HOW DO PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS IN THE ARAB SECTOR IN ISRAEL PERCEIVE THE ROLE OF THEIR MANAGERS AS LEADERS, COACHES, AND CLIMATE SETTERS IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THEIR ORGANIZATIONS?

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Abstract:

The study explores public sector workers in the Arab sector in Israel's perspectives on their managers as leaders, coaches and climate setters with the intent of understanding the leadership attributes they value, to what extent managers use coaching approaches effectively, and the extent to which their leadership has an impact on organizational climate and outcomes. A qualitative approach was taken, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 public sector workers from the Arab Sector in Israel, with data thematically analyzed. The findings highlighted participants´ preference for managers who were emotionally intelligent, supportive, and focused on development, while alternative practices such as authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership styles were discouraged. The participants identified the importance of culturally authentic leadership, finding a balance of empathy, authority and coaching to increase employee motivation, trust and organizational outcomes. Additionally, the findings promote the use of leadership development programs that focus on enhancing emotional intelligence and culturally aligned leadership practices, and highlight the value of climate setters and culturally spacious and relational leadership frameworks in managing the public sector. These aspects provide theoretical and empirical contributions to leadership practice in hybrid public sector settings.

JEL: M12; H83; M14

Keywords: public sector leadership, Arab sector in Israel, coaching leadership, organizational climate, emotional intelligence, employee perception, culturally responsive leadership

1. Introduction

This study examines public sector workers in the Arab sector in Israel and their perceptions of the leadership of their managers as leaders, coaches and climate setters.

The study had three main objectives: to identify the attributes of leadership valued by employees, to understand the efficacy of coaching, and to explore the ways leadership behavior shapes elements associated with organizational climate, motivation, and outcomes. Six research questions guided this study, exploring these three key areas of employability, with a particular emphasis on how culture influences the perceptions of leadership. Using a sample of 40 public sector employees, qualitative methodology relying on semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was used to elicit detailed responses from respondents within a specific sociocultural milieu. The findings indicate the preference for emotionally intelligent and developmental leadership styles, while discovering that there was poor perception of disengaged and strong authoritarian leadership styles as well. These findings may have practical implications for leadership development offerings and organizational planning, in addition to issues pertaining to the future of cultural and managerial alignment in the public sector.

The study identifies three important types of managers: leaders who inspire and guide, coaches who foster individual and professional development, and climate setters who create a workplace environment. Leadership is not just a matter of the ability to make decisions. It encompasses many aspects, such as emotional intelligence, communication, and building trust (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Sharma *et al.*, 2024). Coaching, as a leadership function, is process-oriented and focuses on relationships that empower and nurture individual growth and skills development through coaching, feedback, support, and individualized development (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2023; Romão *et al.*, 2022). Climate is defined in this study as the collective experience of the work environment, which can differ by situational aspect and type of experience, but is influenced by individual leadership style, including how it is involved in job satisfaction and employee performance (Al-Madadha *et al.*, 2019; Shanker *et al.*, 2017). This study is foundational because it also helps identify how culturally embedded practices in the Arab sector impact expectations and interpretations of leadership, which remains a poor and understudied topic in available literature.

In terms of methodology, a qualitative design was undertaken using a purposive sampling strategy and semi-structured interviews conducted in both Arabic and Hebrew, along with thematic analysis. The participants documented their stories about relational leadership grounded in a specific culture, and the findings demonstrated a strong correlation between positive leadership---characterized by elements of support, coaching, and successfully creating an inclusive climate---with motivation, trust, and organizational effectiveness. Meanwhile, laissez-faire or excessively authoritative styles are not only disempowering but damaging to morale and clarity. The study recommends leadership development programs focus on emotional intelligence, coaching capacity and cultural responsiveness; and furthermore, that public sector institutions establish leadership evaluation frameworks that include both structural accountability and relational effectiveness. Ultimately, the research has implications to remind readers in this context that the leadership in both authority and empathy, as well as structure and support, best meet both the well-being of employees and the purpose of organizations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Manager as a Leader

The role of a public sector manager as a leader has changed quite significantly, adopting a more inclusive and adaptable style of leadership within public sector organizations that attends to current organizational requirements and challenges (Musaigwa, 2023). Current public sector leaders are expected to go beyond command-and-control leadership that produces compliance, to leverage participatory leadership practices that promote collaboration and trust, and lead to empowered people at all organizational levels (Mau *et al.*, 2018). This paradigm shift is essential to mitigate the increasingly complex, overlapping challenges that require joint and concerted action. In general terms, successful public sector leaders will adopt practices that embrace emotional intelligence, the self-awareness required to enable the leader to manage and inspire people positively and in ways that promote them to feel a sense of belonging and psychological safety (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Specifically, these leaders will seek to unleash the potential of human beings, including especially those people they lead, by creating environments free of distrust and dismissal, where people feel a sense of value and part of a greater purpose larger than themselves and the organization. This way of conceptualizing leadership practice is not simply about performance, but it is also about leading change to enable organizations to stay focused on their public service objectives (Maamari & Saheb, 2018).

2.2 The Manager as a Coach

Shifting into the coaching aspect of management means the focus of the role has now shifted from leadership to being heavily people-oriented, emphasizing development and directly working with people (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2023). At this level, a manager must coach and unlock the potential of each team member on board while managing their individual and personal growth and development with the use of feedback, skill development, and goal setting (Mclean, *et al.*, 2005). Leader-coaches as managers have a focus on people and support, and they are crucial to the process of development and building important supportive working relationships with regard to people management (Romão *et al.*, 2022). Coaching leaders are paramount in the areas of trust in a key relationship where all managers will build and foster respect, where staff feel valued, where staff are motivated to perform to the best of their ability, and where the manager's leadership is not simply about being their supervisor, as they have invested in their long-term success while managing and guiding people development processes that also outstandingly benefits organizational success (Joo, *et al.*, 2012).

Coaching leadership is comprised of cognition, attitudes, leadership behavior, and leadership development; coaching leaders believe that employees are competent and capable of development (Cui *et al.*, 2022). Coaching leaders can influence their subordinates' work-related feelings and attitudes through encouragement, guidance, facilitation, and inspiration (Yuan *et al.*, 2019). Coaching leaders put their subordinates

into a self-sufficient and responsible work role (Wang *et al.*, 2022), and their leadership behavior is based on asking instead of giving ready-made solutions and answers; they are keen listeners and are comfortable in tapping into analytical skills. Coaching leaders are then able to make an assessment of their subordinates' needs and, in turn, help them to discover their strengths and take advantage of those strengths at work (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2023).

2.3 The Manager as a Climate Setters

The organizational climate created by management is crucial to the achievement of organizational goals. Research shows that when an organizational climate is positive, it may lead to organizational effectiveness by promoting knowledge sharing, increasing psychological empowerment (Al-Madadha *et al.*, 2019), and improving employee creativity (Arshad *et al.*, 2021). Shanker *et al.* (2017) showed a strong positive correlation between organizational climate and managerial performance, which supports prior evidence lessening organization climate and processes improve employee outcomes (Shanker *et al.*, 2017; Ehrhart & Kuenzi, 2017).

Leadership is one of the main influences on employee performance. Sharma *et al.* (2024) described leadership as the capacity of an individual to affect, influence, or motivate others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organization. Leadership is more than verbal communications, it also includes mobilizing resources and technology for decision making, innovation, and strengthening subordinates (Erbay *et al.*, 2024).

Significant issues arise on whether leadership style creates organizational climate or the other way around. If a leadership style is a cause, an effective leadership style can assist employees in creating and sustaining a positive climate associated with their organizational functioning (Sihite *et al.*, 2024). A poor leadership style will usually leave an organization with a difficult and sometimes deteriorating climate, characterized by dissatisfaction or engagement (Saeed *et al.*, 2023). However, if viewed as a cause, organizational climate may change or align leadership style. Leadership style may change because organizational climate may serve as a maladaptive response to the account of employee interest and organizational priorities (Kristianto *et al.*, 2018). They will be better able to achieve positive outcomes with the organizational priorities if the leader recognizes, with agreement, the balance with the employee interests shown by the climate. Leadership style and organizational climate take on a reciprocal nature: each affecting and reinforcing the other (Fayaz & Gulzar, 2025).

3. Material and Methods

This research used a qualitative, descriptive methodology to study the perceptions of public sector employees in the Arab sector in Israel, relating to their managers as leaders, coaches, and climate anchors. A qualitative approach was intentional because this method can provide a more nuanced understanding of complex social situations from

the perspective of those experiencing the situation (Hennink *et al.*, 2020). Hatch (2023) states the value of qualitative research when exploring the experiences of people within culturally embedded beliefs and values. In the case of this study, the aim was to understand some aspects of leadership in a specific sociocultural sector. Qualitative research was the most suited option for looking at subjective perceptions and vertical dynamics within organizations.

The main data collection tool used in this research was the semi-structured interview. This tool was beneficial because it allowed for a balance of focused inquiry and flexibility. Semi-structured interviews have been effective in organizational studies that sought to explore perceptions and workplace relationships and aimed to uncover what is obvious (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview guide contained open-ended questions specific to leadership characteristics, coaching behaviors, organizational climate, employee satisfaction, and culturally influenced perceptions of leadership. Interviews took place in participants' preferred languages (Hebrew or Arabic) to allow for greater comfort and potentially greater depth of response.

The study population included public sector employees in the governmental and municipal offices in the Arab sector in Israel with actual experience in managerial leadership roles in culturally specific public organizations. A total of 40 participants were selected based on purposive sampling, which is appropriate for qualitative research to include individuals with rich knowledge and experience related to the aims of the study (Palinkas *et al.* 2015). The participants were diverse in age, gender, professional roles, and public agencies will allow a broad perspective.

The data we collected were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analyses, used widely in the qualitative traditions, refer to a flexible approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes across qualitative data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, further detailed themes not only highlight the contrasting and recurring themes looked at in relation to leader practices and coaching, but also the organizational climate and how cultural contexts define the experience of the workplace in the Arab sector in Israel. Thematic analysis includes an iterative process that consists of the following six steps: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

4. Results

The findings from this study present a multifaceted view of leadership as experienced by public sector workers from the Arab sector in Israel, with culturally anchored expectations and interpersonal relations at the center. Thematic analysis yielded several core themes indicating that employees valued emotionally intelligent, supportive, coaching managers in distinction from those who were viewed as authoritarian or disengaged.

4.1 Theme 1: Valued Leadership Qualities Among Public Sector Workers in the Arab Sector in Israel

Arab public sector employees in Israel described several styles of leadership that contributed to their views of effectiveness as a manager. Some participants fondly described supportive and emotionally intelligent leaders who created a sense of belonging and respect. One employee said, *"My manager is a real listener. You feel like he sees your value, not just your job position."* This view aligns with the leadership model articulated by Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023); as viewed through the lens of awareness and emotional intelligence in supporting psychological safety and inclusion.

The employee experiences of authoritarian leadership were beneficial, but some participants described their leaders. One participant said, *"He gives orders and expects orders to be done, with no questions asked. It's difficult to work in this way, but at least something is getting done, and in time."* This view represents earlier models of command-and-control leadership; at the same time, less inclusive and relatable when compared to the positive experiences of members who had supportive leaders, authoritarian leadership may still be appropriate in contexts that prefer unidirectional decision-making dominance (Musaigwa, 2023). Conversely, strictly authoritarian leadership necessarily suggests a lack of relational warmth that prevents in-depth empathy and connects with followers (Mau *et al.*, 2018), whether currently dominant in a public sector context.

In contrast, others saw leadership styles that were categorized as laissez-faire leaders without holding anyone in the organization to have any measure of accountability or leadership direction. One employee informed us, *"Our manager barely even shows up or gets involved, and does not provide feedback, which leaves us guessing about the important work we are engaged in, which creates a context of unintended stress and confusion."* This known description of laissez-faire leadership reflects the components of avoiding and refraining from leading, cumulatively acting destructively through lack of awareness, as direction creates clear expectations in organizations. Laissez-faire leadership approach builds on or permits an origin of eroding clarity and moral specifically as employees in the public sector can be directed to complex occupations. Those employed in the public sector typically utilize elements of structure, so workers take on tough work in government when a structure is implemented (Fayaz & Gulzar, 2025).

4.2 Theme 2: Perceptions of Managerial Coaching Among Public Sector Workers in the Arab Sector in Israel

Employees in the Arab sector view coaching as a central part of leadership, not a supplementary task. One participant said, *"My manager doesn't just give orders—he gives advice on how I can grow. It's more like he's a mentor and not just a boss."* Another participant said, *"When she sits with us to set goals and check in, it makes me feel like my development is important."* These experiences support the claims of Mäkelä et al. (2023) that coaching leadership is closely related to individualized support, goal-setting, and interactions

focusing on development. Romão *et al.* (2022) affirmed that coaching relationships build trust and engagement, especially when managers care about their employees' future. In a public service context, this coaching style in leadership may build motivation and connection to their organization's purpose, especially within culturally collectivist values of the Arab sector in Israel.

4.3 Theme 3: The Impact of Leadership Practices on Organizational Climate as Perceived by Public Sector Workers in the Arab Sector in Israel

Many participants linked positive organizational climates to managers who were emotionally aware and empowered. One participant reflected, "*Before, the atmosphere was cold, and with pressure...our new manager has made it so that you feel safe to share ideas.*" Another said, "*You can see the difference—people collaborate more; the leadership makes you feel respected.*" Such comments are supported by Al-Madadha *et al.* (2019), who found differences in positive climates which had greater knowledge sharing and psychological empowerment. Arshad *et al.* (2021) identified that the relationship between leadership and creativity was through supportive climates. In this study, the participants regularly connected respected and inclusive leadership to positive morale, communication, and cooperation; this reinforces the finding from Shanker *et al.* (2017), where leadership directly influenced organizational climate and managerial effectiveness.

4.4 Theme 4: Leadership Style and Its Influence on Motivation and Job Satisfaction Among Arab Public Sector Employees in Israel

Participants frequently described how leadership styles shaped their daily motivation and satisfaction at work. One participant stated, "*My last manager was all about control and blame; I dreaded coming to work. Now, I have someone who supports us, and it makes a huge difference.*" Another shared, "*When a manager recognizes your efforts, even with words, you feel seen and motivated to give more.*" These observations reflect Sharma *et al.* (2024), who described effective leadership as the ability to inspire and energize staff through both influence and recognition. Erbay *et al.* (2024) further emphasized that beyond communication, effective leaders empower employees by facilitating decision-making and resource access. In this study, positive leadership practices were clearly tied to higher levels of job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, especially in the context of community-oriented values in the Arab public sector.

4.5 Theme 5: Perceived Effects of Leadership Behaviors on Organizational Outcomes Among Public Sector Workers in the Arab Sector in Israel

Interviewees conveyed the real effects of leadership behaviors on organizational outcomes. One employee remarked, "*When a manager puts in the time and invests in us, turnover is low. People stick around because we feel connected.*" Another stated, "*Our productivity went up since our manager started having regular feedback sessions and check-ins as a team.*" Together, these insights are consistent with those of Ehrhart and Kuenzi (2017), who identified the link between leadership and important outcomes of organizational

climate and engagement, including retention and performance. Similarly, Sihite *et al.* (2024) pointed to leadership style as the most relevant factor for building sustainable workplace satisfaction and function. The participants in this study indicated that positive leadership behaviors can lead to tangible improvements in retention, teamwork, and output in Arab public sector institutions.

4.6 Theme 6: Cultural Influences on Leadership Perceptions Among Public Sector Workers in the Arab Sector in Israel

Participants frequently framed their perceptions of leadership relative to cultural norms of respect, hierarchy, and community. One participant noted, *"In our culture, we expect respect for authority, but we also expect our leaders to care personally."* Another explained, "*A good manager here will be aware of family pressures, and will know how to balance empathy with professionalism."* These descriptions match Maamari and Saheb's (2018) findings related to effective leadership in Arab cultures, which combine a recognition of both relational sensitivity and structural authority. Fayaz and Gulzar (2025) also emphasized the reciprocal relationship of leadership style and organizational climate, particularly in culturally driven systems. The participants considered effective leadership not only through Western leadership models, but also through culturally-based expectations that valued collective success, personal relationships, and mutual respect.

5. Discussion

This study examined how public sector employees in the Arab sector in Israel understand the role of public sector managerial practices in shaping leadership, coaching, and organizational climate. The analysis reveals a rich interplay of expectations, behaviors, and cultural meanings around managerial effectiveness in this particular context. Employees' perceptions of leadership did not take a single model of leadership to assess; in fact, employees' perceptions were a layered evaluation process, incorporating the emotional engagement with the manager, the structure itself, and ultimately how the manager managed competing expectations from both a personal and work expectation perspective. These findings expand our understanding of public sector work and offer a culturally relevant frame for examining frameworks of leadership practice across varied organizational contexts.

One of the most interesting findings was the range of leadership styles borne by participants, who experienced two extremes, from having emotionally intelligent and supportive leaders, to having authoritarian leaders, and finally to having disengaged (laissez-faire) leaders. Participants described how emotionally intelligent leadership has been applauded by participants for creating a climate of trust and psychological safety, which is consistent with the values outlined by Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023). Authoritarian leadership, on the other hand, was noted by some as effective to simply ensure a task got completed; this also reflects what Musaigwa (2023) described as an expectation within some public sector institutions with a stubborn top-

down atmosphere to facilitate control and performance, whereas there exist some organizations that impose unwavering accountability on public sector managers. Laissez-faire leadership was universally critiqued by participants for inaction and lack of direction, reinforcing the concerns by Fayaz and Gulzar (2025) regarding the risks of weak managerial involvement when engaged in complex working environments such as the public sector.

Also notable was the value participants placed on the coaching aspect of leadership. Employees appreciated managers who were willing to invest in them, beyond overseeing them. This aligns with Mäkelä *et al.* (2023), who describe the coaching form of leadership as developmental, goal-oriented and intentional in providing personalized help. In the Arab public sector, the role of coaching is not seen as a management bonus, but rather as a duty, highlighting the importance of coaching practice and associated cultural factors of mentoring, mutual respect, and commitment over time. In terms of leadership, Romão *et al.* (2022) state that coaching leadership behavior is associated with higher levels of development, persistence and team-orientation, which was clearly demonstrated in participants' experiences to higher levels of long-term engagement and team purpose.

Another major theme was the role of management in improving organizational climate. Employees talked about how 'inclusive, respectful ' leadership improved morale, communications and teamwork behaviors; all of which is supported by Al-Madadha *et al.* (2019) and Arshad *et al.* (2021), who both noted that behaviors linked to leadership significantly influenced climate indicators, such as community of practice knowledge sharing and psychological empowerment. Participants noted that management leadership either supports climates of openness and collaboration or climates of fear and fragmentation. This exemplifies Shanker *et al.* (2017), who stated that organizational climate is not necessarily a static background condition but is an active output of leadership performance. In Arab public service organizations, the climate is especially susceptible to impact from interpersonal behaviors and trust-related actions by leaders.

The impact of leadership on motivation and job satisfaction was intertwined with the climate. The data indicated that employees' commitment and productivity increased when they felt valued, guided, or recognized. This was consistent with Sharma *et al.* (2024), who noted that effective leadership energizes employees and nurtures loyalty. Erbay *et al.* (2024) made the point that when it comes to empowering leadership communication only scratches the surface, but it also entails enabling participation and having resources available to these employees, both of which participants saw as motivations. Collectively, this suggests that leadership in this sector must balance knowledge and powers associated with intelligence and strategic authority, with genuine relational depth, especially in organizations that contribute to public accountability and social good.

Finally, cultural expectations must be acknowledged in order to fully understand the powerful influence culture exerts on shaping leadership expectations. Participants uniformly evaluated their managers through a lens characterized by Arab cultural social

values of respect and reverence for hierarchy, care for the individual, and, in both personal and professional contexts, amalgamating professional guidance with personal care and understanding. These cultural expectations were highly supported by Maamari and Saheb (2018), who argued that effective leadership in Arab contexts must be authoritative leadership as well as compassionate leadership. Also similar to our observations, Fayaz and Gulzar (2025) described the leadership-climate relationship as reciprocal, where cultural norms shape how leadership is received and interpreted. In this study specifically, leadership success did not solely look at effectiveness or performance, but also with respect to community values and relationships. Consequently, culture was not treated as a backdrop but as foreground with respect to leadership assessment.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study provide a detailed account of how Arab public sector employees in Israel, described as separate but complementary to their managerial counterparts, conceptualize these managers as leaders, coaches, and climate setters. The analysis is based on the premise that leadership is not approached monolithically, but rather through a range of expectations shaped by the culture that is actually informed socially cognizant. The results revealed a range of leadership styles, where empathically supportive and development-oriented managers were endorsed most positively, while authoritarian and, especially, laissez-faire styles were met with confusion or discontent. The data also revealed the importance of coaching and social sensitivity, including the role that the manager has in creating organizational climate that is functional or dysfunctional. The results highlight the importance of the growing literature on emotional intelligence (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023), trust-oriented coaching (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2023), and the essential role of the manager as the architect of developmentally empowering environments (Al-Madadha *et al.*, 2019; Arshad *et al.*, 2021) for public sector managers.

A key takeaway from this study is the significance of culturally responsive leadership. In the Arab public sector context, there is an expectation that leaders effectively weave together professional capability into a relationship in which personal care will touch the hearts of direct reports; this fits within the context-specific relational leadership approach that connects with Maamari and Saheb's (2018) work on leadership values of Arabs. In reviewing the study's findings, the study confirmed that positive leadership approaches improved organizational performance and outcomes in organizational retention, motivation, satisfaction, and productivity (Sharma *et al.*, 2024; Ehrhart & Kuenzi, 2017). However, it also revealed rigid or disengaged leadership styles persist, demonstrating that in institutional culture management systems and cultures are sometimes not aligned with models of best behaviors, and when they are misaligned, this might limit the potential for organizations to achieve goals in optimal conditions but especially when people are securely safe in their workplace - this might also have been a

contradiction to personal experiences. Finally, the leadership/local climate dynamic (Fayaz & Gulzar, 2025) was acknowledged, suggesting that development in management should happen as a holistic management of the process of organizational change.

While reduced, reconciling a reality is a set of unresolved questions for consideration. Particularly, were the systemic constraints placed upon public sector administration (such as the nature of bureaucracy, the presence of political interference, or the management of organized resources) the determining factor in their managerial behaviors, and how did these constrain different styles of coaching or support? Although the study draws together a large spread of diversity, an interesting future pathway for research could be to explore perceptions of managers and to examine their tensions in struggles. There is certainly an opportunity to build a body of research comparative across sectors, or ethnic groups, for example, showing how leaders adapt to deal with differences of multiculturalism. Overall, the study contributes further to developing a considerably wider body of research that pushes the thinking and practice that culturally-fitted, emotionally-intelligent, and coaching-oriented leadership can (sometimes) be enough to serve the realities in public service today. When leadership is practiced with cognition and compassion at the same time, it operates a new engine of change that will beam meaning and sustainability.

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Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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