

# **Senior Public Managers' Engagement: A Person Situation Interactionist Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the engagement of senior public managers by developing a person-situation-interactionist perspective. The paper integrates the literature on social exchange theory and person-organization fit to explore the effects of decision autonomy and shared vision on the engagement of more than 2,000 senior public sector managers in the central government agencies of three continental European countries: France, Germany and the Netherlands. Then, it examines whether the locus of control of those managers moderates the decision autonomy-engagement and shared vision-engagement relationships. The structural equation modeling results suggest that there are positive relationships between both decision autonomy and shared vision and employee engagement. Further analysis revealed that an internal locus of control strengthened the decision autonomy-engagement relationship, but that it weakened the shared vision-engagement relationship.

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## **Introduction**

Employee engagement is one of the most important topics in the fields of HRM, organizational behaviour and general management (Albrecht, 2014). Yet, despite the explosion of interest in the potential benefits of employee engagement, evidence on the key drivers of engagement lags behind that on its outcomes (see Saks, 2006; Rees, Alfes, and Gatenby, 2013; Brunetto et al., 2014). Research suggests that work characteristics and values are likely to be important precursors of employee engagement. Social exchange theory highlights the role of work autonomy: employees entrusted with control over job decisions, are more engaged than those with less autonomy (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006). Theories of person-organization fit emphasise the importance of shared vision: employees who share similar attitudes towards organizational goals are more engaged (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Although a growing number of studies now examine these issues, that research rarely considers the role that personality might play in influencing the relationship between work characteristics and values and engagement. To address this gap in the literature, this study adopts a “person-situation-interactionist perspective” (Ng and Butts, 2009, p.290), which highlights that employee outcomes are the product of employees’ experience of work and organizations and their personality. This perspective is utilised in the study by analysing the impact that personality has on the relationships between decision autonomy and shared vision, and engagement. A “person-situation-interactionist perspective” is also further developed by focusing on the engagement of senior public managers in central government agencies – civil servants who operate in a unique work environment and possess highly distinctive values and attitudes (Page and Wright, 1999).

In seeking to emphasise the importance of personality as a moderator of the antecedents of employee engagement, the study builds on the insights of Upper Echelons Theory, which suggests that senior managers' personal characteristics affect organizational behaviour (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). In doing so, the focus is on senior managers' locus of control because this is a key indicator of the way in which managers' attitudes can influence organizational decision-making and outcomes (Miller, De Vries and Toulouse, 1982; Boone, De Brabander and van Witteloostuijn, 1996). In particular, an internal locus of control, which prompts individuals to feel that they are masters rather than prisoners of their own fate, is positively related to job satisfaction and performance (Ng, Sorensen, and Eby, 2006; Ng and Butts, 2009). As such, it seems likely that locus of control will condition the ways in which work characteristics and values shape senior managers' engagement.

The paper begins by exploring theoretical perspectives on the engagement of senior managers, developing hypotheses about the separate effects of decision autonomy and shared vision on that engagement. Next, hypotheses on the moderating effects of an internal locus of control on those relationships are elaborated. Following that, the data and methods employed in the study are described. The results of the analyses that are carried out are then reported, and the theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

## **Engagement among Senior Managers**

The concept of employee engagement can be defined as the extent to which an individual is satisfied with his work and committed to his organization (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002). As Wiley, Kowske and Herman (2010) put it, engagement captures the degree to which an employee is willing to display attitudes and behaviours that help in the achievement of organizational objectives. Importantly, the focus in this study is on *employee* rather than *work* engagement. While work engagement is concerned with the relationship of the employee with

their work only, employee engagement, as defined above, is concerned with an employee's relationship with both their work and organization.

Research on the antecedents of employee engagement has so far neglected the moderating effect of personality on the relationship between key situational variables (i.e. work characteristics and values) and engagement. Moreover, little attention has been paid to the engagement of senior managers, even though they are vital to the survival and success of organizations. Saks (2006), for example, analyses the relationship between work characteristics and front-line employees in firms operating in multiple industries, while Brunetto et al. (2014) examine the relationship between work characteristics and the engagement of front-line professionals in the public sector. To address these gaps in the literature, this study evaluates the extent to which locus of control moderates the relationship between decision autonomy and shared vision and the engagement of senior public managers in central government agencies.

The development of a “person-situation-interactionist perspective” on the engagement of senior managers is a particularly valuable empirical and theoretical extension of the existing literature. Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick and Mason, 1984) indicates that the personality of senior managers has vitally important implications for organizational functioning, and according to Warshawsky, Havens and Knafl (2012, p. 418), “managers are critical for creating environments fostering employee engagement”. The more engaged senior managers are, the better they are able to transmit positive experiences to their subordinates (Schaufeli and Salanova 2008). Moreover, the engagement of senior public managers may also have far-reaching societal implications – engaged public managers implement public policy more successfully and respond more effectively to social needs and demands (Bryer, 2007). By examining how locus of control shapes the engagement of senior public sector managers, this paper therefore addresses calls for more research on the antecedents of engagement (Brunetto

et al., 2014), and casts light on critical issues in the psychology of management and human resource management in the public sector.

### *Decision Autonomy and Senior Managers' Engagement*

The concept of autonomy in the workplace refers to the degree of control an individual has over his or her work assignment (Richman et al., 2008). It is regarded as a predictor of employee engagement because it speaks directly to an individual's experience of the work environment (Richman et al., 2008). Decision autonomy refers to the degree of freedom an individual has in making decisions regarding key aspects of their work (Morgeson and Humphrey 2006). It implies that an individual is authorised to make decisions free from the intervention of others (Yang and Choi, 2009) – something that is particularly important for senior managers seeking to make their mark on an organization.

According to social exchange theory, when employees perceive that they are treated well by their organizations, they will reciprocate in positive ways (Blau, 1964). Richman et al (2008) suggest that employees engage more with organizations that value and respect them, and a key indicator of this is the degree of autonomy that they are able to exercise. For senior managers, this relates to the authority to make substantive decisions about staffing and personnel issues, including hiring and firing, as well as the structures of authority and lines of decision-making associated with getting things done. When managers have considerable autonomy, they perceive that the organization trusts them, and will, in turn, demonstrate much greater engagement (Saks, 2006). Evidence shows that autonomy is consistently an important antecedent of the engagement of front-line employees and supervisors (Crawford, LePine, and Rich, 2010; Christian, Garza, and Slaughter, 2011), and it may be that it matters even more for senior managers who are responsible for a much wider range of organizational outcomes. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 1: Decision autonomy will be positively related to senior public managers' engagement*

### *Shared vision and Senior Managers' Engagement*

Values are the beliefs that individuals have about the desirability of the behavioural choices that they make (Rokeach, 1973). Within this study, shared vision signifies the degree to which the employees within an organization share the same work values (Jehn, Chadwick, and Thatcher, 1997). It represents a “clear and common picture of a desired future state that members of an organization identify with themselves” (Hoe, 2007, p. 12). Individuals who share work values are bound together by common goals and aspirations, and critically, will behave in ways that benefit the organization (Bolino, Turnley and Bloodgood, 2002).

Shared vision facilitates the pursuit of organizational goals because it ensures that the behaviour of employees is consistent with the organization's desired business outcomes. As such, it can replace more formal mechanisms of control within organizations (Hoe, 2007). In particular, shared vision promotes the integration of the whole organization (e.g. Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Hoe, 2007), which, in turn, enhances work-related outcomes. All of which also seems likely to have a positive influence on senior managers' attitudes toward their organization. Indeed, a meta-analysis by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) showed that when employees perceive that their values and goals are congruent with those of their colleagues, they have increased organizational commitment and job satisfaction and decreased intentions to quit. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that shared vision is positively related to the engagement of front-line employees (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010; Li et al, 2015). As a result, it is expected that:

*Hypothesis 2: Shared vision will be positively related to senior public managers' engagement*

### *Locus of Control as a Moderator*

Within the psychology literature, locus of control refers to the degree to which individuals believe that they have control over their own fate (Rotter, 1966). According to Rotter (1966), an individual's locus of control can be either internal or external. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that they are the masters of their own fate. They are confident in their ability to achieve their goals and perceive a strong association between their actions and consequences. Individuals with an external locus of control, on the other hand, believe that they have little direct control over their destiny. They usually attribute personal outcomes to external factors, such as the actions of powerful others, the degree of task difficulty that they face, serendipity or sheer misfortune.

According to Ng and Butts (2009, p. 292), an internal locus of control involves a "tendency to exert active control over the environment". For "internals", the external environment is at least partly under their control (Ng, Sorensen, and Eby, 2006), and this gives them the confidence to proactively shape their work experiences in ways that are favourable to them. Internals' preference for exerting control would therefore seem likely to strengthen the connection between autonomy and engagement for these individuals. In particular, senior managers with an internal locus of control will value greater autonomy over key decisions than those with an external locus of control because of their "orientation toward exerting more control and having a greater impact in organizations" (Ng and Butts 2009, p. 293). Therefore, it is predicted that internals, compared to externals, will be more likely to display high levels of engagement when decision-making autonomy is high. Hence:

*Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between decision autonomy and engagement will be stronger for senior public managers with an internal rather than an external locus of control.*

Although an internal locus of control seems likely to enhance the engagement of senior managers when decision autonomy is high, there are circumstances in which an external rather than an internal locus of control may bring organizational benefits. For instance, it has been argued that externals experience higher levels of fit with their jobs and perform better when the scope for independent action is constrained and rule-following is necessary or encouraged (Coleman, Irving, and Cooper 1999). Accordingly, this paper predicts that externals will display higher levels of engagement than internals when shared vision is high within an organization.

Individuals with an external locus of control believe that they have little control over their destiny and feel uncertain about achieving personal goals. As a result, they have an in-built predilection for binding their fate to that of others. While this can prove problematic when individual initiative is important for the realization of organizational goals, it may be valuable when team discipline and combined effort matter (Spector, 1982; Boone, Van Olffen, and Van Witteloostuijn, 2005). Internals prefer taking responsibility for their actions and behaviours, which may make them less dependent on collective goals and aspirations (Sacks and Silberman, 2000). In situations requiring more careful cultivation and synchronization of collective endeavour, internals' predilection for risk-taking may potentially pose challenges for both organizational leaders and followers (Spector 1982; Boone, Van Olffen, and Van Witteloostuijn, 2005). All of which seems to suggest that for managers with an external locus of control the connection between shared vision and engagement will be stronger than for those with an internal locus of control. Thus, the final hypothesis is that:

*Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between shared vision and engagement will be stronger for senior public managers with an external rather than an internal locus of control.*



The connections between decision autonomy, shared vision, locus of control and engagement are modelled in figure 1.

-Insert Figure 1 here-

## **Method**

### *Sample*

The analysis utilizes data from a large-N questionnaire survey of senior public managers in central government agencies conducted in three continental European countries: France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Senior civil servants are members of the political elite within European societies, and as such their engagement with their work and organization has important implications for society as a whole as well as for the functioning of the organizations in which they are employed. The survey was based on a census of top executives in all central government ministries and agencies in the three countries to avoid random sampling and related problems of representativeness. In France, top civil servants in all the ministries, prefectures, regional ministerial directorates, departmental directorates and executive agencies were surveyed, whilst in Germany, all senior managers in federal and state (länder) government ministries and agencies were surveyed. In the Netherlands, senior civil servants in all central government ministries and executive agencies (*batenlastendiensten*) were surveyed, as well those in autonomous administrative authorities (ZBOs) (Hammerschmid, Oprisor and Stimac, 2013).

The survey was sent out to over 8,569 high ranking managers in the three countries via post and email (using either a personalized access link or an anonymous one to a webpage), depending on each country's predefined access strategy. Invitations were followed by reminders after two weeks in the field. When the surveys were closed, the datasets were cleaned

and checked by a central research team according to a standardised procedure. Respondents who did not answer a majority of the survey items were dropped and the descriptives and frequencies were checked to make sure the data was plausible.

Table 1 shows the number of questionnaires distributed and the response rates in the three countries. There were 2,052 valid answers available from the three countries and an overall response rate of 24%. Non-response bias was tested by comparing early respondents (first 10% of returned questionnaires) and late respondents (last 10% of returned questionnaires) in each country. Late respondents here were used as a proxy for non-respondents (Armstrong and Overton 1977). Independent sample *t*-tests uncovered no significant differences between both groups, which suggests non-response bias is not a problem. Of the total respondents, 73% were male, a percentage analogous to the proportion of men in top executive positions in the public sector in Europe (OECD 2013). As regards to age, 3.5% of the respondents were less than 35, 17% were between 36 and 45, 42% were between 46 and 55, and the remainder were above 55. A total of 15% of respondents had a PhD, 76% had masters, and the rest had a bachelor's degree. The data are subject to strict anonymity regulations, to protect individual respondents.

-Insert Table 1 here-

### *Measures*

Short scales were used to lower the response burden, increase the response rate and reduce non-response bias, particularly as the study data was collected from senior managers, and postal and email questionnaires were used (Edwards et al., 2002). Research also suggests that short scales with good psychometric properties can achieve adequate statistical power by using samples of more than 300 respondents (Scott et al., 2009). Furthermore, according to Widaman

et al. (2011; pg. 55), when structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to analyse data (as it was in this study), relying on a short or long form of a scale “should not matter”, because the analysis accommodates the different levels of reliability of both the short and long forms.

*Senior managers’ engagement* was measured using a three-item scale developed by Wiley, Kowske, and Herman (2010). A sample item is “I would recommend this organization as a good place to work”. The Cronbach’s alpha gauging the scale reliability for the engagement measure was 0.73 – alphas above 0.7 indicate a good level of reliability (Nunnally, 1978). A seven-point response format was used ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

Four items were used to measure *decision autonomy*. The items assessed the extent of autonomy managers had with regards to four key aspects of strategic human resource management: hiring staff, dismissing staff, promoting staff and making changes to the organizational structure. The study focuses on decisions about the management of human resources rather than the broader strategic mission of the organizations for which senior public sector executives’ work, as the latter is usually determined by senior politicians (Bowman, Duncan, and Weir, 2000). The Cronbach’s alpha for the decision making autonomy measure was 0.84. A sample item is “I have the following degree of autonomy with regard to hiring staff”. Responses ranged from 1 (very low autonomy) to 7 (very high autonomy).

*Shared vision* was measured using three items from the scale developed by Leana and Pil (2006). A sample item is “People in my organization share the same ambitions and vision for the organization”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this three-item scale was 0.86. A seven-point response format was used ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

*Locus of control* was initially measured using three items from Carpenter and Seki’s (2006) shortened version of the Rotter scale. One item had to be eliminated because it reduced the reliability of the scale. A sample item is “I believe that success depends on ability rather

than luck". The Cronbach's alpha for the two-item scale was 0.77. Responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

The analysis was conducted using the following controls: age, gender and education, since previous research has shown that these variables are related to employee engagement (Avery, McKay and Wilson 2007).

### *Measurement Validation*

Using AMOS 21 and robust maximum likelihood, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the relationships amongst autonomy, shared vision, locus of control and engagement. The fit of the model was good ( $\chi^2$  (df = 86) = 803.109,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI= 0.932, RMSEA= 0.064, and TLI= 0.892). The factor loading of each survey item on its corresponding construct was significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level, signifying convergent validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The constructs also possessed high internal consistency (see Table 2) with composite reliabilities above 0.75 (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). Discriminant validity was examined by analysing whether the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct was greater than the correlation between that construct and all other constructs in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows that discriminant validity was satisfied in all cases.

-Insert Table 2 here-

France, Germany and the Netherlands each have distinctive administrative cultures that shape the central government apparatus and the values and attitudes of the senior civil servants that work within it (Hammerschmid et al, 2016). The French state has long held to a Napoleonic administrative culture in which a strong state holds sway over society. The German federal system supports a more organic tradition, characterised by co-operative state-society relations.

The Dutch state combines elements of the organic tradition and the more pluralist state-society relations found in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries (Loughlin and Peters, 1997). Hence, since the data used for the analysis were pooled from these three different administrative settings, it is important to test for configural invariance – whether the same pattern of factors and factor loadings are observed across different groups; and metric invariance – whether the relationships between items and factors are equivalent between groups (Kim et al., 2013).

Configural invariance was tested by running a model in which the loadings and error variances were allowed to vary across the three groups. The fit of this model was good ( $\chi^2$  (df = 177) = 712.087,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.942, RMSEA = 0.038, and TLI = 0.910), indicating the same factor structure for all groups. Metric invariance was tested by running another model in which the factor loadings for the three groups were held equal. The fit of this model was also good ( $\chi^2$  (df = 195) = 972.639,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.915, RMSEA = 0.044, and TLI = 0.881) indicating that the relationships between each latent variable and associated items were invariant over groups. Changes in CFI ( $\Delta$ CFI), RMSEA ( $\Delta$ RMSEA) and TLI ( $\Delta$  TLI) between the metric and configural model were 0.027, 0.006 and 0.029 respectively. Pooling the data for the French, German and Dutch civil servants is therefore appropriate as the constructs have the same meaning for the three groups of managers. Moreover, further analysis revealed that the main effects that we identify are present within each of the samples, indicating that despite differences in administrative culture, there appear to be important similarities in the values and attitudes among senior civil servants in France, Germany and the Netherlands (see also the discussion below).

Following Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) recommendations, common method bias (CMB) was addressed in a number of ways. First, the data collection process ensured respondents' anonymity, and used a variety of scale formats. Second, two statistical tests were used to detect

and control for CMB. Harman's single-factor test was performed, whereby all the survey items were loaded onto a single factor representing a common influence. The CFA for this model exhibited an extremely poor fit ( $\chi^2$  (df = 65) = 5499.647,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.468, RMSEA = 0.202, and TLI = 0.255), suggesting the absence of CMB. The more stringent unmeasured latent method factor technique was also used, which allows survey items to load on both their theoretical constructs and a latent common method factor (Cole, Bedeian, and Bruch, 2011). The variance extracted (AVE) by the common method factor for this model was 0.247, falling below the 0.50 value that indicates the presence of CMB (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

## Results

The *residual centering approach* to latent interaction modelling with SEM was used to examine the moderating role of locus of control on the relationship between autonomy, shared vision and engagement (see Little et al., 2006). This approach has more power in detecting interaction effects than conventional multiple regression, is relatively easy to use, clearly identifies the relative contribution of interaction and main (first-order) effects, and has been shown to perform well in comparison with other latent interaction methods (Little et al. 2006).

Residual centring is a two-step procedure. First, two survey items are selected, one from each first-order construct (e.g. decision autonomy and locus of control), and multiplied together (e.g., DAUTON1\*LC1). The cross-product is regressed on all items within the two first-order constructs (DAUTON1, DAUTON2, DAUTON3, DAUTON4, DAUTON5, LC1 and LC 2) and residuals retrieved, in this instance (DAUTON1\*LC1\_res). The procedure is then repeated for each ( $5 \times 2 = 10$ ) cross-product. Second, the 10 sets of residuals are treated as indicators of the latent (autonomy-locus of control) interaction term when estimating the structural model. Finally, correlated covariances are estimated between residual-centred survey items if the original cross-product comprised the same first-order item.

Two models were used to test the study hypotheses. In the first model, locus of control moderated the relationship between decision autonomy and engagement, whereas in the second, locus of control moderated the relationship between shared vision and engagement. As shown in Table 3, the two proposed structural models provided a good fit to the data: ( $\chi^2$  (df = 201) = 952.758,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.957, RMSEA = 0.043, and TLI = 0.941) for the first model; and ( $\chi^2$  (df = 106) = 299.720,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.987, RMSEA = 0.030, and TLI = 0.981) for the second model. In the first model, the predictor variables explained 13.4 percent of the variance in engagement; in the second, they explained 38 percent. The analysis supported hypothesis 1: decision autonomy had a significant positive association with engagement ( $\beta = 0.205$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The analysis also revealed that shared vision had a significant positive association with engagement ( $\beta = 0.533$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, hypothesis 2 was also supported. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the interaction between decision autonomy and locus of control was significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.117$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while that between shared vision and locus of control was significant and negative ( $\beta = -0.094$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

-Insert Table 3 here-

To better understand the nature of the interactions, moderated multiple regression was carried out (see Aiken and West, 1991). The autonomy-engagement relationships were plotted for managers whose scores on the moderator (i.e. locus of control) were one standard deviation below the mean and one standard deviation above the mean (see Figure 2a). The slope coefficients were higher for managers with a high locus of control ( $\beta = 0.160$ ,  $t = 5.655$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and lower for managers with a low locus of control ( $\beta = 0.111$ ,  $t = 3.726$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, in support of hypothesis 3, the relationship between autonomy and engagement is stronger for managers with a high locus of control (i.e. internals) than those with a low locus of control (i.e.

externals). For the interaction between shared vision and locus of control, the slope coefficient was higher for managers with a low locus of control ( $\beta = 0.473$ ,  $t = 15.262$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) than for those with a high locus of control ( $\beta = 0.409$ ,  $t = 14.012$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Figure 2b). In line with hypothesis 4, these results suggest shared vision matters for the engagement of all managers, but to a lesser extent for those with a higher locus of control (i.e. internals).

-Insert Figure 2a here-

-Insert Figure 2b here-

To add further confidence in these findings, the analysis was repeated treating decision autonomy and shared vision as the moderator variables and locus of control as the focal variable, with similar results. The slope coefficients for the locus of control-engagement relationship were higher when decision autonomy was higher ( $\beta = 0.277$ ,  $t = 4.658$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and lower when decision autonomy was lower ( $\beta = 0.186$ ,  $t = 3.917$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which suggests that autonomy is important to the engagement of all managers, but to a greater extent for those with a higher locus of control. As regards to shared vision, the slope coefficients for the locus of control-engagement relationship were higher when shared vision was lower ( $\beta = 0.195$ ,  $t = 4.922$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and lower when shared vision was higher ( $\beta = 0.099$ ,  $t = 1.869$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ). This suggests that as managers' locus of control increased (i.e. for internals), the association between shared vision and engagement decreased. In other words, shared vision matters more for managers with an external rather than an internal locus of control.

## **Discussion**

This paper examines the influence of decision autonomy and shared vision on the engagement of senior public managers. A person situation interactionist perspective is adopted by examining the moderating role of locus of control on the relationships between decision-



making autonomy, shared vision and engagement. In line with social exchange theory and prior research findings (e.g. Crawford, LePine, and Rich, 2010; Christian, Garza, and Slaughter, 2011) the results provide support for the direct positive association between autonomy and engagement. This confirms that when managers have considerable autonomy, they perceive that the organization trusts them, and will, in turn, demonstrate greater engagement (Saks, 2006). Despite the differences in administrative culture in France, Germany and the Netherlands, further analysis indicates that these findings hold across all three countries, thereby providing even greater support for the theoretical arguments about senior managers' engagement presented in the paper.

Furthermore, consistent with prior research on front-line employees (Rich, Lepine and Crawford, 2010; Li et al, 2015), the results suggest that shared vision has a significant positive relationship with the engagement of senior public managers. Thus, when public managers share the same work values, they will be more likely to display attitudes and behaviours that help in the achievement of organizational objectives. Again, this relationship was observed in each of the three continental European countries included in the study, suggesting that senior public managers' attitudes towards their work and organization may transcend national differences in administrative culture.

Interestingly, it is worth noting that shared vision has a much stronger relationship with engagement than does decision autonomy – the total variance of engagement explained by decision autonomy was only 5.8%, whereas shared vision explained 32.5%. The shared public service ethos characteristic of senior civil servants may explain why shared vision has such a strong effect. Nevertheless, it is also conceivable that the weaker relationship between autonomy and engagement is attributable to the comparatively low levels of decision autonomy found within the study's sample of managers (see Table 2). One reason for this may be that senior public managers are particularly constrained by the institutional environment. For

example, civil service employees in continental European central governments have very high levels of job security and protection, making large scale organizational changes difficult (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Further research exploring the extent to which openness to personnel reforms varies across countries and the ways in which that might influence senior public managers' engagement would cast valuable light on the institutional determinants of managers' values and attitudes.

The results of testing the moderating role of locus of control revealed that for individuals with an internal locus of control, decision autonomy was more strongly related with engagement than for those with an external locus of control. Thus, decision autonomy is important to the engagement of all managers, but to a greater extent for those with a higher locus of control. In addition, the results suggest that for individuals with an external locus of control, shared vision was more strongly related with engagement than for those with an internal locus of control. In other words, as managers' locus of control increased, the association between shared vision and engagement decreased. Thus, shared vision matters more for managers with an external rather than an internal locus of control.

## **Theoretical Implications**

In terms of theoretical implications, the findings seem to provide more support for the insights of theories of person-organization-fit, than for the ideas associated with social exchange theory – shared vision is a stronger determinant of senior public managers’ engagement than decision-making autonomy. Hence, it is possible that person-organization fit theories are better suited to explaining managerial values and attitudes in the public sector than social exchange theory. That said, the results also highlight the importance of personality. Senior public managers with an internal locus of control experience an especially strong connection between decision autonomy and engagement, but a weaker connection between shared vision and engagement. All of the above therefore confirms the merits of the “person situation interactionist perspective” adopted for the study.

## **Practical Implications**

In terms of management implications, the findings for shared vision highlight the importance of workplace initiatives that can facilitate co-worker trust and identification in order to enhance the engagement of managers as well as their subordinates. At the same time, the findings suggest that managers themselves should have more freedom when making strategic decisions relating to human resource management. In doing so, this will show that the organization trusts them, and, in turn, they will feel more motivated to engage with their work and organization. Organizations could also select and hire employees based on their locus of control. Since the engagement of senior public managers has important societal implications, the recruitment of effective and engaged senior managers is a uniquely important issue. Depending on whether the freedom to manage or shared values are deemed to be more important, government recruiters might give preference to job candidates with a high or a low locus of control. For example, the importance of harnessing the public service ethos of employees in central

governments, may mean that individuals with a lower propensity to take risks have a greater aptitude for senior managerial roles.

## **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Despite the strengths of the analysis, the study has a number of limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data means levels of association only are reported. Longitudinal or experimental designs could address the issue of causality. Second, although tests did not reveal the presence of common methods bias, it would be valuable to repeat the analysis undertaken here using data captured from more than one source. Third, while the predictive power of locus of control in explaining employee outcomes is comparable with that of the Big Five personality traits (Ng et al, 2006), it would be interesting and valuable to examine the role of traits, such as conscientiousness and agreeableness in subsequent research. Likewise, when measuring decision making autonomy, only aspects relating to human resource management are considered. Other types of strategic and operational decisions, such as budgeting and performance management, should be considered in the future. Finally, although limiting the study sample to senior public sector executives illustrates the value of a “person-situation-interactionist-perspective”, these individuals have an unusually high level of education and intrinsic motivation (Page and Wright, 1999). Future research should therefore examine the generalizability of the findings to public sector employees in the lower rungs of the organizational ladder, as well as to senior managers and other employees in private sector organizations.

## **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated the value of a person situation interactionist perspective for understanding the psychology of public management. In doing so, it highlights that decision

autonomy and a shared vision may both enhance the engagement of senior public managers, but that these positive relationships may be contingent upon the personality of managers, especially their locus of control. The study indicates that research on human resource management in the public sector should therefore seek to identify the potential benefits of alternative positive psychology interventions.

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**TABLE 1.** Number of questionnaires and response rates

<b>Country</b>	<b>Questionnaires Delivered</b>	<b>Questionnaires Completed</b>	<b>Response Rate %</b>
Germany	2295	566	24.66
France	5297	1193	22.52
Netherlands	977	293	29.99
Total	8569	2052	23.95

**TABLE 2.** Means, Standard Deviations, Inter-correlations and Reliability Estimates

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Decision Autonomy	3.64	1.48	0.72, (0.84)						
2.Shared Vision	4.33	1.22	0.31*	0.83, (0.87)					
3.Locus of Control	6.21	0.81	0.07	0.13	0.81, (0.79)				
4.Engagement	4.98	1.28	0.26	0.58	0.24	0.73, (0.77)			
5.Gender (male=1, female=2)	1.27	0.44	-0.07	-0.06	0.08	-0.09			
6.Age	3.13	0.82	0.08	0.04	0.09	0.11	-0.07		
7.Education	2.05	0.49	0.01	-0.00	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	0.05	-

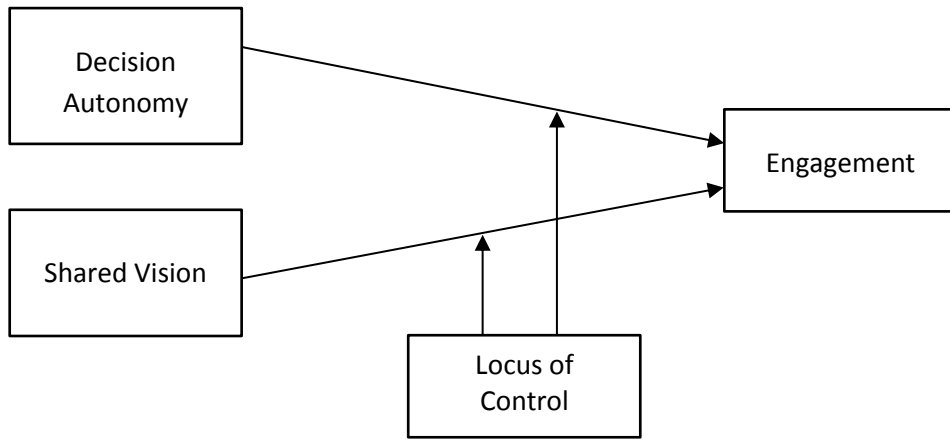
*Sub-diagonal entries are the latent construct inter-correlations. The first entry on the diagonal is square root of the AVE, whilst the second entry in parenthesis is the composite reliability score.*

*\*All correlations above 0.10 are significant at  $p < 0.001$ , whereas correlations below 0.04 are non-significant. Age and education were measured as multichotomous variables (for age, 35 or less=1, 36-45=2, 46-55=3, 56-65=4 and 66 or older=5; whereas for education, graduate degree (BA level) =1, postgraduate degree (MA level) = 2 and PhD/doctoral degree =3).*

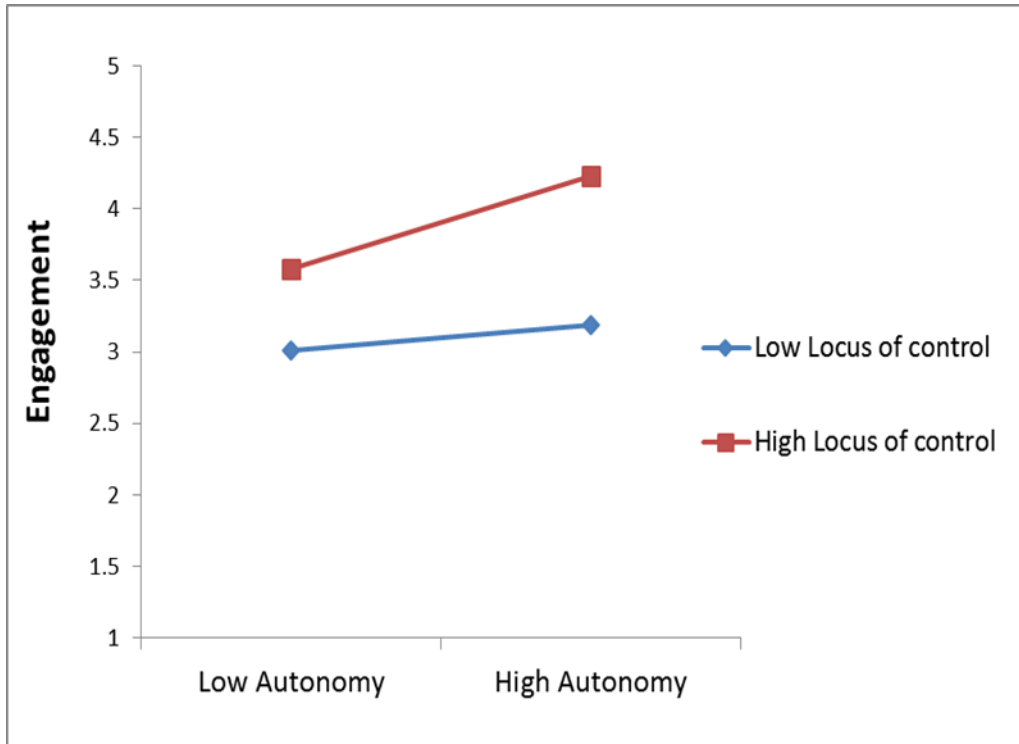
**TABLE 3.** Results of structural models

Path	Model 1	Model 2
Decision Autonomy → Engagement	0.205**	
Locus of Control → Engagement	0.405**	
Decision Autonomy × Locus → Engagement	0.117**	
Shared Vision → Engagement		0.533**
Locus of Control → Engagement		0.306**
Shared Vision × Locus → Engagement		-0.094*
Model Fit Statistics		
$\chi^2$	952.758	299.720
Df	201	106
RMSEA	0.043	0.030
CFI	0.957	0.987
TLI	0.941	0.981

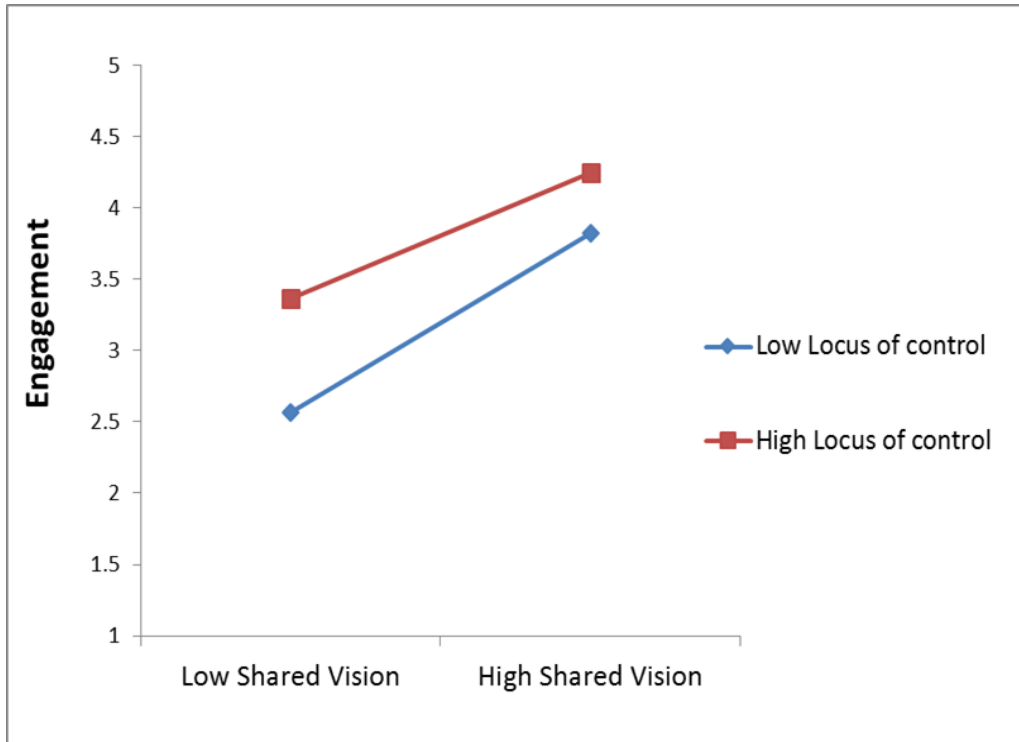
\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$



**FIGURE 1.** Model of Employee Engagement among Senior Managers



**FIGURE 2A.** Moderating Effect of Locus of Control on the Decision Autonomy-Engagement Relationship



**FIGURE 2B.** Moderating Effect of Locus of Control on the Shared Vision-Engagement Relationship