even any two of them together, have not been described before. But the configuration and the problem the framework is constructed around are novel. First, organizational capacity and institutional continuity are regarded as elements of leadership here; therefore, the effectiveness of leadership is judged through the capabilities and sustainability of institutions on one hand and then to the qualities of individuals who lead them. Second, the framework is constructed around the patronage problem, which is the key issue in Nigerian political economy (Joseph, 1987; Ekeh, 1975; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997); the answer to it is Consistency, which refers to rule-governed appointment and succession and clearly differentiates this framework from the models presented in Table 2. Third, Credibility in this framework is treated as an achievement in conditions of low public trust (Afrobarometer, 2023). Fourth, the conditionality of leadership described in it is based on Nigerian evidence (Roll, 2011, 2014). The majority of evidence supporting individual dimensions of the framework is non-Nigerian, and the framework itself is a hypothesis to be tested.

Discussion of findings

First, the literature makes a consistent point: the issues with leadership in Nigeria cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of weak individuals or institutional deficits but by the way in which the two interact. Research on corruption and insecurity (Turaki et al., 2024), on prebendal and neopatrimonial politics (Joseph, 1987; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997) and on Nigerian institutions (Roll, 2011, 2014) all support the view that institutional factors impose constraints on individual actions and that achievements related to individuals are precarious. Official statistics on kidnapping, ransom and security allocations (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Dataphyte, 2024) support but do not prove the claim that spending without institutional capacity and credible leadership has not resulted in security. This reinforces the logic of a framework that includes individual traits (Character, Competence and individual Capacity), institutional conditions (institutional Capacity and Consistency) and Credibility as the outcome linking them.

Second, leadership development initiatives in African public institutions at least aim to be multidimensional. LEAPS offers a combination of curriculum, coaching and institutional capacity building efforts (African Capacity Building Foundation, n.d.), while the Aig-Imoukhuede partnership focuses on building the capability of mid-career public servants (Olowu, 2026). Both are examples, and neither provides outcomes, but they suggest a potential principle for designing leadership interventions: working on only one C in isolation, whether in the form of anti-corruption campaigns targeting Character alone or technical training ignoring Consistency, is likely insufficient. Whether interventions that foster all five Cs simultaneously produce more successful outcomes is a question for empirical analysis.

Third, the literature points out to the limits of using foreign theories of leadership in contexts where they were not developed. As indicated differently by Zvavahera and Svongoro (2024) in relation to Zimbabwe and by Eyong (2019) in relation to councils in Cameroon and Nigeria, theories not adapted to the local context are unlikely to make an impact. The ideas about motivation presented by Transformational Leadership Theory and about consistency of rules put forward by Institutional Theory can be transplanted to Nigeria but only when adapted to the specific forms of the deficit, namely political appointments, bad succession planning and institutional distrust. The 5C Framework is thus a contextual adaptation of Western theories rather than their repudiation. Its implications touch upon three recurrent issues in Nigerian public administration. In relation to insecurity, higher spending without leaders capable of building

institutional trust and coordinating institutions is unlikely to resolve the issue. In terms of long-term policy implementation, multi-year commitments require sustained leaders and rules (Roll, 2011), which is provided for in the framework under the heading of Consistency. In relation to inclusive development, politically motivated appointments (Nolas-Alausa, 2026; Nwafor et al., 2020) mean that inclusive processes cannot be built merely through participation. The constitutional requirement of federal character in appointments – ensuring that government reflects the diversity of the country – is an appropriate inclusion method, and any merit-based reform would need to reconcile rather than undermine it.

The limitations of the synthesis must be discussed. The 5C Framework has not been tested using primary data collected in Nigerian public institutions and its dimensions lack the validated measures, such as used by Reddick et al. (2025) in the case of ethical leadership and Posner and Kouzes (1988) in the case of credibility and adapted to Nigerian samples. The non-systematic approach, lack of record screening and use of grey literature reduce the replicability and evidential power of the synthesis. Most of the literature used to support individual dimensions was drawn from outside of Nigeria, and several Nigerian claims, especially those on board appointments, are based on scant evidence. None of the above reduces the conceptual value of the synthesis, which is to combine scattered strands of leadership and institutional literature and to present institutional conditions as an integral part of the leadership deficit.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this paper, the leadership deficit in Nigerian public institutions has been investigated, and a 5C Framework for Leadership has been developed and presented on the basis of Transformational Leadership Theory and Institutional Theory: Character and Competence as individual-level inputs, Capacity at both individual and institutional levels and Consistency as enabling conditions and Credibility as an earned outcome that feeds back into the other factors. The literature indicates that the crisis is not due to mere lack of individuals' moral qualities or institutional design flaws, but to the way in which the two interact. African program evidence is illustrative, but not evaluative, and the 5C Framework is offered for testing purposes. Six recommendations follow. Each mentions the responsible institution, the intervention mechanism, the timeframe and indicators for measuring progress. The responsible institutions are selected on the basis of their mandates, and their legal powers must be verified before adoption of these recommendations. The timeframes are staged so that early steps are made during one election cycle.

1. *Merit- and integrity-based appointment and promotion to leadership positions (Character, Competence and individual Capacity)* The Federal Civil Service Commission and the state civil service commissions, in collaboration with the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation and the Code of Conduct Bureau, need to publish a profile for each directorate level position and equivalents that specifies integrity, competence, educational and experience requirements of those in these leadership positions. Candidates will be assessed through structured interviews and asset declaration checks, and shortlist and assessment outcomes are to be published. The profile needs to be developed within one year, piloted in three to five Ministries, Departments and Agencies in months 12 to 24, and scaled up to the entire service in months 24 to 48. Success can be measured by the percentage of leadership appointments made against the published profiles, percentage of appointees with completed integrity screening, number of appointments overturned and challenges successfully met, and time taken to fill such appointments.

2. *Leadership development to match the five Cs (Competence, Capacity, Consistency and Character)*: The Administrative Staff College of Nigeria and universities with Public Administration Departments, in conjunction with the Office of the Head of the Civil Service, should develop modules for integrity (Character), policy analysis and management (Competence), financial and systems management (Capacity) and rules, succession and appointment procedures (Consistency), along with mentoring. Credibility should not be a module; instead modules on stakeholder engagement and delivery of commitment should deal with this conduct. The curriculum should be developed within one year, first cohort trained within 12 to 36 months, and evaluated in months 36 to 48. Measures are the number of officers completing the program, pre- and post-program 360-degree feedback, and supervisor rating after 12 months from program completion.
3. *Institutional capacity diagnostics and resourcing (institutional Capacity)*: The Office of the Head of the Civil Service and Bureau of Public Service Reforms, in partnership with the Budget Office of the Federation and supervising ministries, should adopt a standard annual institutional capacity diagnostic for each Ministry, Department and Agency, covering release of funds, critical vacant posts, working financial and personnel systems, and delegation of authority. Diagnostics results need to be published and leaders' performance targets set based on baseline capacity established by the diagnostic. This instrument needs to be developed within one year, first round of diagnostics completed in months 12 to 24, and the exercise carried out annually. Measures include the percentage of approved budget release and utilization, the percentage of critical posts vacant, the percentage of organizations with working financial and personnel systems, and service turnaround time.
4. *Statutory and regulatory protection for appointment and succession processes (Consistency):* The National Assembly and State Assemblies, in collaboration with the Bureau of Public Enterprises and civil service commissions, need to introduce laws or regulations on appointments to boards and key offices. Such laws or regulations need to have published criteria, skill matrix, fixed tenure with removal only on specified grounds, written succession plans, and disclosure of appointments. Drafting should be done in up to 18 months and enactment or binding regulations in 36 months and compliance monitored annually after enactment. Measures include the percentage of boards constituted in accordance with published criteria, percentage of office holders completing fixed tenures, the percentage of institutions having active succession plans, and continuity of policies despite change of heads.
5. *Redesigned leadership performance evaluation (all five Cs)*: The Office of the Head of the Civil Service and Bureau of Public Service Reforms, in collaboration with the civil service commissions, need to extend performance evaluations to cover the five dimensions. Credibility should be measured independently as an outcome through feedback from staff, stakeholders, and citizens and not through supervisors and self-ratings, evaluation outcomes used in promotions and successions, and aggregate results published. This evaluation system should be developed within one year, piloted in months 12 to 30 and rolled out in full between months 30 to 60. Measures are the percentage of leaders evaluated on the five dimensions, staff trust index, stakeholder satisfaction levels, and changes in both over successive years.
6. *Empirical validation of the framework (all five Cs):* Research universities and research institutes, facilitated by national research funding agencies and arrangements made

through the Office of the Head of the Civil Service, need to adapt and validate the indicators in Table 1, survey public servants and test the hypothesized relationships among the five Cs, including whether Capacity and Consistency moderate the effects of Character and Competence on institutional performance and Credibility is an outcome of the other four. Instruments need to be validated within one year and surveys and analyses completed between months 12 to 36. Measures are validated instruments, sample sizes and response rates, and published test of the framework.

Obstacles to implementation arising from political economy. These recommendations will face opposition and the theory in this paper identifies its source. Where appointments to boards and senior offices serve coalition-building and loyalty purposes (Joseph, 1987; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997), fixed tenure, competitive assessment and publication of criteria limit the discretion of the actors whose support is needed for reforms. Ministers, governors, party leaders and their patrons will resist or formally comply with reforms, thus creating the decoupling identified by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and may oppose merit-based reforms as an assault on federal-character principle. There are four strategies from the evidence provided in this paper. First, start in areas where there is overlap of political interest and organizational function since Roll's (2011) agencies were created as a result of presidential interest. Second, embed the rules in statute or binding regulation and not in executive circulars, and publish criteria and appointments so that any deviation is publicly known to civil society, professional associations and media. Third, sequence reforms in such a way that early measures (profiles and capacity diagnostics) impose little cost on powerful actors prior to adoption of contentious rules (protection of tenure and board selection). Fourth, recognize that reforms require political management, since political support will always be contingent and must be renewed continually (Roll, 2011). However, none of these guarantees success and patronage cannot be overcome with technical design alone.

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