



RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE CAMEROONIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

This research arose from the observation that employees in the Cameroonian civil service show insufficient engagement at work. Several studies indicate that low work engagement has multiple consequences for organisations. Mowday and colleagues (1982) show that it contributes to increased stress and reduced vigilance; it also leads to reduced effort, lower performance and loss of efficiency (Aseron et al., 2020). Allen and Meyer (1996) argue that disengaged employees may become unpleasant and aggressive. In this context, the role played by the leader appears important for revitalising the organisational environment. The objective of this study is to show that transformational leadership predicts work engagement. A random sample of 179 employees in the city of Yaounde was selected. Data were collected using a questionnaire composed of measurement scales: work engagement was assessed using the Allen and Meyer (1993) scale, while transformational leadership was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire developed by Bass and Avolio (2003). The results indicate that H1 ($\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$), H2 ($\beta = 0.26$; $p < 0.05$), H3 ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < 0.05$) and H4 ($\beta = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$) are all significant. These findings show that transformational leadership predicts work engagement. The study concludes that leaders must lead by example in order to transform colleagues' apathy into work engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement at work has interested researchers for many years, mainly because of its central role in any policy aimed at retaining employees. Engagement helps organisations retain those who contribute most significantly to professional objectives. Kiesler (2003) defines engagement as the link that exists between an individual and his or her actions. At a time when organisational effectiveness increasingly depends on sound management of the human factor, creating strong engagement among employees appears to be a priority for managers. Professional life itself is confronted with several alternatives, such as the pressure of immediate necessity, the prospect of advancement, personal initiative, and the maximisation of gain. Depending on the situation, the practice of a profession may reveal an inclination toward needs or aspirations, conformism, autonomy, speculation, and work. In Cameroon, public-sector employees generally display a weakened form of engagement, visible through certain behaviours and moods, including frequent strikes, laxity at work, repeated abandonment of duty posts reflected in numerous hierarchical reminders to comply with instructions, fraudulent practices such as being replaced by a third party in one's duties, failure by newly assigned employees to take up service, especially in rural areas, fraudulent transfers, forgery and use of forged documents, among others.

Considering the behaviours observed among teachers in relation to work, the resulting problem is lack of work engagement, manifested through lateness, absenteeism, slow work, laxity, bad moods, insubordination, failure to respect procedures, and especially failure to respect the hierarchy. In the education sub-sector, the Education Sector Strategy Paper and the State Report on the National Education System (RESEN, 2006) reveal a form of disaffection among teachers toward their profession. Similarly, the report of the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (2011) indicates that, in Africa, teachers increasingly feel uncomfortable in their profession and that teacher dissatisfaction with their professional situation reaches 50%. In Cameroon, the same report indicates 56% satisfaction and 44% dissatisfaction, a rate sufficiently significant to deserve serious attention. Yet, as Bruns and Luque (2014) emphasise, the teacher is the main school-level factor influencing pupils' performance, and no other variable plays such a significant role. Teachers are therefore the principal resource of an education system. They influence the education system and incontestably remain at the heart of the educational community. In the health sector, one observes in emergency units of hospitals in Cameroon that citizens sometimes die because of the absence of rapid care, while patients are abandoned to themselves. In administration, staff often arrive late at work, are frequently absent, and even when they are

present, they do not work or engage in activities other than those prescribed to them. Others engage in corruption, embezzlement, harassment, and uncivil behaviour. In public services, it is not uncommon to observe that activity is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals who are overwhelmed by workload, while boredom, emptiness, and apathy affect other employees in the same service who, in practice, find themselves without activity. The choice of persons involved in actual work is often guided by informal criteria linked to trust, perceived competence, and, above all, membership of ethnic and trafficking networks. Indeed, the study of the relationship to work conducted by Nyock Ilouga (2020) among Cameroonian private- and public-sector workers shows that the attractiveness of work lies essentially in the possibility of participating in trafficking networks systematically organised around prescribed work. These networks become the real work and take precedence over prescribed work. This mode of operation creates, for some employees, work overload associated with more income, more recognition, more promotion opportunities, higher engagement, and stronger attachment to work and to the organisation. For others, namely those who are effectively excluded from work, one may observe higher frustration, loss of meaning at work, and certainly a lower level of work engagement. In all cases, such functioning undermines service quality and overall organisational performance and fuels conflicts among workers. This is why the present analysis focuses on alternatives for developing work engagement in the civil service. The leadership style applied appears to be responsible for this situation. The main research question is therefore formulated as follows: is transformational leadership necessary for employee work engagement? The engagement crisis is one of the problems currently facing Cameroonian organisations, irrespective of their sector of activity. Understanding this phenomenon is an asset for helping Cameroonian organisations manage their personnel, and particularly their work teams, more effectively. The objective of this research is to show that work engagement depends on transformational leadership practised by civil-service managers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformational Leadership: The word “leadership” appeared in England in the thirteenth century (El Mahi & Slaoui, 2023). The earliest works on leadership were carried out by researchers at Ohio University, notably Blake and Mouton (1945 and 1953). In order to identify the dimensions that influence managers’ behaviour, in other words to understand how leaders behave in their managerial work, researchers at Ohio University conducted statistical studies and analyses based on questionnaires comprising more than 150 examples of typical behaviours administered to a large number of leaders. Like organisations elsewhere in the world, organisations in Cameroon operate under a management system headed by a leader. Despite more than half a century of studies on the concept of leadership, its definition remains vague and difficult to determine, and the difficulty of providing a clear and precise characterisation remains a major obstacle for most researchers (Aditya, 2004; Parry & Bryman, 2006; Xenikou, 2017). For the purposes of this study, the definition by Schermerhorn et al. (2010, p. 313) is retained for its relevance: leadership is a process through which an individual influences others so that they understand and share

a vision of what must be done and how it should be done, while also supporting individual and collective efforts toward the achievement of common objectives. Many leadership styles have been considered in the literature (Blake & Mouton, 1981; Clawson, 1999; Den Hartog et al., 1999). However, the most widely discussed styles are transactional and transformational leadership (Sfantou et al., 2017). The focus of the present research is transformational leadership. According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership theory involves leaders adopting ethical behaviours by inspiring followers and providing intellectual stimulation for both employees’ individual interests and organisational interests, thereby expanding the scope of leadership (Bello, 2012; Hirak et al., 2012; Krishnan, 2012; McKnight, 2013). It emphasises the ethical dimensions of leaders and leader-follower relations (Pandey et al., 2015). Transformational leaders therefore present a vision that complements the mission by focusing on the empowerment and inspiration of all those who work within the organisation (Bass, 1985). They demonstrate moral and ethical behaviour toward followers through interpersonal interactions (Choudhary et al., 2013). The literature on transformational leadership generally distinguishes five models. First, the model of Podsakoff et al. (1990) comprises four dimensions: core transformational behaviours, high performance expectations, intellectual stimulation, and individualised support. Second, the Bass and Avolio (1995) model comprises four dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Third, the Conger and Kanungo (1994) model includes vision and articulation, personal risk, unconventional behaviour, sensitivity to subordinates’ needs, and sensitivity to the environment. Fourth, Rafferty and Griffin (2004) conceptualised transformational leadership through five dimensions: vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition. The final model is that of Shamir et al. (1998), which includes four dimensions, among them emphasis on ideas, exemplary behaviour, and emphasis on collective identity. The presence of several models of transformational leadership in the literature makes it possible to describe and distinguish transformational leader behaviour according to multiple dimensions (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

According to Bass and Avolio (1994), cited by Tian et al. (2020), transformational leadership has four dimensions. The first is charisma, which refers to the fact that transformational leaders serve as role models for employees, facilitate acceptance of group objectives, and encourage employees to elevate their organisational goals. The second is intellectual stimulation, which means that leaders help colleagues identify new approaches when such approaches appear necessary. The third is individualised consideration, through which the leader pays greater attention to followers’ needs, acts as a mentor, and listens to employees’ complaints. The fourth is inspirational motivation, which refers to leaders communicating high expectations to subordinates and inspiring them through a strong tendency to commit themselves and integrate into a shared organisational vision.

Work Engagement: Allen and Meyer (1990) define commitment as a force that binds an individual to an action aimed at achieving an established objective. This definition situates commitment in a professional context. Thévenet (2004) argues that three conditions promote employee engagement at work: coherence, reciprocity, and

appropriation. Coherence refers to the consistency between the general policy of the enterprise and its organisational project, on the one hand, and strategic and operational decisions, on the other. Reciprocity refers to the employee's feeling that there is a fair relationship between what he or she contributes to the organisation and what the organisation provides in return, such as remuneration, advancement, and status. Appropriation refers to the degree to which the employee identifies with the values and objectives of the organisation. Engagement is an action that carries meaning. Keeping one's commitment means making an effort to maintain a certain idea of one's presence in the world. By committing oneself, a person no longer acts merely out of habit or instinct, but adopts a personal norm that serves as a guide or reference point. Work engagement is a state of mind or attitude that increases the chances of staff retention in organisations (Meyer & Allen, 1991). One often observes with pleasure the joy and happiness of new recruits who enter the professional sphere with great enthusiasm, ready to work seriously toward the achievement of set objectives. In Cameroon, as elsewhere, obtaining a job is the result of a difficult struggle for all those who have only their competences to rely on. It is therefore a moment of great joy, the beginning of an occupation, and the end of unemployment. Sometimes, many recruits even wish to start work on the very day they are hired; this is a sign of engagement and gratitude toward the organisation. Allen and Meyer (1991) distinguish three dimensions of commitment: affective, continuance, and normative. Commitment is affective when it concerns the employee's identification with and involvement in the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Folger and Konovsky (1989) argued that employees' affective commitment appears to be influenced more by the fairness of the procedures used to arrive at a decision than by the final outcome of that decision. The normative dimension may be defined as a moral component referring to the feeling of obligation and responsibility that an employee feels toward the organisation and that pushes him or her to remain there (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The continuance or calculated dimension refers to an individual's predisposition to feel attached to the organisation because of the benefits it provides, such as salary, status, and promotion, and because of the costs associated with leaving it (Meyer & Allen, 1991). According to numerous studies, affective organisational commitment reduces employees' risk of resignation and is the dimension of commitment that best predicts retention when compared with normative and continuance forms. Nevertheless, several studies have also shown that continuance commitment to the organisation is likely to reduce voluntary departures. By contrast, most studies have shown that normative organisational commitment has little effect on retention.

Explanatory Theory: Social Exchange Theory: Homans (1961) considers social exchange as a transaction of activity, tangible or intangible, which may involve gratifications or rewards between at least two individuals. This exchange of activity must involve at least two persons and must not only be apparent, material, or immaterial; it must also generate costs or rewards. However, Blau (1964) is generally considered the founder of this theory. Drawing on the work of Homans (1958), Blau classified exchange relationships into two categories: economic relationships and social relationships. Blau (1964) indicates that, unlike economic exchange, social exchange is based on favours that create diffuse future obligations, not precisely specified, and whose counterpart cannot be negotiated but must be left to the discretion of the

actor. In other words, social exchange defines mutual interactions between two or more parties that are part of a diachronic pattern of gift and counter-gift (Mauss, 1923). Social exchange theory postulates that a high-quality relational exchange established between an employee and his or her organisation generates a sense of obligation or reciprocity that is stronger than a purely economic and instrumental exchange relationship (Blau, 1964). According to Shore et al. (2003), social exchange theory is used as a major conceptualisation for evaluating the employee-organisation relationship. This theory explains how a behaviour, such as work engagement, may be adopted within an organisation and possesses strong predictive power grounded in reciprocity, that is, giving a benefit in exchange for a gain received (Molm et al., 2007). Social exchange theory, with its principle of reciprocity, is useful because it helps explain behaviours in the workplace. It has established itself as a relevant theoretical framework in the study of work relations (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007), including relations between transformational leaders and employees engaged at work. In the work situation, social exchange theory postulates that when workers receive help, support, attention, or other benevolent provisions, they are more inclined to reciprocate by displaying positive, value-creating work attitudes and behaviours (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Following this logic, support generally comes from the organisation itself through its general policy and human resource management policy; from the immediate superior or supervisor through his or her management style; and from co-workers through helping behaviours (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

General Research Hypothesis: Hersey and Blanchard (1966), among many others, highlighted the influence of leadership style on motivation and job satisfaction. They particularly agree that employees' voluntary engagement at work depends on leaders' capacity to generate enthusiasm and adherence to organisational objectives. The manager's leadership style may therefore affect employee behaviour as well as employees' affective reaction toward work. For this reason, the following research hypothesis is formulated: transformational leadership predicts work engagement among public-sector employees.

Operationalisation and Research Hypotheses: The operationalisation of transformational leadership is based on Bass and Avolio (2003), with the following modalities: charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. The research hypotheses are as follows: H1: leader charisma increases work engagement; H2: inspirational motivation predicts work engagement; H3: intellectual stimulation predicts work engagement; H4: individualised consideration is associated with work engagement.

Participants: The participants in this research included 54.49% (92 participants) aged between 25 and 40 years, with a mean work engagement score of 3.15, and 44.38% (79 participants) aged between 40 and 60 years, with a mean work engagement score of 3.36. There were as many young as older employees, and those over 40 years of age were more engaged at work than younger employees. Men represented 76 participants, or 42.70%, while women represented 95 participants, or 53.3%. The mean work engagement score

among men was 3.27, while among women it was 3.20, indicating that men were more engaged at work than women. A total of 4.49% had only a primary-school certificate, representing 8 participants; 33.71% had secondary-school qualifications; 1.12% had a doctorate; and 60%, or 106 participants, held either a bachelor's or master's degree. Participants with between 10 and 20 years of service represented 40.44% and had a mean work engagement score of 3.20, while those with fewer than 10 years of service represented 51.12% and had a mean work engagement score of 3.15. The level of work engagement was therefore similar regardless of length of service. Nearly 40% of participants were married, 35% were single, and 16% were cohabiting. Civil servants represented 84.27%, or 146 participants, compared with 28 participants, or 15.73%, in other public employment categories. In addition, 48.88% of participants, or 87 persons, could not recommend civil-service work to their children, compared with 46.63% who would do so.

Data Collection Instruments: In the contemporary literature, the most widely accepted instrument for measuring work engagement is that of Allen and Meyer (1993). Work engagement was assessed using the Allen and Meyer (1993) scale, composed of 18 items distributed equally across three main dimensions: affective commitment (6 items), continuance commitment (6 items), and normative commitment (6 items). Participants were required to express their degree of agreement with each item using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree. Transformational leadership was assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X) developed by Bass and Avolio (2003), with the following modalities: charisma, 6 items (items 1 to 6); inspirational motivation, 6 items (items 7 to 12); intellectual stimulation, 4 items (items 13 to 16); and individualised consideration, 4 items (items 17 to 20).

Reliability Test: The internal reliability test of the measurement scales produced the following results: the global Cronbach's alpha for work engagement was 0.84, while that of transformational leadership was 0.86. These results show that the items are sufficiently coherent and actually measure what they are intended to measure. Data analysis was carried out using Jamovi, through correlation analysis and regression analysis.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses: This table, with $N = 176$, shows that women ($M = 3.45$) have a higher level of engagement than men ($M = 3.22$). Employees with more than 20 years of service ($M = 3.46$) are more engaged than those with barely 5 years of service ($M = 3.28$). It is also observed that those with up to 10 years of service ($M = 3.41$) are more engaged than those with up to 2 years of service ($M = 3.30$). This analysis suggests that, in the Cameroonian civil service, work engagement varies according to length of service. According to the correlation matrix, the correlation between charisma and work engagement is positive and significant ($r = 0.341$; $p < 0.05$). This means that employee work engagement increases as the leader's charisma also increases. The correlation between engagement and inspirational motivation is also positive, although weak ($r = 0.333$; $p < 0.05$). The correlation between engagement and intellectual stimulation is positive (r

$= 0.360$; $p < 0.05$). Finally, the correlation between individualised consideration and work engagement is weak but positive ($r = 0.243$; $p < 0.05$). For H1, leader charisma increases work engagement: $\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$. This hypothesis is significant and shows that the greater the leader's charisma, the more employees demonstrate work engagement. The strength of this relationship is approximately 11%. For H2, inspirational motivation predicts work engagement: $\beta = 0.26$; $p < 0.05$. This hypothesis is significant and shows that the leader's inspirational motivation increases employee work engagement. The increase in engagement explained by inspirational motivation is reflected by an adjusted R^2 of 0.10, or 10%. For H3, intellectual stimulation predicts work engagement: $\beta = 0.29$; $p < 0.05$. This hypothesis is significant and shows that employees' intellectual stimulation predicts their work engagement. This prediction is reflected by an adjusted R^2 of 0.12, or 12%. For H4, individualised consideration is associated with work engagement: $\beta = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$. This hypothesis is significant and shows that individualised consideration increases public-sector employees' work engagement. The increase in engagement is approximately 5%.

DISCUSSION

Many researchers attest that lack of work engagement has harmful consequences for workers' lived experiences. Mowday and colleagues (1982) showed that lack of engagement may be responsible for increased employee stress, manifested through disorders and reduced vigilance. At the organisational level, lack of engagement leads to reduced effort, lower performance, and loss of effectiveness (Aseron et al., 2020). Allen and Meyer (1996) affirm that employees may become unpleasant and aggressive. Brimecombe (2013) suggests that when employees are treated unfairly, they demonstrate low loyalty at work and may be encouraged to display deviant acts and behaviours that serve their own personal interests. Le Gonidec (2006) considers work engagement an important criterion of organisational effectiveness, given that it predicts staff stability and the degree of mobilisation. Some researchers have therefore considered it necessary to identify the factors that trigger the process of work engagement.

The relationship between career management and engagement examined in the study by Meyer and Smith (2000) appeared to be the practice with the strongest effects on affective engagement. The effect of the absence of career management on disengagement confirms the work of Tremblay and Roger (2004) and Noah (2017) on the negative effects of career plateauing. Ongoni (2007), for his part, believes that the degree of employee commitment or loyalty toward the organisation depends largely on job enrichment, employee empowerment, and remuneration. Morin (2008) showed that better working conditions increase the level of well-being, which in turn fully contributes to employee work engagement. Khan (2010) revealed a positive relationship between employee engagement and professional performance. Camilleri (2002) studied some of the major antecedents that encourage employees to commit themselves to an organisation, using regression and analysis of variance, and found that level of education, personality, and position are important parameters determining an individual's level of engagement. Mengoua (2022) shows that the usefulness of work promotes

Table 1. Internal Reliability of the Scales (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale / Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha (alpha)	Interpretation
Transformational Leadership (Global)	20	0.860	Excellent
- Charisma	6	0.768	Acceptable
- Inspirational motivation	6	0.688	Borderline / Acceptable
- Intellectual stimulation	4	0.343	Weak
- Individualised consideration	4	0.667	Borderline
Work Engagement (Global)	18	0.840	Excellent
- Affective commitment	6	0.682	Borderline / Acceptable
- Continuance commitment	6	0.764	Acceptable
- Normative commitment	6	0.869	Good

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Transactional Leadership by Sex and Length of Service

Category	N	%	M (Transactional leadership)	SD
1-2 years	11	6.25	3.305	0.673
2-5 years	41	23.30	3.284	0.544
5-10 years	39	22.16	3.411	0.622
10-15 years	36	20.45	3.456	0.732
15-20 years	36	20.45	3.336	0.683
+20 years	13	7.39	3.468	0.540
Male	76	44.44	3.222	0.659
Female	95	55.56	3.457	0.589

Table 3. Correlation Matrix Between Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Charisma	1.000				
2. Inspirational motivation	0.686*	1.000			
3. Intellectual stimulation	0.517*	0.670*	1.000		
4. Individualised consideration	0.428*	0.583*	0.603*	1.000	
5. Engagement	0.341*	0.333*	0.360*	0.243*	1.000

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. Summary of the Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Predictive variable	beta (coefficient)	t value	p (significance)	R ²	Adjusted R ²
H1	Charisma	0.254	4.818	< 0.001	0.117	0.111
H2	Inspirational motivation	0.267	4.692	< 0.001	0.111	0.106
H3	Intellectual stimulation	0.294	5.121	< 0.001	0.130	0.125
H4	Individualised consideration	0.169	3.328	0.001	0.059	0.054

employee engagement. Regarding the dimension of understanding work, the results reveal that teachers operating in a context where work is not well organised do not seem to understand their work. This lack of understanding constitutes an obstacle to teacher work engagement. Nyagono (2020) shows that democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles contribute to increased work engagement. Lo (2009) examined the relationship between leadership styles, focusing mainly on transformational and transactional leadership, and employee engagement in Malaysia using regression analysis. The study found that transformational leaders are more capable of engaging employees than transactional leaders. The findings indicate that transformational leaders have a more significant and stronger relationship with employee engagement. This implies that leaders who provide guidance, support followers, and pay attention to their individual needs improve employees' level of engagement. In the present research, the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement was postulated, and the following results were obtained. H1, leader charisma increases work engagement, is significant ($\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$), showing that the greater the leader's charisma, the more employees demonstrate work engagement. This relationship has a strength of approximately 11%. H2, inspirational motivation predicts work engagement, is significant ($\beta = 0.26$; $p < 0.05$), showing that the public-sector leader's inspirational motivation increases work engagement. The increase in engagement explained by inspirational motivation is indicated by an adjusted R² of 0.10,

or 10%. H3, intellectual stimulation predicts work engagement, is significant ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < 0.05$), showing that employees' intellectual stimulation predicts their work engagement. This prediction is reflected by an adjusted R² of 0.12, or 12%. H4, individualised consideration is associated with work engagement, is significant ($\beta = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$), showing that individualised consideration increases public-sector employees' work engagement. The increase in engagement is approximately 5%. The results of this research are consistent with those of Lo (2009), specifying that transformational leadership predicts employee work engagement. However, the present study did not examine the role played by transactional leadership, nor by democratic and laissez-faire leadership as in the research of Nyagono (2020). It also differs from Mengoua (2022), which showed that the meaning given to work increased employee work engagement.

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