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An Analysis of Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Climate on the Supportive Leadership–Employee Wellbeing Linkage in the Lebanese Academic Sector

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Abstract: Leaders are determinants of employee behavioral and work outcomes across industries. Notably, in the higher education sector where staff are required to perform various tasks while delivering knowledge to the younger generation, thus shaping the future of society. The current research employs social exchange and social identity theories to investigate the direct effect of supportive leadership on the wellbeing of employees. The indirect effects of organizational climate as a mediator, and perceived organizational support as a moderator are examined to better understand the underlying predictors of wellbeing in academia. Surveys were collected using a purposive and convenience sampling method and analyzed using partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with Smart-PLS software, Version 3. The results show that the wellbeing of academic staff is not only influenced by the role and behavior of leaders but also the dynamics that surround it, namely, organizational climate aligned with the leadership efforts, and perceived organizational support among the staff that provides security, sense of belonging, and identity, leading to improved wellbeing. Organizational support when perceived by staff members can significantly boost the effectiveness of leadership efforts towards enhancing employees' wellbeing.

Keywords: supportive leadership; organizational climate; perceived organizational support; employee wellbeing; academia

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1. Introduction

The environment of organizations in today's dynamics requires a leadership approach that yields positive psychological outcomes among staff members. For the case of the academic sector, it is important to note the high expectations of the staff to perform well regarding their educational and administrative roles and responsibilities. Leaders can shape the atmosphere of the workplace in a positive light, where the experiences of members are enhanced. Supportive leadership as a modern approach in the literature is focused on the current study due to its relevance in the academic sector. This style of leadership can be described as a leader who exhibits attentiveness to their staff and their needs (Farid et al., 2021). These leaders also provide emotional and instrumental support as well as engaging in appreciative behaviors, which can have a major impact on the wellbeing of employees in the organizational setting (Kelloway et al., 2013; Rajashekar & Jain, 2024) and their innovativeness and engagement at work (Jia et al., 2022; Stein et al., 2021).

Supportive leadership in higher education settings can act as a pivotal determinant of psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing (Hannah et al., 2020), which can manifest as higher productivity, engagement, and effectiveness in using human capital sustainably (Asghar et al., 2022; Sarmah et al., 2022). As the current study examines the relationship between supportive leadership and employees' wellbeing in the academic sector, it is important to note that most studies focus on healthcare and corporate environments. This implies that there is a gap in the academic setting especially in the Middle East as it is underexplored, underdeveloped, and needs empirical evidence such as the case of Lebanon (Chami-Malaeb et al., 2024; Malaeb et al., 2023). Thus, a major driver for the conduct of this study is the scarcity of available studies examining such contexts in the extant literature of leadership and employee wellbeing.

The wellbeing of employees under certain leadership approaches is a complex subject as there are numerous conditions that influence this (e.g., organizational climate). In this respect, the organizational climate can be described as practices, procedures and expectations of behavior within the organization that is perceived by its members (Khan et al., 2021; Viitala et al., 2015). This climate can impact on the relationship between leaders and the employees and the dynamics that can define the employee outcomes (e.g., wellbeing). Additionally, perceived organizational support (POS) explains the belief and perception of employees regarding the degree to which the organization values their work and contributions while caring for their wellbeing, which can be an enhancer for the leader–wellbeing relationship (Ilyas et al., 2023; Pattali et al., 2024). The current research argues that the combined premises of social exchange theory (SET) and social identity theory (SIT) can elaborate on the perception of employees towards supportive treatment from the leader and the organization itself. Through this lens, the employees are more likely to engage in reciprocative behavior with a positive attitude developed towards the firm, leading to a higher level of wellbeing (social, psychological, and emotional) (R. Ahmad et al., 2023). SIT also posits that fostering a strong sense of identity with the firm, which is linked to leadership and perception of support can have a significant contribution to the psychological and wellbeing of the staff members (Greco et al., 2022), particularly in the case of academia due to the previously noted high expectations from the academic staff (e.g., educational and administrative roles) (S. F. Ahmad et al., 2022).

In accordance with what was noted, the current study aims to examine the role of supportive leaders in academia for promotion of employee wellbeing in the Lebanese context. In doing so, the current research (a) assesses the direct impact of supportive leadership on employees' wellbeing (psychological, emotional, and social); (b) analyzes the mediating role of organizational climate on the said relationship; and (c) examines the moderating (enhancer) role of perceived organizational support in this context. These aims highlight the contextual setting of the research, which follows a set theoretical premise that specifically assess the wellbeing of employees in the academic sector of Lebanon (i.e., universities). Thus, the contributions of this study are made to the literature of organizational behavior and leadership with a particular context of the education sector in the Middle East. This addresses the noted gaps and calls in the literature for obtaining empirical evidence in this region due to the underexplored and scarcity of studies (Al Hadrawi et al., 2023; Arar, 2020; Bray & Hajar, 2023; Jia et al., 2022).

In addition to the previously noted gaps, when the region has economic, social, and other challenges, the academic sector becomes more important as it requires adaptivity and emotionally intelligent leaders who can facilitate motivation, support, and professional and personal wellbeing (S. F. Ahmad et al., 2022; Jia et al., 2022). Through establishing an adequate organizational climate, and leveraging perceptions of organizational support, supportive leadership can enhance the workplace in terms of effectiveness, productivity,

and wellbeing (social, emotional, and psychological) (Khan et al., 2021; Pattali et al., 2024). Moreover, the current research deploys a modern analytical technique (i.e., PLS-SEM), which utilizes empirical evidence with robust accuracy and reliability to validate the hypotheses and theoretical framework of the research. For the specific context of Lebanese universities, the political, financial, and structural limitations should be considered as a major factor that affects the psychosocial dynamics of employees and their wellbeing. Thus, the current research contributes to a practical domain of the education sector which reveals how embedding supportive leadership can guide the workplace towards a climate that provides employees with necessary tools to have a high level of wellbeing (e.g., emotional support, instrumental support, and appreciative behavior) (Sarmah et al., 2022). This study argues that through establishing such a workplace climate, supportive leaders can yield emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing for their academic staff, which in turn can manifest in a higher performance for the department/faculty. This gains a higher importance in the Lebanese context as per the previously noted limitations and challenges.

The psychological wellbeing aspect can be gained through supportive leadership behaviors under the premises of social exchange theory (SET) (R. Ahmad et al., 2023), which suggests the perception of support from the leader can trigger positive responses from the employees. Similarly, both emotional and social wellbeing dimensions can be improved through a supportive leader who provides a collective identity and belonging (Al Hadrawi et al., 2023; Greco et al., 2022). This combination enables the current study to contextualize both leader–employee relationship and the institutional setting that can drive the organization towards a more sustained performance despite the resource restrictions (i.e., climate and support). As majority of studies emphasize on Western or East Asian countries, the gap in the dynamics of leadership and wellbeing outcomes, particularly in the education sector of the Middle East is a crucial driver for the conduct of this study (Arar et al., 2022; Abdelwahed & Doghan, 2023; Bray & Hajar, 2023).

2. Hypotheses and Theories

2.1. Theoretical Setting

In the current study, the role of supportive leaders can be grounded in the premises of social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964), where the social behaviors of staff members are determined by the exchanges where individuals tend to be risk averse while trying to increase their benefits. In the academic organization setting, this manifests as a reciprocation among the employees and their leaders (Montano et al., 2017). Hence, in return for the supportive behavior of the leaders (emotional, instrumental, and appreciative behavior), employees can exhibit commitment, engagement, and better psychological and emotional wellbeing (Farid et al., 2021; Jia et al., 2022; Xuecheng et al., 2022). SET in the current context explains the affective outcomes of supportive leadership for academic staff, which in turn not only enhances their wellbeing but can manifest as a higher performance (Farid et al., 2021; Zeb et al., 2023) and innovative work behaviors (Jia et al., 2022). SET has been used in higher education and other public sectors, which confirms the relational quality and perception of fairness from leaders are essential for achieving positive employee outcomes (e.g., wellbeing) (Montano et al., 2017; Zeb et al., 2023).

In addition to what was noted, the current research also benefits from the premises of social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as the sense of identification, self-concept, and a certain belonging to social groups further enhance the behavioral outcomes and well-being among employees. In this sense, academic staff can thrive under an organizational climate where a shared identity persists, leading to an alignment between the values of the organization and the employees (Ho & Chan, 2022). In this research, SIT provides a framework wherein the academic staff perceive being valued along with support from

their organizations and their leaders, which enhances their work experiences by heightening their sense of identity and purpose (Krug et al., 2021). Subsequently, this leads to a better wellbeing including the social, psychological, and emotional dimensions (Canto & Vallejo-Martín, 2021) that are operationalized in this study. SIT is a widely used framework in the educational literature, which supports the identity dynamics and the interplay of emotional and psychological wellbeing (Gong & Wang, 2023).

The combined premises of SET and SIT enable the current study to develop the hypotheses that are also illustrated in the proposed model (see Figure 1).

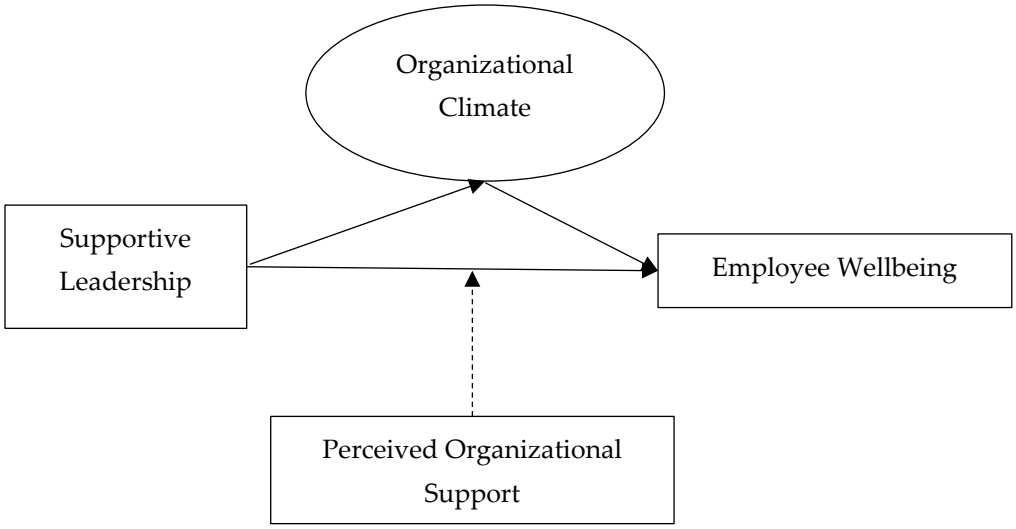

Figure 1. Research Model.

2.2. *Supportive Leadership and Employees' Wellbeing*

A supportive leader incorporates three core aspects in their behavior towards the employees and their overall outlook for the workplace namely, instrumental support, emotional reassurance, and appreciative behavior (Farid et al., 2021). These elements are significant determinants of employees' psychological and emotional wellbeing, which can also link to their social wellbeing as the dimensions for overall wellbeing (Niinihuhta & Häggman-Laitila, 2022; Rachmad, 2022). When supportive leaders are in action, their concerns and support are practical, genuine, and thorough, which further encourages collaboration, sense of value, and emotional security (Curtin et al., 2022). This becomes more important for the case of academic staff as emotional stability can increase their productivity and job satisfaction (Liang & Chu, 2021), contributing to their wellbeing. It is recommended that leaders focus on developing employee-centered approaches as they can improve resilience through reducing stress and negative emotional responses in high pressure sectors (i.e., education) (Kelloway et al., 2012). This argument benefits from the premises of SET (Blau, 1964) where the socio-emotional bonds that are established between a leader and their staff can drive reciprocity, higher engagement with the job, trust, commitment, and overall performance and wellbeing (Farid et al., 2021; Liang & Chu, 2021), rendering such behaviors as crucial for obtaining positive outcomes.

In line with what was noted, the supportive leader and their behaviors (i.e., emotional, instrumental, appreciative) goes beyond the transactional interactions in the workplace by fostering trust, which in turn leads to a collective sense of identity. This falls under the premises of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Kelloway et al., 2012). SIT explains how these leadership traits can establish belongingness among the academic staff, which promotes their sense of identity with the organization (i.e., university). A meta-analysis conducted by Montano et al. (2023) revealed that while mental health hazards can be negated by

supportive leadership traits, the performance of employees can be improved as their psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing is provided with safety and support at work. As academic staff are required to use cognitive and emotional resources, such leaders can be a major determinant of avoiding burnout and disconnectedness (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Both SET and SIT provide a wide perspective through which supportive leadership dimensions act as functions of the domains of wellbeing (i.e., social, emotional, and psychological) (Montano et al., 2017). Accordingly, the following hypothesis has been developed:

Hypothesis 1: *Supportive leadership and its dimensions have a direct and positive impact on academic staffs' wellbeing and its dimensions.*

2.3. Mediating Role of Organizational Climate

Organizational climate can be described as a shared sense and perception of the workplace that can include leadership, communications and interactions, expected behaviors, and work–life balance (Y. Zhang et al., 2021). This climate, when applied to the organizational setting (e.g., through supportive leadership), can translate into improved wellbeing of employees as it pertains to their emotional demands that are particularly high in the education sector (Greco et al., 2022; Stein et al., 2021). Supportive leaders have the capabilities to provide employees with emotional, instrumental, and appreciative support, which innately changes the atmosphere of the workplace into a climate of trust, cooperation, and respect (Jia et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2003). Organizational climate can be a significant mediator for linking leadership efforts to the wellbeing outcomes of employees as it encompasses positive changes in the workplace and deliverance of supportive intentions in a tangible manner that affects employees' wellbeing (Y. Zhang et al., 2021). Under the premises of SET (Blau, 1964), the current research argues that when academic staff perceive supportive leadership traits, they are more likely to reflect this support in their overall welfare and performance (Roberts, 2010; Schneider et al., 2013). As a reciprocative behavior with a supportive workplace, employees are prone to exhibit emotional and psychological engagement, which creates a deeper feeling of wellbeing (Jiang & Probst, 2021; Zohar & Hofmann, 2012). Notably, when the leadership approach is also supportive, the wellbeing outcomes of social, emotional, and psychological can be expected due to the complementary influence of leadership on the climate of the organization.

Following what was noted, the SIT framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides a premise with which the organizational climate can promote a sense of identification with the company, which can highlight and empower the emotional and social attributes to employees through supportive leadership behavior (García-Cabrera & García-Soto, 2021; Jia et al., 2022). Positive and ethical leadership approaches have been found to have a positive influence on organizational climate, rendering supportive leadership a similar contextual setting wherein through emotional, instrumental, and appreciative behaviors of leaders, employees gain a higher level of wellbeing, affecting their personal and professional domains (García-Cabrera & García-Soto, 2021). Notably, organizational climate has been found to have a mediating effect when it comes to leadership outcomes in various settings (Jiang & Probst, 2021), which further implies its application in a higher educational context. In the academic sector, there are high expectations from academic staff which can include ambiguity, emotional and psychological labor, and performance-related stress and anxiety (Horoub & Zargar, 2022; Montano et al., 2023).

The theoretical premises of SET and SIT provide sufficient support for the interrelationship among leadership behavior, climate of the workplace shaped under leadership style, and multifaceted wellbeing outcomes among employees due to the psychological and emotional safety, belonging, being valued, professional and personal support, and

a shared sense of achievement and goal, which can magnify wellbeing. Organizational climate (especially as a mediator) is shaped through the instrumental, emotional, and appreciative support of the leader, which can then manifest as employee performance and wellbeing outcomes. This has been reported in extant literature (e.g., Hayat & Afshari, 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Schneider et al., 2013; Y. Zhang et al., 2021), which provides support for the current research to operationalize organizational climate with leader support, role clarification, and recognition/appreciation and reward dimensions.

The climate is a shared perception of policies, regulations, procedures, and expectations in the workplace, which are heavily reliance on the behavior and style of leadership. When the supportive leadership traits are present in the higher education setting, the fairness, value of job, and trust-building elements can be established for the staff which in turn can improve their wellbeing (Hayat & Afshari, 2021; Parker et al., 2003). This perception of climate can be improved through clarification of roles, provision of necessary knowledge, tools and equipment, supportive supervision, and job autonomy, which can significantly improve affective commitment along with mental and social dimensions of wellbeing (Y. Zhang et al., 2021; Zohar & Hofmann, 2012). Furthermore, it has been reported that the values of leadership can be better aligned with employees' values through a workplace climate that exhibits support on a routine basis (Canli & Özdemir, 2022; Khan et al., 2021). Under the perspective of SET, the organizational climate shaped by a supportive leader can yield effectiveness in terms of utilizing resources, encouraging trust and commitment, and fostering positive reciprocal attitudes that can vividly improve wellbeing. In a similar vein, SIT suggests that such climates can create cohesiveness and affirmation among employees, which creates identification that leads to a better state of psychological and social wellbeing. As universities have a hierarchical structure, and demands are high from the academic staff, and in accordance with the noted arguments, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 2: *Organizational Climate can mediate the relationship between supportive leadership and employee wellbeing in the Lebanese academic sector.*

2.4. Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (hereafter POS) can be described as a perception of appreciation and being valued for an individual in the workplace setting (Eisenberger et al., 2016). This care and support provided to the staff members can be a major source of improvement for wellbeing as it pertains to the interactions and relationships that are formed in the workplace (e.g., leadership traits) (Ilyas et al., 2023; Pattali et al., 2024). POS is crucial for industries where demands and stress are high, and roles can deplete the psychological and emotional resources of individuals (i.e., education sector) (Greco et al., 2022). Under the premises of SET (Blau, 1964), employees can develop a positive perception when organization values their work and contributions while exhibiting genuine care for their wellbeing (social, emotional, and psychological). This is more than mere behavioral traits of leaders and requires a systemic and strategic implementation of support mechanisms for employees. Such practices can yield loyalty, trust, innovation, and resilience among academic staff (Asghar et al., 2022; Jia et al., 2022). In the current context, supportive leaders possess traits that are a good fit for obtaining wellbeing among employees (emotional, instrumental, and appreciative behaviors). This aligns with the premises of POS as it addresses a deep and comprehensive organizational approach towards the workplace and employees' outcomes. This suggests that POS can be an enhancer (moderator) for the positive supportive leadership traits and their effort for achieving a higher level of wellbeing for staff in the higher education setting of Lebanon (Caesens et al., 2021; Eisenberger et al., 2016). This is linked to the reduction in stress, uncertainty, and ambiguity, which in

turn shows care from the organization particularly for academic roles, which have a high workload (Shoss et al., 2021).

Referring to the premises of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), POS can act as a resource as well as a tangible tool for the company to provide institution-wide support practices that can foster a sense of belonging, involvement, commitment, and trust among employees (Jia et al., 2022). Having developed a sense of identification with the values of the organization steers employees towards a higher level of POS, which boosts their self-concept and alignment with the objectives of the organization. For the specific context of Lebanese higher education institutions, job security, emotional and psychological safety, and uncertainty in role descriptions are considered important elements that a supportive leader and organization can address to improve POS. When the workplace is demanding and has stressors, social and psychological wellbeing are negatively influenced, which can be diminished through a high level of POS (Shoss et al., 2021). For academic staff in faculties of Lebanese universities, there are numerous limitations and stressors, which can negate their wellbeing. Thus, the implementation of supportive organizational policies can act as an enhancer of wellbeing among employees while contributing to the efforts of leadership to improve the workplace.

The above mentioned arguments fall under the theoretical framework of the research where SET and SIT can explain the importance of POS as a moderator for the relationship between supportive leadership traits and wellbeing outcomes. In this respect, when leaders (as organizational stewards) exhibit care for their employees and provide them with training, equipment, and feedback while showing appreciation for the value of their work, it is more likely that POS is increased among employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This can have vivid implications for enhancing the wellbeing of academic staff especially for the case of Lebanese universities with regard to the various challenges and limitations (e.g., political, economic, social, and technological) (Ben Hassen, 2024; Chami-Malaeb et al., 2024). Supportive leaders have the necessary traits (i.e., emotional support, instrumental support, and appreciative behavior) to offer unbridled support, assurance, and safety to employees, which can be perceived more through the existence of a higher level of POS.

Supervisors are also important elements that need support from their organization, which highlights another aspect of the vitality of POS in an organizational setting. A supportive procedure in the organization (POS) can also boost the leaders' efforts to increase employees' sense of identity, commitment, and overall performance, which require a high level of wellbeing and is aligned with the premises of SIT. Through group cohesion, a psychological, emotional, and social attachment shapes enhance the perception of fairness, value, and identity (Hayat & Afshari, 2021; Ilyas et al., 2023; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). Similarly, due to the strategic nature of practices that yield POS in an organization, there is an innate outcome that consists of resilience, improved performance, and satisfaction for employees, which are antecedents of wellbeing (Eisenberger et al., 2016). This research argues that for the case of Lebanese universities and their academic staff, it becomes essential to have procedures for establishing and/or improving POS, which entails legitimacy and support for both leaders and employees. In turn, this can be manifested as legitimate strategies that are guided by a supportive leader and can present the commitment of the organization to enhancing emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing of academic staff. In the light of what is mentioned in this section, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 3: *Perceived Organizational Support has a moderating (enhancer) effect on the relationship between supportive leadership and academic staff's wellbeing.*

3. Research Design

3.1. Methodology and Approach

This study utilizes a quantitative and deductive approach (Casula et al., 2021), where a convenience sampling method is used to obtain the necessary data to test the current hypotheses. Firstly, the purposive sampling method enabled the researchers to ensure that participants are academic staff with both teaching and administration responsibilities. This was followed by a convenience sampling method with which participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. The respondents were chosen from four different universities in Beirut, Lebanon. Relevant permissions were granted from the managers (i.e., departmental deans) of the said universities prior to the data collection process. A pilot test with 15 samples was conducted, where no items were removed or added to the survey and readability and understandability were confirmed. The pilot test data were excluded from the final analysis. Sample size was calculated using G*power software version 3.1 (statistical power 90%; effect size 0.15; $\alpha = 0.05$), which was shown to be 106. This was combined with the recommendations for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017), which led to a range of 106 to 150. Accordingly, a total of 180 questionnaires were distributed among academic staff of four universities in Beirut, from which a total of 141 surveys remained for the final analysis (78.33% response rate). A written consent form was provided to participants where they were informed of the purposes of the study, confidentiality of the data, and anonymity along with availability to withdraw.

3.2. Measurements

The questionnaire was designed based on the most relevant, valid, and available scales in the existing literature. In this sense, supportive leadership (operationalized as emotional, instrumental, and appreciative support) was measured with three questions for each dimension based on the works of Rudolph et al. (2022) and Sarmah et al. (2022). Samples for each item are as follows: (1) My supervisor listens attentively to my concerns; (2) My supervisor assists me in solving work-related problems; and (3) My supervisor recognizes my achievements. Furthermore, employee wellbeing and its dimensions (i.e., emotional, psychological, and social) are measured using three questions for each dimension derived from the reliable and commonly used measures (i.e., Canli & Özdemir, 2022; Farid et al., 2021; Montano et al., 2017). Sample questions are as follows: (a) I feel emotionally drained at the end of the workday; (b) I find my work meaningful and fulfilling; and (c) I feel a sense of belonging within my work team, for emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, respectively. This is followed by nine questions (three for each dimension) to measure organizational climate through the operationalization of leader support, role clarity, and recognition and reward as dimensions. These questions were derived from the works of Canli and Özdemir (2022), Imran and Anis-ul-Haque (2011), and Y. Zhang et al. (2022). Sample questions are as follows: (1) Leaders are accessible when employees need guidance; (2) My job duties are well-defined; and (3) Employees are rewarded fairly for their contributions. Lastly, perceived organizational support was measured using three questions derived from the work of Eisenberger et al. (1986) with a sample question "My organization shows concern for me".

3.3. Sample Characteristics

Following the literature review, the current structural model consists of three control variables, namely, age, gender, and work experience. These factors are controlled in the analytical stages as they can have an impact on the outcomes of the analysis due to their influence on psychological aspects (Cheng et al., 2022; Ng & Feldman, 2009; Pelled et al., 1999). There are no major differences between male and female students with 68 and

73 responses; the majority of participants had an experience between 1 and 4 years (48.23%) followed by less than one year (32.62%) and more than 4 years (19.15%); the age range of respondents varied between 25 and 30 (32.62%) followed by 31 and 36 (31.92%), 37 and 45 (24.12%), and more than 45 years of age with 11.34% of the total 141 samples. The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
25–30	46	32.62%
31–36	45	31.92%
37–45	34	24.12%
+45	16	11.34%
Gender		
Male	68	48.22%
Female	73	51.78%
Work Experience		
<1 year	46	32.62%
1–4 years	68	48.23%
+4 years	27	19.15%

N = 141.

3.4. Research Model

Following the contextual framework the aims of the study, a causal model is developed, which is illustrated in Figure 1. In this model, supportive leadership is the independent variable; employee wellbeing is the dependent variable; organizational climate is the mediator; and perceived organizational support is the moderator.

4. Findings

The model presented in Figure 1 is examined through Smart-PLS software Version 3 and the analytical technique of partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) where latent variables exist, normal distribution is not a concern, and the accuracy of analysis is relied upon a relatively small sample size (Hair et al., 2017). Accordingly, Table 2 presents the first stage of analysis in which measurement model is assessed and is found to be statistically satisfactory. This is due to the acceptable values for outer loadings, Rho A, alpha (α), and composite reliability (CR) (between 0.7 and 0.9) (Jöreskog, 1971; Diamantopoulos et al., 2012; Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015; Hair et al., 2019). Similarly, average variance extracted (AVE) is found satisfactory (more than 0.5) stating the convergent validity of the dataset (Hair et al., 2017).

Furthermore, Table 2 accounts for the reflective variables, variance inflation factor (VIF), which is below 3, stating no concerns for multicollinearity (Henseler et al., 2009). In addition, Table 3 presents the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratios (HTMT), which are below 0.85, stating a satisfactory convergent validity along with an adequate reliability for the current parameters (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2. Measurement Model.

Construct	Dimensions	Indicator	Outer Loadings	α	Rho A	CR	AVE	VIF	Weights	t-Stat.	CV
Supportive Leadership α = 0.811 CV = 0.708	Emotional	EM1	0.722	0.804	0.811	0.802	0.662	1.845	0.369	2.309 **	0.713
		EM2	0.797						0.411	2.220 **	
		EM3	0.774						0.366	2.188 **	
	Instrumental	IN1	0.840	0.775	0.785	0.744	0.721	1.741	0.376	2.112 *	0.726
		IN2	0.824						0.381	2.301 **	
		IN3	0.811						0.374	2.345 *	
	Appreciative	AP1	0.821	0.742	0.745	0.719	0.715	2.348	0.523	3.308 **	0.730
		AP2	0.749						0.440	2.304 *	
		AP3	0.813						0.376	2.121 *	
Employee Wellbeing α = 0.802 CV = 0.711	Emotional	EW1	0.841	0.834	0.867	0.808	0.748	1.864	0.413	2.431 *	0.729
		EW2	0.815						0.446	2.235 *	
		EW3	0.809						0.432	2.380 *	
	Psychological	PS1	0.867	0.782	0.761	0.771	0.737	1.877	0.502	2.610 *	0.711
		PS2	0.725						0.389	2.546 *	
		PS3	0.770						0.432	2.726 *	
	Social	SW1	0.791	0.785	0.809	0.738	0.725	1.944	0.384	2.688 *	0.733
		SW2	0.788						0.361	2.764 *	
		SW3	0.779						0.377	2.620 *	
Perceived Organizational Support	-	POS1	0.844	0.855	0.881	0.832	0.545		-		
		POS2	0.826								
		POS3	0.817								
Organizational Climate α = 0.796 CV = 0.726	Leader Support	LS1	0.713	0.773	0.814	0.765	0.624	1.870	0.409	2.451 *	0.721
		LS2	0.745						0.419	2.266 *	
		LS3	0.721						0.413	2.73 *	
	Role Clarity	RC1	0.719	0.801	0.833	0.841	0.708	1.921	0.349	2.135 *	0.749
		RC2	0.733						0.401	2.440 *	
		RC3	0.729						0.367	2.391 **	
	Reward and Recognition	RR1	0.779	0.748	0.739	0.781	0.724	1.936	0.413	2.345 *	0.739
		RR2	0.815						0.415	2.301 *	
		RR3	0.774						0.411	2.411 *	

* 0.05, ** 0.01.

As the measurement model assessment presented in Tables 2 and 3 show adequacy for further analysis, Table 4 shows that both normal fit index (NFI) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) imply a good model fit with values of 0.921 and 0.023, respectively. Similarly, r-square (predictive power) and q-square (predictive relevance) are both found to be acceptable, which further implies the accuracy of the current model (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, the structural model assessment that tests the hypotheses of the study is shown in Table 4, where all hypotheses are supported. The first hypothesis (direct effect of supportive leadership on employee wellbeing) is supported as β = 0.318, t = 4.918. This is followed by support for the second hypothesis with statistical significance of the mediating role of organizational climate on the supportive leadership–employee wellbeing (β = 0.188, t = 2.833). Lastly, the third hypothesis is supported by the current findings (β = 0.183, t = 2.716) reflecting the moderating (enhancer) effect of POS on the supportive leadership–employee wellbeing relationship.

Table 3. Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

	EM	IN	AP	EW	PS	SW	POS	LS	RC
EM	-								
IN	0.711	-							
AP	0.444	0.522	-						
EW	0.722	0.604	0.723	-					
PS	0.631	0.637	0.621	0.645	-				
SW	0.607	0.609	0.644	0.634	0.705	-			
POS	0.637	0.497	0.661	0.594	0.679	0.680	-		
LS	0.519	0.537	0.608	0.581	0.544	0.671	0.677	-	
RC	0.607	0.610	0.577	0.613	0.598	0.479	0.616	0.620	-
RR	0.577	0.549	0.611	0.603	0.634	0.629	0.626	0.673	0.709

Emotional leadership: EM; Instrumental leadership: IN; Appreciative behavior: AP; Emotional wellbeing: EW; Psychological wellbeing: PS; Social wellbeing: SW; Perceived organizational support: POS; Leadership support: LS; Role clarity: RC; Reward and recognition: RR.

Table 4. Structural Model Assessment.

Effects	Relations	β	t-Statistics	f^2	Decision
Direct					
H1	SL → EW	0.318	4.918 ***	0.134	Supported
Mediation					
H2	SL → OC → EW	0.188	2.833 **	0.038	Supported
Moderation					
H3	SL*POS → EW	0.183	2.716 **	0.037	Supported
Control Variables	Age → EW	0.120	2.021 *		
	Gender → EW	0.123	2.203 *		
	Experience → EW	0.119	2.177 *		
		$R^2_{IP} = 0.44/Q^2_{IP} = 0.24$			
		$R^2_{GI} = 0.51/Q^2_{GI} = 0.27$			
		SRMR: 0.023; NFI: 0.921			

* 0.05, ** 0.01, *** 0.001.

These results suggest that university managers can incorporate supportive practices in their organization to ensure positive performance and wellbeing outcomes, which can be boosted through implementation of supportive leaders to further improve the organizational climate and yield significant improvements in psychological, social, and emotional domains of academic staff's wellbeing. The moderation effect can also be seen in Figure 2, where the interaction plot is illustrated. The supportive leadership interaction was measured with standard deviation of 1.313 and mean of 1.678, while POS was measured with standard deviation of 1.117 and mean of 0.979. Figure 2 shows that through high levels of POS, universities can reach higher levels of wellbeing with the supportive leader in action. This also suggests that with lower levels of SL (perhaps in the early stages of establishment), higher POS can still yield significant wellbeing outcomes for academic staff of Lebanese universities.

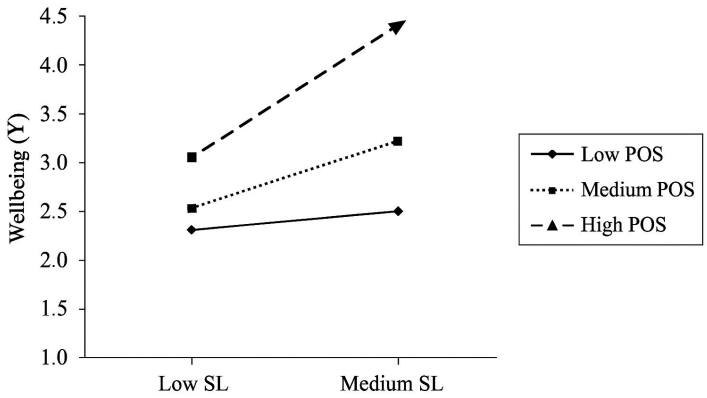

Figure 2. Interaction Plot.

Discussion

The support for the first hypothesis of the research shows that supportive leaders in the academic setting of Lebanon (i.e., universities) can make a difference by affecting the wellbeing of academic staff across emotional, psychological, and social domains, which is also aligned with the premises of SET (Blau, 1964). This is also in line with the existing literature, which shows that emotional support, instrumental aid, and appreciative behaviors of leaders can have a significant influence on employees' wellbeing and performance outcomes (e.g., Curtin et al., 2022; Farid et al., 2021; Niinihuhta & Häggman-Laitila, 2022). As shown in this research, academic setting is a sector in which supportive leadership traits can overcome the limitations of institutional or structural support dynamics. Furthermore, the current results are in consensus with the premises of SIT (Montano et al., 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), where it elaborates on the mechanisms of employees and their emotions regarding their treatment and support by the organization. Thus, when supportive leaders deploy their traits in the university context, academic staff are more likely to internalize identity with the university which improves their psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing through positive communications, connectedness, and social values and belongingness (Kelloway et al., 2012; Liang & Chu, 2021). This also highlights the contributions of the current research to literature as it extends the geographical borders to Middle East (i.e., Lebanon) and education sector which faces both local and regional instabilities in society, political, economic, and institutional domains (Chami-Malaeb et al., 2024; Malaeb et al., 2023). The combination of SET and SIT frameworks also validates the empirical findings of the current study as it provides a comprehensive setting for better understanding the dimensions of wellbeing and the organizational mechanisms that influence its outcome (Montano et al., 2017).

The mediation effect of organizational climate on the supportive leadership—employee wellbeing relationship was found significant (partial) which implies that the workplace environment that fosters respect, safety, trust, and support can deliver the behaviors of leaders to employees in a tangible manner (Montano et al., 2017). As the socio-emotional, and psychological needs of employees are met by leaders' behaviors, reciprocity is triggered which drives the staff towards having a healthier relationship with their organization, leading to an increase in their overall wellbeing. This mediating role is also in line with SIT as it explains the alignment of employees with a group identity through meaning, emotional resources, and shared values. The current findings while highlighting the contextual, theoretical, and sectoral contributions are also in line with the existing body of knowledge (e.g., García-Cabrera & García-Soto, 2021; Y. Zhang et al., 2021). Leadership can obtain more effective outcomes through a climate that emphasizes their approach and style. This can help the leaders to improve morale and performance of their employees. Due to political stress and underfunding in the education sector in Lebanon, these findings

can be a driver for universities to improve their workplace. Organizational climate as a mediator in university context in a Middle Eastern country shows the applicability of supportive leadership traits (emotional, instrumental and appreciative) in a manner that enables them to shift and change the climate of the faculty/department.

The partial mediation effect is further complemented by the statistical significance of the indirect and moderating influence of perceived organizational support (POS) on the supportive leadership—academic staff's wellbeing linkage. POS can act as an amplifier that can manifest as commitment among employees while being a tool for the leaders to create meaning, trust, value, reciprocation, and identity among their employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Eisenberger et al., 2016). In turn, leaders are made able to drive performance and improved wellbeing for their staff. Employees can sense a deeper care and belonging from their organization which is elaborated through the leadership's behavior which can boost emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing. These findings also show consensus with the existing literature that address the leader-follower interactions and outcomes (e.g., Abolnasser et al., 2023; Makwetta et al., 2021; Sarwar et al., 2020; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). Integration of POS as a moderator enables the current research to interpret the underlying factors that contribute to the wellbeing of academic staff in Lebanese universities (Makwetta et al., 2021; Rajashekar & Jain, 2024), which can be beneficial for scholars interested in leadership outcomes in organizational settings and practitioners such as human resource management departments in universities where supportive practices can be established on a company-wide scale.

5. Conclusions

The results obtained in this study suggest that supportive leadership can be a great pathway for universities in Lebanon (and to extension, the Middle East region) to achieve significant levels of wellbeing for academic staff. Emotional bonds, instrumental aids (e.g., technical support, training and development programs), and appreciative behaviors of leaders can yield emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing for academic staff of Lebanese universities. Providing the leaders with supportive organizational practices and procedures can further boost the said wellbeing domains, while also providing the employees with an environment that has established support mechanisms, leading to enhanced perceived organizational support (Caesens et al., 2021; Eisenberger et al., 2016; Rajashekar & Jain, 2024). This also aligns with the notions of organizational climate that pertains to leader support, role clarification, and rewards and recognitions (Abolnasser et al., 2023; Canli & Özdemir, 2022; Rasool et al., 2021; Y. Zhang et al., 2022). Supportive leaders can benefit from the organizational support mechanisms to better translate their visions into tangible practices that positively affect the climate of the workplace through clear instructions and expectations, and recognition of performance while rewarding engagement, involvement, innovation, and other forms of performance outcomes (Rudolph et al., 2022; Sarmah et al., 2022). These results imply both theoretical and practical perspectives which are highlighted in the following sections.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The theoretical contributions of the current study are to the understanding and application of social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964). Results demonstrate the dynamics of supportive leadership traits and the initiation of reciprocative behavior among academic staff of Lebanese universities. This creates an emotional bond between the leaders and staff, which if perceived genuine, positive outcomes in emotional state, psychological health, and social wellbeing can be observed. This is in line with other studies, in which similar contextual settings have been addressed (e.g., Kelloway et al., 2012; Liang & Chu, 2021;

Montano et al., 2017). Furthermore, organizational climate as defined in this study (i.e., leader support, role clarity, and rewards/recognition) better explains and translates the approach of leaders as an identity in the workplace, which aligns with the wellbeing outcomes (García-Cabrera & García-Soto, 2021; Y. Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, the enhancing effects of POS falls within the premises of SET as higher or lower perceptions of institutional support can shape a broader sense of care, which in turn improves engagement and involvement among employees. This ultimately strengthens the interactions and relationships among the leaders (i.e., faculty deans) and their staff (i.e., university level academic staff) (Eisenberger et al., 2016; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Application of SET in academic sector of Middle Eastern universities is, thus, supported by empirical evidence, which can be used as a comparative result with non-Western and other sectors in the literature.

In addition to the abovementioned notes, social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) can be observed in the current findings as the linkage between leaders' behaviors and wellbeing of academic staff is highly influenced by the ability of leaders and the organization to create a sense of identity for their staff (particularly academic staff). Supportive leadership traits can establish an environment in which emotional and relational bons are created with staff to improve their sense of identity (e.g., pride, academic prowess, and belonging) (Jiang & Probst, 2021; Y. Zhang et al., 2021). This can be a source that leaders use to better deliver change to organizational climate while benefiting from institutional mechanisms that provide complementary and/or necessary support systems (Kelloway et al., 2012; Liang & Chu, 2021). When academic staff develop their identification with their leaders and the university, it empowers their psychological and social wellbeing, especially when leaders engage in supportive behaviors (Gong & Wang, 2023). These implications also show consensus for POS as a function that provides validation for groups (i.e., academic staff) as a social element in the workplace which improves the sense of identity, leading to improved wellbeing outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 2016; Hayat & Afshari, 2021; Ilyas et al., 2023). The current results thus highlight the importance and applicability of SIT in the education sector of Middle East (i.e., Lebanon) which sheds light on the vitality of identity, values, and social context of a supportive workplace for academic staff.

5.2. Practical Implications

In addition to what was mentioned, the current research provides several practical pathways for practitioners (e.g., managers in universities of Lebanon, and Middle East) as there should be an emphasis on provision of strategic value by implementing support mechanisms. This provides the necessary foundation for POS which then can be utilized by adequate leadership (i.e., supportive) with institutional support that also enables them to shape the climate of the faculties in their vision with strategic alignment with human resources and other supportive initiatives. Universities can benefit from this structure as it can enable them to train needed leaders in-house with a deep understanding of the specific contexts of their organization while fostering wellbeing for academic staff. Through provision of feedback, mental support, clarification in job descriptions and expectations, recognition and rewarding innovation, and other positive behaviors in the workplace can significantly improve the psychological and emotional wellbeing of academic staff as it balances the pressures and limitations they face in their work. A data-driven human resource management system can be specifically used by leaders (e.g., faculty deans) which can improve resilience, agility, and performance of academic staff among Lebanese universities. Furthermore, universities can have dedicated Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for wellbeing measures in their leadership assessment and pathways for managerial promotions. This can also aid the talent and employee retention, engagement and long-term benefits for the organization as a unit.

5.3. Limitations and Recommendations

Regardless of the previously noted contributions, there are a number of hindering elements that should be addressed. The current study used a quantitative approach and PLS-SEM as analytical technique, which deals with limited sample size, hindering the generalizability of findings. Future studies can avoid this issue by expanding the sample size. The cross-sectional data collection procedure also limits the variations that can occur, which longitudinal studies can overcome. Middle Eastern countries and particularly Lebanon can benefit from more studies that can improve the understanding of organizational behavior, leadership, and wellbeing outcomes to contribute to reducing the scarcity of data in this regard. Qualitative methods can also be used in future studies to obtain a more in-depth understanding of leadership–wellbeing relationship. The current research uses SIT and SET, which provide sufficient theoretical framework for its conduct. Future studies can employ other theories such as job demand–resource theory, conservation of resources theory, and leader–member exchange theory. Cultural, social, and political factors can also be determinants or influential in this context, which can be addressed by future studies to improve upon the contextual limitations of this research.

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