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Exploring the Role of Strategic Leadership Components in the Development of Smart Organizations: *Evidence from Telecommunication Companies in the Kurdistan Region*

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Strategic Leadership, Digitalization, Smart Organizations, Telecommunication Companies, Kurdistan Region

Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to explore the role of key strategic leadership components, such as long-term orientation, digital orientation, involvement orientation, employee orientation, and information orientation, on the development of smart organizations. The research focuses on the managerial and technical employees of the telecommunication companies in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As a data collection process, the questionnaire is used to attain data from the research population represented by 700 managerial and technical staff of Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain Iraq, and a total of 397 valid replies were obtained. The Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used as a statistical analysis technique to test the proposed hypotheses. The results establish that the development of smart organizations is positively influenced by all five key strategic leadership components. The most significant among them was the influence of employee and digital orientation, underscoring the vital role that staff and digital transformation play in telecommunication companies. The positive and significant influences of information and involvement orientations also confirmed the significant role of data-based leadership and active engagement in leaders' efficacy. These results determine that to foster smart-based practices, agility, and inventiveness within organizations, including telecom providers, leaders should adopt a multifaceted strategic approach. For telecommunication companies' leaders willing to invest in digital technology and knowledge-intensive practices in a transition towards smart organizational models, the research provides actionable insights.

1. Introduction

In the world of fast digitalization and deepening competition, companies, especially those in the telecommunications industry, are constantly faced with the pressure of innovation, change, and decision-making based on data. In these situations, the term smart organization has become even more popular. Smart organization refers to those organizations that leverage technology, innovation, and flexibility to manage the uncertainty of market conditions (Wang et al., 2020). Thus, smarter organizations differ from others in that they can utilize organizational learning, strategic foresight, and employee empowerment to build resilience and long-term development (Morrar et al., 2017). Strategic leadership is the core of this transformation. Strategic leadership is a vital factor in building smart organizational capabilities and ways of functioning. Strategic leadership is considered the ability of a leader to guide people and organizations toward strategic long-term goals, ensure effective change, prepare for and respond to change, align resources with environmental demands, and foster creativity (Ireland & Hitt, 2005). Therefore, strategic leadership not only encourages new technology adoption but also makes the cultural and structural change required for organizations to become smart effectively. As strategic leaders have a crucial role in shaping organizational smart culture, advanced systems, and decision-making processes in industries like telecommunication, where technology drives competition (Avolio et al., 2009; Ismail et al., 2018). In addition to technological infrastructure, smart organizations are also enabled by an open, foresighted, flexible, and innovative mindset of their leadership. In this context, organizations embracing knowledge integration, digital transformation, and strategic experimentation, all of which are typically facilitated by strategic leadership, stand a better opportunity to thrive in transforming markets (Pisano, 2015; Rashid, 2025). Strategic leaders, therefore, encourage a supportive culture, cross-functional coordination, digitalization, and ongoing organizational learning, where all essential pillars in facilitating smart organizations (Alzoubi et al., 2022). Strategic leadership in telecommunications companies is required now during this time of revolution to shape AI-powered digital innovation, improve service, and facilitate organizational change. Yet, there are limited empirical studies that explore the influence of strategic leadership components in enabling smart organizations and enhancing smart organizational practices in this particular economic and geopolitical landscape. The present research, consequently, utilizes empirical data from the mentioned telecommunication companies to explore how key strategic leadership components enable the development of smart organizations. The current research is categorized into five principal sections. The introduction comes first and gives an overview of the study background. The second is a discussion of the theoretical foundation and gives a review of the literature that can be used for the research constructs. This section is also more concerned with the conceptual framework of research and how the hypotheses were developed. The third section expounds in detail the methodology of research, that is, the design of research, sampling method, data collection technique, and analytical procedure used. The fourth one reveals outcomes, which show how the findings of data analysis are related to the given hypotheses. The fifth one expounds on the results and offers practice and future study recommendations. It also addresses the implications of the results and concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategic Leadership Components

Strategic leadership and its key components contribute greatly to long-term organizational performance, especially in dynamic and complex contexts. Strategic leadership, as stated by Ismail et al. (2018), involves a leader's capacity to craft a plan, create an inspiring vision, inspire people to put the vision into action, and scan the outer and inner environment to catalyze strategic change. Strategic leadership, consequently, in the AI era and a stronger digitalization future cannot be avoided. This kind of leadership encompasses the proper use of available material, human resources, and potentialities in the future, to achieve organizational transformation. It is the practice of establishing goals and overseeing major activities like planning, controlling, and staffing in a long-term strategic plan (Quong & Walker, 2010). Besides, goal achievement in uncertain and

opportunity-rich settings is a dimension of strategic leadership. It taps into such scopes as rule-making, consensus-building, organizational culture, resource allocation, and philosophical influence (Alzubia & Khalid, 2022). Singh et al. (2023) also argued that strategic leaders must implement change, build shared visions, and manage human resources strategically to establish a long-term competitive advantage. With soundly developed strategic plans, they are vital to lead scientific, technical, and informational progress (Kumar et al., 2024). Strategic leadership is purported to engender cooperation, communication, and the ability to transform and improve organizational performance and decision-making (Russell, 2018). Through finding and empowering leaders who possess the potential to balance short-term performance and long-term sustainability, strategic leadership is in the service of organizational maturity (Sonmez & Adiguzel, 2020).

According to Bhattacharyya & Jha (2018), establishing a healthy corporate culture that can support innovation, flexibility, and strategic thinking is a key element of such Long-Term Orientation (LTO). Consequently, LTO enables leadership resilience in a way that businesses learn to internalize uncertainty and change (Luo et al., 2024). A leader's capacity to integrate digital technology into strategy, operations, and organizational culture and to become innovative and engage in co-creation with external ecosystems is reflected in the leader's digital orientation. Executives make timely decisions and promote good use of data through real-time analytics (Davenport & Harris, 2017). According to Hill et al. (2017), involvement orientation empowers stakeholders and employees by utilizing decentralized control and shared decision-making, boosting morale, ownership, and unity. Staff orientation guarantees the coordination of new employees with corporate objectives. Strategic leaders employ onboarding to provide mentorship and opportunities for long-term growth, to instill values, evaluate potential, and create commitment (Robbins & Judge, 2019). As outlined by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), it assists in the creation of a growth mindset and resilience to keep innovating. Lastly, information orientation strongly puts attention on using information to guide learning cultures, improve decision-making, and align knowledge streams with the company's goals. To create sustained performance, leaders promote information sharing through formal processes. It is believed that strategic leadership is a wide range of orientations, competencies, behaviors, responsibilities, and skills that help leaders empower and sustain their organizations. It not only requires the ability to create and formulate an inspiring strategic vision, but also the ability to motivate, encourage, and persuade others to accept and strive towards that vision. In doing this, strategic leaders utilize what they already have, what they do best, and what they've acquired by experience to find and implement the best processes and strategies for their companies. These skills enable them to improve the organization's performance and keep it competitive under changing and difficult situations.

2.2. Smart Organizations

Smart organizations are an uninterrupted, adjustable, and learning-oriented shape, which is most applicable regarding emerging organizational paradigms and technological progress (Adamczewski, 2016). Smart organizations, as they are referred to, are knowledge-driven, well-networked, and adaptable to changing conditions, and thus can capture digital opportunities with creativity and velocity as per the European Commission (Adamik, 2020; Filos, 2006). One of the smart organization’s components is the ability to sense and react to the uncertainty and complexity of internal and external environments. To deal with issues holistically, this entails the use of strategic leadership tools to measure environmental uncertainty, build scenarios, and utilize systems thinking (Khaddam et al., 2020). Strategic leaders can develop creative options and close the gap between organizational aspirations and real performance through conducting efficient environmental analysis (Hadi, 2013). To become more efficient, simplify decision-making, and automate processes, smart business operations use data-driven technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and the Internet of Things (IoT) (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). To automate intricate processes, they utilize digital twins, cloud solutions, and advanced analytics to be responsive, efficient, and to monitor in real-time (Tao et al., 2018).

However, for smart operations to exist, there needs to be a cultural shift from infrastructure to data-driven innovation and cross-functional collaboration (Wamba et al., 2017). Continuous Learning

(CL), which underpins flexibility, critical thinking, and proactive innovation, is the cornerstone of a smart organization. CL makes individuals and teams more effective, innovative, and market-focused problem solvers for future problems (Abdullah et al., 2020). It entails learning from experience, teamwork, and varied real-world experience in conjunction with the learning environment (Adaileh & Adaileh, 2021). Collective intelligence, the converging synergy of different viewpoints and knowledge to facilitate better decision-making and innovation, is another essential component of smart organizations (Malone & Bernstein, 2015). Web-based tools facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and instant communication, making it a possibility. By establishing agile strategic groups, feedback cycles, and learning from success and failure, collective intelligence may be implemented in organizations (Laudon & Laudon, 2021). Furthermore, it becomes clear that smart organizations are not only defined by how technologically advanced they are, but also by how well they have the leadership, knowledge, innovation, and agility that enable them to succeed. From this perspective, the use of collective intelligence, data-driven operations, strategic environmental scanning, smart practices, and continuous organizational learning are all critical to their success, especially in the current environment of telecommunication companies. It is believed that smart organizations focus their energies on creating new thinking and knowledge instead of playing by the old rules and entrenched hierarchies. These kinds of organizations use their resources wisely on ongoing employee training, are worried about hiring and keeping top talent, and continually update their technology in an effort to take advantage of new digital prospects. They can respond fast and well to changes in the outside world by inducing organizational flexibility and a learning culture. Smart organizations also prove to possess the capacity for observing, absorbing, and leveraging the different skills and knowledge of their workers. This improves the insight of the organization as a whole and keeps it competitive in the long run.

2.3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework employed in this research, which marks the interlinkages among the independent and dependent variables. Key strategic leadership components, including long-term orientation, digital orientation, involvement orientation, employee orientation, and information orientation, capture the independent variables. These depict the portfolio nature of strategic leadership in guiding organizations through dynamic and knowledge-based environments (Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018).

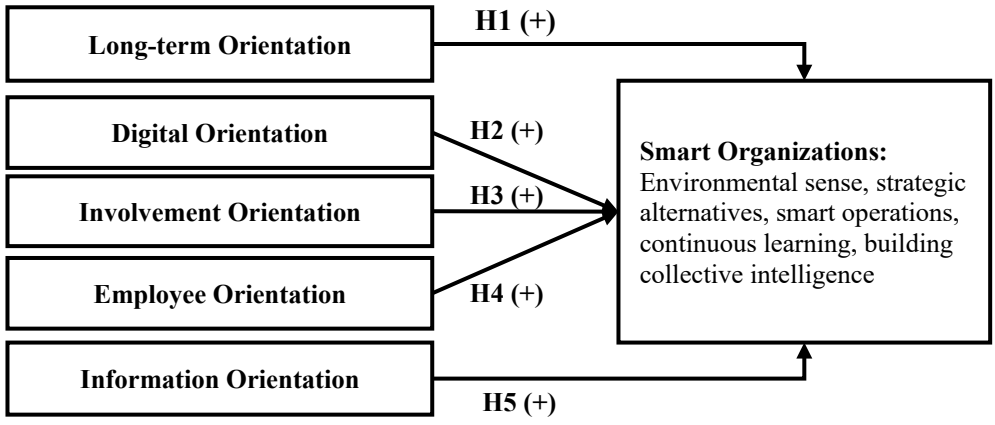

Figure 1: Conceptual research framework

For smart organizations, as the dependent variable of the framework, five fundamental dimensions are used (Khaddam, Artima & Badr, 2020), such as sensing environmental stimuli from the internal and external environments, which is termed environmental sense. Meanwhile, creating and evaluating new strategies to close the gap between business objectives and performance is known as a strategic alternative and is one of the important components of smart organizations. In addition to continuous learning, an ongoing organizational focus on learning, innovation, and talent development at all levels is required. Smart operations also include a mix of data-driven processes,

digital technologies, and adaptive workflows to improve operational efficiency. Furthermore, the deliberate engagement of various information, opinions, and experiences for problem-solving and informed decision-making collectively is termed building collective intelligence (Abdullah et al., 2020). This conceptual framework is the foundation on which the research hypotheses are based.

2.3.1. Long-Term Orientation and Smart Organizations

Strategic leadership theory and future-oriented leadership are the foundations of long-term orientation, which focuses on a leader's ability to anticipate and maintain organizational performance in the future (Ireland & Hitt, 2005). It is consistent with stewardship theory, i.e., leaders have to focus on intergenerational value creation and long-term growth instead of short-term results. Long-term orientation guarantees harmony between learning, people, and technology with long-term purposes and adaptability in smart organizations (Avolio et al., 2009). As evidenced by research conducted by Ismail et al. (2018), long-term orientation by strategic leaders facilitates digital transformation and strategic adaptability in smart organizations. From the theories and empirical findings mentioned, the first hypothesis could be stated as follows:

Hypothesis (H1): Long-term orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations.

2.3.2. Digital Orientation and Smart Organizations

Theory and empirical research showed that strategic leadership attitude toward digital orientation positively contributes to the development of smart organizations. The digital orientation is the inclination of strategic leaders to leverage digital technology to transform business designs and smart operations (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). In this respect, dynamic capacities theory and digital transformation theory are linked with this, indicating how to pay attention and gain from digital opportunities within smart organizations (Teece, 2007). By definition, the digital mindset of strategic leaders determines the adaptable systems and digital infrastructure that smart companies depend on. According to Bharadwaj et al. (2013), digital capability development and performance outcomes are enhanced when strategic leadership has good digital orientation. Digitally literate leaders are successful at launching smart technologies, spurring innovation, and driving change (Westerman et al., 2014). In this regard, Tallon et al. (2019) also showed the positive association between smart organizations and digital orientation. Based on the above-mentioned, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis (H2): Digital orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations.

2.3.3. Involvement Orientation and Smart Organizations

Theories supported the effect of strategic leadership's involvement orientation on smart organizations, particularly organizational citizenship behavior theory and participatory leadership theory, which emphasize collective decision-making and employee participation at all levels and promote involvement orientation. Consequently, involvement orientation is significant in smart organizations mainly to initiate innovation, cross-functional learning, and galvanize collective intelligence (Malone & Bernstein, 2015). However, as Katzenbach & Smith (2005) maintain, involvement-oriented leadership allows organizational flexibility and learning. In this context, Al-Juboory & Al-Samman (2020) showed that strategic leadership's involvement orientation is associated with the elimination of departmental silos and the development of smart practices and cross-departmental teamwork. Based on the theories and empirical findings mentioned above, the third hypothesis could be stated as follows:

Hypothesis (H3): Involvement orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations.

2.3.4. Employee Orientation and Smart Organizations

Theory of human capital and leadership theory, which focuses on empowering individuals on the grounds of trust, support, and developmental attention, are the bases of employee orientation. In this respect, when strategic leadership establishes strong employee orientation, it positively contributes to the development of smart organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1994). As indicated by Yaghoubi et al. (2011), employee development and well-being-oriented leadership are essential for smart

organizations, which prosper on the intellectual contributions of their human capital. As shown by Avolio et al. (2009), employee-oriented leaders promote maximum creativity and information exchange that positively influences the development of smart organizations. Furthermore, Makhmutov et al. (2016) revealed that smart organizations with a high regard for human capital development enhance productivity through enabling more collaboration and creativity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis (H4): Employee orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations.

2.3.5. Information Orientation and Smart Organizations

The possible influence of strategic leadership's information orientation on smart organizations is well supported by both the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) and Information Systems Theory (IST), and they are the pillars of information orientation. In this respect, data, analytics, and knowledge flows are coordinated with decision-making processes in a smart organization, mainly when leadership prioritizes information management. However, agility, innovation, and better performance are preferred in smart organizations by timely access to credible data (Marchand et al., 2000). As indicated by Marchand et al. (2001), organizational achievement and information orientation of strategic leadership were revealed to be highly related, particularly within smart organizations. Furthermore, in their research, Wamba et al. (2017) showed that the capabilities of information and data analysis help smart organizations make strategic decisions. As designated by Tao et al. (2018), smart organizations use information systems (such as digital twins and the Internet of Things) to improve organizational intellect and responsiveness. Hence, the fifth hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis (H5): Information orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The data collection was conducted electronically through Microsoft Forms, a professional and secure online survey tool. In this process, around 700 managerial, technical, IT, and telecommunication employees within three main telecommunication providers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain Iraq, were sent the questionnaire. To enhance the representativeness of the sample and limit the possibility of selection bias, a simple random sampling was applied mainly to give an equivalent opportunity to each prospective respondent for selection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To this end, the broadly used principles of Sekaran and Bougie (2016), who suggest that an adequate sample size in quantitative research is usually 30 to 500 respondents, were also followed in determining an adequate sample size. In this respect, a pilot test with 56 respondents was carried out before conducting the main survey to pre-test the face validity, coherence, and clarity of the questionnaire. The pilot test result assured the instrument's readiness for the full-scale study since it did not yield any problems (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Official communication was used in the mobilization of participants. As a result of follow-up reminders and phone calls with facilitators in all three companies, there were a total of 397 completed and valid surveys. The empirical data were then examined using SmartPLS 4, a robust analysis program for partial least squares structural equation modeling, or PLS-SEM, which is best for exploration research and complex models with several constructs and indicators for hypothesis testing and model evaluation (Hair et al., 2021).

3.2. Participants Features

The participants in this research were employees from telecommunication companies operating in the Kurdistan Region, precisely Asiacell (39.8 percent, n=158), Korek Telecom (32.7 percent, n=130), and Zain Iraq (27.5 percent, n=109). The participants were male (57.4 percent, n=228) and female (42.6 percent, n=169). The participants' highest degree earned was bachelor's (72.8 percent, n=289), diploma (15.9 percent, n=63), master's (9.1 percent, n=36), and doctorate (2.3 percent, n=9). Participants showed various professional roles, comprising managers (9.1 percent, n=36),

telecommunications specialists (35 percent, n=139), IT professionals and programmers (32.7 percent, n=130), and technicians and operators (23.2 percent, n=92). All participants were between the ages of 25 and 60. The participants were assured anonymity and confidentiality, see (Table 1) below.

Table 1: Profile of the Survey Participants.

Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Participants	**Asiacell**	**158**	**39.8**	
Telecommunication	**Korek Telecom**	130	32.7	**397**
Companies	**Zain Iraq**	109	27.5	
Gender	**Male**	**228**	**57.4**	**397**
	Female	169	42.6	
Education Level	**Diploma**	63	15.9	**397**
	Bachelor Degree	**289**	**72.7**	
	Master Degree	36	9.1	
	PhD	9	2.3	
Professional Roles	**Managers**	36	9.1	**397**
	Telecommunications Specialists	**139**	**35**	
	IT Professionals and Programmers	130	32.7	
	Technicians and Operators	92	23.2	

3.3. Measures

The variables of current research were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, in which one indicated (completely disagreed) and seven indicated (completely agree). For validity, contextual appositeness, the construct items used in this research were chosen and modified from established tools as mentioned above. In more specific terms, five core dimensions, long-term orientation, digital orientation, engagement orientation, employee orientation, and information orientation, were used to operationalize strategic leadership. 18 items that were modified from Bhattacharyya and Jha (2018) were used to measure these dimensions, to present an inclusive evaluation of strategic leadership behavior and practice. In this context, five components were also used to measure the smart organizations, and 25 items were adapted from Khaddam et al. (2020) and Abdullah et al. (2020). All these items were chosen to offer an all-inclusive and effective valuation of the research variables, considering the complex nature of smart organizational strengths and capabilities.

3.4. Data Analysis

The empirical data that were obtained from telecommunication companies were analyzed to test research hypotheses by using PLS-SEM, a variance-based approach. In this regard, path modeling entails a three-stage analysis process before hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2019). These tests are the structural model, determining discriminant validity, and testing convergent validity. Convergent validity also requires that three essential requirements be fulfilled. First, factor loadings for all indicators of research constructs must be significant and higher than (0.70), which indicates high item reliability. In addition, constructs should explain more than half of the variation in their observed variables if their Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than (0.50). Third, there should be good internal consistency between the items by achieving a Composite Reliability (CR) of over (0.80). The square root of the AVE of every construct (AVE) must be higher than its correlations with other constructs for discriminant validity to hold. This ensures that every latent variable captures a unique part of the model and is conceptually unique (Hair et al., 2021). Nevertheless, once convergent and discriminant validities are determined, a structural model is conducted based on the dependent variable's R^2 value. This value, representing what percentage of dependent variable variance can be explained by independent variables, reflects the explanatory power of the model. According to Hensler et al. (2009), for a model to qualify as significant and interpretable, it must achieve at least (0.19) R^2 value. The standardized path coefficients measuring the strength of correlations between independent and dependent variables are the main focus of the research for testing hypotheses (Chin, 2003). Furthermore, the statistical significance of all paths is checked through t-values and p-values, which accept or reject the hypotheses.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Establishing Reliability and Validity

Table 2 below displays the results of reliability and validity tests, such as AVE, loading values, CR, and Cronbach's α tests, which all strongly support the constructs' convergent reliability and validity. The AVE value for long-term orientation was high at 0.534, for digital orientation was 0.634, and for involvement orientation was 0.506. However, the AVE values for employee orientation and information orientation were both high at 0.624 and 0.698, respectively. Finally, for smart organizations, it was also high, 0.553, and all these values were greater than 0.5. In addition, the results of loading values for strategic leadership components and smart organizations varied from 0.697 to 0.851, also indicating the validity of all constructs. The CR values for all the model constructs presented values over 0.80; for strategic leadership components, the values ranged from 0.823 to 0.914. For smart organizations it reached 0.897, and all these values also indicated that internal consistency for research variables was strong. Table 1 revealed that Cronbach's α values for the strategic leadership constructs varied from 0.786 to 0.879. Furthermore, smart organizations show a Cronbach's α of 0.794, indicating high reliability.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity.

Constructs	Items Code	AVE	Loadings	CR	Cronbach's α
Long-Term Orientation	***LTO***	0.534	0.767 to 0.848	0.894	**0.867**
Digital Orientation	***DO***	0.592	0.717 to **0.851**	0.823	0.817
Involvement Orientation	***INVO***	0.506	0.726 to 0.792	0.816	0.810
Employee Orientation	***EO***	0.624	0.747 to 0.817	**0.914**	0.879
Information Orientation	***INFO***	**0.698**	0.704 to 0.829	0.846	0.786
Smart Organizations	***SO***	0.553	0.697 to 0.783	0.897	0.794

4.2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated with the Fornell–Larcker criterion because it is still one of the most common ways of examining whether latent constructs are different from each other. The procedure compares the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct with its correlations with other constructs in the model. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of a construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with all other latent constructs or variables. Hair et al. (2021) reiterate that the correlation matrix should distinctly show that each construct is more strongly correlated with its own indicators than with other constructs' indicators. The findings in Table 3 affirm the attainment of discriminant validity in the measurement model, as the square roots of the AVE of all the constructs are greater than their respective inter-construct correlations. The figures realized were 0.894 for long-term orientation, 0.889 for digital orientation, 0.864 for involvement orientation, 0.851 for employee orientation, 0.883 for information orientation, and 0.793 for smart organizations. These results show that each construct is different from the others, which provides evidence for the validity of the measurement model.

Table 3: Results of Discriminant Validity Test.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion						
	LV_1	**LV_2**	**LV_3**	**LV_4**	**LV_5**	**LV_6**
LTO	**0.894**					
DO	0.838	**0.889**				
INVO	0.793	0.798	**0.864**			
EO	0.701	0.712	0.799	**0.851**		
INFO	0.766	0.778	0.786	0.709	**0.883**	
SO	0.699	0.675	0.627	0.738	0.645	**0.793**

Notes: LTO, *Long-Term Orientation,* ***DO****, Digital Orientation,* ***INVO,*** *Involvement Orientation,* ***EO,*** *Employee Orientation,* ***INFO,*** *Information Orientation, and* ***SO,*** *Smart Organizations*

4.3. Establishing the Model Fit

The model's appropriateness was tested to make sure that it indeed represents the conceptual model and fits well with the data collected. Besides, before examining the research hypotheses, it is necessary to determine the model's fit since this indicates that the model possesses structural validity and empirical adequacy (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013). Accordingly, different statistical metrics were applied. If SRMR is below 0.08, it indicates the best fit between the data and the model. This is because it calculates the difference between the observed and expected relations. VIF assesses the existence of multicollinearity among indicators, where VIF <5 (and ideally <3.3) indicates that multicollinearity is not a significant problem. Lastly, the NFI evaluates the conceptual framework relative to a null model, where values approaching 1 (conventionally greater than 0.90) indicate that there is a more favorable fit. As presented in Table 4, the value of SRMR reaches (0.069), indicating good fits, since this value is less than (0.08). The value loaded on Chi-square was (2.098), which was less than 3, indicating a good fit. The value of VIF ranges from a lowest of 1.614 to a maximum of 2.702, far below the threshold level of 5 (and ideally <3.3), which indicates no multicollinearity effects. Furthermore, NFI reached (1.000), also above 0.90, supporting the appropriateness of the conceptual model. Inclusive, these results demonstrate that the research conceptual model fits the empirical data well.

Table 4: Results of Model Fit Tests.

Fitness Test Method	Estimated Model	Decision Criteria	Overall Decision
SRMR	**0.069**	< 0.08	**Fit**
VIF	**Range from 1.614 to 2.702**	<5 (and ideally < 3.3)	**Fit**
NFI	**1.000**	≥ 0.90	**Fit**

Notes: SRMR, *Standardized Root-Mean-Square Residual;* ***VIF****, Variance Inflation Factor; and* ***NFI,*** *Normed Fit Index.*

4.4. Hypotheses Testing

In this part, hypotheses are tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). In the first stage, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was checked. As recommended by Henseler, Hubona, & Ray (2016) this is a vital step in confirming the model's predictive validity as it determines how large a proportion of the dependent variable change is explained by the independent variables. Figure 2 and Table 5 illustrate the results, from which it can be seen that the R^2 of smart organizations is 0.535. It can therefore be found that the model has significant predictive power in explaining most of the variance in empirical research data. Results in Table 5 showed that long-term orientation positively and significantly influences the development of smart organizations with effect size, ***β*= 0.258,** and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, hypothesis ***H1***, which states that long-term orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations, is supported. One percent improvement in long-term orientation results in an increase of up to 0.258 in the development of smart organizations.

Table 5: Path Analysis Coefficients, T-Value, and P-Value for the SEM.

Hypotheses	Interaction	Path coefficients (*β*)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	LTO ->SO	***β*= 0.258**	4.891	**0.000**	Supported
H2	DO ->SO	***β*= 0.294**	6.042	**0.000**	Supported
H3	INVO ->SO	***β*= 0.193**	2.657	**0.003**	Supported
H4	EO ->SO	***β*= 0.404**	8.144	**0.000**	Supported
H5	INFO ->SO	***β*= 0.219**	3.791	**0.000**	Supported

Dependent variable: **Smart Organizations**
R^2 Value = 0.535, **df** (5, 397), **F:** 347.279

Notes: LTO, *Long-Term Orientation;* ***DO****, Digital Orientation;* ***INVO,*** *Involvement Orientation;* ***EO,*** *Employee Orientation;* ***INFO,*** *Information Orientation; and* ***SO,*** *Smart Organizations*

The results displayed that digital orientation has a positive influence on the development of smart organizations with an effect size ***β*= 0.294** and p-value 0.000; thus, ***H2*** states that digital orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations, which is supported. Moreover,

involvement orientation positively influences the development of smart organizations, with an effect size of ***β*= 0.193** and a p-value of 0.000. Consequently, the third hypothesis, ***H3***, is accepted. Results in Table 5 also showed that employee orientation positively and significantly influences the development of smart organizations with strong effect up to ***β*= 0.404** and p-value of 0.000. Therefore, hypothesis ***H4*** is supported. Furthermore, results indicate that information orientation positively and significantly influences the development of smart organizations, given the coefficient of ***β*= 0.219** and p-value of 0.000, which leads to the acceptance of ***H5***.

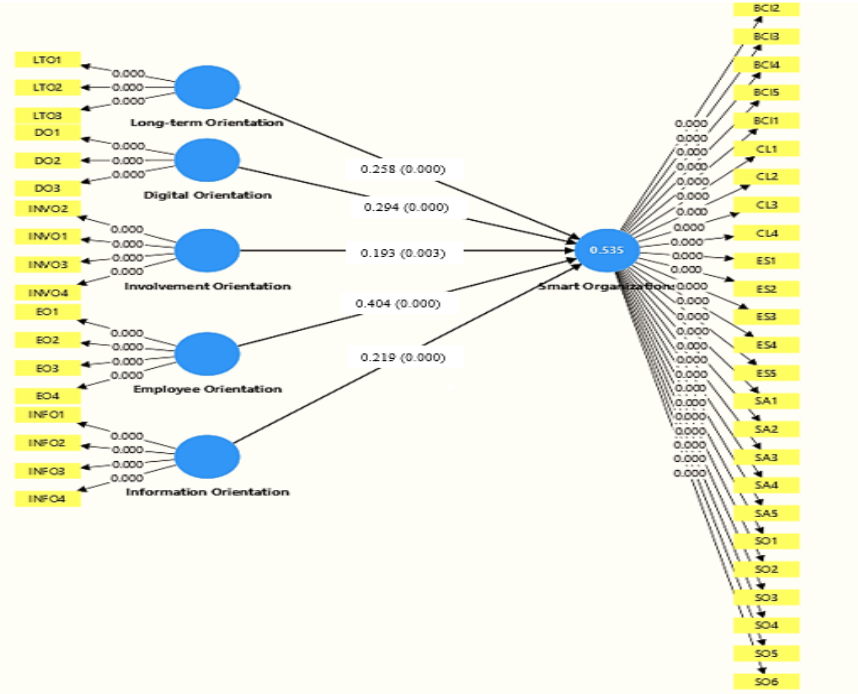

Figure 2: Result of the structural model.

5. Conclusions, Managerial Implications, and Recommendations

5.1. Discussions of the Findings

The research findings, corroborated by relevant theories and previous research findings, present solid empirical support for the contribution of strategic leadership components to the development of smart organizations. Each of the five components or orientations was seen to positively influence the development of smart organizations. The significant effect was found to be digital orientation, which confirmed the strategic leader's ability to accept digital transformation as a dynamic force behind the growth of smart organizations. As evident in the work of Bharadwaj et al. (2013), smart organizations would propose to progress and improve digital tools that recognize the significance of technology and data-driven approaches. Westerman et al. (2014) also determined that leaders who possess the capability to understand digital tools can stimulate innovation, handle changes, and employ smart technologies in their organizations. The findings of this research are in line with Tallon et al. (2019), who revealed a significant positive relationship between emphasizing digital and the success of smart organizations. The current research finding is also in line with previous studies that involvement orientation prefers joint decision-making and participatory leadership affects smart organizational development (Malone & Bernstein, 2015). The research also determined that employee-centered strategic leadership contributes significantly to smart organizational development in line with Yaghoubi et al. (2011), who emphasized that employee development directly influences learning and innovation in smart organizations. Employee-centered leaders create innovation and foster knowledge sharing, which are major drivers for the development of smart organizations as proposed by Avolio et al. (2009).

The significant effect of long-term orientation in the development of smart organizations, established in the current research, supports the theoretical basics rooted in strategic leadership theory and future-oriented leadership, which indicates leaders' ability to plan and forecast the future. It ensures value creation through aligning people, learning, and technology towards flexibility in

the long run (Avolio et al., 2009). Strategic decisions made in partnership with team members, as per a study carried out by Katzenbach & Smith (2005), increase organizational creativity and flexibility potential, two vital attributes of smart approaches. Moreover, departmental silo-breaking, cross-departmental collaboration facilitation, and the adoption of smart practices are all correlated with involvement orientation (Al-Juboory & Al-Samman, 2020). Combined, these results indicate that the agility, innovation, and collective intelligence characteristics of smart organizations are supported through the engagement of different internal stakeholders. Similarly, Makhmutov et al. (2016) illustrated how organizational cooperation, productivity, and organizational ability are all enabled in smart organizations by human capital growth. From the research findings, leaders who value their human capital create environments for transformation, problem-solving, and flexibility, all of which are vital elements of smart organizational dynamics. Lastly, the significant effect of information orientation underlines the pivotal role of data and knowledge in smart organizations. This is established in information systems theory and the knowledge-based view (KBV). Information orientation highlights how crucial data, analytics, and knowledge streams are to decision-making. Wamba et al. (2017) and Tao et al. (2018) demonstrate that executives who place a high emphasis on information management improve organizational responsiveness, intelligence, and innovation.

5.2. Conclusions

The results demonstrated that strategic leadership components have a critical function in determining how smart organizational development happens. Each of the five components that were studied, such as the long-term, digital, involvement, employee, and information orientation, make positive and statistically significant contributions to the development of smart organizations. Hence, validation of all five hypotheses assures the strategic leadership components affect the development of smart organizations and assures the validity of the put-forward research model. Most crucial among them were employee orientation and digital orientation, emphasizing the transformational potential of digitalization if embraced in strategic leadership. The findings also confirm, however, the central roles assumed by knowledge-based, involvement, and people-oriented leadership philosophies. Together, the above orientations assist smart organizations, defined by flexibility, creativity, strategic minds, and collective intelligence, to emerge. They are especially important where the argument is made for the telecommunication companies in the Kurdistan Region. It is they who evidence statistically the increased focus on strategic leadership competence and digital innovation as building blocks of long-term organizational growth. They also evidence the degree to which the domestic businesses must become more strategic, visionary in style of leadership, to compete effectively in regional and international markets.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the research conclusions, some actionable recommendations are presented to the leaders of telecommunication companies, i.e., Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain Iraq. In this respect, telecommunications leaders suggested initially setting up inclusive leadership development programs, which are designed to provide instruction to stakeholders and knowledge in areas of modern leadership practices, technology application, long-term strategic planning, and building competencies among telecommunication employees. Accordingly, to prepare leaders to manage complexity, disruption, and digital change in their companies, these programs need to incorporate scenario-based training, mentoring, and cross-functional working.

It also recommends implementing organizational development models personalized to the Kurdistan Region telecommunications business. Through measurable criteria, such as leadership in strategic direction, innovation performance, digital readiness, and organizational learning, telecommunication companies can monitor their progress toward obtaining smart organization status. In this regard, telecommunication companies can identify capability gaps, set priorities for action, and measure their advancement toward established goals by conducting assessments every three to six months.

Research recommends that leaders cultivate a learning, co-operative, and flexible culture. This is to imply that embedding professional development as the everyday aspect of employees' and leaders'

culture and creating communities of practice, knowledge forums, and innovation spaces allows staff to communicate and solve issues as a group. In facilitating such a culture, reward mechanisms also need to be rearranged in congruence with learning goals, creativity, and receptiveness to new ways of thinking. In addition, investment in digital infrastructure and ecosystems also has a significant role. To set the stage for smart operations, telecom leaders should have the highest priority for the development and building of 5G networks, cloud centers, cybersecurity, and AI platforms. Coordination with the regulators to harmonize policies and regulations, and in the use of public-private partnerships, will speed up the building of gigantic-scale digital infrastructure and make the regional market more competitive.

Telecom companies also need to move out of their own networks and look for ways to partner with the universities, research centers, technology companies, and international telecom players.

Research recommends considering systemic cooperation through the common institution of research and development projects, centers of co-innovation, and knowledge transfer programs, which will upgrade innovation opportunities, shift knowledge transfer, and apply global best practices. Furthermore, joining regional and international telecom companies will further allow local companies to remain informed of new global practices and trends. Operating at their full potential, the programs will allow telecommunications executives from the Kurdistan Region to find out how to develop their leadership, develop innovation, build strong digital ecosystems, and make their companies smart, competitive, and future-ready.

5.4. Managerial Implications

This research has wide-ranging and deep managerial implications for managers, specifically in Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain Iraq. First, the prevalence of long-term orientation shows that leaders' strategic choices must consider the longer, broader implications of decisions, as well as indicators of short-term performance. In this respect, managers may be asked to craft a vision projecting future opportunities and threats in an attempt to position the organization for long-term adaptation and innovation. With digital orientation's broad-ranging impacts, telecom managers in Kurdistan should prioritize 5G adoption and AI-driven customer analytics. This includes leveraging technology infrastructure and improving the digital thinking environment across the organization. Consequently, leaders should initiate the adoption of the latest digital technologies, encourage flexibility, and embrace innovations with new technologies to improve productivity, client satisfaction, and innovation. The positive impacts of involvement orientation show that strategic leadership is the key to the development of smart organizations. Since strategic leaders are required to form cross-functional teamwork, actively include employees in strategic planning, and offer open communication to take advantage of the employees' collective intelligence. This enables employees to make indirect contributions to company goals, and trust is established by this active management. In addition, the strategic value of human capital is evident in how critical employee orientation is. Talent nurturing, employee empowerment, and the establishment of healthy workplaces should therefore be the paramount managerial agenda. To achieve this, managers can promote motivation, retention, and innovation potential by mapping professional development and employee well-being to organizational goals. Lastly, the implications of an information orientation suggest that telecommunication companies, particularly Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain Iraq, need to have robust systems of analysis and knowledge management. In the capability to facilitate quick evidence-based decision-making, managers need mechanisms to capture information, analyze it, and utilize it strategically. Based on that, with adequate infrastructure and culture to facilitate its generation, dissemination, and utilization, knowledge can be regarded as a valuable asset, particularly for smart organizations.

5.5. Academic Implication

The current research also has significant implications for the existing academic literature relating to strategic leadership and the development of smart organizations. With a concentration in the telecommunication sector of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, it supports existing theoretical models within a previously under-researched emerging markets context, typified by sparse empirical research. The research combines key elements of strategic leadership, that is, long-term, digital,

involvement, employee, and information orientations, with the smart organization theory, thus providing a unique perspective on the influence of leadership orientations on the development of smart organizations. This research bridges a great gap in the literature by locating the research in a non-Western cultural and institutional context, thereby challenging Western-dominated orientation hegemony. The conclusions add to the growing body of smart organizations by showing that orientations of strategic leadership are what improve adaptability, creativity, and sustainable competitiveness in high-risk dynamic contexts. In addition, the research is evidence in favor of smart organization theory and strategic leadership theory, cross-cultural and comparative studies. The research illuminates the contextual generalizability of leadership practices in organizational "smartness" construction and brings in new measures for scholars to gain enhanced insight into the complex dynamics among leadership, innovation, knowledge competence, and organizational change across contexts.

5.6. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

While the perceptive data and information offered in the research can be noted, it may not be without limitations. To begin with, a formal survey questionnaire was utilized in data collection. This method may not capture the extent and depth of organizational or individual behaviors connected with strategic leadership and smart organizations' development, though it does capture quantifiable impressions well. In-depth interviewing and focus groups are a few of the qualitative methodologies that might be used concurrently with subsequent research to give a richer and more advanced understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The geographical scope was limited to Iraq's Kurdistan Region and did not span other parts of the country. Although Kurdistan has its own political and economic region, it is inappropriate to conclude that the results can be applied to all telecommunication operators in Iraq. Therefore, to increase the external validity and generalizability of findings, further studies need to broaden their geographical reach to cover more parts of Iraq and even neighboring countries. The industrial focus of the research was limited to three telecom operators, such as Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain Iraq. Although they are major telecommunication companies in the Kurdistan Region, findings may not apply to other industries with other leadership styles, organizational structures, or innovation practices. It would be useful for future studies to test mediation by organizational agility or moderation by digital infrastructure.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors hereby confirm that there are no authentic or potential conflicts of interest related to this research in terms of authorship or publication. At the same time, all stages of the process of conducting the research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and final reporting, were conducted with the utmost integrity, ensuring that findings and conclusions were presented in an objective, unbiased, and transparent manner.

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لێکۆڵینەوە لە ڕۆڵی پێکهاتەکانی سەرکردایەتی ستراتیژی لە پەرەپێدانی ڕێکخراوە زیرەکەکان: بەڵگەی مەیدانی لە کۆمپانیاکانی پەیوەندی لە هەرێمی کوردستاندا

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پوختە

ئامانجی سەرەکی ئەم توێژینەوەیە لێکۆڵینەوەیە لە ڕۆڵی پێکهاتە سەرەکییەکانی سەرکردایەتی ستراتیژی، وەک ئاراستەکردنی درێژخایەن، ئاراستەکردنی دیجیتاڵی، ئاراستەکردنی بەشداریکردن، ئاراستەکردنی کارمەند و ئاراستەکردنی زانیاری لە پەرەپێدانی ڕێکخراوە زیرەکەکان. توێژینەوەکە تیشک دەخاتە سەر بۆچوونی کارمەندانی کارگێڕی و تەکنیکی کۆمپانیاکانی پەیوەندییەکان لە هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراق، وەک پرۆسەی کۆکردنەوەی داتا و زانیاری، پرسیارنامە بەکاردەهێنرا بۆ بەدەستهێنانی زانیاری لە کۆمەڵگەی ئاماری توێژینەوە، کە لەلایەن 700 ستافی بەڕێوەبردن و تەکنیکی ئاسیاسیڵ، کۆرەک تیلیکۆم، و زەین عێراق نوێنەرایەتی دەکرێت و بە گشتی 397 وەڵامی ڕەوا وەرگیراون. تایبەت بە تاقیکردنەوەی گریمانەکان مۆدێلکردنی هاوکێشە پێکهاتەییەکان (PLS-SEM) وەک تەکنیکێکی شیکاری ئاماری بەکارهاتووە. ئەنجامەکان ئەوە دەسەلمێنن کە هەر پێنج پێکهاتە سەرەکییەکەی سەرکردایەتی ستراتیژی کاریگەری ئەرێنیان لەسەر پەرەپێدانی ڕێکخراوە زیرەکەکان هەیە. گرنگترینیان کاریگەری ئاراستەکردنی کارمەند و دیجیتاڵی لە کۆمپانیاکانی پەیوەندیدا. هەروەها کاریگەرییە ئەرێنی و بەرچاوەی ئاراستەکردنی زانیاری و بەشداریکردن ڕۆڵی گرنگی سەرکردایەتی لەسەر بنەمای داتا و بەشداری چالاکانە لە کاریگەریی سەرکردەکاندا پشتڕاستکردەوە. ئەم ئەنجامانە دیاری دەکەن کە بۆ پەرەپێدانی پراکتیکەکانی بنەمای زیرەک، چالاکی و داهێنان لەناو ڕێکخراوەکاندا، لەوانەش دابینکەرانی پەیوەندییەکان، سەرکردەکان دەبێ ڕێبازێکی ستراتیژی فرەلایەنە بگرنەبەر. بۆ سەرکردەکانی کۆمپانیاکانی پەیوەندییەکان کە ئامادەن وەبەرهێنان لە تەکنەلۆژیای دیجیتاڵی و پراکتیکەکانی زانیاری چڕ بکەن لە گواستنەوەیەکدا بەرەو مۆدێلی ڕێکخراوەیی زیرەک، توێژینەوەکە تێڕوانینێکی کردارییی دەدات.

وشە سەرەکییەکان: سەرکردایەتی ستراتیژی، بە دیجیتاڵکردن، ڕێکخراوە زیرەکەکان، کۆمپانیاکانی پەیوەندی و هەرێمی کوردستان

استكشاف دور مكونات القيادة الاستراتيجية في تطوير المنظمات الذكية: أدلة من شركات الاتصالات في إقليم كردستان

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الملخص

الهدف الرئيسي من هذا البحث هو استكشاف دور مكونات القيادة الاستراتيجية الرئيسية، مثل التوجه طويل المدى، والتوجه الرقمي، والتوجه نحو المشاركة، والتوجه نحو الموظفين، والتوجه نحو المعلومات، في تطوير المنظمات الذكية. يركز البحث على الموظفين الإداريين والفنيين في شركات الاتصالات في إقليم كردستان العراق. وكعملية لجمع البيانات، استُخدم الاستبانة لجمع البيانات من مجتمع البحث، والممثل بـ 700 موظف إداري وفني في شركات آسياسيل، وكورك تيليكوم، وزين العراق، وقد تم الحصول على 397 إجابة صحيحة. تم استخدام نمذجة المعادلات الهيكلية للمربعات الصغرى الجزئية (PLS-SEM) كأسلوب تحليل إحصائي لاختبار الفرضيات المقترحة. تثبت النتائج أن تطوير المنظمات الذكية يتأثر إيجابياً بجميع مكونات القيادة الاستراتيجية الرئيسية الخمسة. كان أهمها تأثير التوجه نحو الموظفين والتوجه الرقمي في شركات الاتصالات. كما أكدت الآثار الإيجابية والمهمة للتوجهات المعلوماتية والتوجه نحو المشاركة الدور الحيوي للقيادة القائمة على البيانات والمشاركة الفعالة في فعالية القادة. تُشير هذه النتائج إلى أنه لتعزيز الممارسات الذكية، والمرونة، والابتكار داخل المؤسسات، بما في ذلك شركات الاتصالات، ينبغي على القادة اعتماد نهج استراتيجي متعدد الجوانب. يُقدم البحث رؤى عملية لقادة شركات الاتصالات الراغبين في الاستثمار في التكنولوجيا الرقمية والممارسات كثيفة المعرفة في مرحلة الانتقال نحو نماذج منظمات ذكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القيادة الاستراتيجية، التحول الرقمي، المنظمات الذكية، شركات الاتصالات، وإقليم كوردستان