

THE IMPACT OF CREATIVE MANAGEMENT ON DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN IRAQ: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AS MEDIATING VARIABLE

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the impact of creative management on digital leadership in the presence of the knowledge management variable as an intermediary variable; and to achieve the study goal, a questionnaire was developed, and its stability and validity were verified. The study community represented all employees working in Iraqi universities, specifically in the various units represented by (Director of the University Library Unit, Director of the Computer Unit, Director of the Quality Unit Supervisor or Engineer, Administrative Employee in the Units (Library, Computer, Quality)); Their number reached (750), and the researcher distributed (254) questionnaires; According to the requirements and requirements of selecting the optimal sample, but (24) questionnaires were not retrieved, and thus the number of questionnaires that can be subjected to statistical analysis procedures (230) questionnaires with a percentage of (90.5%), and the information and data were analyzed using the analysis program (SPSS), and the study used arithmetic means and standard deviation, as well as the multiple and simple regression equation, and after analyzing the tool, the study reached a set of results, the most prominent of which was the impact of creative management on digital leadership in the presence of the knowledge management variable; The study recommended the necessity of conducting studies related to its topic, including different societies and environments.

Keywords: Creative Management, Digital Leadership, Knowledge Management, Iraqi Universities.

INTRODUCTION

Universities are key institutions in the development of human capital, tasked with preparing individuals who possess the knowledge, skills, and talents necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex and technology-driven world. Human resources are the foundation upon which universities build their strategies, implement activities, and achieve long-term objectives (Srivastava, 2024). In this context, the ability to effectively manage knowledge has become a strategic necessity. Knowledge management enables universities to identify, organize, share, and apply knowledge in ways that improve decision-making, enhance administrative efficiency, and support innovation (Nasir et al., 2024; Abdelhadi, 2023).

Amid the accelerating pace of digital transformation, institutions of higher education must adopt digital leadership approaches that rely on digital technologies to adapt, innovate, and remain competitive (Areiqat, 2025).

Digital leadership not only enhances operational capabilities but also supports the development of new skill sets aligned with the demands of the digital era (Ayroot & Al-Shawabkeh, 2023).

Furthermore, as educational institutions are central to the acquisition, generation, and dissemination of knowledge (Al-Aqili, 2024), there is a growing need to manage academic talents and intellectual assets more effectively.

This study explores the impact of creative management on digital leadership in Iraqi public universities, with a particular focus on the mediating role of knowledge management.

By understanding these relationships, the study seeks to provide insights that can contribute to the development of more innovative, knowledge-driven leadership practices in the higher education sector.

Study Problem

Creative management, as discussed by Tarambiwa, Langton, Mafini, and Bhadury (2024), plays a key role in improving institutional performance, especially in educational settings.

Iraqi universities, facing economic, political, and technological challenges, are turning to digital leadership to adapt and stay competitive (Shen, 2022).

Digital leadership enhances knowledge management and promotes innovation (Areiqat, 2024).

This study investigates the influence of creative management—specifically fluency, flexibility, originality, and sensitivity to problems—on digital leadership. It also explores the mediating role of knowledge management in Iraqi public universities.

Importance of the Study

Knowledge is a vital resource that drives innovation in universities (Almuaqel, 2024), and its application enhances research and digital leadership (Liu, 2024).

This study offers a basis for future research on the role of knowledge management between creative management and digital leadership in Iraqi universities.

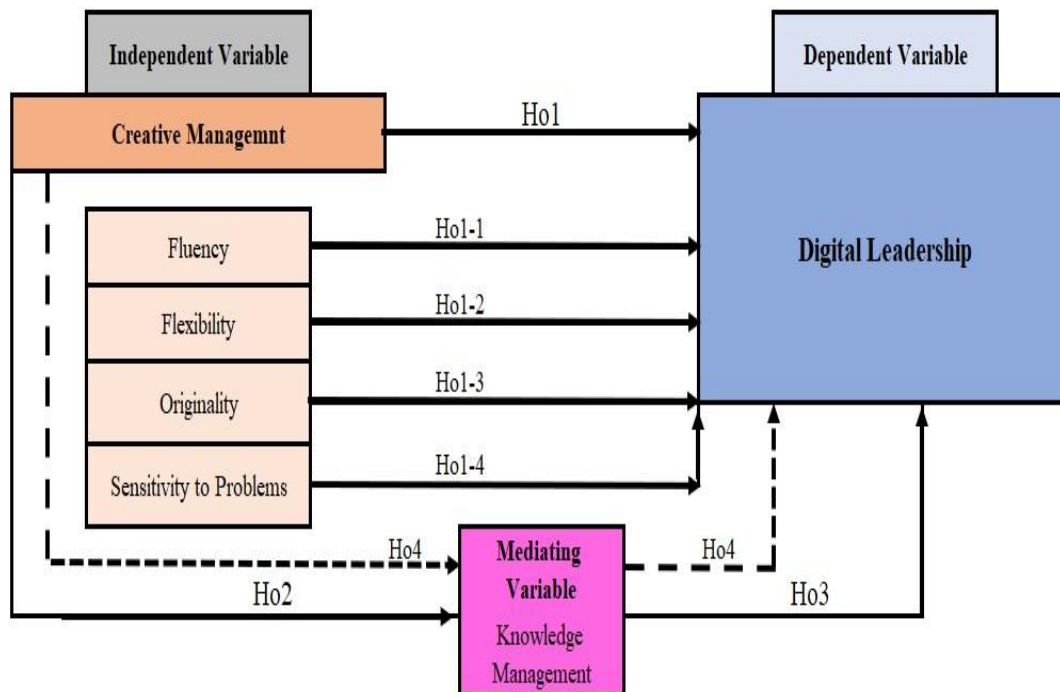
Main Study Question

What is the impact of creative management dimensions (fluency, flexibility, originality, and problem sensitivity) on digital leadership in Iraqi public universities, with knowledge management as a mediating variable?

Main Hypothesis 1 (H01):

There is no statistically significant effect at the 0.05 significance level ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) of creative management dimensions (fluency, flexibility, originality, and problem sensitivity) on digital leadership in Iraqi public universities, with knowledge management as a mediating variable.

Study Model



Model Reference

- **Independent Variable:** Abdelhadi, M. (2024).
- **Dependent Variable:** Liu, Y. (2024).
- **Mediating Variable:** Sulaytin, R. (2024).

Previous Studies

Abdelhadi, M. (2023). aimed to identify the theoretical foundations of creative management and the intellectual foundations of governance, to examine Egypt's efforts to enhance governance in primary schools (theoretically), and to investigate the current status of governance in primary schools in Kafr El-Sheikh Governorate from the perspective of the creative management approach (empirically). A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods simultaneously. A questionnaire was used as the study instrument. The study population consisted of some primary schools in several districts of Kafr El-Sheikh Governorate, with a sample size of 398 individuals. SPSS software was employed to analyze the collected data. The study revealed several findings, most notably that the level of creative management application was moderate.

The study also indicated efforts to utilize databases and available information sources to participate in decision-making and to provide a link on the school's website to receive and consider suggestions.

Additionally, a proposed framework was developed to enhance governance in primary schools in Kafr El-Sheikh Governorate based on the creative management approach.

Suleitin, A. (2023). aimed to determine the impact of knowledge management processes (knowledge generation, knowledge storage, knowledge distribution, and knowledge application) on job performance in private commercial banks in the Syrian coast.

The study employed a descriptive-analytical approach and used a questionnaire as the data collection tool.

The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of employees across all administrative levels in several private commercial banks in the Syrian coast. The sample consisted of 117 employees, of whom 105 valid responses were retrieved for statistical analysis. The study utilized the SPSS software to perform statistical description and hypothesis testing.

The results indicated that the level of knowledge management application in private commercial banks in the Syrian coast was moderate, and the job performance level of employees was also moderate.

The study recommended enhancing the process of knowledge generation, providing a conducive environment for it, and fostering a culture that encourages and motivates learning and sharing of information and ideas.

Kusa, A. (2024). aimed to examine the impact of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and knowledge management (KM) on company performance (PERF), as well as the effect of knowledge management on the relationship between the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation and PERF. The dimensions studied were risk-taking (RT), innovativeness (IN), and proactiveness (PR).

Structural equation modeling and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) methodologies were employed to explore the targeted relationships. The study sample consisted of 150 small furniture manufacturing firms operating in Poland. The study simultaneously used two methodologies representing different approaches to investigating the expected relationships.

The findings indicated a moderate level of knowledge management application and highlighted the role of knowledge management within the EO context and its impact on PERF in low-tech industries.

The study recommended that knowledge management accompanied by innovativeness is a crucial condition for achieving PERF. Furthermore, the absence of knowledge management combined with the absence of risk-taking (RT) and innovativeness (IN) negatively affects PERF.

Autio, E., Jinjara, Y., Komlósi, É., Park, D., Szerb, L., & Tiszberger, M. G. (2024). aimed to address the question regarding specific bottlenecks that hinder the performance of digital entrepreneurship systems in the countries under study, with a particular focus on developing Asian economies.

The study utilized the Global Index of Digital Entrepreneurship Systems (GIDES), a composite index that evaluates the performance of digital entrepreneurship systems at the national level.

Unlike traditional entrepreneurship or most entrepreneurial ecosystem measures, GIDES adopts a systematic approach using the Penalty Function Bottleneck (PFB) algorithm to identify bottlenecks that may lead to overall system performance deterioration.

The results indicated that most developing Asian economies have significant room for improvement. While developing Asia excels in physical infrastructure, it needs to work on its culture and informal institutions.

The study recommended adopting GIDES to monitor all formal, structural, and digital frameworks that support digital entrepreneurship, as it provides a deeper understanding of how digitization impacts entrepreneurship.

Study Population and Sample

The study population comprises all employees working in Iraqi public universities, totaling 48 institutions nationwide. According to data from the Department of Personnel Affairs for the academic year 2023/2024, the total number of employees across these universities is approximately 195,000, serving in various administrative roles.

A purposive sample was selected, focusing on employees holding the following positions:

- Director of University Library Unit
- Director of Computer Unit
- Director of Quality Assurance Unit
- Supervisors or Engineers
- Administrative staff in the above-mentioned units

The total sample consisted of 750 employees, and a total of 254 questionnaires were distributed based on Sekaran and Bougie (2016) sampling recommendations.

The questionnaires were targeted toward staff with academic qualifications relevant to the study's objectives.

Data collection and analysis were conducted using the SPSS software. Of the 254 questionnaires distributed, 230 valid responses were received, representing a response rate of 90.5%.

The high validity of responses enabled effective statistical analysis and hypothesis testing.

The study covered staff from all 48 Iraqi public universities, as listed by the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2024).

These universities span across all provinces in Iraq, including major institutions such as:

No	University Name	Governorate	No	University Name	Governorate
1	University of Baghdad	Baghdad	17	University of Fallujah	Al-Anbar
2	Al-Mustansiriyah University	Baghdad	18	University of Anbar	Al-Anbar
3	Al-Nahrain University	Baghdad	19	University of Kirkuk	Kirkuk
4	University of Information and Communications Technology	Baghdad	20	University of Basrah	Basrah
5	Iraqi University	Baghdad	21	Basrah University for Oil and Gas	Basrah
6	Middle Technical University	Baghdad	22	Southern Technical University	Basrah
7	Al-Karkh University for Science	Baghdad	23	University of Kufa	Najaf
8	Ibn Sina University for Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences	Baghdad	24	Jaber Ibn Hayyan Medical University	Najaf
9	University of Technology	Baghdad	25	Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University	Najaf
10	University of Mosul	Nineveh	26	University of Karbala	Karbala
11	University of Nineveh	Nineveh	27	University of Maysan	Maysan
12	University of Tal Afar	Nineveh	28	University of Al-Muthanna	Al-Muthanna
13	Al-Hamdaniya University	Nineveh	29	University of Diyala	Diyala
14	Northern Technical University	Nineveh	30	University of Dhi Qar	Dhi Qar
15	University of Samarra	Salah al-Din	31	University of Wasit	Wasit
16	University of Tikrit	Salah al-Din	32	University of Al-Qadisiyah	Diwaniyah
33	University of Babylon	Babylon	41	University of Zakho	Duhok
34	Al-Qasim Green University	Babylon	42	Duhok Polytechnic University	Duhok
35	University of Salahaddin	Erbil	43	University of Sulaimani	Sulaymaniyah
36	Hawler Medical University	Erbil	44	Sulaimani Polytechnic University	Sulaymaniyah
37	University of Koya	Erbil	45	University of Garmian	Sulaymaniyah
38	Erbil Polytechnic University	Erbil	46	University of Karmian	Sulaymaniyah
39	University of Soran	Erbil	47	University of Raparin	Sulaymaniyah
40	University of Duhok	Duhok	48	University of Halabja	Sulaymaniyah

Source

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research – Iraq (2024)
Website: https://mohe.sr.gov.iq/ar/public_universities

STUDY METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the study, the descriptive/analytical methodology was employed due to its suitability to the nature of the research. Specifically, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, ver. 26) was utilized to answer the study's questions and test its hypotheses (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The statistical analysis revealed the following key findings related to the study hypotheses:

Creative Management: The level of applying creative management dimensions was moderate. This aligns with Al-Aqeefi (2024) and Abdelhadi (2023), who also found moderate implementation levels. Genuine creativity in organizations reflects their development, modernity, democracy, and a genuine desire by management to enhance work and capabilities to meet planned objectives. Creativity requires sustained effort, including employee development through training, conferences, and exposure to best practices, alongside advanced technologies and methodologies. Management's key role is to encourage and participate in creativity, fostering an environment that accepts innovation and change. Effective creative behavior demonstrates successful organizational behavior management in harnessing members' intellectual and creative potential.

Digital Leadership: The application level of digital leadership dimensions was moderate, consistent with studies by Mohammed (2024) and Eirot (2023). Digital entrepreneurship plays a vital role in fostering innovation and service development that enhances customer satisfaction. Historically, entrepreneurship has been fundamental to human civilizations and economic development. Digital entrepreneurship is a creative process that leverages strengths and converts challenges into innovative opportunities, utilizing available human and infrastructural resources to improve service quality and productivity.

Knowledge Management: The application level of knowledge management was also moderate, in line with Sadoun (2023), Kusa (2024), and Srivastava (2024).

Relationships Among Variables

- Creative management dimensions (fluency, flexibility, originality, problem sensitivity) significantly influence digital leadership in Iraqi public universities, with knowledge management acting as a mediating variable. This agrees with Abdelhadi (2024).
- Fluency, flexibility, originality, and problem sensitivity each have significant effects on digital leadership through knowledge management, supported by studies from Eirot (2023), Mohammed (2024), and Sadoun (2023).
- Creative management also significantly affects knowledge management, corroborated by Abdelhadi (2024).

- Knowledge management significantly impacts digital leadership, consistent with Sulaytin (2024).
- Overall, creative management influences digital leadership in Iraqi public universities, as confirmed by Abdelhadi (2024).

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the study recommends the following for Iraqi universities:

- Emphasize the importance of creative management, digital leadership, and knowledge management by engaging employees and enhancing their relevant skills, attitudes, and perspectives.
- Enhance employee capacities regarding creative management principles, digital leadership, and knowledge management through continuous training programs.
- Implement knowledge management and digital leadership principles to improve advanced and innovative university services, thereby increasing student satisfaction.
- Develop strategic visions to improve university infrastructure to respond effectively to internal and external changes.
- Maintain senior management focus on modern management principles by adopting leadership styles that stimulate creativity, knowledge acquisition, and digital leadership to achieve excellence and competitiveness.
- Prioritize continuous performance improvement and agility in adapting to environmental changes by integrating new technologies and improving internal work environments to allow flexible workforce movement and skill transfer.
- Strengthen requirements for knowledge management, digital leadership, and creative management, and collaborate with leading global universities in student services to enhance competitive advantage.
- Develop flexible plans to address potential upcoming challenges proactively.

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