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Impact of Academic Leaders in Enhancing Faculty Morale: A Comprehensive Analysis at the University of Hafr Al-Batin, Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

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Based on the importance of faculty morale and its impact on various variables such as performance index, job satisfaction, and the teaching and learning environment, this study aimed to investigate the influence of academic leadership in enhancing the morale of faculty members at the University of Hafr Al-Batin in Saudi Arabia from their own perspective. The study also aimed to identify the obstacles hindering morale improvement and determine the most effective ways to enhance it. Additionally, the study examined the impact of two variables, namely academic rank, and gender, on the sample's responses. The descriptive-analytical method was used, employing a questionnaire composed of 39 items distributed across three dimensions: the impact of academic leaders in enhancing morale, obstacles to enhancing morale, and ways to enhance morale. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 272 faculty members at the university. The study concluded that the influence of academic leaders in enhancing faculty members' morale was moderate, while the obstacles to enhancing morale were perceived as high. The sample also agreed on the ways to enhance morale with a high. The study did not reveal statistically significant differences in the areas of study based on the variables of academic rank and gender. Overall, this research contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on effective leadership practices in academia, suggesting avenues for further investigation and improvement in higher education institutions.

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The world today is witnessing remarkable development in all fields of science and knowledge, particularly in the field of administrative sciences in particular, and change and innovation in

the administrative work system has become necessary and urgent. It has gone in different directions and used multiple tools, one of which was developing the performance of leaders and individuals after business organizations realized that access Reaching the summit depends heavily on the quality of leadership and its management style, and any change for the better is largely based on the quality of leadership and its management style in organizations.

Previous research on leadership has shown that the leader's behavior and communication style with their subordinates are what lead to the development of future trust and impact the morale of their followers (Kasper-Fuehrer & Ashkanasy, 2001; Permadi & Agustina, 2022). Many employees attribute their low morale to the practices of the leaders who oversee them (Schuler, 2004; Slater, 2008). This also extends to the approach leaders take in dealing with negative situations such as downsizing or budget cuts, which directly affects the followers' trust in these leaders (Korsgaard et al., 2002; Tourish et al., 2004). Other studies have confirmed the positive impact of leadership on several variables, such as organizational effectiveness and increased employee creative behavior (Cengiz Ucar, 2021; Solomona Nebiyu, 2021).

Leadership has become a key measure of organizational success and is considered the most critical element in achieving organizational goals. It is the central hub in coordinating various essential components of the organization, including organizational, human, and social aspects of the management process. Given this importance, the development of leadership styles that align human potential with reality and prepare for the future becomes crucial. It serves as a central axis for the relationship between leaders and subordinates and has a direct and strong impact on productivity. It is the leader who motivates and inspires others with their ideas and values, urging them to implement policies to achieve desired goals, resolving conflicts among subordinates, and creating a conducive environment for work and accomplishment (Roncesvalles & Gaerlan, 2020).

The importance of this study lies in its detailed examination of how leadership styles, especially in the context of higher education, need to evolve to meet the challenges of the 21st century. While existing research has established the broad impact of leadership on organizational dynamics, this study delves into the specific interplay between leadership approaches and faculty morale within universities. It aims to fill a gap in the current literature by providing nuanced insights into the adaptation of leadership styles in an era marked by rapid globalization, technological advancement, and competitive pressures in the realm of higher education.

On the other hand, a faculty member is considered one of the most influential factors in the higher education system, and through their competence, the efficiency and quality of higher education are demonstrated. They are the center of activity and movement for all university operations, as well as the leaders in scientific research and connecting their university with the local community (Ibn Othman et al., 2018). Globalization, global competition, innovation, and technological advancement have dominated the importance of higher education in the 21st century, and the focus on faculty members has become a fundamental element in achieving sustainable competitive advantage for universities (Alwahaibi, 2020). Rawung (2013) argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between the leader and faculty members, as the leader derives strength from their morale, and the motivations of these followers are shaped through the leadership styles they follow. Given the importance of university faculty members, working on enhancing their morale has become one of the key pillars that help leaders achieve success

in educational institutions. In fact, morale is considered one of the most necessary topics for success in various fields, and a decrease in morale is a strong indicator of the intention to leave the position and the institution (Calkins et al., 2019).

The morale of a faculty member refers to the prevailing spirit or mood among a group of individuals who exhibit confidence in the university, readiness to achieve its goals, and loyalty to the community they work within. It also indicates the employees' sense of satisfaction with themselves and their work. A faculty member with high morale is highly motivated and enthusiastic about their work, demonstrating increased commitment to their position and the university. As a result, their productivity and performance tend to improve. Conversely, those with low morale show decreased interest in their work and diminished feelings of belonging to the job and the university. Altawdi et al. (2022) define morale as "a combination of psychological, rational, and emotional aspects that motivate individuals to work collaboratively with their community in order to achieve the group's goals, thereby meeting their needs and achieving a state of satisfaction" (p. 71). Washington and Watson (1976) describe morale as the state in which employees perceive their jobs and the extent to which they meet their needs and expectations. Peterson et al. (2008)

) also indicate that morale is a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance toward the goals and tasks of the group. Its presence reflects trust, optimism, enthusiasm, loyalty, and direction toward the common goal. Morale is both an individual and collective characteristic, but it primarily manifests at the individual level (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Zeitz, 1983).

Academic leaders in universities represent the most prominent element in boosting the morale of faculty members. This influence is linked to the extent to which these leaders are able to impact members through their skills, abilities, leadership traits, and management styles (Robbins & Judge, 2007; Schuler, 2004). These leaders are more effective when they work diligently to meet the needs and requirements of members and employees within the academic institution, achieve job satisfaction, and make work more enjoyable by providing a comfortable psychological climate that helps direct attention toward achieving goals (Avolio, 2011). They create suitable working conditions, avoid bias in dealing with them, and work on developing their self-confidence and ability to engage in creative work. This role may lead to the spread of satisfaction among all faculty members in the department, while there may be a faculty member in a discouraging and demoralizing work environment, who does not care about hindering or stopping work, which negatively affects the level of outcomes of these institutions (Alawda, 2018; Alzahrani, 2020; Lavoie, 2017).

In the same context, leadership behavior is recognized as one of the most important determining factors for the level of morale among individuals working in the institution (Naile & Selesho, 2014). Leadership based on authoritarianism, power hoarding, and treating individuals with a degree of arrogance and condescension, leads individuals to distance themselves from it, lower their morale, and consequently hinder the achievement of goals. On the other hand, a successful leader recognizes the importance of human behavior, understands human nature, works on forming a cooperative group that believes in effective teamwork, resolves conflicts among employees, makes them feel important, and involves them in decision-making. Overall, it can be said that the collective behavior style that is concerned with employees, considers human considerations, is characterized by social awareness, and supports human relationships with employees, is the beneficial approach in many activities and fields

(Ismail et al., 2023). Numerous studies have concluded that leadership has a positive impact on the morale of employees (Daminik, 2019; Fiona et al., 2015; Ngambi, 2011; Noor & Ampornstira, 2019).

Several studies have shown that the irregularity of spiritual morale often stems from the changes that occur in the leadership style of managers in those administrations. Leadership and administrative practices are factors that have an impact on the morale of employees. Fairness in treatment and work elevates the morale of employees and increases their sense of comfort in working with a sympathetic administrator. Conversely, autocratic and controlling leaders make employees feel as if they are forced to work, while laissez-faire or lenient leaders lead them toward an unfavorable climate devoid of any development or change (Hebert, 2019; Stewart et al., 2015). There is no doubt that higher education institutions are one of the most important institutions in society that are influenced by and influence the administrative system around them. Their success and efficiency in performing their functions and achieving their goals depend on the efficiency and capability of their academic leadership. Similarly, no contemporary human society can move forward autonomously in the absence of its university institutions, which are supposed to shape its future visions and enlighten its mind with knowledge. This requires that the institution's leadership be advanced, starting from the university president, through the vice presidents and deans of colleges, their deputies, and ending with department heads.

This research is significant as it addresses a notable gap in current literature regarding the influence of academic leadership on faculty morale, particularly in the local and Arab contexts. While previous studies have explored leadership in various organizational settings, the specific impact of academic leaders in these regions on faculty morale remains underexplored. This study provides valuable insights into this area, highlighting the need for leadership styles and practices that effectively enhance faculty morale, particularly considering the unique administrative and organizational challenges faced by academic institutions in these regions.

Study Objectives

A study by Abdulrahim and Ahmed (2020) revealed that some faculty members at the University of Hafr Al-Batin suffer from stress and burnout, which in turn negatively affects their morale. This can also have a negative impact on their teaching performance, contributing to a decline in the university's ranking among other universities. At the same time, Saudi university leaders are facing a new challenge in light of the new university system, which aims to transform universities into financially and administratively independent institutions, expand financial investments and vital projects within them, and enhance their work. This requires the development of leadership at all levels, capable of moving the university forward, based on the vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2030 to be at the forefront of the world in all aspects. The vision emphasizes the importance of higher education, which is witnessing rapid changes in contemporary societies, necessitating educational institutions to adopt more advanced administrative and educational policies. On the other hand, raising the morale of faculty members is crucial and represents one of the important pillars and fundamental supports that the university relies on to achieve its goals. This study aims to uncover the impact of academic leaders in enhancing faculty morale at the university, with the hope of strengthening this impact to achieve the university's goals and aspirations as stated in its vision and mission. Especially

since this university is one of the newest universities recently established in the Kingdom, it still needs many studies that help in developing the university environment and providing everything that contributes to establishing an effective and positive organizational climate for faculty members. Hence, the objectives of this study are to reveal the impact of academic leaders in enhancing faculty morale, identify the main obstacles that hinder the enhancement of this morale, and finally determine the means that support and develop this morale. The research questions can be defined as follows:

1. What is the impact of academic leaders in enhancing faculty morale at the University of Hafr Al-Batin from the perspective of faculty members themselves ?
2. What are the obstacles to enhancing faculty morale at the University of Hafr Al-Batin from the perspective of the members themselves ?
3. What are the ways to enhance faculty morale at the University of Hafr Al-Batin from the perspective of the members themselves?
4. Are there statistically significant differences in the sample's responses to the study's variables attributed to the variables of academic degree and gender?

The researcher believes that the results of the study will serve as guidelines for administrative work in the higher education sector at local, regional, and international levels. This is particularly relevant given the existing gap in current research regarding the importance of faculty members' morale and the impact of leadership styles on fostering it. Additionally, the results provide an analysis of the actual practices of academic leaders at the university, highlight the main obstacles to the low morale of faculty members, as well as identify ways to enhance this morale.

Literature Review

Many studies have focused on the variables of leadership and employee morale in various business organizations. These studies have varied, with some examining leadership and its realities and effects, others exploring employee morale and its factors, and others studying the correlational relationship between leadership styles and employee morale. The methodological approaches used in these studies have also been diverse, with some relying on surveys, for example (Kerlin & Dunlap, 1993; Ryan et al., 2012), while others have used in-depth interviews with employees (Magnuson et al., 2009). In order to uncover the morale of faculty members and the factors that influence it, and to discover ways to enhance it in the university, Hebert (2019) conducted a study that found that the morale of faculty members is influenced by various aspects of work life, including workload, supportive resources, and appreciation. However, the evidence also indicates that one of the strongest variables that affect morale is the perceptions of the abilities and actions of the department leader, and a list of suggestions has been developed for academic leaders to consider as they deal with morale. However, Hebert's (2019) study, while comprehensive in its scope, lacks a deeper exploration of the nuanced interactions between faculty members' personal attributes and the leadership styles they encounter. This gap suggests a need for more holistic research that considers both individual and organizational factors.

Mildred and James (2019) also revealed a strong positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee morale, while there was a moderate positive

relationship between transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and employee morale. This is consistent with the findings of Rawat (2015), which showed that transformational leaders have a strong impact on employee morale. Noor and Ampornstira (2019) conducted a study aimed at understanding the effects of leadership on employee morale in higher education. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from scholars with different backgrounds and experiences in Bangkok, Thailand. The study's results showed that employee morale is a mediating variable between leadership styles or practices and employee performance. If leadership behavior is satisfying to employees, morale will be high, leading to better performance. However, Noor and Ampornstira's (2019) study primarily focused on Bangkok, Thailand, and may not fully represent the global diversity in higher education contexts. This highlights the need for more geographically diverse studies to understand the universal applicability of these findings.

In a similar context, Hickman (2017) conducted a qualitative study aimed at identifying the leadership characteristics, traits, and other aspects that may stimulate or hinder morale among teachers and professional assistants from their perspective. The study involved willing principals, teachers, and professional assistants from a small school district in the southeastern United States, totaling 40 individuals. The results showed a significant relationship between leadership practices and teacher morale, and several leadership characteristics, traits, and other aspects were identified as influential on morale. Eboka (2016) conducted a study to determine the impact of leadership styles and gender on teacher morale. The study was conducted on a simple random sample consisting of 72 principals and 2506 teachers from three educational regions in Delta State, Nigeria. The study used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the Bordeaux questionnaire for teachers' opinions. The results of the study revealed that leadership styles and gender jointly influence teacher morale, with transformational leadership style and male principals having the greatest impact on teacher morale. Stewart et al. (2015) conducted a study aimed at discovering the impact of leadership styles of public school principals on work performance and employee morale. The study used an analytical approach and included a sample of school employees. The results of the study showed that work performance and employee morale are significantly influenced by the leadership style of government school principals, which is consistent with the findings of Ngambi (2011).

Researchers have also not overlooked the study of the impact of various leadership styles on numerous administrative variables, such as job satisfaction (Akdol & Sebnem, 2017; Yeh et al., 2022), job performance (Dahlan et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2020), and creativity and organizational innovation (Al Harbi et al., 2019), among other variables. It is noteworthy that the majority of these studies have demonstrated a clear influence of the nature and style of leadership on these variables.

The review of previous studies has demonstrated the importance of the spiritual morale of employees in organizations, in its various forms, and that the practices and methods of leaders have a positive or negative impact on the morale of employees. It has also shown that this morale is influenced by several variables and their reciprocal effects. The most prominent of these variables is the impact of the leadership style adopted in the organization. This necessitates researchers and interested parties to uncover its reality, work on its development, and search for ways to help create an enhanced reality for this morale in all sectors, especially in higher education institutions. It is noticeable that there is a clear shortage of this type of study

in the Saudi and Arab environments in general. It is also noticeable that the majority of these studies have used the correlational approach to uncover the relationship between leadership or one of its styles and morale. This supports the need for this study, which can provide new and interesting insights into the Saudi and Arab education environment, and uses a descriptive approach to reveal the impact of leaders on the morale of faculty members, which has not been used in previous studies according to the researcher's knowledge.

It is crucial to incorporate the latest research findings in the present domain to ensure the paper's relevance and comprehensiveness. The current study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the Saudi and Arab educational contexts, which have been notably underrepresented in existing literature. The study also endeavors to ascertain whether gender plays a role in influencing how leadership affects morale, particularly in a context where females receive distinctive treatment, a characteristic of the Saudi and broader Arab cultural environments. This aspect has not been prominently featured in previous studies. By employing a descriptive approach, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how leadership influences faculty morale in these specific cultural and educational settings.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive-analytical methodology, chosen for its appropriateness to the study's problem, its objectives, and in addressing its research questions. The focus was on exploring the impact of academic leadership on the morale of faculty members at the University, as perceived by the members themselves. The study identified a set of statements explaining the practices and behaviors of leaders, according to previous studies, play a major role in boosting employee morale (e.g., Hebert, 2019; Ngambi, 2011; Stewart et al., 2015). Unlike common correlational research in this field, this study is descriptive, aiming to delve directly into the practices and behaviors emanating from leaders. It was also conducted in one of the recently established Saudi government universities, under Royal Decree No. (20937) dated April 3, 2014.

The study population consisted of all faculty members at the university, totaling (827) faculty members (General Manager of Human Resources Administration, personal communication, May 16, 2023). The comprehensive census method was used for the population, and the questionnaire was distributed electronically to all members. The final number of valid questionnaires for analysis was (272), representing a percentage of (32.9%) of the original population. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample according to the study variables.

Table 1

Distribution of Sample Individuals According to the Studied Variables

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Males	119	44
	Females	153	56
	Total	272	100
Academic rank	Professor	7	2.6
	Associate Professor	20	7.4
	Assistant Professor	110	40.4
	Lecture	92	33.8
	Teaching Assistant	43	15.8
	Total	272	100

Instrument

The researcher designed a questionnaire with the aim of investigating the impact of academic leaders on enhancing the morale of faculty members at the University of Hafr Al-Batin in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was designed based on the theoretical aspect and a number of previous studies that have been mentioned before, for instance, but not limited to (Daminik, 2019; Eboka, 2016; Fiona et al., 2015; Hebert, 2019; Ngambi, 2011; Noor & Ampornstira, 2019), and consisted of 39 statements distributed across 3 dimensions, namely:

The first axis: The impact of academic leaders in enhancing morale, consists of 18 statements, distributed in three dimensions: personal impact (7 statements), institutional impact (6 statements), and human impact (5 statements).

The second axis: Obstacles to enhancing morale, consists of (14 statements), distributed across two dimensions: Administrative obstacles (8 statements) and Human and moral obstacles (6 statements).

The third axis: ways to enhance morale, consisting of (7 statements).

The Likert pentagon scale was adopted to score the results using the following correction key: (strongly agree - agree - moderately agree - disagree - strongly disagree), and the scores were assigned (5-4-3-2-1) respectively.

The length of the class was calculated by dividing the range (the largest value in the correction key minus the smallest value in the correction key) by the number of classes $(5-1) \div 5 = .8$. After adding the length of the class to the smallest value in the correction key, five levels were determined for dealing with grade averages, as follows:

- Very low: from 1.00 - 1.80.
- Low: from 1.81 - 2.60.
- Medium: From 2.61 to 3.40. High: From 3.41 to 4.20.
- Very high: from 4.21-5.00.

The content of the questionnaire was verified by presenting it to a group of reviewers, consisting of 8 leadership experts and faculty members from the University of Hafr Al-Batin and outside. This was done to ensure that the statements belong to the axis, are relevant to the objective, have appropriate wording, and include any additional items related to the study's objective that were not mentioned. Several modifications were made, including the following:

- Some statements were rephrased based on the reviewers' suggestions, which the researcher agreed with.
- Two new statements were added based on the recommendations of two reviewers, which are related to leadership practices that affect morale.
- All statements included in the initial version of the questionnaire were retained after 80% of the reviewers agreed on their importance.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was ensured by using the Pearson correlation coefficient. This was done after distributing the questionnaire to a sample drawn from the original population, which did not include the final sample for the study. The sample consisted of 20 responses, and the Pearson correlation coefficient values for each statement with its axis ranged from .57 to .97. These values are statistically significant at a significance level of .01. The Pearson correlation coefficient values for each axis with the entire questionnaire were .88, .83, and .88, respectively. This indicates the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The

questionnaire's stability was also verified by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded values of .97 for the entire tool and .98, .96, and .96 for each axis, respectively. These values indicate the high stability of the tool.

Results

Answering the first question: What is the impact of academic Leaders in enhancing faculty morale at the University of Hafr Al-Batin from the perspective of faculty members themselves?

The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the sample's responses to the statements of the first axis of the questionnaire were calculated, and the degree of agreement on each statement was determined. Table 2 shows the details of the results.

Table 2

Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Sample's Responses to the First Axis

the impact of academic leaders in enhancing faculty morale		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	The impact	St. rank
1	It affords me opportunities for excellence and creativity	3.20	.76	Moderate	4
2	It motivates me to overcome work difficulties	3.22	.71	Moderate	3
3	It supports me in the development of my skills.	3.13	.71	Moderate	7
4	I feel satisfied with my work at the university.	3.18	.87	Moderate	5
5	It provides me with the necessary resources to accomplish the task.	3.17	.88	Moderate	6
6	Opportunities for advancement grant me the chance to progress.	3.23	.88	Moderate	2
7	It instills in me a sense of personal competence in managing work.	3.26	.77	Moderate	1
Arithmetic mean of personal impact		3.20	.80	Moderate	
8	Uses specific and fair criteria to evaluate my performance:	3.17	.82	Moderate	3
9	Adopts a just system of incentives and rewards	3.21	.88	Moderate	1
10	Participates in making relevant decisions	3.20	.88	Moderate	2
11	It motivates me to work with the team.	3.11	.94	Moderate	6
12	Supports me in conducting scientific research.	3.17	.87	Moderate	4
13	Provide me with all the new information related to the task.	3.16	.77	Moderate	5
Arithmetic mean of institutional impact		3.17	.86	Moderate	
14	Significantly enhances my confidence in him	3.23	.77	Moderate	2
15	Treats me with appreciation and respect	3.25	.82	Moderate	1
16	Listens to me and cares about my problems	3.19	.90	Moderate	3
17	Values the effort I put in	3.18	.89	Moderate	5
18	Allows me the opportunity to express my opinion	3.19	.91	Moderate	4
Arithmetic mean of human impact		3.21	.86		
Average score for axis		3.19	.47		

Table 2 indicates that the overall arithmetic mean for the first dimension (the impact of academic leaders on enhancing morale) is 3.19, indicating a moderate level of influence, with a standard deviation of .47, suggesting modest variation in the sample's responses around the mean. This result indicates that the impact of academic leaders on enhancing teachers' morale is not high, indicating the need for adopting new leadership methods to enhance this situation. Table 2 also reveals that the average scores for the three dimensions (personal, institutional, and human) are moderate, with a standard deviation reflecting limited variation in the sample's responses. Faculty members evaluate the practices and behaviors of leaders that affect their morale at a moderate level. This result also suggests that the members' morale is not at the ideal level, as derived from their responses regarding their assessments of the leaders' practices associated with these morale aspects. The average scores for all statements in the three dimensions range from 3.11 to 3.26, which are very close averages, showing minimal differences in evaluating these practices. The highest-scoring statements in each dimension focus on leaders' efforts to build trust and drive toward achievement, although they did not exceed the moderate level. For example, statement 7 in the first dimension, "It instills in me a

sense of personal competence in managing work," obtained the highest average of 3.26, and statement 15 in the third dimension, "Treats me with appreciation and respect," obtained the second-highest average.

Answering the second question: What are the obstacles to enhancing the morale of faculty members at Hafar Al-Batin University from the perspective of the members themselves?

The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the sample's responses to the statements of the second dimension of the questionnaire were calculated, and the degree of agreement on each statement was determined. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3

Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Sample's Responses to the Second Axis

	obstacles to enhancing the morale of faculty members	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	The impact	St. rank
1	Weakness of the material incentives provided to faculty members	3.72	.77	high	1
2	Academic leadership neglects social relations and communication with faculty members	3.65	.74	high	2
3	The presence of systems and regulations that hinder the creativity process of the faculty member	3.64	.76	high	4
4	Limited opportunities for faculty members to participate in conferences and seminars	3.58	.77	high	5
5	Assigning faculty members with heavy teaching loads hinders their creativity	3.64	.76	high	3
6	Absence of incentives for excellence among faculty members in academic and research work.	3.54	.73	high	6
7	Neutralizing outstanding academic competencies from important leadership positions	3.51	.77	high	8
8	Lack of transparency and clarity regarding the events and new decisions taking place within the university	3.54	.82	high	7
	Arithmetic mean of Administrative obstacles.	3.60	.77	high	
9	Lack of attention to the problems and needs of faculty members.	3.64	.79	high	2
10	Weakness in highlighting the role of faculty members in enhancing the university's level	3.51	.76	high	5
11	Lack of academic leadership confidence in faculty members' competence and performance	3.68	.85	high	1
12	Absence of an organizational culture that facilitates the creation of a competitive advantage for faculty members	3.60	.77	high	3
13	Weak communication between faculty members and university leaders	3.56	.79	high	4
14	Marginalization of academic competencies and lack of involvement in decision-making	3.50	.80	high	6
	Arithmetic mean of Human and moral obstacles.	3.58	.79		
	Average score for axis	3.59	.36		

Table 3 indicates that the arithmetic mean for the second axis (obstacles to enhancing the morale of faculty members) reached 3.59, indicating the presence of obstacles to a high degree, with a standard deviation of .36, which is a low value indicating low variation in the sample respondents' ratings from the arithmetic mean. This result indicates that there are obstacles that hinder the impact of academic leaders in enhancing the morale of faculty members at the university, including administrative, human, and moral obstacles. This result is consistent with the result obtained in the first axis, which showed a moderate influence of leaders in enhancing morale, as these obstacles affected the leaders' ability to have a positive impact on morale. The averages for this axis ranged between (3.72-3.50), which is a short period between the two means and does not represent a significant difference. Statement 1 in the administrative obstacles had the highest average (3.72) and stated "Weakness of the material incentives provided to faculty members" considering that it is the responsibility of leaders to ensure the

provision of material incentives to members. On the other hand, statement 14 in the human and moral obstacles had the lowest average (3.50) and stated "marginalization of academic competencies and lack of involvement in decision-making". These results are consistent with several studies, such as the study by Hebert (2019), which showed that the morale of faculty members is influenced by various aspects of work life, including workload, supportive resources, appreciation, and relationships with colleagues, and the actions of department heads. They are also consistent with the majority of studies that attributed the decrease in morale of employees to the practices of their leaders (Schuler, 2004; Slater, 2008).

Answering the third question: What are the ways to enhance faculty morale at the University of Hafr Al-Batin from the perspective of the members themselves?

The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the sample members' answers to the statements of the third axis of the questionnaire were extracted, and the degree of agreement with each statement was determined, Table 4 shows the results of that.

Table 4

Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Sample's Responses on the Third Axis

	obstacles to enhancing the morale of faculty members	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Degree of agree.	St. rank
1	Implementing a clear system for incentives and rewards	4.01	.66	high	1
2	Establishing a practical and equitable system for complaints and suggestions.	3.58	.90	high	2
3	Providing psychological, career, and social counseling services to faculty members.	3.68	.75	high	4
4	Providing a clear work policy by precisely and clearly defining responsibilities	3.57	.87	high	5
5	Developing executive regulations for the higher education system and its regulations that enhance the participation of faculty members and support their needs.	3.69	.81	high	3
6	Providing opportunities for competent individuals to participate in university leadership.	3.68	.85	high	6
7	Highlighting the distinguished roles of faculty members in the academic and research field.	3.74	.73	high	8
	Arithmetic mean score for axis	3.70	.49	high	

Table 4 indicates that the arithmetic mean of the third axis (ways to enhance morale) reached (3.70), indicating that the sample sees the importance of these methods in enhancing morale to a high degree, with a standard deviation of (.49), which is a low value indicating low variation in the responses of the sample individuals from the arithmetic mean. Table 4 shows that all statements of this axis came within a high degree, meaning that faculty members at the university emphasized that there is a set of factors that help enhance the impact of academic leaders in boosting the morale of faculty members. Among the most prominent of these methods is for the university to implement a fair and practical system for complaints and suggestions, and provide psychological, professional, and social counseling services. It is also necessary to have a clear work policy that defines responsibilities and duties. Faculty members also emphasized the need to build executive rules for the higher education system and develop them to support their contributions and highlight its distinguished role in the academic and research field. This result is consistent with the low impact mentioned in the first axis, as well as consistent with the high presence of obstacles to enhancing morale mentioned in the second axis.

Answering the fourth question: Are there statistically significant differences in the impact of academic leadership in enhancing the morale of faculty members at the University of Hafr Al-Batin attributed to the variables (academic rank and gender)?

First, The variable of academic rank: The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the sample individuals' responses to the questionnaire axes were calculated, and the statistical test (One-way Anova) was used according to the variable of academic rank. Table 5 illustrates the results.

Table 5

Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations, and Results of the Anova Test on the Questionnaire Axes According to the Variable of Academic Rank

Axis	Academic Rank	<i>f</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Source of Variation	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
The impact of academic leaders in enhancing morale	Professor	7	2.83	.36	Between Groups	2.0	4	.50	2.26	.06
	Associate Professor	20	3.11	.43	Within groups	58.87	267	.22		
	Assistant Professor	110	3.22	.53	Total	60.88	271			
	Lecture	92	3.13	.45						
	Teaching assistant	43	3.30	.34						
Obstacles to enhancing morale	Professor	7	3.57	.31	Between Groups	0.26	4	.06	.50	.73
	Associate Professor	20	3.53	.37	Within groups	35.60	267	.13		
	Assistant Professor	110	3.62	.35	Total	35.87	271			
	Lecture	92	3.56	.37						
	Teaching assistant	43	3.61	.35						
Ways to enhance morale	Professor	7	3.55	.35	Between Groups	0.50	4	.12	.51	.72
	Associate Professor	20	3.76	.47	Within groups	65.94	267	.24		
	Assistant Professor	110	3.74	.51	Total	66.45	271			
	Lecture	92	3.67	.49						
	Teaching assistant	43	3.67	.47						

Table 5 indicates that the values of the statistical significance (*p*) for the ANOVA test are greater than .05 for all questionnaire dimensions. This suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the sample respondents regarding the impact of academic leaders on enhancing the morale of faculty members based on their academic degrees. In simpler terms, the variable of academic degree does not significantly affect the respondents' answers to the questionnaire. This lack of significant difference may be attributed to the fact that faculty members, regardless of their academic degrees, perform their roles in a similar and consistent environment, and they have the same perception and understanding of leadership impacts around them. This result is also supported by the low standard deviation of the sample responses in all questionnaire items and dimensions.

Secondly, the variable of gender: The mean scores and standard deviations of the sample respondents' responses to the questionnaire dimensions were calculated, and the Independent Samples Test was used according to the gender variable. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6*Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, Independent Samples Test According to Gender*

Axis	n	M	SD	df	t	p
The impact of academic leaders in enhancing morale	119	3.17	.45	270	0.70	.07
	153	3.21	.49			
Obstacles to enhancing morale	119	3.55	.33	270	1.73	.05
	153	3.63	.37			
Ways to enhance morale	119	3.69	.51	270	0.54	.36
	153	3.73	.47			

It is evident from [Table 6](#) that the values of the statistical significance Sig for the t-test are greater than (.05) in all domains, indicating the absence of statistically significant differences attributed to gender between the mean scores of the sample respondents regarding the impact of academic leadership in enhancing members' morale. This means that there is no significant effect of the gender variable on the sample's responses to the questionnaire. This similarity may be attributed to everyone's participation in dealing with systems and regulations that do not differentiate between males and females, whether in teaching, research, or administrative tasks. Additionally, they interact with the same leadership, leading to this agreement in their perceptions of her impact. These findings differ from a study conducted by Eboka (2016), which showed that the leadership styles of managers and their gender jointly influence teachers' morale.

Discussion

This study originated from a gap in current research regarding the impact of academic leaders on the morale of faculty members, especially at the local and broader Arab levels. Its results demonstrated a moderate influence of academic leaders in enhancing the general morale of faculty members. This finding aligns with the positive and significant relationship between leadership practices and employee morale established in previous studies, such as Heber (2019), Mildred and James (2019), Rawat (2015), and Noor and Ampornstira (2019). The current result, revealing a moderate level of leadership impact on faculty morale, supports the scientific outcomes of previous studies that affirmed the effect of leadership practices on morale. The reduced impact identified in this study can be attributed to several factors that the researcher believes have negatively influenced leadership practices. This rationale is supported by the high agreement of the sample with the material, human, and moral obstacles presented in the second axis of the study.

The highest average was obtained for the human impact, while the institutional impact showed the lowest average, suggesting that this decrease may be attributed to administrative and organizational reasons that are not directly related to the skills and efficiency of these leaders. This reality revealed by the study can also be attributed to the general situation of the University of Hafr Al-Batin, which has been affected by a number of conditions that have negatively impacted its performance and management. One of the most influential factors is the frequent turnover of the university presidency. Within the nine years since its establishment, the university has had five presidents, none of whom completed more than three years in their position. This, in turn, has affected the administrative and organizational stability of the university. Additionally, the university's recent establishment in 2014, the incomplete academic staff, and the lack of experience have contributed to the decline in the impact of leaders on the

morale of faculty members. These results open the door for the Ministry of Education, as the responsible authority for universities in the Kingdom, to review the regulations and laws governing the work of universities and grant more administrative and financial freedom to the universities in a way that allows leaders to activate their leadership impacts and achieve the university's goals in general.

The study's findings regarding the obstacles to enhancing morale highlighted the significant presence of these impediments. The statement related to the weakness of material incentives received the highest average in the dimension of material obstacles, aligning with the reality of the Saudi faculty pay scale, which is among the lowest across the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. In terms of moral obstacles, the statement indicating a lack of confidence by the academic leadership in the faculty's competence and performance scored the highest average. This result is a natural consequence of the instability in appointing top university leadership, with frequent replacements that resonate through other academic and administrative positions. Each new leader tends to change most of the existing staff.

The study results also indicate that Saudi higher education institutions need more independence to enable leaders to adopt practices and methods that support and enhance the morale and performance of employees. Several studies have pointed out the low independence of Saudi universities (Almanea, 2020; Alqahtani, 2019; Altuwijri, 2020), which will result in administrative problems, the most important of which is the decrease in the leaders' impact on the members' morale. There are positive reflections on this reality through the Vision 2030 of the Kingdom, as well as the new university system being developed by the Ministry of Education, which grants these institutions more academic and administrative freedom.

The study results also contribute to the third axis of enhancing morale, which received high approval, drawing attention to the importance of the proposals mentioned in it. It also indicates that the decrease in the leaders' impact on enhancing morale may be attributed to organizational and institutional factors that restrict the work of these leaders. Therefore, all the proposals mentioned in the axis of enhancement came with a high degree of importance, the most important of which is the application of a clear system of incentives and rewards, the establishment of executive rules for the higher education system and its regulations that enhance the participation of faculty members and support their needs, and the provision of a clear work policy by accurately and clearly defining responsibilities.

The study's findings have demonstrated that Saudi higher education institutions face a series of challenges, seemingly stemming from various factors and causes. A key factor is the decision to rapidly expand the establishment of universities within a short timeframe. The number of universities rose to more than 42, a significant increase from just eight universities before the year 2000. This led to a shortage of qualified academic staff and a deficiency in the necessary infrastructure for these institutions. This situation, in turn, impacted the practices of leaders within these institutions. Their approaches did not meet the aspirations for boosting the morale of faculty members, a matter of great importance. Such deficiencies have significant repercussions on the performance, productivity, and continuity of faculty members.

Conclusion

The implications of this research are profound and far-reaching, especially in the context of Vision 2030 and the evolving Saudi university system. It's crucial that academic leaders internalize the study's findings to enhance faculty morale, a key driver for overall institutional performance. This includes the development of a fair and encouraging system for material incentives, addressing a current lack of a clear incentive system, and the growing need for resources to facilitate life matters. Moreover, there's a pressing need to disseminate a culture of teamwork, participation, and empowerment, and to tangibly implement these principles, as the study indicates a decline in their practice. Additionally, establishing clear, flexible work systems and regulations that facilitate achievement and participation is essential. This study not only contributes valuable insights into effective leadership practices in academia but also opens up new research avenues, such as exploring the impact of faculty attitudes on student success and their interrelated dynamics. Furthermore, conducting similar studies in more mature academic environments would offer comparative insights and a clearer understanding of different academic contexts. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education take these findings into account, using them to create an environment where academic leaders can significantly impact faculty morale, thereby contributing to the enhancement of higher education institutions.

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