

Leadership Styles, Work Engagement, and Job Satisfaction: A Job Demands-Resources Perspective from Globacom Limited, Nigeria's Contracting Telecommunications Operator

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement in sub-Saharan Africa stands at 19 per cent, the second-lowest of any world region, and Nigeria's telecommunications sector has lost thousands of skilled staff to emigration in recent years. Whether supervisory leadership behaviour can offset this pressure, and by what mechanism, remains largely untested in African private-sector settings. Drawing on Job Demands-Resources theory, this study examines whether work engagement mediates the relationships between three leadership styles, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, and employee job satisfaction. Data were collected from 380 employees of Globacom Limited, a major Nigerian telecommunications operator undergoing sustained commercial contraction, using validated scales assembled into a single structured questionnaire, and analysed with partial least squares structural equation modelling and 5,000-subsample bootstrapping. The measurement model met all established thresholds for reliability and validity. Transformational leadership was the strongest positive predictor of engagement and satisfaction; transactional leadership showed smaller positive effects; laissez-faire leadership predicted both outcomes negatively, with an effect on engagement comparable in size to that of transactional leadership. Work engagement was the strongest single predictor of satisfaction and significantly mediated all three leadership pathways, in each case through complementary partial mediation. The findings extend Job Demands-Resources theory to a resource-

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scarce African organisational context and offer a theory-grounded basis for prioritising leadership behaviours in retention strategy.

Keywords: transformational leadership; laissez-faire leadership; work engagement; job satisfaction; Job Demands-Resources theory; PLS-SEM; Nigeria.

Introduction

Leadership behaviour shapes how employees experience their work, and two of the outcomes it shapes most consistently are employee engagement and job satisfaction. Meta-analytic evidence spanning eighty-seven independent samples confirms that transformational leadership predicts follower satisfaction and motivation more strongly than transactional approaches, and that passive, avoidant leadership predicts the weakest outcomes of all (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). Engagement, defined as a positive and fulfilling motivational state marked by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006), has since been shown to carry much of this effect forward to satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Christian et al., 2011; Decuyper and Schaufeli, 2021). Yet the regional and sectoral base from which this evidence is drawn remains narrow. Sub-Saharan Africa records engagement of 19 per cent, the second-lowest of any world region, with daily employee stress at a record 47 per cent and roughly three-quarters of employees in the region watching for or actively seeking new work (Gallup, 2025, 2026). The organisations facing this pressure most acutely are rarely the ones on which the leadership-engagement literature has been built.

Two gaps follow from this imbalance, one theoretical and one contextual. Theoretically, most tests of the leadership-engagement-satisfaction chain either aggregate leadership into a single construct or examine one style in isolation, which obscures a prediction that Job Demands-Resources theory makes explicitly: that different leadership behaviours should act on the same mediator in opposite directions, because they add, condition, or remove job resources by

different mechanisms (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). A recent ten-year review of the theory identified this differentiated mediation test as underdeveloped and called for more studies that model engagement explicitly as the transmitting mechanism between distinct antecedents and distal outcomes (Bakker et al., 2023). Where studies do test the mediating role of engagement, the mediator chosen varies considerably, some route the transformational-engagement link through psychological empowerment rather than through engagement itself (Ayu Dina and Tjahjono, 2023), and at least one recent study found engagement weakening rather than strengthening the transformational-performance link, with job satisfaction doing the strengthening instead (Wardani et al., 2025). This inconsistency suggests the mediating architecture between leadership and distal outcomes is more sensitive to context than a single dominant model implies, which strengthens the case for testing it directly in a new setting rather than assuming it will transfer.

Contextually, the empirical base for this chain is concentrated in Western, East Asian, and public-sector African settings (Atiku and Van Wyk, 2024; Thanh and Quang, 2022), leaving private-sector, technology-intensive African organisations, precisely the kind operating under the demand pressures the theory is meant to explain, largely untested. This gap matters because the moderating conditions the wider literature already treats as consequential, high power distance, strong in-group collectivism, and acute labour-market precarity, co-occur in Nigerian private-sector employment at levels the existing evidence base was not estimated under.

Nigeria's telecommunications sector supplies an unusually clear setting in which to close both gaps at once. The sector contributes 8.3 per cent of national real gross domestic product (Techeconomy, 2026), yet the Association of Telecommunications Companies of Nigeria has documented the emigration of more than two thousand trained personnel in a single year and has warned the industry may become labour-stranded by 2030 (Association of Telecommunications Companies of Nigeria, 2023). Globacom Limited, one of the sector's leading indigenous operators, lost 69.2 per cent of its subscriber base within six months of a regulatory subscriber-verification exercise and saw its market share fall from roughly 27 per cent to 11.9 per cent within a year, alongside repeated network outages and a cybersecurity incident that disrupted internal systems (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2024; TechCabal, 2024, 2025). Organisations under this degree of strain are precisely where Job Demands-Resources theory predicts that leadership, as a structural antecedent of the job resource environment, should matter most, and precisely where no peer-reviewed test of that prediction yet exists.

This study addresses both gaps by testing, in a single model, whether transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership predict employee job satisfaction directly and indirectly through work engagement, among employees of Globacom Limited. It contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it estimates three separate specific indirect effects rather than one aggregate mediation term, which allows the differential resource logic that Job Demands-Resources theory implies for each leadership style to be tested rather than assumed. Second, it estimates the model under documented organisational contraction, a boundary condition on which the theory offers a testable prediction, resource scarcity should raise the marginal value of the leadership resources that remain, but on which almost no existing evidence bears. Third, it extends the theory's empirical reach into a West African private-sector technology organisation, a

combination of region, ownership structure, and sectoral pressure that remains substantially under-represented in the published record.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1 Job Demands-Resources Theory

Job Demands-Resources theory holds that any occupational context can be described along two dimensions: demands, the aspects of work that require sustained effort and carry a cost, and resources, the aspects that help achieve work goals, offset the cost of demands, and stimulate growth (Demerouti et al., 2001). The theory specifies two distinct pathways. A health-impairment pathway runs from excessive demands through exhaustion to disengagement, and eventually to strain-related outcomes such as burnout and withdrawal; a motivational pathway runs from resources through engagement to positive distal outcomes, including satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). The two pathways are not mirror images of one another. Resources do not merely offset demands; they carry an independent motivational function, satisfying employees' underlying needs for competence, autonomy, and connection in a way that low demands alone cannot (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). It is the motivational pathway this study tests, and leadership, on the account developed below, enters that pathway as an antecedent of the resources it sets in motion rather than as a resource in its own right.

Leadership occupies a specific position within this architecture. It is not itself a resource so much as a structural antecedent that determines which resources are available at the level of the individual job (Tummers and Bakker, 2021). Supervisors control access to feedback, autonomy, developmental support, recognition, and role clarity, each an established job resource, and their characteristic behaviour therefore sets the resource level of the roles reporting to them. The most recent systematic synthesis of leadership within the Job Demands-Resources framework, drawing on 139 studies, confirms this

structural role and identifies three distinct mechanisms by which leadership operates: directly shaping demands and resources, moderating the impact of demands and resources on wellbeing, and shaping employees' own job-crafting behaviour (Tummers and Bakker, 2021). A parallel meta-analysis distinguishing constructive from destructive leadership styles found the two operate as theoretically opposite resource conditions rather than as points on a single continuum, each with its own credibility interval for engagement and burnout (Pletzer et al., 2024).

2.2 Leadership Styles as Differentiated Resource Conditions

The leadership taxonomy applied here follows the Full Range Leadership Model (Bass and Avolio, 1994), which distinguishes transformational leadership, built on inspirational vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration; transactional leadership, built on contingent reward and performance monitoring; and laissez-faire leadership, defined by the avoidance of decisions and the withdrawal of direction. Read through Job Demands-Resources theory, the three styles are not merely different in effectiveness but different in the resource logic they enact.

Transformational leadership is resource-enriching. Intellectual stimulation supplies cognitive challenge and task variety, individualised consideration supplies developmental support, and inspirational communication supplies goal clarity and meaning, each an unconditional addition to the follower's resource pool. It should therefore predict engagement and satisfaction most strongly, a pattern confirmed across recent quantitative studies in both organisational and hospitality settings (Aftab et al., 2023; Sutanto et al., 2025).

Transactional leadership is resource-conditional. Contingent reward supplies feedback and role clarity, both genuine resources, but only within the terms of a specified exchange, while active

management by exception supplies monitoring rather than support. The theory predicts a real but smaller positive effect, and the empirical record bears this out less consistently than for transformational leadership, an inconsistency traceable in part to studies that collapse contingent reward and management by exception into one construct, averaging an enabling behaviour with a corrective one (Thanh and Quang, 2022).

Laissez-faire leadership is resource-depleting. By withholding decisions, direction, and availability, an avoidant supervisor removes resources that employees would otherwise draw on, and the theory predicts a negative effect on both engagement and satisfaction. The evidence for this negative effect is now unusually consistent. A three-wave longitudinal study of 449 employees found that laissez-faire leadership erodes leader-member exchange and, through it, affective organisational commitment, with the damage most pronounced among employees who define themselves through their relationships with others (Robert and Vandenberghe, 2021). A separate time-lagged study found the damage runs in both directions: laissez-faire leadership predicted follower counterproductive behaviour, which in turn predicted emotional strain and turnover intentions in the leaders themselves (Perkins et al., 2025). A third study compared laissez-faire leadership directly against overtly abusive supervision and found the passive style more harmful to team trust and organisational citizenship behaviour than the openly hostile one, a finding at odds with the older assumption that mere absence of leadership is qualitatively milder than active mistreatment (Klasmeier et al., 2022).

2.4 Study Context

Globacom Limited supplies a demanding test of this resource logic because it was not operating under ordinary conditions during the study period. The company lost the majority of its subscriber base within six months of a regulatory identity-verification exercise, saw its market share fall by more than half within a year, and

experienced repeated network outages alongside a cybersecurity incident that disrupted internal systems during the period surrounding data collection (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2024; TechCabal, 2024, 2025). Job Demands-Resources theory offers a specific prediction for organisations under this kind of strain: as ambient job demands rise and organisational resources contract, the marginal value of the resources that remain, including the resources a supervisor controls, should increase rather than decrease. Testing the model within an organisation meeting this description, rather than within the stable or growing organisations that dominate the published evidence, allows that boundary condition to be examined directly rather than assumed.

2.3 Hypothesis Development

Following Job Demands-Resources theory's prediction that leadership shapes distal outcomes both directly and through the resources it makes available, seven direct paths and three indirect paths are hypothesised.

Direct effects on job satisfaction. Satisfaction is a distal attitudinal outcome reached partly through engagement and partly through other channels the model does not isolate, including satisfaction with supervision itself.

H1a: Transformational leadership has a significant positive direct effect on employee job satisfaction.

H1b: Transactional leadership has a significant positive direct effect on employee job satisfaction.

H1c: Laissez-faire leadership has a significant negative direct effect on employee job satisfaction.

Effects on work engagement. This is the theory's central proposition applied to three differentiated antecedents.

H2a: Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on work engagement.

H2b: Transactional leadership has a significant positive effect on work engagement.

H2c: Laissez-faire leadership has a significant negative effect on work engagement.

Engagement and satisfaction. Engagement, as the proximal motivational state, should translate into a more positive evaluation of the job overall.

H3: Work engagement has a significant positive effect on employee job satisfaction.

Mediation. If resources generate engagement and engagement generates distal outcomes, engagement should carry part of each leadership effect on satisfaction, in proportion to that style's effect on engagement.

H4a: Work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction.

H4b: Work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and employee job satisfaction.

H4c: Work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and employee job satisfaction.

Figure 1 presents the resulting conceptual model.

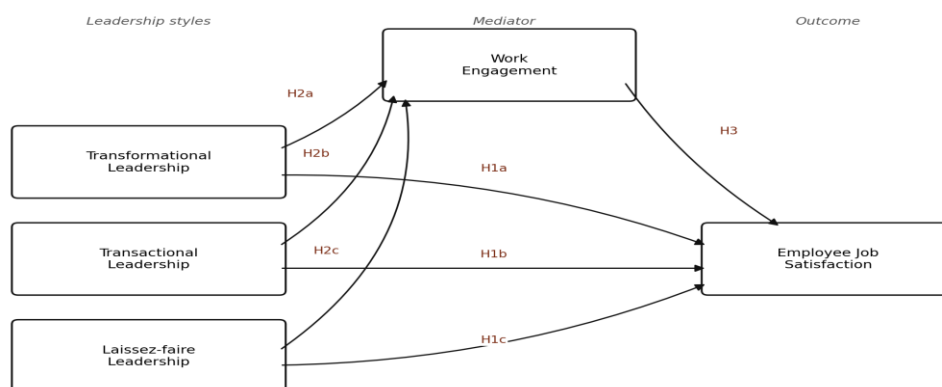


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Contribution statement. The study contributes to management theory and practice in three respects. It provides the first test, to our knowledge, of the full three-style leadership taxonomy operating simultaneously as differentiated resource conditions within a single mediation model in a West African telecommunications organisation. It estimates that model under documented, verifiable organisational contraction, a boundary condition Job Demands-Resources theory implies but on which direct evidence is scarce. It also reports three separate specific indirect effects with bootstrapped confidence intervals rather than one aggregate mediation term, using the mediation-type classification of Zhao et al. (2010) rather than the earlier Baron and Kenny (1986) sequence, which recent methodological work has shown to misclassify partial mediation as an absence of effect when a direct path loses significance for reasons unrelated to the mediator (Zhao et al., 2010).

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design and Setting

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was adopted, consistent with the study's associational objectives and with the requirement, under partial least squares structural equation modelling, of numerical indicator data for multiple constructs collected under comparable conditions (Hair et al., 2019, 2022). The setting was Globacom Limited, a major

Nigerian telecommunications operator with corporate and operational offices in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. Cross-sectional design does not support causal inference, a limitation returned to in Section 5.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population comprised full-time employees with at least six months of tenure across the three locations, approximately 5,000 individuals, distributed across five functional departments: network operations, customer experience, information technology, commercial and marketing, and corporate services. A minimum sample of 357 was indicated by the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for a population of this size, cross-validated against a G*Power minimum of 85 for a four-predictor model at $f^2 = 0.15$, power = 0.80, and $\alpha = 0.05$ (Faul et al., 2009). Stratified random sampling was applied across fifteen location-by-department cells, and 400 questionnaires were distributed to allow for non-response. Of 391 returns, 380 were retained after removing nine questionnaires with more than 10 per cent missing items and two showing non-differentiated responding, an effective response rate of 95.0 per cent.

The sample was 62.1 per cent male, with 50.0 per cent aged between 21 and 30, 89.7 per cent holding at least a bachelor's degree, and departmental and locational representation close to the intended stratification (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Profile (n = 380)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	236	62.1
	Female	144	37.9
Age	21-30 years	190	50.0
	31-40 years	132	34.7
	41-50 years	58	15.3
Education	HND	39	10.3
	Bachelor's degree	246	64.7
	Postgraduate	95	25.0
Tenure	Under 2 years	75	19.7
	2-5 years	115	30.3
	6-10 years	132	34.7
	Over 10 years	58	15.3
Department	Network Operations	76	20.0
	Customer Experience	77	20.3
	Information Technology	76	20.0
	Commercial and Marketing	76	20.0
	Corporate Services	75	19.7
Location	Lagos	156	41.1
	Abuja	113	29.7
	Port Harcourt	111	29.2

Note: Population N = 5,000; sample distributed = 400; valid responses = 380; response rate = 95.0%.

3.3 Measures

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire assembling three validated instruments, comprising 48 five-point Likert items (1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership were measured with a 24-item selection from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Form 5X (Bass and Avolio, 1999), covering idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration for transformational leadership, contingent reward and management

by exception for transactional leadership, and a single laissez-faire subscale. Work engagement was measured with the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, covering vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006), adapted to the five-point format of the wider instrument. Employee job satisfaction was measured with fifteen items across five subscales of the Job Satisfaction Survey, pay, promotion, supervision, co-workers, and nature of work (Spector, 1985). Seven negatively valenced satisfaction items were reverse-scored before analysis.

The instrument was piloted on 32 employees outside the main sample and reviewed by two academic experts and one senior human resources practitioner, resulting in three wording amendments that did not alter any measured construct. Content validity for all three source instruments rests on an established prior validation literature (Bass and Avolio, 1999; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Spector, 1985); convergent and discriminant validity were assessed within the estimated measurement model and are reported in Section 4.2.

Ethical clearance was obtained before data collection, and formal permission was secured from Globacom Limited's human resources department. Participation was voluntary, responses were anonymous, and no personally identifying information was collected. Questionnaires were returned in sealed envelopes to a central collection point rather than directly to the researcher, a procedure that also served as a partial safeguard against evaluation apprehension when respondents rated their own supervisors.

3.4 Common Method Bias

Because leadership, engagement, and satisfaction were all self-reported by the same respondent at the same time, common method bias is a relevant threat (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2024). Procedural remedies were applied before data collection: respondent anonymity, sealed and centrally collected returns rather than direct handover to the researcher, and physical separation of the three instrument sections within the questionnaire. As a post-hoc statistical check, Harman's single-factor test was conducted on all 48 items using unrotated principal component extraction; the first factor accounted for 38.9 per cent of total variance, below the 50 per cent threshold conventionally treated as indicating a dominant common factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This result is reported with the caveat that a recent large-scale review found Harman's test insensitive to known differences in research design and therefore an unreliable stand-alone indicator of bias (Howard et al., 2024); it is

presented here as one supporting check alongside the procedural remedies, not as a substitute for them.

3.5 Analytical Strategy

Analysis proceeded in two stages. Preliminary diagnostics, reliability, linearity, multicollinearity, correlation and exploratory factor analysis, were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. The measurement and structural models were then estimated in SmartPLS 4.0 using the path weighting scheme.

Partial least squares structural equation modelling was preferred over covariance-based estimation for reasons specific to this model. The study's objective is predictive and explanatory, matching what partial least squares estimation maximises (Hair et al., 2019). The model estimates two endogenous constructs, seven direct paths, and three specific indirect effects simultaneously, which the technique handles as one system rather than through sequential regression. It imposes no multivariate normality requirement, relevant given 48 Likert-type indicators. Its handling of reflective blocks of unequal size, from three indicators for *laissez-faire* leadership to fifteen for transformational leadership and job satisfaction, avoids the identification difficulties short blocks create under covariance-based estimation. Finally, it supplies the bootstrapping infrastructure needed to estimate three specific indirect effects with bias-corrected confidence intervals (Hair et al., 2022; Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

Significance was established through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples and 95 per cent bias-corrected and accelerated confidence intervals. Because partial least squares estimation produces no global covariance-based fit statistic, model adequacy was instead assessed through the coefficient of determination, effect sizes, the Stone-Geisser predictive relevance statistic (Q^2), the standardised root mean square residual, and the Tenenhaus et al. (2005) goodness-of-fit index, following current reporting guidance for the technique (Hair et al., 2019, 2022).

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Diagnostics

Internal consistency was acceptable to excellent across all five constructs, Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.815 for laissez-faire leadership to 0.952 for job satisfaction. All seven predictor-criterion relationships specified in the model showed a significant linear component with a non-significant deviation-from-linearity term (all $p > 0.43$), supporting the linear specification that partial least squares estimation assumes. Variance inflation factors ranged from 1.206 to 1.605 across both structural equations, well below the conservative threshold of 3.3, indicating that the three leadership styles are

empirically distinguishable rather than reflecting a single undifferentiated evaluation of the supervisor. Sampling adequacy for exploratory factor analysis was excellent, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.969, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(1128) = 12,031.74$, $p < 0.001$. An unconstrained principal component extraction recovered exactly five components with eigenvalues above 1.0, jointly explaining 62.2 per cent of total variance, and every one of the 48 items loaded most strongly on the component corresponding to its intended construct, with no cross-loading exceeding 0.35. Table 2 reports descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and inter-construct correlations.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Transformational leadership	3.159	0.652	(0.950)				
2. Transactional leadership	2.955	0.650	0.379**	(0.891)			
3. Laissez-faire leadership	3.045	0.800	-0.481**	-0.328**	(0.815)		
4. Work engagement	2.857	0.703	0.531**	0.399**	-0.436**	(0.927)	
5. Job satisfaction	2.913	0.644	0.547**	0.427**	-0.428**	0.636**	(0.952)

*Note: n = 380. Values on the diagonal in parentheses are Cronbach's alpha. ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed.*

All construct means clustered near the scale midpoint, between 2.857 for work engagement and 3.159 for transformational leadership, and every correlation carried the sign predicted by the theoretical model, with the strongest association observed between work engagement and job satisfaction ($r = 0.636$, $p < 0.001$).

4.2 Measurement Model

Following the two-step procedure recommended for partial least squares estimation

(Hair et al., 2019), the measurement model was assessed before the structural model was interpreted. Outer loadings ranged from 0.691 to 0.882 across the 48 indicators; 47 exceeded the 0.708 benchmark, and the single exception, an individualised-consideration item at 0.691, was retained because its removal would have improved average variance extracted by less than 0.01 while narrowing coverage of a three-item dimension. Composite reliability ranged from 0.889 to 0.957 and average variance extracted from 0.589 to 0.728 across all five constructs, both above their respective 0.70 and 0.50 thresholds (Table 3).

Table 3. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Items	Loading range	Composite reliability	AVE
Transformational leadership	15	0.691-0.830	0.955	0.589

Construct	Items	Loading range	Composite reliability	AVE
Transactional leadership	6	0.755-0.865	0.917	0.648
Laissez-faire leadership	3	0.821-0.882	0.889	0.728
Work engagement	9	0.710-0.846	0.939	0.632
Job satisfaction	15	0.737-0.826	0.957	0.599

Note: All loadings significant at $p < 0.001$. Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) exceed the 0.70 and 0.50 thresholds respectively (Hair et al., 2019). Full item-level loadings available from the corresponding author.

Discriminant validity was supported by three converging criteria. Every heterotrait-monotrait ratio fell below 0.68, comfortably under the conservative 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015); the square root of each construct's average variance extracted exceeded its

correlation with every other construct, satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion; and every indicator loaded more strongly on its assigned construct than on any other. The tightest margin in the model was between work engagement and job satisfaction, the pair most exposed to conceptual overlap, where the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of 0.677 still cleared the strict threshold with room to spare, a result of some importance given that the mediation test in Section 4.4 depends on these two constructs being empirically separable (Table 4).

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

	TFL	TRL	LFL	WE	JS
Transformational leadership (TFL)	0.767	0.380	-0.491	0.535	0.550
Transactional leadership (TRL)	0.412	0.805	-0.330	0.402	0.431
Laissez-faire leadership (LFL)	-0.547	-0.384	0.853	-0.446	-0.434
Work engagement (WE)	0.566	0.439	-0.501	0.795	0.638
Job satisfaction (JS)	0.575	0.464	-0.486	0.677	0.774

Note: Values above the diagonal are latent variable correlations; values on the diagonal (bold position) are the square root of AVE; values below the diagonal are heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios. All HTMT values fall below the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015), and every diagonal value exceeds the corresponding row and column correlations, satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The three leadership styles jointly explained 36.3 per cent of variance in work engagement (adjusted $R^2 = 0.358$), and the four predictors together explained 49.4 per cent of

variance in job satisfaction (adjusted $R^2 = 0.489$). Both values fall in the moderate range on conventional behavioural-research benchmarks. Predictive relevance, assessed through blindfolding with an omission distance of seven, was confirmed for both endogenous constructs, $Q^2 = 0.229$ for engagement and $Q^2 = 0.294$ for satisfaction, and the standardised root mean square residual of 0.061 fell below the 0.08 approximate-fit threshold. The Tenenhaus et al. (2005) goodness-of-fit index reached 0.523, indicating a large global fit against conventional benchmarks, though this index is reported alongside, rather than in place of, the R^2 and Q^2

results, given its limitations as a stand-alone adequacy criterion.

All seven direct hypotheses were supported (Table 5). Transformational leadership was the strongest positive predictor of both work engagement ($\beta = 0.360$, $t = 7.745$, $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.228$, $t = 5.081$, $p < 0.001$). Transactional leadership showed smaller but significant positive effects on engagement ($\beta = 0.198$, $t = 4.582$, $p < 0.001$) and satisfaction ($\beta =$

0.147 , $t = 3.303$, $p = 0.001$). Laissez-faire leadership predicted both outcomes negatively, engagement ($\beta = -0.204$, $t = -4.446$, $p < 0.001$) and satisfaction ($\beta = -0.087$, $t = -2.044$, $p = 0.041$), the latter the weakest of the seven direct paths, with a confidence interval that approached, though did not include, zero. Work engagement was the strongest single predictor in the model of job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.419$, $t = 9.713$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.220$), exceeding every leadership path in both magnitude and effect size.

Table 5. Structural Model Results and Direct Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis	Path	β [95% CI]	SE	t	p	f^2	Decision
H1a	TFL→JS	0.228 [0.140, 0.318]	0.045	5.081	<0.001	0.063	Supported
H1b	TRL→JS	0.147 [0.061, 0.231]	0.045	3.303	0.001	0.034	Supported
H1c	LFL→JS	-0.087 [-0.168, -0.004]	0.042	-2.044	0.041	0.010	Supported
H2a	TFL→WE	0.360 [0.270, 0.447]	0.046	7.745	<0.001	0.143	Supported
H2b	TRL→WE	0.198 [0.117, 0.283]	0.043	4.582	<0.001	0.051	Supported
H2c	LFL→WE	-0.204 [-0.293, -0.114]	0.046	-4.446	<0.001	0.048	Supported
H3	WE→JS	0.419 [0.336, 0.505]	0.043	9.713	<0.001	0.220	Supported

Note: $n = 380$; 5,000 bootstrap subsamples; confidence intervals are bias-corrected and accelerated. R^2 (WE) = 0.363, adjusted $R^2 = 0.358$; R^2 (JS) = 0.494, adjusted $R^2 = 0.489$. Q^2 (WE) = 0.229; Q^2 (JS) = 0.294. SRMR = 0.061; GoF = 0.523.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

All three specific indirect effects were significant, with bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals excluding zero (Table 6). Following Zhao et al. (2010), each pathway was classified according to whether the direct and

indirect effects were both significant and shared a sign. All three pathways met this condition and were accordingly classified as complementary partial mediation, rather than the indirect-only pattern that some studies label full mediation, or the sign-reversed pattern that would indicate an unmodelled suppressor.

Table 6. Specific Indirect Effects and Mediation Test Results

Hypothesis	Path	Indirect β [95% CI]	t	Direct β	Total β	VAF	Decision
H4a	TFL→WE→JS	0.151 [0.105, 0.197]	6.526	0.228**	0.378	39.9%	Supported
H4b	TRL→WE→JS	0.083 [0.046, 0.124]	4.045	0.147**	0.230	36.1%	Supported
H4c	LFL→WE→JS	-0.085 [-0.132, -0.045]	-3.881	-0.087**	-0.172	49.4%	Supported

*Note: $n = 380$; 5,000 bootstrap subsamples. VAF is variance accounted for (indirect effect

divided by total effect). ** indicates the direct effect remains significant with the mediator in the

model. All three pathways are classified as complementary partial mediation, following Zhao et al. (2010): both the direct and indirect effect are significant and share a sign.*

The proportion of the total effect carried by engagement, the variance accounted for, differed meaningfully across pathways: 39.9 per cent for transformational leadership, 36.1 per cent for transactional leadership, and 49.4 per cent for laissez-faire leadership. Engagement therefore carried close to half of the laissez-faire effect on satisfaction but little more than a third of the transactional effect, a pattern consistent with the resource logic set out in Section 2.2. An absent supervisor operates almost entirely through resource deprivation, leaving little else through which the effect could travel, whereas a transactional supervisor delivers part of the effect directly, plausibly through the pay and promotion facets of satisfaction, which respond to a specified reward exchange without requiring an intervening engaged state.

5. Discussion

The pattern of results maps closely onto the resource logic that Job Demands-Resources theory predicts for the three leadership styles, and it does so in a setting where that prediction had not previously been tested. Transformational leadership outperformed the two alternatives on every path in which it appeared, consistent with its status as the most consistently effective style in the international literature (Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Sutanto et al., 2025). The transactional coefficient, though smaller, was positive and significant on both outcomes, which is not universally reported; some studies find transactional leadership weak or null, an inconsistency this study's theoretical framing suggests may partly reflect the common practice of aggregating contingent reward with performance monitoring into a single construct (Thanh and Quang, 2022). One plausible, though not directly tested, explanation for the comparatively strong transactional effect observed here is that in a labour market marked by precarity and within an organisation under

visible commercial strain, the predictability of a specified reward exchange itself functions as a resource, reducing ambiguity in an otherwise uncertain environment.

The finding that engagement only partially, rather than fully, mediates every pathway is worth setting against studies that report a more complicated picture still. A recent Indonesian public-sector study found that engagement actually weakened the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance, while job satisfaction strengthened it, the reverse of the pattern this study's theoretical framing would predict for a Job Demands-Resources motivational chain (Wardani et al., 2025). Other work routes the transformational-engagement link through psychological empowerment rather than treating engagement as the terminal mediator (Ayu Dina and Tjahjono, 2023). Read alongside the present results, this suggests the mediating architecture connecting leadership to distal outcomes is not fixed across settings or outcome variables, and that engagement's role should be established empirically in each new context rather than imported from studies conducted elsewhere, a caution the consistency of the present findings does not exempt this study from either.

The laissez-faire finding carries the clearest theoretical weight. Its coefficient on engagement, in absolute magnitude, marginally exceeded the positive transactional coefficient, meaning that an avoidant supervisor destroyed roughly as much engagement as a contingent-reward supervisor created. This mirrors recent evidence that laissez-faire leadership can be uniquely destructive relative to even overtly negative supervision (Klasmeier et al., 2022), and that its costs extend to the avoidant leaders themselves (Perkins et al., 2025), supporting a shift towards treating leadership avoidance as an active depleting condition rather than a neutral absence of behaviour, a distinction with direct implications for how organisations monitor and address it.

Work engagement was the strongest single predictor of satisfaction in the model, and it significantly mediated all three leadership pathways, though never fully. Each direct effect remained significant once engagement was entered, and the variance accounted for by the indirect route ranged from 36 to 49 per cent. This pattern, complementary partial mediation across all three pathways and in every case, is precisely what the motivational process of Job Demands-Resources theory anticipates: engagement is the dominant transmission mechanism, not the only one. Studies that treat full mediation as the stronger or more desirable finding risk mischaracterising what a well-specified resource model should produce.

The differentiated variance-accounted-for proportions are themselves informative. Engagement carried the largest share of the laissez-faire effect, consistent with an avoidant supervisor operating through resource deprivation with few other channels available, and the smallest share of the transactional effect, consistent with reward and promotion facets of satisfaction responding partly to the exchange itself rather than solely to the psychological state it produces. This differentiation, obtainable only by estimating three separate indirect effects rather than one aggregate term, is a direct product of the study's design and a point on which much prior Nigerian and African leadership research has been silent.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings extend Job Demands-Resources theory in three respects. First, they confirm the theory's motivational pathway operating as specified in a private-sector West African organisation under documented commercial contraction, a combination of setting and condition largely absent from the existing evidence base, which draws predominantly on stable or growing organisations. Second, they support reconceptualising laissez-faire leadership as an active resource-depleting condition, given an effect on engagement comparable in size to an actively resource-enriching style, rather than as a

passive baseline against which other styles are compared. Third, they demonstrate, through differentiated indirect-effect estimation, that the proportion of a leadership effect transmitted through engagement is not constant across styles but varies systematically with the resource logic each style enacts, a nuance an aggregated leadership construct cannot recover.

A further theoretical point follows from what the model does not explain. The three leadership styles jointly accounted for 36.3 per cent of the variance in work engagement, leaving close to two-thirds attributable to factors the model did not specify, plausibly including pay adequacy, job security, workload, and the wider macroeconomic pressure documented in Section 1. This is not a weakness in the measurement so much as a substantive finding in its own right: it indicates that leadership, while the strongest single antecedent tested here, operates as one job resource among several rather than as a proxy for the resource environment as a whole, a distinction that matters for how the theory is applied in practice and one the moderate, rather than large, effect sizes obtained throughout the structural model (Table 5) reinforce.

5.2 Practical Implications

For management, three implications follow directly from the pattern of coefficients. Leadership development should prioritise transformational behaviours, since these carry both the largest total effect and the largest engagement-mediated component. Leadership avoidance should be treated as a measurable performance concern rather than a stylistic preference, given its cost to engagement is comparable to the benefit of active transactional leadership. Because leadership styles jointly explain little more than a third of engagement variance, leadership development should be positioned as one substantial element of a broader retention strategy rather than as a sufficient response to the disengagement documented across the region, and organisations should expect leadership interventions to move engagement meaningfully without expecting

them, on their own, to close the gap the regional statistics in Section 1 describe.

6. Conclusion

This study examined whether work engagement mediates the relationships between three leadership styles and employee job satisfaction among employees of Globacom Limited, a major Nigerian telecommunications operator undergoing sustained commercial contraction. Grounded in Job Demands-Resources theory, the model was estimated using partial least squares structural equation modelling on data from 380 employees, with a measurement model that met all conventional reliability and validity thresholds. All ten hypotheses were supported. Transformational leadership was the strongest positive predictor of engagement and satisfaction; transactional leadership showed smaller positive effects; laissez-faire leadership predicted both outcomes negatively, with an effect on engagement comparable in magnitude to that of transactional leadership. Work engagement was the strongest single predictor of satisfaction and significantly, though only partially, mediated all three leadership pathways.

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Two limitations merit particular note. The cross-sectional, single-source design means the estimated paths represent associations rather than established causal effects, and common method variance, though addressed procedurally and checked post hoc, cannot be fully excluded from a design in which predictor, mediator, and outcome share a single respondent and occasion. The transactional construct was measured as a composite of contingent reward and management by exception, which may understate the divergence between these two behaviours that the theoretical discussion in Section 2.2 anticipates.

Future research should adopt a time-lagged or longitudinal design to establish temporal precedence between engagement and satisfaction; disaggregate contingent reward from management by exception to test directly whether their effects diverge as theorised; and extend the model across multiple operators within the same sector to establish whether the resource logic identified here generalises beyond a single, highly strained organisation to the wider Nigerian telecommunications labour market.

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