



THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP STYLE IN ENHANCING EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT AT MBEYA URBAN WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION AUTHORITY, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT :

This study examined the role of leadership style in enhancing employee commitment at Mbeya Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Authority (Mbeya UWSA), Tanzania. A mixed-methods approach and descriptive cross-sectional design were used. The study population comprised 195 employees. Approximately 130 respondents were initially determined using Yamane's formula; 93 usable questionnaires were obtained and complemented by interviews with nine key informants. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Leadership style was assessed through employee involvement in decision-making, communication of organizational goals, fair treatment, supervisory support and motivation, open communication, and recognition of employee contributions. The findings indicate generally weak and uneven experiences of leadership. Positive responses were 35.5% for decision-making participation, 30.1% for goal communication, 28.0% for fair treatment, 16.1% for supervisory support and motivation, 22.6% for open communication, and 23.7% for recognition. Qualitative evidence showed that participation, guidance, feedback, appreciation, and consultation existed in some departments but were not consistently experienced. The study concludes that leadership style is important for employee commitment, but its contribution depends on consistent implementation across departments. It recommends stronger participative leadership, communication, supervisory support, fairness, employee voice, systematic recognition, and leadership development.

Keywords: Leadership style; employee commitment; participative leadership; supervisory support; public sector; Mbeya UWSA; Tanzania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership style refers to the pattern of behaviours through which leaders direct, influence, motivate, communicate with, and support employees in pursuit of organizational objectives. Contemporary leadership research emphasizes participation, communication, fairness, support, empowerment, and recognition as important expressions of leadership. Evidence indicates that leadership behaviours are associated with employee commitment and other positive organizational outcomes (Abd El Qader & Benoliel, 2024; Madale & Mwakalila, 2024; Morais et al., 2024; Timbula & Marvadi, 2024).

Employee commitment is important because committed employees are more likely to identify with organizational goals, remain with the organization, cooperate with colleagues, and contribute to organizational effectiveness. Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualized commitment as affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Leadership can shape these forms of commitment through employees' everyday experiences of participation, support, fairness, communication, and recognition.

In public water utilities, leadership is particularly important because service delivery requires coordination among administrative, technical, operational, and support employees. Leaders must therefore create conditions that promote employee voice, clear goals, fair treatment, supervisory support, open communication, and recognition. This study focuses on Mbeya UWSA to establish how these behaviours are experienced by employees.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although leadership and employee commitment have been widely studied, employees may experience leadership differently across departments and supervisory relationships. Recent studies report positive relationships between leadership and commitment in educational institutions, civil-service settings, and other public organizations (Abd El Qader & Benoliel, 2024; Abulaaban & Erhan, 2024; Morais et al., 2024). However, limited empirical evidence concerns leadership behaviours within public water supply and sanitation organizations in Tanzania.

At Mbeya UWSA, limited evidence was available on employees' perceptions of participation, communication, fairness, supervisory support, open communication, and recognition. The existence of formal meetings, policies, appraisal systems, or communication channels does not necessarily mean

that employees experience leadership as participative, supportive, fair, or effective. Consequently, the study examined leadership style through six observable dimensions and considered their implications for employee commitment.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The study aimed to examine the role of leadership style in enhancing employee commitment at Mbeya UWSA, with particular attention to employee involvement in decision-making, communication of organizational goals, fair treatment, supervisory support and motivation, open communication, and recognition of employee contributions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

2.1.1 Three-Component Model of Employee Commitment

Meyer and Allen's (1991) Three-Component Model explains commitment through affective, continuance, and normative dimensions. Affective commitment concerns emotional attachment and identification; continuance commitment reflects perceived costs of leaving; and normative commitment concerns an obligation to remain. The model is relevant because leadership can shape the workplace experiences through which employees develop attachment to the organization.

Participative and supportive leadership may strengthen affective commitment by giving employees voice, respect, guidance, and recognition. Fair treatment and recognition may also contribute to normative commitment by creating perceptions of positive treatment that employees may feel obliged to reciprocate. Conversely, poor communication, exclusion, unfairness, and weak supervisory support may reduce positive attachment.

2.1.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory explains organizational relationships in terms of reciprocal exchanges (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When employees perceive that leaders provide support, fairness, respect, open communication, and recognition, they may reciprocate through greater loyalty and commitment. Leadership therefore represents an important relational exchange between employees and the organization.

The theory suggests that participation communicates trust, constructive guidance signals support, and recognition communicates that contributions are valued. Where these exchanges are weak or inconsistent, employees may perceive an imbalance in the employment relationship, potentially weakening commitment. Together, Social Exchange Theory and the Three-Component Model provide complementary explanations for the leadership–commitment relationship.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Recent empirical studies generally indicate that constructive leadership is positively associated with employee commitment. Timbula and Marvadi (2024), studying 502 employees in Ethiopian microfinance institutions, found significant effects of transformational and transactional leadership on organizational commitment, with job satisfaction mediating the relationship. Arafat and Gul (2024) similarly found positive effects of leadership styles on commitment among employees, with transformational leadership showing a stronger contribution.

Participative leadership has received particular attention because it emphasizes employee involvement and shared decision-making. Evidence among civil servants indicates that participative leadership is related to affective and normative commitment, partly through trust in supervisors. Abulaaban and Erhan (2024), using 494 university employees, also found that participative leadership contributed to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and performance. Padmavathy et al. (2024) reported that clear vision and a positive working environment were associated with employee dedication and commitment.

Evidence from public institutions demonstrates that leadership effects may differ by context. Adaiaka and Dou (2024), examining four public institutions in Algeria, found significant effects of administrative leadership styles on commitment. Kato et al. (2024), studying 175 academic staff at Kyambogo University, found that participative leadership significantly influenced commitment, while directive and supportive behaviours were not significant in their model. These differences reinforce the need to examine leadership within specific institutional settings.

Recent research further highlights interpersonal relationships, fairness, trust, recognition, and well-being. Kelm and Borchert (2025), in a two-wave study of 282 employees in Germany, found that positive leadership enhanced affective commitment partly through psychological need satisfaction and well-being. González-Cánovas et al. (2024), studying 302 employees, found that trust in leadership and justice were important in fostering commitment, with distributive justice helping to explain the relationship.

Jo and Shin (2025), using a large sample of 25,285 employees, found that recognition and fairness were positively associated with employee outcomes, while transformational leadership enhanced engagement. In contrast, Elgueta and Grill (2025), examining 582 local-government employees over 18 months, found that destructive leadership was negatively associated with organizational commitment. These studies indicate that specific leadership

behaviours may matter more than leadership labels alone.

Tanzanian evidence also supports the relevance of managerial practices. Tandika (2024), using 249 employees across 51 public-sector organizations, found that performance-management practices were relevant to employee commitment. Madale and Mwakalila (2024), studying Temeke Municipal Council, reported positive associations involving communication, transformational leadership, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job commitment. However, these studies do not specifically examine leadership behaviours in public water utilities.

2.3 Research Gap

The literature establishes a broad leadership–commitment relationship but leaves a contextual gap concerning public water supply and sanitation organizations in Tanzania. Much of the evidence comes from education, banking, microfinance, local government, and general public-sector settings. In addition, many studies examine named leadership styles rather than observable behaviours experienced by employees. The present study addresses this gap by examining six practical leadership dimensions at Mbeya UWSA and combining questionnaire evidence with key-informant accounts.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach and Design

The study used a mixed-methods approach with a descriptive cross-sectional design. Quantitative data measured employee perceptions, while qualitative evidence explained how leadership was experienced. Data were collected at one point in time, making the design suitable for describing existing practices without manipulating the organizational environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

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3.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted at Mbeya Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Authority in Mbeya Region, Tanzania. The Authority provides water supply and sanitation services and depends on administrative, technical, and operational employees. The population comprised 195 employees, including heads of departments, senior staff, administrative staff, technical staff, and operational staff.

3.3 Sample and Sampling

A sample of approximately 130 respondents was initially determined using Yamane's formula. Stratified sampling was used to represent different employee categories, followed by simple random sampling. The final quantitative dataset contained 93 usable questionnaire responses. Nine key informants with managerial or senior responsibilities were interviewed for the qualitative component.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Structured questionnaires assessed six leadership indicators: employee involvement in decision-making, communication of organizational goals, fair treatment, supervisory support and motivation, open communication, and recognition of employee contributions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine key informants. Documentary evidence considered included staff meeting records, annual reports, performance appraisal records, training and development records, promotion and appointment records, and recognition records.

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, focusing on participation, communication, fairness, support, recognition, trust, motivation, and commitment. Integration of both forms of evidence helped identify overall patterns and departmental variation.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.829, indicating adequate sampling adequacy. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1117.904$, $p < .001$), indicating sufficient correlations among questionnaire items. The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.914, demonstrating excellent internal consistency.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, information was collected for academic purposes, and respondents' views were treated confidentially. Findings were reported in aggregate form to avoid identifying individual participants.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Overall Leadership Style Findings

The quantitative findings show that positive experiences of leadership were generally low across all six dimensions. The strongest positive response concerned employee involvement in decision-making (35.5%), while supervisory support and motivation recorded the lowest positive response (16.1%). Open communication and recognition were also weak.

Table 1: Role of leadership style on employee commitment

Leadership indicator	Positive	Negative
Decision-making participation	35.5%	42.0%
Goal communication	30.1%	36.5%
Fair treatment	28.0%	36.6%
Supervisory support/motivation	16.1%	58.1%
Open communication	22.6%	57.0%
Recognition	23.7%	54.8%

Source: Researcher (2026)

4.2 Employee Involvement in Decision-Making

Among 93 respondents, 18 (19.4%) agreed and 15 (16.1%) strongly agreed that supervisors involved employees in decision-making, giving a positive response of 35.5%. Conversely, 29 (31.2%) disagreed and 10 (10.8%) strongly disagreed, giving 42.0% negative responses; 21 (22.6%) were neutral. The results indicate that participation was not consistently experienced. Interviews nevertheless showed participation in meetings, planning, problem-solving, and work-related discussions in some departments.

4.3 Communication of Organizational Goals

Twenty-one respondents (22.6%) agreed and seven (7.5%) strongly agreed that leadership communicated organizational goals clearly, giving a positive response of 30.1%. Twenty-seven (29.0%) disagreed and seven (7.5%) strongly disagreed, giving 36.5% negative responses, while 31 (33.3%) were neutral. Interviews indicated that management used meetings and departmental discussions, but communication was not always consistent or effective.

4.4 Fair Treatment of Employees

Only 22 respondents (23.7%) agreed and four (4.3%) strongly agreed that leaders treated employees fairly, producing a positive response of 28.0%. Twenty-six (28.0%) disagreed and eight (8.6%) strongly disagreed, giving 36.6% negative responses; 33 (35.5%) were neutral. Key informants associated fairness with transparent decisions, fair allocation of responsibilities, recognition of effort, and open communication, noting that fairness strengthened trust.

4.5 Supervisory Support and Motivation

Supervisory support was the weakest dimension. Eleven respondents (11.8%) agreed and four (4.3%) strongly agreed that supervisors supported and motivated employees, producing 16.1% positive responses. Forty (43.0%) disagreed and 14 (15.1%) strongly disagreed, producing 58.1% negative responses; 24 (25.8%) were neutral. Interviews identified some supervisors who provided guidance, constructive feedback, assistance with concerns, and professional development support.

4.6 Open Communication

Fifteen respondents (16.1%) agreed and six (6.5%) strongly agreed that leadership encouraged open communication, producing 22.6% positive responses. Thirty-six (38.7%) disagreed and 17 (18.3%) strongly disagreed, producing 57.0% negative responses, while 19 (20.4%) were neutral. Interviews indicated that employees could raise concerns in meetings, but such opportunities varied across departments.

4.7 Recognition of Employee Contributions

Thirteen respondents (14.0%) agreed and nine (9.7%) strongly agreed that leaders recognized employee contributions, producing 23.7% positive responses. Thirty-nine (41.9%) disagreed and 12 (12.9%) strongly disagreed, producing 54.8% negative responses; 20 (21.5%) were neutral. Qualitative evidence showed that verbal appreciation, rewards, and acknowledgement occurred in some departments, but recognition was not systematic or consistently experienced

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that leadership style is relevant to employee commitment at Mbeya UWSA, but the contribution of leadership depends on the consistency with which employees experience leadership behaviours. The results do not indicate a complete absence of leadership mechanisms; rather, they reveal uneven implementation across departments and supervisory relationships. This is consistent with public-sector evidence that leadership outcomes depend partly on organizational and administrative context (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022).

5.1 Participation and Employee Voice

The 35.5% positive response on decision-making participation indicates that employee voice requires strengthening. Participation can create ownership because employees contribute knowledge and perspectives affecting their work. Where decisions are made without adequate consultation, employees may feel less valued. This interpretation is consistent with Social Exchange Theory, under which meaningful participation represents a valued organizational resource that can support reciprocity and commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

5.2 Communication and Clarity

The 30.1% positive response concerning goal communication and 22.6% concerning open communication suggest that formal communication mechanisms were not always experienced as effective. Clear communication enables employees to understand priorities and how their roles contribute to them, while open communication provides opportunities to raise concerns and obtain feedback. These findings reinforce the importance of favourable treatment and supervisor support in employees' perceptions that the organization values them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

5.3 Fairness, Support and Recognition

Fair treatment recorded 28.0% positive responses, while supervisory support recorded only 16.1%. Supervisors are the immediate representatives of management and therefore strongly shape daily employee experiences. Supportive supervision can provide guidance, feedback, assistance, and recognition, whereas inconsistent support may create perceptions of organizational indifference. The 58.1% negative response for supervisory support is therefore particularly important.

Recognition recorded 23.7% positive responses despite qualitative evidence that appreciation and rewards occurred in some departments. This discrepancy indicates that informal recognition may not be sufficiently systematic. Recognition is more likely to strengthen commitment when it is fair, transparent, and linked to genuine contribution. This is consistent with servant-leadership research emphasizing follower development, empowerment, and concern for employee needs (Eva et al., 2019).

5.4 Implications for Employee Commitment

The findings can be interpreted through Meyer and Allen's (1991) Three-Component Model. Consistently positive leadership may strengthen affective commitment by increasing emotional attachment and identification. Fair treatment and recognition may also support normative commitment by creating a sense of positive reciprocity. Conversely, weak leadership experiences may reduce affective attachment and willingness to contribute.

Overall, leadership should be understood not merely as a formal managerial function but as a relational process. Participation, communication, fairness, support, and recognition signal whether employees are valued. Positive and consistent signals can strengthen trust and identification, whereas weak or inconsistent signals may weaken the social exchange between employees and the organization.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that leadership style plays an important role in enhancing employee commitment at Mbeya UWSA. Leadership practices involving employee participation, communication, fairness, supervisory support, open communication, and recognition can contribute to trust, motivation, belongingness, and organizational identification. However, the empirical findings show substantial weaknesses in employees' consistent experience of

these practices. The central management challenge is therefore not simply establishing leadership mechanisms, but ensuring their consistent implementation across departments.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, Mbeya UWSA should strengthen participative leadership by expanding departmental consultative meetings, problem-solving teams, employee suggestion mechanisms, and structured feedback opportunities. Employee participation should involve genuine consideration of views rather than simply communicating decisions already made.

Second, management should improve communication of organizational goals, priorities, policies, and performance expectations. Supervisors should translate organizational objectives into clear departmental and individual responsibilities and provide opportunities for clarification and feedback.

Third, supervisory support should be strengthened through leadership development in coaching, feedback, motivation, conflict management, communication, and employee support. Regular supervisor employee feedback sessions should address performance, challenges, development needs, and expectations.

Fourth, leadership should be fair and transparent. Decisions concerning work allocation, promotion, training, recognition, and other employee matters should use clear and consistently applied criteria. Appropriate mechanisms should be available for employees to raise concerns about perceived unfairness.

Fifth, the Authority should establish systematic recognition mechanisms for outstanding performance, innovation, teamwork, service quality, and other desirable contributions. Recognition should be transparent and equitable rather than dependent solely on individual supervisors.

Sixth, open communication and employee voice should be strengthened through departmental meetings, feedback systems, suggestion mechanisms, and supervisor consultations. Finally, regular leadership development should be provided for heads of departments, supervisors, and other employees with managerial responsibilities, emphasizing participative, supportive, ethical, transformational, and employee-oriented behaviours.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

8.1 Managerial Implications

Leadership development should extend beyond senior management to supervisors and departmental leaders because employees experience the organization through daily interactions with supervisors. Improvements at this level may directly influence employee trust, motivation, and commitment.

8.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings support Social Exchange Theory by highlighting support, fairness, communication, participation, and recognition as important resources exchanged within the employment relationship. They also support the Three-Component Model by indicating that positive leadership experiences can contribute to emotional attachment and willingness to remain committed.

8.3 Policy Implications

Public water utilities should incorporate participative leadership, employee voice, supervisory support, fairness, and recognition into human-resource policies and leadership-performance frameworks. Leadership effectiveness should be assessed not only through operational targets but also through employee experiences.

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