

International Journal of Research in Human Resource Management



E-ISSN: 2663-3361
P-ISSN: 2663-3213
IJRHRM 2023; 5(1): 126-131
www.humanresourcejournal.com
Received: 09-01-2023
Accepted: 12-02-2023

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Effects of Anglophone crisis on employees' work engagement before and during: A comparative analysis in The University of Bamenda

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26633213.2023.v5.i1b.138>

Abstract

This research aimed to determine and compare the employees' work engagement levels before and during the Anglophone Crisis. Data were collected through a survey from the employees of The University of Bamenda for the academic years 2016 and 2021-2023. The survey covered 170 of workers administrators, teaching and support staffs for the academic years 2016 and 2021-2023 however 97 responded through simple random sampling. The statistical analysis using the Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-Test of Independent Means revealed that, as a whole, the employees were very strongly engaged at work before and during the Crisis, and their levels of work engagement between these periods did not significantly differ. Administrative interventions in the form of technical, physical, moral, emotional, and financial support and well-managed employee engagement activities that could boost their mental and emotional wellness were recommended to mitigate the effect of a Crisis. The study recommends a follow-up investigation on employees' engagement at work, considering other variables such as age, sex, tenure, and generational groupings. It also recommends a more objective assessment of employee work engagement with the list of criteria in harmony with the three pillars of the institution: instruction, research, and extension.

Keywords: Employees' work engagement, Anglophone crisis

1. Introduction

According to Eyong A. (2023) ^[28], institution operating in today's society, it would at one time or the other witness instability in which the impacts of event(s) threaten its operations, survivals or reputation. The ability of such an organization to effectively manage such crisis is what differentiate an organization from another that permits such horrible state to dampen its strategic. (Macfarlane, 2010) ^[29].

The university of Bamenda is one of the public institutions in Cameroon that had been affected by two major crises. the Anglophone crisis and the outbreak of Covid 19 Crisis.

The Anglophone crisis started dramatically at the end of 2016. What started as peaceful protests in 2016 quickly escalated into a full-scale armed conflict with clear secessionist agenda.

The dramatic switch from mere protest to open conflict occurred on October 1, 2017, when separatists declared an independent Ambazonia. Violence has simmered since then with almost daily casualties. The start of Operation Ghost Town—a general strike and boycott of schools each Monday in NWSW—has slowed commerce and activity and interrupted access to services in urban areas. Widespread compliance with the boycotts and strikes should not be chalked up to militant coercion alone, but rather suggests general support for the Anglophone struggle in these areas.

Work engagement is so much important for organizations. According to Society for Human Resource Management. (2016), It enable the institution to deliver high performance and gain a competitive advantage. Also, it influences the workplace's organizational culture, including a safe workplace, ownership, effective leadership, and training programs that focus on skills.

When the Anglophone Crisis happened, and the series of lockdowns and Strikes took place, it caused an atmosphere of uncertainties and confusion, creating communication gaps and disrupting our lives.

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According to Diadjeng, W. (2021) [21], keeping employees engaged and passionate about work is a difficult task for organizations worldwide under such scenario

The university of Bamenda been one of affected public institution in Northwest Region considers its workers as one of its assets and priorities, this is seen in it critical agenda to pursue personal and collegial excellence in teaching, training, research and outreach in the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon tradition without sacrificing the advantages of cultural dialogue.

Statement of the problem

However, this research sought to find out if the Crisis has changed their level of work engagement and, if it did, which aspects have been affected by it. Findings from this research could offer insights into keeping the employees engaged and passionate about their work and their commitment to the various university affairs that involve their active work engagement. Also, this study also aimed to compare workers engagement before and during the Anglophone Crisis that is if the Crisis has created a change in their level of engagement and, if positive, which areas of their engagement have been affected by it.

Hypothesis

There are no significant differences between the employees’ level of work engagement before and during the Crisis and when grouped as Faculty and Administrative Staff.

Methodology

Research Design

This survey adopted a descriptive-comparative design using quantitative data. This design was used because the study deals with comparative work engagement levels before (2016) and during the Crisis (2016-2023).

The survey covered 170 of workers administrators, teaching and support staffs for the academic years 2016 and 2021-

2023 however 97 responded through simple random sampling.

The research questionnaire was made up of 27 questions using a 5-point Likert scale, rated as 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. Ratings as follow: 5 (Always), 4 (Very Often), 3 (Sometimes), 2 (Rarely), and 1 (Never).

To test the reliability, 30 workers who were not considered actual respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire. Base one result, data were treated using Cronbach’s alpha method, a tool for assessing the reliability of the test. The result was 0.977, considered as highly reliable.

Mean, and standard deviation were used to describe the level of workers’ engagement and to know which areas they declared Very Strong, Strong, Moderate, Weak, and Very Weak work engagement in the workplace. As seen below.

Table 1: Scale used in interpreting the employees’ level of work engagement.

Mean Scale	Interpretation	Description
4.20-5.00	Very Strong	Always engaged at work
3.40-4.19	Strong	Most of the time engaged at work
2.60-3.39	Moderate	Sometimes engaged at work
1.80-2.59	Weak	Rarely work engaged at work
1.00-1.79	Very weak	Never engaged at

T-test of independent means was used to determine the significant difference between the work engagement before and during the Crisis.

Results

Data in Table 2 reveal that in 2016 and 2021-2023 as a whole, the employees expressed a very strong work engagement (m = 4.47; SD = 0.42) and (m = 4.49; SD = 0.41). This means that they were constantly involved and committed to their respective roles and meeting expectations, as evidenced by the data for each indicator in the survey.

Table 2: Level of work engagement of JBLCF-B employees before and during the Crisis.

Categories	Before the Pa	Pandemic (2016)	Interpretation	During the Crisis 2016-2023)		
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Interpretation
Faculty	4.49	0.44	Very Strong	4.43	0.40	Very Strong
Admin staff	4.46	0.40	Very Strong	4.55	0.41	Very Strong
Total	4.47	0.42	Very Strong	4.49	0.41	Very Strong

From this result in general, the employees are satisfied, committed, and dedicated to providing the best outcomes in delivering their services to those they serve. Previous studies have found that organizations with highly engaged employees experience increased customer satisfaction and productivity [Ahmetoglu, G. et al. (2015) [3]. This result also reveal that they can excise a more positive attitude towards work. Supportive of this statement are the studies that demonstrated a high commitment, loyalty, and productivity among deeply engaged employees [May, D. et al. 2004] [30]. Though Table 2 indicate a very strong level of Work Engagement between the 2016 and 2021-2023 however, in Table 3 the result indicates some changes Looking at each indicator, it can be noted that some figures (Mean ratings) have declined on specific items (shaded portions on the Table) during the Crisis.

Noted in common between the two sets of data (before and during the Crisis), the mean scores have declined on the following points: (4) I feel motivating at my work, (17) I

use much time thinking about my work, and (19) I speak positively of this organization to my friends. However, it can be noted that most of these declining values are identify among the workers only, specifically on the following items:

From these detailed results, it can be said that while the administrative staff have remained unfazed by the Crisis in most areas of their work engagement and are only negatively affected on three items also felt by the faculty, it is the faculty members’ work engagement that is greatly affected during the Crisis.

Noting the items listed above, it could be said that their *motivation or drive, resilience, and focus* were most affected during the Crisis, as evidenced by the slight decline in the mean ratings.

From these detailed results, it can be said that while the administrative staff have remained unchanged by the Crisis in most areas of their work engagement and are only negatively affected on three items.

Table 3: Detailed results of workers work engagement BEFORE and DURING the Crisis.

Sr. No	Employee’s Engagement	Admin		Staff		Faculty				Total			
		Before		During		Before		During		Before		During	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	At work, I am passionate about my job.	4.58	0.55	4.64	0.61	4.53	0.60	4.64	0.48	4.56	0.57	4.64	0.55
2.	I am enthusiastic about my job.	4.53	0.75	4.60	0.65	4.58	0.60	4.61	0.49	4.55	0.69	4.61	0.57
3.	I show a great deal of passion while performing tasks.	4.57	0.55	4.64	0.57	4.61	0.56	4.66	0.48	4.59	0.55	4.65	0.52
4.	I feel motivating at my work.	4.61	0.54	4.53	0.65	4.56	0.63	4.51	0.50	4.59	0.58	4.52	0.58
5.	I feel positive about my job.	4.66	0.50	4.67	0.58	4.63	0.52	4.58	0.55	4.65	0.51	4.63	0.57
6.	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	4.39	0.69	4.63	0.57	4.40	0.73	4.42	0.61	4.40	0.70	4.53	0.60
7.	I find the work I do full of meaning and purpose.	4.63	0.56	4.67	0.50	4.67	0.55	4.57	0.56	4.65	0.55	4.62	0.53
8.	I am proud of the work that I do.	4.80	0.46	4.80	0.47	4.67	0.55	4.73	0.45	4.74	0.50	4.77	0.46
9.	My job inspires me.	4.58	0.63	4.71	0.54	4.61	0.53	4.58	0.53	4.60	0.59	4.65	0.54
10.	At work, my mind is focused on my job.	4.53	0.55	4.69	0.53	4.51	0.57	4.54	0.50	4.52	0.56	4.61	0.52
11.	I deal with emotional problems very calmly.	4.35	0.66	4.46	0.67	4.32	0.74	4.28	0.67	4.34	0.69	4.37	0.68
12.	I can continue working for very long periods.	4.37	0.66	4.50	0.68	4.44	0.71	4.24	0.72	4.40	0.68	4.37	0.71
13.	I do my best to solve problems in my job.	4.47	0.75	4.79	0.45	4.65	0.55	4.55	0.56	4.54	0.68	4.67	0.52
14.	At work, I persist through challenges.	4.53	0.62	4.64	0.57	4.47	0.66	4.45	0.53	4.51	0.63	4.55	0.56
15.	Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget everything.	3.97	0.96	4.09	0.81	4.16	0.84	3.99	0.86	4.05	0.91	4.04	0.83
16.	When I am working, I often lose track of time.	3.92	1.00	4.01	0.94	4.21	0.90	3.81	0.86	4.04	0.97	3.91	0.90
17.	I use much time thinking about my work.	4.05	0.89	4.00	0.90	4.04	0.96	3.88	0.77	4.04	0.92	3.94	0.84
18.	This organization inspires the best in me in job performance.	4.33	0.67	4.30	0.73	4.44	0.66	4.25	0.68	4.38	0.67	4.28	0.70
19.	I speak positively of this organization to my friends.	4.37	0.62	4.33	0.72	4.35	0.74	4.31	0.70	4.36	0.67	4.32	0.71
20.	I enjoy working toward achieving organizational objectives.	4.56	0.52	4.66	0.59	4.67	0.51	4.54	0.56	4.60	0.52	4.60	0.57
21.	I understand how my role relates to company goals and objectives.	4.58	0.52	4.71	0.51	4.63	0.49	4.54	0.53	4.60	0.51	4.63	0.53
22.	I perform the tasks that are expected to meet performance requirements.	4.61	0.49	4.70	0.49	4.63	0.52	4.58	0.53	4.62	0.50	4.64	0.51
23.	I fulfill my job description’s assigned responsibilities and duties.	4.61	0.52	4.74	0.58	4.54	0.54	4.57	0.53	4.58	0.52	4.66	0.56
24.	I participate in activities that will influence my performance evaluation.	4.56	0.55	4.67	0.50	4.58	0.50	4.61	0.52	4.57	0.53	4.64	0.51
25.	I look for innovative ways to do my job efficiently.	4.63	0.49	4.74	0.44	4.49	0.57	4.57	0.53	4.57	0.53	4.66	0.49
26.	I am willing to put in much effort beyond expected.	4.53	0.55	4.59	0.58	4.53	0.57	4.45	0.61	4.53	0.56	4.52	0.60
27.	I frequently make suggestions to improve the work of my department.	4.16	0.74	4.44	0.67	4.42	0.60	4.21	0.73	4.27	0.69	4.33	0.71
	Generally	4.46	0.40	4.55	0.41	4.49	0.44	4.43	0.40	4.47	0.42	4.49	0.41

In total, no significant difference was found between the level of work engagement in the workplace of the employees both before and during the Crisis, as shown in Table. From this result, it can be inferred that both groups are comparably the same in their level of work engagement when generalizing, irrespective of their nature of work. This result demonstrates their willingness to attain university goals and objectives. This widespread work engagement indicates a positive work environment and a highly

motivational state and commitment within the organization (Bakker, A. B. 2011) [11]. In this research, however, any modification in the level of work engagement, whether statistically different or not, is worth considering in making administrative decisions because, in some scenarios, these movements in the evaluation of certain indicators speak of work-related issues that cannot be all the time said or expressed verbally by the employees.

Table 4: T-Test Results on Difference in worker’s Engagement.

Employee	Employee Engagement Before Crisis						Interpretation
	n	Mean	SD	df	T	p	
Teaching staff	57	4.49	0.44	134	0.33	0.74	Not significant @ 0.05 alpha level of significance
Admin	79	4.46	0.40				
Total	136	4.47	0.42				

Employee	Employee Engagement During Crisis						Interpretation
	n	Mean	SD	df	T	p	
Teaching	67	4.43	0.40	135	1.77	0.08	Not significant @ 0.05 alpha level of significance
Admin	70	4.55	0.41				
Total	137	4.49	0.41				

*p<0.05, significant at 0.05 alpha level of significance

However, Table 5 shows no significant difference between the employees’ levels of work engagement before and during the Crisis. This implies that although they might

have been negatively affected by the Crisis, their level of engagement did not significantly deteriorate since the first lockdown in October 1 2017.

Table 5: Employees’ work engagement BEFORE and DURING the Crisis.

Employee’s Engagement	Df	t	p	Interpretation
Before Crisis During Crisis	135	0.42	0.68	Not significant @ 0.05 alpha level of significance

Recommended Interventions to Mitigate the Effect of a Crisis or Crisis on Employees’ Engagement

The final research question in this study is “What proposed interventions can be recommended to mitigate the effect of a Crisis or any form of a crisis on employees’ work engagement?” A face-to-face interview was conducted among the employees to gather substantial data on this concern. These employees were randomly selected using simple random sampling. From a thematic analysis of their responses, the following recommendations were derived:

Strong Administrative Support. The interviewed workers specifically stated wanting technical, physical, moral, emotional, and financial support from the Administration. By technical and physical support, they mean providing what they need to deliver their classes online to make their situation less stressful and more convenient.

This includes a steady internet source, conducive and safe workspaces, and teaching equipment and devices within their reach. With moral and emotional support, they expect the Administration to be more sensitive and understand what they are going through. They said that just like other schools, they wish they could also be allowed most of the working days to work from home instead of reporting to school, which could make them more prone to the attacks. Monitoring their attendance can be done online, and working from home could save them from using on their daily transportation, especially when their finances are tight during the Crisis.

Workers Engagement Activities. By this, they mean activities that could boost their mental and emotional wellness. With the crazy effects of the Crisis on their mental and emotional state, they crave activities that could create a closer bond among themselves despite the physical distance, virtual activities through which they could talk and share each other’s experiences and even their skills and talents as they cheer each other up amid the challenges and difficulties they are facing. Unlike when they are called for a meeting to only talk about updates and problems about work, they want to experience activities that could strengthen the sense of connection and empathy between themselves and the Administration. according to Amir, M. T., & et. (2021) [4]. Combining resilience and engagement activities may contribute to an enhanced productivity of employees. These programs could include approaches to avoid burnout by directly influencing subjective engagement to experience vigor and dedication. Employers need to comprehend their employees’ needs and wants. The massive effect of the Anglophone Crisis on employees’ private and work lives is prompting employee anxiety, frustration, and burnout. When left unattended, these emotions can influence employee engagement and performance, resulting in poor work quality and mistakes and, in the long run affecting a company’s capacity to survive in these troublesome occasions (Adhitama, J. et al. (n.d) .) [11].

Discussion

lecturers are at the forefront of whether the delivery of learning to students will succeed. With the switching from traditional face-to-face to the New Normal online/hybrid mode of instruction, teachers have been bombarded by many expectations. In meeting these expectations, they face barriers and challenges right from home, including a lack of basic facilities, external distractions, and family interruption during instruction and assessments [Joshi, A.,et al.. (2020)]. At school, they are confronted with more challenges, such as the budget for purchasing advanced technologies, a lack

of training, a lack of technical support and facilities [Onyema et al. (2020).] [31], a lack of clarity and direction, communication and collaboration difficulties between teachers and students [Hargreaves, A.,et al. (2020)] [26], and technical difficulties [Arora, A.et al. (2020)] [18].

In the study of Akour et al (2020) [2], it was found that 31% of teachers had severe distress, and 38% had mild to moderate distress. According to the same source, engagement with family was the most reported self-copying activity during the Crisis. More than half of the participants were most concerned and fearful about the threat posed by secessionists fighters that could affect them and their families. So left between their concern for their family at home and their students in their virtual classes, teachers have experienced various levels of distress that have affected them psychologically. looking Baker, C. et al. (2021) [9], Teachers who experienced more stressors reported worse mental health and found it harder to cope and teach.

Furthermore, Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. [2021] [32] found that 17%, 19%, and 30% of teachers reported levels of anxiety, depression, and stress during the Crisis. These scenarios also hold true among the faculty respondents in this study. Given these observations, schools must take the initiative to ensure that the teaching workforce is supported enough to create a sense of security amid the pressures they face during a Crisis.

In a multiple regression analysis done by Prasad et al. [2020] [33], it was found that organizational climate and job satisfaction, among other factors, significantly influence the psychological well-being of the employees in a technologically-driven industry such as the educational system at the height of the Crisis when teachers are made to conduct their classes online or in a hybrid set-up. From this finding, it can be said that when employees are struck by a crisis such as the ANGLOPHONE CRISIS, they could be shaken but remain steadfast in a supportive and caring work environment.

However, it could not be denied that the employees’ work engagement has taken a blow, particularly in their motivation or drive, resilience, and focus. With the Crisis not ending yet, they could reach the point of exhaustion and loosen their hold on their commitment to continue to engage incessantly.

Several studies have shown that workers’ financial insecurity due to economic fallout resulting from the Anglophone Crisis is one of the top contributors to stress. Hjelm, L., et al. (2017) [34]. Financial distress has been positively correlated with high absenteeism Prawitz, A. et al (2010) [35]. It has also been negatively associated with work engagement, workplace performance, and organizational commitment (Sinclair, R. et al. (2016) [36]. When their employers in mandatory quarantine cannot provide job protection and income replacement, employees are likely to experience a complicated array of negative emotions and stress that may impair their work effort and resources Rasdi, R. et al. (2021) [37]. Hence, wherever possible, remote working options and felt support need to be worked out by the employer in all sectors to reduce stress and enhance the psychological well-being of employees, Prasad, D. et al. (2020) [38].

Conclusion

worker engagement in the workplace is an important factor

that can contribute to the success of an organization. It is a crucial indicator of employees who are committed, loyal, enthusiastic, productive, motivated, and willing to give their best to attain organizational goals. The results gathered from this research have shown positive outcomes. First, it was gathered that, as a whole, the employees were very strongly engaged at work before and during the Crisis. Second, their levels of work engagement before and during the Crisis did not significantly differ. This result means that even after the Crisis hit them, their sense of commitment to engage themselves at work did not significantly deteriorate or diminish.

However, small outcome shows that the teaching employees are the ones who have been most affected, particularly in their motivation or drive, resilience, and focus at work. This has been attributed to the numerous adjustments they had to face in the transition from in-class to online instructors and their worries over the threats of secessionists groups on themselves and their respective families, which could have financial repercussions.

Administrative intervention in the form of technical, physical, moral, emotional, and financial support and well-managed employee engagement activities that could boost their mental and emotional wellness was recommended to mitigate the effect of a Crisis or crisis on employees' engagement.

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