

The Impact of Strategic Physiognomy on Sustainable Performance

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Abstract: Purpose: The objective of this study was to quantify the relationship between strategic physiognomy (i.e., mental empowerment, inspiration, and deep understanding) and sustainable performance (i.e., economic performance, social performance, and environmental performance) .

Methodology: A purposive sample was adopted through a comprehensive survey of senior and middle management in private universities and colleges in the Middle Euphrates region (Babel, Karbala, Najaf, Diwaniya, and Samawah governorates). A total of 480 questionnaires were distributed, with 433 returned, yielding a response rate of 90%.

Significance: The importance of this study lies in its focus on contemporary and novel variables in business management in general, and strategic management in particular, in addition to the study field characterized by modernity and administrative and financial independence. It also establishes the linkage between its variables (strategic physiognomy, and sustainable performance).

Key Findings and Recommendations The study concluded that private universities and colleges that adopt strategic physiognomy and its dimensions are more capable of achieving sustainability, indicating that the impact of physiognomy is enhanced, reflected in universities' adoption of strategic thinking and future physiognomy approaches. The researcher recommends expanding innovative and modern projects by establishing research units or centers to nurture talented individuals and adopting environmental developments and changes in the higher education sector.

Keywords: Strategic Physiognomy, sustainable performance, private universities and colleges, Middle Euphrates region.

1. Introduction

Rapid and dynamic changes continue to shape the current business environment, significantly impacting human performance in how individuals respond and adapt. These developments have introduced new challenges that demand high cognitive capabilities to meet the requirements of the present era (Hashem et al., 2026). This underscores the central theme of the current research, which examines key latent traits and their influence on transforming organizational realities by leveraging elements that provide additional strength to achieve this transformation.

Drawing from a comprehensive understanding of human nature, including its characteristics and behaviors, contemporary organizations have begun to harness analytical capabilities through what is known as strategic physiognomy (Hussain, 2018). This represents a fundamental tool for studying organizational contexts and forecasting changes, as it contributes to a deeper understanding of human behavior and enables individuals to engage consciously with others by interpreting non-verbal cues and comprehending internal motivations.

Sustainable performance, in turn, reflects an organization's ability to generate continuous economic value through prudent resource management and an effective balance among economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Hashem et al., 2025). This approach supports organizational continuity and long-term competitive advantage, grounded in the philosophy of sustainability, which is the primary concern organizations seek to adopt to ensure their longevity and adaptability to surrounding environmental changes.



2. Research Problem

Organizations currently conduct their activities and tasks amid the challenges of rapid change, which reflects instability in their environment. Therefore, they require a set of resources and capabilities that assist them in adapting to this change.

The research problem centers on the following main question:

"To what extent do senior and middle management in private universities and colleges perceive the importance of strategic physiognomy and its impact on achieving sustainable performance?"

From this, a series of subsidiary questions arise:

1. What is the level of availability of the dimensions of strategic physiognomy in the organizations under study?
2. What is the level of availability of the dimensions of sustainable performance in the organizations under study?
3. What is the nature of the correlation and impact relationship between strategic physiognomy, and sustainable performance?

Hypotheses

The research hypotheses were formulated as an attempt to answer the questions raised in the research problem and were divided as follows:

H1: It states that (there is an effect of strategic physiognomy on sustainable performance), from which three sub-hypotheses branch out as detailed below:

- a. (There is an effect of mental empowerment on sustainable performance in its dimensions)
- b. (There is an effect of inspiration on sustainable performance in its dimensions)
- c. (There is an effect of deep understanding on sustainable performance in its dimensions)

3. Theoretical Framework

Strategic Physiognomy

According to Dabbas and Muhemmed (2018), the science of strategic physiognomy involves studying personality traits through the analysis of facial features. It continues to be utilized in various judgment and decision-making processes. This science examines the relationship between physical facial characteristics—such as the forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, and ears—and personality traits, including conscientiousness, decisiveness, and friendliness. Organizations continuously strive to develop strategic physiognomy to build personalities that ensure success (Alsaqal et al., 2021). Strategic physiognomy is considered a highly unique skill that enables senior management to read faces, understand minds, and analyze individuals' personalities deeply. This capability allows them to select the ideal candidate for the appropriate position, thereby motivating employees to advance toward achieving organizational goals. Therefore, it can be stated that physiognomy is not merely a passion or talent but a vital tool for success in the business world (Jamal, 2022). It has been defined as a set of skills, traits, and practices used by leaders within organizations, including monitoring employees' personal characteristics based on the nature of the organization's work, the strategy being formulated, and the approach to managing it—especially when applied in decision-making processes (Suleiman, 2022). Abdullah (2024) noted that strategic physiognomy is both a science and an art: a science because it focuses on analyzing the psychological characteristics of the counterpart, and an art because it involves imagination and deriving the thoughts that may be occupying the counterpart's mind.

Accordingly, researchers define strategic physiognomy as a set of capabilities and skills possessed by senior management and strategic leaders, combining mental empowerment, inspiration, and deep understanding to assist them in decision-making aimed at gaining a competitive advantage amid rapidly accelerating dynamic changes.

Dimensions of Strategic Physiognomy

There is a divergence of opinions among researchers and authors regarding the classification of the dimensions of strategic physiognomy. Researchers such as Mohammed and Saeed (2021) agree that mental empowerment is one of the dimensions of strategic physiognomy. Conversely, Alsaqal et al. (2021) and Abdullah (2024) concur that inspiration and deep understanding are dimensions of strategic physiognomy.

A. Mental Empowerment

Mental empowerment plays a crucial role in achieving organizational excellence by engaging leaders in leadership roles within the organization. This involvement enhances their leadership skills and allows them to allocate time to more significant activities, such as visualization, strategic thinking, and developing innovative solutions to ongoing challenges (Kolzow, 2014:256-257). Mental empowerment is considered the key to the success of any organization by balancing the interests of stakeholders (customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, government, and society) through empowering all employees and focusing on value-added activities (Al Majmai and Al-Obeid, 2023:130).

From the researchers' perspective, mental empowerment is a systematic cognitive process supported by managerial practices aimed at providing employees with the necessary information to make decisions consistent with the organization's vision and strategic objectives. The essence of mental empowerment revolves around enhancing mutual trust, developing capabilities, improving performance levels, and achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

B. Inspiration

Oleynick et al. (2014) as a prominent expert in this area, they describe that inspiration occurs fairly consistently (in the form of embodiment) such that motivation coming from people attempting to stick a creative idea will not yield creative ideas. Rather than spurring new ideas, it is seen more as a catalyst to work that already exists.

Inspiration constitutes an important motivation that encourages individuals to commence their creative endeavors (Dabbas and Muhammed, 2018). Creators are true gold and a reliable buttress of any organization which aims to develop. Organizations that strive to inspire their employees get the way for success and excellence. According to the observations of a management expert, inspiration not only raises trust levels between people and management but also develops creative horizons for thinking beyond pre-defined boundaries.

Fadhil et al. (2024) argue that inspiration is closely connected with creativity, especially in terms of both concepts sharing positive effects. Inspiration inspires employees to conquer challenges in creative, dynamic styles and is regarded as a trait of lasting wellness, which includes emotional and cognitive elements. It enhances individual performance and drives employee engagement and leads to higher job satisfaction.

Accordingly, researchers view inspiration as a leadership process aimed at activating individuals' intrinsic motivations and encouraging them to adopt the organization's vision and mission with a positive and creative spirit. Inspiration represents one of the fundamental pillars of effective strategic leadership by supporting innovation and creating an organizational culture based on self-motivation and shared vision.

C. Deep Understanding

Deep understanding as the third dimension of strategic physiognomy and which includes persistence in learning, connection between current idea-based knowledge with knowledge learned previously, logical dialogue and asking questions (Abdel-Hassan and Abdul-Hussein, 2016). Strategy formulation is based on knowledge of the mission, capabilities, challenges, and opportunities facing the organization; it needs awareness that fits where the organization is in its environment (Hussain, 2018). Deep understanding includes strong perception and cognitive skills critical for solving problems and innovating (Shaheed, 2023). As Omran and Fleih (2024) state, organizations acknowledge deep understanding as the first type of intelligence by merging commercial, competitive, or emotional intelligence as a crucial factor for enhancing leadership and making decisions. It provides critical data for detailed strategies and plans. Which means deep understanding is a sort of tactical cognition enhancing your planning, execution, competitive capacity and decision making based on knowledge with the roots in awareness and analysis..

Sustainable Performance

Lozano (2015) defines sustainable performance as a measure of the extent to which an organization adopts environmental safety, social justice, and economic prosperity in its operations, and the impact of this adoption on its reputation, employee productivity in particular, and society as a whole. Building on the concept of performance, the notion of sustainable performance has emerged, representing a combination of individual behavior, procedures, and techniques that guide work towards achieving objectives. Nor-aishah et al. (2020) also describe sustainable performance as the integration of the economic, environmental, and social aspects of an organization in a manner that does not negatively affect the environment or society, while achieving long-term economic benefits. Accordingly, sustainable performance represents a natural response to the surrounding organizational environment and the significant advancements in communications and technology, under the principles of work sustainability, resource

utilization and conservation, and sustainability in customer relations, which are established principles within the organization until its goals are achieved (Shalaka and Goud, 2022).

In light of this, researchers define sustainable performance as an organization's ability to achieve continuous economic value through prudent resource management and an effective balance among economic, social, and environmental dimensions, thereby supporting its continuity and long-term competitive advantage.

4. Dimensions of Sustainable Performance

The dimensions or metrics of sustainable performance, namely (economic performance, social performance, environmental performance), have been adopted as follows:

A. Economic Performance

Economic performance is considered a source of organizational strength as it forms the basis of traditional financial performance. It also contributes to the economic development of the environment in which the organization operates and its stakeholders, while adhering to the principles of fair competition (combating corruption, illegal contracts, abuse of power, etc.). This dimension includes financial and commercial principles (Arowoshegbe and Emmanuel, 2016).

According to Afum et al. (2020), economic performance is manifested in the organization's pursuit of maximizing returns at the lowest cost and highest quality level, in addition to enhancing competitive position, ensuring good relationships with all stakeholders, and determining the most appropriate competitive approach in the market.

Accordingly, from the researchers' perspective, economic performance is the organization's ability to achieve maximum possible returns at minimum cost, with efficient use and preservation of resources, and generating profits that meet the needs of shareholders and stakeholders, thereby strengthening the competitive position and ensuring long-term performance sustainability.

B. Social Performance

Social performance is related to the ability to balance economic efficiency and individual and community labor productivity through the prudent use of natural resources to promote sustainable development. It requires linking competitive business strategy with social management to meet the needs and expectations of all stakeholders (Haseeb et al., 2019). Buallay et al. (2020:364) state that social sustainability aims to preserve the positive values of individuals and society, encompassing the organization's impact on all stakeholders, such as working conditions, compensation, anti-discrimination, safety, and respect for human rights. Chowdhury and Shumon (2020) highlight that key criteria for sustainable social activities include providing a healthy and safe environment, fair wages, suitable working conditions, and non-discrimination among employees. Based on this, from the researchers' viewpoint, social performance is the organization's ability to achieve its defined social objectives by supporting community welfare, meeting the needs of the current generation while safeguarding the rights of future generations, promoting employment opportunities, equality, and improving living standards.

C. Environmental Performance

Environmental performance involves reconciling the organization's activities with the protection of ecosystems by analyzing the organization's impacts and outputs, such as resource consumption, waste, and emissions, ensuring resource consumption occurs at a rate lower than their renewal and limiting waste and emissions (Alhaddi, 2015).

Achieving environmental performance sustainability necessitates changing the mindset and behavior of all employees across all organizational areas, as the organization cannot reach environmental sustainability without the efforts of every employee (Iqbal et al., 2018).

Adamu et al. (2019) note that the organization focuses on all aspects of environmental impact to provide a comprehensive picture of its performance. These aspects include organizational environmental behavior, i.e., the organization's environmental responsibility in its ability to meet environmental standards. With the international expansion of organizations, they are required to comply with global standards. Due to changes in environmental policies and increasing stakeholder interest, organizations tend to adopt environmentally friendly practices, making environmental sustainability a managerial priority. Proactive implementation of environmental management systems is encouraged to increase environmental productivity by reducing waste and emissions and leveraging production processes to improve economic performance (Gupta et al., 2020:4).

Based on the above and from the researchers' perspective, environmental performance is the organization's ability to achieve its environmental objectives through rationalizing resource use, reducing waste and emissions, and preserving the surrounding environment, thereby enhancing sustainability and maintaining the ecosystem's capacity to endure as long as possible.

Statistical Analysis:

First: Descriptive Analysis of the Strategic Physiognomy Variable

The results indicate the responses of the sample individuals regarding the study items and variables, for which descriptive analysis was calculated, including the mean, standard deviation, and relative importance. Overall, this section indicated a positive agreement among the sample individuals, with a relative importance of (82.62%), a weighted mean of (4.131), and a standard deviation of (0.394), reflecting consistency in the responses. Regarding the sub-dimensions, the results were as follows:

1) Description of the Mental Empowerment Items

The results show that the overall level of agreement reached a relative importance of (82.60%), with a mean value of (4.130). The level of consistency is acceptable, as reflected by the standard deviation of (0.460). The most significant and agreed-upon item is item (5) (Contributes to enhancing conscious thinking and rapid learning, thereby boosting employees' confidence) with a relative importance of (84.39%). The lowest-rated item is item (1) (Involves competent employees in strategic decision-making) with a relative importance of (79.68%).

2) Description of the Inspiration Items

The results indicate that the overall level of agreement reached a relative importance of (82.59%), with a mean value of (4.130). The level of consistency is acceptable, as reflected by the standard deviation of (0.440). The most significant and agreed-upon item is item (9) (Focuses on modernity and innovation and seeks to support talented individuals) with a relative importance of (84.35%). The lowest-rated item is item (11) (Provides an opportunity for all employees to present ideas and solutions when facing emergency situations) with a relative importance of (81.33%).

3) Description of the Deep Understanding Items

The results show that the overall level of agreement reached a relative importance of (82.68%), with a mean value of (4.134). The level of consistency is acceptable, as reflected by the standard deviation of (0.448). The most significant and agreed-upon item is item (14) (Acts with wisdom and quick physiognomy when dealing with opportunities) with a relative importance of (85.03%). The lowest-rated item is item (18) (Shares knowledge and applied success strategies) with a relative importance of (80.37%).

Second: Descriptive Analysis of Sustainable Performance Variable

The results indicate the responses of the sample individuals regarding the study items and variables, for which descriptive analysis was calculated, including the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and relative importance. Overall, this section pointed to a positive agreement among the sample members, with a relative importance of (82.47%), a weighted arithmetic mean of (4.124), and a standard deviation of (0.408), indicating consistency among the responses. Regarding the sub-dimensions, the results were as follows:

1) Description of Economic Performance Items

The results show that the overall agreement level reached a relative importance of (82.12%), with an arithmetic mean value of (4.106). The level of consistency is acceptable, as reflected by the standard deviation value of (0.460). The most important and agreed-upon item is item (6) (Aiming to achieve long-term sustainability of performance) with a relative importance of (85.22%). The lowest item is item (3) (Relying on automation in transactions between departments and with beneficiaries represented by students and visitors, which saves effort and time) with a relative importance of (79.86%).

2) Description of Social Performance Items

The results indicate that the overall agreement level reached a relative importance of (82.48%), with an arithmetic mean value of (4.124). The level of consistency is acceptable, as reflected by the standard deviation value of (0.457). The most important and agreed-upon item is item (11) (Keen on holding workshops and seminars to raise awareness of the importance of social responsibility within the community) with a relative importance of (86.82%).

The lowest item is item (9) (Keen on granting free scholarships to a broader segment of society, thereby enhancing its social responsibility) with a relative importance of (78.86%).

3) Description of Environmental Performance Items

The results indicate that the overall agreement level reached a relative importance of (82.81%), with an arithmetic mean value of (4.124). The level of consistency is acceptable, as reflected by the standard deviation value of (0.491). The most important and agreed-upon item is item (16) (Committed to international environmental standards and specifications) with a relative importance of (84.71%). The lowest item is item (14) (Relying on renewable energy as an alternative energy source) with a relative importance of (77.85%).

Hypotheses Testing

This section involves the following hypotheses testing :

H1: There is an impact of strategic physiognomy on sustainable performance.

To test this hypothesis, its sub-hypotheses are examined. The results in Table (1) indicate the following:

H1a: There is an impact of mental empowerment on sustainable performance.

Table 1 reflects the extensive impact of mental empowerment on sustainable performance, for which F-value is under critical value and P-value is significantly smaller than one. These coefficients reflect the baseline effect ($\alpha=1.092$) as well as per-unit positive impact ($\beta = 0.492$). The regression fits the data at a 95% confidence. It has an R^2 of 0.307, which means that it explains only 30.7% of the variation in the dependent variable. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted..

H1b: There is an impact of inspiration on sustainable performance.

Results also show that inspiration has an impact on sustainable performance, with the F-value (13.223) below critical value and a P-value less than 0.05. The regression coefficients are $\alpha = 1.074$ (baseline) and $\beta = 0.496$, which reflects a unit increase and positive effect. The R^2 is 0.285 at a 95% confidence level so this regression fits relatively well, but explains only 28.5% of all the variation. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted..

H1c: There is an impact of deep understanding on sustainable performance.

The table indicates that deep understanding has an effect on sustainable performance because the value of F is less than critical value and the regression is also significance (P-value). Baseline: $\alpha = 1.604$; $\beta = 0.610$). The regression tells about the relation at 95% of confidence level. The R^2 is 0.448 which is explaining of 44.8% of the variations. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted..

H1: There is an impact of strategic physiognomy on sustainable performance.

In Table 1, strategic physiognomy represents an effect on sustainable performance as F-value is less than critical value and P-value is less than α . A constant ($\alpha = 1.268$) and β ($\beta = 0.691$), as the regression coefficients, indicate a positive effect of oxytocin administration on the effectiveness of social interaction between mentors and mentees. The variance explained by the model is 44.5% ($R^2 = 0.445$), which describes the relationship at a confidence level of 95%. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted..

Table (1)

H1 Testing

Dimensions	Dependent variable	(α)	(β)	Coefficient of determination (R^2)	Calculated value of (F)	tabulated value (F)	P-value
Mental empowerment	Sustainable performance	1.092	0.492	0.307	192.299	F(0.05) = 3.841 F(0.01) = 6.635	0.000
Inspiration		1.074	0.496	0.285	173.806		0.000

Deep understanding		1.604	0.610	0.448	352.963		0.000
Strategic physiognomy		1.268	0.691	0.445	349.442		0.000

Source: Spss output

5. Conclusion

The analysis results indicated that the management of the universities under study contributes to enhancing conscious thinking and rapid learning, which positively reflects on the confidence of the affiliates in their abilities and capabilities. It is evident that there is a clear orientation towards modernity and innovation through the support and encouragement of talented individuals and new ideas. On the other hand, there is a satisfactory level of wisdom and quick wit in dealing with opportunities within the universities under study, which contributes to making decisions characterized by flexibility and effectiveness. Furthermore, the university management in question possesses proactive initiatives to exploit opportunities and adhere to environmental specifications and standards, reflecting a commitment to sustainability aspects.

Conversely, there is a deficiency in organizational participation, leading to weak involvement of competent staff in strategic decision-making, and a lack of emphasis by the universities under study on providing free educational opportunities, indicating weaknesses in social responsibility programs. Additionally, the lack of prioritization for renewable energy programs reduces the chances of these universities in achieving environmental sustainability. The results also demonstrated a significant impact of cognitive empowerment on sustainable performance, underscoring the importance of university leadership possessing a motivational vision that drives change and development.

The findings revealed that inspiration affects sustainable performance, suggesting that analysing the internal and external environment is a crucial factor in making effective strategic decisions.

In conclusion, the results indicated that private universities and colleges that adopt strategic physiognomy in its dimensions are more capable of achieving sustainability.

Recommendations

Researchers consistently recommend that university administrations under study support conscious thinking and rapid learning through specialized training programs that enhance confidence and cognitive skills. They also advocate for the expansion of innovative and contemporary projects by establishing units or research centers dedicated to nurturing talented individuals. Additionally, there is an emphasis on supporting the skills necessary to capitalize on opportunities within university leadership through flexible and responsive plans. Furthermore, it is imperative to develop the university work model in accordance with environmental and technological variables to ensure adaptability and continuity. Commitment to international environmental standards and the development of internal control systems to monitor their implementation and continuously improve them is essential, particularly through the adoption of renewable energy projects such as clean energy and solar power, thereby reducing reliance on traditional sources to guarantee sustainability. Engaging competent staff in strategic decision-making by enhancing their intellectual empowerment and involving them in specialized committees that promote organizational participation is also recommended.

Moreover, researchers advise expanding scholarship programs to encompass broader segments of society to strengthen the university's role in supporting social responsibility initiatives. The establishment of a dedicated system for receiving proposals and ideas in emergency situations is necessary to ensure rapid response and benefit from expertise. Attention to automation and digital transformation through the development of a unified electronic system that connects departments, reduces effort and time, and contributes to improving service quality is also highlighted.

Finally, researchers emphasize the necessity for private universities and colleges to adopt clear performance indicators for sustainable performance, focusing on academic, social, and environmental outcomes to ensure long-term sustainability.

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