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EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SECTOR: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract:

This systematic literature review examines the phenomenon of laissez-faire leadership (LFL) in public sector organisations. Given rising demands for innovation, accountability, and reform, the study addresses the critical question of how LFL affects organizational performance and when its use is appropriate. Using the PRISMA 2020 framework, searches were conducted across Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases, yielding 40 primary studies that met predefined inclusion criteria. The authors outlined their screening, inclusion, and exclusion criteria in detail to ensure the selection of high-quality empirical studies. The results were classified into three main themes: 1) Laissez-faire leadership and Employee Engagement, 2) Laissez-faire leadership and Employee Performance, and 3) Laissez-faire leadership and Context in Public Sector. Analysis identified substantial variation: in contexts lacking institutional structure, clear governance or active leadership, LFL tends to correlate with poor performance, role ambiguity, and lowered commitment; conversely, within supportive environments featuring stable institutions, participatory frameworks and capable staff, LFL may foster autonomy, creativity, and job satisfaction. These findings suggest that LFL should not be dismissed outright, but rather applied selectively, depending on the organizational culture, stability, and context. Consequently, recommendations urge public sector leaders and policymakers to consider the organizational environment and employee readiness before adopting hands-off leadership approaches.

Keywords:

Laissez-faire Leadership, Engagement, Performance, Public Sector

Introduction

Characterized by minimal intervention and hands-off style, Laissez-faire leadership (LFL) has long been associated with such negative organizational impacts, namely, disorganization, confusion, and low performance (Kuijpers et al., 2024; Stone, 2025). This leadership style originated from the management theory in the early 20th century. Furthermore, this style is more efficient in settings that involve employees with a high level of competence as well as motivation, as it allows them to be more creative and autonomous (Kamal & Kesuma, 2024; Stone, 2025). However, as it requires accountability and more structured guidance, the utilization of this leadership method remains controversial in the public sector. Furthermore, it is reported by recent researchers that the LFL effects may be different in the context and particular needs of the organization, which at the same time indicates that researchers have begun to challenge the conventional view of LFL as inherently negative (Hussain & Franken, 2025; Pahi & Hamid, 2016).

In the context of the public sector, LFL is influenced by numerous factors, including the type of work and the autonomy given to the employees. As an example, LFL has been identified to promote job satisfaction in the Australian public sector when employees find meaning in their work and have enough autonomy (Hussain & Franken, 2025). On the other hand, the leadership style in the Vietnamese public sector has been associated with such adverse consequences as decreased work engagement and increased technostress (Thanh et al., 2022; Ly & Ly, 2024). Although these findings are not conclusive, there appears to be a significant gap in the literature regarding the conditions under which LFL can be productive in a public sector environment. Very little research has investigated the possible beneficial results of LFL in an environment where creativity and autonomy are valued, whereas most of the available studies have mainly concentrated on the negative implications (Kamal & Kesuma, 2024; Kuijpers et al., 2024). As such, it can be suggested that future studies ought to address the gaps existing in the current literature by focusing on the dynamics and context-dependent aspects of LFL in various contexts of the public sector (Hussain & Franken, 2025; Kuijpers et al., 2024; Pahi & Hamid, 2016).

Literature Review

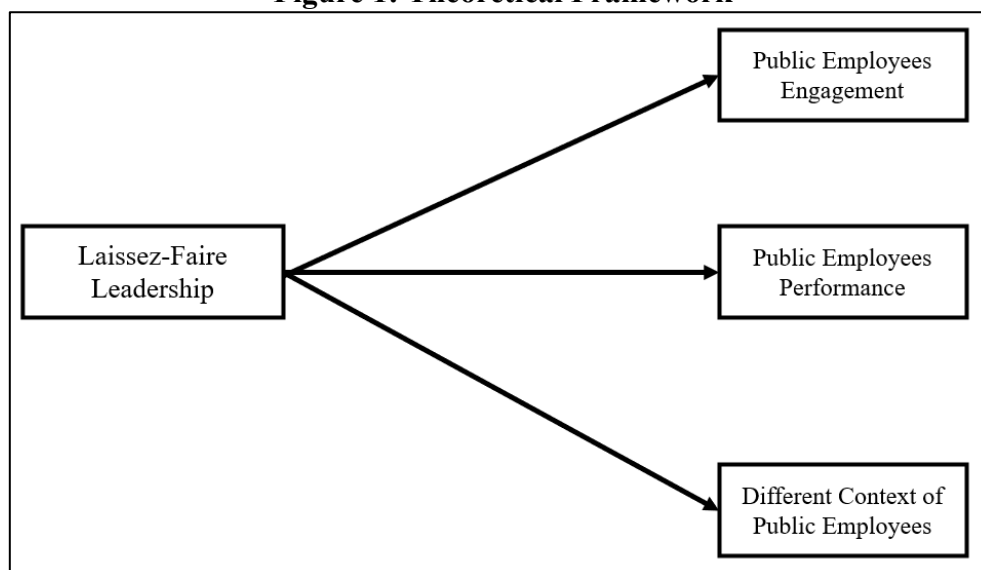
LFL is grounded in the management thought process of the early 20th century, which focuses on limited leadership involvement. LFL is often associated with adverse organizational effects, including disorganization and poor performance. Yet, it can also be very effective if implemented in a setting that involves highly competent employees (Stone, 2025). In the public sector, theoretical principles of leadership are significant in public management due to their extensive use in various research areas, such as administration, psychology, political science, sociology, and anthropology (Chinchay Díaz & Chávarry Ysla, 2021).

Besides, the empirical studies of LFL in the public sector show mixed results. Although it typically leads to low productivity and dissatisfaction of the workforce (Mohan & Jayalakshmi, 2025), it can also be a factor in enhancing job satisfaction in case meaningful work is done (Hussain & Franken, 2025). The role clarity and the well-being of the organization employees can be negatively impacted by LFL during the restructuring of the organization (Lundmark et al., 2022). Moreover, it has also been found to influence organization commitment and cynicism of change (Albrecht, 2005). The contextual variables, such as team competence and motivation, are highly decisive in the effectiveness of LFL. This leadership approach can lead to disorientation and demotivation in an environment where a systematic guide is required

(Stone, 2025). However, it is likely to result in both innovation and autonomy in creative and knowledge-intensive industries (Rassa & Emeagwali, 2020). There are special restrictions associated with the bureaucratic nature of the public sector, which can contribute to increasing or inhibiting the effect of LFL (Hussain & Franken, 2025).

Comparative studies have shown that LFL tends to result in poorer performance compared to transformational and transactional leadership. It is one of the factors that lead to low productivity and increased turnover motivations in the tourism sector (Mohan & Jayalakshmi, 2025). Furthermore, it can positively influence the intrinsic motivation, although it has a negative effect on the task performance in the healthcare industry (Alsadaan et al., 2025). Therefore, these studies indicate the need to adopt a balance approach to leadership, specifically in a resource-constrained and dynamic environment (Armas et al., 2025). It is crucial for practitioners in the public sector to be familiar with the nuanced impacts of LFL. Although it offers the ability to develop autonomy and be more creative, it must be implemented carefully to prevent adverse effects like decreased performance and dissatisfaction among employees (Hussain & Franken, 2025; Stone, 2025). Education on this type of leadership style should be part of training programs, as well as observed during the changes of the organization (Lundmark et al., 2022). The solution to this is to train public sector reforms with a balance of freedom and structured support in order to achieve the highest job satisfaction and engagement (Hussain & Franken, 2025). Therefore, according to the information stated above, the theoretical framework of this SLR is depicted in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Source: Author (2024)

Research Question

According to Kitchenham (2007), research questions are the most important planning tasks. To formulate the qualitative research questions, this SLR adopted the PICO framework by Lockwood et al. (2015), which stands for Population, Interest, and Context.

- i. Population (P): The population of interest in the study. It describes the target population, patient group, or society of the research.

- ii. Interest (I): The primary focus/phenomenon of interest in the study. It could be related to a particular event, behavior, intervention, or problem that the research aims to investigate or understand.
- iii. Context (Co): This describes the setting, environment, or specific context in which the population and interest exist. The background may refer to geographic location, cultural or societal contexts, or any other relevant context for the study.

This leads to the two research questions detailed below, which this study successfully generated:

- i. How does LFL in public sector organizations influence employee engagement, and what role do organizational culture and leadership context play in shaping this relationship?
- ii. What is the effect of LFL on employee performance in the public sector, and how does the organizational environment influence this relationship?
- iii. What contextual factors (e.g., organizational structure, political environment, and leadership frameworks) affect the implementation and outcomes of LFL in public sector organizations?

Methodology

In this study, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework by Page et al. (2021) has been employed. This framework is globally accepted as a guideline of systematic reviews ensuring transparency, completeness and rigor of the methods. Additionally, through this frame, researchers can identify, screen, and select studies with minimal bias, which ultimately increases the reliability of their findings. The two comprehensive databases utilized in this research were Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases.

They were employed due to their robust and extensive academic coverage. The PRISMA process is carried out in four steps, namely identification, screening, eligibility, and data abstraction. Likewise, the PRISMA process is conducted in four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and data abstraction. Such stages will facilitate the elimination of the selected studies and the extracting of valuable data. Through systematic reviews, accuracy and credibility will be attained, which will give credible conclusions informing the research and policy.

Identification

This study adhered to a systematic review procedure by rigorously collecting relevant literature. It started out with the selection of the correct keywords and finding the related words with the help of dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, and previous research. Afterwards, the sets of search strings were independently created in the Web of Science and Scopus databases (Table 1) and yielded 338 publications relevant to address the research topic.

Table 1: Search String

Database	Search String
Scopus	<p>As of 21 November 2025</p> <p>TITLE-ABS-KEY (("LFL" OR "Hands-Off Leadership" OR "Non-Interventionist Leadership" OR "Passive Leadership" OR "Minimalist Leadership" OR "Delegative Leadership" OR "Uninvolved Leadership" OR "Permissive Leadership" OR "Autonomous Leadership" OR "Self-Directed Leadership" OR "Free-Rein Leadership" OR "passive-avoidant leadership" OR "leader inaction" OR "inaction leadership" OR "absence of leadership" OR "zero leadership" OR "noninfluencing leadership" OR "non-influencing leadership" OR "noninfluence leadership" OR "non-influence leadership" OR "leader non-intervention" OR "minimal leader involvement" OR "ineffective leadership" OR "avoid responsibilities leadership" OR "avoidance leadership" OR "non-involvement leadership" OR "passive management-by-exception" OR "management-by-exception leadership" OR "management by exception leadership" OR "nonexistent leadership" OR "non-existent leadership" OR "delegative leadership" OR "noninvolvement leadership") AND ("government" OR "public sector" OR "civil sector" OR "civil service" OR "agenc*" OR "institute" OR "municipal*" OR "public administration" OR "state" OR "civil" OR "non profit" OR "none profit" OR "non-profit" OR "ministr*"))</p>
Web of Science	<p>As of 21 November 2025</p> <p>Topic: (("LFL" OR "Hands-Off Leadership" OR "Non-Interventionist Leadership" OR "Passive Leadership" OR "Minimalist Leadership" OR "Delegative Leadership" OR "Uninvolved Leadership" OR "Permissive Leadership" OR "Autonomous Leadership" OR "Self-Directed Leadership" OR "Free-Rein Leadership" OR "passive-avoidant leadership" OR "leader inaction" OR "inaction leadership" OR "absence of leadership" OR "zero leadership" OR "noninfluencing leadership" OR "non-influencing leadership" OR "noninfluence leadership" OR "non-influence leadership" OR "leader non-intervention" OR "minimal leader involvement" OR "ineffective leadership" OR "avoid responsibilities leadership" OR "avoidance leadership" OR "non-involvement leadership" OR "passive management-by-exception" OR "management-by-exception leadership" OR "management by exception leadership" OR "nonexistent leadership" OR "non-existent leadership" OR "delegative leadership" OR "noninvolvement leadership") AND ("government" OR "public sector" OR "civil sector" OR "civil service" OR "agenc*" OR "institute" OR "municipal*" OR "public administration" OR "state" OR "civil" OR "non profit" OR "none profit" OR "non-profit" OR "ministr*"))</p>

Source: Author (2025)

Screening

All the possible studies were filtered well during the screening phase to make sure that they were in line with the research questions. A priority was given to research that concentrates on LFL in the field of the public sector, and duplication of records was eliminated. After managing to eliminate 218 irrelevant and 23 duplicate publications, 120 publications in the initial pool survived the filtering program. The articles with the publication date not older than 2021-2025 in the English language alone were kept (refer to Table 2).

Table 2: The Selection Criterion Is Searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2021 – 2025	< 2021
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press

Source: Author (2025)

Eligibility

During the eligibility phase, there were 97 articles that were originally identified to be reviewed. All the articles have been screened based on the selection procedures and specifically based on the title and contents, and information to ensure that they addressed the objectives of the study. Hence, the title-search strategy has filtered out 57 articles as they were not connected to the study. Likewise, those studies have the criteria where the objectives and abstracts are not associated with the research purpose, the titles which were not relevant, and lacked access to the full text.

Included

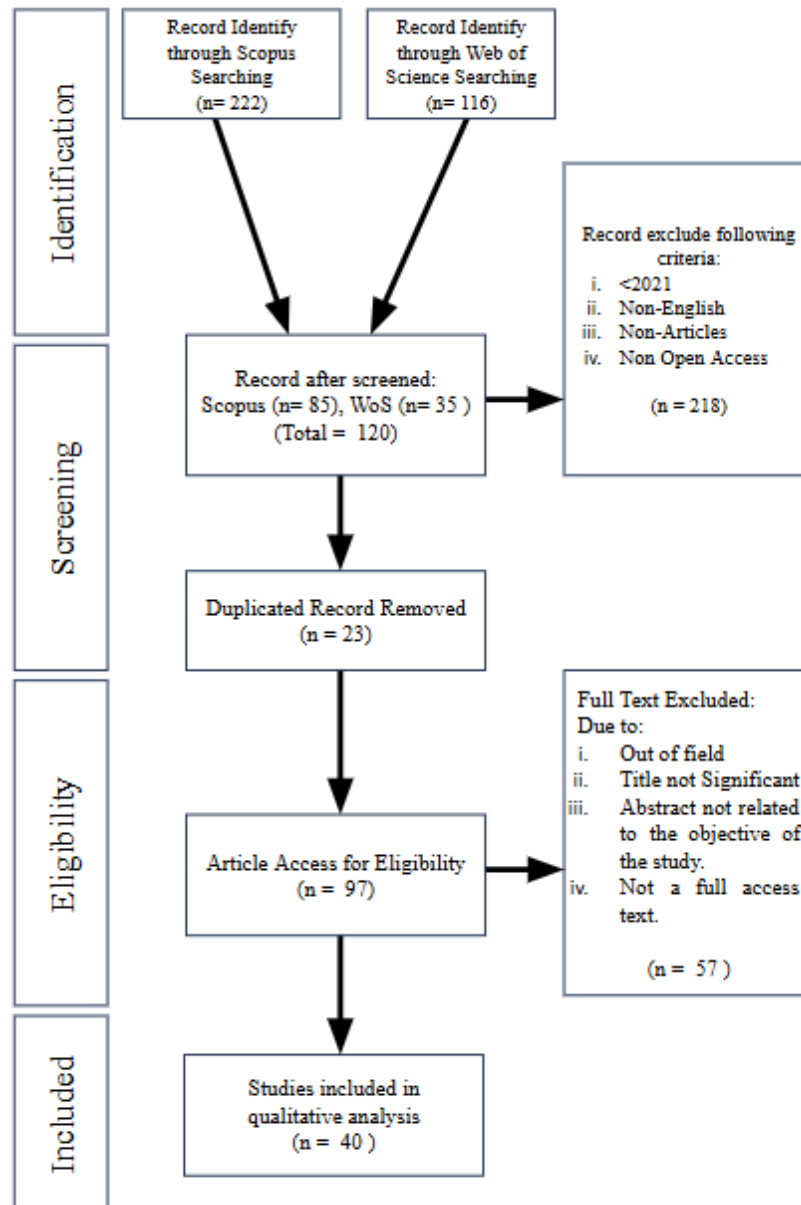
The eligibility phase of the SLR ensures that only relevant studies are included for analysis. Titles and content were screened, resulting in the exclusion of 57 articles due to irrelevance, poor titles, lack of full-text access, or insufficient empirical evidence. The quality of the review can be maintained through this rigorous appraisal. Ultimately, 40 articles were selected to be further analyzed in producing a focused set of articles, which will be used to address the research questions. This will add validity and reliability to the findings that will be used to make relevant contributions to EA. The detail information of articles included is illustrated in Figure 2.

Data Abstraction and Analysis

Consequently, the quantitative methods were used to synthesize the findings of 41 articles reviewed using the meta-analytic approach. Through data extraction and collaborative teamwork guided by the context-driven data, a few key themes emerged regarding EA. Additionally, thematic analysis also enhances the transparency and rigor of the findings through a comprehensive log. In order to produce a comprehensive thematic framework, the final stage involves comparing teams' findings with the aim of resolving differences and establishing a common framework. Iteration makes the results more valid as it emphasizes the flexibility of the staff and encourages mixed research methods research by combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

Results and Findings

Figure 2: PRISMA Framework



Source: Page et al. (2021)

Quality Appraisal

When determining the quality and relevance of the primary studies to be included in a systematic literature review (SLR), we adhere to the guidelines of quality assessment, provided by Abouzahra et al. (2020), which includes six criteria. All the studies are evaluated by three experts using a scoring system: "Yes" (Y) for full compliance (1 point), "Partly" (P) for partial compliance (0.5 points), and "No" (N) for non-compliance (0 points).

The six criteria assessed are:

1. **Purpose:** Whether the study's objectives are clearly defined.
2. **Relevance:** The study's significance and potential contributions to the field.
3. **Methodology:** The clarity and appropriateness of the research methodology.

4. **Conceptual Clarity:** The clear definition of the theoretical framework and key concepts.
5. **Comparative Analysis:** Whether the study is compared with similar works to highlight its contributions.
6. **Limitations:** Whether the study clearly identifies its limitations.

Each expert evaluates the study using these criteria, to which they are required to adhere. The resulting scores are subsequently aggregated. In order to warrant that only high-quality studies are selected, the overall score must be greater than 3.0. This ensures that the rigor of the SLR is maintained, as only studies that meet specific quality standards are included. The results of the Quality Appraisal are illustrated in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Results of Quality Appraisal

Paper ID	Author	QA 1	QA 2	QA 3	QA 4	QA 5	QA 6	Total Mark	% Score	Scopus	Wos
PS1	(Emami-Sigaroudi et al., 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	100%	✓	
PS2	(Kittithammavong et al., 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	Y	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS3	(Mah et al., 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS4	(Li et al., 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	100%	✓	
PS5	(Ntontis et al., 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	Y	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS6	(Masenya & Ngoepe, 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	100%	✓	
PS7	(Krommendijk, 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS8	(Bani-Melhem et al., 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS9	(Di Mascio et al., 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS10	(Al Balushi & Jamaludin, 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS11	(Shakur et al., 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS12	(Corrigan et al., 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS13	(Altaher et al., 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS14	(Liu, 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	100%	✓	
PS15	(Martinez, 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS16	(Bejarano Lizano et al., 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS17	(Ly & Ly, 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS18	(Velarde-Molina et al., 2024)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS19	(Ismail, Basir, Hassan, et al., 2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	

PS20	(Ismail, Basir, Ishak, et al., 2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS21	(Atiku et al., 2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS22	(Alboliteeh, 2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS23	(Hinse & Mathieu, 2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS24	(Berger et al., 2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS25	(Almansoori & Ahmad, 2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS26	(Thanh et al., 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS27	(Bani-Melhem et al., 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS28	(Hai & Quang, 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS29	(Pakpahan & Pantan, 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS30	(Bolarinwa et al., 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS31	(Whitewood, 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS32	(Barkhuizen & Masale, 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS33	(Mendis et al., 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS34	(Plimmer et al., 2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS35	(Subedi et al., 2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS36	(Zhang et al., 2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS37	(Murphy et al., 2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	✓
PS38	(Makhdoom et al., 2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS39	(Szabla, 2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	
PS40	(Donkor et al., 2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.70%	✓	

Source: compiled by Author (2025)

Table 3 demonstrates that the majority of papers that are involved in the quality assessment scored highly, which is 37 out of 40, with an average percentage of 91.7%. In other words, it indicates that the above papers consistently satisfy the six quality evaluation criteria, specifically in the aspects of study purpose, methodology, and research relevance. Only a few papers (PS2, PS7, PS9, PS14, and PS18) received a score of 5.5 out of 6 due to minor gaps in certain areas, like comparison with other work or limitations. Overall, the studies demonstrate robust methodologies and significant contributions to their respective fields, highlighting their relevance and quality in addressing various leadership and organizational issues.

Discussion

The 40 articles included in the SLR were divided into three themes (Table 4), namely LFL in the perspective of engagement, performance and context. The former was the primary topic of LFL in the public sector in the context of engagement that addresses the subsequent impact of leadership style, especially laissez-faire, on employee engagement, commitment, satisfaction and participation. The second themes involve on how LFL impact the employee's performance where the focus is on outcomes (job performance, service delivery, innovation, effectiveness) in a public sector or related context under different leadership styles including LFL and lastly LFL in public sector within different context emphasizing structural, institutional, environmental or policy contexts (e.g., culture, system design, team dynamics) in which leaderships are imposed.

Table 4: Articles based on Theme

Theme	PS Numbers
Engagement	PS4, PS6, PS8, PS10, PS13, PS16, PS18, PS19, PS20, PS22, PS23, PS24, PS26, PS28, PS30, PS32, PS34, PS40
Performance	PS1, PS3, PS5, PS6, PS8, PS9, PS10, PS12, PS13, PS17, PS18, PS21, PS23, PS24, PS28, PS29, PS30, PS33, PS34, PS37, PS38, PS40
Context	PS1, PS2, PS3, PS5, PS7, PS9, PS11, PS12, PS14, PS15, PS17, PS18, PS21, PS23, PS25, PS27, PS31, PS32, PS33, PS34, PS35, PS36, PS37, PS38, PS39

Source: Generated by Author (2025)

Discussion

How Does LFL In Public Sector Organizations Influence Employee Engagement, And What Role Do Organizational Culture And Leadership Context Play In Shaping This Relationship?

The collected evidence from the eighteen studies paints a clear pattern: laissez-faire leadership in public-sector organizations is typically associated with decreased employee engagement, particularly in the absence of support, structure, or participative supervision. For instance, Thanh et al. (2022) and Hai & Quang (2022) found that staff engagement had dropped in the context of laissez-faire leadership as opposed to transformational or transactional leadership. Furthermore, disengagement was indicated by Plimmer et al. (2022), who attributed higher bullying and lower job satisfaction to laissez-faire leadership within New Zealand public agencies. Hinse & Mathieu (2023) reported higher job-stress-related presenteeism under laissez-faire among public-sector workers. Similarly, Velarde-Molina et al. (2024) and Bejarano Lizano et al. (2024) respectively concluded that laissez-faire leadership negatively correlates with the organizational climate and results in low organizational commitment within the municipal and university contexts.

Other studies highlight that laissez-faire leadership may only maintain engagement when moderated by strong organizational culture or supportive leadership contexts. Al Balushi & Jamaludin (2025) reported that in Oman, corporate culture moderated the impact of laissez-faire leadership on job outcomes. Passive leadership, as demonstrated by Bani-Melhem et al. (2025) exacerbated the negative influence of illegitimate tasks by raising the levels of meaningless work, which undermines innovative behavior and, therefore, engagement. Li et al. (2025) indicated that “collaborative autonomy under leadership support” yielded a high

work-related sense of gain. In other words, it indicates that mere autonomy, such as unstructured laissez-faire without support, does not ensure engagement. Further, Berger et al. (2023) established that laissez-faire leadership added role-conflict and overload in health-care settings, leading to poor engagement, whereas Barkhuizen & Masale (2022) found that weak leadership-talent mindset contributed to turnover and poor retention. Donkor et al. (2021) showed that in the presence of organizational commitment between leadership and job performance, laissez-faire leadership was not as effective in maintaining engagement. Generally, the finding indicates that laissez-faire leadership tends to weaken employee engagement in the public-sector organisations unless complemented with a supportive organizational culture, robust structural direction, and active leadership involvement.

What Is The Effect Of LFL On Employee Performance In The Public Sector, And How Does The Organizational Environment Influence This Relationship?

LFL in the public sector also presents some impacts on the performance of employees, in which both benefits and limitations may arise with its application. According to Ntontis et al. (2025) and Berger et al. (2023), despite the fact that LFL can facilitate autonomy, it can also lead to more stress, role conflict, and burnout, which have a negative influence on performance. Nonetheless, other scholars such as Donkor et al. (2021) and Bani-Melhem et al. (2025), observed that the adverse effect of LFL may be managed through the incorporation of strong organizational commitment and efficient systems. In addition, Al Balushi & Jamaludin (2025) also focus on the fact that its negative effects on performance can be reduced with the help of the cultural aspects, such as collectivism. Furthermore, Plimmer et al. (2022), Ly & Ly (2024), and Velarde-Molina et al. (2024) indicate that without a proper structure and organizational support, LFL will probably decrease employee involvement and performance. Thus, even though LFL may cause positive improvement in some situations, it generally has a negative effect on performance unless accompanied by a supportive organizational environment and proper leadership development structures.

What Contextual Factors (E.G., Organizational Structure, Political Environment, And Leadership Frameworks) Affect The Implementation And Outcomes Of LFL In Public Sector Organizations?

The reviewed studies highlight those contextual conditions in public-sector organisations as having a significant impact on how LFL plays out and its respective outcomes. An example would be a high-stakes environment, such as CPR teams, where Emami-Sigaroudi et al. (2025) found that strategic communication, coordinated rotation and participatory leadership are more effective than passive laissez-faire leadership. Meanwhile, (Kittithammavong et al., 2025) reported that poor leadership and inconsistency in policy erode performance in the context of environmental-management efforts. In Italy, Di Mascio et al. (2025) established that institutional design in isolation could not develop innovation without active leadership, and Krommendijk (2025) insisted that small states require persuasive leadership for successful coalition-building, in which passive leadership proved insufficient. In addition, cultural contexts and leadership frameworks also influence the results because older leaders are perceived to be inactive in hierarchical and high-power-distance settings, which hampers performance (Shakur et al., 2024). In times of crises like COVID-19 (Ly & Ly, 2024), LFL in Cambodia's public sectors were associated with higher levels of technostress that decreased organizational functioning. In Peru, Velarde-Molina et al. (2024) found that LFL had detrimental effects on organizational climate, which could negatively affect performance. In addition, Barkhuizen and Masale (2022) warned that the absence of a leadership-talent mindset

results in poor talent management and turnover, demonstrating that LFL without capacity often fails to sustain performance. Similarly, Murphy et al. (2021) observed that in the contexts of sharing public health data, the lack of leadership and management was more prevalent than the lack of technical issues, which supports the need to prioritize leadership frameworks over tools. Therefore, these findings imply that LFL are rarely effective in the environment of the public sector unless they are reinforced with strong institutional design, responsive leadership frameworks, cultural sensitivity, and contextual awareness. In the absence of such support, laissez-faire is likely to undermine performance, cohesion and organizational effectiveness.

Conclusion

The reviewed studies collectively show that LFL in public-sector contexts rarely leads to success on its own; instead, positive outcomes depend strongly on the surrounding context. As an example, effective communication, systematic group dynamics and participative leadership are essential to high-stakes group work. Passive leadership cannot be compensated for by administrative structures and institutional design alone. A passive leadership style is likely to escalate strain and decrease collaboration and performance in stressful or changing situations. On the other hand, even less-active leadership styles can be buffered when organizational culture, leadership potential, and a supportive environment are aligned. In short, LFL without supportive structures, cultural alignment and proactive involvement tends to negatively affect performance and cohesion, whereas effective leadership results will only be achieved at the cost of favorable environmental conditions.

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