

**LEADERSHIP STYLES AND THEIR IMPACT ON INSTITUTIONAL
INTEGRITY: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ANTHILLS OF
THE SAVANNAH***

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Abstract

The paper explores the influence of leadership styles on institutional integrity, using Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* as a literary case study. By employing a qualitative literary analysis, the research investigates the behaviours of key characters: the President, Chris, and Ikem, and the consequences of their leadership approaches on the stability and credibility of societal institutions. The President's authoritarian and self-serving style undermines public trust, while Chris's bureaucratic and mediating approach maintains functional stability without inspiring loyalty or ethical commitment. In contrast, Ikem's transformational and principled leadership fosters trust, accountability, and ethical cohesion. Drawing parallels to university governance, the study highlights the critical role of ethical and visionary leadership in sustaining institutional integrity, promoting stakeholder confidence, and preventing organisational decay. The findings suggest that principled leadership not only strengthens institutional frameworks but also cultivates a culture of accountability, thereby providing valuable lessons for contemporary academic and administrative leadership.

Keywords: Leadership Styles; Institutional Integrity; Principled Leadership; Chinua Achebe; Organizational Trust

1.0 Introduction

Leadership remains a central determinant of institutional effectiveness and public trust, particularly in academic and societal settings. Universities, as complex institutions, rely on leaders who can navigate competing interests while maintaining transparency and accountability. Without principled leadership, institutions risk declining credibility and inefficiency (Northouse, 2021). Leadership extends beyond organisational management to shaping institutional culture. Literary texts offer insights into leadership by allowing researchers to examine moral choices, decision-making, and institutional consequences through narrative and characterisation. As Achebe (1987) infers in *Anthills of the Savannah*, power can be abused if the moral compass of those who wield it is skewed, which illustrates how leadership style affects institutional stability.

Anthills of the Savannah explores leadership within the fictional West African nation of Kangan by foregrounding the relationship between ethical responsibility and public trust. Characters such as authoritarian President Sam, bureaucratic Chris, and principled Ikem exemplify divergent leadership styles with distinct implications for institutional integrity. Leadership scholarship identifies these styles as transformational, authoritarian, and ethical, providing frameworks to interpret the outcomes of character actions in literary and real-world

contexts (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership inspires followers to embrace shared values and ethical standards, fostering trust (Burns, 1978). In contrast, authoritarian leadership centralises decision-making, often prioritising personal gain over collective welfare, which can undermine credibility (Eisenbach, Watson, & Pillai, 1999). Mapping these frameworks onto Achebe's narrative elucidates how leadership impacts institutional resilience.

Trust and integrity are interdependent pillars of institutional legitimacy. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) argue that trust emerges when leaders demonstrate ability, benevolence, and integrity, while institutional integrity reflects adherence to ethical standards. In the novel, the erosion of trust under corrupt leadership mirrors real-world scenarios where universities falter due to unethical governance. Conversely, principled leadership, as exemplified by Ikem, encourages accountability and strengthens institutions (Ciulla, 2004). Literature thus becomes a prism through which leadership decisions can be critically analysed, offering lessons for contemporary organisational contexts. This study explores how different leadership styles impact institutional integrity, drawing insights from Achebe's work to inform leadership practice within universities.

2.0 Critical Receptions on Leadership Typologies

Among various frameworks, transformational leadership has received significant empirical support for its capacity to elevate organisational trust and ethical behaviour. Research indicates that transformational leaders positively influence organisational citizenship behaviours by fostering trustworthiness and trust in leaders, which in turn enhances both individual and group performance (Han et al., 2023). In addition, transformational leadership has been shown to strengthen affective organisational commitment and job performance through the mediating role of employee engagement, illustrating its reverberating effect on organisational functioning and ethical climate (Wang et al., 2022). Transformational leadership's emphasis on idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration correlates with increased organisational culture and ethical practice (Jaskyte et al., 2023).

Contrastingly, authoritarian leadership centralises authority and prioritises top-down decision-making, which often produces negative effects on employee trust and behaviour. Empirical studies show that authoritarian leadership can undermine employees' safety compliance and participation behaviour by eroding trust in leadership (Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, authoritarian leadership is associated with organisational deviance and psychological contract violations, which demonstrates how centralised, autocratic behaviour may erode employee morale and ethical engagement (Pizzolitto et al., 2022). While some research suggests contextual conditions where authoritarian behaviours yield positive task outcomes, the prevailing literature associates authoritarian leadership with deteriorated work climates and perception of unfair control (Pizzolitto et al., 2022). Thus, although authoritarianism may achieve compliance in some contexts, it often conflicts with institutional integrity and stakeholder trust, especially in knowledge-based or academic environments.

In contrast, ethical or principled leadership emphasises fairness, transparency, and moral integrity as core leader behaviours, which reinforce institutional trust and ethical climate. Studies demonstrate that ethical leadership positively predicts organisational commitment and citizenship behaviours, often through enhancing perceived organisational support and trust (Agag et al., 2025). Meta-analytic evidence shows strong positive relationships between ethical leadership and organisational trust, justice, motivation, and commitment, while reducing organisational cynicism and silence (Özdoğan & Sarier, 2024). Moreover, ethical leadership contributes to a robust ethical climate by modelling integrity and reinforcing ethical conduct norms (Enwereuzor et al., 2020). The outcome of these findings presupposes that leadership styles rooted in integrity and ethical decision-making are integral to sustaining institutional trust and organisational legitimacy, which is a principle highly pertinent to university governance.

2.1 Fiction and Leadership Analysis

Academic work also highlights how fiction is integrated into leadership pedagogy. Studies demonstrate that using novels and other fictional texts in leadership courses enhances critical thinking and sense-making among learners because it offers contextualised case studies of leadership behaviours that prompt reflection and deeper understanding by students (Armstrong, 2021). Research in management education similarly identifies typologies of stories that connect literary narratives to managerial practices, thereby showing how characters and their choices can illustrate organisational values and leadership challenges (da Costa Rocha, 2023). Scholars have also explicitly advocated treating fiction *as* organisational data, arguing that novels and dramatic texts can serve as sources for theorising leadership and organisational phenomena through characters' interactions and power relations (Śliwa, 2019; Beyes, 2019). This body of work suggests that literary representation makes abstract leadership concepts more concrete and accessible by situating them in lived, albeit imagined, social contexts.

However, despite this growing literature, a notable gap remains: there are few systematic studies linking African literature, especially novels, to academic analyses of leadership within institutions such as universities. Much of the current research focuses on Western texts or uses fiction pedagogically rather than analytically to draw insights about institutional trust and governance, particularly in the context of African university leadership. This gap points to an opportunity for research that bridges African literary criticism with organisational leadership theory to interpret how fictional leadership projections reflect real-world governance challenges and institutional integrity issues.

3.0. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative literary analysis approach to explore how leadership styles influence institutional integrity, using Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* as the primary data source. The novel provides a rich narrative of political and social leadership; as such, it offers insights into ethical decision-making, power dynamics, behavioural patterns, and

institutional outcomes. Data extraction involved a close reading of the text to identify instances of leadership behaviour, ethical dilemmas, and the consequences of decisions on societal institutions. Key characters, including the President, Chris, and Ikem, were selected as focal points because their actions exemplify contrasting leadership styles and their effects on institutional trust. The analytical framework draws on leadership typologies such as transformational, authoritarian, and ethical/principled leadership, to code and categorise characters' actions. This methodology is justified by the premise that literature functions as a mirror of real-life realities, which include the academic institution.

4.0 Analysis / Discussion

Through Achebe's narrative in *Anthills of the Savannah*, profound insight is offered into the typologies of leadership embodied in the fictional nation of Kangan. The novel does not merely recount the collapse of a postcolonial African state; it anatomises the moral and psychological foundations of governance. Through the interrelated figures of President Sam, Chris Oriko, and Ikem Osodi, Achebe crafts a layered representation of leadership as both personal disposition and structural phenomenon. These characters do not function as isolated personalities; rather, they symbolise ideological positions within the spectrum of political authority. In this way, Achebe presents a panoramic depiction of the post-independence African state, exposing how power may be exercised through fear, compromised through complicity, or redeemed through moral courage.

Achebe's oft-quoted assertion in *The Trouble with Nigeria* that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (Achebe, 1983) has, over time, assumed the character of a cliché in public discourse. Yet its resonance persists because it captures the cyclical tragedy of postcolonial governance. As scholars such as Ake (1996) argue, the crisis of African states is fundamentally rooted in the disarticulation between political authority and public accountability. Leadership becomes detached from service and reconfigured as domination. Achebe anticipates this scholarly position in his fictional rendering of Kangan, where access to power often results not in reform but in replication of impunity. The novel, therefore, challenges the facile repetition of leadership critique by dramatising how individuals, when afforded authority, frequently succumb to the very excesses they once condemned.

At the centre of this crisis stands President Sam, a military ruler elevated to civilian supremacy without adequate preparation for democratic governance. Chris observes with striking candour:

His Excellency came to power without any preparation for political leadership – a fact which, he being a very intelligent person knew perfectly well and which, furthermore, should not have surprised anyone. Sandhurst, after all, did not set about training officers to take over Her Majesty's throne but rather in the high tradition of proud aloofness from politics and public affairs. [...] and so [...] he called his friends together and said: 'What shall I do?' (12).

This early description is revealing as Sam's ascent to power is not undergirded by ideological clarity, institutional competence, or civic vision. Rather, it is accidental and opportunistic. His own admission, "What shall I do?", signals intellectual vacuity at the very apex of authority. Achebe thus establishes a leadership vacuum masked by military bravado. As Ake (1996) notes in his analysis of authoritarian African regimes, military rulers frequently rely on coercive legitimacy rather than participatory consent. Sam embodies this pattern: his legitimacy is derived from force, not from democratic mandate or moral authority.

The preference for ruthless domination is echoed within his advisory circle. Chris recalls that "and some will add: That's a pity because what this country really needs is a ruthless dictator. At least for five good years" (3). This sentiment reflects a troubling popular psychology in which dictatorship is rationalised as necessary discipline. Yet such reasoning, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) observes, normalises authoritarianism under the guise of developmental urgency. In Sam's case, ruthlessness becomes not a transitional necessity but a defining ethos. When confronted during a presidential meeting, he declares, "You all seem to forget that I am still a soldier, not a politician" (4). The remark is more than defensive rhetoric; it is an ideological declaration. Sam perceives leadership not as deliberative governance but as a command hierarchy.

Within leadership theory, reliance on intimidation as a mechanism of compliance is widely regarded as symptomatic of failed governance. As Kellerman (2004) contends, bad leadership thrives on manipulation and fear, cultivating obedience rather than respect. Sam's assertion of military identity underscores his resistance to democratic accountability. Rather than engaging his advisers in reasoned debate, he reasserts his authority through threat. This dismissal of constructive criticism, as Lipman-Blumen (2005) suggests, reflects the pathology of toxic leadership, where dissent is equated with disloyalty and force becomes the default response to disagreement. Sam's insecurity manifests most vividly in his early paranoia. Chris recounts that "in his first days of power, his constant nightmare was of the people falling into disaffection and erupting into ugly demonstrations all over the place, and he drove himself crazy worrying how to prevent it" (13). Fear of popular uprising becomes the psychological engine of his administration. Although Chris remarks that "For His Excellency, it was only a passing phase, though. He soon mastered his fear" (12), but this mastery does not translate into confidence rooted in public trust. Instead, it evolves into calculated intimidation sustained by a lack of accountability. Accountability is, therefore, displaced by surveillance and censorship.

The Abazon delegation episode illustrates this authoritarian reflex. When the delegates seek redress concerning "the drought in their region" (16), Sam does not respond with policy initiative but with repression. He orders, "make sure that nothing about petitions gets into the papers. I don't want to see any talk of complaints and petitions in the press" (18). This directive epitomises governance by concealment. Rather than addressing existential concerns, Sam silences the articulation of grievance. Such behaviour aligns with what Ake (1996) describes as the criminalisation of civic participation in postcolonial autocracies.

The NTBB policy further institutionalises censorship. Ikem explains that “it means Not To Be Broadcast” and that “it doesn’t now apply to dirty records alone. Anything inconvenient to those in government is NTBB” (61). Here, state machinery is mobilised to regulate truth itself. When Ikem persists in his editorial critique, Sam commands Chris:

“While investigations continue into Ikem’s link with the Abazon agitators, he cannot continue to edit the National Gazette. [...] That’s why I have sent for you. I want you as Commissioner for Information to issue a formal letter suspending him with immediate effect’ [...] I want him [...] barred completely from the premises of the Gazette” (143).

The calculated silencing of dissent reveals how leadership failure produces structural corruption, while abuse of power becomes normalised, and with that, institutional safeguards are eroded. This degeneration is mirrored in the ostentatious wealth of Alhaji Abdul Mahmoud:

Rumour has it that he has, in the last year, knocked all other Kangan millionaires into a cocked hat. Eight ocean liners, they say, two or three private jets; a private jetty and so, say rumour-mongers, he is the prince of smugglers [...] fifty odd companies, including a bank. Monopoly of government fertilizer imports [...] what I find worrying and I don’t think I can quite believe it yet is that (voice lowered) he may be fronting you know for... your host.’ (117)

This accumulation of wealth suggests systemic complicity. In this scenario, corruption is not incidental but institutional. Leadership failure at the apex filters downward, engendering moral decay across society. Mr Osodi’s critique of the Electricity Corporation demonstrates this contagion:

Let’s take the Electricity Corporation of Kangan as an example out of many. What do we see? Chaotic billing procedures deliberately done to cover their massive fraud; illegal connections carried out or condoned by their own staff; theft of meters and a host of other petty and serious crimes, including, if you please, the readiness at the end of the day to burn down the entire Accounts and Audit Departments if an inquiry should ever be mooted. (159)

The imagery of burning audit departments encapsulates institutionalised impunity. Fraud becomes bureaucratic design. Achebe thus presents corruption as the logical outcome of authoritarian leadership.

In contrast, Chris embodies bureaucratic compromise. His exchange with Ikem reveals this divergence:

‘I was calling you about this morning’s editorial.’ Chris avoids my gaze, his irritation barely contained. ‘You know, Ikem, I have given up trying to understand what you are

up to. Really, I have. How can you go about creating stupid problems for yourself and for everybody else?’ I reply firmly, ‘Come on now! Speak for yourself, Chris. I am quite able to take care of myself. As for my editorials, as long as I remain editor of the Gazette, I shall not seek anybody’s permission for what I write. (44)

Chris’s discomfort is palpable. Although he recognises Sam’s excesses, he opts for accommodation. The narrator observes:

When Chris first heard through a friend’s telephone call of MM’s deportation at six p.m. the day before, he had tried to speak to Ikem, but he had apparently gone out with Elewa. So the last time they had talked together was the morning of the regicide story. Containing his irritation as much as possible, he had wanted to know exactly what Ikem had said at the lecture. (166)

Chris’s disposition does not necessarily come from the point of truth but rather from political expediency. His bureaucratic caution reflects complicity fostered by proximity to power. When Ikem declares that “worshipping a dictator is such a pain in the ass” (45), the rebuke exposes the moral burden of compromise.

By contrast, Ikem Osodi exemplifies transformational leadership grounded in moral courage, which is mirrored in his editorials. The narrator notes “his most poignant editorials, such as his condemnation of human blood sport called public execution, his general dissatisfaction with government policies [...]” (141). At the University of Bassa, he warns that “they threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit – in state, in church or mosque, [...] in the university or wherever” (153). His speech, described as “a brief presentation, twenty to twenty-five minutes long [...] so well crafted and so powerfully spoken [...] it was serious but not solemn; sometimes witty without falling into familiarity of banter” (153), awakens civic consciousness. Again, Ikem’s solidarity with the Abazon delegates, including “motor mechanics, retail traders, tailors, vulcanizers, taxi-and-bus-drivers [...] and others doing all kinds of odd jobs or nothing at all in the city. A truly motley crowd!” (121), demonstrates grassroots engagement. Even when unlawfully confronted at the Harmony Hotel, he restrains incitement as the narrator observes that “the Master of Ceremonies was boiling into another protest, but Ikem made the sign of silence to him – a straight finger across sealed lips” (130). Ikem deliberately surrenders himself to the officers, choosing to endure their oppression rather than risk provoking the agitated crowd into a violent confrontation that could endanger lives. However, at the station, he is treated with dignity by the senior officer in charge, who rebukes his junior colleagues for harassing him:

This man is Mr Osodi, the Editor of the *National Gazette*. Everybody in the country knows him except you. So you carry your stupid nonsense and go and contravene a man of such calibre. Tomorrow now if he takes up his pen to lambast the Police you all go begin complain like monkey [...] Now, all of you listen well. You see this man

here, make una look im face well well. If any of you go out tomorrow and begin fool
around his car I go give the person proper gbali-gbali. (132)

Though capable of retaliation, Ikem chooses restraint. Leadership, Achebe suggests, is not domination but ethical self-control. Through Sam, Chris, and Ikem, *Anthills of the Savannah* thus presents a triadic model of African leadership: authoritarian coercion, bureaucratic compromise, and principled transformation. The novel, on this then, affirms that genuine national renewal depends upon leaders who privilege integrity over fear, service over spectacle, and accountability over impunity.

4.1 Character Leadership Profiles

Character	Leadership Style	Key Actions	Impact on Institution	University Parallel
President Sam	Authoritarian, corrupt	Centralized power suppresses dissent	Weakens trust, creates instability	Poor university governance leads to low stakeholder confidence
Chris	Bureaucratic / mediating	Manages policies, compromises	Stabilizes institution but lacks vision	Middle management maintains day-to-day functions
Ikem	Transformational, principled	Advocates change, inspire citizens	Builds trust, strengthens moral foundation	Ethical leadership improves institutional credibility

4.2 Implications for University Governance

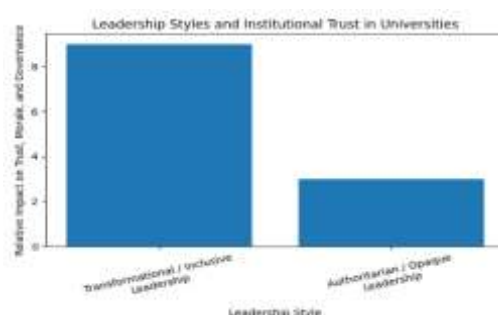
Leadership styles significantly influence how trust is shaped among staff, students, and even the university stakeholders, with direct consequences for institutional integrity and governance. Research indicates that transformational leadership in higher education is consistently linked with positive organisational outcomes, including trust and engagement. For example, studies demonstrate that transformational leadership fosters an environment where leaders inspire and motivate followers, which in turn strengthens trust in leadership and affective commitment among staff (Van der Voet, 2022).

In university settings, trust is foundational to effective governance, as it underpins cooperation and shared decision-making, as well as academic freedom. Meta-analyses of leadership in higher education suggest that positive leadership styles are correlated with higher job satisfaction among academic staff, which is closely related to perceptions of institutional trust and fairness (Kasalak et al., 2022). Such trust enhances faculty engagement in governance processes, reduces resistance to change, promotes collaborative problem-solving, and generally enhances growth. Moreover, research in higher education contexts confirms that

transformational leadership positively influences staff morale and motivation (Hongyan Jiang et al., 2017).

Conversely, leadership that resembles authoritarian or highly hierarchical models can have detrimental effects on university cultures. Empirical studies across organisational contexts show that authoritarian leadership is associated with reduced active support for organisational initiatives and negative reactions from employees, which can be extrapolated to university governance settings where collaborative input is critical (Du et al., 2019). In universities, such styles may manifest as centralised decision-making, lack of participatory governance, opaque administrative practices, and even oppression, which erode trust among staff and students. In contrast, when leaders adopt participative and ethical governance practices, institutional trust and morale improve. **Hassan and Hatmaker (2015)** show that high-quality, participative leader–employee relationships significantly enhance trust and organisational commitment in public institutions. Similarly, **Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, and Wu (2018)** found that inclusive and ethical leadership styles positively predict employee commitment and perceived value within organisations, which are outcomes that are typically weakened under authoritarian leadership behaviours.

Fig 1.0: Leadership Styles and Institutional Trust in Universities



Drawing on the insights from fiction as a reflective lens for institutional settings, Achebe's portrayal of leadership in *Anthills of the Savannah* offers a lens through which university governance can be critically examined. The behaviours of President Sam, Chris, and Ikem Osodi act as symbolic analogues for institutional leaders. It depicts how authoritarian, compromising, or transformational styles shape trust, morale, and engagement. As reflected in the graph, transformational and inclusive leadership has a significantly higher positive impact on institutional trust, engagement, and governance, whereas authoritarian and opaque leadership correlates with diminished trust and morale, which reinforces the fact that ethical and participatory leadership is essential for any thriving academic environment.

Suffice it to say then that literature reveals that transformational and inclusive leadership styles not only foster innovation and academic excellence but also cultivate trust, enhance performance, commitment, and ethical governance, while authoritarian and opaque leadership practices tend to corrode morale and institutional integrity in university environments.

5.0 Conclusion

The article from the foregoing analyses has examined the influence of leadership styles on institutional integrity, using Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* as a literary lens. The analysis revealed that leadership behaviours, whether transformational, authoritarian, or ethical, have direct and observable effects on institutional trust and staff morale/confidence. Transformational leaders, exemplified in the text, inspire followers through vision, ethical decision-making, and participative governance, which cultivates trust and enhances organisational commitment, as well as fosters an ethical institutional climate. Conversely, authoritarian leadership, which brings about unethical practices as it is characterised by centralised control and self-interest, was shown to undermine institutional credibility and erode morale.

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