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A Systematic Review of Human Resource Management Strategies for Enhancing Employee Morale: A Case Study of the Wasit Provincial Government

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to systematically review the published literature in order to identify, analyze, and classify human resource management strategies that are effective in enhancing employee morale in the Wasit Provincial Government of Iraq. To achieve this objective, a systematic review method and an extensive search of the reputable Scopus and Web of Science scientific databases were employed. The PRISMA guidelines were used to improve the accuracy and transparency of reporting. The study population comprised all sources related to human resource management and employee morale. The search and screening process was conducted in several stages, ultimately resulting in the inclusion of 19 articles through the primary pathway and six articles through the supplementary pathway involving Google Scholar and reputable websites. The content analysis identified six principal strategic categories: managerial and leadership strategies, human resource development strategies, organizational cultural and social strategies, employee welfare and quality-of-work-life strategies, structural and organizational strategies, and technological and innovative strategies. Employee morale was analyzed as a multidimensional construct comprising motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, and psychological well-being. The descriptive findings indicated that the largest number of articles was published between 2016 and 2018 and that quantitative approaches predominated in the reviewed studies. The principal contribution of this study is the identification and presentation of an integrated framework of effective human resource management strategies for enhancing employee morale, with particular emphasis on the central role of managerial and leadership strategies as the most influential category. The findings may assist human resource managers and organizational policymakers in the Wasit Provincial Government in developing and implementing measures that address employees' needs and expectations by providing a deeper understanding of the factors affecting employee morale, thereby improving both morale and organizational productivity.

Keywords: systematic review, human resource management strategies, employee morale, Wasit Provincial Government, thematic analysis

Introduction

Human resources constitute a central source of organizational capability because the quality, motivation, commitment, and coordinated effort of employees directly influence the extent to which an organization can achieve its strategic and operational objectives. Although financial resources, technology, formal structures, and administrative procedures remain important, their effectiveness ultimately depends on employees' willingness and ability to use them productively. This relationship is particularly evident in public-sector organizations, where employees are expected to provide reliable services, implement public policies, respond to citizens' needs, and maintain institutional continuity despite bureaucratic constraints,

political pressures, resource limitations, and changing environmental demands. Within this context, employee morale is not merely an individual emotional condition; rather, it is an organizationally consequential phenomenon reflected in employees' motivation, confidence, enthusiasm, collective spirit, job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, psychological well-being, and willingness to contribute beyond minimum role requirements. Studies have accordingly associated higher morale with improved productivity, stronger performance, and more constructive workplace behavior, whereas deteriorating morale may contribute to withdrawal, reduced cooperation, absenteeism, turnover intentions, and declining service quality [1-4].

Employee morale is a multidimensional and dynamic construct that emerges from the interaction between individual characteristics and the organizational environment. It encompasses employees' perceptions of the value of their work, the fairness of organizational procedures, the availability of support and recognition, the quality of interpersonal relations, the meaningfulness of organizational goals, and the extent to which employees believe that their contributions are respected. Morale is therefore closely related to, but not synonymous with, job satisfaction, work motivation, organizational commitment, work engagement, organizational identification, and psychological well-being. These constructs represent interconnected dimensions of employees' overall experience of organizational membership. A positive organizational context may strengthen employees' sense of belonging and vitality, while ambiguity, inadequate recognition, interpersonal conflict, excessive workload, or weak leadership may diminish their willingness to invest effort in organizational goals. Research on motivation, organizational identity, citizenship behavior, and work spirit further indicates that morale is shaped by both intrinsic factors, such as meaning, achievement, autonomy, and professional growth, and extrinsic factors, such as compensation, supervisory support, security, and working conditions [5-8].

The importance of morale becomes especially pronounced in governmental and public-service organizations. Such organizations frequently operate within highly formalized structures characterized by hierarchical decision-making, rigid regulations, limited managerial discretion, complex accountability systems, and competing political and administrative expectations. Under these conditions, employees may experience uncertainty concerning organizational priorities, limited participation in decision-making, inadequate performance feedback, or weak alignment between individual duties and institutional missions. Organizational goal ambiguity is particularly problematic because employees who do not clearly understand the purpose, expected outcomes, or relative importance of their work may find it difficult to sustain motivation and commitment. Public organizations must therefore translate broad governmental mandates into understandable operational goals, clarify employee roles, and establish a credible connection between everyday activities and public value creation. Evidence suggests that organizational mission, individual characteristics, security-oriented leadership, service conditions, and the quality of internal management can significantly affect morale in public and quasi-public institutions [9-12].

Human resource management provides the principal organizational mechanism through which many of these determinants can be influenced. Contemporary human resource management extends beyond administrative functions such as payroll, record keeping, and recruitment. It includes the integrated design of staffing, training, performance management, compensation, employee relations, career development, participation, well-being, talent management, and organizational development practices. Strategic human resource management further emphasizes the vertical alignment of these practices with organizational objectives and their horizontal consistency as a coherent system. When human resource practices are mutually reinforcing, employees are more likely to perceive the organization as supportive, fair, and development-oriented.

High-performance work practices, for example, may increase employees' knowledge, skills, autonomy, and opportunities to participate, thereby strengthening motivation and organizational performance. Similarly, strategically aligned human capital practices may improve both employee capability and institutional effectiveness, particularly when organizations treat employees as long-term assets rather than merely as labor inputs [13-16].

Recruitment, selection, organizational socialization, training, development, and talent management are among the foundational human resource strategies associated with morale. Selecting employees whose abilities and values correspond with organizational requirements can improve person–job and person–organization fit, while structured socialization can reduce uncertainty and facilitate early engagement. Training and professional development communicate organizational investment in employees and enable them to respond competently to evolving job demands. Opportunities for learning, career advancement, mentoring, and talent development may also strengthen employees' perceptions of future prospects within the organization. However, the effectiveness of talent management depends on how clearly its objectives are communicated, whether opportunities are distributed fairly, and whether practices respond to employees' actual needs rather than serving only an elite group. Professional competency is likewise connected to organizational commitment, because employees who feel capable and professionally supported are generally better positioned to identify with their work and remain attached to the organization [17-20].

Leadership and managerial behavior represent another major pathway through which human resource strategies affect morale. Employees' immediate supervisors shape their daily experience of organizational policies by allocating work, communicating expectations, providing feedback, resolving conflicts, recognizing contributions, and supporting professional and personal needs. Supportive, participative, and fair leadership may increase trust and psychological safety, whereas authoritarian, inconsistent, or indifferent management may intensify stress and disengagement. Decentralized decision-making and empowerment can enhance employees' sense of control and responsibility, particularly when they are accompanied by adequate resources and managerial support. Structural empowerment has also been linked to lower burnout and stronger organizational citizenship behavior, suggesting that access to information, opportunities, support, and resources can improve both employee well-being and discretionary contribution. Evidence from healthcare and other demanding service settings similarly highlights the importance of competent management, supervisory support, and meaningful employee involvement in sustaining organizational performance and morale [21-24].

Performance management, compensation, recognition, and organizational justice are equally important. Employees are more likely to maintain morale when performance standards are clear, appraisals are credible, feedback is constructive, and rewards correspond reasonably to effort and contribution. Compensation has both economic and symbolic significance: it supports employees' material needs while also communicating how the organization values their work. Nevertheless, financial rewards alone are insufficient. Recognition, developmental feedback, promotion opportunities, autonomy, and meaningful assignments may provide equally important sources of motivation. Incentive systems can also reinforce organizational values, including sustainability and collective responsibility, when they combine material and nonmaterial rewards. Conversely, perceptions of distributive, procedural, or interpersonal injustice may weaken trust and commitment even when nominal compensation is adequate. Organizational climate and employees' individual characteristics can further shape how reward systems, managerial practices, and workplace conditions are interpreted [25-28].

The social and cultural dimensions of the workplace also have substantial implications for morale. Organizational culture influences how employees understand acceptable behavior, leadership credibility, cooperation, learning, ethics, and mutual responsibility. A culture characterized by trust, transparency, inclusion, respect, and knowledge sharing can strengthen social cohesion and make employees more willing to exchange experience and support one another. Inclusive workplaces may enhance morale by reducing exclusion and ensuring that employees perceive themselves as legitimate and valued organizational members. Informal social interaction and appropriate workplace enjoyment can also contribute to engagement, trust, and informal learning, provided that such practices are authentic, culturally appropriate, and not imposed in ways that trivialize employees' concerns. Knowledge-intensive organizations particularly depend on social environments that support cooperation and tacit knowledge sharing. Accordingly, human resource strategies for morale enhancement must address not only formal policies but also the cultural norms and relational processes through which those policies are enacted [29-33].

Employee well-being and quality of working life constitute another essential domain. Excessive job demands, inadequate staffing, emotional strain, work–family conflict, workplace bullying, and chronic stress may erode morale even in organizations with otherwise sophisticated human resource systems. Research in healthcare settings demonstrates that workload, professional pressures, interpersonal conditions, and insufficient support can affect stress-related outcomes, job satisfaction, and turnover. Workplace bullying is especially damaging because it undermines psychological well-being and may subsequently impair performance and constructive behavior. Human resource management must therefore incorporate preventive and supportive measures, including workload assessment, adequate staffing, stress-management programs, anti-bullying policies, occupational health initiatives, flexible scheduling, and family-supportive supervision. Training supervisors to recognize and support employees' work–family needs can improve attitudes and contextual performance, while a broader focus on workplace well-being can help organizations create conditions in which employees are able not merely to remain employed but to flourish professionally [34-37].

The relationship between morale and organizational performance is also mediated by employees' willingness to engage in adaptive, cooperative, and innovative behavior. High morale can encourage employees to show initiative, assist colleagues, share knowledge, and pursue improvements beyond formal job descriptions. Innovative work behavior is particularly relevant in contemporary organizations because public institutions increasingly face complex social demands that cannot be addressed through routine administrative procedures alone. Employees are more likely to propose and implement new ideas when they experience trust, psychological safety, managerial support, and confidence that their efforts will be recognized rather than punished. Conversely, low morale can produce risk avoidance, resistance to change, and passive compliance. Research linking morale with innovative behavior, organizational structure, and broader improvement processes suggests that morale should be treated as a strategic organizational resource rather than as a secondary employee-relations concern [38-40].

Digital transformation and artificial intelligence have added a new dimension to the management of employee morale. Artificial intelligence can support human resource planning, training, workload allocation, performance analysis, employee-service delivery, and decision-making. By automating repetitive tasks and providing data-driven support, AI may reduce administrative burdens and allow employees to focus on more meaningful, relational, and cognitively demanding work. AI-supported training and leadership systems may also facilitate personalized development and timely feedback. At the same

time, technology may generate uncertainty regarding job security, surveillance, fairness, algorithmic bias, skill obsolescence, and the changing distribution of authority. The effects of AI on morale therefore depend on transparent implementation, employee involvement, ethical governance, adequate reskilling, and the alignment of digital systems with human-centered organizational values. Recent work has emphasized the potential of AI-oriented organizational cultures to enhance engagement, reduce workloads, and improve performance, while emerging research also highlights the use of machine learning and big-data analytics in turnover prediction and administrative decision-making [41-45].

Despite the breadth of research on human resource management, engagement, satisfaction, commitment, well-being, and performance, the evidence remains dispersed across sectors, disciplines, organizational settings, and individual human resource practices. Some studies emphasize leadership and empowerment, whereas others focus on compensation, culture, workload, inclusion, technology, or employee development. This fragmentation complicates the task of public-sector decision-makers who require an integrated understanding of how different strategies may operate together. The problem is particularly important in provincial governmental institutions, where administrative responsibilities are diverse, resources may be constrained, and employees work within formalized systems that may limit flexibility. The Wasit Provincial Government must coordinate public administration, service delivery, development activities, interdepartmental relations, and citizen-facing functions; consequently, employee morale can influence both internal efficiency and the quality of public outcomes. Although international and sector-specific studies provide valuable evidence, their findings require systematic organization before they can inform an institutionally relevant framework for this governmental setting [4, 32, 38, 39].

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to systematically identify, analyze, and classify human resource management strategies that can enhance employee morale in the Wasit Provincial Government and to develop an integrated framework for their application.

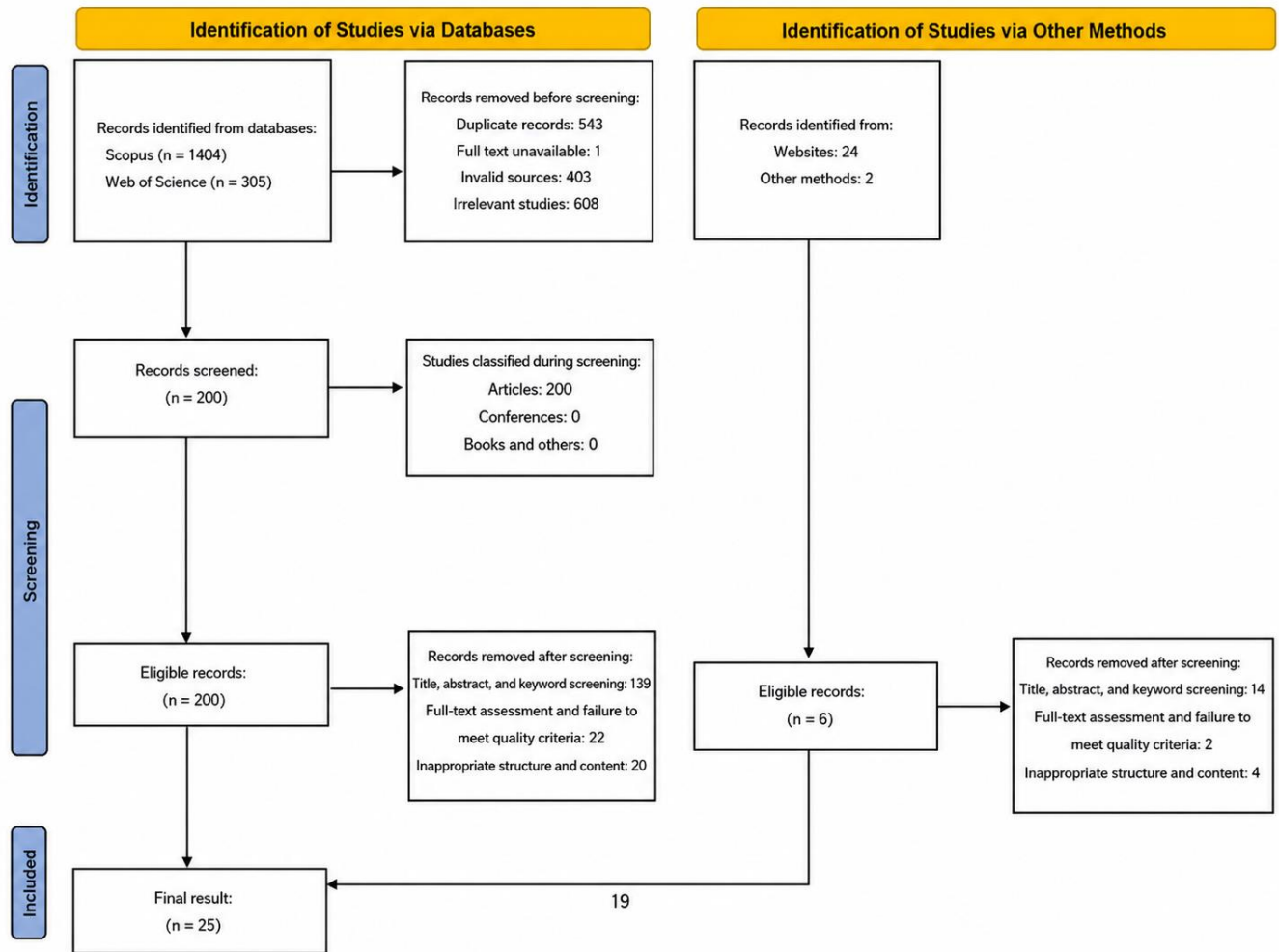
Methodology

Study Type and Research Approach

The present research is a systematic review study. Unlike primary research articles, a literature review does not generate new data; rather, it evaluates and assesses previously published findings and provides readers with the best available evidence. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data in this study.

Systematic Review Process

The present study employed a systematic review process. This process comprised three principal phases—review planning, review implementation, and review reporting—and eight operational steps. All stages of the systematic review process employed in this study are illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 1*PRISMA Flowchart*

Research Quality

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was used to assess the quality of the selected articles. This instrument consists of 10 key questions addressing various aspects of a research article, including the research objective, research questions, data collection methods, data analysis, and presentation of findings. Each question was assigned a full score of 2, a score of 0 when the criterion was not met, or an intermediate score of 1. The maximum score for each article was 20, and articles scoring above 14, equivalent to 70%, were approved for inclusion in the final stage.

Step One: Formulation of the Research Question

Systematic review studies require clearly defined research questions because such questions guide researchers toward the attainment of specific objectives. The research question of the present study was as follows:

- Which human resource management strategies are effective in enhancing employee morale in the Wasit Provincial Government?

Step Two: Development of the Systematic Review Protocol

Developing a systematic review protocol is a fundamental step in conducting review studies because it defines the research pathway and enhances the transparency, accuracy, and reproducibility of the findings. In the present study, all stages were planned and implemented in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines and the scientific principles governing systematic reviews. This process was intended to ensure that the final set of selected studies could adequately address the research question concerning strategies for enhancing employee morale in the Wasit Provincial Government. The systematic review protocol was developed around the following dimensions: human resource management strategies and practices employed in organizations; the various dimensions of employee morale, including motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, and psychological well-being; the relationship between human resource management strategies and employee morale; and organizational conditions, culture, and climate, particularly in governmental and public-sector organizations.

Step Three: Identification of Sources and Development of the Search Strategy

Keywords used to examine the research literature must be selected carefully and accurately. In the present study, the keywords were selected in consultation with expert academics and researchers in the field, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Keywords and Search Strategy Used in the Databases

Search Strategy	Databases
("human resource management" OR "human resources management" OR HRM OR "strategic human resource management" OR SHRM OR "HR strategies" OR "human resource strategies" OR "HR practices" OR "human resource practices" OR "personnel management" OR "human capital management" OR "workforce management") AND ("employee morale" OR "staff morale" OR "workplace morale" OR "employee motivation" OR "work motivation" OR "employee engagement" OR "job engagement" OR "employee attitudes" OR "work attitudes" OR "psychological well-being" OR "employee well-being" OR "organizational commitment" OR "job satisfaction") AND ("organizational assessment" OR "current status" OR "status quo" OR "organizational climate" OR "work climate" OR "organizational culture" OR "public sector organizations" OR "government organizations")	Scopus and Web of Science

Step Four: Database Search

Following the identification of relevant sources and the development of the search strategy, a systematic search of scientific studies was initiated to comprehensively collect evidence related to the research objectives.

Search of the primary databases: In the first stage, a structured search was conducted in the two reputable scientific databases of Web of Science and Scopus. The systematic search retrieved 308 articles from Web of Science and 1,404 articles from Scopus. In total, 1,751 scientific records were identified as the initial raw dataset.

Supplementary search through other methods: To enhance the comprehensiveness of the systematic review and ensure that important studies not indexed in the primary databases were not omitted, a supplementary search was conducted using open-access scientific sources, including reputable websites and Google Scholar. This supplementary search identified 26 relevant scientific records, comprising 24 records from reputable scientific websites and two records identified through other methods.

Step Five: Study Selection and Screening—Primary Pathway

To obtain valid scientific evidence and provide an accurate response to the research question, the study identification and screening process was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines.

Database-merging stage: All sources retrieved from the two databases were merged. At this stage, a total of 1,751 scientific records were identified, and no records were excluded because this stage involved only the consolidation of database results.

Duplicate-removal stage: Because of the substantial overlap in the indexing of articles across scientific databases, 543 duplicate articles were identified and removed. Following this initial refinement, 1,208 unique articles remained for the subsequent screening stages.

Full-text accessibility assessment: At this stage, one source was excluded because its full text was unavailable. Consequently, 1,207 studies remained for the subsequent screening stages.

Removal of invalid sources: The scientific credibility of the sources was assessed. Studies published in unreliable journals or lacking appropriate scientific indexing were excluded. At this stage, 403 invalid sources were removed, leaving 804 studies.

Removal of irrelevant sources: The thematic relevance of the sources to the research objective was evaluated. Accordingly, 604 sources that lacked a direct and meaningful relationship with human resource management strategies and employee morale enhancement were excluded, and 200 studies were selected for more detailed assessment.

Title, abstract, and keyword screening: This assessment was conducted to ensure that the content of the studies was aligned with the research question. As a result, 139 sources were excluded, and 61 studies were deemed eligible for continued screening.

Preliminary structural quality assessment: The selected studies were evaluated in terms of preliminary structural quality, including the clarity of their objectives, methodological coherence, and transparency of findings. At this stage, 22 studies were excluded because of structural weaknesses, leaving 39 studies.

Assessment of scientific structure and content: At the final stage, the remaining sources were carefully evaluated in terms of their scientific structure and content. Twenty studies were excluded because their structure or scientific content was not adequately aligned with the research objectives. Ultimately, 19 studies were selected through the primary pathway as the final sources for analysis and synthesis in the systematic review.

Table 2

Screening Process for Studies Identified Through the Primary Pathway: Scopus and Web of Science

Stage	Stage Title	Records Entering Stage	Records Excluded	Records Remaining
First	Database merging	1,751	0	1,751
Second	Removal of duplicate sources	1,751	543	1,208
Third	Unavailability of the complete source	1,208	1	1,207
Fourth	Invalid sources	1,207	403	804
Fifth	Irrelevant sources	804	604	200
Sixth	Title, abstract, and keyword screening	200	139	61
Seventh	Preliminary structural quality assessment	61	22	39
Eighth	Assessment of inappropriate structure and content	39	20	19

. Step Six: Identification and Screening of Studies Through the Secondary Supplementary Pathway

To complete the coverage of relevant studies, a supplementary search was conducted in open-access scientific websites and Google Scholar. Together with reference-list screening of key articles, these searches identified 26 relevant scientific records, comprising 24 records from reputable scientific websites and two records identified through other methods.

In the second stage, titles, abstracts, and keywords were screened to assess the initial relevance of the studies to the research objectives and research question. As a result, 14 sources were excluded because they lacked sufficient thematic

relevance to human resource management strategies and employee morale enhancement, reducing the number of remaining sources to 12 studies.

In the third stage, the full texts of the studies were assessed. At this stage, the scientific quality of the sources was evaluated in terms of the clarity of the theoretical framework, methodological coherence, and adequacy of the data. Accordingly, two studies were excluded because they did not meet the required scientific quality standards, leaving 10 sources for the next screening stage.

In the fourth and final stage, the remaining sources were carefully evaluated in terms of scientific structure and content. Four studies were excluded because of inappropriate structure, weak analysis, or inadequate alignment between their content and the research objectives. Ultimately, six studies were selected as eligible sources for inclusion in the final analysis and synthesis stage of the systematic review.

Table 3

Identification, Screening, and Selection of Studies Through the Secondary Pathway

Stage	Stage Title	Records Entering Stage	Records Excluded	Records Remaining
First	Identification of records through websites and other methods	26	0	26
Second	Title, abstract, and keyword screening	26	14	12
Third	Full-text assessment and failure to meet the required scientific quality	12	2	10
Fourth	Exclusion of sources with inappropriate structure and content	10	4	6

Step Seven: Quality Assessment of the Selected Studies

To ensure the scientific credibility of the findings and enhance the reliability of the results of the present systematic review, the quality of the selected studies was assessed using the CASP instrument. Following the identification, screening, and selection stages, 25 articles were considered eligible for final quality assessment, including 19 articles from the primary pathway and six articles from the secondary pathway.

The quality assessment criteria included the clarity of the research objective, appropriateness of the research design, sampling method and participant characteristics, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the validity and applicability of the findings. The assessment results indicated that all 25 reviewed articles demonstrated “very good to excellent” scientific quality. In all studies, the research objectives were clearly defined, and the research designs were aligned with the research questions and theoretical frameworks. Based on the CASP quality assessment results, it may be concluded that the selected body of studies possessed a high degree of validity, methodological coherence, and scientific value.

Step Eight: Strategy Extraction

Following the final selection of 25 articles, comprising 19 articles from the primary pathway and six from the secondary pathway, the process of extracting strategies that were effective in enhancing employee morale was undertaken. At this stage, the full title of each study and the key human resource management strategies extracted from it were recorded, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4*Extraction of Strategies From the 25 Selected Articles*

No.	Article Title in English	Employee Morale Strategies
1	<i>Employee engagement, human resource management practices and competitive advantage: An integrated approach</i> (Albrecht et al., 2015)	Selecting employees on the basis of characteristics aligned with engagement; socialization based on the provision of job resources; performance management accompanied by feedback and performance agreements; training, development, and empowerment for job redesign
2	<i>Communicating the psychological contract: An employer perspective</i> (Guest & Conway, 2002)	Effective communication management during recruitment and selection; transparent daily workplace communication; consistent hierarchical communication; fulfillment of training and development commitments; provision of a safe work environment; regular performance feedback; fair organizational treatment
3	<i>Talent management strategy of employee engagement in Indian ITES employees: Key to retention</i> (Bhatnagar, 2007)	Buddy systems; strengthening work engagement; ensuring a rapid and meaningful start to employment; reforming reward and recognition systems; providing growth opportunities; redesigning recruitment and integration processes; clarifying expectations; evaluating managers on the basis of employee development; developing a positive organizational culture; designing career pathways
4	<i>The determinants and consequences of adult nursing staff turnover: A systematic review of systematic reviews</i> (Halter et al., 2017)	Strengthening supervisory support; modifying management styles; stress- and burnout-management programs; improving job satisfaction; strengthening organizational commitment; workload management
5	<i>Talent management: For what, how and how well? An empirical exploration of talent management in practice</i> (Thunnissen, 2016)	Attending to employee needs in the implementation of talent management; ensuring clarity regarding the value and objectives of talent management; focusing on individual factors affecting employee experiences; continuously evaluating the effectiveness of talent-management strategies
6	<i>Nurses' professional competency and organizational commitment: Is it important for human resource management?</i> (Karami et al., 2017)	Developing interpersonal relationships and emotional support; strengthening an appreciation-based organizational culture; personalizing human resource strategies; assigning mentoring roles; developing soft skills; conducting integrated needs assessments; implementing participatory feedback systems
7	<i>Exploring the burden of emergency care: Predictors of stress-health outcomes in emergency nurses</i> (Adriaenssens et al., 2011)	Increasing decision-making authority; expanding skill variety; improving work procedures; strengthening the reward system; providing supervisory social support; managing job demands; periodically assessing job characteristics
8	<i>Organizational configuration of hospitals succeeding in attracting and retaining nurses</i> (Stordeur et al., 2007)	Balancing job demands and rewards; effective nursing leadership; reducing role ambiguity; strengthening organizational communication; developing a positive organizational culture; managing work-life balance; creating a healthy and meaningful work environment
9	<i>High performance work practices in the health care sector: A Dutch case study</i> (Boselie, 2010)	Developing employees' skills and knowledge; empowerment and job autonomy; employee participation in decision-making
10	<i>Workplace bullying, employee performance and behaviors: The mediating role of psychological well-being</i> (Devonish, 2013)	Implementing decisive anti-bullying policies in the workplace; promoting a positive work culture; managing organizational conflict
11	<i>Tacit knowledge sharing between IT workers: The role of organizational culture, personality, and social environment</i> (Borges, 2013)	Creating a trust-based organizational culture; designing collaboration-based reward systems; strengthening positive social interactions; developing a social environment based on collective values
12	<i>A realist evaluation of the management of a well-performing regional hospital in Ghana</i> (Marchal et al., 2010)	Employee training; effective communication; decentralized decision-making and empowerment
13	<i>The relationship between fun and workplace engagement</i> (Plester & Hutchison, 2016)	Promoting organic workplace fun; leaders' role-modeling of appropriate fun; communicating positive cultural signals; strengthening social interaction; applying flexibility when evaluating social behaviors; separately assessing job and organizational engagement
14	<i>The mediating effect of burnout on the relationship between structural empowerment and organizational citizenship behaviours</i> (Gilbert et al., 2010)	Structural employee empowerment; job-burnout reduction programs; strengthening organizational citizenship behaviors; supporting interpersonal interactions; creating a sense of reciprocal exchange
15	<i>The influence of family-supportive supervisor training on employee job performance and attitudes</i> (Odle-Dusseau et al., 2016)	Training family-supportive supervisors; developing supervisors' work-family management skills; providing person-centered employee support; strengthening contextual performance
16	<i>Creating a healthy workplace for new-generation nurses</i> (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2008)	Strengthening social-support systems; increasing decision-making autonomy; managing workloads; providing flexible work schedules; revising reward and recognition systems; participative management
17	<i>Well-being in the workplace through interaction between individual characteristics and organizational context</i> (Biggio & Cortese, 2013)	Employee participation in decision-making; continuous training and development; creating a supportive work environment; work-life balance policies; recognizing and rewarding performance; developing a culture of trust and transparency
18	<i>Factors influencing registered nurses' perception of their overall job satisfaction: A qualitative study</i> (Atefi et al., 2014)	Providing staffing levels appropriate to workloads; investing in professional development; improving rewards and benefits; designing an empowering work environment; creating a flexible workplace
19	<i>Artificial-Intelligence-Supported Reduction of Employees' Workload to Increase the Company's Performance in Today's VUCA Environment</i> (Rozman et al., 2023a)	Developing an AI-oriented organizational culture; AI-supported leadership; AI-assisted employee training; transparent communication concerning technology; focusing on increased employee engagement
20	<i>Impact of perceived corporate culture on organizational commitment</i> (Ortega-Parra & Sastre-Castillo, 2013)	Career advancement; employee training; promotion of ethical behavior; emphasis on human-centered values; alignment of organizational and employee values
21	<i>Maximizing employee engagement through artificial intelligent organizational culture in the context of leadership and training of employees</i> (Rozman et al., 2023b)	AI-supported leadership; targeted AI-based training; improving team performance through AI; assigning repetitive tasks to AI; developing data-driven skills; creating a culture of innovation and learning; integrating human resource management with digital transformation

22	<i>Critical factors for knowledge sharing in technology-intensive organizations: Evidence from UAE service sector</i> (AlShamsi & Ajmal, 2018)	Increasing employee engagement; performance- and reward-related strategies; organizational leadership development; development of a positive organizational culture
23	<i>Employees and sustainability: The role of incentives</i> (Merriman et al., 2016)	Sustainability-based compensation; alignment of individual and organizational values; use of nonfinancial incentives; integrated use of tangible and intangible rewards
24	<i>Organizational climate and job satisfaction: Do employees' personalities matter?</i> (Ahmad et al., 2018)	Democratic performance-appraisal systems; immediate performance-based rewards; mentoring programs; reduced bureaucracy; promotion of a collaborative culture; personality-balanced recruitment; customization of management practices according to employee personality
25	<i>Worklife and satisfaction of hospitalists: Toward flourishing careers</i> (Hinami et al., 2012)	Improving the organizational climate; organizational fairness; provision of personal time; revising compensation arrangements; strengthening relationships with leaders; increasing job autonomy

Findings and Results

The findings obtained from the review of the articles are presented in two sections: descriptive findings and analytical findings based on thematic analysis.

The descriptive findings describe and analyze the selected articles in terms of their bibliographic characteristics. This section presents the distribution of the articles according to year of publication, methodology, database, and subject area.

Table 5

Distribution of Articles by Year of Publication

Year of Publication	Number of Articles	Percentage
2002	1	4%
2007	1	4%
2008	1	4%
2010	2	8%
2011	1	4%
2012	1	4%
2013	3	12%
2014	1	4%
2015	1	4%
2016	3	12%
2017	2	8%
2018	2	8%
2023	3	12%
Total	25	100%

As shown in Table 5, the largest numbers of articles were published in 2013, with three articles accounting for 12%; 2016, with three articles accounting for 12%; and 2023, with three articles accounting for 12%. The publication trend indicates growing scholarly attention to human resource management strategies and employee morale during the past decade. The publication period extending from 2002 to 2023 demonstrates the continuing importance of this topic over the past two decades.

Table 6

Distribution of Articles by Methodology

Methodology	Number of Articles	Percentage
Quantitative	10	40%
Mixed methods—quantitative and qualitative	7	28%
Qualitative	4	16%
Systematic review	3	12%
Conceptual/theoretical	1	4%
Total	25	100%

As shown in Table 6, among the 25 final articles, the quantitative approach had the highest frequency, accounting for 40%, or 10 articles. The mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, ranked second, accounting for

28%, or seven articles. Qualitative studies accounted for 16%, or four articles, and systematic reviews accounted for 12%, or three articles. Only one article, representing 4%, was entirely conceptual and theoretical. This distribution demonstrates the predominance of quantitative and mixed-methods approaches in studies of employee morale.

Table 7

Distribution of Articles by Database

Database	Number of Articles	Percentage
Scopus	10	40%
Web of Science	6	24%
Scopus and Web of Science—jointly indexed	3	12%
Google Scholar and reputable websites	6	24%
Total	25	100%

As shown in Table 7, Scopus accounted for the largest proportion of the final articles, with 40%, or 10 articles. Web of Science and Google Scholar together with reputable websites each accounted for 24%, or six articles. Twelve percent of the articles, corresponding to three articles, were indexed in both Scopus and Web of Science. This distribution demonstrates the importance of simultaneously searching multiple databases to achieve comprehensive coverage in systematic reviews.

Table 8

Distribution of Articles by Subject Area

Principal Subject Area	Number of Articles	Percentage
Human resource management and employee morale	8	32%
Human resource management and work engagement	6	24%
Human resource management and job satisfaction	5	20%
Human resource management and organizational commitment	4	16%
Human resource management and psychological well-being	2	8%
Total	25	100%

As shown in Table 8, the largest proportion of articles addressed human resource management and employee morale, accounting for 32%, or eight articles. Human resource management and work engagement accounted for 24%, or six articles, followed by human resource management and job satisfaction, which accounted for 20%, or five articles. Human resource management and organizational commitment accounted for 16%, or four articles, whereas human resource management and psychological well-being accounted for 8%, or two articles.

Table 9

Distribution of Articles by Type of Organization Studied

Type of Organization	Number of Articles	Percentage
Hospitals and healthcare centers	10	40%
Governmental and public-sector organizations	5	20%
Information technology organizations	3	12%
Service organizations	3	12%
Industrial and manufacturing organizations	2	8%
Other organizations	2	8%
Total	25	100%

As shown in Table 9, the largest proportion of articles, comprising 40%, or 10 articles, focused on hospitals and healthcare centers. Governmental and public-sector organizations ranked second, accounting for 20%, or five articles. This distribution reflects the substantial concentration of studies in the healthcare sector while also revealing a research gap concerning

governmental organizations, including provincial governments. This gap further demonstrates the necessity of conducting the present study.

In this section, thematic analysis was used to extract and classify strategies that are effective in enhancing employee morale. The conceptual analysis process was conducted in three stages: coding and integration of concepts, formation of subcategories, and formation of principal categories.

Stage One: Coding and Integration of Concepts

At this stage, all strategies extracted from the articles were examined, and conceptually similar items were merged and standardized. In many articles, a single concept may have been expressed using different terms. For example, “professional training,” “skills development,” and “training programs” all refer to the common concept of employee training and development. The purpose of this process was to reduce conceptual fragmentation and create standardized codes suitable for analysis.

Table 10

Coding and Integration of Concepts

Initial Extracted Code	Integrated Code
Employee training, skills development, professional training, investment in professional development	Employee training and development
Empowerment, increased decision-making authority, job autonomy, structural empowerment	Employee empowerment
Employee participation in decision-making, participative management	Participation in decision-making
Performance feedback, performance appraisal, performance management accompanied by feedback	Performance management and feedback
Rewards, incentives, benefits, reward and recognition systems, compensation	Reward and compensation system
Supervisory support, supportive leadership, managerial support, stronger relationships with leaders	Managerial support and leadership
Positive organizational culture, shared values, a culture of trust and transparency, promotion of a collaborative culture	Positive organizational culture
Organizational communication, information transparency, transparent daily communication, effective communication	Effective organizational communication
Stress and burnout management, job-burnout reduction programs, employee welfare and health management	Employee welfare and health management
Work–life balance, work–life balance policies, flexible work schedules	Work–life balance
Workload management, staffing levels proportionate to workload	Workload management
Knowledge sharing and social interaction, strengthening positive social interactions, development of the social environment	Organizational interaction and collaboration
Organizational security and justice, fair treatment, organizational fairness, perceived justice	Organizational justice and fairness
Use of artificial intelligence at work, AI-oriented organizational culture, AI-supported leadership	Adoption of technology and innovation
Reduced role ambiguity, clarification of expectations, expectation management	Role and expectation clarity
Mentoring, development of interpersonal relationships, personalization of strategies	Individual and relational development
Value alignment, alignment of organizational and employee values	Value alignment

Stage Two: Formation of Subcategories

At this stage, the integrated codes that conceptually belonged to a common domain were grouped into subcategories. For example, the codes “employee training” and “empowerment” are both related to the development of employee capabilities; therefore, they were classified under the human capital development subcategory. The formation of subcategories helps organize concepts at a higher level and facilitates their analysis.

Table 11

Formation of Subcategories

Subcategory	Related Codes
Human capital development	Employee training and development; employee empowerment
Performance management	Performance management and feedback; reward and compensation system
Organizational leadership and management	Managerial support and leadership; participation in decision-making
Organizational culture and relationships	Positive organizational culture; effective organizational communication; organizational interaction and collaboration
Welfare and working conditions	Employee welfare and health management; work–life balance; workload management
Organizational justice and trust	Organizational justice and fairness; role and expectation clarity
Organizational innovation and technology	Adoption of technology and innovation
Individual and relational development	Individual and relational development; value alignment

At this stage, the subcategories were classified at a broader level into the principal categories or themes of the study. These categories represent the key domains that exert the greatest influence on employee morale. Ultimately, these principal categories may serve as the basis for developing a conceptual model for enhancing employee morale.

Table 12

Formation of Principal Categories

Principal Category	Related Subcategories	Number of Related Articles
Managerial and leadership strategies	Organizational leadership and management; performance management	18
Human resource development strategies	Human capital development; individual and relational development	16
Organizational cultural and social strategies	Organizational culture and relationships; value alignment	15
Employee welfare and quality-of-work-life strategies	Welfare and working conditions	12
Structural and organizational strategies	Organizational justice and trust	10
Technological and innovative strategies	Organizational innovation and technology	3

Discussion and Conclusion

The present systematic review sought to identify, analyze, and classify human resource management strategies that contribute to enhancing employee morale, with particular relevance to the Wasit Provincial Government. The findings showed that employee morale is influenced by a broad and interconnected set of organizational practices rather than by any single managerial intervention. The thematic analysis generated six principal categories: managerial and leadership strategies, human resource development strategies, organizational cultural and social strategies, employee welfare and quality-of-work-life strategies, structural and organizational strategies, and technological and innovative strategies. Among these categories, managerial and leadership strategies were the most frequently represented, appearing in 18 of the 25 selected studies. Human resource development strategies were identified in 16 studies, organizational cultural and social strategies in 15 studies, employee welfare and quality-of-work-life strategies in 12 studies, structural and organizational strategies in 10 studies, and technological and innovative strategies in three studies. These findings indicate that employee morale is a multidimensional organizational outcome that emerges from the combined effects of leadership, development opportunities, workplace culture, fairness, well-being, job design, and technological change.

The predominance of managerial and leadership strategies suggests that employees' immediate and continuing interactions with managers are among the strongest determinants of morale. The reviewed studies emphasized supportive leadership, supervisory assistance, participative management, decentralized decision-making, performance feedback, recognition, and stronger relationships between employees and organizational leaders. This finding is consistent with research showing that leadership practices shape employees' perceptions of security, respect, trust, fairness, and organizational support. Security-oriented leadership, for example, has been associated with organizational vitality through the mediating role of work morale, indicating that leadership influences not only employees' psychological states but also the broader energy and dynamism of the organization [7]. Similarly, research in military organizations has shown that leadership quality, personnel training, and managerial preparedness are central to maintaining morale under demanding and uncertain conditions [10]. The importance of supportive management is also reflected in evidence from healthcare organizations, where supervisory support, management style, and leadership quality have been identified as important determinants of staff retention, satisfaction, and organizational commitment [21, 23].

The strong role of leadership can be explained by the fact that managers translate formal human resource policies into employees' daily work experiences. Even well-designed policies may fail to improve morale when managers implement them inconsistently, communicate poorly, or overlook employee concerns. Conversely, supportive managers can strengthen morale by clarifying expectations, acknowledging employees' contributions, involving them in decisions, and providing the resources required to perform effectively. Structural empowerment is particularly important in this regard. When employees have access to information, support, resources, and opportunities, they are more likely to experience control over their work and demonstrate organizational citizenship behaviors. Previous findings have shown that structural empowerment can reduce burnout and indirectly strengthen citizenship behavior, indicating that leadership and organizational systems jointly affect both well-being and discretionary performance [22]. The reviewed evidence therefore supports the conclusion that managerial and leadership strategies should occupy a central position in any framework intended to improve morale in the Wasit Provincial Government.

Human resource development emerged as the second most prominent category. The relevant strategies included employee training, professional development, empowerment, mentoring, career-path design, soft-skills development, and personalization of human resource practices. This result indicates that employees' morale is likely to increase when the organization invests in their current capabilities and future advancement. Training communicates that employees are valued and that the organization is willing to allocate resources to their growth. It can also reduce role-related uncertainty and improve employees' confidence in dealing with complex work demands. Research has shown that professional competency is positively related to organizational commitment, suggesting that employees who feel capable and professionally supported are more likely to remain psychologically attached to the organization [18]. Similarly, high-performance work practices that develop employee skills, knowledge, autonomy, and participation may strengthen both performance and positive attitudes toward the organization [13].

The findings concerning talent management further reinforce the importance of developmental practices. Talent management contributes to morale when it responds to employee needs, provides transparent advancement opportunities, and demonstrates clear organizational objectives. However, its effectiveness depends on whether employees perceive such practices as fair and inclusive. Previous research has shown that talent management systems may produce stronger outcomes when their purposes, target groups, and benefits are clearly defined and when their effects are evaluated from the employee perspective [17]. Furthermore, engagement-oriented human resource systems emphasize recruitment, socialization, training, performance management, and empowerment as interconnected practices rather than isolated interventions [16]. The present results therefore suggest that human resource development should not be limited to occasional training courses; instead, it should be incorporated into a coherent system of competency development, mentoring, career progression, and job enrichment.

Organizational cultural and social strategies constituted the third major category and were represented in 15 studies. These strategies included the development of a positive organizational culture, trust, transparency, effective communication, collaborative relationships, knowledge sharing, social interaction, workplace inclusion, and alignment between employee and organizational values. This finding confirms that morale is socially constructed within the organization. Employees interpret their work experiences through shared norms, relationships, and patterns of communication. A culture based on trust and collaboration can strengthen psychological safety, reduce uncertainty, and encourage employees to contribute knowledge

and ideas. Research on tacit knowledge sharing has demonstrated that organizational culture, personality, and the social environment affect employees' willingness to exchange experience and cooperate with colleagues [29]. Evidence from technology-intensive organizations has similarly shown that leadership, performance systems, rewards, and organizational culture are critical to knowledge-sharing behavior [30].

The finding regarding cultural alignment is also consistent with evidence that perceived corporate culture affects organizational commitment. Employees are more likely to become attached to an organization when they perceive compatibility between organizational values and their own expectations and ethical standards [27]. Workplace inclusion may further strengthen morale by ensuring that employees feel respected, accepted, and able to participate fully in organizational life [32]. In addition, appropriate workplace enjoyment and positive informal interaction can increase engagement and contribute to a more supportive organizational atmosphere [31]. More recent evidence suggests that workplace fun may support informal learning through organizational trust, demonstrating that positive social experiences can have both emotional and developmental consequences [33]. For the Wasit Provincial Government, these findings imply that morale-enhancement initiatives should address not only formal systems but also communication quality, interpersonal trust, cooperation across administrative units, and the symbolic messages conveyed by organizational culture.

Employee welfare and quality-of-work-life strategies were identified in 12 studies. This category included stress and burnout management, work-life balance, workload management, flexible scheduling, healthy working conditions, family-supportive supervision, and attention to psychological well-being. The importance of this category reflects the fact that employees cannot maintain high morale under conditions of excessive workload, chronic stress, interpersonal mistreatment, or persistent conflict between occupational and personal responsibilities. Studies of emergency nurses have shown that demanding work conditions and job characteristics can predict adverse stress-related health outcomes [24]. Similarly, workload, management support, professional opportunities, and workplace conditions have been identified as important influences on job satisfaction in healthcare employees [19]. Research on hospitalists also indicates that organizational climate, autonomy, compensation, leadership relationships, and personal time contribute to satisfaction and flourishing careers [28].

The findings further suggest that welfare strategies should include protection against negative workplace behaviors. Workplace bullying can impair employee performance and behavior through its adverse effect on psychological well-being [34]. This underscores the need for clear anti-bullying procedures, confidential reporting mechanisms, conflict-resolution systems, and managerial accountability. Family-supportive supervisor training may also improve employee attitudes and performance by helping managers respond more effectively to work-family demands [35]. In practical terms, the Wasit Provincial Government should recognize that morale cannot be improved solely by motivational slogans or financial incentives when employees face unmanaged workloads, occupational stress, or poor interpersonal treatment. Welfare and quality-of-work-life policies must therefore be treated as strategic components of human resource management.

Structural and organizational strategies appeared in 10 studies and included organizational justice, role clarity, expectation management, reduction of bureaucracy, fair treatment, transparent procedures, job autonomy, and equitable reward systems. The relevance of these factors is particularly important in public-sector organizations, where administrative complexity and formal procedures may generate ambiguity and frustration. Research has shown that organizational goal ambiguity can negatively affect employee morale, particularly when employees do not clearly understand institutional

priorities or the relationship between their duties and the organizational mission [9]. The present findings therefore highlight the importance of clarifying roles, responsibilities, performance standards, and decision-making authority.

Organizational justice is also central because employees evaluate not only the outcomes they receive but also the procedures through which decisions are made and the manner in which they are treated. Compensation can contribute to morale when it is perceived as fair, timely, and consistent with employee contributions [11]. Incentive systems may become more effective when they combine material and nonmaterial rewards and reflect broader organizational priorities [25]. At the same time, the effect of organizational climate on job satisfaction may vary according to employee personality, indicating that standardized management practices may not affect all employees in the same way [26]. These findings support a balanced approach in which public-sector organizations establish clear and equitable systems while retaining enough flexibility to respond to individual differences.

Technological and innovative strategies were the least frequently represented category, appearing in only three studies. Nevertheless, their emergence is theoretically and practically significant. The reviewed studies emphasized AI-supported leadership, AI-based training, automation of repetitive tasks, reduction of employee workload, data-driven skills, digital transformation, and the creation of an innovation-oriented organizational culture. The relatively low frequency of this category may reflect the recent emergence of artificial intelligence applications in human resource management rather than their limited importance. Research has shown that AI-supported systems can reduce workload and improve organizational performance in volatile and uncertain environments [41]. Artificially intelligent organizational cultures may also strengthen employee engagement when technology is integrated with leadership and training practices [42].

Recent studies further suggest that artificial intelligence can improve administrative performance, human resource decision-making, and digital transformation, particularly when employees receive adequate training and when implementation is aligned with organizational needs [43, 44]. Machine-learning and big-data methods may also support turnover prediction and allow human resource departments to identify patterns associated with employee withdrawal [45]. However, the effect of technology on morale is unlikely to be uniformly positive. Employees may perceive AI as supportive when it reduces repetitive work and facilitates development, but as threatening when it increases surveillance, uncertainty, or fears of job displacement. Therefore, technological strategies should be introduced transparently, ethically, and with employee participation.

The descriptive findings also provide important contextual insights. Quantitative studies constituted the largest methodological group, followed by mixed-methods and qualitative studies. This pattern indicates that the field has primarily examined relationships among human resource practices, morale, engagement, satisfaction, commitment, and performance through measurable variables. Although this approach has generated valuable evidence, the presence of qualitative and mixed-methods studies demonstrates the importance of understanding employees' lived experiences and the contextual meaning of morale. The concentration of studies in hospitals and healthcare institutions further indicates that much of the evidence has emerged from high-pressure service environments. While these settings share several characteristics with governmental organizations, including formal structures, professional responsibilities, service obligations, and workload pressures, the comparatively smaller number of public-sector studies reveals a substantial contextual gap.

Overall, the findings support an integrated interpretation of employee morale. Morale is not produced by isolated incentives or temporary motivational activities; rather, it results from employees' cumulative assessment of how the

organization leads, develops, rewards, protects, includes, and communicates with them. Studies have repeatedly associated morale with productivity, performance, organizational commitment, engagement, and innovative behavior [1, 37-39]. Accordingly, an effective framework for the Wasit Provincial Government should combine supportive leadership, transparent performance management, development opportunities, positive culture, employee welfare, organizational justice, and responsible technological innovation. The central role of managerial and leadership strategies does not diminish the importance of the other categories; instead, it suggests that leadership is the mechanism through which many human resource strategies are coordinated and translated into daily organizational practice.

The present study has several limitations. First, the review was based mainly on studies indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, supplemented by Google Scholar and selected reputable websites; therefore, potentially relevant studies published in other databases, local journals, organizational reports, dissertations, or unpublished sources may not have been included. Second, the selected studies were heterogeneous in terms of organizational context, methodology, employee population, and conceptualization of morale, which limited direct comparison across findings. Third, a substantial proportion of the reviewed evidence originated in healthcare organizations, while fewer studies focused specifically on governmental and provincial administrations. Consequently, the transferability of some findings to the Wasit Provincial Government should be considered carefully. Finally, the thematic synthesis depended on the information reported in the selected articles and may not fully capture undocumented organizational, political, cultural, and administrative factors specific to the study setting.

Future studies should empirically test the six-category framework within the Wasit Provincial Government and other Iraqi public-sector organizations. Quantitative research could examine the relative and combined effects of leadership, development, culture, welfare, justice, and technology on different dimensions of morale. Qualitative interviews and focus groups could explore how employees interpret these strategies and identify context-specific barriers to their implementation. Longitudinal and intervention-based designs are also recommended to determine whether changes in human resource practices produce sustained improvements in morale, performance, and service quality. Future research should additionally compare administrative units, occupational groups, managerial levels, and demographic categories and investigate whether organizational trust, perceived support, psychological safety, or engagement mediate the relationship between human resource strategies and employee morale.

Managers and policymakers in the Wasit Provincial Government should adopt an integrated human resource strategy rather than relying on isolated motivational initiatives. Priority should be given to training managers in supportive leadership, participative decision-making, constructive feedback, conflict resolution, and fair performance management. The organization should establish transparent career-development pathways, mentoring systems, equitable compensation and recognition procedures, and regular assessments of workload and employee well-being. Internal communication should be strengthened, roles and expectations should be clarified, and employees should be provided with safe channels for expressing concerns and contributing to decisions. Technological tools, including artificial intelligence, should be introduced gradually and transparently, accompanied by employee training, ethical safeguards, and clear evidence that technology is intended to support rather than displace employees.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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