

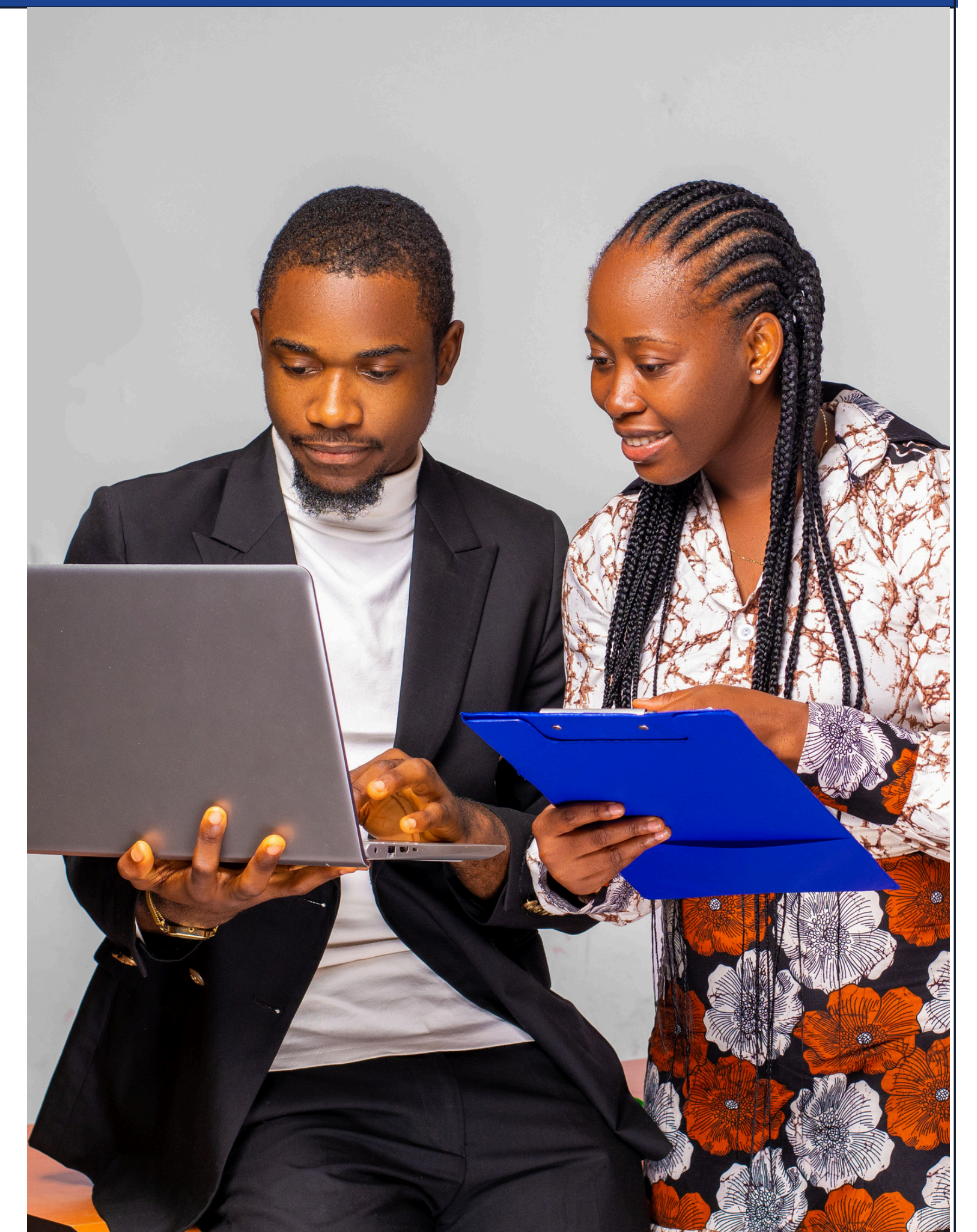
TRUST, RELIGION AND RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP: HOW EMPLOYEES JUDGE LEADERS IN FRAGILE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent research has increasingly focused on the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership. This paper examines how the evolving concept of responsible leadership fosters employees' trust within ethically fragile and institutionally unstable business environments. Rather than treating responsible leadership as a fixed normative framework, this study repositions it as a dynamic arena where diverse stakeholders hold conflicting expectations. The study adopts an exploratory qualitative design, drawing on 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews within a case study framework. This methodology enabled a nuanced and thorough analysis of how employees perceive and navigate the complexities of trust dynamics in the organisational context. While this paper broadens the concept of responsible leadership beyond a Western-centric perspective, its findings are largely drawn from a single organisational context. Given Nigeria's considerable diversity, additional research is needed to strengthen these claims and improve the generalisability of the conclusions. This paper provides actionable insights for enhancing leadership and organisational development, especially in settings where institutional safeguards are fragile or uncertain. By examining responsible leadership through the lens of the Nigerian context, this study underscores the role of local context in organisational research. Its findings emphasise the importance of developing leadership theories attuned to and adaptable to distinct cultural realities.



KEYWORDS

- Responsible leadership
- Trust
- Employee behaviour
- Institutions
- Religion
- Nigeria

RESEARCH RELEVANCE

- Leader evaluation in a fragile institutional context is shaped by perceived authenticity deeply embedded in complex cultural and religious expectations.
- Elevating leaders as moral anchors in the absence of robust institutions risks circumventing essential structural reforms.
- We challenge the presumption that religious values are inherently stabilising, revealing their capacity for destabilisation and exclusion.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Okpanum, I., & Omeihe, K. (2026). Trust, religion and responsible leadership: how employees judge leaders in fragile institutional contexts.

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“Within organisations, philanthropy often reinforces kinship metaphors, with leaders described as father, elder or brother. These familial analogies risk romanticising leadership, reducing complex power dynamics to simplistic notions of obligation and care.”

