

The Impact Of Strategic Agility In Achieving Sustainable Competitive Advantage

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Abstract

The study aims to identify the impact of strategic agility and its dimensions (strategic sensitivity, collective commitment, resource fluidity) on sustainable competitive advantage. The study population consisted of university professors in Iraqi universities. A random sample of (78) was selected. The study tool was the questionnaire. Two models were formulated for the variables. The study used the structural analytical approach using structural modeling. Among the results that were reached was that strategic agility affects... Positively contributing to sustainable competitive advantage, strategic agility has become the primary means of survival, ability to compete, and confronting ongoing turmoil in the business environment.

Keywords:

Strategic agility, strategic sensitivity, collective commitment, resource fluidity, sustainable competitive advantage.

Introduction

So far, the world is witnessing four industrial revolutions. First, Industry 1.0 is about hydraulic and steam engines in factories. Second, Industry 2.0 depends on

specialization of work and production. This leads to high productivity and low production costs. Third, Industry 3.0 introduces the widespread use of electronic technology, information technology, and continuous automated manufacturing processes (Schwab, 2016), which requires new ways to compete. (Thi et al., 2022). There is a wide debate among researchers about the practices and methods that organizations can follow in order to keep up with environmental turmoil and the dynamism of changes and competition taking place in them (Xue, 2019). This controversy, in its nature, has drawn many intellectual frameworks that can be employed by strategic decision makers within the organization in order to deal with accelerating environmental changes. This obliges business organizations to rapidly develop the environmental developments taking place by possessing high flexibility to confront these developments. The concept of strategic agility is repeatedly mentioned in studies and research related to business administration and comprehensive quality management, as well as marketing research addressing this concept, but under different names (Stanley & Lambert, 2019). The concept of strategic agility occupies great importance in contemporary organizations that are operating in an unstable environment characterized by a great degree of complexity. This complexity makes the task of senior management in achieving the current and future goals of the organization very difficult due to the developments occurring in the environment, such as (the rapid and enormous progress in modern technologies and means of diverse communication and greater openness of global markets...etc.) (Arokodare & Asikhia, 2020).

Today, higher education sectors are highly competitive (Stimac & Leko, 2012). This has been produced by economic forces that have their origin in the development of a global education market . That force higher education institutions to respond quickly to new competitive dynamics. (Araya, 2013). The latter is due to the need for higher education institutions to constantly innovate, diversify their structures, and find more effective ways to deliver services to their clients. In this context, it is argued that the globalization of the economy has impacted the higher education sector, since governments' increased demand and continuous reduction of financing (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Accordingly, this study aims to identify the impact of strategic agility in achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

Research Problem

Business organizations constantly interact with constantly developing and changing environments, and this interaction takes place according to different mechanisms in light of the general perspective and philosophy of managing business organizations. For this interaction to be meaningful, it requires meaningful attention to strategic tools such as strategic agility. Strategic agility gives the organization a flexible framework that enables it to succeed and excel through the work teams having broad powers and decision-making practices with high degrees of independence. Agile organizations are those that can quickly meet the needs of their customers by introducing new products. As a result, organizations are required to develop a distinct set of strategic agility capabilities, unique in them to form competitive capabilities advantages, as it is the gateway to

anticipating strategic changes in the environment surrounding them, and responding to these changes in a way that achieves their survival and growth in the long term.

Accordingly, the research problem is to determine a relationship between strategic agility and sustainable competitive advantage.

Research Importance

Strategic agility is considered one of the topics of modern management thought at the present time, because it facilitates organizational tasks, detects strengths and opportunities and invests in them, addresses waste and loss in products, as well as increases the performance of the organization, and the success of business organizations is achieved through their ability to survive, Adaptation and quick response to changes. In a fast-paced business environment, achieving a sustainable advantage that ensures superiority over its competitors by ensuring customers' desires and needs. This prompted business organizations to search for unconventional management strategies and philosophies to face new challenges and rapid developments. Among these options was strategic agility, which in turn contributes to improving the organization's ability to survive and grow. Strategic agility is the key to success in a rapidly changing business environment. It is the ability to support and lead sudden change in order to take advantage of the opportunities available in an unstable market that faces many changes. It is the strategy that gives organizations the ability to realize and obtain the advantages offered by environmental opportunities. Through planning and implementing short-term and long-term change that occurs in the activities of business

organizations quickly, effectively and in the required manner. Strategic agility is the opportunity provided to organizations to grow and prosper, and achieve competitive advantage in an unstable business environment, and this reflects positively on sustainable competitive advantage.

Research Objectives

The research aims to:

- 1) Highlighting the concepts of strategic agility and sustainable competitive advantage
- 2) Identifying the level of interest in the concepts of strategic agility and sustainable competitive advantage
- 3) Identify the impact of strategic agility on sustainable competitive advantage
- 4) Providing the necessary recommendations on how to support the ability to adapt and respond quickly to changes in the competitive environment.

Research Hypotheses

(H1): There is positive correlation between strategic agility and sustainable competitive advantage

(H2): There is positive effect of strategic agility on sustainable competitive advantage.

Literature Review

Strategic Agility

Agile concepts initially emerged and spread in the areas of manufacturing before moving and developing into various fields, including management, marketing, production, services, education, and health care. In 2001, it developed into the field

of software, and a group of software development specialists issued what is known as the “Agile Manifesto” (Fowler & Highsmith, 2001). It is a set of basic principles that state that the organizational process should revolve around individuals and the interaction between them more than written tools and processes. Agility in management is a modern trend, mentality, and culture that stems from the field of change management, and has emerged for multiple reasons and factors. Therefore, digital transformation is the main factor in the emergence of the need for agility, in addition to other factors related to customers, competitors, and others related to products (Nutton,2020). Strategic agility has become the primary means of survival and the ability to compete and confront the ongoing turmoil in the business environment at the present time. Hence, the speed of change and the suddenness of events in the turbulent environment makes markets appear, divide, develop, and die. In light of this turbulent environment, there is no way to survive and prosper except through strategic agility, which provides the organization with the ability to be flexible and quick to respond in the face of new, unexpected changes and enables it to continuously readjust the organization’s strategic direction and develop innovative ways to create value (Glesne & Pedersen, 2020). Agility may mean agility and flexibility, and an organization is agile when it can maximize its strengths in a continuous manner and try to confront continuous environmental changes. The higher the agility, the more options are available to the organization to provide what is necessary at the right time and the right place. While (Teece et al, 2016) see that the term “Agility” is almost synonymous with the term “Flexibility.” Agility is the ability to adjust the strategic direction and

adapt it continuously in an essential work to create value for the organization, or it is “the ability to maintain flexibility in the face of new developments. or the ability to create effective and sustainable organizational change. Considering the agility of this framework will help managers make high-quality decisions and will help researchers better understand the issues facing management in the innovation economy. (Ju et al., 2020). While Prange (2016) believes that agility means taking risks ,as agility here is a reaction to the difficulties imposed by the field of work, which Overcome by change and weakness. As for (Wendler, 2014) , agility is imperative for business success, as it helps companies achieve competitive performance in dynamic work environments, and that information technology can enhance competitive agility by building digital options, helping companies accelerate the decision-making process, facilitating communication, and rapid response. to changing circumstances (Orvos et al., 2019). Agile companies can take advantage of emerging business opportunities to respond to rapidly changing conditions, overcome unexpected threats, and thrive in competitive environments (Nutton,2020).

Dimensions Of Strategic Agility

The literature indicates that there are three superior capabilities necessary to form strategic agility, which are (strategic sensitivity, collective commitment, and provision of resources) (Morshedy, 2021)(AlTaweel & Al-Hawary,2021) as in Figure 1 :

Strategic Sensitivity

The organization's ability to monitor and understand environmental changes and sense future threats and opportunities for the organization in the business environment, which is the organization's awareness of the strategic direction and awareness of the way to achieve the vision, mission and strategic goals by understanding opportunities quickly responding and acting with competitors (Al-Badrani, 2015). Strategic sensitivity is crucial in order to understand Market conditions and turbulence allow leaders to develop innovations to gain competitive advantage (Oventhal, 2016).

Collective Commitment

It means the organization's ability to make strategic decisions quickly and collectively throughout the organization, especially in the senior management team when understanding changes in the external and internal environment without personal interests or the emergence of factors of power or control within the organization, as well as the presence of sympathy and mutual trust between members of senior management and all members. The organization works to reduce resistance to change, and facilitates the process of adopting and implementing senior management decisions at all administrative levels, which works to increase the organization's response speed to emerging opportunities without being hampered by internal disputes, personal policies, and conflicts within the organization. Collective capabilities represent the organization's ability to benefit from resources such as infrastructure, partners, and workers, which are

greater than the resources. They represent making decisive collective decisions while avoiding individual decisions faster to take advantage of opportunities, maintain agility, and enhance competitiveness (Sajdak, 2015).

Resource Fluidity

It is the internal ability to quickly transfer resources to investment areas in order to support competitiveness (Oventhal, 2016). It is a tool for intelligent restructuring and purchasing processes and ideas to support human resources capacity and environmental adaptation, which supports strategic agility and achieving competitive advantage by reviewing organizational capabilities according to the regulatory environment (Morshedy, 2021).

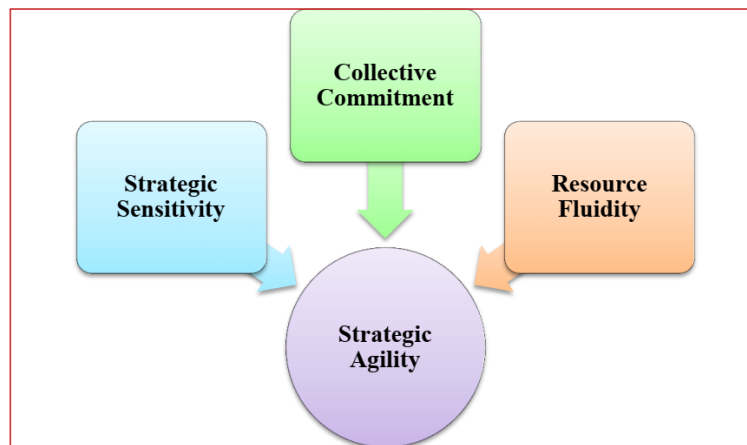


Figure 1 : Dimensions Of Strategic Agility

Source: (Mavengere, 2013)

Sustainability

The concept of sustainability has become linked to environmental concepts and is known at the global level through the “Shared Future” report prepared by the United Nations Committee on Environment and Development. Which showed that

sustainability is related to environmental safety and social justice, as well as to the economic prosperity of organizations (Zhang et al., 2020), through the formulation of multiple terms, including sustainable development, which means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Christofi et al, 2012). Then, the idea of integrating the economy and environment was considered under the concept of environmental development. This concept refers to focusing on development patterns that generate more poverty and environmental damage (Diagne, 2013). Sustainability is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource such that the resource is not permanently exhausted or destroyed".

The term "sustainable" describes the biological environment, which includes a variety of living things and natural elements that enable them to persist for as long as feasible. Another meaning of sustainability is preserving the standard of living through environmental adaptation and long-term use of natural resources in a way that ensures life will continue. Sustainability can also be defined as a collection of essential mechanisms that give different kinds of living organisms the capacity to survive, enabling them to preserve the succession of their generations and evolve new strategies for growth throughout time.

Sustainable Competitive Advantage

A competitive strategy determines how the company will compete in its business units. Robbins et al., (2015) describe how they will primarily compete in their market. However, when it comes to organizations that participate in multiple businesses, each of them will have their competitive strategy and this will define

their competitive advantage. The concept of competitive advantage is a modern concept and has received the attention of many researchers and writers on all aspects, whether in service or industrial organizations. We find (Hicks) defining it as the application of a technological information system with the intention of getting ahead of competitors, meaning that it is considered a means for the organization to obtain the information it needs in order to build advantages. Competitiveness achieves superiority over competing organizations. Kotler addressed it as the organization's ability and ability to perform in one or several ways that competitors cannot follow in the present and future (Hoffman , 2019).

Sustainability Elements

1) Economic Sustainability

In order to ensure economic sustainability, important resources must be provided for future generations. This is accomplished by putting the principle of fair and equal distribution across generations into practice, since it can be used to make the best use possible of limited resources , and to the level of individual satisfaction (Mania & Rieber, 2019).

2) Social sustainability

Social sustainability - people's feeling that they are part of the development process and their belief that they and their descendants will benefit from it - is essential to addressing today's development challenges, and represents the objective equivalent at the social level of environmental and economic sustainability. Social sustainability is concerned with values, religions, traditions, and the situation in which people live (Tooranloo et al, 2017).

2) Environmental Sustainability

The word "environmental" is linked to the human impact on natural systems, and the term "environmental sustainability" is defined based on the most common definition of sustainable development, that is, meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Buallay, 2020). There are many theories related to the environmental sustainability of companies. Under the institutional theory, companies work on environmental activities to meet industry laws, government legislation, and customer requirements, while the resource-based theory states that companies work on environmental activities to develop and develop their resources, which then bring them more benefits (Hubbard & Vetter,2023).

Methodology

Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection in the study was the questionnaire. Two sections of the questionnaire were created: one for the dependent variable (sustainable competitive advantage) and the other for the independent variable (strategic agility) and its dimensions (strategic sensitivity (SA1), collective commitment (SA2), and resource fluidity (SA3)). The model in Figure 2 was created to express relationships and hypotheses.

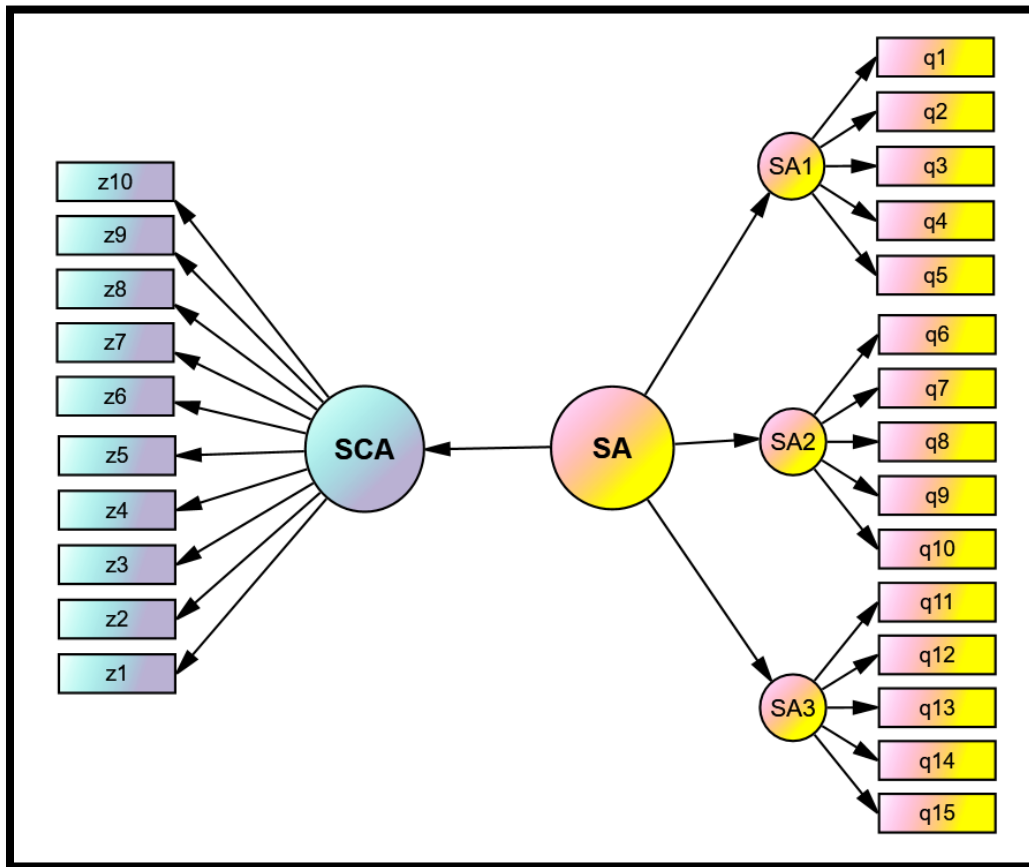


Figure 2: Study Model

Content Validity

The validity of the questionnaire is that the questionnaire performs and measures what it was actually designed to measure, and what is meant is that the questionnaire is clear according to its meaning and vocabulary, and is understandable to those who will be included in the questionnaire, as well as being valid for statistical analysis. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher used the (content validity) method in order to test the validity of the

content of the questionnaire. The extreme comparison approach was used to calculate this criterion, which involved adding up all of the questions and sorting them ascending. The upper part and the lower part of the prepared replies were separated. An analysis was conducted comparing the averages using data from the upper end (27%) and the lower end (27%) of the data sets. Both parties tested the difference between the sample means, and the statistical analysis's findings indicated that there is a significant difference between the upper and lower parties' means. This is because the calculated T value of 7.647 is higher than its tabulated counterpart of 1.789 at a significance level of 0.05 and a degree of freedom of 99. The validity of the scale is demonstrated by its ability to discriminate between responses with large and small values.

Reliability

The concept of reliability refers to the consistency of the results of the scale, because the strength of consistency in the questionnaire indicates the closeness or equality of the results of application to the same research topic in two different periods, and the degree of stability. The reliability coefficient is higher than (0.70), which indicates the stability and reliability of the research results. Therefore, the reliability coefficient was calculated according to the Cronbach's alpha method.

Table 1 indicates that the reliability coefficient for the strategic agility variable is (0.864), the reliability coefficient for the sustainable competitive advantage variable is (0.813), and the overall reliability coefficient is (0.833), and this indicates the reliability of the tool.

Table 1: Reliability According To Cronbach Alpha

Var.	Items	Cronbach Alpha
SA1	5	0.784
SA2	5	0.885
SA3	5	0.745
SA	15	0.864
SCA	10	0.813
Total	25	0.833

Structural Modeling and CFA

In order to formulate models for the variables and conduct confirmatory factor analysis CFA, the structural modeling (SEM) method was used, as this method plays an important role in verifying the validity of the model and path analyses. It is considered a modern method that has witnessed great interest in various applications in the field of developing scales.

Factor analysis requires that the loadings be higher than 0.50, and structural modeling requires that three conditions be met from a group of conditions called good fit indices, which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Structural Modeling Equation Threshold

Fit Indices	Perfect-Fit Index Values	Acceptable-Fit Index Values
χ^2/df	$0 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 3$	$3 < \chi^2/df \leq 5$
* GFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90
* AGFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90
IFI	≥ 0.95	0.90–0.94
TLI (NNFI)	≥ 0.95	0.90–0.94
CFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90
SRMR	$0.08 \leq$	$0.10 \leq$
RMSEA	$0.05 \leq$	$0.08 \leq$

Source: Polat et al., 2023

Table 1 and Figure 3,4 indicate that the structural model of the variables was acceptable, as it recorded acceptable values compared to the conditions mentioned for structural modeling and confirmatory factor analysis.

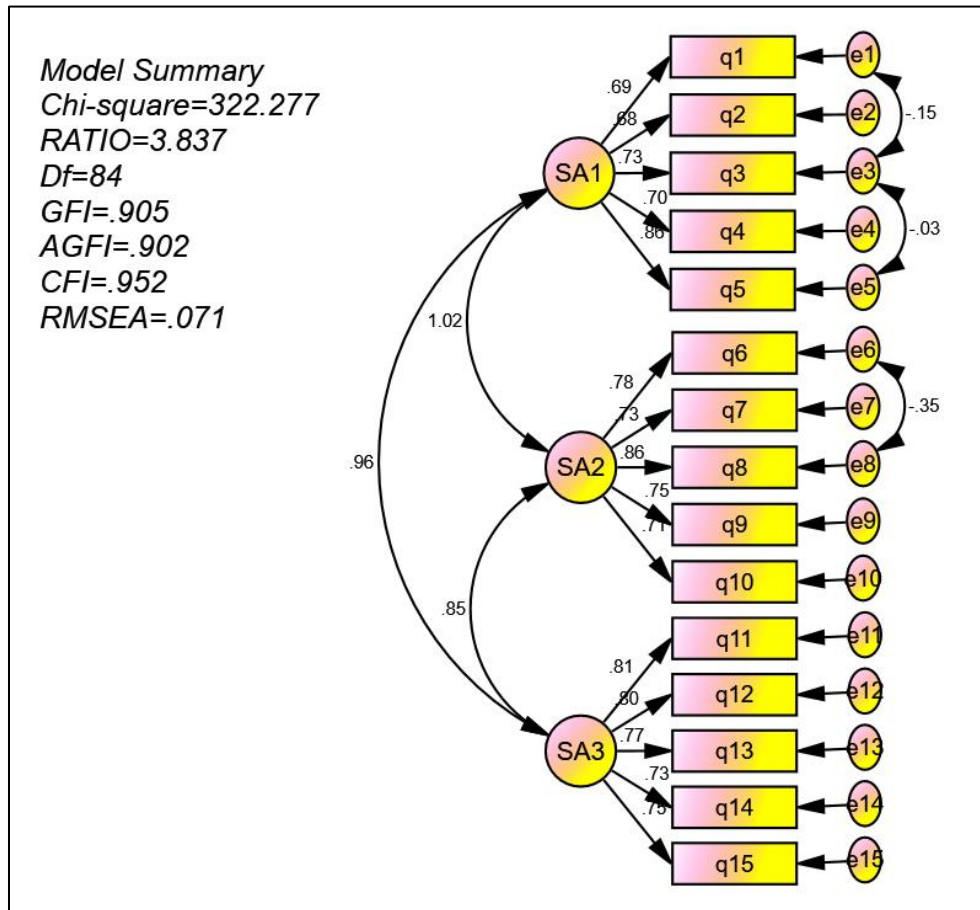


Figure 3: SA model

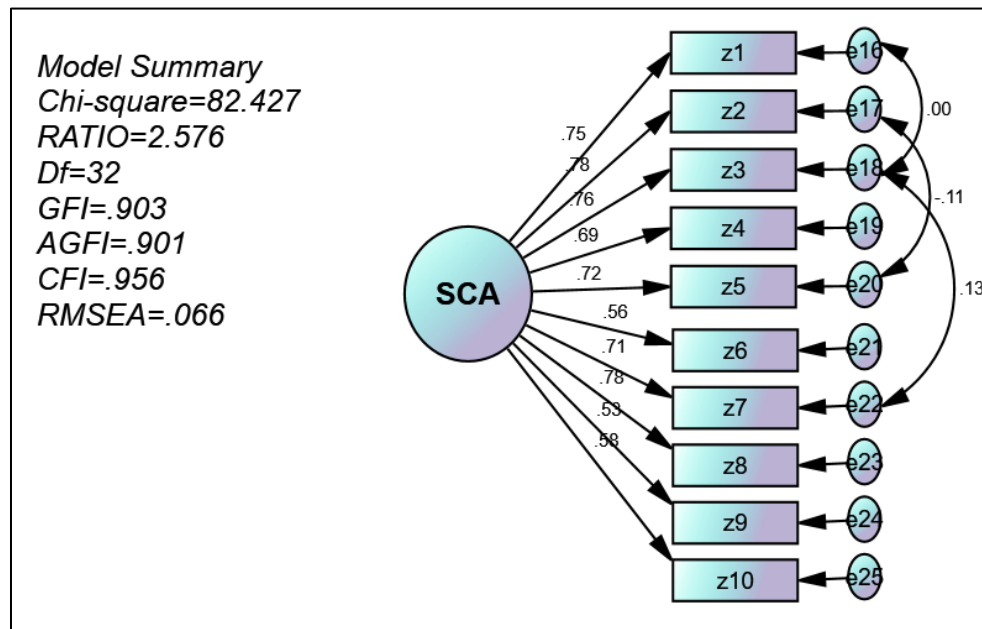


Figure 4: SCA model

Correlation Hypotheses

Table 3 indicates correlations between X and Y in their dimensions, as the correlation between SA and SCA of (0.835 **), with T of (15.257) and significant at the level of (0.05), therefore hypothesis 1 is accepted. As for the sub-hypotheses, a positive correlation was recorded between SA1 and SCA with a correlation coefficient of (0.743 **) with T of (11.158) and significant at the level of (0.05), therefore hypothesis 1-1 is accepted. A positive correlation between SA2 and SCA ,with a correlation coefficient (0.728 **) with T of (10.680) and significant at the level of (0.05), therefore hypothesis 1-2 is accepted. Also, a positive correlation relationship was recorded between SA3 and SCA with a correlation coefficient

(0.795 **), with T of (13.191) and significant at the level of (0.05), therefore hypothesis 1-3 is accepted.

Table 3 : Correlation Results

Variable	r	T	Sig.
SA1	0.743 **	11.158	0.000
SA2	0.728 **	10.680	0.000
SA3	0.795 **	13.191	0.000
SA	0.835 **	15.257	0.000

Structural Effect

Table 4 and Figures 5.6 indicate the structural model of the influence between the variables. Table 1 and Figure 2 may refer to the relationship of the effect of SA on SCA with (0.830), and this value is significant, and this relationship is significant based on the value of (F) recorded a high value with an acceptable level of significance and smaller than 0.05. this proves Hypothesis 2.

The sub-relationships were also acceptable. There was a significant effect of the SA1 variable on SCA of (0.601). This result is significant based on the value of (F), which recorded a high value with an acceptable level of significance and smaller than 0.05. This proves Hypothesis 2-1.

There is a significant effect of SA2 on SCA of (0.480), and this result is significant based on the value of (F), which recorded a high value with an acceptable level of significance and smaller than 0.05. This proves hypothesis 2-2.

There is also a significant effect of the SA3 variable on SCA of (0.723), and this result is significant based on the value of (F), which recorded a high value with an acceptable level of significance and smaller than 0.05. This proves Hypothesis 2-3.

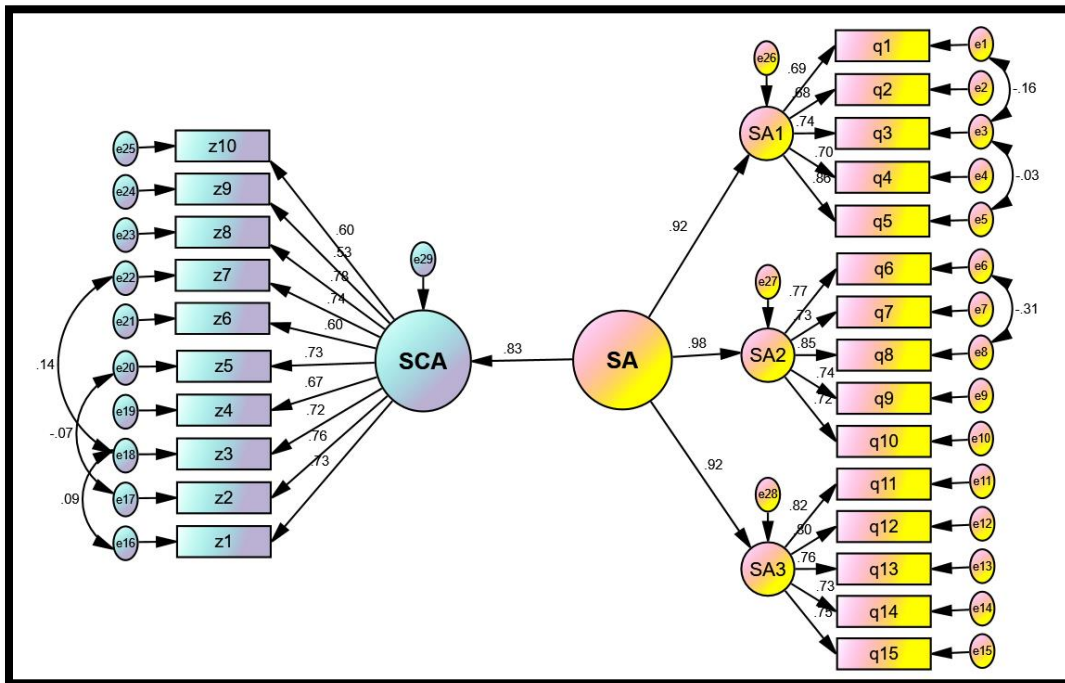


Figure 5: Structural Effect of SCA On SA

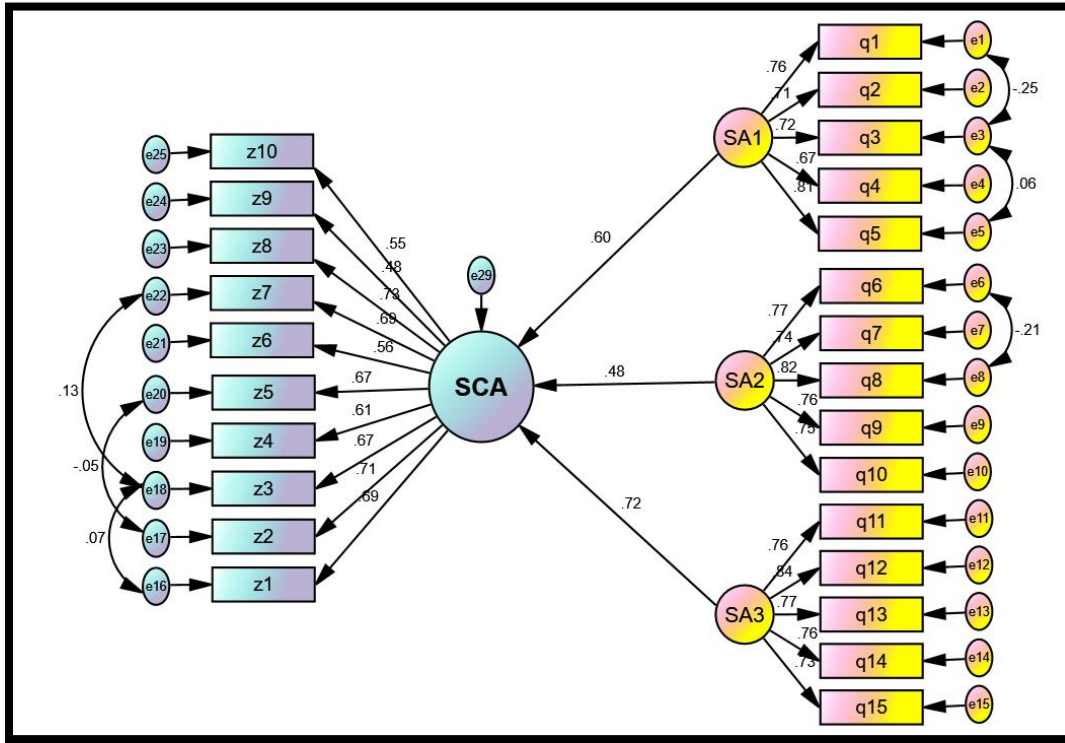


Figure 6: Structural Effect of SCA Dimensions On SA

Table 4 : Structural Effect Results

Path	Estimate	F	Sig.
SA1.....>SCA	0.601	23.931	0.000
SA2.....>SCA	0.480	11.015	0.000
SA3.....>SCA	0.723	25.165	0.000
SA.....>SCA	0.830	26.714	0.000

Discussion And Conclusions

Global, Arab and local higher education institutions face a wave of challenges that are worsening day after day. Due to the rapid global changes, it has become necessary that Iraqi universities need strategic agility, with regard to higher education institutions in Iraq, so that they have been able to perform tasks and responsibilities in a limited manner. Its current situation, with its modest current capabilities, and the extent of the problems and challenges it faces, and in light of the comprehensive changes that are sweeping the world today, makes it difficult for it to interact positively with those challenges and rapid changes, and to achieve its goals, as it finds that the difficulty in its interaction results from the gap arising from the lack of studies that It deals with the topic of strategic agility and achieving competitive advantage in higher education. Therefore, this study comes as a modest scientific attempt to find out the role of strategic agility in achieving sustainable competitive advantage in Iraqi universities. The study reached the following conclusions:

1. The concept of strategic agility occupies great importance in current time that are operating in an unstable environment characterized by a great degree of complexity. This complexity makes the task of senior management in achieving the current and future goals of the organization very difficult.
2. In a dynamic corporate climate, agility is essential for success since it indicates one's capacity to adapt to changes and seize chances in a turbulent and highly uncertain environment.

3. Strategic sensitivity positively affects sustainable competitive advantage, as the ability to adapt to environmental transformations and changes quickly and effectively reflects positively on sustainable competitive advantage.
4. Collective commitment positively affects sustainable competitive advantage, as the team's collective commitment leads to improving the quality of products and services and is reflected in customer satisfaction and improving sustainable competitive advantage.
5. The flow of resources positively affects sustainable competitive advantage. Easily accessing resources and allocating them effectively affects reducing time and improving products and services and is reflected positively in sustainable competitive advantage.
6. The results related to structural equation modeling for testing the hypotheses of influence relationships between the study variables showed that there is a positive significant effect of strategic agility in achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

Recommendations

1. Universities should increase the level of interest in strategic agility because of its importance in achieving their future directions.
2. Universities must pay attention to the time factor and take timely measures that are reflected in environmental opportunities.
3. Possessing distinguished leadership skills and being able to deal with tasks and resources and balance between them.

4. Universities must be confident that leadership styles achieve strategic agility and reflect positively on sustainable competitive advantage.
5. Activating the role of strategic agility to achieve its competitive advantage in an environment characterized by rapid changes where there is no place for weak institutions to keep pace with change.
6. To be flexible and adaptable to the variables of the environment of higher education institutions so that strategic decisions are made on an ongoing basis.
7. The necessity of organizing workshops to increase the capabilities of members of the institutional community to sense environmental changes.
8. The need to enhance strategic agility practices, including (strategic sensitivity, collective commitment, resource fluidity) among strategic work units in universities.

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