Mindful Leadership And Team Resilience Of Football Clubs In South-South Region Of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the relationship between mindful leadership, measured through self-awareness and mindful communication, and team resilience among football clubs in Nigeria's South-South region. Employing a cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 188 participants, including players, technical crew, and management staff from the 2024/2025 NPFL and NWFL seasons, using a stratified random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire, adapted from validated sources, measured constructs on a five-point Likert scale, with Cronbach's Alpha confirming high reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$). Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze relationships. Findings revealed a low-to-moderate positive correlation between self-awareness and team resilience ($r = .389$, $p < .01$), indicating that leaders' emotional awareness and reflective practices enhance team adaptability. A stronger positive correlation was found between mindful communication and team resilience ($r = .599$, $p < .01$), highlighting the critical role of clear, empathetic communication in fostering team cohesion and strategic adaptability. The study concludes that mindful leadership significantly enhances team resilience, enabling football clubs to navigate competitive pressures effectively. It is recommended that clubs implement leadership training focusing on self-awareness through reflective practices and emotional intelligence coaching, alongside workshops to improve mindful communication skills, emphasizing active listening and constructive conflict resolution. These interventions can strengthen team resilience, fostering sustained performance in dynamic environments.

Keywords: Mindful Leadership, Self-Awareness, Mindful Communication, Team Resilience.

1.0 Background of the Study

Football is a vital sector in Nigeria's economy, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and foreign exchange earnings (Eni et al., 2024). The sport's popularity and commercial potential make it a key driver of economic growth, yet the sector faces persistent challenges, including inconsistent team performance, financial instability, and poor crisis management. These challenges undermine team resilience; that is, the ability of football clubs to adapt, recover, and thrive amid adversities such as injuries, financial constraints, and competitive pressures (Hartwig et al., 2020). Given the high-stakes nature of professional football, resilience is crucial for sustaining performance, maintaining player morale, and ensuring long-term organizational success (López-Gajardo et al., 2023). However, despite its importance, many football clubs in Nigeria struggle with declining resilience, raising concerns about leadership effectiveness in fostering adaptability and cohesion.

Team resilience is critical for football clubs, as it enables teams to navigate dynamic, high-stakes environments while sustaining performance and cohesion (López-Gajardo et al., 2023). Resilient teams demonstrate adaptability, recover swiftly from disruptions like match losses or strategic errors, and maintain collective efficacy through shared goals and interdependence (Dimas et al., 2021). This capacity is vital in the high-pressure context of football, where teams face constant scrutiny and the need for rapid tactical adjustments. Eni et al. (2024) highlight that psychological safety and improvisation are key to resilience, particularly in dynamic settings, while Singh et al. (2024) emphasize that targeted interventions can strengthen teams' ability to manage uncertainties. Fostering team resilience is essential for clubs to thrive amidst competitive and operational challenges, ensuring sustained performance and organizational stability.

Mindful leadership, characterized by self-awareness and mindful communication, emerges as a promising driver of team resilience. Self-awareness enables leaders to recognize their emotions, strengths, and limitations, fostering emotional regulation and authentic decision-making that enhances team dynamics (Ebieme et al., 2024; Dierdorff et al., 2019). Mindful communication, marked by open, empathetic, and nonjudgmental interactions, promotes psychological safety and team cohesion, critical for navigating complex challenges (Khoury et al., 2022; Kusuma et al., 2023). Doornich and Lynch (2024) underscore that mindful leaders inspire trust and adaptive responses in high-pressure settings, while Nugraha et al. (2024) note their role in fostering healthier work environments. The Theory of High-Reliability Organizations (HROs), with its principles of commitment to resilience and sensitivity to operations, provides a robust framework for understanding how mindful leadership enhances team resilience in football clubs, where rapid

adaptation to adversities mirrors the demands of high-reliability contexts (Martínez-Córcoles & Vogus, 2020; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

Despite the growing body of research on team resilience predictors, a significant gap exists in exploring mindful leadership's role in the football sector, particularly in Nigeria's South-South region. Studies like López-Gajardo et al. (2023) focused on cohesion and efficacy but overlook leadership variables, while Eni et al. (2024) examined resilience in multi-project environments without addressing mindfulness. Ebieme et al. (2024) highlighted self-awareness in Nigerian educators but did not link it to team resilience, and Nugraha et al. (2024) explored mindful leadership's impact on individual commitment, not team-level outcomes. Doornich and Lynch (2024) provided a theoretical framework for mindful leadership but it lacked empirical testing in sports contexts. This study sort to address these gaps by investigating how self-awareness and mindful communication influence team resilience in South-South Nigerian football clubs.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated:

H_{01}:   There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and team resilience in football clubs in South-South, Nigeria.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between mindful communication and team resilience in football clubs in South-South, Nigeria.

2.0 Literature review

2.1   Conceptual framework

2.1.1   Mindful Leadership

Mindful leadership is characterized by an intentional state of awareness that enables leaders to remain fully present, fostering clarity, creativity, and compassion in their decision-making and interactions. It involves cultivating self-awareness and emotional regulation, allowing leaders to respond thoughtfully to workplace dynamics rather than reacting impulsively. Recent research highlights its transformative impact on organizational outcomes, emphasizing its role in enhancing employee green creativity through social information processing (Sun & Xi, 2024). Mindful leadership also promotes organizational commitment by fostering self-efficacy, as leaders who practice mindfulness create healthier work environments that value balance and personal growth (Nugraha et al., 2024). Furthermore, it supports resilience and employee engagement by moderating the effects of organizational culture and reducing turnover intentions through empathetic and mindful practices (Wibowo & Paramita, 2022; Yang et al., 2024). Mindful leaders inspire trust and foster innovative, adaptive responses to challenges, by aligning actions with inner values and maintaining focus in high-pressure situations; making it a critical framework for effective leadership in dynamic settings like football clubs (Doornich & Lynch, 2024).

2.1.2   Measures of Mindful Leadership

2.1.2.1   Self-Awareness
Self-awareness refers to a leader's ability to consciously recognize and understand their emotions, strengths, limitations, and their impact on others, thereby enhancing leadership effectiveness. It is a critical component of emotional intelligence, enabling leaders to adapt their styles to diverse contexts and improve team dynamics through accurate self-perception and metaperception (Dierdorff et al., 2019). Recent studies underscore its importance in fostering authentic leadership and improving job performance, particularly in high-stakes environments, by facilitating reflective practices and emotional regulation (Ebieme et al., 2024). Self-awareness also mediates the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance, as leaders who are self-aware can better navigate workplace pressures and align their actions with organizational goals (Wiwin et al., 2024). Self-aware leaders enhance their decision-making and collaboration by engaging in practical reflexivity and structured introspective experiences (Svalgaard, 2018).

2.1.2.2   Mindful Communication

Mindful communication involves engaging with others in an open, compassionate, and nonjudgmental manner, prioritizing deep listening and emotional awareness to foster effective interactions. It enhances workplace relationships by promoting empathy and reducing dysfunctional communication patterns, such as blame or avoidance, which is particularly crucial in team-oriented settings like football clubs (Khoury et al., 2022). Studies have demonstrated that mindful communication strengthens organizational learning by making tacit knowledge explicit, especially in virtual and hybrid work environments post-COVID-19 (Renecle et al., 2020). It also supports collective mindfulness by fostering a culture of attentive listening and psychological safety, enabling teams to navigate complex and dynamic challenges effectively (Kusuma et al., 2023). Leaders can enhance team cohesion and adaptability, through training their employees in mindful communication practices, ensuring clear and purposeful exchanges that contribute to team resilience and performance (Martínez-Córcoles & Vogus, 2020).

2.1.3   Team Resilience

Team resilience refers to a team's collective capacity to manage pressures, recover from adversities, and adapt effectively to challenges, thereby maintaining performance and well-being in dynamic environments. It is a dynamic process that involves interdependent team responses to adverse events, distinguishing it from related constructs like team adaptation by focusing on minimal disruption and sustained functionality (Hartwig et al., 2020). Some studies highlight its mediating role in linking transformational leadership to team effectiveness, emphasizing shared goals and interdependence in high-stakes contexts like sports teams (e.g. Dimas et al., 2021). Team resilience is also influenced by organizational culture and leadership practices, with mindful leadership fostering environments that enhance collective efficacy and team cohesion (Eni et al., 2024; López-Gajardo et al., 2023). Furthermore, interventions aimed at building resilience through training can strengthen a team's ability to navigate disruptions, making it a critical factor for football clubs facing competitive and environmental uncertainties (Singh et al., 2024).

2.2   Theoretical Framework

The Theory of High-Reliability Organizations (HROs)

The Theory of High-Reliability Organizations (HROs) was initially developed by researchers such as Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe in the 1990s to explain how complex, high-risk organizations—like nuclear power plants, air traffic control systems, and aircraft carriers—manage to function with nearly error-free performance over long periods (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). The theory identifies five core principles: a preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise. These principles highlight how HROs maintain a continuous state of alertness, learn from near-misses, and prioritize adaptability and frontline knowledge in decision-making. Critics argue that HRO theory may be contextually limited, as its principles are largely derived from highly structured and regulated environments and may not easily transfer to less formal or resource-constrained sectors (Rochlin, 1993). Additionally, some scholars note that the theory underemphasizes the role of organizational politics and cultural diversity in shaping reliability outcomes (Leveson, 2004).

The HRO theory provides a robust framework for understanding how mindful leadership practices can enhance team resilience in dynamic, high-pressure environments. Football clubs, while not as life-critical as traditional HROs, face intense competitive and operational demands, requiring rapid adaptation to adversities like player injuries, tactical shifts, or external pressures. The HRO tenet of commitment to resilience aligns with team resilience, as mindful leaders foster adaptive processes that help teams recover from setbacks, such as through self-awareness and mindful communication (Martínez-Córcoles & Vogus, 2020). Sensitivity to operations supports leaders in maintaining situational awareness, enabling proactive responses to on-field and off-field challenges. Furthermore, deference to expertise can translate to empowering players and coaches with specialized skills, enhancing team cohesion and performance under pressure (Renecle et al., 2020).

2.3 Empirical Review

Table 2.1: Webometrics of Gaps in Literature

S/N	Author(s) / Year	Country	Topic/ Objectives	Methodology	Findings	Conclusion	Gaps	Comparison with Current Study
1.	Eni et al. (2024)	Indonesia	To examine how project and demographic variables influence team resilience in multi-project environments	Survey of 349 respondents; descriptive stats and crosstabs; SPSS	Resilience differed by industry; non-construction teams showed higher resilience; psychological safety and improvisation were key	Team resilience depends on context and resource access	Did not include leadership variables or psychological traits like mindfulness	Supports the relevance of psychological safety and adaptation, but lacks focus on leadership, which is addressed in the current study
2.	Ebieme et al. (2024)	Nigeria	To determine the influence of	Survey of 92 respondents; descriptive and simple	All components of self-awareness	Self-awareness enhances performance	Focused only on educators; did not link	Reinforces the value of self-awareness, a

			self-awareness on job performance of business educators	linear regression; SPSS	significantly predicted job performance	under pressure	to team-based or resilience outcomes	proxy in current study, but in a different population and context
3.	Nugraha et al. (2024)	Indonesia	To explore how mindful leadership and culture influence commitment, mediated by self-efficacy	Survey of 266 lecturers; path analysis	Mindful leadership indirectly enhances commitment via self-efficacy	Mindful leadership strengthens psychological mechanisms for organizational outcomes	Did not assess resilience; focused on individual commitment	Supports relevance of mindful leadership, but current study expands to resilience in team sports
4.	López-Gajardo et al. (2023)	Spain	To assess how cohesion and efficacy relate to resilience and performance in team sports	Two studies with 394 and 434 athletes; questionnaires; cross-sectional and longitudinal design	Cohesion and efficacy predict resilience; resilience predicts performance	Resilience mediates team processes and performance	Did not include leadership or mindfulness variables	Strong contextual similarity to football; complements current study by linking resilience to performance, though leadership is omitted
5.	Doornich & Lynch (2024)	Multinational	To review leadership qualities derived from mindfulness practices	Semi-systematic review of 19 studies (2000–2021)	Identified attention, awareness, and authenticity as core traits	Proposed "three-pillar" framework for mindful leadership	Lacked empirical testing and team-level focus	Offers theoretical support for mindful leadership but lacks empirical validation in sports; current study fills this gap

3.0 Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional research design in line with Creswell's (2014) proposition for obtaining empirical data at a specific point in time to identify patterns across a population. Guided by the positivist paradigm, as emphasized by Babbie (2010) and Cooper and Schindler (2011), the study maintained objectivity by focusing on observable variables and statistical associations. A structured questionnaire was administered to a stratified random sample of 188 participants drawn from a total population of 353, comprising players, technical crew, and management staff from male and female football clubs participating in the 2024/2025 NPFL and NWFL seasons. The instrument measured self-awareness and mindful communication (mindful leadership), and team resilience, with items drawn from validated sources including Condon (2011), Khoury et al. (2022), and Sharma and Sharma (2016). The use of a five-point Likert scale ensured standardized responses and statistical comparability across constructs.

Reliability of the research instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, with all constructs exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.7, thus indicating high internal consistency (Pallant, 2011). Validity was established through expert review and content validation, drawing from frameworks advanced by Blumberg et al. (2005) and Robson (2011). Primary data were collected and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to examine the linear relationships between mindful leadership dimensions and team resilience. This analytical method allowed the study to test hypotheses on the strength and direction of

relationships without researcher interference, aligning with the positivist ontology articulated by Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Nachmias and Nachmias (2008).

4.0 Results and Discussion
4.1 Results and Analyses
Table 4.1: Demographic Analysis of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	107	56.9%	56.9%	56.9%
	Female	81	43.1%	43.1%	100.0%
Age Group	Under 18	24	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%
	18–24 years	32	17.0%	17.0%	29.8%
	25–30 years	78	41.5%	41.5%	71.3%
	31–35 years	35	18.6%	18.6%	89.9%
	36 years and above	19	10.1%	10.1%	100.0%
Educational Qualification	No Formal Education	14	7.4%	7.4%	7.4%
	Primary Education	25	13.3%	13.3%	20.7%
	SSCE/WAEC	70	37.2%	37.2%	58.0%
	National Diploma	45	23.9%	23.9%	81.9%
	Bachelor's Degree/Equivalent	34	18.1%	18.1%	100.0%
Years of Experience	0–2 years	17	9.0%	9.0%	9.0%
	3–5 years	77	41.0%	41.0%	50.0%
	6–10 years	46	24.5%	24.5%	74.5%
	11 years and above	48	25.5%	25.5%	100.0%

From Table 4.1, most participants were male (56.9%), indicating a slightly male-dominated sample, while females accounted for 43.1%. Respondents were predominantly between 25 and 30 years old (41.5%), reflecting a youthful, professionally active demographic likely to be engaged in team sports. Educationally, the highest proportion had completed secondary education (37.2%) or held a national diploma (23.9%), suggesting moderate educational attainment. Regarding experience, the majority (41.0%) had between 3 and 5 years of professional engagement in football, with a significant portion (25.5%) having over 11 years, indicating a diverse range of expertise and exposure to team dynamics.

4.1.1 Univariate Analysis

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-awareness	My team leader is aware of how their emotions influence their decisions.	3.37	1.044	-0.412	-0.218
	My team leader understands their strengths and uses them effectively.	3.51	1.082	-0.654	-0.194
	My team leader recognizes limitations and works to improve.	3.91	0.912	-1.189	1.881
	My team leader reflects to align with team goals.	3.85	0.964	-1.036	1.198
	My team leader acknowledges effects on morale/performance.	3.26	0.954	-0.245	-0.264
	My team leader takes responsibility for mistakes.	3.21	1.028	-0.228	-0.499
Mindful communication	My team leader ensures communication is clear.	3.47	0.961	-0.672	0.068
	My team leader listens actively and responds thoughtfully.	2.96	1.106	0.026	-0.790
	My team leader creates a positive, supportive atmosphere.	2.87	1.059	0.160	-0.653
	My team leader handles conflict respectfully.	3.34	0.960	-0.509	-0.124
	My team leader checks understanding during communication.	3.38	0.937	-0.467	0.204
	Our team adjusts to unexpected challenges.	3.16	0.930	-0.335	-0.003

	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
Team Resilience	We reorganize strategies when circumstances change.	3.69	1.148	-0.968	0.324
	Our team believes we can achieve goals together.	3.13	1.079	-0.113	-0.718
	We feel confident that we can overcome obstacles as a group.	3.41	1.083	-0.466	-0.401
	We share knowledge and resources with each other readily.	3.76	0.910	-1.089	1.574

The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents generally perceived their team leaders as possessing moderate to high levels of self-awareness. Items such as recognizing personal limitations (M = 3.91, SD = 0.912) and engaging in reflective practices to align with team goals (M = 3.85, SD = 0.964) recorded the highest mean scores, with negatively skewed distributions and high kurtosis values, suggesting a strong consensus among respondents. This points to a perception of emotionally intelligent leadership. Conversely, perceptions of leaders acknowledging their impact on team morale (M = 3.26) and taking responsibility for mistakes (M = 3.21) were lower, suggesting some inconsistency in how accountability and emotional influence are demonstrated by leaders.

For mindful communication, responses were more varied. While clarity in communication (M = 3.47, SD = 0.961) and respectful conflict resolution (M = 3.34, SD = 0.960) received moderate agreement, statements related to active listening (M = 2.96) and fostering a supportive environment (M = 2.87) were rated lowest, with near-zero or positive skewness, suggesting that some team leaders may struggle with empathy and inclusive dialogue. Regarding team resilience, respondents expressed stronger agreement with items related to strategic adaptation (M = 3.69, SD = 1.148) and knowledge/resource sharing (M = 3.76, SD = 0.910), while commitment to shared goals (M = 3.13) and confidence in overcoming obstacles (M = 3.41) were perceived less strongly. These patterns imply that while teams demonstrate flexibility and collaboration under pressure, there may be weaker cohesion around shared purpose and collective efficacy.

4.1.2 Bivariate Analysis
Table 4.3: Pearson Correlation Matrix

		Self-awareness	Mindful Communication	Team Resilience
Self-awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.519**	.389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	188	188	188
Mindful Communication	Pearson Correlation	.519**	1	.599**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	188	188	188
Team Resilience	Pearson Correlation	.389**	.599**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	188	188	188

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The bivariate analysis in Table 4.3 reveals statistically significant and positive correlations among all three variables. Self-awareness showed a moderate correlation with team resilience (r = .389, p < .01), indicating that increased awareness by leaders enhances a team's ability to remain adaptive and focused under pressure. Mindful communication had an even stronger relationship with team resilience (r = .599, p < .01), suggesting that clear, empathetic, and intentional communication strongly predicts collective adaptability and recovery from setbacks.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

Mindful Leadership and Team Resilience

The findings of this study reveal significant relationships between mindful leadership, decomposed into self-awareness and mindful communication, and team resilience in football clubs in Nigeria's South-South region. The low-to-moderate positive correlation between self-awareness and team resilience (r = .389, p < .01) underscores the importance of leaders' ability to recognize their emotions, strengths, and limitations in fostering resilient team dynamics. Ebieme et al. (2024) emphasize that self-awareness enhances job performance in high-stakes environments by facilitating reflective practices and emotional regulation, which aligns with the current findings. Self-aware leaders in football clubs can navigate the pressures of competitive matches and team management by aligning their actions with team goals, as supported by Wiwin et al. (2024), who note that self-awareness mediates the relationship between organizational culture and performance. This reflective capacity allows leaders to adapt their styles to diverse contexts, improving team dynamics through accurate self-perception (Dierdorff et al., 2019). Furthermore, Doornich and Lynch (2024) highlight that self-aware leaders inspire trust and foster adaptive responses by maintaining focus in high-pressure situations, a critical trait for football clubs facing tactical and environmental uncertainties. The HRO principle of sensitivity to

operations, as described by Martínez-Córcoles and Vogus (2020), complements this finding, as self-aware leaders maintain situational awareness, enabling proactive responses to challenges like player injuries or strategic shifts.

The strong positive correlation between mindful communication and team resilience ($r = .599$, $p < .01$) highlights its pivotal role in enhancing team adaptability and cohesion. Mindful communication, characterized by open, compassionate, and nonjudgmental interactions, fosters psychological safety and effective team coordination, as noted by Kusuma et al. (2023). This is particularly relevant in football clubs, where clear and purposeful exchanges during training and matches are essential for navigating dynamic challenges (Khoury et al., 2022). Martínez-Córcoles and Vogus (2020) further support this, stating that mindful communication enhances collective mindfulness, enabling teams to address complex issues effectively. The findings align with Renecle et al. (2020), who demonstrate that mindful communication strengthens organizational learning by making tacit knowledge explicit, a process vital for football teams adapting to new strategies or opponents. Nugraha et al. (2024) also suggest that mindful communication fosters healthier work environments, promoting team commitment and resilience. Within the HRO framework, mindful communication supports deference to expertise by empowering players and coaches to share specialized insights, enhancing team performance under pressure (Renecle et al., 2020).

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study investigated the relationship between mindful leadership, measured through self-awareness and mindful communication, and team resilience among football clubs in the South-South region of Nigeria. The findings revealed that both self-awareness and mindful communication significantly and positively correlate with team resilience, indicating that teams led by emotionally attuned and communicative leaders are more capable of adapting to challenges, reorganizing strategies, and maintaining cohesion under pressure. Therefore, it is recommended that:

i. Football club management invest in developing leaders' self-awareness through structured reflective practices and emotional intelligence training. To actualize this, clubs can implement regular leadership coaching sessions, personality assessments, and feedback systems where team members anonymously assess their leaders' emotional responsiveness and impact on morale.

ii. Management should enhance mindful communication skills among team leaders by promoting active listening, clarity in messaging, and constructive conflict resolution. Practically, clubs can conduct monthly communication workshops, role-play sessions during training camps, and establish peer-review mechanisms that encourage open, respectful dialogue among team members and staff.

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