

# Laissez-faire Leadership Style and Employee Performance at Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Shafie Ali Salad

(<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2097-8921>)

\*Corresponding author: [shafie.salad25@gmail.com](mailto:shafie.salad25@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *This study examined the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland, guided by Lewin's Leadership Style Theory and Behavioural Leadership Theory. A quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were collected from 92 employees using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive analysis, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, was used. Inferential analysis, specifically Pearson correlation, was used. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between laissez-faire leadership and employee performance ( $r = 0.614, p = 0.001$ ), suggesting that autonomy-supportive leadership enhances employee performance. The study concludes that laissez-faire leadership can be an effective approach in the Civil Service Commission, particularly when combined with structured support mechanisms such as regular performance reviews, mentoring, and clear accountability frameworks. The study recommends that the Commission should establish structured performance reviews and feedback mechanisms to provide consistent guidance while allowing employees autonomy in their work.*

**Keywords:** Laissez-faire leadership, employee performance, autonomy, Civil Service Commission, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

## Introduction

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping employee behaviour, motivation, and overall organisational performance. Among the various leadership styles, laissez-faire leadership is characterised by minimal supervision, a hands-off approach, and allowing employees to make decisions independently (Bass & Riggio, 2018). Unlike directive or participative leadership styles, laissez-faire leaders provide autonomy but often offer limited guidance, which can influence employee performance in both positive and negative ways (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2017).

In public sector institutions, such as the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland, leadership practices significantly affect organisational efficiency, employee productivity, and service delivery. While laissez-faire leadership may promote creativity, self-motivation, and problem-solving skills, it may also lead to ambiguity, lack of accountability, and inconsistent performance if not managed properly (Zhu, Chew, & Spangler, 2018).

In the Civil Service Commission, employees have reported varying experiences regarding managerial supervision and support. Some departments exhibit high autonomy and independence, while others suffer from unclear roles, delayed decision-making, and inconsistent guidance. Such variability raises concerns about how laissez-faire leadership affects employee performance, particularly in a hierarchical public sector context where accountability and structured workflows are critical. Despite its prevalence, little empirical research has examined the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and employee performance within Somaliland's public sector institutions. This knowledge gap makes it difficult for policymakers and managers to adopt strategies that balance employee autonomy with organisational efficiency. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The study tested the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) that there is no significant relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Theoretical review

Understanding how leadership influences employee performance requires a theoretical foundation that explains both leadership styles and observable leader behaviours. This study examines the impact of laissez-faire leadership on employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Two theories were selected to guide the analysis: Lewin's Leadership Style Theory and Behavioural Leadership Theory. These theories were chosen because they provide complementary perspectives, combining a classification of leadership styles with observable behavioural mechanisms, which is critical for understanding how minimal intervention influences employee performance in hierarchical public sector organisations.

Lewin’s Leadership Style Theory, proposed by Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939), categorises leadership into autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles. The core assumption is that leadership style directly influences follower behaviour, motivation, and task performance. Laissez-faire leaders adopt a hands-off approach, providing autonomy but limited guidance, which can foster creativity and initiative but may also result in role ambiguity and inconsistent performance. Strengths of this theory include its clear classification system and predictive value for leader–follower outcomes, while its limitations involve oversimplification and limited consideration of contextual factors.

Behavioural Leadership Theory, developed through studies by Blake and Mouton (1964) and elaborated by Northouse (2019), focuses on observable leader behaviours rather than inherent traits. It assumes that leader actions, task-oriented or people-oriented, directly influence employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance. In the context of laissez-faire leadership, minimal guidance may enhance autonomy for skilled employees but can reduce accountability in structured environments. Strengths of this theory include its practical applicability and focus on observable behaviours, while weaknesses include limited attention to personality, organisational culture, and situational variables.

Together, these theories are complementary: Lewin’s framework identifies laissez-faire as a leadership style, while Behavioural Leadership Theory explains the mechanisms through which such behaviours impact performance. However, gaps remain. Both theories underrepresent the influence of organisational and cultural contexts, particularly in public sector institutions in developing countries, where hierarchical structures and resource limitations may moderate leadership effectiveness. This study addresses these gaps by empirically examining the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and employee performance in a structured, resource-constrained public sector environment.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance. A cross-sectional survey was conducted to collect data. This design was chosen because it allows for statistical analysis of relationships between variables at a single point in time, providing measurable insights into the relationship between laissez-faire leadership practices and employee performance. The target population comprised all employees of the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa. Using Slovin’s formula with a margin of error of 5% and a population of 120 employees, the sample size was determined to be 92 respondents. To ensure proportional representation across different departments, stratified random sampling was employed. Employees were first grouped into strata based on their department or unit, and then respondents were randomly selected from each stratum in proportion to the size of the department. This approach enhanced representativeness and minimised sampling bias.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts to ensure content validity. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach’s alpha. Data were analysed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarise employees’ perceptions of laissez-faire leadership behaviours and performance. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation, were employed to test the relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance. The study ensured voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents. Permission was obtained from the Civil Service Commission to conduct the study, and informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection.

### 4. Results

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of laissez-faire Leadership Style and Employee Performance**

No.	Statement	SA (F%)	A (F%)	NS (F%)	D (F%)	SD (F%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Employees are given autonomy to make decisions	30 (32.6%)	38 (41.3%)	12 (13.0%)	12 (13.0%)	0 (0%)	3.87	0.88

2	Supervisors provide minimal supervision	28 (30.4%)	35 (38.0%)	10 (10.9%)	19 (20.7%)	0 (0%)	3.79	0.92
3	Employees participate in planning and problem-solving activities	27 (29.3%)	36 (39.1%)	13 (14.1%)	16 (17.4%)	0 (0%)	3.78	0.94
4	Employees are trusted to make decisions without constant guidance	25 (27.2%)	34 (37.0%)	14 (15.2%)	19 (20.6%)	0 (0%)	3.72	0.95
5	Employee performance (task completion, accountability, adherence to standards)	32 (34.8%)	37 (40.2%)	10 (10.9%)	13 (14.1%)	0 (0%)	3.95	0.87
Average Mean and STD							<b>3.82</b>	<b>0.91</b>

**Source:** Primary data, 2021.

Table 1 shows that 30 (32.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 38 (41.3%) agreed, 12 (13.0%) were not sure, 12 (13.0%) disagreed, and 0 (0%) strongly disagreed that employees are given autonomy to make decisions. The mean of this item was 3.87 with a standard deviation of 0.88, which is high on the Likert scale, indicating that decision-making autonomy is widely practised and valued among employees.

Table 1 shows that 28 (30.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 35 (38.0%) agreed, 10 (10.9%) were not sure, 19 (20.7%) disagreed, and 0 (0%) strongly disagreed that supervisors provide minimal supervision. The mean of this item was 3.79 with a standard deviation of 0.92, which is high on the Likert scale, indicating that a hands-off leadership approach is moderately practised and generally perceived positively by employees.

Table 1 shows that 27 (29.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 36 (39.1%) agreed, 13 (14.1%) were not sure, 16 (17.4%) disagreed, and 0 (0%) strongly disagreed that employees participate in planning and problem-solving activities. The mean of this item was 3.78 with a standard deviation of 0.94, which is high on the Likert scale, indicating that employee involvement in planning and problem-solving is moderately practised and valued within the Commission.

Table 1 shows that 25 (27.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 34 (37.0%) agreed, 14 (15.2%) were not sure, 19 (20.6%) disagreed, and 0 (0%) strongly disagreed that employees are trusted to make decisions without constant guidance. The mean of this item was 3.72 with a standard deviation of 0.95, which is high on the Likert scale, indicating that employees generally experience autonomy in their work, although some variability in supervision practices exists across departments.

Table 1 shows that 32 (34.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 37 (40.2%) agreed, 10 (10.9%) were not sure, 13 (14.1%) disagreed, and 0 (0%) strongly disagreed that employee performance meets expectations for task completion, accountability, and adherence to standards. The mean of this item was 3.95 with a standard deviation of 0.87, which is high on the Likert scale, indicating that employees generally perceive their performance positively and consider themselves effective under current leadership practices.

The overall results indicate that laissez-faire leadership behaviours and employee performance are generally perceived positively by employees. The average mean across all items was 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.91, which is high on the Likert scale. This suggests that employees experience moderate to high levels of autonomy, minimal supervision, and involvement in planning and problem-solving, while also perceiving their performance measured through task completion, accountability, and adherence to

standards, as effective. The relatively low standard deviation indicates consistency in responses among the 92 respondents, implying a shared perception of leadership practices and employee performance across the institution.

**Table 2: Inferential Statistics of laissez-faire Leadership Style and Employee Performance**

	laissez-faire leadership style	Employee performance
Pearson Correlation	1	.614**
laissez-faire leadership style Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
N	92	92
Pearson Correlation	.614**	1
Employee performance Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
N	92	92

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Primary data, 2021.

The Pearson correlation analysis in Table 2 shows a moderate positive relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance ( $r = 0.614$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This indicates that higher levels of laissez-faire leadership are characterised by granting employees autonomy, reducing close supervision, and allowing independent decision-making. In general, the results suggest that employees tend to perform more effectively when given freedom and independence in their work, indicating the potential benefits of a hands-off leadership approach in hierarchical public sector settings.

Regarding the hypothesis, the study tested the null hypothesis, which stated that there is a significant relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance. Given the statistically significant correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ), the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that laissez-faire leadership behaviours have a significant positive relationship with employee performance, implying that allowing employees autonomy and minimising micromanagement can enhance both productivity and accountability within the Civil Service Commission.

## 5: Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a significant positive relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance, with a Pearson correlation of  $r = 0.614$  ( $p = 0.001$ ).

These results are consistent with Lewin's Leadership Style Theory, which categorises leadership into autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles and posits that the laissez-faire approach allows employees greater freedom to make decisions and self-regulate their work (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). The findings also align with the Behavioural Leadership Theory, which emphasises that leader behaviours, rather than traits alone, influence subordinate performance.

Previous studies support these conclusions. For instance, Ahmad and Malik (2018) found that autonomy-supportive leadership positively influences employee engagement and performance in public sector organisations. Similarly, Gunawan and Djumahir (2017) observed that laissez-faire leadership can enhance innovation and accountability when employees are competent and self-directed. The current study extends this literature to the context of Somaliland, showing that hands-off leadership practices can also be effective in resource-constrained and hierarchical public institutions, filling a contextual gap.

## 6. Conclusion

The study found a significant positive relationship between laissez-faire leadership style and employee performance, indicating that granting employees autonomy, minimising supervision, and allowing independent decision-making can enhance employee performance. This suggests that employees in hierarchical public institutions perform more effectively when provided with a degree of freedom and trust in their work. Therefore, the study concludes that laissez-faire leadership can be an effective approach in the Civil Service Commission, particularly when combined with structured support mechanisms such as regular performance reviews, mentoring, and clear accountability frameworks.

## **7. Recommendations**

The Commission should establish structured performance reviews and feedback mechanisms to provide consistent guidance while allowing employees autonomy in their work.

The Commission should foster employee autonomy in decision-making by clearly defining roles and responsibilities while giving discretion in task execution to enhance motivation, accountability, and efficiency.

The Commission should provide leadership training for managers, focusing on balancing minimal supervision with effective support and demonstrating how autonomy-supportive behaviours improve performance and morale.

The Commission should cultivate a culture that values initiative and self-directed work, using recognition programs and incentives to reinforce positive behaviours and encourage high employee performance.

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