

STRATEGIC CLARITY AND ITS FUNCTION IN DEVELOPING THE DIGITAL STRATEGY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE VIEWPOINTS OF A SAMPLE OF ACADEMIC LEADERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KUFA

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Abstract

This study looks at how well a strategy is defined affects the development of digital approaches at Kufa University. Three elements—clear goals, well-defined activities and procedures, and efficient resource allocation—defined strategic clarity; the digital plan covered topics including digital infrastructure, digital culture, and innovation in the digital sphere. A descriptive-analytical technique was used and academic leaders—deans, associate deans, and heads of departments—were surveyed. Out of 95 questionnaires sent, 93 legitimate responses were returned and examined using SPSS program. The results showed that participants showed great levels of digital strategy as well as strategic clarity. The results also showed a major beneficial link between strategic clarity and digital strategy ($r = 0.871$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, regression analysis confirmed that strategic clarity significantly influences digital plans and explains 75.9% of their variation ($R^2 = 0.759$). Among the several facets of strategic clarity, the clearest link to digital strategy shown was objectives' clarity. The study finds that increased strategic clarity is essential for accelerating digital transformation efforts and improving the results of online projects in higher education institutions.

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are now changing quickly because of new technology and digital developments. These developments compel colleges to set out unique strategic routes that may guide their resources and skills towards reaching long-term objectives. In management, the idea of strategic clarity is considered essential since it helps the staff to better understand the vision, mission, and strategic goals of the company, therefore improving the performance and efficiency of the business.

Given the continuous digital transformation in higher education, a digital plan has emerged as a current tool that colleges use to improve their research, administrative, and academic output by means of skillful application of digital technologies and creative methods. Consequently, the research problem is found using the following basic question, which concerns the role of strategic clarity in supporting digital strategy from the perspective of academic leaders at the University of Kufa.

The fundamental research question gives rise to several specific research questions: (1) it seeks to determine the extent of strategic clarity among academic leaders at the University of Kufa. (2) it examines the level of digital strategy implementation within the University of Kufa. (3) it investigates whether a clear relationship exists between strategic clarity and digital strategy. (4) it explores the extent to which strategic clarity has a significant impact on digital strategy. Together, these questions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of strategic clarity in supporting digital strategy within the higher education context.

This study aims to determine the level of strategic clarity among academic leaders at the University of Kufa, then measure the extent to which the university implements digital strategy and also examine the characteristics of the relationship between strategic clarity and digital strategy, and finally assess the impact of strategic clarity on the development of digital strategy. Through these objectives, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of strategic clarity in supporting and complementing digital strategy within higher education institutions.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on strategic clarity and digital strategy within the management literature. It provides a theoretical framework that helps explain the relationship between strategic clarity and digital strategy and supports higher education institutions in conducting future research in the fields of strategic management and digital transformation. In addition, the study assists the University of Kufa in assessing the level of strategic clarity among its academic leaders while emphasizing the importance of strategic clarity in advancing digital strategy. Finally, the findings are expected to support initiatives aimed at promoting digital transformation and enhancing the quality of administrative and academic services.

Following the theoretical background, two main hypotheses are proposed regarding the relationship between strategic clarity and digital strategy. The first main hypothesis posits that strategic clarity and digital strategy have a significant and positive relationship. Specifically, it is hypothesized that digital strategy is strongly associated with the clarity of strategic vision, the clarity of strategic goals, and the clarity of roles and responsibilities. The second main hypothesis suggests that strategic clarity has a significant influence on digital strategy. More specifically, digital strategy is expected to be significantly affected by the clarity of strategic vision, the clarity of strategic goals, and the degree of role clarity and accountability. Collectively, these hypotheses provide a framework for examining both the relational and causal dimensions of strategic clarity in supporting the development and implementation of digital strategy.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Strategic clarity

Strategic clarity appeared with the emergence of strategic management as a tool through which the organization's strategic directions for its human resources can be clarified and interpreted. As an academic concept, strategic clarity emerged clearly and explicitly at the end of the nineteenth century (Bantel, 1993) and over the past four decades. Much research has been conducted on strategic clarity, focusing squarely on its role in achieving alignment between vision, strategic priority, and strategy scope (Danook & Al. obaidy, 2024). Strategic management consultants and communication experts often assert that strategic clarity arose because of the organization's need to develop a clear strategy, provide valuable guidance to employees, and define the methods the organization will follow to achieve its strategic objectives (Smith & Thomas, 2020). Many varied approaches and trends can be relied upon in discussing the concept of mental image, as it is possible for the mental image of the organization to be formed internally among its employees, and externally among customers and parties related to its operations. Therefore, it can be said that the mental image is formed through the shared vision of those dealing with the organization, as it must be consistent between the organization's slogan and the way it deals with its human resources and customers (Karadeniz & Cdr, 2009).

The importance of strategic clarity emerges from it being an integrated approach that works to achieve organizational coherence and a shared understanding within the organization, as well as improving individual and organizational performance through standards, objectives, and organizational roles. It also involves developing strategies and implementation mechanisms. (Covin et al., 2020) indicates that it helps managers understand how to determine work procedures. Additionally, it helps build alignment during strategic planning and works to identify gaps and deficiencies in the organization's performance, while adapting to potential and unexpected risks. (Ritchie-Dunham, & Puente, 2008).

1.1.2. Dimensions of Strategic Clarity

Objectives are the starting point and the guide for any work in the organization (Dhaher & Saaed, 2021). It is a statement of the desired future that the organization seeks to achieve. It is an

internal source of motivation and commitment, a guide for action, and a means to measure performance. Objectives may be strategic and related to the future of the organization, or tactical and related to determining the results of units within the organization. Clarity of objectives means the alignment of each employee's goal within the organization with the group and organizational goals, and the absence of conflict between them. When employees achieve clear objectives, they better understand the intentions of the organization, which enhances their sense of belonging and connection to the organization (Hansen & Kjeldsen, 2018).

The clarity of activities and procedures is one of the important tools that organizations rely on to enhance their organizational performance. These procedures and activities must be characterized by clarity, accuracy, and simplicity. In order for the organization to achieve its goals, it must identify the activities necessary to achieve these goals. Activities are the main structures through which work is activated (Larsson, 2018). This is accomplished through a set of procedures that are considered the essence of the organization's work, and by specifying how any task or step is to be carried out in detail (Kim, Kim & Kwon, 2020).

For organizations to survive, they need resources to sustain their operations, which are defined as all assets that an organization can employ or acquire in order to achieve its goals. The organization has two types of resources: the first is value-driving resources, which are resources that drive value for the entire organization and its stakeholders. These are intangible assets such as customer (satisfaction), product quality, trust in the product, reputation, and organizational culture. The second type is enabling resources, which are possessed by all organizations and are represented by tangible assets—human, organizational, financial, and physical resources. The success and distinction of organizations depend on their ability to invest in enabling resources, whose impact is reflected in the value-driving resources, thereby creating greater value for the organization

1.1.3. Digital Strategy

While contemporary research has sought to investigate the concept of digital strategy, a distinct, comprehensive, and widely accepted definition seems to be lacking. Bharadwaj et al. (2013) describe digital strategy as "an organizational approach developed and implemented by utilizing digital resources to generate unique value." Mithas, Tafti, and Mitchell (2013) assert that digital strategy encompasses "the level to which a company participates in various IT activities and arises from the interaction between a company's digital strategic orientation and its industry landscape." Woodard et al. (2013) characterize digital strategy as "a series of intentional competitive moves made by a firm as it vies by providing digitally enhanced products or services".

Digital strategy is essential since it enables companies to reach higher levels of efficiency and production by changing with the digital commerce scene. By properly applying digital information and data, it helps to raise product and service standards, simplify operational processes, and guide decision-making. Furthermore, a digital plan enables businesses to take chances that come from digital developments and solve problems related to continuous technical development (Anderson MacGyver, 2018; Bharadwaj et al., 2013).

As Bharadwaj et al. (2013) point out, digital strategy is now a key component of organizational strategy since it creates value and a competitive edge by means of integration of digital technologies into company operations and processes. Kane et al. (2015) also said that companies with a well-defined digital plan are better able to encourage innovation and quickly respond to changes in their surroundings than those without a clear digital focus.

1.1.4. Dimensions of Digital Approach

This study finds three key components of digital strategy: infrastructure, culture, and innovation.

Digital Infrastructure

The technical foundation that businesses depend on to carry out their digital plans is digital infrastructure. This covers hardware, communication systems, databases, information management systems, software solutions, and other digital tools that help to enable operational tasks and deliver services.

Matt, Hess, and Benlian (2015) claim that the presence of a sophisticated digital infrastructure able to change with fresh technologies and continuous improvements greatly affects the efficacy of digital strategy. Furthermore simplified information exchange, improved communication, and boosted cooperation among different departments of a company is enabled by digital infrastructure.

Digital Culture

Digital culture is the set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and activities that drive workers to embrace and skillfully apply digital tools in daily chores. This element is regarded essential for the effective implementation of digital strategy as it influences workers' willingness to adopt technological advances and digital changes.

Digital culture is among the most important factors influencing the success of digital transformation projects as it supports continuous learning, encourages creativity, and improves flexibility, Kane et al. (2015) noted. A robust digital culture encourages experimentation, helps to develop digital competency among the staff, and conditions one to be open to new technologies.

Digital Innovation

Digital innovation is the ability of a company to use digital technologies to develop fresh goods, services, procedures, or business models as well as to enhance current ones in a way that benefits stakeholders.

Based on Nambisan et al. (2017), digital technology's features provide businesses great chances to improve their performance and create new sources of competitive advantage by use of its capabilities. It also helps companies to respond more rapidly to changes in customer preferences and market dynamics.

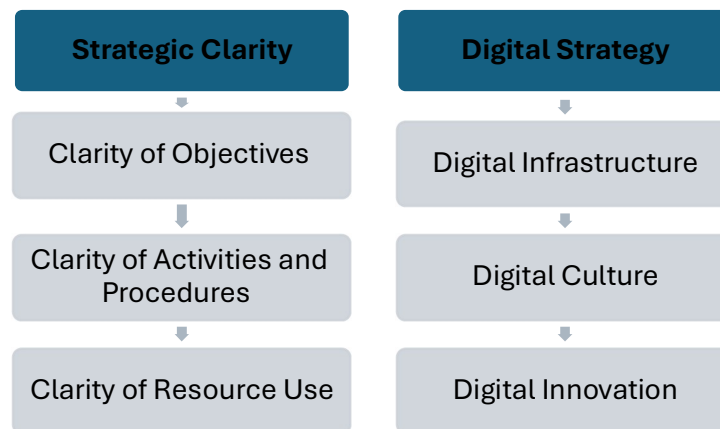


Figure 1. Hypothetical Research Model

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study used a descriptive-analytical research design to examine the role of strategic clarity in enhancing digital strategy at the University of Kufa. The population was made up with academic leaders in the form of various levels such as deans, assistant deans, heads of departments. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to assess the dimensions of strategic clarity and digital strategy. A total of 95 questionnaires were distributed, of which 93 valid responses were obtained and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study employed descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to assess the levels of strategic clarity and digital strategy, as well as to examine the relationship and influence between the two variables.

2.2. Population and Sample

This study's population—academic leaders from the University of Kufa—includes deans, assistant deans, and department heads—totaling 95 people, but 93 completed surveys in all were appropriate for statistical analysis; this translates to a response rate of 97.9%, which shows how strongly the participants cooperated.

2.3. Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a two section questionnaire; with demographics comprising the first section and the second, strategic clarity and digital strategy variables.

2.4. Measurement Scale

A five-point Likert scale was used to gauge respondents' perceptions, with response options from Strongly Disagree assigned a value of 1 to Strongly Agree which received a value of 5. The intermediate categories included Disagree (2), Neutral (3), and Agree (4), thereby providing a standardized framework for assessing participants' responses to the questionnaire items.

Table 1. Five-point Likert scale

Response Category	Weight
Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

2.5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed, and the research hypotheses were tested using the SPSS Statistics program. The statistical techniques employed included: (1) frequencies and percentages, (2) arithmetic mean, (3) standard deviation, (4) coefficient of variation (C.V.), (5) Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess reliability, (6) Pearson correlation coefficient to examine relationships among variables, (7) simple and multiple linear regression analyses to evaluate the effects of independent variables on dependent variables, (8) the coefficient of determination (R^2) to determine the explanatory power of the regression models, (9) the F-test to assess the overall significance of the regression models, and (10) the t-test to evaluate the significance of individual regression coefficients.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Demographic Factors of the Research Sample and Response Rate

A total of (95) questionnaires were distributed to academic leaders at the University of Kufa, of which (93) valid questionnaires were retrieved for statistical analysis, with a response rate of (97.9%).

Table 2. Personal Information of the Research Sample

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	68	73.1%
Female	25	26.9%
Age		
Less than 40 years	16	17.2%
40-49 years	31	33.3%
50-59 years	29	31.2%
60 years and above	17	18.3%
Academic Qualification		
Master's	21	22.6%
PhD	72	77.4%
Years of Service		
Less than 10 years	14	15.1%
10-19 years	35	37.6%
20 years and above	44	47.3%

3.2. The validity and reliability coefficient of the research scale and normal distribution

Table 3. The validity and reliability coefficient of the research scale and normal distribution

Dimensions	Number of paragraphs	Cronbach Alpha	Honesty	Kurtosis	Skewness
Clarity of objectives	6	0.894	0.946	1.361	-1.105
Clarity of activities and procedures	6	0.912	0.955	1.427	-1.184
Clarity of resource usage	6	0.887	0.942	1.318	-1.094
Strategic clarity	18	0.919	0.958	1.392	-1.128
Digital infrastructure	6	0.921	0.960	1.441	-1.227
Digital culture	6	0.903	0.950	1.382	-1.163
Digital innovation	6	0.916	0.957	1.416	-1.208
Digital strategy	18	0.928	0.963	1.446	-1.199

All reliability coefficient values surpass (0.70), therefore suggesting that the scale has a great degree of reliability. Confirming the fit of the research tool, the validity ratings also topped (0.90). Furthermore showing that the data is normally distributed, the skewness and kurtosis values dropped inside the tolerated range (± 1.96).

Table 4. Descriptive criteria for the strategic clarity variable

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Agreement Percentage	C.V	Rank
First Dimension: Clarity of Objectives					
The university has clear and announced strategic objectives for all employees	4.33	0.582	86.6%	13.4%	2
I clearly understand the university's strategic objectives	4.38	0.551	87.6%	12.6%	1
The strategic objectives are clarified when preparing academic plans and programs	4.27	0.623	85.4%	14.6%	4
The university's objectives are realistic and applicable	4.24	0.648	84.8%	15.3%	5
The objectives of academic units are linked to the university's strategic objectives	4.29	0.612	85.8%	14.2%	3
The strategic objectives are reviewed and updated to match environmental changes	4.21	0.664	84.2%	15.8%	6
General Average	4.29	0.613	85.7%	14.3%	1
Second Dimension: Clarity of Activities and Procedures					
There are clear work procedures that support the implementation of strategic objectives	4.26	0.621	85.2%	14.5%	2
The activities required to achieve the strategic objectives are accurately determined	4.31	0.584	86.2%	13.5%	1
Guidelines and manuals are available to clarify the mechanisms for implementing various tasks and work	4.19	0.667	83.8%	15.9%	4
Administrative procedures are clear and easy to implement	4.18	0.674	83.6%	16.1%	5
Employees are continuously informed of any modifications to procedures	4.12	0.708	82.4%	17.2%	6
The approved procedures contribute to facilitating the implementation of strategic plans	4.22	0.641	84.4%	15.1%	3
General Average	4.21	0.649	84.2%	15.4%	2
Third Dimension: Clarity of Resource Utilization					
Resources are allocated in line with the university's strategic priorities	4.15	0.676	83.0%	16.2%	2
There are clear mechanisms for distributing resources among different units	4.08	0.714	81.6%	17.5%	5
Financial resources are invested to support strategic objectives	4.12	0.688	82.4%	16.7%	3
Clear information is available on how resources are used	4.06	0.732	81.2%	18.0%	6
The university ensures optimal use of human and technological resources	4.18	0.651	83.6%	15.6%	1
The efficiency of resource utilization is evaluated periodically	4.10	0.697	82.0%	17.0%	4
Overall Average	4.11	0.693	82.3%	16.9%	3

Table 5. Descriptive Criteria for the Digital Strategy Variable

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Agreement Percentage	C.V	Rank
First Dimension: Digital Infrastructure					
The university has a modern digital infrastructure	4.42	0.514	88.4%	11.6%	1
Information systems are available to support decision-making	4.38	0.546	87.6%	12.4%	2
The university enjoys advanced networks and technologies	4.31	0.592	86.2%	13.7%	4
Digital systems are continuously updated	4.28	0.611	85.6%	14.3%	5
The university provides effective electronic platforms	4.35	0.568	87.0%	13.1%	3
The digital infrastructure contributes to performance improvement	4.25	0.638	85.0%	15.0%	6
Overall Average	4.33	0.578	86.6%	13.3%	1
Second Dimension: Digital Culture					
The university encourages the use of digital technologies	4.23	0.625	84.6%	14.8%	1
The administration supports the dissemination of digital culture	4.19	0.654	83.8%	15.6%	2
Digital training programs are available	4.11	0.702	82.2%	17.1%	6
The university encourages digital knowledge exchange	4.15	0.673	83.0%	16.2%	4
There is a prevailing positive attitude towards technology	4.18	0.661	83.6%	15.8%	3
The university culture supports digital development	4.14	0.687	82.8%	16.6%	5
Overall Average	4.17	0.667	83.3%	16.0%	2
Third Dimension: Digital Innovation					
The university encourages innovative digital ideas	4.15	0.681	83.0%	16.4%	2
Modern technologies are employed to develop	4.19	0.642	83.8%	15.3%	1
The administration supports new digital initiatives	4.10	0.706	82.0%	17.2%	4
The university seeks to develop new digital solutions	4.08	0.721	81.6%	17.7%	6
Digital technologies are invested in to improve quality	4.12	0.684	82.4%	16.6%	3
The university has the ability to adopt digital innovations	4.09	0.698	81.8%	17.1%	5
Overall Average	4.12	0.689	82.4%	16.7%	3

3.3. Testing Research Hypotheses

Table 6. Matrix of Correlation Relationships Between Research Variables

Dimensions of Strategic Clarity	Correlation Coefficient (r) with Digital Strategy	Sig.	Decision
Clarity of Objectives	0.812	0.000	Accepted
Clarity of Activities and Procedures	0.779	0.000	Accepted
Clarity of Resource Utilization	0.741	0.000	Accepted
Overall Strategic Clarity	0.871	0.000	Accepted

The overall correlation coefficient of (0.871) at a significance level of (0.000) clearly shows that strategic clarity and digital strategy have positive and substantial correlation relations, meaning that greater strategic clarity is related with a higher level of digital strategy at the University of Kufa.

Table 7. Testing the Influence Hypothesis of Strategic Clarity on Digital Strategy

Independent Variable	Beta	R ²	F Calculated	Sig.	Decision
Strategic Clarity	0.871	0.759	286.417	0.000	Accepted

The results show that the digital strategy explains (75.9%) of the variation in strategic clarity; other factors outside the study model account for the balance. The computed (F) value came to be (286.417), which is significant at a significance level of (0.000), so supporting the main influence theory that strategic clarity has a big influence in improving the digital strategy.

The findings indicate that strategic clarity was perceived at a high level among academic leaders at the University of Kufa, with the dimension of clarity of objectives obtaining the highest mean score ($M = 4.29$). This result suggests that respondents clearly understood the university's strategic goals and recognized the alignment between institutional objectives and academic activities. Such findings support the argument that strategic clarity contributes to organizational coherence and facilitates the achievement of strategic goals by providing clear direction and expectations for employees. When organizational members understand strategic objectives, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment and alignment with institutional priorities (Hansen & Kjeldsen, 2018). Furthermore, strategic clarity serves as an important mechanism for improving organizational performance and strengthening coordination across organizational units (Covin et al., 2020).

The study also revealed that digital strategy was implemented at a high level, particularly in the dimension of digital infrastructure ($M = 4.33$). This finding reflects the university's efforts to provide modern technological facilities, information systems, and digital platforms that support academic and administrative activities. The result is consistent with Bharadwaj et al. (2013), who emphasized that digital strategy enables organizations to create value and improve competitiveness through the effective integration of digital technologies. Similarly, Matt, Hess & Benlian (2015) argued that a robust digital infrastructure is a critical foundation for successful digital transformation because it facilitates communication, information sharing, and organizational adaptability. The relatively high scores for digital culture and digital innovation further indicate that the university has established a supportive environment for embracing technological change and encouraging innovative digital initiatives.

A major contribution of this study is the empirical evidence demonstrating a strong positive relationship between strategic clarity and digital strategy ($r = 0.871$, $p < .01$), with strategic clarity explaining 75.9% of the variance in digital strategy ($R^2 = 0.759$). These findings suggest that universities with clearly communicated objectives, well-defined procedures, and transparent resource allocation mechanisms are more capable of implementing effective digital strategies. Among the dimensions of strategic clarity, clarity of objectives exhibited the strongest relationship with digital strategy, highlighting the importance of clear strategic direction in digital transformation efforts. This result supports previous studies that identified strategic alignment and organizational clarity as critical determinants of successful digital transformation and innovation initiatives (Smith & Thomas, 2020; Vial, 2019). Therefore, higher education institutions seeking to strengthen their digital capabilities should prioritize enhancing strategic clarity as a means of improving digital planning, implementation, and long-term sustainability.

4. Conclusions

The findings indicate that academic leaders at the University of Kufa perceive a high level of strategic clarity within the institution, while the implementation of digital strategy is also considered to be at a high level. The study further demonstrates a strong positive relationship between strategic clarity and digital strategy ($r = 0.871$), confirming that greater strategic clarity is associated with more effective digital strategy implementation. Among the dimensions of strategic clarity, clarity of objectives emerged as the most influential factor in strengthening digital strategy. Moreover, the results reveal that strategic clarity significantly contributes to enhancing digital strategy, explaining 75.9% of its variance. Based on these findings, the study recommends improving the dissemination and communication of strategic objectives across all university departments, implementing continuous training programs to support digital transformation initiatives, enhancing transparency in organizational processes and resource allocation, increasing investment in technological assets and digital infrastructure, and fostering a supportive environment that encourages digital innovation and sustainable digital development.

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