



Micromanagement in Higher Education Institutions: A Conceptual Review of Its Impact on Faculty Well-Being

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Abstract

The rising concerns in the Higher Education sector necessitate a focus on the deteriorating well-being of faculty members. Despite their ongoing contributions to institutional functioning, student outcomes, research and innovation, their personal and professional well-being has been severely compromised in recent years. Toxic leadership patterns like micromanagement hamper their functional autonomy, academic motivation, job engagement and mental health. This conceptual review examines the impact of micromanagement on faculty members' professional well-being through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT) and job demand-resource (JDR) models. Focusing on professional well-being, it reveals that micromanagement impacts faculty members' autonomy and academic freedom, induces cognitive and emotional strain, erodes trust, hampers collegial relationships, and negatively affects their job motivation and satisfaction. Self-determination theory reinforces this view by demonstrating how micromanagement leadership can negatively influence three faculty needs critical to their well-being: autonomy, belongingness, and competence. Additionally, the job demand-resource model positions toxic leadership, such as micromanagement, as a job demand rather than a resource, causing persistent stress and ill-being. The theoretical and literature synthesis advocates healthy leadership styles that foster faculty members' well-being and mental health. Moreover, the concept of micromanagement, which remains understudied primarily in higher education settings, has been emphasised, highlighting its rising prevalence and the need for action.

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Introduction

Quality leadership provides the foundation for the effective functioning of any institution across all sectors or industries. Different leadership styles prevail in the contemporary global landscape, and a growing body of management and leadership literature focuses on toxic leadership. Toxic leadership undermines the organisational cultures, processes, policies, and stakeholders, and its menace extends to multiple domains of institutional work. One such purportedly toxic leadership style gaining significant traction among researchers and practitioners worldwide is micromanagement. Micromanagement is a supervision style characterised by excessive oversight, which takes away subordinates' right to decision-making and interferes excessively, to the extent that it hampers an individual's outcome (1,2). Such supervision patterns are perceived negatively by followers, as they hinder their autonomy and learning opportunities (3). Such levels of supervision go beyond the accepted level of exercised control, becoming detrimental rather than conducive to organisational and individual performance. Micromanagers take undue interest in the minutest of subordinate activities and hold the false assumption that all tasks in the organisation can be carried out independently (4). Such behaviours breed more negatives than positives for the employees, organisations and stakeholders. Micromanagement leads to disengagement, a lack of trust, frustration, and productivity loss among employees. Additionally, during teamwork, the employee's ability to innovate and add value is compromised due to demotivation and the

perception that task output is the sole responsibility of leaders (5).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are providers of knowledge, innovation, autonomous thinking, academic freedom, and growth opportunities for the youth of any country. With these premises in mind, HEIs require knowledge providers who promote these ideas themselves. Healthy leadership with the least resistance to autonomy is mandatory for HEIs to justify their functioning. However, micromanagement is a growing leadership concern across all levels of HEI leadership. Faculty members bear the direct consequences of micromanagement, indirectly affecting student outcomes. In academic settings, micromanagement is generally perceived as a negative leadership approach because it contradicts the principles of participatory decision-making, which are essential to creating shared accountability and achieving institutional goals (6). Micromanagers prefer things their way and refrain from providing constructive criticism or feedback on subordinates' actions. When this scenario plays out in HEIs, faculty members often feel that their professional autonomy, growth, and actions are being undermined by departmental heads or administrative leadership. This undermines their motivation, accountability, and efforts to deliver quality education (6). Harmful micromanagement patterns in individual leaders gradually become ingrained in institutional culture, becoming a daily part of operations. This issue emerges at the top and cascades to lower levels, creating a domino effect that hampers faculty members' morale, job satisfaction, and work quality (7). When these factors are significantly impaired, an individual's overall well-being is compromised. Due to excessive control and reporting, faculty members face mounting work pressures that create tremendous stress on their personal and professional lives (8). Micromanaging leaders require unattainable perfection and precision, which may not always be practical or possible. These expectations trickle down to their subordinates, creating conflicts that affect their personal and professional well-being. Although well-being is a multifaceted concept with varied conceptualisations across research, Mitra (2024) has suggested the ABC framework, which focuses on agency, belongingness, and competencies to maintain faculty well-being. This is very close to, and in opposition to, what micromanagement looks like: individuals experience a loss of independence, issues with relational harmony, and constant self-doubt.

This conceptual review discusses the growing concerns about faculty well-being, which have been significantly overlooked in the past literature. For any HEI, faculty members are its backbone, and understanding the barriers to their well-being, professionally and personally, helps take corrective measures to improve. Moreover, the existing literature on micromanagement suggests a significant gap in the higher education sector. This focus further slims down in the Indian context, where toxic leadership styles are highly underexplored, despite a compelling prevalence (9). The present review seeks to provide a robust groundwork for future scholars on the outcomes of micromanagement on faculty well-being in HEIs. Thus, compelling the top leadership and policymakers to design and implement interventions to discourage such leadership styles. Moreover, there is ample scope to understand the different theoretical frameworks that can provide the basis for micromanagement conceptualisation, and this theory-centric exploration can serve as its starting point. The promotion of greater work on

faculty well-being, particularly in the context of micromanagement, is emphasised, especially in the Asian context.

Literature Review

Micromanagement Leadership

Micromanagement occurs when leaders are driven by their need to exert absolute control and excessively interfere with their subordinates' work, creating an unacknowledged work environment and hindering employee innovation (Azeez & Aboobaker, 2024). It involves managing the minute or minutiae of day-to-day work affairs to reassure themselves that the work is performed to their standards (10). Micromanagers are consistent scrutinizers of decisions their subordinates make, even when those decisions are appropriate based on evidence and situational demands (11). Finn et al. (2018) investigated the effect of increased supervision from attending surgeons on the error rates in their subordinates' outcomes. However, no significant change in the error rate was apparent with increased resident supervision. Conversely, negative consequences emerged for interns' autonomy and decision-making empowerment, as they inhibited them from acting on their judgments. Reflecting on this, it is fair to say that micromanagement can undermine subordinate learning and active participation. Delegation issues are a primary concern when working with micromanagers, as it is not their preferred approach. However, even when they engage in delegation, they undertake dysfunctional tactics, such as authorising key responsibilities to junior staff, who are less likely to question their decisions, or giving unrelated work assignments to individual team members, making them feel disengaged (10). From a bird's view, these are ways of creating false perceptions in their followers' minds that the task outcomes are unachievable without their involvement or consultation. In reality, it is a result of their conscious, faulty delegation. Another characteristic that aligns with micromanagement is the tendency to set unnecessary timelines, demand frequent and unreasonable reporting and delay task approvals arising from their need for perfection and self-doubt (10). Directive and control-based leadership is necessary in specific situations, such as organisational change initiatives, novel or challenging endeavours, and when working with incompetent or novice workers, as well as when subordinates lack observed self-initiative (1,2). However, leaders must be self-aware and question when direction shifts to micromanaging behavioural patterns, compromising the worker's autonomy and growth, instead of polishing and catalysing their work results.

Understanding micromanagement leadership in higher education remains preliminary, with no integrated frameworks or literature to guide its knowledge base. However, a general understanding of micromanagement leadership across sectors and disciplines helps set the stage for its inquiry. In the context of higher education, micromanagement in clinical supervision is rationalised to ensure patient safety and efficient subordinate outcomes. However, the underlying causes relate to the attending faculty's lack of trust and personal insecurities (13). However, this style may seem justified to a micromanager; evidence suggests that academic micromanagement puts teachers' job satisfaction and professional development at risk, negatively impacting their performance parameters (14). Changes in governance structures also influence the faculty

autonomy and control patterns in higher education. The adoption of a highly bureaucratic and managerialist administration at the institutional level makes faculty members feel more controlled and reduces their participation in decision-making (Carvalho & Videira, 2019). Patterns of management at the top influence leadership styles at lower levels, thereby indirectly affecting faculty members' autonomy. Institutions that operate on principles of autonomy encourage faculty members and heads to advocate for academic freedom and intellectual growth (16). This emphasises that institutional culture and values are crucial in shaping leadership patterns and faculty members' experiences and outcomes. Past research has found that women leaders are more likely to be perceived as micromanagers than their male counterparts, possibly due to gender stereotypes and societal expectations that women are more caring, nurturing, and controlling (17). Contrastingly, Sims (2021) holds that women in academia are perceived as incompetent and untrustworthy, facing the transgressions of micromanagers who often do not micromanage themselves. Only with heightened emotional intelligence can the women faculty members maintain their professional identity, agency, and competence. However, enough evidence fails to support gender disparities in the expression and experience of micromanagement in higher education, and there is ample scope for further investigation. Higher education leaders need to acknowledge faculty members' academic autonomy in promoting research, allowing curriculum development, fostering freedom of expression, fostering professional development, and stimulating participation in decision-making (16).

Faculty Well-being in HEIs

Well-being has been conceptualised as a multi-faced construct that primarily relates to an individual's health, wellness and happiness (18). This essentially points to an individual's experience of a positive mental and physical state. Advancing a step further, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) views well-being as the absence of negative emotions, which may lead to depression, anxiety and hampered life satisfaction (19). The different aspects of well-being encompass physical, emotional, social, psychological, life-based, and occupational well-being. Another theoretical perspective on well-being distinguishes between objective and subjective well-being. While objective well-being relates to economic, social, and environmental measures, the subjective dimension concerns an individual's emotional aspects and perceived experiences in their social milieu (20,21). A closer look at the various aspects of well-being reveals that they are interwoven, with changes in one aspect leading to changes in others. Thus, these aspects are distinct in meaning but associated in dynamics. As suggested by (18), the term "well-being" should be used specifically rather than broadly to clarify what the study seeks to address. The overall well-being may encompass its multiple facets, without placing undue emphasis on the one in focus. For the purpose of this review, the primary focus is on the occupational/workplace well-being. To determine work-related well-being, various positive determinants, such as leadership support, institutional culture, interpersonal work relationships, academic autonomy, and the influence of one's work, are crucial (22). Work-centred well-being should not focus on the absence of challenges for faculty members, but rather on providing sufficient psychological, physical, and

social resources to meet them (23). Academic institutions and leaders should acknowledge the need to provide faculty members with the requisite discretion and autonomy for decision-making and action, create a supportive and collaborative work environment, and ensure that their contributions are valued and worth. A coherent ABC (Autonomy, Belongingness, and Competence) well-being model, rooted in the self-determination theory (SDT), provides a practical understanding of faculty well-being in higher education. The three psychological factors are key in assessing an employee's motivation, life satisfaction, and well-being (24). Ryan & Deci (2000) have found that these three work needs are universal and cross-culturally applicable, making significant contributions to work motivation, psychological empowerment, social integration, and personal well-being. The findings of Martela & Riekkari (2018) suggest that autonomy, belongingness, and competence are strong predictors of work meaningfulness, especially in the Indian context. Moreover, the amplified role of autonomy has been discussed, suggesting that top leadership experiences greater work-meaningfulness than subordinates due to more autonomous work conditions. Allowing provisions for a subordinate's occupational agency improves their perceived work-meaningfulness and, in turn, leads to better job motivation and satisfaction. Reis et al. (2000) also endorse the strong relevance of autonomy, belongingness and competence in determining an individual's emotional well-being. In the academic context, there may be insufficient literature to support this model for faculty well-being. However, the model's cross-contextual applicability allows one to draw from empirical evidence in parallel fields.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical basis for micromanagement is starkly absent in scholarly work on leadership styles across organisational behaviour, psychology, and management. However, several models have been explored that provide sufficient grounds for comprehending the topic.

Self-Determination Theory

According to the self-determination theory (SDT), an individual's well-being, through psychological growth, autonomy, and social connectedness, is influenced by extrinsic controls or intrinsic drivers. Extrinsic controls, which may manifest as micromanagement, are less effective than intrinsic controls such as self-interest, satisfaction, and happiness (27). Thus, excessive explicit leadership control and sanctions may backfire, leading to deteriorated productivity and motivation. The Self-determination model serves as a linking pin between micromanagement and well-being, as autonomy, competence, and relatedness directly contribute to teachers' well-being (27,28). Haw et al. (2024) found that supportive school leadership has a significant positive association with teacher well-being and serves as a safeguard against ill-being. Supportive leadership manifests as autonomous, relational, and competence-building, starkly contrasting with micromanaging leadership. Moreover, the need for belonging has the strongest relationship with teacher well-being in collectivistic societies, as healthy interpersonal exchanges are crucial for an individual's social identity and self-worth. Moreover, supportive and transformational leaders tend to promote autonomous motivation in their followers, i.e. being motivated to work towards a goal due to

volition, willingness and personal meaningfulness (28,29). On the other hand, micromanagement promotes working within scaffolds created by their leaders and undermines subordinates' intrinsic motivation, drive, and task ownership. Fostering autonomous motivation among faculty members is desirable, leading to a higher happiness index (29). Lyness et al. (2013) extend this to suggest that top leadership can address the three needs of faculty well-being through perspective-taking, choice-giving, minimising controlling speech, supporting faculty skill development to meet challenges, acknowledging feelings, and providing avenues for collaborative relationships. By undertaking these interventions with conscious effort, micromanaging tendencies can be overcome, and a well-being-driven leadership mindset can be established.

Job-Resource Demand Model

The Job Demand-Resource (JDR) model also shows how toxic leadership can create job hindrances to exercising autonomy, gaining feedback, and perceived employee social support. Furthermore, they challenge the subordinate's well-being by affecting personal growth, motivation, stress, and job satisfaction. Based on the review findings, indirect links between JDR and micromanagement have been established, as there is no direct way to consolidate them (30). Micromanagement leadership majorly constitutes a high-order job demand for the faculty members in higher education, rather than being a high-order resource (31). The argument is that promoting faculty well-being requires positive resources and motivation-building through growth opportunities, leadership support, peer support, and academic autonomy. Findings by Huang & Wang (2022) suggest that leadership support and trust are vital for faculty well-being, organisational commitment and psychological empowerment. Moreover, a resource-rich academic environment motivates them to achieve organisational goals and reduces emotional exhaustion by fostering feelings of meaningfulness and competence. Research suggests that extrinsic motivators, such as pay and rewards, are less strongly associated with teacher well-being and job satisfaction than managerial support and autonomy. Moreover, supportive managers can act as buffers for work-life conflicts, while low managerial support leads to an experience of negative affect among teachers (33). This suggests that toxic leadership patterns, such as micromanagement, pose a significant job detriment by imposing irrational job demands, including relentless reporting, excessive task loads, and stringent control mechanisms. A systematic review of JDR theory and leadership reveals that negative leadership styles are perceived as job demands, whereas positive styles are viewed as resources. However, viewing leaders as change agents who can tackle job demands by reducing unnecessary workloads and elevating job resources through increased autonomy and social support aids in enhancing motivation, job performance, better job engagement, and reducing emotional exhaustion (30).

This review aims to understand how the SDT and JDR models can be applied to enhance the comprehension of micromanagement leadership and well-being in the higher education context, providing logical linkages among the variables.

Micromanagement outcomes for faculty well-being

A mere theorisation of general and academic micromanagement does little to justify its conceptual exploration. By focusing on outcomes of faculty well-being, its impact can be gauged, along with the motivations that underlie such leadership behaviour. Evidence suggests that leader incompetence and the protection of power are plausible toxic intents, which lead to micro-managerial tendencies (34,35). When leaders are incompetent in key areas, they tend to display superficial knowledge by taking credit for minor work elements, creating a false perception of superiority. Moreover, they try to control subordinates' interaction and autonomy to exert power over them. Different conceptual pathways that emerged after an in-depth review of existing literature have been presented below:

- a. **Loss of Autonomy and Academic Freedom:** Every individual requires freedom of expression and action, within rational bounds. Providing academic autonomy to faculty members in HEIs improves their students' learning quality, creates a stress-free work environment and fosters motivation (36). However, a lack of trust and insecurity, associated with feelings of powerlessness, causes some academic leaders to refrain from giving requisite autonomy and scope for competence development to their faculty members (13,37). Displaying such behaviour patterns significantly undermines the academic liberty and freedom that faculty members seek. Furthermore, it undermines faculty members' trust in their abilities and erodes student motivation when faculty members restrict their academic input. The self-determination view of motivation precisely documents the close link between motivation and competence as a propellant of faculty motivation and well-being (14,36). Most micromanagers use legitimate and illegitimate influence tactics to exert authority and control over their subordinates. This is an attempt to make it known that they are the designated authority by the institution, but it stems from the fear of losing control and autonomy accorded to them (34). However, such leader behaviours contribute to feelings of powerlessness by positioning them as the sole ones capable of solving work problems and making effective decisions. No institutional mechanisms overtly monitor these leaders and warn them of undermining faculty members' independence and agency (38).
- b. **Emotional and Cognitive Strain (Burnout, Stress):** Faculty members are under consistent pressure to face the ongoing demands and workloads that the higher leadership exerts, with the view that faculty progress needs regular improvements (23). These pressures to perform and meet the performance standard, coupled with a lack of consideration for faculty members' mental and physical health, stem from a micromanagement culture prevalent in HEIs. Such leaders fear that work will not be error-free and tighten their grip on subordinates to achieve outcomes (10). However, being faced with such expectations and multiple workloads across the academic, administrative, and research domains negatively impacts their psychological well-being. Another aspect that can cause mental strain and frustration among individuals under highly interfering conditions is the expectation to fulfil menial or futile work responsibilities, which feel like an 'empty burden'

for subordinates. This is because such duties lack purpose and hinder individuals from addressing pressing issues in their jobs (34). Faculty members already burdened with various academic, administrative, and research responsibilities in academic institutions have hardly any time left to address proximal issues. Interestingly, apart from direct leadership and work issues, feelings of being unable to act on or address these leadership experiences build as faculty members' frustration (38). This suggests that not only toxic leadership experiences but also the inability to cope are noteworthy hurdles to faculty well-being. In most cases, micromanagers expect their subordinates to accept their behaviour and actions without questioning their authority. This gives rise to emotional dissonance among faculty members, a state of tension in which the individual's experience and expression are incongruent due to the leader's or organisational suppression of genuine emotions (35). A possible reason for this lack of expression could be the dominance of hierarchical structures and a strong inclination to comply with leaders, especially in countries like India (9). When individuals are restrained from freely expressing themselves, it stifles their emotional autonomy and psychological well-being. This also suggests that although curtailed work autonomy has been more frequently discussed, issues of emotional autonomy are prevalent as well.

- c. ***Erosion of Trust and Collegial Relationships:*** Any relationship is as good as the quantum of trust between the parties involved. However, the relational exchange becomes superficial and ineffective when that gets toppled. Micromanagers are seldom satisfied with their team's outcomes, and this insecurity justifies their exercise of controlled delegation and constant questioning of their subordinates' actions (13). This seems rational to the heads, as it feeds their insecurities appropriately. However, it becomes the premise of eroded trust between them. In medical settings, heads and supervisors limit their subordinates' autonomy with positive intent to ensure patient care and safety. However, this destabilises their subordinates' emotional and psychological well-being (13). In academic nursing, leaders who adopt an authoritative stance by micromanaging, failing to be transparent, and failing to build consensus with their subordinates reflect a lack of trust (39). This disintegrates them from their teams and closes opportunities for transparent and open exchange. Evidence from past research suggests that when leaders adopt a welfare-based approach and focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships with their faculty members, their professional and personal well-being is positively affected (35,40). Fahie (2019) noted that faculty members in Irish HEIs felt that toxic leaders are key drivers of non-collegial, fear-based cultural silos, resulting in discontent and reduced productivity at the departmental and institutional levels.
- d. ***Decline in Motivation and Job Satisfaction:*** Job satisfaction is a key indicator of faculty well-being in higher education. It is an experience of positive emotions, experiences and job-related attitudes contributing to individual and organisational effectiveness (35). This, in turn, is influenced by various institutional factors like perceptions of institutional

climate, administration, social dynamics and leadership (41). The role of leadership in promoting faculty well-being has been well documented in the literature. Findings of Ng & Sorensen (2008) show that the absence of perceived social support from supervisors impairs employees' work-related attitudes and creates a negative organisational perception among faculty members. Job satisfaction and motivation are closely linked variables, where low job satisfaction leads to decreased motivation among employees to perform at their best. According to self-determination theory, motivation emerges from intrinsically motivated autonomous behaviours. However, controlled behaviours develop through extrinsic contingencies or rewards (25,36). Micromanagers tend to exert extrinsic pressures and control conditions on faculty members, encouraging them to act according to their wishes, which can lead to demotivation in performance and productivity. Hudgins et al. (2022) explored the relationship between the toxic leadership behaviours of academic nursing leaders and the faculty members' job satisfaction and intent to stay. Toxic leadership styles, such as micromanagement, were found to have substantial negative consequences on job satisfaction and staying intent, suggesting that leadership has a vital influence on an individual's well-being. Present literature indicates that excessive task scrutiny and micromanagement make an employee feel devalued, creating a demotivated workforce in higher education (9).

Contributions of the study

Since no integrated models of micromanagement and faculty well-being in higher education exist in the present literature, their sub-dimensions have been studied independently. Based on the review, the study integrates interdisciplinary models that most closely explain the conceptual relationship between different study constructs, which is largely absent in the existing works (22,43). Turning to micromanagement literature, hardly any scholarly material persists in the field of education, especially in the higher education sector (43). This paper aims to bridge this gap and encourage further research in this sector. The present study makes a significant contribution by analysing the application of two critical models to understand the consequences of micromanagement leadership on faculty well-being in the higher education sector. The review uncovers that a fair amount of literature explores teacher well-being at the school level, but substantial research is missing for faculty well-being in Higher Education (23). Despite the reiterated importance of faculty well-being in research and practice, its connection to micromanagement and other toxic leadership styles remains understudied, especially in Asia. This conceptual review can pave the way for future researchers to conduct empirical evidence-based research in this area and investigate the micromanagement outcomes for well-being outlined in this paper. Once a solid understanding of its primary consequences emerges, intervention studies highlighting effective coping means to enhance faculty well-being can be carried out. The different conceptual themes presented in this paper can serve as models for future enquiry. Moreover, this paper attempts to shift the narratives of idealised leadership to dysfunctional realities that prevail in the higher education sector. This paper seeks to understand faculty well-being with a focus on varied occupational aspects, contrasting the focus

of the present literature on job stress and satisfaction (22). Based on the review, it can be observed that the JDR model has been more prominently studied in the context of positive leadership styles like transformational and servant leadership than relatively toxic ones like abusive leadership or micromanagement (30). This study has attempted to bridge this gap by reviewing and synthesising relevant literature.

Research Limitations

Despite conducting a comprehensive review, it is not entirely free from limitations. The review primarily draws on Western literature, as substantial scholarly material on India and other Asian countries is scarce. Hence, perspectives of the Indian higher education sector have not been fully captured. This conceptual, theory-building paper neither undertakes any empirical investigation in this area nor extends any theoretical model. Although theoretical frameworks have been used to lay the groundwork for the topic, the models fail to fully and explicitly explain the relationships among the study's constructs. For instance, both models emphasise autonomy as a dominant motivator and resource but lack a leadership perspective. The JDR model still accounts for leadership support and trust to some extent. However, in SDT, it needs to be situationally implied. Finally, this review is qualitative, which restricts its generalizability across contexts and cultures. The areas of professional well-being have been focused upon, with little attention paid to personal well-being, despite its strong anticipated association with micromanaging leadership.

Conclusion

This review presents a conceptual take on micromanagement's outcomes for faculty well-being in HEIs. It examines the general characteristics of micromanagers, with a particular focus on higher education. The concept of well-being has been foregrounded with special reference to the occupational dimension. Based on a scholarly review of the two primary study constructs, the association between micromanaging leadership and well-being outcomes in higher education has been explored. The SDT and JDR theoretical frameworks have been used to provide clarity and to lay a solid foundation for further exploration of the topic. Four key themes of micromanagerial repercussions for faculty members' workplace well-being emerged: loss of autonomy and academic freedom; emotional and cognitive strain (including burnout and stress); erosion of trust and collegial relationships; and decline in motivation and job satisfaction. Though other negative impacts of micromanagement persist, these themes emerged as prominent indicators of hampered workplace well-being.

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