

Measuring the Impact of Knowledge Management, Leadership, Employee Commitment, and Employee Engagement on the HEIs Sustainability in Iraq

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Abstract

This paper aims to emphasize how the behavioural factors offered at Iraqi higher education institutions can influence sustainability performance. The conclusions are based on a pilot questionnaire conducted by the authors on the level of Iraqi academics in public universities. A sample of 100 respondents served as the basis for the results. Based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient test, the results show that all of the measures above the 0.70 benchmark and had high reliability coefficients that varied from 0.80 to 0.96 with no appreciable variation of skewness values from zero. The study's findings also showed that sustainability performance was highly influenced by knowledge management, leadership, employee commitment, and employee engagement. The study confirmed the effectiveness of the instrument used to analyze various particular predictors of HEI sustainability in Iraq. This model is promising since it demonstrates an increase in behavioral variance in an explanatory manner.

Keywords: Sustainability Performance, Behavioural Factors, Higher Education, Academics, Iraq

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1. Introduction

Sustainable performance of higher education institutions (HEIs) is a significant source of growth since they serve as a platform to breed and encourage the growth of knowledge that may help a country thrive (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2022). Strengthening universities' role in supporting regional development while maintaining a competitive edge is a significant challenge. By doing so, universities may increase the political and cultural leadership of their communities through their sustained success. Higher education institutions are anticipated to play an increasingly significant role in advancing sustainability through research and education as public knowledge of and engagement with sustainable development grows (Findler, Schönherr, Lozano, & Stacherl, 2018; Tabucanon et al., 2021). Iraqi universities are able to train citizens, politicians, educators, health professionals, philosophers, attorneys, artists, and activists to promote the growth of inclusive, just, and peaceful societies. Universities can conduct basic and applied research to advance our knowledge of science and create useful applications for it. In industrialized economies, there is rising awareness that academic research and teaching should be focused on certain social and economic goals (Abdullah, Ahmad, & Elias, 2022).

Additionally, the sustained performance of universities contributes significantly to the social advancement of the knowledge-based economy and serves a crucial role in enhancing national welfare. The ability of HEIs to have an impact on a variety of interest groups (students, communities, and society at large) determines their relevance (Raimi, 2020). As a result, all nations have a keen interest in how these institutions can work sustainably. The global economy has changed since the turn of the 20th century, signaling a transition away from reliance on material economic drivers and toward knowledge-driven intangible resources (Tien, Ngoc, Trang, & Mai, 2022).

The development of strategies that enable economic and social progress is central to HE's role. Universities, without a doubt, have a profound impact on society. Apart from driving economic growth, they generate knowledge, which has been a fundamental, traditional, basic mission in the past (Khan, Akram, Adeel-Farooq, Jamal, & Ahmmmed, 2020). Also, the key to institutional sustainability in higher education appears to be aligned with leadership capabilities and viewpoints. Sustaining university leadership demands the acceptance and integration of new management styles to support human resource development, create a positive work environment for staff and students, and motivate these staff and students to work toward institutional goals and objectives (Yang, Al

Mamun, & Salameh, 2023).

In the past 20 years, Iraq's higher education industry has undergone significant growth and advancement, as shown by the rise in higher education institutions, students enrolled in their programs, faculty members, administrators, and academic staff, as well as the size of expenditures and the decline in financial government support. Thus, it becomes clear that the challenges include the declining quality of graduates, growing competition, expanding accountability mandates by accreditation associations, legislative restrictions, and funding bodies, among other factors, which have "forced" higher education institutions to focus on both academic performance and innovation capabilities (Bawais, Sagsan, & Ertugan, 2020). Therefore, by examining the effects of knowledge management, leadership, employee commitment, and employee engagement on HEI sustainability performance among public universities in Iraq, this study will hopefully fill the aforesaid gap.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Knowledge Management

By defending one's own principles in favor of the truth, Mikalauskiene and Atkočiūnienė (2019) described knowledge as a dynamic human process. They contended that the processes of socialization, externalization, internalization, and combination were what converted tacit information into explicit knowledge. Epistemological and ontological dimensions made up this knowledge concept's abstract structure. As a result, knowledge within a business was spread throughout a variety of locations, including databases, knowledge bases, filing cabinets, and human minds (Ghaith, Enas, Mutia, & Abdul Malek, 2018; Majumder & Dey, 2022). This knowledge could then be exploited to give the firm a competitive advantage. Knowledge management can then be seen as a deliberate strategy of disseminating the appropriate knowledge to the appropriate people at the appropriate time and assisting members of an organization to share and put information into action in ways that will improve processes, business decision-making, and organizational competitiveness. Knowledge was predicted as the only source of competitive advantage in the future that enabled the organizations to compete (Arsawan et al., 2022).

Knowledge management would be a key component of achieving a sustainable competitive advantage for firms in the new millennium, according to previous researchers (Azeem, Ahmed, Haider, & Sajjad, 2021; Fantazy & Tipu, 2019). As a result, the term "knowledge management" could be used to describe a broad range of actions intended to manage, exchange, or improve intellectual assets within an organization. The goal of knowledge management was to retain and leverage an organization's knowledge asset in order to realize its maximum value for overall success (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021; Masenya, 2022).

Knowledge management was also found to be complex without generally accepted definitions because it had several interpretations that included various forms of knowledge management (Manesh, Pellegrini, Marzi, & Dabic, 2020). Although there is no universal agreement on what knowledge management is (Kianto, Shujahat, Hussain, Nawaz, & Ali, 2019), it has been adopted and widely used in business organizations, and as a result, knowledge management is a crucial component of organizational sustainability (J. Abbas, 2020; Mahdi, Nassar, & Almsafir, 2019).

2.2 Leadership Style

One of the most crucial results in human resources is leadership style, which is also one of the subjects that management and industrial psychology researchers study the most. This is most likely due to the fact that leadership is the central, albeit occasionally divisive, topic of organizational study (A. Abbas, Saud, Suhariadi, Usman, & Ekowati, 2022; Ghaith et al., 2018; Muhammed & Zaim, 2020). Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939), three psychologists, defined three main leadership philosophies: democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire. Organizations can become more productive and lucrative through leadership, but the degree of success depends on the leader's style and the atmosphere that is consequently established for people to function well. According to Amelia, Jamaludin, and Nandang (2023), managers' leadership styles have a significant impact on organizationally important outcomes like low staff turnover, lower absenteeism, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance. Similar to how interpersonal relationships, rewards, and punishments influence employee behavior, motivation, and attitude, leadership style also affects how well a company performs (Manzoor et al., 2019).

Indeed, leadership has been studied as one of the most complex processes by organizational and psychological academics. The intricacy of the idea is shown by the fact that there are so many different definitions of leadership in the literature (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampieri, 2019). Kolenda (2021) state that there are as many definitions and models of leadership as there are individuals who have attempted to define it. Mansaray (2019) defines leadership as the capacity of an individual to persuade and guide subordinates toward a common goal. Similar to this definition, Mansaray (2019) and Kamalaldin, Sjödin, Hullova, and Parida (2021) define leadership as the process of convincing followers to understand and consent to cooperate in order to achieve common objectives. It's also important to note that there have been significant changes in leadership over time, as seen in the section below on the different types of leadership styles.

2.3 Employee Commitment

Given the various definitions of commitment, it can be concluded that the concept is one of the most important elements in employee behavioural support for change projects (Alqudah, Carballo-Penela, & Ruza-Sanmartín, 2022; Khaskheli et al., 2020). The relationship between employees and employers is shown to be defined by kinds of commitment at work. Employers can have peace of mind knowing that a committed employee supports the company on a mental, physical, and emotional level (Ghaith & Mutia, 2019). Due to the labor-intensive nature of the hospitality sector, employers strive to understand their staff members' motivations in order to meet their needs. Employee commitment may be a key intervening variable in this process (Harris, DiPietro, Line, & Murphy, 2019; Putra, Cho, & Liu, 2017; Wang, 2016) and this is because the hospitality sector is labor-intensive.

According to Leitão, Pereira, and Gonçalves (2019), employees who feel valued at work are more likely to be productive and perform at greater levels than those who don't feel valued. Having an organizational commitment also means that the person believes the organization's aims and objectives are legitimate and deserving of their best efforts. As a result, people who have a high level of organizational commitment are eager to work hard for the organization and accept its aims and values (Ghaith & Mutia, 2019; Purwanto, Purba, Bernarto, & Sijabat, 2021). Organizational commitment "strongly influences the quality of work and services and plays a major role in organizational development" (Naz et al., 2020). As a result, people who are dedicated to the organization are more inclined to go above and beyond to accomplish organizational goals, which may involve using creativity in the workplace (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). According to Ghaith and Mutia (2019), organizational commitment is a long-term reaction to circumstances in the workplace and is generally constant among employees.

2.4 Employee Engagement

Work engagement is defined as a positive, comprehensive, and affective state of motivation. According to Decuyper and Schaufeli (2020), work attitudes—which are at the center of conversations about job quality—and work engagement can be conceptually related. Work involvement, according to Ababneh (2021), is a personal psychological, emotional, and behavioral state geared toward an institutional outcome. Ghaith (2020), noted that engagement is regarded as a favorable work-related psychological state in addition to reflecting an authentic excitement for the purpose of concentrating an effort toward achieving organizational goals.

As a result, an engaged employee can be thought of as an active worker who has been given a wealth of personal resources. This idea is sometimes referred to as motivational (Gopalan, Pattusamy, & Goodman, 2021). According to Risley (2020), motivated employees pay attention to the success of the company. As a result, it can be identified by lively and engaged workplace interaction (Hewett, Becker, & Bish, 2019). Engagement is therefore seen as a key idea for raising organizational performance.

A new scale for gauging employee engagement was developed in 2012 by (Soane et al.). They came up with three requirements for being in an engaged state, mainly based on Vogel, Rodell, and Sabey (2020) engagement theorization. The authors characterized work role, or focus, activity, and good affect as the conditions. Since activation is a component of affect, there is a fundamental relationship between these two states. According to Kuzior, Kettler, and Rağ (2022), ISA engagement has a positive impact on organizational sustainability.

2.5 HEIs Sustainability Performance

In order to acquire a competitive edge, firms conceptualize new methods to execute operations, use new procedures, new technology, or differentiate inputs at the level of strategy implementation (Chadwick & Flinchbaugh, 2021). Keeping imitators at bay requires integrating a variety of strategic measures. Credible competitive advantage measurements may be helpful in figuring out the degree of performance necessary to achieve a competitive advantage, which may be used to determine whether a competitive advantage has been attained. Porter's (1985) definition of competitive advantage can be viewed in terms of value and a company's performance as equivalent to the specific net benefits of the price paid (Sadeghian Esfahani, Cahoon, Chen, Pateman, & Sajadi, 2021), suggesting that enhancing sustainable performance is valuable because it can give a company a competitive advantage.

There are numerous ways to gauge sustainable performance, and each company is free to apply created metrics that are pertinent to its operations. Despite the fact that sustainable performance serves as a common foundation for many distinct company models, there are significant strategic differences, such as operations in the service sector. It is vital to define and choose appropriate indicators of long-term performance in higher education because the focus of this study is on this area (Parvez & Agrawal, 2019).

The investigation aimed to identify the common shared sustainability indicators of the universities, their variations, and future contributions to research productivity and government efforts utilizing the sustainability indicators of the rated indices (Ramísio, Pinto, Gouveia, Costa, & Arezes, 2019). According to Caeiro, Sandoval Hamón, Martins, and Bayas Aldaz (2020) and Žalėnienė and Pereira (2021), universities should place more emphasis on the efficacy and efficiency of publicly funded research, the stability of investments, and increased efforts to leverage international initiatives that support exceptional educational programs and comprehensive

internationalization. Despite this, the authors noted concerns and cautions regarding the indicators used, the institutions being investigated, and the range of features used to compare this type of ranking indices.

3. Data Collection

This article is based on a quantitative analysis technique, which is the research strategy that is most appropriate for this subject. The quantitative approach uses a framework of asking why certain things happen based on how different variables interact, which can be reduced to quantitative form and is probably applicable to superior populations (Singh, Kumar, & Roy, 2018). To collect data from a group of people, Zikmund (2016) employed a questionnaire as a calculation tool. As a result, this study gathers information about Iraq's public universities by employing self-administered questions that the respondents provided. In this work, all academics who worked at public universities between 2021 and 2023.

3.1 Data Instrument

A questionnaire survey was created as a way to collect information. The questionnaire components were specifically designed to prevent duplication in terms of the measures offered in the measurement structures included in the test model. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the questionnaire components were applied and adjusted based on the analytical observations and descriptions examined in the literature, as described by Shrestha (2021), as seen below.

Table 1: Measuring Instruments

No.	Variable	No. of Items	Adapted
1	Knowledge Management	34	Obeidat and Zyod (2015); Yang and Chen (2007); Memon (2015)
2	Leadership	27	Obeidat and Tarhini (2016); Petzer (2018)
3	Employee Commitment	13	Ghaith and Mutia (2019)
4	Employee Engagement	9	Soane et al. (2012)
5	Sustainability performance	9	Albatayneh (2014)

3.2 Data Analysis

Data from 100 participants collected as part of the pilot test to precisely measure what it is intended to calculate and assess the measurement instrument's dependability. Before data can be collected, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a pilot test is required to address any questionnaire deficiencies. The idea is based on a number of variables, and in this case, it is primarily intended to evaluate the extent to which the research instrument is adequate and to ascertain whether the instrument in question appropriate for the context.

As can be seen in Table 2, the results showed that both interventions had a high reliability coefficient, ranging from 0.80 to 0.96. (Awang, 2015; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) recognize an average dependability of 0.60 as a reliability coefficient, and a high reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above.

Table 2: Summary of Reliability Results

Variable	Code	No. items	Cronbach's Alpha
Knowledge sharing	KS	9	0.96
Knowledge capabilities	KCP	14	0.95
Knowledge creation	KC	11	0.96
Transformational leadership	TFL	7	0.92
Transactional leadership	TSL	4	0.96
Authentic Leadership	AL	16	0.93
Attractive commitment	AC	6	0.91
Normative commitment	NC	4	0.85
Continuance commitment	CC	3	0.84
Intellectual engagement	IE	3	0.95
Social engagement	SE	3	0.81
Affective engagement	AE	3	0.96
Sustainable Performance	SP	9	0.80

The reliability of the twelve dimensions included in the constructs (knowledge management, leadership, employee commitment, and employee engagement) and we find that it is reliable because the Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.7. There are 34 items included in the construct knowledge management if we look at the value of Cronbach alpha we see that it is 0.96 which is higher than the benchmark value of 0.7. After including the 27 items of leadership the value of reliability is high and above the acceptable value. The alpha value for the construct employee commitment is also found to be higher than the benchmark value of 0.7. The Cronbach alpha value of the employee engagement which is above the suggested level of 0.7. The alpha value of the construct

sustainable performance is 0.80.

3.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Since each variable has a second order and a sub-dimension, the EFA for that variable was done independently. Effendi, Matore, Khairani, and Adnan (2019), among other statisticians, suggested adopting EFA for each component. EFAs were completed as a result for knowledge management, leadership, employee commitment, and employee engagement. See the EFA in the table below.

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis for all sub-dimension

	Component		
	1	2	3
KCP4	.874	.071	.317
KCP10	.848	.137	.297
KCP5	.828	.161	.258
KCP8	.807	.137	.253
KCP1	.807	.132	.431
KCP6	.805	.138	.266
KCP11	.797	.301	.267
KCP12	.787	.127	.341
KCP7	.764	.118	.296
KCP2	.747	.205	.394
KCP3	.743	.150	.437
KCP14	.724	.256	.335
KC6	.066	.891	.026
KC8	-.021	.879	.148
KC7	.065	.866	.071
KC9	.039	.856	.125
KC11	.095	.829	-.021
KC3	.256	.818	.183
KC4	.239	.800	.090
KC10	.284	.794	.111
KC2	.167	.792	.108
KC5	.262	.788	.155
KS9	.334	.083	.858
KS2	.337	.080	.852
KS7	.338	.113	.837
KS3	.361	.139	.823
KS1	.408	.163	.821
KS4	.388	.163	.810
KS6	.469	.075	.769
KS5	.458	.179	.768
AL15	.924	.009	-.113
AL6	.924	.009	-.113
AL9	.924	.009	-.113
AL12	.924	.009	-.113
AL4	.902	.103	.058
AL10	.902	.103	.058
AL7	.902	.103	.058
AL5	.884	.217	-.158
AL8	.884	.217	-.158
AL14	.884	.217	-.158
AL11	.884	.217	-.158
AL3	.667	.144	-.310
AL2	.631	.316	-.276
AL1	.597	.249	-.276
TFL5	.070	.905	.035
TFL3	.111	.901	.051
TFL1	.125	.901	-.002

	Component		
	1	2	3
TFL2	.125	.900	.071
TFL4	.100	.888	-.005
TFL6	.247	.524	.130
TSL3	-.169	.045	.924
TSL2	-.095	.057	.924
TSL1	-.151	.052	.922
TSL4	-.164	.142	.915
AC3	.915	.117	.160
AC4	.908	.191	.109
AC5	.896	.213	.135
AC2	.841	.203	.131
AC1	.639	.344	.232
NC1	.129	.886	.196
NC2	.198	.878	-.010
NC4	.205	.823	.208
NC3	.289	.764	.109
CC1	.090	.113	.930
CC3	.177	.064	.910
CC2	.215	.215	.701
AE1	.975	.035	.029
AE2	.975	.025	.020
AE3	.957	.058	.069
IE1	-.002	.954	-.143
IE3	.023	.953	-.144
IE2	.105	.925	-.218
SE3	.149	-.168	.904
SE2	.221	-.175	.890
SE1	-.219	-.132	.696

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

The reliability of the entire construct is evident from the construct reliability tables described above because every variable, with the exception of (KS8, KCP9, KCP13, KC1, TFL7, AL13, AL16, and AC6), has an Alpha value larger than .05 (DeVellis, 2016).

5. Conclusion

This article's objective is to identify the critical elements that should be supported at an Iraqi HEI in order to focus education on behavior for sustainability. To do this, a model has been developed, tested, and validated. The findings of this study suggest that knowledge management, leadership, employee commitment, and employee engagement are the critical elements in supporting such education. Therefore, policies should be created to support those behavioral traits related to an individual's goals and personality traits in order to change their ideas.

This paradigm, which is based on behavioral factors, contends that when these elements are active, people experience a sense of personal obligation, either rejecting or not denying the effects of their actions on the wellbeing of others. Because it was put to the test using trustworthy analytical techniques, the model is extremely valid and stable. The model is currently at an exploratory stage, but the four significant latent variables are significantly connected. There were few participants, and the surveys were conducted at public HEIs in Iraq. More participants and institutions will be needed for future study. In developing-nation institutions, anticipation is the trait that faculty members and administrators are least likely to display, while involvement is more likely. Additionally, our findings open up new directions for interdisciplinary study, particularly when environmental science, social science, and education come together. Researchers could advance theoretical knowledge in an integrative and holistic fashion by examining the networks of collaboration between various fields. Additionally, this study emphasized the significance of stakeholders in the creation of sustainable universities in Iraq, which could result in new ideas on stakeholder engagement in this situation.

The current study concluded by outlining future directions for research in this area, including diversifying sustainable performance for universities in Iraq, coordinating development with local, regional, and global

sustainability goals, fostering interdisciplinary research, deepening stakeholder engagement, and improving the sustainability assessment indicator system for universities. This paper offered helpful insights for both practitioners and academics by proposing a guiding framework for various values under ecosystem services with the aim of achieving sustainable performance.

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