

Administrative dynamics and work-related illnesses in the centre-Cameroon region

Abstract

Public services in Cameroon are a collection of dilapidated units, dependent on the “precarious effect” and colonial tradition. The workers, using modern industrial mechanisms, are unable to adapt to them and are victims of recurrent pathologies. Each individual has a capacity for action independent of the group, which he uses rationally by mobilising the information at his disposal and trying to obtain the best possible results. The meaning and symbolism produced around pathologies and the dynamics based on the perceptual schemes developed by some and others around administrations and modernity betray the societal and cultural. The social and cultural representations that revolve around government reinforce the actions and at the same time contain the endogenous and cultural perceptions. The uses that individuals make of administrations and which can be linked to the representations they have of them consist essentially of concrete actions whose meaning is provided by these representations.

Keywords: African societies, polygynous, pathologies, modernisation

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Introduction

A large number of studies are looking at the effects of work organisation on workers' health. Quantitative data can be used to assess the extent of the phenomenon. L. Vogel (2009) points out that “every year, around 160,000 people die as a result of a work-related accident or illness in the EU-27”. The crisis is currently leading to an intensification and acceleration of restructuring in the world of work, which has a direct impact on work situations and exacerbates psychosocial risks (PSR), which until now have been analysed solely from a psychological or medical anthropological perspective, without emphasising the related developmental obstacles. More specifically, while disorders linked to dangerous working environments (dust, toxic chemicals, noise, working at heights, etc.) have remained stable and at a high level for a decade, there has been an increase in risks linked to work organisation. But these problems, in turn, can have physical repercussions, leading to cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and so on. Even in the absence of repetitive movements, the intensification of work rhythms, the increase in constraints (reduced room for manoeuvre, etc.) and the loss of meaning in work are also factors explaining the increase in MSDs (Daniellou and Escriva, 2008). The most obvious manifestation of this increase in hardship is the simultaneous deterioration in the mental and physical balance of a growing number of employees. This is reflected in a veritable ‘epidemic’ of musculoskeletal disorders and, at the same time, in a series of symptoms perceived as stress and psychosocial disorders.

The provision of equipment and work aids has resulted in improved living conditions for staff, better health and, consequently, higher performance in terms of results. The government of the Republic of Cameroon has understood this very well. To ensure the well-being of its staff, the government allocates a portfolio each year to each ministry for the purchase of equipment (office, IT, etc.), office supplies (paper, ink, pens, etc.), furniture (tables, chairs, filing cabinets, cupboards, etc.) and logistics (rolling stock, etc.). This is commonly referred to as the operating budget, and for some ministries, the practice of sport is instituted without saying so, to accompany these efforts and above all to achieve better results.

However, work-related illnesses are on the increase. The effects on physical and mental health are always significant. Until the 2000s, in Cameroon, work-related illnesses numbered forty-four (44). Almost a decade later, this figure has doubled to ninety-one (91). This contradiction between the budgets allocated for furnishing government offices, for example, and the various efforts made by the government through the provision of equipment, supplies and so on, contrasts with the different outputs or results obtained.

Methodological approach

The research methodology for this article was based on anthropological methods, using field research. Data was collected from a target population and a very specific sample. Our study population consisted of all the staff of central and decentralised public services living in the seven districts of the city of Yaoundé, and users who frequent these services on a fairly regular basis. Given the specific nature of our research, we placed this population in the age range from under 35 to 50 and over. The choice of this age group is understandable insofar as it is an active population. Our sample was made up of staff and users of public services whose age ranged from around 35 or less to 50 and over (-35 years; +50 years).

The data for this study were collected using images, spoken words and figures. These different sources of information were the basis for the choice of data collection tools. The nature of the data required a certain number of collection techniques. In the data collection process, our work was divided into two phases: a pre-validation phase for the various tools, i.e. the pre-survey, and the actual data collection phase. The first phase came into effect once the tools had been validated by the research director, followed immediately by the actual data collection phase. Generally speaking, this took place over a period of four months. 376 informants were contacted and only 363 were surveyed, corresponding to our inclusion criteria. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and then transcribed for analysis. Observation enabled us to check and understand what our informants were describing.

The various articulations that made up our data collection tool enabled us to use a quantitative-qualitative analysis when analysing

the data. This gave us the opportunity, as far as the analysis was concerned, to combine both calculations and an analysis of the content of the observations collected. Thanks to this analysis, we have been able to focus on certain cases or clues that have enabled us to evaluate certain phenomena that are no less significant. The analysis of quantitative data concerns the questionnaire sent to staff and/or users. This required the use of two compatible software programmes, namely CS-Pro version 6.0 and S.P.S.S. (Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 17.0) to carry out the various verification and analysis operations. The search for the statistical test to be applied to the inferential analysis of the data from a study depends on the nature of the variables in the research hypotheses. Frequency counts enabled us to compare the relative importance of different items. For inferential analyses proper, the use of Bravais Pearson correlation statistical tests in particular enabled us to quantify our information and determine whether or not it was significant.

To analyze the qualitative data from this study, we used content analysis. For Berelson¹ (1952), it is defined as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. In anthropology, and particularly in medical anthropology, the aim is to analyse the survey material collected during observations, group interviews or individual interviews: behaviour, words, gestures, what is not said and what is implied. Qualitative data takes the form of text (words, phrases, expressions of language) or symbolic information (gestures, tone of voice, impressions, etc.). It may take the form of a transcript of an interview, notes from observations in the field, or written documents of various kinds (stories, reports and answers to questions). With this in mind, we transcribed our interviews. To analyse them, we used qualitative data processing software, in this case Tropes V8.4 in its French version.

Gender and work in government departments in Cameroon

The notion of gender has always been at the centre of debates and discussions in the management and organisation of life in society and work in particular. The place of women and men in public administration in Cameroon is a permanent reality. According to some observers, women are not sufficiently represented in decision-making spheres and therefore in administrations. However, the reality of the population is different. According to the country's latest statistics, women account for a very large proportion of the population. The EDS-MICS (2011: 37) states that: Although the vast majority of women and men aged 15-49 are educated, there remains a sizeable fringe of the population with no level of education (8% of men and 20% of women). Women are less literate (69%) than men (82%). The literacy rate also varies significantly between regions: for women, it ranges from 23% in the Far North to 92% in the South; for men, it ranges from 53% in the Far North to 93% in the Littoral. Exposure of target populations to the media (audiovisual and written press) is not yet widespread: 40% of women and 20% of men are not exposed to any media. Nearly seven out of ten women (69%) and eight out of ten men (78%) were economically active in the 12 months prior to the survey; nearly two out of five of these worked in agriculture.

This reading of the EDS-MICS (2011) gives us an idea of the place and position of women in Cameroonian society. This perception will be further confirmed by our field data. According to the various participants in our fieldwork, we were given to understand that administrative services are more frequented by men. In fact, like most phallographic African societies, the people of Cameroon have repro-

duced this model in the administrative services. There is a kind of masculinisation of the administration that is perceptible. In fact, as the table below shows, of the 360 people we interviewed in the field and observed, 61.9% were men.¹

This majority percentage could, according to some, betray the very spirit of the distribution of tasks and administrative reality. On the other hand, the percentage of women is only 38.1%. This still low percentage, according to women's rights associations, means that women are somewhat peripheralized in the administrative decision-making process. In other words, women only come second in the administration. These different figures allow us to say quite simply that the male gender is more involved than the female gender in government departments in Cameroon. This distribution of figures could raise a real question, the understanding of which could certainly be justified by the symbolism of tasks and gender that we will be able to address in the remainder of our work, according to our research participants (Table 1).

Table 1 Gender and representation in government departments in Cameroon

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Male	223	61,9	61,9	61,9
	Female	137	38,1	38,1	38,1
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

This gender distribution will give rise to a need to pay attention to the age distribution in such a highly male-dominated administration. This is why Alphonse points out that: *when you look at Cameroonian administrations and those of Mfoundi, the gender representation (male/female) shows a high number of men than women, with figures that sometimes double when it comes to the male gender.*

What's more, Martine, a secretary working in one of the sub-prefectures where the work was carried out, said: *“Women are marginalised and less present than men. Women are still considered to be less productive than men and they get pregnant all the time”.*

Age of recipients of administrative services in Cameroon

Given the state nature of the administration and the services requested by its users, we were given a concrete breakdown of ages. According to our objectives, from the outset we targeted a categorical age reference based on the type of services and requests, which initially ranged between 18 and 50 years of age. But the reality in the field forced us to review this division. As a result of our data collection work, we found that in reality the research participants were predominantly in the following age groups, in descending order [40-44], [35-39] and [45-49].

These different age groups correspond respectively to the percentages: 29.7% for the first, 21.4% for the second and 19.2% for the third of the target population. This is what allowed us to focus on another category of stakeholder, which as we can see is at a completely different level. This is the category of respondents in the [30-34] age bracket, with a percentage of 16.7%. Finally, we have the least represented, with percentages of 9.7% and 3.3%, representing the age groups [under 30] and [50 and over] respectively.

These figures give us a simple and coherent picture of the different age groups of the population present or more efficient in Cameroon's administrations. But they also give us a precise view of the type of users who make greater demands on these services and who are present in a general, consistent and permanent way. Another fact is that it

¹Berelson B. *Content analysis in communication research*. Glencoe: Free press. 1952.

becomes very easy and obvious to realise the ageing nature of these users of administrative services, who for the most part are considered by younger people to be “digital illiterates” and therefore of the older generation. This, according to some, is why the administration, as one of the participants in the research pointed out, “has a certain sluggishness and slowness when it comes to managing files”.

The age groups in the administrations are not very different from the rest of the country. With people aged 30 and over, we can see that talking about administrative dynamics is an illusion. Older people occupy positions and are permanent, without leaving any opportunities for younger people. Says François (Liaison Officer)

Maxime goes further and reinforces François’ comments when he says: “Young people have their whole lives ahead of them and lack experience, and what’s more they know nothing about the workings of the profession (Table 2).

Table 2 Age distribution of requests for administrative services in mfoundi

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Under 30 years old	35	9,7	9,7	9,7
	30 - 34 years old	60	16,7	16,7	26,4
	35 - 39 years old	77	21,4	21,4	47,8
	40 - 44 years old	107	29,7	29,7	77,5
	45 - 49 years old	69	19,2	19,2	96,7
	50 years old and over	12	3,3	3,3	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

This breakdown of the participants in the research enables us, quite rightly, to see in a logical way the relationship to marital status and above all to the different responsibilities of the services induced by the position and situation of each of the actors according to the service, the categorization and the social and therefore administrative hierarchy.

Administrative actors and marital status

In Cameroon, marriage or, more generally, a union is the preferred framework for sexual activity and procreation, but above all for accountability in the administrative services. For women, the almost universal nature of union means that permanent celibacy is a marginal phenomenon. Marital status is thus one of the most important events in the early stages of empowerment. For the purposes of this study, this applies to all women and men who have declared themselves married or living in a marital relationship with one or more partners. This includes civil, religious and customary marriages as well as de facto unions.

It would appear from our fieldwork and the data collected that our research participants are in a variety of marital situations. In fact, the breakdown of the latter shows a proportion of people who, according to them, are married in a monogamous regime and some who define themselves as single. The first group is in the majority, with percentages of 62.5% for the former and 24.4% for the latter. Then there are those who are married and polygynous, and finally widowers, whose respective percentages are 6.7% and 4.2%.

don’t talk about marital status. In this part of the country, which is more Christian, people think that officially having a wife is ideal.

Polygamists and single people are often relegated to second place. It’s still very serious for single people, says Uriel.

For Jean Marc (office agent)

Being single is synonymous with a lack of responsibility. That’s why single people aren’t often appointed to positions of responsibility. On top of that, family allowances are often a reason to get married. So you’ll see that as soon as you’re recruited, you get married for the sake of positioning and the social gaze.

From these figures, we can see that users of administrative services are more monogamous than polygynous. In addition, there are more married people than single people and widowers. This breakdown could in some way betray the different relationships to religious obedience’s, but also the relationship to the different positions of responsibility held by the various people in these administrations that have come to our attention. The table below provides a brief overview of the different marital status of the research participants (Table 3).

Table 3 Marital status of research participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Single	88	24,4	24,4	24,4
	Married monogamous	225	62,5	62,5	86,9
	Married - polygamous	24	6,7	6,7	93,6
	Widowed	15	4,2	4,2	97,8
	Séparé(e)/ Divorcé(e)	8	2,2	2,2	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Religious representation of service providers

This part of the work was the one that suffered most during our fieldwork in terms of data collection, given the current situation in the country. Our various informants were reluctant to even mention the question of religious affiliation and barely paid it any attention. However, we were able to gather information following a long and persistent explanation of the importance and relevance of this question to our work. This is why the table below shows that the respondents were from different regions. On the one hand, we have Christians, with a majority percentage of 66.4% respectively. Then there are the Muslims, who are in the minority here, with 33.6% represented. Stéphane says: “The administrations are mainly made up of Christians rather than Muslims, and in the Adamaoua, North and Far North zones it’s more the other way round. In fact, we can recognise that geographical location has a lot to do with it”. Mohamadou, for his part, says bluntly it’s the ‘gada mayo’ area: ‘the people on the other side of the mayo’. So it’s normal to have more Christians in the southern regions of the country. What’s more, the far south of Cameroon is essentially Christian, the Muslims who live there come from the far north and we also have a few converts to Islam. But in the Sahelian zones it’s the other way round.

This distribution somewhat betrays the opinions gathered on the ground according to the answers to the question: in your opinion, why are there not enough Muslims in the administrative services? “It’s quite clear, do the wadjo (Muslims) go to school a lot”, said one of the participants (Table 4). This distribution suggests that administrations in the Centre region are more Christian than Muslim. In other words, the location of the Centre, right in the Christian zone, could justify the lower presence of Muslims in the administrations. We will probably come back to this later. In addition, we are tempted to ask whether the Christians are those with a higher level of education than the Muslims.

Table 4 Religious distribution of research participants in the centre region

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Christians	239	66,4	66,4	66,4
	Muslims	121	33,6	33,6	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Educational level of Yaoundé administrative staff

The second of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aims to provide primary education for all and therefore to increase the primary school attendance rate and the literacy rate of the 15-24 age group. This is what led us to focus our attention on this variant. It is very important from the point of view of reading administrative services. Looking at the table below, we can see that more than half of the participants admit to having a higher level of education, with 79.4% represented. However, there are those respondents who claim to have upper secondary education, with a percentage of 12.8%. Finally, we have a minority who claim to have lower secondary education, i.e. 7.5% of participants. (Table 5) So here we have an administration with a predominantly university level of education, but how can we understand or grasp this reality? For a better understanding, we have chosen to present it in the (Table 6) below.

Table 5 Participants' level of education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Secondary 1st cycle	46	12,8	12,8	12,8
	Secondary 2nd cycle	27	7,5	7,5	20,3
	Higher education	286	79,4	79,7	100,0
	Subtotal	359	99,7	100,0	
	No answer	1	3		
	Grand total	360	100,0		

Table 6 Clear distribution of qualifications among research participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
	BEPC/CAP/ GCE-OL	46	12,8	12,8	12,8
	BACC/GCE-AL/ BEP	75	20,8	20,8	33,6
	DEUG/BTS/ DUT	47	13,1	13,1	46,7
	Licence/Bachelor Degree	51	14,2	14,2	60,8
	Maitrise/Master I	87	24,2	24,2	85,0
	DEA/Master 2	54	15,0	15,0	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

The table above shows that most of our research participants have a degree equivalent to a Maitrise/Master 1 and a BACC/GCE-AL/ BEP, with respective percentages of 24.2% and 20.8%. It should be noted that another group admit to having a higher level of education, with a DEA/MASTER 2 diploma and a Licence/Bachelor's Degree, respectively accounting for 15.0% of the former and 14.2% of the latter. These comments give concrete form to what some of our informants had to say. Martin tells us. In Cameroon and the Centre region, we have almost a pyramid-shaped administration, with qualifications

ranging from the BEPC to the highest level. In the past, it was possible to find people with only the Certificat d'Etudes Primaires et Elémentaires (Certificate of Primary and Elementary Education). But now it's the Brevet and in a few years it will be the Probatoire or the Baccalauréat. For Marcel: *This distribution is abnormal because society is changing. The administration is not on the sidelines, so it needs to be more dynamic. It's true that there are more people with the Brevet and the Baccalauréat, but over time, only the Baccalauréat will have the broadest base, along with the licences.*

He adds: *"In Cameroon, we have a very high number of graduates. However, the figures for the Centre region show a guitar shape. The first cycle is more representative, the second cycle less so and higher education even more so"* Jean François (Deputy Director). This distribution betrays the gradual organisation in this administration.

Gradual organization of administrative players

After collecting the data, we can see that the majority of our participants state that they have the rank of manager in these administrative services. In other words, between 10-12 and administrative contract workers, between 7-9, with a percentage of 51.1% for the former and 21.1% for the latter. Then we have those who are rather simple civil servants in category A-D, amounting to 12.8%. Finally, we have contract civil servants and those with no answers, whose combined percentage is 7.5% of the study population. This is briefly illustrated in the following (Table 7).

Table 7 Grades/categories of research participants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	State contract employee	27	7,5	7,5	100,0
	Administrative contract employee (7 - 9)	76	21,1	21,1	92,5
	Administrative services executive (10 -12)	184	51,1	51,1	71,4
	Civil servants (A-D)	46	12,8	12,8	20,3
	No answer	27	7,5	7,5	7,5
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Marcel's comments corroborate the figures in this table. He said-

When you look at the grades in the Cameroon administration in general and in the Centre in particular, you can see that from contract staff to civil servants, you will find that contract staff are often more numerous and less representative, and according to the indexes, managers are more numerous.

This distribution of administrations according to the grades and categories of the Cameroonian civil service is what makes the reading of the level of function of the various people in this administration convincing.

Functional level of research participants

From the field data and according to our various research participants, it emerges that most of them claim to belong to the managerial and contractual positions, with respective percentages of 36.1% and 20.3% of those represented. These two characteristics are those of the

organisation of the Cameroonian administration. Civil servants are those recruited by the Ministry of the Civil Service. The others are also recruited, but are under contract, hence the term administration contractual. There are, of course, contract administrative staffs.

Pierre, Head of Office, supposes *when you look at the administration in the Centre, particularly the departments you've chosen, can't you see that there are more people at the top than at the bottom? Sub-prefects, deputies, directors and equivalent, as well as heads of departments and contract executives, are the most numerous according to their level and category; the others come after them. Take a ratio of the 7 departments in the boroughs and tell me if I'm wrong.*

It's worth noting in passing that there is another section which, on the other hand, admits to being more and more involved in the functions of Sub-Prefects / Deputy Directors and Heads of Department. For the latter, the respective percentages are 15.3% for the former and 14.2% for the latter. Finally, the least represented are support staff and office managers, with percentages of 7.5% and 6.7% of the population respectively. (Table 8) This classification of participants by function within the administrations allows us to focus on the means they use to access the various services.

Table 8 Classification by function level according to our participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Sub-prefects/ Deputy directors and equivalent	55	15,3	15,3	15,3
Head of department	51	14,2	14,2	29,4
Contract manager	130	36,1	36,1	65,6
Office managers	24	6,7	6,7	72,2
Support staff	27	7,5	7,5	79,7
Agent	73	20,3	20,3	100,0
Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Participants' means of access to administrative services

The means of access to administrative services by our various participants are varied. With regard to these different means of accessing services, the participants in our research report mixed results.

Véronik (secretary) said:

Are you in Yaoundé or do you come from elsewhere? If you're in the city, you must know that here in the city, there are asphalted areas and others that aren't. In the dry season, it's dusty. In the rainy season it's dust and in the rainy season it's mud. Surprising, isn't it! In the middle of the political capital, the seat of the republican institutions.

In fact, it emerges that the latter admit to going to their place of work on a tarmac road. These are the group with a majority percentage of 92.5% of representatives. The second group is made up of all those who go to work on an unpaved road. This second group has a percentage of 7.5%. This somewhat betrays the urban character of the city and suggests the expansion of modernization in the city, or the centralization of institutions (Table 9).

Table 9 Means of access to the place of service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid A tarmac road	333	92,5	92,5	92,5
An unsealed road	27	7,5	7,5	100,0
Total	360	100,0	100,0	

These different means of access to service locations inevitably lead us to question the situation and location of these administrative services.²

Situation and location of workplaces by participants

Given the levels of education of the various participants as set out above, it would be truly absurd to believe that they are incapable of locating their places of work. This is why the different percentages here are the highest. We have those participants who are able to indicate where their place of work is, with a percentage of 92.2%. Then there is the minority percentage of 7.8% for those who say they are unable to clearly indicate where they work, as shown in the table below (Table 10).

Table 10 Indicative frequency of place of work

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid Yes	332	92,2	92,2	92,2
No	28	7,8	7,8	100,0
Total	360	100,0	100,0	

It would be really stupid and foolish to believe that an individual working in an administrative service could not locate or situate his place of work. Don't forget that even if we live at one end of town, we're supposed to go to work every morning because we work in public services. If you can't find your way around or don't know where you work, you won't be able to work and serve the nation.

Says Francine (administrative contract worker). Maurice goes further and says, *"The services in the Centre region are right in the centre of town and are often located either near the markets or near the shopping centres. But most of them are in the city centre. And sometimes this exposes us to various nuisances, such as passing priority cars (ambulances), cars with loudspeakers (advertising), horns, etc."*³⁻⁵

We can see that the majority percentage of 85.8% represents those subjects who admit that their place of work is in the city. Next comes the second bracket, represented by subjects who are located near a shopping center and near a market, with percentages of 7.5% and 6.7% respectively, as shown in the table below (Table 11).

Table 11 Representativeness of workplace location

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid Close to a market	24	6,7	6,7	6,7
In the city	309	85,8	85,8	92,5
Near a shopping center	27	7,5	7,5	100,0
Total	360	100,0	100,0	

The situation of administrative services in the city of Yaoundé often seems complex, given the unplanned nature of housing and the anarchism that characterises the organisation of neighbourhoods. For example, many services are located alongside markets, drinking establishments, roadsides with traffic and noise pollution.

Noise pollution and administrative services

Noise pollution is a reality in urban environments. This is acknowledged by users of administrative services. 85.9% of them say they have to deal with noise pollution in their various workplaces.

Between the horns, the noise of the markets, the music of the pubs, the old air conditioners, etc., these users of the administrative services forge themselves a reason to be. Then comes the second group, represented by those who say that this phenomenon is periodic or even unknown. Their percentage is 7.5% and 6.7% according to our sample. However, is it even possible to conceive of an administrative service in an urban environment and outside urban realities? This question remains. However, how often do they experience these different types of noise pollution? (Table 12).

Table 12 Breakdown of percentages of participants complaining about noise in their workplaces

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No	24	6,7	6,7	6,7
	Yes internally and externally	309	85,9	85,9	92,5
	Sometimes	27	7,5	7,5	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Frequency of noise pollution near administrative services

In the light of all the above, the observation that emerges is that the majority of participants in the research state that they experience noise pollution every day and on certain occasions. It is on the basis of their comments and responses that it is possible to obtain the percentages of 51.4% and 26.9% representation respectively for the former. Then there are those who say that once or twice a week they have to deal with this reality, which as we can imagine and will see later could be the cause of a host of problems. For this second group of participants, the respective percentages are 14.2% and 7.5%.(Table 13) This situation of noise pollution, as some people might recognize, can be a factor in the depreciation of the working environment.⁶

Table 13 Frequency of noise pollution in the workplace

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Every day	185	51,4	51,4	51,4
	Once a week	27	7,5	7,5	58,9
	Twice a week	51	14,2	14,2	73,1
	On certain occasions	97	26,9	26,9	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Assessment of the working environment

Whether a situation is good or bad is a matter of common knowledge. Although this varies from one society to another, from one individual to another, it remains firmly anchored in perceptions. This judgement is, moreover, what could in one way or another influence the choice of a particular way of behaving with regard to a given fact or work climate. A high proportion of participants state that they have an assessment of the work climate that they describe as “fair in terms of professional productivity”. We regularly have 42.5% of them acknowledging this. On the other hand, others stated that they were “in a climate conducive to productivity” and “in a climate detrimental to productivity”, with decreasing percentages of 29.4% and 20.3% respectively. This is shown in the table below. The immediate work environment therefore has a definite influence on performance and work

climate. (Table 14) We can point out here with our respondents that: “the workers’ work climate is the one that logically determines the workers’ state of health”. This reality is recognised and commonplace, as Mr Martin Xavier (whom we have chosen to call this because he requested anonymity) told us: “How can you expect good performance when the climate and work environment are not conducive? I can assure you that if the climate and the work environment are not good, don’t expect anything good”. In fact, if the environment is right, work performance follows. A poor working environment necessarily influences workers’ health, but also and above all their productivity. The impact is such that the pathologies that arise are often profound and have a lifelong effect on the worker.^{7, 8}

Table 14 Overall assessment of the work environment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No response	28	7,8	7,8	7,8
	Detrimental to productivity	73	20,3	20,3	28,1
	Fair for productivity	153	42,5	42,5	70,6
	Good for productivity	106	29,4	29,4	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Participants’ current state of health

Worker health is a concern that has interested researchers for centuries. “A healthy employee/worker is a healthy company. A worker’s state of health determines the quality of his or her performance and has an impact on the company’s returns,” points out Antoine (whom we call by this name for the sake of protecting his identity). He goes further and says: *You see, the administrations in Cameroon are a laughing stock. The people in positions of responsibility for production are sick individuals. How can we expect them to be productive? Those who have grey matter to spare are far away or exposed to an environment conducive to pathologies. This is what slows down productivity.*

Based on our field data, we can state unequivocally that workers’ health problems are on the increase and are present in Cameroon’s administrative services, and more specifically those in the Centre region. All of them indicate that their state of health is fairly good. The respective percentages are 41.9% and 22.8%. Then there is a low percentage of 20.3% and 15.0% representing indifferent health and very good health respectively, as shown in the table below. These different responses reflect to some extent the frequency with which people have been ill over the last six months (Table 15).

Table 15 Participants’ assessment of their state of health

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Very good	54	15,0	15,0	15,0
	Good	82	22,8	22,8	37,8
	Fair	151	41,9	41,9	79,7
	Indifferent	73	20,3	20,3	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Illness frequency over the last six months

An individual’s frequency of illness can say a lot about their state of health. This is what led us to take an interest in this extremely im-

portant aspect of the relationship between work and work-related illnesses. The observation that can be made and which emerges from our field surveys is that, over the last three months prior to our fieldwork, the majority of our participants declared that they had not been ill. On the basis of percentages, we would say that these are 70.3%. But for the others, with a low percentage of 29.7%, this corresponds to those who admit to having been ill during the same period. (Table 16) This representativeness is what led us to try to understand and detect the causes of these pathologies as well as the morbidities to which they were exposed.^{9, 10}

Table 16 Affirmation of cases of illness over the last six months

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	107	29,7	29,7	29,7
	No	253	70,3	70,3	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Typologies and causalities of work-related pathologies in administrations

We will obviously begin this sub-section of the chapter with what, according to our informants, is at the origin of the different pathologies.

a. Typology of work-related illnesses in the public sector

Since the aim of our research was to identify illnesses as a whole, we did not want to dissect the internal or physiological characteristics of the illnesses found in our work. We therefore focused on their identification and causes.

b. Causes of work-related illnesses in the public sector

Every reality related to man and his environment always has a cause, an origin. More than half of the participants who acknowledged having been ill in the three months prior to our fieldwork said they had no answer as to the cause of the illness (62.8%). In other words, most of them said: “*I can't specify what caused my illness*”. A small proportion, namely 29.4% and 7.8%, said that the causes of their illness were “*too much work and the climate*”, as justified by this table (Table 17).

Table 17 Attribution of causes of illness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	No response	226	62,8	62,8	62,8
	Too much work	106	29,4	29,4	92,2
	The climate	28	7,8	7,8	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

In addition, we also have “*sleep problems*” for some people, which, according to our sample, is 56.9%. Then we have all the people who rather disagree and those who rather say they have never suffered over the same period with a percentage of 43.1% respectively. (Table 18) Among our 360 research participants, we counted 253 who declared and acknowledged that they had never suffered from digestive problems in the last three months, representing the majority of subjects with a percentage of 70.3%. A further 107 admitted to having suffered from digestive problems, accounting for 29.7%. We can therefore say that administrative workers suffer less from digestive problems. In other words, their work has less influence on their diet. “*Digestive dis-*

orders are not work-related pathologies. In reality, it all depends on how you eat and what you eat”, says one informant. However, another admitted that: “*given the location of the place of work, you can end up eating anything at any time*”.¹¹⁻¹³

Table 18 Percentage of people who have suffered from sleep problems

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	205	56,9	56,9	56,9
	No	155	43,1	43,1	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

(Table 19) Apart from digestive problems, we also had people who had suffered from chest pain. The table below shows that the majority of subjects stated that they had never suffered from chest pain. In other words, 92.2% of our respondents said that they had never experienced such pain. Others, on the other hand, with a percentage of 7.8% of representatives, acknowledged having suffered from chest pain. These are the figures that allow us to say that there are fewer chest pain sufferers in the three months prior to our fieldwork in the administrations (Table 20).

Table 19 Proportion of people who have suffered from digestive problems

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	107	29,7	29,7	29,7
	No	253	70,3	70,3	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Table 20 Percentage of people with chest pain in the last three months

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	28	7,8	7,8	7,8
	No	332	92,2	92,2	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

As far as headaches are concerned, we have some people who admit to having suffered from headaches. It is very clear that 72.2% of research participants admit to having suffered from a headache in the last three months. Only 27.8%, representing the second group of participants did not admit to having had headaches. This is what allows us to recognize that headaches are a real problem in administrations. In fact, the link with noise pollution makes perfect sense here and justifies this high percentage (Table 21). With regard to malaria, a majority of our respondents (76.9%), as well as those who had had contact with the administrative department, admitted that they had not suffered from malaria in recent months.^{14,15} The reason given was simple: urbanization, and therefore the absence of mosquito nests in the heart of the city. This percentage is the most representative. Then we have all the participants who admit to having suffered from malaria. Their reduced number gives a percentage of 23.1% of the study population (Table 22).

Table 21 Breakdown of headache sufferers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	260	72,2	72,2	72,2
	No	100	27,8	27,8	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Table 22 People who had or had not had malaria

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	83	23,1	23,1	23,1
	No	277	76,9	76,9	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

With regard to other morbidities such as coughing or any other, our fieldwork allows us to say that among the 360 respondents, we have 184, or 51.1%, which represents the majority or more than half of the subjects who say they have never suffered from coughing. Then there were 176 who said they had suffered from a cough, with a percentage of 48.9%. One of the reasons given for this is that “*coughs are an illness that you get most of the time between the changes of season. Because it’s so contagious, it’s very easy to get*”, said one of the participants (Table 23). With regard to stress, our interviews and field data show that 65.3% of our sample is made up of people who say they have suffered from stress, with these being in the majority. A further 34.7% of research participants said they had not suffered from stress in the last three months (Table 24). The distribution of participants in the table below shows a high frequency of those who claim not to have suffered from overwork, with 78.3% represented. Next we have those who say they have suffered from overwork, with a percentage of 21.7%. (Table 25) We can conclude by acknowledging that the various participants in the research recognize a division of tasks that is often a function of gender, level of education, age and religion. Marital status is also a factor influencing how people move through the ranks.^{16,17} In addition, many realities are problems for the administrative populations of the Centre region. As a result, many illnesses affect administrative staff.

Table 23 Frequency of people having suffered from coughs, etc

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	176	48,9	48,9	48,9
	No	184	51,1	51,1	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Table 24 Percentage of people who have suffered from stress

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	235	65,3	65,3	65,3
	No	125	34,7	34,7	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Table 25 People who have suffered from overwork

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	78	21,7	21,7	21,7
	No	282	78,3	78,3	100,0
	Total	360	100,0	100,0	

Work-related illnesses and obstacles to development

Although some people refuse to recognize all the illnesses associated with their work, one thing is certain: they are a fact of life. Working conditions and the working environment, with outdated equipment and dilapidated offices, are factors that sooner or later are the cause of a good number of morbidities. This is what always leads to sick leave for some staff and even to the death of others. These factors only serve to slow down the development of government departments, most of which are also short of staff. We believe that it is urgent to set

up mechanisms for monitoring and tracing supplies of equipment and the working environment, which is the source of workers’ illnesses. In addition, the introduction of health and life insurance for government employees would undoubtedly ensure that these illnesses, which are hampering the development and transformation of government departments, go on the offensive. The equitable distribution of staff and respect for the timetable for different periods of leave could also go some way to resolving the problem of illnesses that are holding back our administrations, but also to combating the recurrent bogus leaves and missions that are granted on the basis of medical certificates justifying a morbidity.^{18–20}

We can end by recognizing that many factors internal to our administrations, as well as certain pathologies, are real facts and real causes of obstacles to development in administrations, whether or not they are in the Centre region. It is therefore imperative to review certain behaviors and practices to ensure that they are part of the process of modernization and globalization that they must undergo.

Conclusion

The administrative services in Cameroon and the Central Region are a collection of outdated work production units based on colonial tradition and therefore a source of dysfunction and maladjustment to the current context of modernisation. Even when using modern industrial mechanisms, the local people are unable to adapt to the modern world and are victims of recurring pathologies, which hamper the smooth running of the administrations for which they are responsible. All the problems inherent in decentralization and in managing the dynamics of administrations in relation to the productivity of services, the pathologies caused by latency, inaction and lack of understanding of the liberal nature, are dependent on so-called modern administrations. Each individual has a capacity for action independent of the group, which he uses rationally by mobilising the information at his disposal and trying to obtain the best possible results. In this way, the dynamic of the administrations is as much the responsibility of the institution as that of the individuals involved in the modernisation process aimed at achieving results, productivity and combating work-related illnesses. The semantics and symbolism produced around pathologies, as well as the transformation according to the perceptual schemes developed by some and others around administrations and modernity, which itself betrays the societal and cultural inherent in the group to which the individual belongs and in his or her own training, have been the order of the day. Thus, the social and cultural representations that revolve around the administration reinforce the actions and at the same time contain the endogenous and cultural perceptions. The uses that individual’s make of government departments and which are linked to the representations they have of them essentially consist of concrete actions whose meaning is provided by the latter. That humans interact according to certain dispositions, which become rules and norms that they find or set up themselves for their own development, even if it is at the expense of others.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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