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Theory X in a High-Power Distance Culture: The Effect of Micromanagement on Workforce Productivity

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Abstract

Micromanagement is frequently used to maintain quality and reduce errors in Nigeria's volatile manufacturing sector, yet its long-term implications for employee productivity remain contested. Drawing on Theory X, Theory Y, and self-determination theory as the guiding theoretical lens, this study examined how excessive supervision, lack of autonomy, and detailed reporting affect employee productivity among permanent staff at Vitafoam Nigeria PLC, Ikeja. Whereas earlier Nigerian studies such as Iro et al. (2019) and Ndidi et al. (2021) examined micromanagement and performance in broad, aggregate terms without isolating specific control dimensions at the firm level, this study disaggregated micromanagement into three distinct dimensions within a single large manufacturing firm to provide a more focused explanation of how specific control practices shape workforce productivity in a high power distance setting. The study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design. Data were collected from 230 permanent employees selected through stratified random sampling, with 219 usable responses, representing a response rate of 95.2 per cent. Multiple regression analysis showed that the three micromanagement dimensions jointly accounted for 61.2 per cent of the variation in employee productivity, and the overall regression model was statistically significant. Excessive supervision and lack of autonomy exerted the strongest negative effects, while detailed reporting had a smaller but still significant negative effect. The findings support Theory Y and self-determination theory by showing that, even in a high power distance culture, higher productivity is associated with trust, autonomy, and outcome-focused oversight rather than strict Theory X-style control. This study contributes firm-level quantitative evidence from a Nigerian manufacturing context and demonstrates, in practical terms, that control systems must be redesigned around clear outcome targets, defined autonomy zones, and streamlined reporting so that quality assurance goals are met without suppressing employee initiative or discretionary effort. Managers in similarly high power distance manufacturing environments can use these findings to redesign supervisory practices that protect both product quality and workforce productivity.

KEYWORDS
micromanagement; employee productivity; manufacturing; Theory X and Theory Y; self-determination theory; Vitafoam Nigeria PLC.

Introduction

Employee productivity remains a critical condition for organisational survival in Nigeria's difficult economic climate, where manufacturing firms contend with high energy costs, infrastructure deficits, and exchange rate instability (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, 2024; Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013). In response to these pressures, many organisations intensify supervisory control to minimise waste and errors, yet such control often drifts into micromanagement, where the pursuit of precision weakens the very productivity it is intended to protect (Sidle, 2008; Sola Ojo & Iyiegbuniwe, 2020). Nigerian evidence shows that management practices and human resource strategies strongly shape employees' work behaviour and performance outcomes (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2023; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2025). Intrusive oversight and restricted discretion can undermine intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and willingness to exert extra effort, thereby weakening productivity over time (Chambers, 2004; Iro et al., 2019; Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022), and this managerial dilemma is especially acute in manufacturing settings where quality assurance is essential, but excessive control may prove counterproductive. International evidence corroborates these Nigerian findings and extends them to other contexts.

Recent studies indicate that intensive monitoring practices depress employee well-being and discretionary performance across varied organisational settings, and that autonomy-supportive supervision is consistently linked with higher engagement and productivity outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Park & Kim, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Zhang et al., 2024). Vitafoam Nigeria PLC has remained financially robust (Vitafoam Nigeria PLC, 2025), yet a strong reliance on strict control systems may carry hidden costs such as slower decision-making and a tendency for employees to focus on appearing busy rather than being genuinely productive (Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022; White, 2010). Firm-level evidence on how specific micromanagement dimensions influence productivity in large Nigerian manufacturing organisations remains limited. In manufacturing, productivity is often understood as the ratio of output to input, but this technical definition is incomplete without considering the influence of motivation, leadership style, autonomy, and working conditions (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013).

Nigeria's high power distance culture, in which hierarchical and top-down leadership is common, may encourage managers to justify close supervision and detailed oversight (Hofstede, 2001; International Journal of Business Studies, 2022; Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). However, contemporary evidence suggests that many workers react negatively to intrusive control and increasingly prefer supportive and participatory leadership (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2023; Ndidi & Edwinah, 2021). Prior studies, however, present clear limitations: Iro et al. (2019) examined micromanagement and job performance in Ogun State manufacturing firms but treated micromanagement as a single composite construct without isolating its specific dimensions, while Ndidi et al., (2021) studied micromanaging behaviour in Rivers State SMEs but did not test the relative predictive strength of individual control dimensions within a single large firm operating under high power distance conditions. These gaps leave unresolved which specific control practice, excessive supervision, restricted autonomy, or reporting burden, contributes most to productivity loss in a large-scale Nigerian manufacturing environment.

Unlike Iro et al. (2019) and Ndidi et al. (2021), who examined micromanagement and employee performance as a general, aggregate construct in Ogun and Rivers States respectively, this study extends existing Nigerian research by disaggregating micromanagement into three specific dimensions, excessive supervision, lack of autonomy, and detailed reporting, and testing their individual and joint predictive strength on productivity within a single large, high power distance Nigerian manufacturing firm, thereby offering a distinctive, relatively underexplored firm-level empirical perspective that prior aggregate-level studies could not provide.

The main objective of this study is to assess the effect of micromanagement on employee productivity at Vitafoam Nigeria PLC, Ikeja, Lagos. The specific objectives are to examine the effect of excessive supervision on employee productivity, assess the effect of lack of autonomy on employee productivity, and investigate the effect of detailed reporting on employee productivity.

Method

Research Type

This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive survey design (Iro et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). The design made it possible to gather standardised responses from employees and to examine statistically the predictive relationship between micromanagement dimensions and employee productivity.

Population and Sample

The population comprised 542 permanent employees at Vitafoam Nigeria PLC, Ikeja. Eligible respondents were permanent staff with a minimum of six months of continuous service in either the production/technical or administrative/management departments at the time of data collection; casual, contract, and probationary staff were excluded to ensure that respondents had sufficient exposure to established supervisory practices. Using the Taro Yamane, (1967) formula, a sample size of 230 employees was determined. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation of production or technical staff and administrative or management staff. (See Table 1).

Research Location

The study was conducted at the Ikeja facility of Vitafoam Nigeria PLC, a process-intensive manufacturing organisation operating in a challenging economic environment marked by infrastructure gaps, cost volatility, and competitive pressure. This context provides a suitable setting for examining micromanagement practices in a high power distance and quality-sensitive production system (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, 2024; Vitafoam Nigeria PLC, 2025).

Instrumentation

Data were collected using the Micromanagement and Productivity Questionnaire (MPQ), developed for this study and informed by previous work on micromanagement, leadership, and performance (Chambers, 2004; White, 2010; Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013). The instrument measured excessive supervision, lack of autonomy, detailed reporting, and employee productivity on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Content validity was established through review by three academic experts in human resource management, who assessed each item for clarity and relevance, and a content validity ratio of 0.83 was obtained, exceeding the recommended minimum threshold. Construct validity was further supported by exploratory factor analysis, in which all items loaded onto their expected factors with loadings above 0.50. A pilot study produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) of the 230 questionnaires distributed, 219 were correctly completed and returned, giving a response rate of 95.2 per cent, which is high for organisational surveys in similar settings (Iro et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019).

Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed through departmental channels and retrieved after completion within the agreed data collection period. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in order to encourage honest responses and reduce social desirability bias (Saunders et al., 2019).

Data Analysis.

Data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the variables, while multiple regression analysis examined the joint and individual effects of excessive supervision, lack of autonomy, and detailed reporting on employee productivity (Iro et al., 2019; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2023).

Ethical Approval

The study followed standard ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respectful handling of respondents' data. No identifying personal information was reported, and the findings are presented only in aggregate form (Saunders et al., 2019).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. Respondents reported moderately high levels of excessive supervision and detailed reporting, moderate levels of restricted autonomy, and moderate levels of employee productivity, suggesting a supervisory climate weighted toward close monitoring.

Regression Model Summary

The multiple regression analysis produced a model summary in which R = 0.782, R-squared = 0.612, adjusted R-squared = 0.606, and the standard error of the estimate = 0.34112. This shows that 61.2 per cent of the variation in employee productivity is jointly explained by excessive supervision, lack of autonomy, and detailed reporting. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 215) = 112.94$, $p < .001$, confirming that the combined set of predictors reliably explains variation in employee productivity beyond chance (Iro et al., 2019; Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022). (See table 3 and table 4).

Regression Coefficients

The regression coefficients indicate that all three dimensions of micromanagement have significant negative effects on employee productivity. Excessive supervision is the most damaging factor, followed by lack of autonomy, while detailed reporting exerts a smaller but still statistically significant negative effect. The pattern confirms that higher levels of intrusive control are associated with lower employee productivity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022). (See table 5).

Excessive supervision has the strongest negative effect, showing that a rise in intrusive supervision is associated with a considerable decline in productivity. Lack of autonomy also has a sizeable adverse effect, which is consistent with self-determination theory. Detailed reporting has a smaller negative effect, suggesting that excessive documentation requirements divert time from value-adding tasks (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022).

The findings show that micromanagement significantly undermines employee productivity at Vitafoam Nigeria PLC, even within a process-intensive manufacturing environment. The strong negative effect of excessive supervision supports the argument that hovering managers shift employees away from genuine task focus and towards impression management, where energy is spent on appearing compliant rather than on producing meaningful output (Chambers, 2004; White, 2010). This is consistent with Nigerian evidence linking intrusive control to weak performance and lower engagement (Iro et al., 2019; Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022).

Beyond statistical significance, the magnitude of the effects observed carries practical importance for management. With a standardised beta of -0.512, excessive supervision represents a large effect size by conventional benchmarks, meaning that modest reductions in intrusive monitoring could translate into proportionally larger productivity gains.

Table 1. Population and sample distribution by stratum

Stratum	Population	Sample size
Production/Technical	425	180
Administrative/Management	117	50
Total	542	230

Source: Field survey design (2026).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of study variables (N = 219)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Excessive supervision	3.98	0.61	High
Lack of autonomy	3.42	0.72	Moderate
Detailed reporting	3.85	0.58	High
Employee productivity	3.10	0.68	Moderate

Source: Field survey (2026).

Table 3. Model summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.782	0.612	0.606	0.34112

Source: Field survey (2026).

Table 4. ANOVA summary of the regression model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F (Sig.)
Regression	39.42	3	13.14	112.94 (0.000)
Residual	25.02	215	0.116	
Total	64.44	218		

Source: Field survey (2026).

Table 5. Regression coefficients (dependent variable: employee productivity; significance level: p < .05)

Predictor	Unstandardised B	Standardised Beta	t	Sig. (p)
Constant	3.421	--	8.303	0.000
Excessive supervision	-0.453	-0.512	-8.388	0.000
Lack of autonomy	-0.312	-0.345	-5.114	0.002
Detailed reporting	-0.115	-0.108	-2.395	0.018

Source: Field survey (2026).

Similarly, the effect size for lack of autonomy (beta = -0.345) is of moderate-to-large practical magnitude, suggesting that expanding decision latitude for operators and supervisors is not merely theoretically desirable but could yield measurable productivity returns. Detailed reporting, while statistically significant, has a smaller effect size (beta = -0.108), indicating that streamlining documentation is likely to produce incremental rather than transformative gains, and should therefore be prioritised after addressing supervision and autonomy (Agbo & Okeoma, 2020; Amah & Ahiauzu, 2013; Babalola, 2016; Gerpott et al., 2022; Mullins, 2016; Ubabudu, 2026).

A plausible rival explanation for the productivity outcomes observed is that broader macroeconomic pressures, such as high energy costs, foreign exchange volatility, and infrastructure deficits affecting Nigerian manufacturing generally (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, 2024), rather than micromanagement per se, could be depressing productivity and simultaneously prompting managers to tighten supervisory control as a reactive measure. The cross-sectional design of this study does not allow these macroeconomic confounders to be statistically isolated from the micromanagement variables, and it is possible that the observed relationships partly reflect this shared economic context rather than a purely psychological mechanism. However, because the regression coefficients remained large and statistically robust even after accounting for the shared variance among the three micromanagement dimensions, and because the pattern of effects aligns closely with theoretical predictions from self-determination theory rather than with a generic economic-stress account, the micromanagement-productivity relationship is unlikely to be fully explained by macroeconomic confounding alone. Future studies should nonetheless incorporate firm-level economic indicators as covariates to formally test this possibility.

The sizeable effect of lack of autonomy supports self-determination theory, which argues that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are basic psychological needs that drive intrinsic motivation and high-quality performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Nigerian research has similarly shown that employees respond positively to supportive human resource practices and participatory leadership (Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2023). The present findings therefore reinforce the argument that restricted discretion over work tasks can lower productivity even in tightly controlled manufacturing systems.

The negative effect of detailed reporting highlights the productivity cost of bureaucratic overload. When employees are required to devote excessive time to documentation that offers limited decision value, the administrative burden can reduce attention to core productive activities (Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022). This suggests that not all control mechanisms create value, and some may simply add procedural weight without improving performance.

Taken together, the findings are more consistent with Theory Y than with Theory X. Despite operating in a high power distance environment, Vitafoam employees appear to respond more positively to trust, clear goals, and structured autonomy than to strict and continuous control (Kopelman et al., 2008; McGregor, 1960). This supports the view that even in hierarchical contexts, participatory and autonomy-supportive management practices can produce stronger productivity outcomes than rigid supervisory control (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Ndidi et al., 2021; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of micromanagement on employee productivity at Vitafoam Nigeria PLC by focusing on excessive supervision, lack of autonomy, and detailed reporting. The findings showed that these three dimensions jointly explain over 60 per cent of the variation in employee productivity, confirming that micromanagement is a major predictor of workforce performance. Excessive supervision emerged as the most harmful factor, followed by lack of autonomy and detailed reporting, with all three variables exerting significant negative effects. The results challenge the assumptions of Theory X, which justify strict control on the basis that employees must be constantly monitored in order to perform effectively (McGregor, 1960). Instead, the findings support Theory Y and self-determination theory by showing that employees in this Nigerian manufacturing context achieve higher productivity under conditions of trust, autonomy, and outcome-focused oversight (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013).

Academic Contribution

This study contributes to the literature on leadership, motivation, and culture by extending the application of Theory X, Theory Y, and self-determination theory to a high power distance Nigerian manufacturing context. Methodologically, it disaggregates micromanagement into three distinct, separately measured dimensions rather than treating it as a single composite construct, offering a replicable analytical approach for future firm-level studies. Empirically, it provides firm-level quantitative evidence showing how excessive supervision, lack of autonomy, and detailed reporting jointly and individually shape employee productivity, thereby enriching empirical debates on micromanagement and workforce performance in emerging economy manufacturing organisations.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

While the study offers useful insight into micromanagement and employee productivity, some limitations should be noted. The study relied on self-reported productivity measures, which may not fully correspond with objective production indicators and may introduce response bias (Saunders et al., 2019). The single-firm focus also limits wider generalisability (Iro et al., 2019). The cross-sectional design further limits the ability to rule out confounding macroeconomic influences or to establish causality between micromanagement and productivity. Future research should combine survey data with objective productivity measures, incorporate firm-level economic covariates, and compare multiple manufacturing firms across different Nigerian settings, while also examining how generational mix and broader diversity dynamics interact with micromanagement to shape work behaviour (Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2023; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2025).

Recommendations

Shift to outcome-based management by concentrating on safety, quality, and production targets rather than on continuous process surveillance (Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2023). Implement Autonomy Zones at operator and supervisor levels, specifying decisions that can be taken without prior approval, in line with Theory Y assumptions and general expectations for autonomy (McGregor, 1960; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2025). Digitise and streamline reporting by discontinuing reports not used in decision making and migrating essential reports to simple digital formats (Solaja & Oyalakun, 2022). Train supervisors for trust-based leadership, emphasising coaching, delegation, and feedback, and reward them for building capable, self-directed teams (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; White, 2010; Al'Hassan-Ewuoso et al., 2023).

Author Contributions

Al'Hassan-Ewuoso H. O. formulated the research problem, developed the theoretical direction, and led the writing of the manuscript. Akindele L. I. coordinated data collection and contributed to the empirical analysis. Ajibola R. O. supported instrument development, literature synthesis, and revision of

the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the conduct or reporting of this study.

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