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Strategic Alliance of Transformational Leadership and Motivation in Operational Excellence

Mohammed Hamoumi[1], Mariam Benhadou[2] & Abdellah Haddout[3]

1,2,3. Industrial Management and Plastics Forming Technology Team
Mechanics, Engineering and Innovation Laboratory, LM2I, National High School of Electricity and Mechanics – ENSEM- Hassan II University, Casablanca, Morocco.
Email: [1]hamoumi@gmail.com, [2]mariambenhadou@yahoo.fr, [3]abdellahhaddout@yahoo.fr

Abstract

Operational excellence is a multidimensional concept that goes beyond implementing best practices. While many companies invest heavily in performance management tools, few pay sufficient attention to the role of leadership and employee motivation. This study aims to fill this gap and seeks to decipher the influence of two fundamental pillars of this concept: leadership and employee motivation. By combining a literature review and an analysis of large-scale empirical data from the Moroccan automotive sector, we seek to understand how these two elements interact to shape an organization's overall performance and to answer the following question: to what extent does the human factor contribute to operational excellence? Strong leadership, capable of inspiring and motivating teams, as well as a committed and motivated workforce, are essential assets for any organization seeking to stand out. This exploration aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the human factor's role in achieving operational excellence and offers insights for leaders and managers looking to build high-performing and sustainable organizations.

Keywords: *Operational Excellence, Automotive Industry, Industrial Performance, Leadership, Motivation, National Culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Operational excellence, synonymous with optimal performance and customer satisfaction, has become a paramount objective for contemporary organizations. While process optimization is a cornerstone of this pursuit, it is insufficient to guarantee sustained success. Leadership, as a human factor, plays a pivotal role in an organization's capacity to achieve operational excellence. Prior research has extensively demonstrated the importance of transformational leadership in inspiring employees and fostering an environment conducive to innovation and continuous improvement [1, 2, 3].

Concurrently, employee motivation is recognized as a key driver of performance. Motivation theories (Maslow, Herzberg, Vroom) have highlighted the complex interplay of factors influencing work motivation. In a specific cultural context such as Morocco, motivation can manifest in unique ways, incorporating spiritual and social dimensions.

However, existing research has often addressed these issues in isolation. Few studies have delved deeply into the interactions between leadership, motivation, and operational excellence within a specific context like the Moroccan automotive industry. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the impact of leadership on employee motivation and, consequently, on achieving operational excellence.

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More specifically, this research aims to:

- Assess the influence of transformational leadership on employee motivation in Moroccan automotive companies.
- Identify the dimensions of motivation most strongly linked to operational excellence.
- Analyze the impact of the Moroccan cultural context on the relationships between leadership, motivation, and operational excellence.

By answering these questions, this study will contribute to a better understanding of the key factors driving operational excellence in a specific context and provide practical recommendations for managers and executives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Leadership and Operational Excellence

While operational excellence is a commendable goal, it extends beyond optimized processes. Leadership plays a pivotal role, as highlighted by [1] and [2]. Studies by [4, 3, 5] corroborate the importance of transformational leadership in embedding operational excellence within an organization's culture.

The works of [6, 7, 8] specify the required competencies: talent selection, project management, authenticity, communication, coaching, and vision creation. However, leadership does not operate in a vacuum. Cultural context, as demonstrated by [9, 10], and the GLOBE project [11], influences effective leadership styles. In the MENA region, for instance, leaders are often perceived as just and charismatic [12].

Finally, [13] study underscores the positive impact of participative leadership on motivation. In conclusion, the success of operational excellence hinges on adaptive leadership capable of inspiring and motivating teams while considering cultural specificities.

Hypothesis H1: There is a positive and significant impact of Leadership on Operational Excellence.

2.2 Motivation and Operational Excellence

The shift of organizations towards a knowledge-based economy has highlighted the critical importance of employee motivation. Management research [14, 15, 16, 17, 18] has explored the multifaceted nature of motivation, emphasizing the significance of individual needs, perceptions, and rewards.

These studies have underscored the need for a personalized approach to motivation management. Recently, transcendent motivation, particularly from an Islamic perspective [19, 20, 21, 22], has garnered attention. This approach, which combines tangible rewards and the pursuit of meaning, offers a complementary perspective for understanding work motivation.

Empirical studies [23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31] converge towards a similar conclusion: motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, is a powerful driver of performance. It influences employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity.

In conclusion, motivation is a key component of operational excellence. It requires a multidimensional approach that takes into account individual needs, cultural values, and organizational specificities. By combining effective management practices and a deep

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understanding of motivating factors, organizations can create a stimulating work environment and improve their overall performance.

Hypothesis H2: Motivation has a positive and significant impact on operational excellence.

2.3 Leadership and Motivation

Transformational leadership, according to [32, 33, 34], is a powerful driver of intrinsic motivation. By inspiring and providing meaning to work, these leaders create a stimulating environment that fosters engagement and performance. However, the organizational context, particularly the social climate [35], plays a crucial role.

Intrinsic motivation, as a mediator between leadership and performance [32, 33], is complemented by reward systems [36], although their impact is complex and contextual. Adapting leadership styles to culture and individuals [37, 34] is also essential.

In conclusion, to maximize performance, organizations should focus on transformational leadership, a positive social climate, and adaptation to specific contexts. The cited studies offer insights into developing effective leadership and motivating teams.

Hypothesis H3: Leadership has a positive and significant impact on employee motivation.

3. EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

3.1 Research Framework and Data Analysis

The empirical study, conducted in 2024, focused on the impact of leadership and motivation on Operational Excellence in the Moroccan automotive sector. A questionnaire, developed based on best practices in Operational Excellence, was sent to 265 identified companies. This questionnaire, supplemented by interviews with managers and HR professionals, allowed us to collect data from 93% of the companies in the sector, providing an in-depth view of the situation.

Analyses focused on the influence of national leadership, the relationship between leadership and motivation, and the factors specific to the Moroccan sociocultural environment that impact the implementation of Operational Excellence.

The results of this study allowed us to identify the levers of leadership and motivation in a Moroccan context, as well as the factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of Operational Excellence.

3.2 Reliability Testing of the Instrument

Reliability analyses, using Cronbach's alpha (Table 1), revealed high internal consistency of the scales measuring leadership and motivation. The coefficients obtained, greater than 0.84, attest to the quality of the items constituting these scales and their ability to reliably measure the concepts studied.

This robust reliability guarantees the validity of the results obtained and allows us to confidently consider further analyses aimed at studying the relationships between leadership, motivation, and performance.

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Table 1: Reliability Analysis Results

Variables	Measurement instruments and coding	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
Leadership	**L01**_Strong management commitment to continuous improvement	0,840
	L02_Allocation of dedicated resources to improvement projects	0,840
	L03_Strong leadership from managers and supervisors	0,842
	L04_Continuous training for all employees, including operators	0,842
	L05_Independence of the quality function	0,839
	L06_Link between individual compensation and overall performance	0,834
	L07_Rigorous audit system with management involvement	0,843
	L08_Active participation of managers in improvement initiatives	0,829
	L09_Shift from top-down management to a bottom-up approach	0,826
	L10_Creation of a dedicated function for continuous improvement (Kaizen)	0,839
	L11_Prioritization of permanent contracts	0,843
	L12_ Promote internal mobility	0,831
Motivation	**M01**_Autonomy	0,832
	M02_Social aspect	0,829
	M03_Interest in your mission and tasks	0,837
	M04_Working conditions	0,840
	M05_Self-fulfillment	0,839
	M06_Resources provided to perform your mission	0,845
	M07_Compensation	0,847
	M08_Training (internal skills development)	0,848
	M09_Goal setting	0,842
	M10_Religious aspect	0,847
	M11_Company culture and project	0,849
	M12_Hierarchical relationship/Communication with your manager	0,842
	M13_The company (passionate job, location, etc.)	0,843
	M14_Job security	0,843
	M15_Trust given to me	0,842
	M16_Responsibility	0,847
	M17_Well-being in the company	0,843
	M18_Recognition	0,844
	M19_Relationships with your colleagues	0,842
	M20_Career progression	0,843

3.3 Sample Profile

Table 2 provides an overview of the sociodemographic and professional characteristics of the study participants. It allows us to better understand the respondent profile and assess the representativeness of the sample in relation to the target population.

Job Functions: The sample is primarily composed of individuals holding technical and middle management positions (engineering, production, quality, maintenance). Support functions (human resources, finance, purchasing) are less represented, suggesting that the study focused on key players in operational processes.

Hierarchical Level: The majority of respondents are managers and technicians. Executives and members of the executive committee are less numerous, which may limit the analysis of perceptions at the strategic level.

Age and Experience: The sample is relatively young, with a majority of respondents aged 20 to 40. This age group generally corresponds to an active and dynamic population, likely to

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be more open to change and new practices. Professional experience is also varied, with a good representation of individuals with more than 5 years of experience

In summary, the table presents a relatively diverse sample in terms of job functions and professional experience, while being centered on key players in operations. This composition allows for obtaining relevant information on the perceptions and expectations of these populations regarding the issues studied. However, it would be interesting to expand the sample to other hierarchical levels to obtain a more complete view of the organization.

Table 2: Demographic and Professional Characteristics of the Study Sample

Characteristics	Result	Percentage
Function	Engineering	26 %
	Production	24 %
	Quality	20 %
	Maintenance	12 %
	Human Resources	6 %
	Method	6 %
	Finance	3 %
	Purchasing	3 %
Hierarchical Level	Executive, Member of the Executive Committee	8 %
	Supervisor	12%
	Manager	39 %
	Technician	21 %
	Team Leader	16 %
	Operator	4 %
Age	20-30	62 %
	30-40	31 %
	40-50	6 %
	+50	2 %
Professional Experience	Less than 2 years	28 %
	2 to 4 years	30 %
	More than 5 years	43 %

3.4 National Leadership and Its Impact on Employees and Operators

We conducted an in-depth survey of managers from 93% of Moroccan automotive companies to assess the influence of their management practices on the behavior of production operators. The results, detailed in Table 3, reveal the perceived level of difficulty operators face in implementing operational excellence requirements on their production lines.

Table 3: The impact of national leadership on employee's engagement

	Average Difficulty	Difficulty level		
Expectations of the Executive Operations team regarding production line employees	(%)	Not at all + Not particularly difficult	Moderately difficult	Extremely + Substantially difficult
Operators actively promote stopping production lines when quality issues arise	70,58	12,12	45,73	42,08
Operators maintain workplace standards and promptly report any production line discrepancies	68,19	17,41	44,37	38,16
Operators are proactive in enhancing standards and performance indicators	67,54	13,99	50,34	35,60
Operators proactively contribute to problem-solving	59,04	11,95	72,87	15,16
Operators rigorously follow quality checklists and standard operating procedures	53,93	22,70	68,60	9,37

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It is undeniable that managers' leadership significantly influences the behavior of shop floor operators. The findings from the average difficulty scores reveal that operators pay less attention to continuous improvement (67.54%) and problem-solving (59.04%). Moreover, the results indicate that operators face difficulties in implementing the "stop at the first defect" procedure in case of quality issues on production lines (70.58%).

These observations can be interpreted as a direct consequence of the difficulty experienced by managers in encouraging and involving employees in process improvement projects and performance indicator improvement (71.67%), as well as in prioritizing quality over productivity and efficiency (63.14%), as already illustrated in Table 3. The findings are fully in line with operations management research highlighting the impact of leadership on employees' adherence to operational excellence requirements.

They also confirm more general studies on the link between managerial behavior and improved company performance, clearly establishing that leadership influences employee behavior in all organizations. Positive leadership undoubtedly facilitates the achievement of company objectives and customer satisfaction. Consequently, it is the integration of operational excellence practices among employees at all levels of the company, thanks to exemplary leadership for operational excellence, that will enable the achievement of the company's multiple objectives in terms of productivity, efficiency, and superior quality performance.

3.5 Model Development

Drawing on the expertise of domain specialists, a research model was developed. This model posits that 12 leadership variables and 20 motivational factors are direct determinants of the benefits derived from implementing Operational Excellence (OpEx). Figure 1 offers a visual representation of this model.

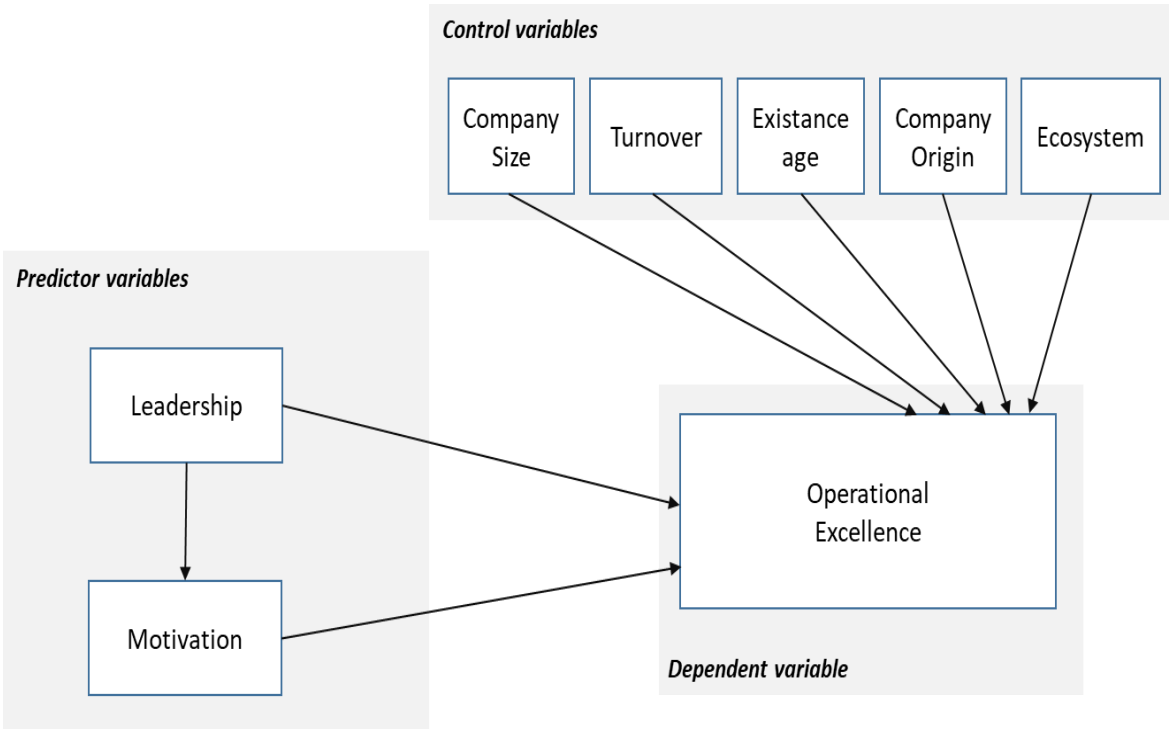

Figure 1: Proposed research model

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3.6 Control variables

Tables 3, 4, and 5 provide a detailed description of the sample, focusing on three key control variables: company size, turnover, age, origin, and ecosystem.

Company size: The tables reveal a clear dominance of large companies in the sample, representing 73.1% of the total. Medium-sized and small companies make up a smaller proportion, at 10.6% and 14% respectively. Micro-enterprises are very underrepresented, with only 2.4% of the sample.

Turnover: In line with size, the majority of companies in the sample generate a turnover of more than 50 million (39.9%). A significant proportion is also in the 10-50 million range (23.9%). Companies with a turnover of less than 2 million are very few.

Company age: The sample is predominantly composed of mature companies, with a high proportion of companies having more than 10 years of existence (58.2%). Young companies (less than 5 years old) are underrepresented, suggesting a potential bias in favor of more established companies.

Table 3: Control variables (n = 587)

		Number	%
Company size	Micro-enterprise	14	2,4%
	Small enterprise	82	14,0%
	Medium-sized enterprise	62	10,6%
	Large enterprise	429	73,1%
Turnover	≤ 2M	25	4,3%
	≤ 10M	188	32,0%
	≤ 50M	140	23,9%
	> 50M	234	39,9%
Company age	0-2 years	15	2,6%
	3-5 years	39	6,6%
	6-10 years	191	32,5%
	11-20 years	178	30,3%
	21 years and up	164	27,9%

Table 4 presents the geographical distribution of the origins of the 587 companies that participated in the research survey conducted in Morocco.

A predominance of companies of French (32.5%) and Moroccan (25.2%) origin is observed, together representing more than half of the companies surveyed.

They are followed by companies originating from the United States (8.2%), Spain (7.3%) and Japan (6.3%). Other countries are represented in smaller proportions.

This table reveals a strong presence of French companies in Morocco, as well as a significant presence of companies from other European countries and North America. Companies originating from Asia (China, South Korea, India, Japan) represent a smaller, but not insignificant, share of the sample.

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Table 4: Control Variable "Company Origin" (n = 587)

		Number	%
Company origin	Germany	18	3,1%
	Austria	3	0,5%
	Belgium	5	0,9%
	Canada	5	0,9%
	China	12	2,0%
	South Korea	7	1,2%
	Spain	43	7,3%
	France	191	32,5%
	India	12	2,0%
	Italy	27	4,6%
	Japan	37	6,3%
	Luxembourg	1	0,2%
	Morocco	148	25,2%
	Portugal	5	0,9%
	United Kingdom	3	0,5%
	Sweden	2	0,3%
	Tunisia	11	1,9%
	Turkey	9	1,5%
	USA	48	8,2%

Table 5 presents the distribution of the 587 surveyed companies according to their business ecosystem. The "Vehicle Interior and Seating" ecosystem concentrates the largest number of companies (34.6%), closely followed by the "Wiring" (20.3%) and "Metal & Stamping" (10.1%) ecosystems. Other ecosystems, such as "Engine & Transmission", "Engineering", and "Spare Parts", each represent a significant share of the sample, while the "Batteries", "Automobile Manufacturer", and "Exterior Systems" ecosystems group a smaller number of companies.

Table 5: Control Variable "Ecosystem" (n = 587)

		Number	%
Ecosystem	Batteries	24	4,1%
	Wiring	119	20,3%
	Car Manufacturer	13	2,2%
	Engineering	50	8,5%
	Vehicle Interior and Seating	203	34,6%
	Metal & Stamping	59	10,1%
	Engine & Transmission	55	9,4%
	Spare Parts	42	7,2%
	Exterior Systems	22	3,7%

Table 6 presents the results of statistical tests assessing the influence of different company characteristics on Operational Excellence. Company size, revenue, and age emerge as significant determinants, having a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. In contrast, the company's geographic origin and sector (ecosystem) do not appear to have a significant influence on the model. These results suggest that the company's intrinsic characteristics, such as its size and age, are more relevant in explaining the observed variations in the studied variable, compared to external factors like origin or sector. However, it is important to nuance these conclusions by considering the limitations of the analysis and to envisage complementary analyses to refine these results.

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Table 6: Results of tests assessing the impact of control variables

Control Variables	Std. coeff. β	p-value
Company size	3,588	0,000
Turnover	2,977	0,003
Age	4,312	0,000
Company origin	0,727	0,467
Ecosystem	0,009	0,993

3.7 Hypothesis Formulation

Based on the developed model, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: The factor "Leadership" has a positive and significant impact on "Operational Excellence".

H2: The factor "Motivation" has a positive and significant impact on "Operational Excellence".

H3: The factor "Leadership" has a positive and significant impact on employee motivation.

3.8 Hypothesis Test

The formulated hypotheses were empirically tested using IBM SPSS Statistics 28. The results of these tests are presented in Table 6, which verifies the validity of the three research hypotheses regarding the relationships between leadership, motivation, and operational excellence (OpEx).

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing for Independent Variables

Hypothesis	hypothesis test	test statistic t/f	p-value	Result
H1	Leadership ➔ ExOp	5,31	0,000	Supported
H2	Motivation ➔ ExOp	2,75	0,006	Supported
H3	Leadership ➔ Motivation	15,31	0,000	Supported

The results demonstrate that all three hypotheses are supported by the data:

- H1: Leadership and Operational Excellence: The t-score of 5.31 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates a statistically significant and positive relationship between leadership and operational excellence. In other words, effective leadership significantly contributes to improved operational excellence.
- H2: Motivation and Operational Excellence: The t-score of 2.75 and a p-value of 0.006 also suggest a positive and significant relationship between employee motivation and operational excellence. This means that motivated employees are more likely to contribute to achieving operational excellence.
- H3: Leadership and Motivation: The very high t-score of 15.31 and a p-value of 0.000 indicate a very strong positive correlation between leadership and employee motivation. Effective leadership thus seems to foster greater motivation among employees.

In summary, the results of these tests confirm the importance of leadership and employee motivation in achieving operational excellence. These three variables are closely linked and contribute significantly to improving the overall performance of the organization.

3.9 Interpretation of Results

Our findings indicate a positive and statistically significant correlation between employee motivation and operational excellence ($r = 0.555$, $p < 0.001$), as well as between leadership and operational excellence ($r = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that boosting

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employee motivation and implementing effective leadership are critical drivers for improving an organization's overall performance. In other words, companies that successfully motivate their employees and develop strong management skills are more likely to achieve operational excellence.

4. CONCLUSION

This study, conducted among a representative sample of 93% of Moroccan automotive companies, delved into the deep-rooted connections between leadership, employee motivation, and operational excellence. Through a rigorous methodology, including a validated questionnaire and in-depth statistical analyses, we were able to uncover significant findings. Our results confirm the critical importance of leadership and employee motivation in achieving operational excellence. Effective leadership, characterized by a clear vision, transparent communication, and support for employee initiatives, fosters high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This positive dynamic translates into improved overall organizational performance, particularly in terms of quality, productivity, and customer satisfaction. The developed theoretical model, which integrates the dimensions of leadership, motivation, and operational excellence, proved to be robust and allowed for the rigorous testing of research hypotheses. The empirical results validated these hypotheses, demonstrating the existence of causal relationships between the studied variables. In conclusion, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on human resource management and operational excellence. The findings underscore the importance of investing in leadership development and employee motivation to improve organizational performance. These conclusions have important implications for Moroccan companies, as well as for organizations operating in other cultural contexts.

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