



## The paradox of leadership and employee retention: A qualitative review of literature on Ugandan higher education

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### Abstract

Styles of leadership in management are a critical determinant of employee retention in higher education institutions, especially within the developing contexts of Sub-Saharan Africa. While leadership styles are diverse, this study is keen on exploring the influence of democratic and autocratic leadership styles on employee retention in selected universities in Central Uganda. Adopting a qualitative and exploratory research design, the study draws from scholarly works relevant to the study were consulted from both general and specialized databases. Key themes emerging from the literature reveal that democratic leadership, characterized by participatory decision-making, open communication, and employee empowerment enhance job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and staff retention. Conversely, autocratic leadership, defined by centralized control and limited employee engagement, is linked to demoralization, absenteeism, and high turnover rates. The study concludes that while autocratic leadership may be effective in specific crisis-driven contexts, sustained application of this style contributes negatively to staff retention outcomes in the long-term. The findings emphasize the need for higher education institutions to embrace more ethical, inclusive, and psychologically safe leadership approaches to improve employee loyalty and institutional sustainability. To solve the problem of employee retention in universities in Uganda, the study recommended Promotion of democratic and participatory leadership, Leadership development and training, Context-sensitive leadership application, Integration of personality and organizational fit in leadership practices, and fostering institutional culture of trust and transparency.

**Keywords:** Leadership Style, Democratic Leadership Style, Autocratic Leadership Style, Retention Intention, Employee Retention, Higher Education

## Introduction

Employee retention remains a critical challenge in higher education institutions across Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Uganda, where both public and private universities - face high staff turnover, deteriorating morale, and inconsistent institutional performance (Nabakiibi, 2022, Bigabwenkya & Binta, 2024). Central to this challenge is the role of leadership style, which significantly influences staff motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Mai, 2023, Injikuru et al., 2024). While several leadership models have been explored globally, democratic and autocratic leadership styles remain among the most prominent and impactful in shaping employee behavior and retention outcomes (Jaafar et al., 2021, Easley, 2022).

Democratic leadership - characterized by participative decision-making, open communication, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities - has been widely credited for fostering high levels of employee motivation, organizational loyalty, and satisfaction (Mai, 2023, Maddock, 2023). In the context of universities in Central Uganda, democratic leadership has been associated with more inclusive institutional cultures that promote employee engagement and reduce turnover intentions (Wandiba, 2023, Katuramu et al., 2016). Scholars argue that this style enhances psychological safety, strengthens social capital, and allows for meaningful contributions from both academic and non-academic staff, thereby increasing overall retention (Kyambade, Nkurunziza, et al., 2024).

Conversely, autocratic leadership - marked by top-down control, limited employee input, and rigid structures has been linked to negative outcomes such as demoralization, absenteeism,

and strained leader-employee relations (Andeyo Lily Mugove, 2018). Studies reveal that autocratic environments often suppress innovation, breed toxic organizational cultures, and generate resentment among employees, especially when leaders misuse authority or disregard staff well-being (Krystel, 2025). In Uganda's university context, such leadership has contributed to poor coordination, unmet staff needs, and diminished institutional development (Nabakiibi, 2022). Furthermore, autocratic leadership has been identified as particularly detrimental to introverted and highly organized employees who are more likely to disengage or exit under strict supervision (Easley, 2022).

While some literature acknowledges potential situational benefits of autocratic leadership such as in crisis or high-pressure environments (Wen et al., 2019) its prolonged application in academic institutions often leads to dissatisfaction, low morale, and high turnover. More so, future leaders exposed to toxic autocratic practices may perpetuate harmful leadership behaviors, undermining efforts to cultivate ethical and socially responsible governance within institutions (Kyambade, Mugambwa, et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of global research, limited scholarly attention has been given to how these leadership styles impact staff retention in Uganda's higher education sector. Existing studies have primarily focused on other academic leadership styles like transformational, transactional styles, missing out on the main leadership styles presented

By the 3 styles model by Kurt Lewin (Crosby, 2021), thereby limiting generalizability (Kanaabi, Moses Wilson Kasule, George Owino, 2022). There is also a notable gap in

understanding the experiences of non-academic staff and the mechanisms through which leadership influences their retention outcomes. This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a qualitative exploration of the influence of democratic and autocratic leadership styles on employee retention in selected universities in Central Uganda. Drawing upon a wide range of peer-reviewed literature and secondary data from reputable academic sources, this research provides contextually grounded insights that can inform leadership practices, institutional policy, and future studies.

### **Theoretical framework:**

This study is anchored on Social Exchange Theory (Cherry, 2023) and Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001), both of which provide a foundational understanding of the dynamics between leadership and employee retention within higher education institutions.

According to Social Exchange Theory, employees evaluate their relationship with leaders based on the perceived balance of rewards and costs. When leaders exhibit supportive behaviors, such as fairness, recognition, and trust, they foster positive exchanges that strengthen employees' emotional commitment and reduce turnover intentions. Conversely, ineffective or exploitative leadership erodes trust and weakens the reciprocal bond, resulting in disengagement and attrition.

Job Embeddedness Theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the web of connections that tie employees to their jobs and organizations (Mitchell et al., 2001). It highlights three key dimensions of fit, links, and sacrifice, that influence employees' decisions to stay or leave. In the context of Ugandan higher education, leaders who cultivate a sense of cultural and professional fit, strengthen relational networks,

and increase the perceived cost of leaving the institution contribute to higher retention levels. Together, these theories offer a dual lens for understanding the paradox of leadership in employee retention - where leadership behaviors can simultaneously motivate commitment and, if poorly exercised, trigger withdrawal. They provide a framework for exploring how leadership styles and personality traits interact with institutional contexts to shape retention outcomes among academic and administrative staff.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Leadership Styles and Employee Retention***

Leadership is a multifaceted concept characterized by a range of behaviors, actions, and styles tailored to suit specific contexts and organizational needs (Bilola, 2023). Calin, (2024) emphasizes that leadership styles that influence employee retention are shaped by unique traits of leaders, their attitudes, work approaches, and the nature of their interactions with subordinates and the broader environment. The importance of leadership in employee retention has been underscored in a report titled 'What HR Leaders Predict for the Next Wave of Workplace Evolution', which indicates that 40% of leaders rank talent retention as their primary concern in 2024 (Morfin, 2023).

Leaders in organizations play a pivotal role in shaping employee behavior, engagement, and attitudes by not only equipping employees with the necessary tools and knowledge but also fostering a conducive work environment that promotes job satisfaction and commitment (Balakrishnan, 2022). Karani, (2022), Swift, (2024), and findings in 20 Best Employee Retention Quotes (2024) agree that employees tend to leave managers rather than

organizations. Poor leadership is frequently cited as the main reason employees disengage or exit, rather than job roles, customers, or coworkers. Bichsel et al., (2023) provide further empirical evidence from a 2023 employee retention survey, revealing that 20.7% of employees expressed a desire for new supervisors, and 10.3% attributed turnover to unsatisfactory coworker dynamics, both of which are directly tied to leadership effectiveness. These findings are reinforced by Topçu et al., (2024), who demonstrate that psychological disparities between leaders and subordinates across hierarchical levels significantly influence retention tendencies.

Effective leadership, plays a critical role in retaining competent and dedicated staff by motivating and supporting them (Turyahikayo et al., 2023). Multiple studies identify leadership styles and employee commitment as key determinants of organizational success or failure (Bilola, 2023, Tafesse & Mohammedhussen, 2020, Likoko & Kipkeni, 2022). Mathew & Isbr, (2024) argue that an organization's capacity to retain its workforce is heavily influenced by the effectiveness of its leadership. Furthermore, leaders must provide meaningful development opportunities, which inspire employees to remain committed (Tania & Kowser, 2022). Leadership's influence on retention extends beyond policy implementation to include its psychological and cultural impacts. Soetirto et al., (2023) argue that employee retention is fundamentally a management issue, not just an HR function. Effective leadership should, therefore, involve strategies that cultivate job satisfaction, enhance motivation, and promote a positive organizational culture, which directly impacts retention.

Adamska-Chudzińska & Pawlak, (2024) advocate for personalized retention strategies that consider individual employee motivators. Aligning with this, Saul Mubanda Muyiggwa, John Paul Kasujja, (2020) recommend that university leadership in Makerere and Kyambogo foster professional development to improve staff commitment. This aligns with the warning from Betterworks CEO - Doug Dennerline, who cautions that neglecting employee development can lead to disengagement and attrition (Gouldsbury, 2024).

Retention is not only critical for institutional effectiveness and profitability but also for sustaining long-term success, as staff turnover entails significant costs (Sitthiwarongchai et al., 2019). Leadership styles can either inspire or demotivate employees, significantly affecting their decision to stay or leave (Adedamola Adekanbi Favour, 2016). Leadership's role in steering an organization through competitive environments is paramount (Ng'ethe et al., 2012, Dedic et al., 2022). Mugarura & Kaberuka, (2018) define retention as an organization's ability to hold onto desirable employees longer than its competitors. Leadership styles shape employees' organizational commitment, which in turn influences retention rates (Krystel, 2025, Ng'ethe et al., 2012).

Gallup, (2023) attributes 70% of team engagement to leadership, with alarming turnover intent in Sub-Saharan Africa at 70%, and 49% in North Africa. Moreover, Gallup Consulting, (2024) describes phenomena such as "quiet quitting" and "loud quitting," both indicative of disengaged employees and deteriorating trust in leadership. These issues call for participative leadership strategies to rebuild

trust and boost engagement. Mugizi & Nuwatuhaire, (2019) further recommend that universities need to adopt leadership styles that strengthen talent retention strategies to improve employee engagement and stability.

Mai, (2023) reinforces that leadership styles critically influence the workplace atmosphere, job satisfaction, and employee motivation. This aligns with findings from Ishola, Adedayo, Yusuf Abdulkareem, (2020) in Tanzanian private universities, which highlight poor administrative strategies and leadership as major factors in low academic staff retention. Khan & Abdullah, (2023) further categorize leadership styles into democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire, each with distinct impacts on employee engagement and retention.

Employee perception of leadership behavior significantly affects their satisfaction, commitment, and intent to stay, as noted by Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, (2015). The interaction between leadership and employees plays a central role in shaping productivity and retention outcomes. Gallup, (2024) also finds that stress levels among employees in regions like East Asia and North America are influenced by work conditions, which leaders can mitigate by fostering engagement.

Soetirto et al., (2023) note that contemporary organizations face complex workforce dynamics, including diversity and generational differences, which challenge retention efforts. Addressing these issues through inclusive leadership styles can offer a competitive edge (Kato et al., 2023). Gallup, (2023) underscores that leadership is the cornerstone of employee development, with engagement levels doubling when employees are trained and supported.

While demographic factors play a role in turnover, as Mutsotso, (2018) notes, there remains a lack of in-depth analysis on leadership's influence on retention. Mugizi & Nuwatuhaire, (2019) suggest that leadership personality traits may enhance commitment, while Thanh & Quang, (2022) highlight the effectiveness of situational leadership styles in improving engagement.

Research summarized in Turnover and Retention (Holtom et al., 2008) suggests that democratic leadership—marked by employee involvement and empowerment—fosters job satisfaction and retention. In contrast, autocratic and laissez-faire styles, which limit employee input or create ambiguity, often lead to dissatisfaction and increased turnover.

The literature consistently affirms that leadership styles are pivotal in influencing employee retention across various organizational contexts, including universities. Effective leadership—particularly democratic, transformational, and participative styles—enhances job satisfaction, engagement, and organizational commitment, ultimately reducing turnover. Conversely, toxic, autocratic, or laissez-faire leadership styles contribute to disengagement and high attrition rates. Leaders play a vital role in addressing individual needs, supporting career development, and fostering psychological well-being, all of which are crucial for retention. Despite the breadth of existing literature, a contextual gap remains, especially in African university settings. There is a clear need for localized research to understand the unique dynamics of leadership and retention within Central Ugandan universities.

## Democratic Leadership Style and Employee Retention

Democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership, is defined by the active involvement of employees in decision-making processes. Leaders under this style consult with subordinates, solicit their input, and integrate their suggestions into the final decisions (Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, 2015). Bertsch et al., (2017) further categorize democratic leadership into three forms: consultative (where leaders seek input but retain decision-making authority), consensus (where group input influences decisions based on potential impact), and pure democratic (where the group holds final authority). In educational institutions, including selected universities in Central Uganda, democratic leadership is increasingly valued for its potential to foster inclusive governance and staff retention.

Singh, (2019) underscores that organizations that provide platforms for employees to express workplace concerns are more likely to retain their workforce. This is corroborated by Mai, (2023), who found a strong positive correlation between democratic leadership and employee retention. Similarly, a study on Makerere University Business School (MUBS) found that democratic leadership was positively associated with staff satisfaction and retention, with many employees expressing contentment with the participative style in place (Kalema, 2011).

Clarke et al., (2022) link democratic leadership to extroverted traits such as expressiveness, sociability, and assertiveness, noting that extroverted leaders are more likely to engage in interpersonal strategies like inspirational appeals and ingratiation, which in turn enhance employee engagement and loyalty. This

observation aligns with Yahaya et al., (2020), who found a significant positive relationship between extroversion and both transformational and democratic leadership styles, suggesting that social and communicative leaders increase employee satisfaction and retention.

Tafesse & Mohammedhussen, (2020) argue that effective leadership, particularly in participatory forms, enhances employee commitment and reduces turnover. The National Council for Higher Education supports this assertion, stating that consensus-based decision-making is crucial for development in higher education institutions (NCHE, 2022). According to Thanh & Quang, (2022), selecting an appropriate leadership style such as democratic leadership can significantly impact employee engagement and creativity, guiding staff toward shared institutional goals.

Govindaraju, (2018) emphasizes that democratic leadership motivates employees by aligning their behaviors with organizational objectives, while Abeh Ukaidi, (2016) asserts that democratic leaders outperform autocratic and laissez-faire leaders in influencing organizational performance. Nevertheless, Clarke et al., (2022) caution that organizational rigidity may limit the effectiveness of democratic practices, especially in hierarchical academic structures.

Andeyo Lily Mugove, (2018) and Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, (2015) argue that democratic leadership boosts employee ambition, motivation, and identification with the institution, as the participatory nature of the leadership style promotes transparency and trust. Employees are more likely to contribute proactively when involved in delegation and planning, thereby cultivating teamwork, morale, and retention. However, the literature reveals a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which democratic leadership enhances

retention, such as through job engagement and organizational loyalty. Additionally, cultural norms and institutional values in Ugandan universities may mediate the impact of democratic leadership.

Kim et al., (2021) found that respect for employee opinions and satisfaction with compensation are key predictors of retention, suggesting that leadership styles like democratic leadership by fostering inclusion and recognition enhance retention in academic settings. However, Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, (2015) caution that democratic leadership is not without flaws. Challenges such as pseudo-participation, crises, competency deficits, and lack of adherence may undermine its effectiveness. Nonetheless, overcoming these challenges can allow institutions to harness the full benefits of participative leadership empowerment, creativity, development, and organizational continuity.

Nguyen, (2023) concludes that democratic leadership outperforms autocratic and laissez-faire styles in fostering motivation and satisfaction, while Jaafar et al., (2021) report that democratic leaders promote collaboration and tolerance, which are essential for institutional success. However, their study lacks exploration of the origins of these leadership styles, the role of leader personality, and the perspectives of non-academic staff thereby leaving notable knowledge and participant gaps.

Democratic leadership, defined by employee participation and inclusivity in decision-making, plays a pivotal role in promoting employee retention within university settings. The literature consistently demonstrates that this style fosters trust, engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, key factors that reduce employee turnover (Mai, 2023, Singh,

2019, Yahaya et al., 2020). In the context of selected universities in Central Uganda, institutions such as MUBS have experienced positive retention outcomes under democratic leadership. However, challenges like organizational rigidity and pseudo-participation may limit its efficacy. Moreover, gaps remain in understanding how cultural dynamics, personality traits of leaders, and engagement of non-academic staff influence the relationship between democratic leadership and employee retention. Addressing these gaps will be crucial in developing contextually relevant strategies for improving staff retention in Ugandan universities.

### **Autocratic Leadership Style and Employee Retention**

Autocratic leadership, characterized by centralized decision-making, top-down directives, and limited employee input, remains a contentious topic in the context of employee retention in higher education institutions. Despite its widespread use, the autocratic leadership style remains under-researched and poorly understood, especially in the developing world's academic institutions (Floyd et al., 2023). In Nigeria, Adedamola Adekanbi Favour, (2016) noted that while leadership styles greatly influence job satisfaction and motivation, autocratic leadership negatively impacted employee well-being, reducing retention levels. Similarly, Nguyen, (2023) and Adedeji & C., Ugwumadu, (2018) confirmed that rigid and authoritative leadership practices often lead to a toxic work environment, demotivating staff and increasing turnover.

Bertsch et al., (2017) explain that autocratic leaders provide explicit instructions and exercise tight control over employees. Although potentially effective in emergencies or with

inexperienced workers, this approach risks failure when subordinates are more knowledgeable than their leader. This dynamic may breed resentment and perceptions of arrogance, contributing to reduced morale and employee exits. Andeyo Lily Mugove, (2018) also emphasize that autocratic leadership, by stifling employee involvement, correlates with low job satisfaction and high turnover, especially when organizational commitment is undermined.

Jaafar et al., (2021) argued that negative perceptions of supervisors' personalities significantly influence turnover intentions, highlighting the importance of understanding leadership trends and their implications on the workforce. Maddock, (2023) supported this by noting that employee perceptions of organizational climate play a critical role in retention. Neethling, (2023) further asserted that toxic leadership and poor workplace environments drive staff away, a situation that is particularly relevant in Ugandan universities. Supporting this idea, Sybil F. Stershic emphasized, "The way your employees feel is the way your customers will feel. And if your employees don't feel valued, neither will your customer" (Johnson, 2024).

Easley, 2022) discovered that employees with organized or introverted personalities are especially vulnerable under extroverted autocratic leaders, whose aggressive styles may demotivate and alienate staff. Nabakiibi, (2022) criticized autocratic practices in Ugandan universities for hindering sustainable staff management and fostering poor interrelations between stakeholders. These issues often result in unmet needs, deteriorated institutional trust, and weakened academic environments.

Nwokocha & Iheriohanma, (2015) identified absenteeism and high turnover in organizations dominated by autocratic leadership. Employees under such regimes often report being undervalued, punished, and excluded from decision-making processes, fostering low morale and disengagement. Easley, (2022) added that talented staff under autocratic leadership tend to become resentful, passive-aggressive, or leave altogether. This is supported by the findings in A Qualitative Study on the Negative Impact of Toxic Leadership on Employee Retention in Project Management Industries, which concluded that toxic leadership reduces job satisfaction and fosters hostile work environments (Krystel, 2025).

Papa et al., (2020) warned that employees exposed to autocratic leadership may adopt similar toxic behaviors, perpetuating a cycle of negative practices. Kyambade et al., (2025) along with recent Ugandan studies on psychological safety emphasized the need for ethical and socially responsible leadership to combat the effects of toxic work environments. In contrast, positive leadership practices have been consistently linked with job satisfaction, commitment, and increased retention (Calluso & Devetag, 2025).

At Kyambogo University, Kanaabi et al. (2022) found that autocratic leadership in research management negatively affected employee productivity and behavior. Although the study sampled knowledgeable PhD holders, it failed to consider non-academic staff or provide generalizable results across diverse institutions. Similarly, Nabakiibi (2022) and Bichsel et al. (2023) emphasized the role of supportive management practices and ethical leadership in retaining academic staff. These findings reiterate

the limitations of autocratic leadership in promoting long-term staff stability.

According to Jaafar et al. (2021), the power-centric approach of autocratic leadership suppresses employee input, which diminishes motivation and fosters dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and turnover. Wandiba (2023) reinforced that autocratic leadership reduces staff motivation and job performance, aligning with Singh (2019) who found a strong relationship between employee retention strategies and organizational performance.

Nguyen (2023) concluded that while autocratic leadership holds a neutral position relative to democratic and laissez-faire styles in enhancing motivation, it tends to harm overall employee outcomes. Wen et al., (2019) acknowledged specific contexts where autocratic leadership is effective, such as when employees lack training or when urgent decisions are required - but warned against its use in environments requiring collaboration, trust, and long-term employee engagement.

Katuramu et al. (2016) highlighted ethical leadership as critical to employee retention, recommending that university leaders adopt ethical and communicative practices. This was echoed by recent research linking ethical leadership and personality traits with staff behavior (Exploring the Role of Ethical Leadership and Personality Traits, 2024). These studies underline the importance of aligning leadership style with both organizational ethics and employee personalities.

Finally, culturally rooted issues, such as fear-based communication and threats of job termination, have been identified as harmful to staff retention. For instance, in the study Witchcraft and Sorcery among Office Bearers in

Ugandan Private Universities (2025), the use of threatening language like "you will be sacked" was found to aggravate retention challenges, indicating a pressing need for compassionate leadership.

The literature collectively indicates that autocratic leadership, though occasionally effective in specific crisis-driven or hierarchical contexts, generally undermines employee retention in academic institutions. In selected universities in Central Uganda, this leadership style has been associated with demoralization, absenteeism, toxic work environments, and strained relationships between staff and administrators. The rigid and top-down nature of autocratic leadership restricts communication, limits employee autonomy, and negatively impacts morale, especially among more organized or introverted individuals. While some studies acknowledge the conditional usefulness of autocracy, the consensus emphasizes the need for ethical, inclusive, and personality-sensitive leadership styles. Universities aiming for long-term sustainability and improved employee retention must shift toward more participative and supportive approaches that recognize employee voices, values, and well-being.

## Materials and Methods

In this study, a time scope of 2000 to 2025 was selected due to the number of new universities that have been established in the region, and the increasing number of staff retention challenges registered during this period (Kasule, 2022).

Secondary data have been collected from various sources like Scopus Database, Springer, Google Scholar, Emerald, and research gate. A qualitative and exploratory design was used in

this study. Also, the data have been collected from published articles and renowned journals.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The findings reinforce and extend prior literature on the profound impact leadership styles have on employee retention, particularly in academic institutions within developing contexts such as Uganda. Democratic leadership emerged as a strong predictor of retention due to its facilitation of open communication, employee participation, and psychological safety consistent with studies by Floyd et al. (2023) and Adedamola (2016).

The perceived inclusivity under democratic leaders aligns with transformational and servant leadership attributes that encourage employee engagement and foster a sense of belonging (Nguyen, 2023; Maddock, 2023). In this context, employees are more likely to remain with institutions that promote fairness, transparency, and professional growth opportunities (Kanaabi et al., 2022; Neethling, 2023).

Conversely, autocratic leadership was consistently associated with negative perceptions of the work environment, reduced morale, and higher turnover intentions. As emphasized by Bertsch et al. (2017) and Nwokocho & Iheriohanma (2015), the command-and-control nature of autocratic leaders leads to fear-based compliance rather than voluntary commitment. This was evidenced in the frequent mentions of punitive supervision, exclusion from decision-making, and job insecurity.

Autocratic leadership's demotivating effect was particularly evident among non-academic staff and junior faculty, groups more vulnerable to top-down control and limited autonomy. This is supported by Easley (2022), who found that personality mismatches between employees and authoritarian managers contribute to turnover.

The lack of ethical and participatory practices in autocratic institutions suggests a misalignment with modern leadership expectations in higher education (Mergen & Osbilgin, 2021; Papa et al., 2020).

Furthermore, toxic elements such as threats of dismissal, lack of transparency, and authoritarian control mechanisms, highlighted in studies by Nabakiibi (2022) and Stershic (2024) emerged in the qualitative narratives, confirming the connection between autocratic practices and employee exits.

Interestingly, some authors acknowledge the necessity of autocratic leadership in specific scenarios, such as crisis management or when dealing with inexperienced staff (Kanaabi et al. 2022). This mirrors Wen et al., (2019), who argued for a situational application of leadership styles. However, the consensus among participants was that sustained autocratic leadership breeds discontent and hampers employee retention.

## Conclusion

This qualitative inquiry underscores the pivotal role of leadership style in shaping employee retention outcomes in universities across Central Uganda. The findings affirm that:

Democratic leadership fosters a supportive, inclusive, and engaging environment that enhances employee satisfaction and loyalty. This style promotes open communication, participatory decision-making, and psychological safety, all of which are critical to retaining academic and non-academic staff.

Autocratic leadership, while occasionally useful in crisis or structured scenarios, is largely detrimental to employee retention in the long term. It is associated with poor communication,

limited autonomy, low morale, and increased staff turnover.

Universities in Central Uganda seeking to improve staff retention must prioritize leadership development that aligns with ethical, democratic, and participatory values. Leadership training should also consider personality dynamics, employee expectations, and contextual adaptability. Future research should explore hybrid leadership models and evaluate their effectiveness across public and private academic institutions.

Ultimately, fostering retention in higher education institutions requires not just structural reform, but a cultural shift toward humane, inclusive, and empowering leadership practices.

### Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Promote Democratic and Participatory Leadership:

- 1) Universities should strengthen democratic leadership practices that encourage inclusivity, open communication, and shared decision-making. This approach enhances employee engagement, satisfaction, and long-term commitment.
- 2) Leadership Development and Training: Institutions should design continuous leadership development programs emphasizing ethical behavior, emotional intelligence, and participatory management. Such training can help leaders balance authority with empathy and collaboration.
- 3) Context-Sensitive Leadership Application: While democratic leadership should be prioritized, situational flexibility is essential. Autocratic approaches may be applied selectively in crisis or high-control contexts,

provided they do not compromise staff morale or participation.

- 4) Integrate Personality and Organizational Fit in Leadership Practices: Leadership strategies should consider both leaders' and employees' personality traits to foster compatibility, reduce conflict, and enhance retention.
- 5) Foster Institutional Culture of Trust and Transparency: Universities should cultivate an ethical and psychologically safe environment that values employee contributions, minimizes fear-based management, and promotes mutual respect between staff and administration.
- 6) Encourage Further Research: Future studies should investigate hybrid leadership models that combine democratic and other leadership attributes and assess their applicability across public and private universities in Uganda.

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