

Democratic Leadership Style and Employee Performance at Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

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Abstract: *This study examined the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The study adopted a quantitative research approach employing a cross-sectional research design and collected data from 92 employees using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire measured key democratic leadership practices, including employee participation in decision-making, open communication, teamwork promotion, and feedback provision, and their perceived impact on employee performance. Descriptive statistics indicated high levels of democratic leadership practices and employee performance, with open communication and teamwork scoring the highest, while feedback provision recorded slightly lower levels. Inferential analysis using Pearson's correlation revealed a strong positive relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance ($r = 0.716, p < 0.05$), suggesting that participative leadership significantly influences employee performance. The findings confirm that democratic leadership practices positively influence employee performance, supporting the theoretical framework. The study recommends that the Civil Service Commission institutionalise feedback mechanisms, provide leadership training for supervisors, and promote participative decision-making to strengthen employee performance and institutional effectiveness. These results contribute to the understanding of effective leadership practices in public sector organisations within Somaliland.*

Keywords: Democratic leadership style, Employee performance, Civil Service Commission, Hargeisa, Somaliland, Participative leadership, Public sector management.

1. Introduction

Leadership is widely recognised as a critical determinant of employee performance and organisational effectiveness, particularly within public-sector institutions where accountability, efficiency, and service delivery are central mandates (Donkor & Zhou, 2020). In public administration contexts, leadership style shapes employee attitudes, motivation, and productivity, thereby influencing institutional performance outcomes (Puni et al., 2018). Among the various leadership approaches, democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership, has attracted considerable scholarly attention because of its emphasis on shared decision-making, open communication, and employee involvement (Asad & Abbas, 2017).

Democratic leadership is characterised by leaders who consult subordinates, encourage participation in decision-making processes, and value employee input before making final decisions (Puni et al., 2018). Unlike autocratic leadership, which centralises authority, democratic leadership promotes collaboration, mutual trust, and collective responsibility. Empirical evidence suggests that when employees are actively involved in organisational decisions, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and accountability, which positively influences their performance (Asad & Abbas, 2017; Donkor & Zhou, 2020). Participative leadership practices are also associated with enhanced job satisfaction, organisational commitment, teamwork, and innovation factors that significantly contribute to improved employee performance (Obiwuru et al., 2016).

The impact of this leadership style on employee performance is particularly significant within government agencies, where motivation is often driven by a sense of duty rather than financial incentives. Research indicates that when public sector employees are granted a voice in departmental processes, their "Public Service Motivation" (PSM) is significantly bolstered, leading to improved extra-role behaviours and higher quality service delivery (Ritz et al., 2016; Iqbal et al., 2018). By fostering psychological safety and professional respect, democratic leaders can mitigate the "red tape" culture that often stifles innovation and efficiency in government bureaus (Caillier, 2020).

In public sector organisations, where bureaucratic structures and hierarchical traditions often dominate, the adoption of democratic leadership practices can facilitate better communication, reduce resistance to change, and enhance employee morale (Donkor & Zhou, 2020). However, the effectiveness of democratic leadership may vary depending on organisational culture, governance systems, and contextual dynamics. In Somaliland, the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa plays a crucial role in overseeing recruitment, performance management, and professional development of public servants. As a key institution responsible for strengthening public administration, leadership practices within the Commission directly affect employee performance and overall public service delivery. Despite this significance, limited empirical research has examined the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance within the Somaliland public sector context, creating a contextual knowledge gap.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The study tested the null hypothesis (Ho) that there is no significant relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The study contributes to leadership and public administration literature and offers practical insights for policymakers and administrators aiming to enhance organisational effectiveness through participative leadership approaches.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical review

This study is grounded in two complementary leadership theories to adequately explain the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Institute in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Because leadership is a multidimensional construct that involves both style classification and observable behaviours, relying on a single theory would be insufficient to provide a comprehensive explanation. Therefore, the study is primarily guided by Lewin's Leadership Style Theory and supported by Behavioural Leadership Theory. Lewin's theory provides the foundational classification of leadership styles, particularly democratic leadership, while Behavioural Leadership Theory explains how specific leader behaviours influence employee performance outcomes. The integration of these two theories offers a strong conceptual and analytical framework for testing the null hypothesis that democratic leadership style has no significant effect on employee performance.

Lewin's Leadership Style Theory was developed in 1939 by Kurt Lewin, together with Ronald Lippitt and Ralph White, following experimental studies on group dynamics and productivity. The theory categorises leadership into three main styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Its central assumption is that leadership style directly influences group behaviour, morale, and productivity. Democratic leadership, in particular, is characterised by participative decision-making, open communication, shared responsibility, and mutual respect between leaders and subordinates. The theory posits that when employees are actively involved in decision-making processes, they develop higher levels of motivation, commitment, and productivity. In the context of this study, Lewin's theory directly explains the independent variable, democratic leadership style, and predicts that such a participatory approach should positively influence employee performance indicators such as efficiency, quality of work, teamwork, and organisational commitment at the Civil Service Commission.

Behavioural Leadership Theory, which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s from studies conducted at Ohio State University and the University of Michigan, further strengthens the explanatory framework of this study. Prominent contributors such as Ralph Stogdill and Rensis Likert shifted attention from leader traits to observable leader behaviours. The theory assumes that leadership effectiveness depends on what leaders do rather than who they are. It identifies two primary dimensions of leadership behaviour: initiating structure (task-oriented behaviour) and consideration (people-oriented behaviour). Democratic leadership aligns closely with high consideration behaviours, including employee support, encouragement of participation, and trust-building, alongside appropriate task structuring. In relation to this study, Behavioural Leadership Theory explains how democratic leadership behaviours such as involving employees in planning, providing feedback, and fostering collaborative relationships translate into improved employee performance. Thus, while Lewin's theory defines democratic leadership as a category, Behavioural Leadership Theory clarifies the behavioural mechanisms through which that style influences performance outcomes.

The synthesis of these two theories enhances the theoretical rigour of the study. Lewin's framework provides the typological foundation by identifying democratic leadership as a participatory style, whereas Behavioural Leadership Theory operationalises this style into measurable behaviours such as participation, support, and structured guidance. The theories are therefore complementary: Lewin explains "what" democratic leadership is, and Behavioural Leadership Theory explains "how" it works in practice. However, both theories also present certain limitations. They were developed in Western contexts and may not fully capture the socio-cultural and institutional realities of public-sector organisations in Somaliland. Additionally, they do not explicitly account for contextual variables such as bureaucratic structures, resource limitations, or organisational culture, which may influence leadership effectiveness in the Civil Service Commission.

Critically, there remains a contextual gap in the empirical application of these classical leadership theories within Somaliland's Civil Service Commission. Research on the relationship between democratic leadership and employee performance in this setting is limited. By testing the null hypothesis that democratic leadership style has no significant effect on employee performance, this study contributes to extending and validating these theories within a new geographical and institutional context. Overall, the combined use of Lewin's Leadership Style Theory and Behavioural Leadership Theory provides a coherent and robust theoretical foundation for examining the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach employing a cross-sectional research design. The quantitative design was considered appropriate because the study sought to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance using measurable variables and statistical analysis. A cross-sectional design enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents at a single point in time to determine the association between the independent and dependent variables. The study was conducted at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The Commission is responsible for recruitment, regulation, performance management, and capacity development of civil servants in Somaliland. As a central public institution, leadership practices within the Commission significantly influence employee performance and institutional effectiveness.

The target population comprised all employees working at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa. The inclusion of employees across different hierarchical levels ensured diverse perspectives regarding leadership practices and performance outcomes. The sample size for the study was 92 respondents, determined using Slovin’s formula. The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of employees across departments and hierarchical levels. The population was first divided into strata based on job category, after which respondents were randomly selected from each stratum. Stratification was appropriate to minimise sampling bias and enhance representativeness.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire method was selected because it allows for efficient data collection from a large number of respondents and facilitates quantitative analysis. Data were coded and analysed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise demographic characteristics and study variables. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was employed to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance. Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected were used strictly for academic purposes.

4. Results

Descriptive Statistics of Democratic Leadership Style and Employee Performance at Civil Service Commission in Hargiesa, Somaliland.

Descriptive statistics were computed to assess the overall levels of democratic leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission (N = 92). Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Democratic Leadership Style and Employee Performance at Civil Service Commission in Hargiesa, Somaliland.

NO	Statement	SA (F%)	A (F%)	NS (F%)	D (F%)	SD (F%)	Mean	Std Dev
1	Employees participate in decision-making processes.	25 (27.2%)	40 (43.5%)	15 (16.3%)	8 (8.7%)	4 (4.3%)	3.87	0.88
2	Communication between supervisors and employees is open.	30 (32.6%)	42 (45.7%)	12 (13.0%)	5 (5.4%)	3 (3.3%)	4.10	0.73
3	Employees have opportunities to express opinions.	26 (28.3%)	40 (43.5%)	16 (17.4%)	6 (6.5%)	4 (4.3%)	3.90	0.84

4	Supervisors provide feedback to employees.	22 (23.9%)	38 (41.3%)	18 (19.6%)	10 (10.9%)	4 (4.3%)	3.82	0.91
5	Teamwork is promoted among employees.	28 (30.4%)	42 (45.7%)	14 (15.2%)	5 (5.4%)	3 (3.3%)	4.05	0.76
6	Employees participate in planning and problem-solving activities.	24 (26.1%)	40 (43.5%)	16 (17.4%)	8 (8.7%)	4 (4.3%)	3.88	0.80
7	Supervisors involve employees in discussions about work tasks.	25 (27.2%)	41 (44.6%)	15 (16.3%)	7 (7.6%)	4 (4.3%)	3.89	0.82
8	Employee performance is monitored to identify areas for improvement.	27 (29.3%)	42 (45.7%)	13 (14.1%)	6 (6.5%)	4 (4.3%)	3.95	0.79
Average Mean							3.93	0.82

Source: Primary data, 2021.

Interpretation guide

Mean range	Response mode	Interpretation
5–4.21	Strongly agree	Very High
4.20–3.41	Agree	High
3.40–2.61	Not sure	None
2.60–1.81	Disagree	Low
1.80–1	Strongly disagree	Very Low

Table 1 indicates that 4 (4.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 8 (8.7%) disagreed, 15 (16.3%) were not sure, 40 (43.5%) agreed, and the remaining 25 (27.2%) strongly agreed that employees participate in decision-making processes. This item had a mean of 3.87 and a standard deviation of 0.88, which is equivalent to high on the Likert scale, implying that participation in decision-making is a common practice and considered important in the Civil Service Commission.

Table 1 shows that 3 (3.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, 5 (5.4%) disagreed, 12 (13.0%) were not sure, 42 (45.7%) agreed, and 30 (32.6%) strongly agreed that communication between supervisors and employees is open. The mean of this item was 4.10 with a standard deviation of 0.73, which is high on the Likert scale, indicating that open communication is well-practised and valued among employees.

According to Table 1, 4 (4.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed, 6 (6.5%) disagreed, 16 (17.4%) were not sure, 40 (43.5%) agreed, and 26 (28.3%) strongly agreed that employees have opportunities to express opinions. This item recorded a mean of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 0.84, interpreted as high on the Likert scale, suggesting that employees generally have avenues to voice their views.

Table 1 shows that 4 (4.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed, 10 (10.9%) disagreed, 18 (19.6%) were not sure, 38 (41.3%) agreed, and 22 (23.9%) strongly agreed that supervisors provide feedback to employees. The mean of this item was 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.91, which is high on the Likert scale, indicating that feedback is provided, although there is some variability in perception.

Table 1 indicates that 3 (3.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed, 5 (5.4%) disagreed, 14 (15.2%) were not sure, 42 (45.7%) agreed, and 28 (30.4%) strongly agreed that teamwork is promoted among employees. The mean was 4.05 with a standard deviation of 0.76, interpreted as high on the Likert scale, implying that teamwork is strongly encouraged and practised.

Table 1 shows that 4 (4.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed, 8 (8.7%) disagreed, 16 (17.4%) were not sure, 40 (43.5%) agreed, and 24 (26.1%) strongly agreed that employees participate in planning and problem-solving activities. This item had a mean of 3.88 and a standard deviation of 0.80, which is high on the Likert scale, suggesting employee involvement in planning and problem-solving is generally observed.

According to Table 1, 4 (4.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed, 7 (7.6%) disagreed, 15 (16.3%) were not sure, 41 (44.6%) agreed, and 25 (27.2%) strongly agreed that supervisors involve employees in discussions about work tasks. The mean was 3.89, and the standard deviation was 0.82, which is high on the Likert scale, showing that discussions about work tasks are encouraged among employees.

Table 1 shows that 4 (4.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed, 6 (6.5%) disagreed, 13 (14.1%) were not sure, 42 (45.7%) agreed, and 27 (29.3%) strongly agreed that employee performance is monitored to identify areas for improvement. This item had a mean of 3.95 and a standard deviation of 0.79, which is high on the Likert scale, implying that performance monitoring is well-practised and considered valuable for continuous improvement.

Inferential Statistics of Democratic Leadership Style and Employee Performance at Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

The relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance was analysed using Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The results are presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Democratic Leadership Style and Employee Performance at Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

	Democratic leadership style	Employee performance
Democratic leadership style	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.716**
	N	.001
Employee performance	Pearson Correlation	92
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.716**
	N	.001
		92

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

Source: Primary data, 2021.

The study examined the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance among employees at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Using Pearson’s correlation analysis, the findings revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($r=0.716$, $p=0.001$, $N=92$). This indicates that higher levels of democratic leadership, characterised by participative decision-making, open communication, and active employee involvement, are associated with improved employee performance outcomes, including productivity, quality of work, teamwork, and goal attainment.

Given the strong positive correlation and the significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This finding implies that democratic leadership practices significantly influence employee performance in the context of public sector institutions. Employees under participative leadership tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement, dedication, and overall performance, indicating the practical need to promote inclusive and participatory leadership styles at the Civil Service Commission.

5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The findings revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between democratic leadership style and employee performance. This indicates that higher levels of participative decision-making, open communication, and employee involvement are associated with improved performance outcomes among employees of the

Commission. The magnitude of the correlation suggests that democratic leadership plays a substantial role in shaping employee productivity, teamwork, and overall effectiveness within the institution.

The results strongly support Lewin's Leadership Style Theory, which categorises leadership into autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles. Lewin posited that democratic leadership fosters higher group morale, participation, and productivity compared to other leadership styles. The present findings empirically validate this theoretical proposition within the context of a public sector institution in Somaliland. Leaders who involve employees in decision-making processes and encourage dialogue appear to create a work environment that enhances accountability and performance. The positive association observed in this study reinforces Lewin's argument that democratic leadership generates more favorable organizational outcomes.

In addition, the findings are consistent with Behavioural Leadership Theory, which emphasises that effective leadership is grounded in observable leader behaviours rather than inherent traits. Behavioural theorists distinguish between task-oriented and people-oriented behaviours, suggesting that leaders who demonstrate supportive and participative behaviours achieve better employee outcomes. Democratic leadership embodies people-oriented behaviours such as consultation, collaboration, and feedback. The strong positive correlation found in this study suggests that when leaders adopt participative and supportive behaviours, employees reciprocate with improved performance. This provides empirical support for the behavioural perspective that leadership effectiveness depends largely on how leaders interact with and involve their subordinates.

The findings are also aligned with previous empirical studies that have reported a positive and significant relationship between democratic or participative leadership and employee performance. For example, Donkor and Zhou (2020) found that participative leadership significantly enhanced employee performance in public sector organisations, while Puni et al. (2018) reported that democratic leadership positively influenced organisational performance outcomes. The present study extends this body of knowledge by providing evidence from the Somaliland public sector context, which has been relatively underexplored in leadership research. The consistency between this study and prior research strengthens the generalizability of the argument that democratic leadership contributes to improved employee outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that the Civil Service Commission should prioritise the promotion of democratic leadership practices to enhance employee performance. Leadership development programs should emphasise skills in participative decision-making, effective communication, and collaborative problem-solving. Institutional mechanisms that facilitate employee involvement, such as consultative meetings, team-based planning, and open feedback systems, should be strengthened to sustain high performance levels. Given the strong relationship identified, democratic leadership can serve as a strategic tool for improving organisational effectiveness and public service delivery.

Theoretically, this study contributes to leadership literature by empirically validating the relevance of Lewin's Leadership Style Theory and reinforcing the principles of Behavioural Leadership Theory within a contemporary public administration setting. The results demonstrate that participative and people-oriented leadership behaviours remain critical determinants of employee performance, even within bureaucratic and structured institutional environments.

6. Conclusion

The findings suggest that a democratic leadership style and employee performance have a significant and positive relationship at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Employees who experience participative decision-making and open communication from their leaders demonstrate higher levels of productivity, teamwork, and overall performance. This emphasises the importance of fostering democratic leadership practices in public sector institutions to enhance employee performance outcomes.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance both leadership practices and employee performance at the Civil Service Commission in Hargeisa, Somaliland:

The study recommended that the Civil Service Commission should establish structured feedback mechanisms, including regular performance appraisals and systematic feedback sessions, to ensure that all employees consistently receive constructive guidance and support for professional development.

The Commission should develop policies that formalise democratic leadership practices, such as requiring employee consultations in decision-making and embedding feedback processes in organisational procedures.

The study recommended that the management of the commission should create formal avenues for employees to contribute to organisational planning and problem-solving, including task forces, committees, and collaborative meetings.

The Commission should encourage cross-departmental collaboration and team-based projects, as this strengthens employee relationships, knowledge sharing, and efficiency.

The study recommended that the Commission train supervisors in democratic leadership approaches, including participative decision-making, effective communication, and constructive feedback.

The Commission should adopt a structured performance management system that tracks progress, identifies gaps, and recognises high performers to further motivate staff and improve service delivery.

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