

## **The Role of Administrative Leadership in the improving Performance of Employees: Iraqi Universities as a Model**

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### **Abstract**

In the current age of competitiveness and progress, organizations largely focus on achieving objectives by following a beneficial system that is capable of running entities. Leadership behaviour is a modern concept, which is considered to impact the intellectual growth and performance of employees. In higher education institutions, it is important to increase employee performance in order to achieve sustainability in the education sector. The current study aims to investigate the effect of the leadership behaviour and style on the employee performance of the Iraqi universities. Following the transformational and transactional theories, the study proposes a conceptual framework to investigate the influence of transformational and transactional leadership of the administrators on academic employee performance the indicators of which are teaching, research and services to the university.

**Keywords:** Leadership Behaviours, Transformational Behaviour, Transactional Behaviour, Iraqi Universities, Academic Employee Performance

### **Introduction**

The 21st century is the age of technology, information and globalization, which are exerting a great competitive pressure on the management of higher education institutions. The colleges and universities administrative sectors are experiencing a dynamic environmental pressure of increasing demand and performance (Mathew, 2010). As higher education institutions play a vital role in initiating and sustaining economic vigour in the world market, the suppliers i.e., the leaders and the workforce are required to respond to the innovative leadership roles and calls exuding training, skills and expertise (Maponya, 2005). In such competitive environments, it is only natural and logical to seek positive and success-oriented leadership because it seems that employee performance in these institutions may be influenced by impactful leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Bensimon (1989) already had recognized the onset of a peculiar pressure build up on the institutions of higher learning when he specified that a number of universities are facing a 'great leadership crisis. The developing countries such as Iraq faced double crisis of leadership and management in post-war recovery phase. According to a report presented by UNESCO (2003), fragile sustenance of international relations and positive influences, Iraqi universities, in terms of management and control, are lagging far behind as compared to the universities of international impact. On top of that, there is scarcity of research that addresses the issue of leadership style and its role in managing higher education institutions in Iraq, and there is limited use of such behaviours (Larsson & Vinberg, 2010). In such a state of affairs where Iraq is a developing country, facing post-war redevelopment plans, and already facing leadership challenges in institutional organizations' infrastructure, it stands to reason that there should be more and more studies on how leadership quality can influence the performance of Iraqi

employees. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Iraq, has also proposed that according to the National Strategy (2009 – 2013), leadership behaviours may be investigated to find workable solutions to increase employee performance in public universities (HEOC-Iraq, 2007). Keeping this in view, the current study aims to investigate the impact of leadership behaviour and style on the performance of the academic employees in public universities of Iraq.

Glancing over the available literature about the influence of leadership behaviours on employee performance makes the reader aware of the presence of a number of studies in this area. However, there is a visible dearth of the investigations pertaining to the how leadership impacts employee performance in higher education institutions. This gap mainly exists in the developing countries of the Arab world (Metcalf et al, 2011). The establishment of notable universities in Iraq such as University of Baghdad, University of Mosul, University of Al-Mustansriyah and University of Basrah around 1950s gave Iraq a sound foundation of an educational system. Nevertheless, the progress scientific research and education in Iraq, after the post-occupational economic sanctions deployed on Iraq, faced a sudden collapse in the support facilitated to the academic staff in Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIs) (Zhang & Rui, 2018). This introduced a visible change also in leadership behaviour and support in HEIs. UNESCO report (2003) verifies that Iraq's academic support for employees has continuously been on the decline since 1991 resulting in the weak global appearance of Iraqi universities. This seems to have further affected negatively the amount of progress in the field of research, curriculum, educational policy, support, facilities, and academic infrastructure. In this case, as Swan and Johnson (1975) indicate, the lack of leadership seems to have adversely affected the employee performance leading to weak foundation for prospective educational establishments.

Several notable researchers (Swanson & Johnson, 1975; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bono & Judge, 2004; Mester, Visser & Roodt, 2003; Deluga, 1990) assert that the leadership behaviour of administrators can potentially influence the performance of the middle managers or employees. Following the debate, Nordin (2011) and Niles (1997) specify two distinguished leadership behaviours in the context of higher education namely transformational leadership behaviour and transactional leadership behaviour. Both kinds of behaviours may go hand in hand however, transformational leadership is considered to motivate employees to perform positively, and charge them with enthusiasm to better their performance as an inner goal leading to achieve organizational objectives (Dubinsky, Yammarino, Jolson & Spangler, 1995). Bass (1990) and Burns (1978) consider both the behaviours as opposite to each other but only depending on their type, not on antagonistic inclinations. Transactional leadership uses fortuitous rewards while the leaders disseminate positive energy for achieving any predetermined goals. There are fair chances that a university may be using any one of these leadership behaviors, and that may lead to executing goals but through different transits. The current study aims to investigate the leadership behaviour employed in Iraqi universities while determining their type and its influence on the employee performance.

## **Literature Review**

### **Performance of Academic Staff or Employees (PAS)**

The greatest stakes depend on the amount of performance that employees of an organization reflect. It is directly related to the organization's market sustainability and reputation. Employees' performance is a means to an end, the end being the achievement of the objectives that an organization strives to meet (). The greater the performance rate, the greater the achievement. With the onset of the 21st century, the competitiveness in field of education and academic services has increased (RESouRCE & GuidE, 2008), and educational organizations, in the shape of higher education institutions, have started to focus on adopting the ways and

measures to ensure successful target achievement through presenting the best of performance (Luterbach & Brown, 2011).

Gaither, Nedwek and Neal (1994) state that academic performance is a quantity, amount or level that is connected with the measurement of some activity of an educational institution. Employee performance is an element that ensures the academic performance of an educational institution. In universities, the performance of employees enables the top management to evaluate the performance of the organization, and the administrators can envisage plans and adopt strategies to increase this performance (Otoo et. al, 2019). Employee performance and measures of its maintenance are significant in sustaining an organization however, in case of universities, its significance increases because education is considered the fountainhead of all progress in the present age of hyper-specialization and progress (Hall & Matthews, 2008).

The measurement of employee performance and the related motivation and reward that they obtain, depend on the leadership behaviours of the administration under which the employees work. Academic employee performance may be measured using academic performance indicator or API. Ewell (1994) defines API as a contextual information regarding the condition or outcome of a regularly produced public action. This action is a publicly reported factor, which is used for planning, overseeing and allocating resources in an organization or a system. Any such piece of information cannot exist in a vacuum, and thus comes with related observations and values. Sapp (1993), like Gaither, Nedwek and Neal (1994), elaborates the nature of APIs as quantitative measures of an action or activity taken in an academic context in academic organizations. APIs are widely used for evaluation purposes of an organization's performance so as to guide the governance and administration in incurring improvement (Muller & de Rijcke, 2017; Dooris & Teeter, 1994). Keeping in view the elements from different literature reviews, the academic employee performance may be termed into teaching, research, university services (Tang & Chamberlain, 1997; Mertler, 2001; Boyer, 1990; Johnes, 1996; Al-Mayali, 2012; Csomos, 2020; Ishak, Suhaida & Yuzainee, 2009). In this connection, there is a scarce empirical investigation on academic employee performance and leadership in Iraqi context (Maziak, 2011) thus the current study attempts to contribute to filling in the gap while selecting the aforementioned performance indicators.

### **Leadership Behaviours**

Leadership behaviour is frequently considered a significant factor in operationalizing an organization and knowledge management (). In higher education institutions, leadership style and behaviours are now deemed important influencer in spite of the fact that more studies are required in order to generalize the concept. Hunt and Larson (1977) define leadership as a subset of human behaviour and its manifestation. In the current study, we define leadership behaviour as an interaction between two or more members of the academic organization that leads to structuring and re-establishing structures of situations, anticipation and perception, also referring to administrators as the foci of action (Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2012; Ng'ethe, Namusonge & Iravo, 2012). Vast literature exists on leadership support in knowledge sharing however, ample room for research exists in the area of leadership impact on employee performance in the developing Arab countries (Almayali, 2012).

In the context of leadership behaviour of administrators, much seem to depend on the transforming behaviour that an administrator extends to employees. Leadership occurs when personnel affect the skills, motivation level and competencies of another personnel. Leadership behaviour is considered to have two kinds namely transformational leadership behaviour and transactional leadership behaviour. Transformational leadership positively influences employees by transforming their motivation level and competency. On the other hand, transactional leadership operates through rewards, and depends on monitoring employees.

Transformational leadership has been much researched while the theory was propounded by Bass (1985) largely founded on the work of Burns (1978) on the relationship between political leaders and their following groups (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Basically, this leadership behaviours influences the team effectiveness and performance by motivating them to rise above their current performance level using the inspiration of the leaders (Anderson, 2017).

### **Transformational Leadership Behaviour**

Following is the core description of transformational leadership behaviour extracted from Bass (1990), and Bass & Avolio (1994); (1) Idealized Behaviour is an influence exerted by leaders on the follower group. Leaders pivot their behaviours on values and beliefs while exuding a sense of pursuit and goal-achievement. Such behaviours keep the followers' welfare at the forefront while sharing risks; (2) Idealized Attributes are the values of loyalty, confidence and mutual respect. Leaders attempt to operationalize following these attributes, which, in turn, motivate the followers to achieve objectives keeping in view the same sense of mission; (3) Inspiration is what leaders aims to infuse in their followers or employees by motivating them while hanging on the aforementioned values. Leaders try to awaken in their followers an envisagement of future in which the expectations of the latter will be materialized. This behavioral attribute infuses meaning in the performance challenge presented to the employees; (4) Intellect Stimulation is a behaviour in which leaders arouse follower' actions by using critical thinking and stimulating follower' critical thinking. Leaders present previous situations with new innovative solutions, restructure problems, and reframe assumptions to infuse modified thinking and creativity. Followers take the stimulation and are anticipated to work in a creative and innovative manner; (5) Consideration is a behaviour that leaders extend to each individual in the team. Leaders pay attention to the needs and necessities of each team member in order to incur growth and work effectiveness.

### **Transactional Leadership Behaviour**

Transactional leadership has a nature different from transformational leadership. According to Bass (1999) and Avolio and Bass (2004), transactional leadership is a condition of the occurrence of mutual interaction between leaders and followers. Through this type of leadership behaviour, leaders affect the actions of followers or employees using the following means; (1) Contingent Rewards are extended to followers acknowledging their efforts and effective actions that increase performance and achieve objectives. Acknowledgement goes a long way in this kind of behaviour. Also, leaders promise to confer rewards and grants in case of achievements and accomplishment of assigned tasks; (2) Active Exception Management is a transactional behavior in which leaders deliberately search for any rules and regulations breach in followers' performance. In case of spotting such an action, leaders take corrective measures to streamline actions and performance; (3) Passive Exception Management is a transactional behaviour in which leaders intervene and take the charge of the situation only when any rule deviation takes place. If the set rules are not followed, a corrective measure is taken.

If compared and contrasted, both leadership styles and behaviours are significant in influencing employee performance by administrators. Both behaviours are competing paradigmatic actions to exert a positive influence on followers' actions. Transformational leadership affects the inner potential and character whereas transactional leadership monitors the actions on the performance of employees (Bono & Judge, 2004). Hautala (2005) puts forth that transformational leadership is used to achieve long-term changes and effects in employee performance to achieve long-term goals whereas transactional leadership is extended to achieve short-term goals and actions. Depending on the nature of these behaviours, transformational leadership intellectually stimulates employees and helps them become productive while

increasing their work interest (Bass, 1990). Contrarily, transactional leadership is situational and stimulates interest in achieving an impending task in a certain situation. Bass and Avolio (1997) call transactional leadership behaviour a means to a current end. It is extended to employees and followers on the basis of exchange relationship between the leaders and the followers. A considerate and experienced leader changes the leadership styles gauging needs and situations. Moreover, leaders assume flexibility to engage in one behaviour and smoothly switching over to the other.

Keeping in view the above-mentioned leadership behaviours and styles, it seems that Iraqi universities lack smooth application of these behaviours and that may have negatively affected the employee performance. A combinative effort is lacking, which requires indepth investigations on the relationship of the extended leadership style in the higher education institutions in Iraq and the employee performance in teaching, research and university services. The current study proposes a framework to investigate the effects of leadership behaviours in Iraqi universities, on the performance of the academic employees i.e., academic staff. The next section presents the framework and the hypotheses of the study.

### Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship of the leadership behaviours in the Iraqi universities on the employee performance. For that matter, the involved personnel are the academic leaders (academic administrators) of the Iraqi public universities, and the employees i.e., the academic staff of these universities. The academic leaders category involves the deans, vice deans and heads of the departments whereas in the category of academic staff fall the professors, associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers of the universities.

The leadership behaviour, which the current study investigates, are two namely transformational and transactional leadership behaviours. Its influence on the academic staff is proposed to be investigated through using Academic Performance Indicators (APIs) of teaching, research and the services that the academic staff renders for the universities. Keeping in this investigation scheme, following is the conceptual framework:

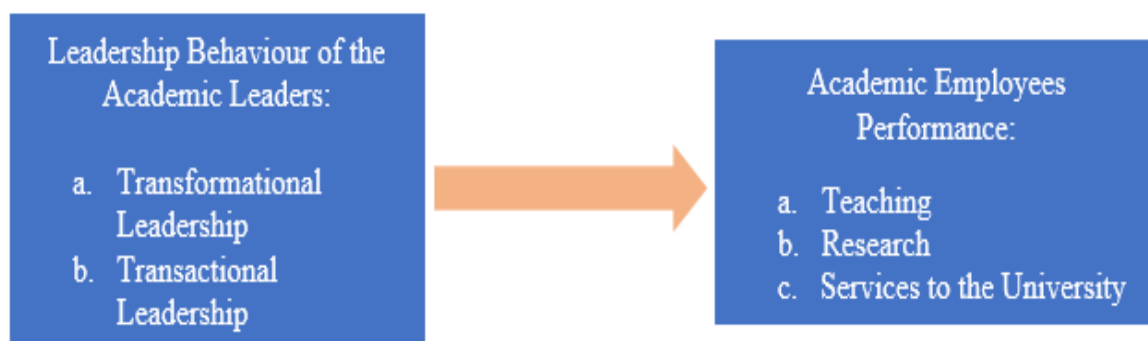


Figure 1. The Relationship between Leadership Behaviour and Staff Performance

### Leadership Behaviour and Performance of Academic staff

Several studies have proposed that leadership behaviours affect the employee performance (Nordin, 2011; Ambad, Kalimin & Damit, 2021; Gwavuya, 2011). Therefore, the current study assumes that positive leadership behaviour positively influences the performance of the academic staff. Thus, the first hypothesis of the study is:

H1: Leadership behaviour has a significant positive relationship between the academic leaders and academic employees in the Iraqi universities.

## **Transformational Leadership Behaviour and Performance of Academic staff**

There are several studies (Camps & Rodriguez, 2011; Griffith, 2004; Nielson, Randall, Yarker & Brenner, 2008), though not in the developing Iraqi contexts, that found the positive role of transformational leadership behaviour in increasing the staff performance. Based on these assumptions, this study forms the second hypothesis:

H2: The transformational leadership style of the academic leaders in the Iraqi universities has a significant positive relationship with the academic staff performance.

## **Transactional Leadership Behaviour and Performance of Academic staff**

Several studies (Mahdinezhad and Suandi, 2013; Nguni, Slegers & Denessen, 2006; Dartey-Baah, 2015; Martin, 2015; Fasola, Adeyemi & Olowe, 2013) have proposed that there exists a positive relationship between transactional leadership behaviour and academic staff performance. However, Fernandes & Awamleh (2004) found that transactional leadership has an insignificant effect on employee performance. Therefore, it is important to investigate the aforementioned relationship in the Iraqi context. Thus, the third hypothesis of the current study is:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between the academic leaders and academic staff in the Iraqi universities.

Descriptive Statistics:

Testing the Normal Distribution of Data

Descriptive statistics for the study variables:

This part focuses on the results of the descriptive statistics of the study variables depending on their specified items. Based on a variety of statistical tools, such as the central tendency represented by the mean, the sample is measured for each item in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the mean in this study is considered the main tool for data collection with the aid of the dispersion scale, which is represented by the standard deviation. The Coefficient of Variation is used to determine the relative importance of the questionnaire items for each variable. In addition, the task of descriptive statistics is to determine the level of response for each item in the study questionnaire. The normal distribution of the variables was tested to ensure the existence of a condition of linear relationships between the independent and dependent variables. According to the findings of the literature review of statistics and the regression method, the following is a detailed presentation of the statistical description results of the dimensions related to the study variables:

First: Administrative leadership:

The findings of this variable's statistical description, which was measured across 10 items, are displayed in Table (1). The eighth item received the most attention because it had a high level of response, which resulted in a significant decrease in the standard deviation (0.655), which expresses a slight degree of dispersion in the sample's responses, and a rise in the mean (3.66) values. The eighth item is: (The good treatment by the administrative leadership of the employees has an impact on their willingness to work more within the organization). In comparison to the other items of the variable, these findings caused the coefficient of difference to drop to its lowest value (0.17), which shows that the respondents strongly agreed on the item content.

Whereas, the lowest relative importance, meaning the tenth and last relative importance, is in the fifth item because it achieved the highest value in the standard deviation (1.033), on one hand. On the other hand, it achieved a decrease in the value of its mean (3.00) as compared to the rest of the items of this variable. As a result, the coefficient of variation (CV) climbed to 0.34, indicating less agreement regarding the statements made in this item's content and regarding the other items in this variable. This is shown in Table (1) in relation to the CV obtained by dividing the standard deviation by the mean.

Table 1. Describing administrative leadership

No	Describing Tools Items	Mean	St.dev	c.v.	approval	Priority
1	A good leader is a catalyst for motivation.	3.20	1.062	0.33	Moderate	9
2	The best team leader is one who has the ability to help others see the positive in themselves and at work	3.21	0.968	0.30	Moderate	6
3	The best team leaders create the conditions for their teams to cheer on.	3.25	1.059	0.32	Moderate	8
4	An attractive leadership personality is good for motivating the organization's members	3.34	1.015	0.30	Moderate	7
5	Administrative leadership develops team spirit	3.00	1.033	0.34	Moderate	10
6	The good treatment of management leadership has a positive impact on employees	2.89	0.839	0.29	Moderate	5
7	Leisure during work encourages individuals to follow the leadership personality	3.82	0.719	0.18	Moderate	2
8	The good treatment by the administrative leadership of the employees has an impact on them to work more within the organization	3.66	0.655	0.17	Moderate	1
9	The leader's follow-up of the communication strategy between him and the employees has a positive impact	3.70	0.955	0.25	High	3
10	The influence of the leader's personality on discipline within the organization through good communication	3.80	0.997	0.26	High	4
	Total	3.387	0.490	0.14	Moderate	

*Second: Improving the performance of employees*

The ninth item (The influence of the leader's personality on discipline within the organization through good communication) gained the largest relative relevance for lowering the value of the standard deviation (0.700), according to the study of this descriptive variable, which is shown in the table (2). On the other hand, because the mean is high (3.90), which implies a very high degree of response, it represents the least dispersion in the research sample's responses. These findings caused the coefficient of difference to be reduced to its lowest value (0.17) in comparison to the other items.

Moreover, it shows that the respondents strongly agreed with the topic of this item. Whereas, the fifth item includes the information with lowest relative importance: (*the goal of your performance assessment is to detect training needs*). This item, however, shows the increase in the standard deviation value to (0.843). In addition, the decrease in the value of the mean to its lowest level (2.70) as compared to the rest of the items.

This could show a moderate response level. As a result, the coefficient of difference will increase to its greatest value (0.31). This suggests a lower level of agreement with the content presented in this item. The results of the statistical analysis varied between these two upper and lower limits of the relative importance shown in the table (2) according to the value of the deviation. As for the remaining items pertaining to this dimension, this method of analysis is applicable.

Table 2. Describing administrative leadership

No.	Describing Tools Items	Mean	St.dev	c.v.	approval	Priority
1	The job you are doing has the right conditions for best performance	3.74	0.705	0.19	Moderate	2
2	The performance appraisal system implemented in your organization achieves a high degree of satisfaction for you.	3.44	0.866	0.25	Moderate	7
3	Performance appraisal is used in the organization to find out all the strengths and weaknesses	3.33	0.889	0.27	Moderate	9
4	Please tell you about their weaknesses or shortcomings	3.18	0.827	0.26	Moderate	8
5	The goal of your performance assessment is to detect training needs	2.70	0.843	0.31	Moderate	10
6	Do you feel that your performance is improving thanks to the training you received?	3.33	0.831	0.25	Moderate	6
7	You are satisfied with the standards and methods of evaluating the performance of your organization's employees	3.36	0.753	0.22	Moderate	5
8	The mechanisms used in the process of evaluating the performance of	3.89	0.819	0.21	Moderate	3

	workers increase the effectiveness of this process					
9	The influence of the leader's personality on discipline within the organization through good communication	3.90	0.700	0.18	High	1
10	The leader follows the communication strategy between him and the employees	3.74	0.835	0.22	High	4
	Total Mean	3.461	0.445	0.13	Moderate	

It is very necessary to go over the data of the study variables to acknowledge if they are normally distributed before initiating the steps of testing the hypotheses. Taking a look at the table (3) of findings from the (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk) tests used to determine if the data were normally distributed as well as the level of each variable included in the study's hypothesis testing models. It has become clear based on the mentioned table (3) that the data of the variables have achieved the condition of the normal distribution in terms of their significance ( $p > .05$ ). This step can guarantee the possibility of applying linear regression models in hypothesis testing. In this study, it is necessary to focus on this type of testing because it has a parametric direction, and the hypothesis of normal distribution is also formulated as shown below:

H0: Normal distribution of data (HO: P=0)

H0: Data is not normally distributed. (HO: P≠0)

Table 3. the results of the normal distribution

Shapiro-Wilk			Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			
Sig.	df	Statistic	Sig.	df	Statistic	
0.216	61	0.974	.200*	61	0.098	administrative leadership
0.827	61	0.988	.200*	61	0.069	performance of employees

The two study variables are represented graphically in Figure (2), which shows that the data do not exit the box plot, and this can demonstrate that the data are distributed normally.

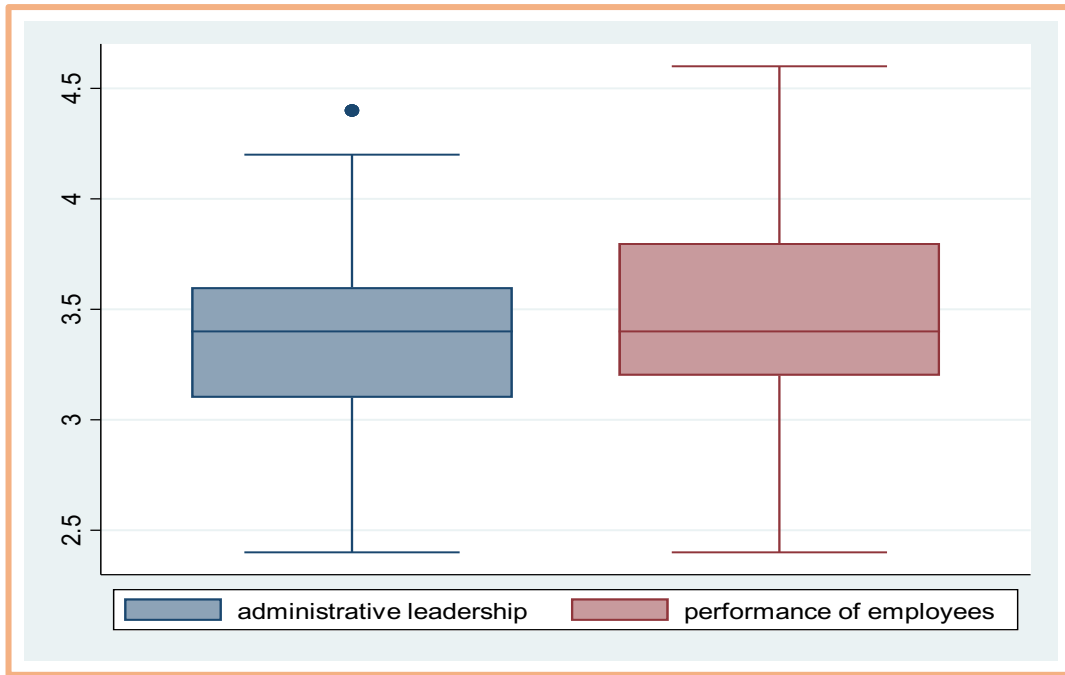


Figure 2. Normal Distribution of the Study Variables

Testing of the first hypothesis:

The results of testing this hypothesis were significant between the dependent variable, administrative leadership, and the performance of employees, with a coefficient of correlation of .712\*\*, as shown in table (4).

The relationship between the independent variable of administrative leadership and the responsive variable of employee performance is graphically expressed in Figure (3).

Table 4. results of testing the second hypothesis

Statistical Indicators						
Details	B	t	P> t	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P>F
Constant B <sub>0</sub>	1.269	4.468	.000	0.507	60.71	.000
administrative leadership -----> performance of employees B <sub>1</sub>	.642	7.792	.000			

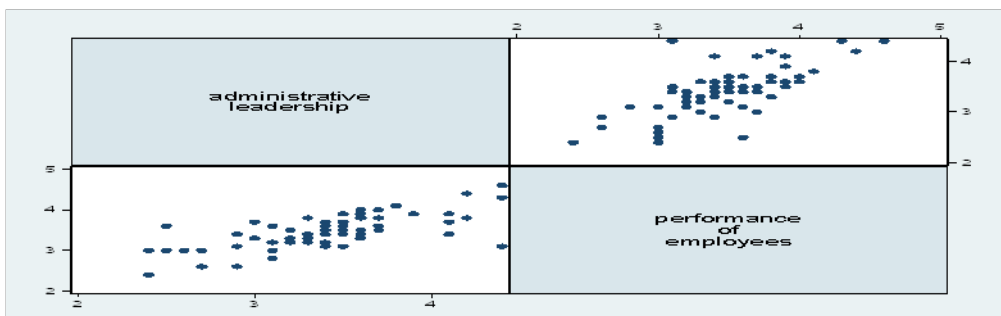


Figure 3. Relationship between the study variables

### Testing the second hypothesis of the research:

The results of testing this second hypothesis, which was devoted to testing the regression relationship, which are presented in the table (4), showed the significance of the test. Moreover, the value of the regression coefficient was ( $B1 = .642$ ,  $P = .000$ ), while the value of the determination coefficient was ( $R2 = .507$ ), with full statistical significance ( $P = 0.000$ ). This indicates the amount of variation (50.7%) that is explained by administrative leadership variation as an independent variable in the performance of employees.

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