

HUMAN-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES: TASK AUTONOMY AND PERCEIVED CAREER ADVANCEMENT AMONG CENTRAL STORES EMPLOYEES AT NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between growth mindset orientation, employee guidance, task autonomy, and perceived career advancement among employees of the Central Stores at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. The study adopted quantitative cross-sectional survey design. From a population of 159 employees, the study selected 112 respondents using the Krejcie-Morgan procedure and analysed 109 valid questionnaires. The researchers collected data using a structured 24-item questionnaire. Experts validated the instrument, and a pilot test produced Cronbach's alpha of 0.891, indicating good reliability. Data was analysed using Pearson correlation and simple linear regression in SPSS version 25. The results showed a strong positive relationship between growth mindset orientation and task autonomy ($r = 0.837$, $R^2 = 0.701$, $p < 0.001$). Employee guidance also showed a strong positive relationship with perceived career advancement ($r = 0.948$, $R^2 = 0.899$, $p < 0.001$). The findings suggest that supportive leadership practices can strengthen employee autonomy and perceptions of career growth. The study recommends learning supportive supervision, structured mentoring, greater employee discretion, and transparent career development practices.

Keywords: Human-Centric Leadership; Growth-Mindset Orientation; Employee Guidance; Task Autonomy; Perceived Career Advancement; Higher Education; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Human-centred management has become an increasingly visible organisational idea as employers seek to combine performance requirements with employee dignity, participation, learning, and well-being. Townsend and Romme (2024) describe the human-centred organisation as an emerging concept that places people and their needs more explicitly within organisational design and decision-making. In higher education, this emphasis is especially relevant because institutional performance depends not only on formal structures and technologies but also on how leaders enable employees to exercise judgment, learn, collaborate, and develop. Heier et al. (2024), for example, translate human-centred leadership principles into actionable practices for academic leaders, emphasising relational and developmental behaviours that support faculty work experiences.

This study uses human-centric leadership as an umbrella framing for workplace practices that recognise employees as active contributors rather than passive recipients of instructions. The empirical analysis does not treat “employee engagement” as a measured dependent variable. Instead, it focuses on two employee-level outcomes that are directly represented in the questionnaire: task autonomy and perceived career advancement. This distinction is important because autonomy concerns discretion over how work is carried out, while perceived career advancement concerns employees’ assessments of opportunities, developmental support, promotion prospects, and progress. Neither construct should be treated as a direct equivalent of employee engagement.

The study also clarifies the status of growth mindset. In the wider literature, growth mindset is principally an individual belief that abilities can be developed through effort, learning, and adaptive strategies. Recent workplace evidence links employee growth mindset with developmental and innovative behaviour and shows that leadership context can strengthen the value employees derive from such beliefs (Liu & Tong, 2022; Rogers et al., 2023). In the present questionnaire, however, the six “growth mindset” items combine employees’ own developmental beliefs with perceptions of supervisors’ and management’s encouragement of learning, experimentation, and development. The construct is therefore interpreted more cautiously as growth-mindset orientation: an employee-level perception that captures both personal growth beliefs and perceived learning-supportive cues in the immediate work environment. It is not treated as a pure leader personality trait.

Central Stores provides an appropriate operational setting for examining these relationships. The unit supports receipt, custody, record-keeping, and distribution of materials required by academic and administrative functions. Employees work within formal procedures and accountability requirements, yet many tasks still require day-to-day judgment, initiative, coordination, and learning. Human-centric supervisory practices may therefore matter for how much discretion employees perceive and how they view their developmental and career prospects. The public-university context is also relevant because formal hierarchies and standardised procedures can coexist with growing expectations for employee initiative, service quality, and professional development. Recent evidence from Nigerian public universities further indicates that supervisory and career-development mentoring can be associated with service outcomes, demonstrating the practical relevance of mentoring structures in this institutional environment (Edema et al., 2024).

A key empirical gap concerns the limited evidence on human-centric leadership-related practices among non-academic operational staff in African public universities. Existing work on autonomy-supportive leadership has established that managerial and institutional support can be associated with autonomy satisfaction, work design, motivation, and employee outcomes (Mokgata et al., 2023; Sarmah et al., 2022). Higher-education research likewise

shows that inclusive or autonomy-supportive climates can support employee autonomy and self-leadership (Matahela & van Rensburg, 2023; Salifu et al., 2026). Mentoring studies show that career and psychosocial guidance can build self-efficacy, socialisation, and career success, but the amount and quality of career support may also depend on how mentors perceive employees' advancement potential (Deng et al., 2022; Moake et al., 2023; Ragins et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022). Less is known about how these relationships manifest among operational staff within a Nigerian university stores unit.

Against this background, the study examines two aligned relationships at the individual employee level: growth-mindset orientation with task autonomy, and employee guidance with perceived career advancement. The unit of analysis is therefore the individual Central Stores employee, and the results represent employees' perceptions rather than department-level or university-level characteristics.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the associations between selected human-centric leadership-related practices and employee outcomes among Central Stores employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

1. To examine the relationship between growth-mindset orientation and task autonomy among Central Stores employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
2. To examine the relationship between employee guidance and perceived career advancement among Central Stores employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Questions

1. What relationship exists between growth-mindset orientation and task autonomy among Central Stores employees?
2. What relationship exists between employee guidance and perceived career advancement among Central Stores employees?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human-Centric Leadership

Human-centric leadership is best understood as a people-oriented approach to organising and supervising work in which employee dignity, voice, development, relationships, and well-being are considered alongside operational performance. Because the concept is still developing, it should not be assumed to be a single universally standardised leadership theory. Townsend and Romme (2024) show that human-centred organising draws together streams of research concerned with human needs, participation, organisational culture, and the design of work. This broader framing is useful for the present study because the questionnaire captures concrete practices and perceptions - learning support, guidance, discretion, mentoring, and developmental opportunities - rather than a validated global human-centric leadership scale.

In academic settings, human-centred leadership has practical relevance because leaders must coordinate professional work while preserving employee discretion and developmental capacity. Heier et al. (2024) identify actionable human-centred leadership practices for academic nurse leaders, while Salifu et al. (2026) report that inclusive leadership is positively linked to employee autonomy among higher-education staff. These studies support a relational interpretation of leadership in which employees are more likely to exercise initiative when the work environment provides support, trust, psychological safety, and room for decision-making.

Growth-Mindset Orientation

A growth mindset reflects the belief that capabilities can be developed rather than being permanently fixed. Within organisations, this belief can shape how employees interpret setbacks, feedback, learning opportunities, and developmental challenges. Liu and Tong (2022) found that employee growth mindset was positively associated with innovative behaviour and that strengths-based leadership amplified the usefulness of employees' developmental orientation. Rogers et al. (2023) likewise demonstrate that growth mindset has meaningful interpersonal consequences at work, extending the concept beyond individual achievement to developmental interactions with colleagues.

The present measure goes beyond a conventional individual growth-mindset scale. Some items refer to personal beliefs and motivation, while others ask whether supervisors or management encourage learning from mistakes, support development, and allow experimentation. For conceptual precision, the measure is therefore labelled growth-mindset orientation. This label acknowledges that responses may partly reflect an employee's beliefs and partly reflect a perceived learning climate. The overlap is important when interpreting the unusually strong relationship with task autonomy and is treated as a measurement limitation rather than ignored.

Employee Guidance

Employee guidance refers here to supervisory and senior-colleague behaviours that provide direction, feedback, advice, support during difficult tasks, and mentoring. Contemporary mentoring research emphasises that guidance can contain both career functions and psychosocial functions. Deng et al. (2022) found, using time-lagged multisource data, that career mentoring facilitated newcomer task mastery and related outcomes through occupational self-efficacy, while psychosocial mentoring supported social integration through social self-efficacy. Nuis et al. (2023), in a systematic review of mentoring in higher education, similarly highlights the need for conceptual clarity and careful alignment between mentoring definitions and measures.

Guidance is relevant to career development because mentors can provide information, visibility, developmental opportunities, confidence, and navigation support. Moake et al. (2023) reports a positive mentoring-career success relationship, while Thakar et al. (2024) show that inclusive mentoring can support self-efficacy for career advancement among early-career faculty and postdoctoral fellows. In the Nigerian public-university context, Edema et al. (2024) found that supervisory and career-development mentoring were associated with quality service delivery. However, mentoring is not necessarily allocated neutrally: Wang et al. (2022) and Ragins et al. (2024) show that mentors' judgments about protégés and advancement potential can shape the career support employees receive. This creates a plausible competing explanation in cross-sectional research: employees perceived as more promising may receive more guidance, rather than guidance alone producing better career prospects.

Task Autonomy

Task autonomy refers to the degree of discretion employees perceive over how they organise, sequence, and perform their work. It is not equivalent to the absence of supervision or organisational rules. Rather, autonomy concerns meaningful latitude within role boundaries. Self-determination research emphasises that supportive social environments can strengthen employees' experience of autonomy. Mokgata et al. (2023) found that autonomy support from managers and other sources was associated with autonomy satisfaction and subsequent work outcomes. Sarmah et al. (2022) likewise showed that autonomy-supportive leadership relates

to job resources and employee well-being, while Wörtler et al. (2022) linked empowering leadership to employees' perceptions of effective flexible work arrangements.

Evidence from education is particularly relevant. Collie (2023) found that teachers' perceptions of autonomy-supportive leadership were associated with more self-determined work motivation. Matahela and van Rensburg (2023) identified an autonomy-supportive climate as a meaningful construct for facilitating self-leadership among health-sciences educators. More recently, Salifu et al. (2026) found that inclusive leadership positively influenced employee autonomy among higher-education staff. Together, these studies suggest that supportive leadership and climate may be associated with employees' perceived discretion and initiative, although the present cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal direction.

Perceived Career Advancement

The study measures perceived career advancement rather than objective promotion. Its six items ask about career-growth opportunities, fair consideration for promotion, the usefulness of training for career prospects, personal progress, management encouragement of career development, and perceived rewards for hard work. The construct therefore reflects employees' subjective assessment of advancement prospects and developmental opportunity at the time of the survey.

Recent evidence supports the relevance of leadership and mentoring for career-related perceptions and outcomes. Li et al. (2022) found that responsible leadership was related to career success in the education sector through motivational mechanisms. Moake et al. (2023) linked mentoring with career success, and Thakar et al. (2024) found that inclusive mentoring supported self-efficacy for career advancement in an academic context. Ragins et al. (2024), however, show why caution is needed: mentors provide different levels of career guidance, partly depending on how they assess a protégé's advancement potential. Perceived career advancement may therefore reflect both the quality of organizational guidance and reciprocal selection processes within mentoring relationships.

Theoretical Framework: Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides the primary explanatory framework for the revised study because it distinguishes social-contextual conditions that support or frustrate the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In workplace applications, autonomy-supportive leadership gives employees meaningful choice, acknowledges perspectives, provides rationale, and reduces unnecessary control. These behaviours can shape how employees experience their work design and their capacity to act with initiative. Recent studies applying SDT to work and education demonstrate that autonomy-supportive leadership and climate are associated with autonomy satisfaction, work resources, motivation, and related employee outcomes (Mokgata et al., 2023; Sarmah et al., 2022; Collie, 2023).

SDT is also relevant to employee guidance because developmental feedback, mentoring, and accessible supervisory support can strengthen competence and relatedness. These resources may help employees interpret career opportunities, develop confidence, and navigate organizational systems. The framework therefore supports the proposed association between employee guidance and perceived career advancement without requiring the stronger causal claim that guidance alone determines promotion. It also accommodates the growth-mindset orientation construct: learning-supportive cues may reinforce competence development and create conditions in which employees feel abler to exercise discretion.

Hypothesis Development

Growth-mindset orientation is expected to be positively associated with task autonomy because employees who perceive a learning-supportive environment and believe capabilities can develop may be more willing to take initiative, learn from mistakes, and use discretion. This expectation is consistent with evidence that developmental beliefs interact with strengths-based leadership (Liu & Tong, 2022) and that autonomy-supportive leadership and climates are associated with autonomy-related work outcomes (Mokgata et al., 2023; Sarmah et al., 2022; Salifu et al., 2026). Nevertheless, reverse interpretation remains possible: employees with greater discretion may also report stronger growth opportunities and encouragement. Accordingly, the hypothesis is framed as an association.

Employee guidance is expected to be positively associated with perceived career advancement because feedback, mentoring, advice, and developmental support can improve employees' access to career information and confidence. This expectation aligns with recent mentoring research linking career mentoring to self-efficacy, socialization, and career success (Deng et al., 2022; Moake et al., 2023; Thakar et al., 2024). However, guidance may also be selectively provided to employees viewed as having advancement potential (Wang et al., 2022; Ragins et al., 2024). The study therefore tests association rather than causation.

Hypotheses

- H01: There is no statistically significant relationship between growth-mindset orientation and task autonomy among Central Stores employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- H02: There is no statistically significant relationship between employee guidance and perceived career advancement among Central Stores employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Level of Analysis

The study adopted quantitative cross-sectional survey design. Data was collected from employees at one point in time to examine statistical associations between growth-mindset orientation and task autonomy, and between employee guidance and perceived career advancement. Because exposure and outcome variables were measured simultaneously, the design does not establish temporal order or causality. The unit and level of analysis were the individual employees of the Central Stores of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; the study did not estimate department-level or university-level effects.

Population, Sampling Frame, and Sampling Procedure

The population comprised of all 159 employees listed in the Central Stores personnel frame supplied by the relevant university registry records. The population consisted of Store Officers (24), Store Assistants (40), Clerical Staff (32), Record Officers (16), Account Staff (16), and Support Personnel (31).

Table 1. Population Distribution

Personnel category	Population
Store Officers	24
Store Assistants	40
Clerical Staff	32
Record Officers	16

Personnel category	Population
Account Staff	16
Support Personnel	31
Total	159

Source: University personnel/field records (2025)

Sample size was estimated using the finite-population procedure reported by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). With $N = 159$, a population proportion of 0.50, 5% precision, and the conventional chi-square value for one degree of freedom at the 95% confidence level, the calculation gives approximately 112.66, conventionally rounded to 113. The field records show that 112 questionnaires were actually administered. The operational administered sample was therefore one employee below the computed target. This discrepancy is reported transparently rather than presenting Krejcie-Morgan as a sampling technique.

To preserve representation across personnel categories, the 112 questionnaires administered were proportionately allocated to the six personnel categories using the population shares, after which employees were selected randomly within each category. The resulting procedure is more accurately described as proportionate stratified random sampling rather than simple random sampling of the entire workforce without strata.

Table 2. Population and Proportionate Sample Allocation

Personnel Category	Population	Allocated Sample
Store Officers	24	17
Store Assistants	40	28
Clerical Staff	32	23
Record Officers	16	11
Account Staff	16	11
Support Personnel	31	22
Total	159	112

Source: Researcher's compilation from the sampling frame (2025)

Instrument and Measurement

Data were collected with a researcher-developed questionnaire comprising demographic items and 24 substantive items. The substantive section used a four-point response scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Six items measured each of four constructs: growth-mindset orientation, employee guidance, task autonomy, and perceived career advancement. The items were not represented as a standardized published scale. The revised terminology reflects the actual content of the items: the growth-mindset block combines individual growth beliefs with perceived supervisory/management learning support, while the career block measures perceived opportunities and prospects rather than verified promotion events.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was assessed through academic review in the Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The review focused on the relevance and clarity of the questionnaire items in relation to the study constructs. A pilot test was then conducted with 20 employees from the Central Stores of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, who were not part of the main study. All 20 pilot questionnaires were returned, coded, and analysed in SPSS version 25. The 24-item instrument yielded an overall Cronbach alpha of 0.891, indicating strong overall internal consistency.

Table 3. Reliability of Instrument

Cronbach's alpha	Number of substantive items
0.891	24

Source: SPSS version 25 output of pilot survey data (2025)

The available study records do not contain construct-specific Cronbach alpha coefficients, confirmatory factor analysis, or other factor-based evidence of construct validity. Those statistics are therefore not invented in this revision. The absence of subscale reliability and factor-validity evidence is acknowledged as a measurement limitation, particularly because the growth-mindset orientation items contain both individual-belief and contextual-leadership content.

Data Collection and Response

Questionnaires were administered in paper-and-pencil format using direct delivery. Respondents were informed in the questionnaire that their responses would be treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes. No respondent name was requested. Of the 112 questionnaires administered, 109 were retrieved and analysed, while three were not retrieved. The usable response rate was therefore 97.3%.

Table 4. Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

Questionnaire status	Frequency	Percentage
Administered	112	100.0
Retrieved and analysed	109	97.3
Not retrieved	3	2.7

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Data Analysis and Model Specification

Data was analysed in SPSS version 25. Frequency and percentages summarize demographic characteristics. Pearson product-moment correlations described the direction and strength of the two hypothesized bivariate relationships. Two separate simple linear regression models were used to summarize the proportion of variance in each outcome associated with its specified predictor. The significance criterion was $p < 0.05$. Because each regression contains only one predictor, within-model multicollinearity is not applicable. The archived manuscript output did not include residual plots or numerical tests of residual normality and homoscedasticity; consequently, this revision does not claim that unreported diagnostics were satisfied.

The two models were specified as follows:

$$\text{Model 1: TA} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{GMO} + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Model 2: PCA} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{EG} + \varepsilon$$

Where TA = Task Autonomy; GMO = Growth-Mindset Orientation; PCA = Perceived Career Advancement; EG = Employee Guidance; β_0 = constant; β_1 = regression coefficient; and ε = error term.

For a one-predictor ordinary least-squares model with standardized variables, the standardized regression coefficient equals the Pearson correlation. Accordingly, standardized β is reported alongside R, R^2 , adjusted R^2 , standard error of estimate, F, and p. Approximate 95% confidence intervals for the two Pearson correlations were calculated using Fisher's z transformation. Unstandardized B coefficients and their confidence intervals were not recoverable from the summary tables retained in the manuscript and are therefore not

fabricated. They should be added from the original SPSS Coefficients tables if those outputs are available before final journal submission.

Common-Method and Ethical Considerations

All substantive variables were measured by the same respondent in the same questionnaire at a single time point. This creates a risk of common-method variance and same-source inflation, particularly given the very high observed correlations. Procedurally, the questionnaire emphasized confidentiality and did not request respondent names, which may reduce evaluation apprehension. However, the available records do not contain a statistical common-method-bias test, marker variable, temporal separation, or multisource validation. The findings are therefore interpreted cautiously, and the issue is carried into the limitations. The source manuscript also did not contain a formal ethics-approval identifier; the authors should insert the relevant institutional approval and consent details before submission if such approval was obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 109 valid responses were analysed. Table 5 presents respondents' gender, age, marital status, and educational qualification. The table is descriptive only; no inferential claim is made that these demographic characteristics caused or strengthened the focal relationships.

Table 5. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	43	39.4
	Female	66	60.6
Age	20-28	3	2.8
	29-39	21	19.3
	40-50	74	67.9
	51 and above	11	10.1
Marital status	Married	89	81.7
	Single	18	16.5
	Other	2	1.8
Education	SSCE/OND	0	0.0
	BSc/HND	66	60.6
	MSc/PhD	9	8.3
	Other	34	31.2

Source: Field Survey (2025). Percentages are recalculated from N = 109 and may differ slightly from whole-number rounding in the original table.

Female employees constituted 60.6% of respondents and male employees 39.4%. Most respondents were aged 40-50 years (67.9%). Married respondents constituted 81.7% of the sample. Regarding educational qualification, 60.6% reported BSc/HND, 8.3% reported MSc/PhD, and 31.2% selected "Other." These distributions describe the composition of the analysed sample but should not be interpreted as evidence about the causes of autonomy or career perceptions.

Bivariate Associations

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Results for the Hypothesised Relationships

Hypothesized relationship	r	95% CI for r	p	N
Growth-mindset orientation - Task autonomy	0.837	0.770 to 0.886	< 0.001	109

Hypothesized relationship	r	95% CI for r	p	N
Employee guidance - Perceived career advancement	0.948	0.925 to 0.964	< 0.001	109

Source: SPSS version 25 summary output (2025); confidence intervals calculated from the reported correlations using Fisher's z transformation.

Growth-mindset orientation had a strong positive association with task autonomy ($r = 0.837$, $p < 0.001$). The approximate 95% confidence interval, 0.770 to 0.886, indicates that the population association is likely to remain strongly positive. Employee guidance had an even stronger positive association with perceived career advancement ($r = 0.948$, $p < 0.001$; approximate 95% CI 0.925 to 0.964). The latter correlation implies very high shared variance and therefore warrants careful consideration of construct overlap, same-source measurement, and reciprocal interpretation.

Simple Regression Results and Hypothesis Tests

Table 7. Summary of Simple Linear Regression Results for the Hypothesised Relationships

Hyp.	Predictor	Outcome	Std. β	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SEE	F (df)	p
H01	Growth-mindset orientation	Task autonomy	0.837	0.837	0.701	0.698	0.18401	250.89 (1,107)	<0.001
H02	Employee guidance	Perceived career advancement	0.948	0.948	0.899	0.898	0.13910	952.39 (1,107)	<0.001

Source: SPSS version 25 output reported in the study records (2025). Standardized β equals r in each one-predictor model.

For H01, the model relating growth-mindset orientation to task autonomy was statistically significant, $F(1, 107) = 250.89$, $p < 0.001$. The model R^2 of 0.701 indicates that 70.1% of the observed variance in task-autonomy scores was statistically shared with growth-mindset-orientation scores in this sample. The adjusted R^2 was 0.698. The null hypothesis of no relationship was therefore rejected. Because both variables were measured at the same time, this result should be described as a strong association rather than evidence that growth-mindset orientation caused task autonomy.

For H02, the model relating employee guidance to perceived career advancement was statistically significant, $F(1, 107) = 952.39$, $p < 0.001$. The model R^2 of 0.899 indicates that 89.9% of the observed variance in perceived-career-advancement scores was statistically shared with employee-guidance scores. The adjusted R^2 was 0.898. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The magnitude is exceptionally high for self-reported organizational constructs and should not be interpreted as proof that guidance determines actual career progression. It may partly reflect overlapping item content, common-method variance, same-source perceptions, or reciprocal processes.

Discussions

Growth-Mindset Orientation and Task Autonomy

The first finding was a strong positive association between growth-mindset orientation and task autonomy. Employees who reported stronger beliefs in development and stronger learning-supportive cues from supervisors and management also reported greater discretion, initiative, and flexibility in carrying out their work. The result is consistent with recent evidence that growth mindset is meaningful in workplace behaviour and that supportive leadership can strengthen the value of developmental beliefs. Liu and Tong (2022) found that employee growth mindset was positively related to innovative behaviour and that strengths-based

leadership strengthened relevant developmental pathways. Rogers et al. (2023) similarly showed that a growth mindset at work can shape developmental interactions with others.

The autonomy component of the findings is also consistent with SDT-based leadership evidence. Mokgata et al. (2023) found that manager autonomy support was an important source of employees' autonomy satisfaction. Sarmah et al. (2022) showed that autonomy-supportive leadership was associated with favourable work design and well-being through job resources. In educational settings, Collie (2023) found that autonomy-supportive leadership practices were linked with teachers' work motivation, while Matahela and van Rensburg (2023) identified an autonomy-supportive climate as relevant to self-leadership among health-sciences educators. Salifu et al. (2026) further reported a positive influence of inclusive leadership on employee autonomy among higher-education staff. These studies do not directly test the same growth-mindset-orientation measure used here, but they provide convergent evidence that supportive, developmental work climates are associated with discretion and self-directed behaviour.

At the same time, the size of the present relationship requires caution. The growth-mindset-orientation measure includes statements about management support, supervisory encouragement, trying new methods, and personal growth beliefs. Task-autonomy items also include supervisory flexibility, independence, and initiative. Some shared wording and common perceptions of a supportive supervisor may therefore contribute to the high R^2 of 0.701. A reverse pathway is also plausible: employees who already experience more discretion may perceive their work environment as more developmental and may feel more able to learn from challenges. The study therefore supports a strong relationship but does not establish which construct precedes the other.

Employee Guidance and Perceived Career Advancement

The second finding was a very strong positive association between employee guidance and perceived career advancement. Employees who reported clearer instructions, useful feedback, accessible advice, senior-colleague support, and mentoring also tended to report more favourable career-growth opportunities, promotion prospects, and management encouragement of development. This pattern is consistent with the contemporary mentoring literature. Deng et al. (2022) found that career mentoring supports newcomer development through occupational self-efficacy. Moake et al. (2023) reported a mentoring-career success relationship, and Thakar et al. (2024) found that inclusive mentoring was associated with self-efficacy for career advancement among early-career faculty and postdoctoral fellows. In the Nigerian public-university context, Edema et al. (2024) also found meaningful associations between supervisory/career-development mentoring and service outcomes.

The result also fits evidence from the education sector showing that leadership can be linked to career success (Li et al., 2022). Structured guidance can help employees understand expectations, obtain feedback, identify development needs, and navigate career systems. These mechanisms make a positive association with perceived advancement plausible. However, mentoring relationships are not one-directional. Wang et al. (2022) demonstrate that supervisors' willingness to provide career mentoring can depend on employee characteristics, while Ragins et al. (2024) found that mentors' beliefs about protégés' advancement potential shape the amount of career guidance they provide. Employees who are already viewed as promising may therefore receive more support and simultaneously perceive better career prospects.

The R^2 of 0.899 deserves particular caution. It indicates unusually high shared variance between two self-reported constructs measured in the same questionnaire. Several employee-guidance items refer to mentoring, management support, and feedback, while perceived-career-

advancement items refer to management encouragement, training, and advancement opportunities. Conceptual proximity between support and career-development perceptions may inflate the observed relationship. The result should therefore be interpreted as evidence of a strong perceived linkage, not as evidence that guidance accounts for 89.9% of objective promotions or actual longitudinal career movement.

Taken together, the findings are consistent with a human-centric view of supervision in which employees' development, voice, competence, and discretion are treated as meaningful organizational concerns. Townsend and Romme (2024) position human-centeredness as an emerging organizational concept that requires attention to human needs and participation, while recent higher-education evidence connects inclusive and supportive leadership with employee autonomy and work-related outcomes (Heier et al., 2024; Salifu et al., 2026). The present study extends this discussion to a non-academic operational unit in a Nigerian public university. The contribution is nevertheless narrower than a claim about employee engagement as a whole. The questionnaire did not include a recognized employee-engagement scale, and the empirical outcomes were task autonomy and perceived career advancement. The revised interpretation therefore avoids treating these variables as engagement dimensions. The study contributes evidence about two specific employee perceptions associated with learning-oriented and guidance-related practices. This conceptual narrowing improves alignment among the title, objectives, measurement, analysis, and conclusion.

CONCLUSION

This study examined two employee-level relationships within the Central Stores of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Growth-mindset orientation was strongly and positively associated with task autonomy, while employee guidance was very strongly and positively associated with perceived career advancement. These findings support the relevance of learning-oriented supervision, developmental support, mentoring, and meaningful discretion in a university administrative setting. They do not demonstrate causal effects, and they should not be interpreted as evidence that task autonomy and perceived career advancement are direct measures of employee engagement.

The strongest practical message is that employee development and discretion should be managed together. Supervisors can encourage learning and initiative while maintaining appropriate accountability, and career guidance can be made more transparent, structured, and equitable. Because the study is cross-sectional, same-source, and confined to one unit, further longitudinal and multi-site evidence is required before stronger claims can be made about the direction or generality of the relationships.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY HR AND UNIT MANAGEMENT

1. Develop learning-supportive supervision. Supervisors should normalize constructive learning from errors, provide developmental feedback, and create appropriate opportunities for employees to try improved work methods within established controls.
2. Protect meaningful task discretion. Central Stores management should clarify non-negotiable accountability requirements while identifying decisions that employees can make independently, such as sequencing routine tasks, organizing work schedules, and proposing process improvements.
3. Formalize mentoring and guidance. Guidance should move beyond informal goodwill by defining mentoring responsibilities, access to senior colleagues, feedback routines, and

development conversations. Formal arrangements should also guard against favouritism in who receives career support.

4. Increase transparency around career development. Promotion criteria, training opportunities, developmental pathways, and career-related decisions should be communicated clearly so that perceptions of advancement are based on understandable institutional processes.
5. Track objective outcomes alongside perceptions. Future HR evaluation should distinguish perceived career advancement from actual promotions, grade changes, training completion, and other verifiable career events.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has several limitations. First, it is a single-site cross-sectional survey of one administrative unit, so the findings should not be generalized automatically to all employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, other Nigerian universities, or other public-sector settings. Second, predictor and outcome variables were reported by the same respondents at the same time, creating potential common-method inflation and preventing temporal or causal inference. Third, the very high associations, particularly between employee guidance and perceived career advancement, raise the possibility of construct overlap and shared response tendencies.

Fourth, growth-mindset orientation is a mixed-content measure: some items reflect employees' beliefs, while others reflect perceived supervisor/management learning support. Future studies should separate employee growth mindset from leader growth-mindset behaviour or learning climate using validated multi-item scales. Fifth, the available pilot output provides only an overall alpha of 0.891; construct-specific reliability and factor-validity evidence were not available. Sixth, perceived career advancement is subjective and should not be equated with actual promotion or longitudinal career movement. Seventh, the archived summary output did not include residual diagnostic statistics or unstandardized coefficient tables, limiting the completeness of regression reporting.

Future research should therefore use multi-site and longitudinal designs, collect data from multiple sources, separate leader-level and employee-level constructs, and include objective career indicators. Where employees are nested under supervisors or units, multilevel modelling should be considered. Qualitative interviews or mixed-method designs could also explain how employees interpret autonomy, mentoring, fairness, and advancement opportunities within university administrative systems. Confirmatory factor analysis and explicit common-method-bias procedures would help establish whether the strong observed relationships persist after measurement overlap is addressed.

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