



Effectiveness of Academic Leadership Practice in Strategic Planning at Baghdad Universities

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Abstract: Objectives: The research aimed to examine the academic leadership's practice of strategic planning among department heads at Baghdad's universities. The Iraqi constitution considers education a fundamental factor in societal progress, and the right to education is guaranteed by the state for all, in addition to free education from primary school through graduation and postgraduate studies. **Method:** To achieve this goal, the study followed the descriptive approach because it is appropriate to the nature of the study, and a questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was developed to reveal the academic leaders' practice of strategic planning. The questionnaire consisted of two axes: strategic planning practices, which consist of three stages: the first is ideal, the second is planning and implementation, and the second axis is difficulties in practices strategic planning. Use the validity of the study tool: The validity of the tool was verified when it was presented to a group of arbitrators and specialists who approved the validity of the paragraph, amendment, deletion or addition, and the tool became composed of (47) paragraphs in its final form. To verify the reliability of the research tool, Cronbach's alpha equation was applied. The research sample included 86 male and 139 female. **Results:** The reality of leadership planning practices is at an average level of practice and some leaders are weak in their awareness. One of the most important challenges facing leaders in strategic planning practices is the limited training programs that address strategic planning practices and the dissemination of the culture and thought of strategic planning and global models through seminars, conferences, and educational periodicals, as well as coordination between different management levels in terms of legislation and laws. **Recommendations:** The research recommended focusing on developing leadership skills in the areas of creativity and innovation among department heads at the University of Baghdad.

Keywords: academic leadership, strategic planning, department heads.

فاعلية ممارسة القيادات الأكاديمية للتخطيط الاستراتيجي في جامعات بغداد

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ملخص: الأهداف: هدفت الدراسة إلى ممارسة القيادات الأكاديمية للتخطيط الاستراتيجي لدى رؤساء الأقسام في جامعات بغداد فقد اعتبر الدستور العراقي التعليم عاملاً أساسياً لتقديم المجتمع وحق التعليم الذي تكفله الدولة للجميع، إضافة إلى مجانية التعليم من المراحل الابتدائية حتى التخرج. والدراسات. تتولى وزارة التعليم مسؤولية تخطيط وتمويل وإدارة المؤسسات التعليمية المعنية برياض الأطفال وذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، والابتدائية والمتوسطة والثانوية، والتي ستكون مخرجاتها من مدخلات مؤسسات وزارة التربية والتعليم. التعليم العالي، الذي تأسس عام 1970 بموجب القرار رقم 132، وهي الجامعة بتخصصاتها الأكاديمية والمهنية المختلفة وتتضمّن إلى مؤسسات وزارة التعليم العالي مجموعة من الهيئات. **المنهجية:** ولتحقيق هذا الهدف اتبعت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي لملائمته لطبيعة الدراسة، واستخدمت الاستبانة لجمع البيانات تم تطوير الاستبانة للكشف عن ممارسة القيادات الأكاديمية للتخطيط الاستراتيجي وتكونت الاستبانة من محورين: ممارسات التخطيط الاستراتيجي ويتكون من ثلاث مراحل: الأولى المثالية، والثانية التخطيط، والتنفيذ، والمحور الثاني صعوبات ممارسات التخطيط الاستراتيجي. استعمل صدق أداة الدراسة: تم التحقق من صدق الأداة أذ تم عرضها على مجموعة من المحكمين والمختصين تم اعتمادهم على صلاحية الفقرة أو التعديل أو الحذف أو الإضافة، وأصبحت الأداة تتكون من (47) فقرة في صورتها النهائية. ثبتت أداة الدراسة: للتحقق من ثبات أداة الدراسة طبقت معادلة كرونباخ ألفا (Alpha Cronbach)، واشتملت عينة الدراسة على (720) فرداً من رؤساء الأقسام، وتم تحديد عينته وفقاً لمتغير الجنس إلى 225 منهم 86 ذكور و139 أنثى، **النتائج:** وبعد معالجة البيانات إحصائياً توصلت الدراسة إلى أن واقع الممارسات التخطيطية للقيادات بدرجة ممارسة متوسطة وضعف وعي بعض القيادات. بينما أظهرت النتائج أن من أهم التحديات التي تواجه القيادات في ممارسات التخطيط الاستراتيجي محدودية البرامج التدريبية التي تتناول ممارسات التخطيط الاستراتيجي ونشر ثقافة وفكر التخطيط الاستراتيجي والنماذج العالمية من خلال الندوات والمؤتمرات والدوريات التثقيفية التنسيق بين مستويات الإدارة المختلفة من حيث التشريعات والقوانين. **التوصيات:** أوصت الدراسة الاهتمام بتنمية مهارات القيادة في مجالي الإبداع والابتكار لدى رؤساء الأقسام بجامعة بغداد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القيادات الأكاديمية، التخطيط الاستراتيجي، رؤساء الأقسام

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Introduction

Contemporary educational institutions have witnessed continual local and global developments and challenges across all domains and levels, necessitating leadership capable of keeping pace with these new developments and adapting to them. Such leadership should work towards leveraging its material and human resources and directing all necessary energies, expertise, and capabilities to achieve its strategic objectives and guide it towards a future marked by efficiency and distinction. Educational institutions, including universities, at various levels, stages, and types, have become urgently in need of such leadership due to their significant status and role in supporting the comprehensive development journey. (alardan,2020) Effectiveness: Defined by Omar (2008) as "the capacity of something to have an impact" (2008, p. 172). Operational Definition: The desire impact that helps in assessing the performance of leaders. Planning: Defined by Tanira (2018) as a set of tasks, responsibilities, and administrative duties performed by school managers for their functions (Tanira, 2018, p. 55).

Education in Iraq adopted the development of strategies for education and higher education by establishing a quality management system by establishing a body specialized in quality and obliging educational institutions to spread and apply their standards and linking performance evaluation and financing, opening graduate studies and sending missions abroad with the level of commitment to applying quality standards. Updating curricula in line with scientific developments and developments, and training for modern teaching methods and electronic learning technologies for all faculty members Supporting universities with scientific competencies and relying on Iraqi immigrant competencies Motivating faculty members to complete and publish. Meaningful applied research Relying on the learning process and expanding

Operational Definition: "The executive processes involved in the stages of strategic planning, which are collaboratively undertaken by leaders, such as establishing an ideal vision, good planning, implementation, and continuous improvement to achieve the desired goals according to a clear vision and mission".

See the researcher also observes that modern societies have begun to move towards effecting change in many policies and strategies, especially at the level of leadership influence, which is starting to lean towards professionalism. The importance of choosing the type of leadership has increased because of the expansion in project establishment and keeping up with new developments and changes, necessitating the differentiation between leadership styles and choosing the appropriate style that facilitates the desired change.

Professional leadership is endowed with a suite of skills that equip leaders with strategic thinking and effective influence on others, achieving the desired change and development in the organization and steering it towards excellence. Among these skills are strategic thinking abilities that enable educational leaders to drive their institutions towards the required changes to achieve the planned objectives effectively and successfully. This also includes envisioning the future and formulating strategies that lead to the realization of that vision in the best possible way, while leveraging all intellectual, material, and human resources (Al-Shahri, 2017).

There is a consensus that the ability to think strategically is the primary approach for successful leaders in their job performance, and since proficiency in strategic thinking is linked to efficiency and excellence in conducting business, it is said that effective and competent leaders possess a higher level of strategic thinking skills compared to their less efficient and effective counterparts; therefore, the

ability to think strategically for leaders is the fundamental determinant of effective presence (Kargin & Aktas, 2012).

Leadership: Defined by Jabran (2009) as an effective collective role aimed at directing the behavior of employees in the organization to achieve common goals through building the future vision and strategic directions of the organization, establishing human relationships among all its members, influencing them, practicing motivation and encouragement, and training the working individuals with the skills required for performing their jobs to the fullest (2009, p. 5).

Operational Definition: The capability that focuses on providing guidance and processes with high efficiency to achieve the organization's goals.

The use of information technology, libraries and virtual laboratories, and the creation of specialized universities. Consequently, leadership has focused on performing with efficiency, characterized by teamwork skills, and providing a work environment that allows for autonomy and the responsibility for decisions and solutions, fostering a strong sense of commitment, enhancing their organizational affiliation, and promoting collaborative work among them to increase productivity and thereby achieve objectives. Higher education institutions in universities lack the development of leadership styles at all levels and the importance of training leaders on modern leadership skills that lead to innovation, creativity, and future foresight, moving away from traditional leadership patterns. Granting academic leaders more authority, which would enhance their role and involvement in the field. (Zaher et al., 2018).

Constructing this competency is pivotal for enhancing productivity through contributions to the development of significant professional skills such as organizational abilities, communication skills, and personal competencies. These skills enable leaders to possess strategic thinking, exert effective influence on others, and achieve the necessary change and development within the organization, propelling it towards excellence. Among these competencies are strategic thinking skills, which empower educational leaders to steer their institutions towards effecting the desired changes and achieving the planned objectives efficiently and successfully. Additionally, they facilitate envisioning the future and formulating strategies that best realize that vision, leveraging all available intellectual, material, and human resources (Al-Shahri, 2017).

Research Significance

Considering the efforts expended and resulting from the changes and developments that have occurred in the education sector, in accordance with the visions of comprehensive future plans, and despite the efforts made by the Ministry of Education in the field of strategic planning, it has yet to fulfil the aspirations and expectations of the community. We observe an average level of clarity in the concept of strategic planning within the Ministry of Education, alongside a deficiency in programs that necessitate ongoing improvement in leadership practices and skill development (Al Habsi 2019) of administrative planning strategies, leads to increased effectiveness within the institution, and the improvement and development of academic programs and their quality (Al-Qaisy, 2019).

Attention must be given to making strategic changes with the support of change leaders, and the necessity of maintaining focus on developing and studying the obstacles that limit the effectiveness of leadership styles in improving organizational performance. It is crucial to increase the awareness of academic department heads about the importance of leadership skills in developing educational work within departments and colleges.

Therefore, this study seeks to understand the effectiveness of the academic leadership's practice of strategic planning at universities in Baghdad. (tofek.2008). Therefore, we hope that researchers will benefit from the research results, especially the following: Planners to benefit and to develop planning practices in academic institutions, and benefit from the advantages of the Kaufman model as one of the global models in the field of strategic planning. Through the effectiveness of the academic leaders' practice of strategic planning in Baghdad universities

Leaders in universities, regardless of their positions, bear the greatest burden of attracting and qualifying human resources and developing the ICT infrastructure, as they are the decision makers within the institution. They need to develop their work systems and evaluate the performance of their human resources in order to maintain the institution's excellence and raise its level in the future (Hashim, 2017).

Research Problem

Contemporary educational institutions have witnessed ongoing local and global developments and challenges across all fields and levels, necessitating the presence of professional leadership capable of keeping pace with these new developments and adapting to them, as well as capitalizing on their material and human resources, and directing all necessary energies, expertise, and capabilities. The researcher posits that higher education institutions require effective leadership, and there is a continuous need to identify leadership styles that result in positive outcomes for employees, such as increased job satisfaction and a generally positive morale, alongside the need for leaders to engage in leadership practices and participate in decision-making. Vumilia (2015) asserts that the practice of effective leadership is among the new requirements for universities, highlighting the necessity for the availability of competent academic leaders.

In universities, irrespective of their positions, the primary responsibility for attracting and training human resources and developing the infrastructure for information and communication technology falls upon them, as they are the decision-makers within the institution. Hence, there is a need to develop their operational systems and evaluate the performance of their human resources to maintain and enhance the institution's excellence into the future (Hashem, 2017). The practice of effective leadership is considered a new requirement for universities, underscoring the necessity for competent academic leaders.

Leadership defines the processes of guidance and coordination within the institution, fundamentally encompassing the determination of vision and mission, practical procedures for achieving organizational objectives, aligning processes and procedures, and managing individuals and material resources. The practice of personal leadership involves building trust, caring for others, and acting ethically (Angelo & Steven, 2004). Iskak, Anthony, and Alisbo (2019) highlighted the most important criteria for professional leadership, represented by adopting strategic leadership, educational leadership, cultural leadership, human resource leadership, and administrative leadership.

Leadership forms the cornerstone upon which change, development, and the quality of university performance in all its details rely, and it is upon their shoulders that the responsibility to face existing challenges, achieve goals, and prepare and develop human resources rests; to contribute to the advancement of scientific, technological, and cultural progress of society. In this context, the researcher emphasizes the importance of focusing on the qualification and training of educational and academic leaders, given its significant impact on their performance and progress (Al-Ardan, 2020, p. 65).

Professionalism entails proficiency in the application of leadership as a practice, the possession of knowledge, the ability to adapt, and the achievement of efficiency and effectiveness. Professionalism and leadership are interdependent qualities that individuals should possess, where the success of one significantly impacts the other (Ortenblad, 2018)

From the researcher's perspective, factors influencing the achievement of professional leadership include leaders possessing a strong personality, the ability to influence others and inspire their aspirations and motivation, the capability to establish supportive and constructive relationships, sufficient knowledge, good experience and ongoing learning, leading excellence, leading change and development, displaying enthusiasm and energy and exhibiting hope and positivity, in addition to demonstrating integrity, transparency, initiative, and the generous provision of information.

It is essential for leaders to enhance their practices in strategic planning to achieve success and sustainable development during times of rapid and continuous changes, particularly in the realms of planning and management in general.

Moreover, leading resources is the backbone for initiating change towards development, and investing in human resources is among the most crucial investments to face challenges. Since the developmental process relies on human resources, it is necessary to identify the major challenges that impede the shift towards sustainable development, along with the mechanisms, tools, and criteria for change (Qarawat, Salah, & Zallag, 2019)

Numerous global and local studies have addressed the importance of utilizing planning models in educational institutions, with Kaufman's model emerging as one of the prevalent approaches in strategic planning. Introduced by Roger Kaufman, a professor of strategic thinking and planning, who founded a center for needs assessment and planning to implement research and development, the model comprises three primary stages (Al-Shammili, 2017).

Study hypothesis: Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level (0.05) between the arithmetic averages of the estimates of the effectiveness of the sample members on the degree to which academic leaders practice strategic planning in Baghdad universities?

Study Objective: The effectiveness of academic leadership's practice of strategic planning in Baghdad universities.

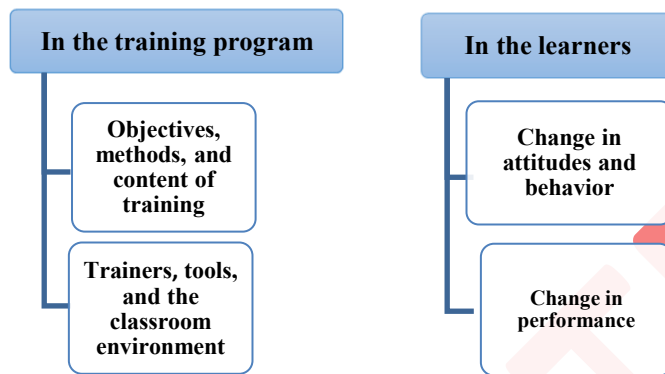
Study Scope: This study is confined to examining the effectiveness of strategic planning practices among academic leaders, specifically department heads, for the year 2023.

Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

First, Training Objectives: Training aims to achieve fundamental purposes, including (Mohamed & Ali, 1998): enhancing individual performance through the acquisition of newly developed cognitive and field skills, increasing individuals' capacity for critical thinking to adapt to their jobs and tackle any challenges they may face, and cultivating positive attitudes among individuals towards the value of their work and the significance of its social implications.

Second, Foundations for Evaluating Training Programs: There are three main points that can be measured to evaluate the impact of training programs, as outlined by Mohamed & Ali (1998), which are as follows: the changes in the effectiveness of the trainees in the workplace setting, the changes in the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the trainees, and the trainees' responses to what they believe they have learned. The following diagram illustrates the components of the training program that require evaluation:

Figure (1): Components of the training program that require evaluation.



The evaluation process necessitates continuous data and information acquisition regarding the trainee and the trainers as primary sources for assessment (Mohamed & Ali, 1998).

The Significance of Training Needs: The importance of designing training programs lies in achieving various training objectives and serves as the principal entry for constructing the training plan, which is designed based on the identified needs. The training program design includes determining the specifications of the training work following a sequential scientific methodology where each phase begins with inputs that are the outputs of the previous stage. These undergo procedures and activities ending with new outputs that become inputs for the next phase (Al-Riyashi & Mohammed, 2014).

Determining training needs by the target group in training is deemed essential for the success of the training program. There are training programs that rely on different sources other than the trainees to determine training needs. Such programs are not considered authentic and may not achieve the desired results due to the lack of conviction by the target group in what these programs offer; therefore, the involvement of trainees in determining their needs leads to their conviction to attend these programs because they will meet their actual needs.

Steps for Preparing Training Programs: The steps followed in preparing training programs are largely similar. Zahran (2016) lists the following as the most important steps in preparing a training program:

- Identifying the training needs of the trainees, which is the starting point in planning the training program.
- Setting the training objectives after recognizing the trainees' training needs.
- Planning the administrative tasks in the training program, which are the procedures that will be taken to ensure the implementation of the training program such as determining the methods and training materials, nominating the trainees, and deciding on the training venue.

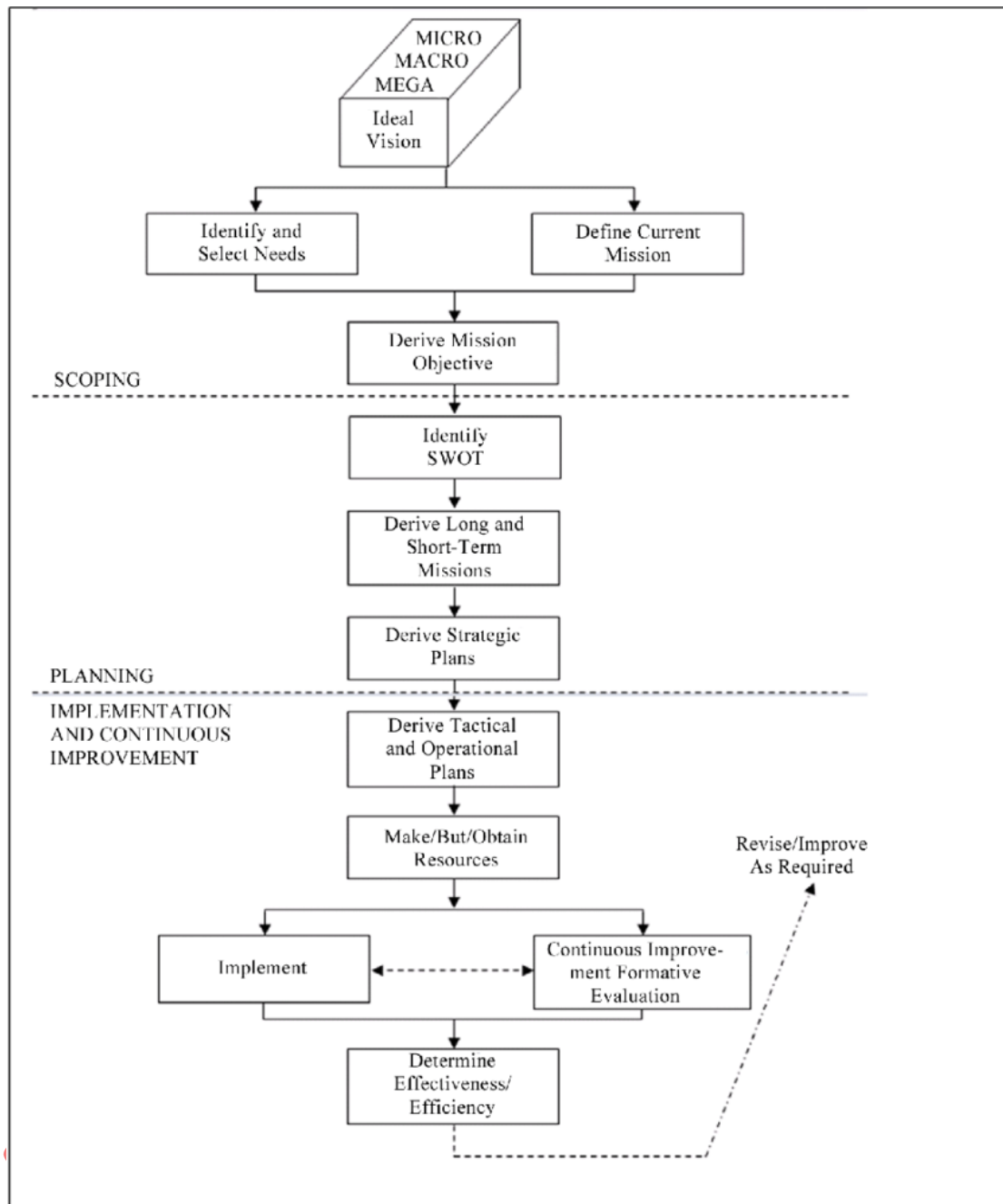
- The execution phase involves carrying out what has been planned and defining the training plan and the course of action.
- The monitoring and evaluation phase involves overseeing the implementation and evaluating the program in terms of objectives and outcomes.

From the discussion presented in this section, we deduce that training plays a significant role in enhancing the level of productive efficiency and developing the thinking skills and research capabilities of the trainees. Providing opportunities for employees to determine their training needs aids in the success of training programs and achieves better results. It is imperative to follow scientific steps to construct training programs considering employees' needs and in keeping up with rapid developments.

Components, Phases, and Practices of Kaufman's Model of Strategic Planning

Roger Kaufman is a professor of educational research and the director of the Center for Needs Assessment and Planning at the Institute for Learning Systems at Florida State University. He is affiliated with the College of Industrial Engineering and Systems Management at the University of Central Florida, has served as a professor at the United States International University and Chapman University in California, and holds a doctorate (in Communications) from New York University, a master's degree in psychology and industrial engineering from Johns Hopkins University, and a bachelor's degree (in Psychology, Sociology, and Statistics) from George Washington University. He also possesses a diploma in School Psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology (Kaufman & Thomas, 1980). Kaufman has published 41 books and over 315 articles on strategic planning, quality management, continuous improvement, performance enhancement, needs assessment, management, and evaluation. He has written numerous professional articles in needs assessment, planning and evaluation, as well as organizational development (Kaufman, 2021).

Kaufman's model of strategic planning consists of three primary phases as illustrated in:



According to the source (Kaufman & Grise, 1995), based on the model in Figure above, Kaufman's model for strategic planning comprises three primary stages, as follows:

The First Stage - The Ideal Vision Phase: This stage defines where the institution aims to go. The mission of the institution is articulated through this vision, offering a more detailed and specific explanation of the vision's essence. The vision and mission are determined considering identifying the needs and gaps within the institution, followed by specifying strategic goals, which must be articulated operationally and precisely to clarify what should be achieved to realize the institution's mission and vision (Tawfiq & Ibrahim, 2008).

Kaufman (2018a) described the ideal vision as determining the macro level of planning, allowing the organization and all its partners to define their direction and how to know when they are nearing their goals. It provides reasonable grounds for setting strategic goals and must be measurable. Kaufman (2018) suggests that the ideal vision is for the entire society, not just for a single organization. Here, the vision represents the macro level of planning, from which the definition of strategic, long-term,

and short-term goals descends; the strategic goals of an organization reflect the elements of the ideal vision.

All partners in strategic planning must have a vision or future forecast of what the situation will be after some time and find patterns that are compatible with continuous development and work. Strategic planning must have the flexibility to deal with the difficulties and obstacles faced in its implementation, and it is long-term planning to achieve certain results.

- a. **Determining the Current Mission (Organization's Mission):** Following the establishment of the ideal vision, the mission of the organization is identified. Current missions are written functions derived from the future vision and are intended to define the present tasks, methods, and status of the institution, not blindly adhered to but rather as logical step towards identifying the current challenges faced by the educational system. The current missions are determined through the identification of the ideal vision and needs, including measurable indicators answering, "Where are we heading?" and "What criteria will allow us to know when we have arrived?" The crafting of the organization's mission requires skill in preparation according to performance standards; thus, a well-prepared mission statement is an indicator of good performance results, providing an appropriate level for the organization (Kaufman & Herman, 1991).
- b. **Identifying Needs:** Kaufman (2018a) defines a need as the gap between current outcomes and desired outcomes. This stage involves substantial planning and is significant; in identifying a need, it should not be defined as inadequate levels of resources or methods, and it is crucial for useful planning to distinguish between ends and means, focusing on outcomes rather than means. "Need" is used solely as a noun, gap between current and desired outcomes. If need is used as a noun, the planner will be able not only to justify beneficial goals but also to rationalize their actions, presenting them based on cost and outcome analysis. They will be able to justify everything they use, do, produce, and deliver as it is the only reasonable way to demonstrate added value.
- c. **Deriving the Fundamental Objective of the Educational Mission (Setting Strategic Goals):** This step is the result of determining the current mission (organization's mission) and identifying needs. In this step, the fundamental mission objective is derived, which involves defining strategic goals, (including detailed performance criteria). It is based on a part of the ideal vision which the educational organization commits to delivering and continuously moving towards. The mission objective is the fundamental direction in which the educational institution will steer, outlining the comprehensive outcomes (outputs) to be delivered.

The term fundamental is used only to emphasize that it is the principal goal from which all other mission goals (for the years extending from now until the achievement of this purpose) are derived and connected (Kaufman & Grise, 1995). Therefore, the fundamental mission objective is drawn from pursuing the ideal vision, the identified and chosen needs, and the measurable definition of the current educational mission. When needs are determined at the level of the ideal vision, educational planners estimate costs against outcomes, from which they can define the elements of the ideal vision they will commit to, constituting the new mission goal.

The Second Stage: The Planning Phase: Planning operations commence from the procedures of analysing and diagnosing reality, which identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This is followed by the process of setting long-term objectives and near-term operational goals, segmented over time. At this step, the vision or strategic plan is completed and becomes ready for the implementation phase (Tawfiq & Ibrahim, 2008). This stage encompasses the following practices:

- a. **Analysis of the Internal and External Environment of the Organization (SWOT Analysis):** Environmental analysis is critical phase that distinguishes strategic planning. Organizations must be fully aware of their internal contents and external environment. The strategic plan is based on information resulting from previously mentioned scope-defining elements, such as identifying the ideal vision and needs and deriving mission objectives. The current step is a tool for analysing the internal and external environment of the institution or educational system in terms of identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It is a fundamental and significant step in planning, where the planner must be particularly diligent in obtaining precise information, revealing the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and analysing them through internal and external scanning (Kaufman & Herman, 1991).
- b. **Setting Long-term and Short-term (Operational) Goals:** With a shared ideal vision, defined needs, and the fundamental mission objective, and the SWOT analysis, long-term and short-term mission objectives can be set. Goals include measurable specifications regarding outcomes, such as: What skills and knowledge will learners acquire upon leaving the educational institution? It acts as bridge between current results and the achievement of the fundamental mission objective, with mission goals based on future orientation data, as well as what is known. SWOT analysis information forms a database from which long-term and short-term tasks are identified. As with all goals, they must be written in measurable performance terms; the ideal vision and the related results ladder determine the intended achievements from now towards the fundamental ideal of continuous improvement of the system and its components (Kaufman & Zahn, 1993).
- c. **Formulation of the Strategic Plan:** This step will answer the key questions: How? Why? Where? and when? At this stage, attention must be given to the beliefs and values in the society to be studied, ensuring that every part of the strategic plan relies on the ideal vision, defined needs, and the fundamental mission objective. Also, at this step, planning partners must gather new and different data to compare the original ideal vision with the current mission, as a means to identify the needs that planners intend to appropriately reduce or eliminate. Results or key functions for implementation and execution are determined alongside the selection of methods and tools to be utilized. Functions can be arranged to form a management plan (mission file) that specifies the desired outcomes and the sequence in which they should be completed (Kaufman & Grise, 1995).

The Third Stage

Implementation and Continuous Improvement Phase: This phase encompasses several practices including the development of an implementation plan, which consists of establishing tactical and operational plans, resource acquisition, application and execution of action plans, formative evaluation, determining efficiency and effectiveness, and finally, review and improvement as needed. Tawfiq and Ibrahim (2008) indicate that this stage involves the construction and formulation of the implementation plan, specifying objectives, means, estimated costs, start and end dates, as well as responsibilities for execution and monitoring, followed by a step to secure the plan's implementation requirements from resources and needs, after which the processes of application, evaluation, and development begin, along with determining effectiveness and mastery, and then replanning and development as required.

Kaufman and Grise (1995) assert that while this stage is not purely strategic planning, it is the phase where everything planned becomes manifest. It includes several steps and practices such as executing the strategic plan, securing resources, applying and implementing the planned actions, conducting

formative evaluation and determining effectiveness and mastery, and finally, summative evaluation, which are as follows:

1. **Implementing the Strategic Plan:** The strategic plan, developed by planning partners, is ready for application and evaluation, representing the actual application of planning to achieve desired outcomes, including:
 - Developing tactical plans: Identifying and selecting the best methods and means to achieve the desired outcomes in the strategic plan, including tactical plan specifications for designing methods, means, and resources, justifying what needs to be achieved, and how it will be done based on cost and outcomes analysis. (Alak, 2019)
 - Developing operational plans: The tactical plan defines the steps of the operational plan, how to proceed, including timelines for completing each action and its delivery as a product to where it should be, as well as detailing the acquisition of all tactics (means, methods).
2. **Identifying or Acquiring Resources:** Through this step, what needs to be provided through education and its needs can be identified, considering alternative technologies (resource identification).
3. **Application and Execution of Planned Actions:** Here, the actions that have been set and planned are executed.
4. **Conducting Formative Evaluation:** This is the ongoing evaluation performed by the planning team to assess the implementation stages, determine what has been achieved, and what needs review.
5. **Determining Effectiveness and Mastery, and Revising as Necessary During Implementation, Tracking Progress to Change What Doesn't Work and Continue What Is Effective.**
6. **Summative Evaluation:** Through this, objectives and purposes are compared with the results, and based on the evaluation, it is determined whether the plan is effective and achieves the desired objectives; here comes the decision to continue and follow the set plan or to review the plan and identify points that need revision and adjustment to address deficiencies resulting from the plan's implementation, improving as needed. The elements of implementation and continuous improvement require sufficient time to focus on them and easily observe the process flow. However, in this step, all requirements will be justified based on an ideal vision identifying gaps in outcomes (needs), where priority reduction or elimination of mission goals that define the outcomes to be achieved to move from current results towards achieving a vision closer to the ideal vision; and measurable performance specifications for functions through which alternative means (including curricula and teaching) can be identified and selected based on cost consequence analysis (Kaufman & Grise, 1995).
 1. Al-Arifi's (2019) study aimed to explore the reality of strategic planning at the General Directorates of Education in the Sultanate of Oman from the perspective of department directors and section heads. The study sample comprised 129 departments and section heads, using a descriptive method and a questionnaire as a data collection tool. The study concluded that the reality of strategic planning at the General Directorates of Education in the Sultanate of Oman was of a moderate degree.
 2. Al-Mutairi's (2019) study aimed to design specialized professional programs for leaders to develop skills and benefit from them in professional life, such as communication skills, crisis,

and conflict management, and encouraging a culture of change, as well as keeping up with developments in leadership and management. Al-Thubaiti's (2019) study emphasized the need to build a strategy for developing leaders' performance in line with the set strategic plan and goals, and the necessity of establishing a leadership development center to prepare, qualify, and develop leaders. The current study seeks to explore the degree of practicing professional leadership skills among deans, their deputies, and heads of academic departments at Qassim University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

3. In light of the above, the current study benefited from previous studies in terms of the theoretical frameworks of these studies by confirming the importance of the study problem, justifying it, choosing the methodology followed, building the appropriate tool for collecting data, defining the axes of the theoretical framework, and presenting the results.
4. The study of Muhammad and Al-Shaili (2016) aimed to identify the most important global models of strategic planning, and to adopt a proposed model that focuses on the Omani environment. The most prominent of these models is the Kaufman model of strategic planning. The researchers used the descriptive approach and the questionnaire as a study tool. The study sample consisted of 35 experts to survey their opinions on the proposed model. The results of the study led to the construction of a proposed model for strategic planning in basic education schools.

Study Methodology

The researcher employed a descriptive analytical approach, which aligns with the nature of this study, through collecting and analyzing data on this research problem using a questionnaire that was administered to department heads at the University of Baghdad.

Study Population: The study population consisted of a sample of (720) department heads, as detailed in the table.

Table (1): Distribution of the Study Population Members.

Number	Gender
403	Male
317	Female
720	Total

Table (2): Distribution of the study sample according to the gender variable.

Total	Percentage	Distinguished Department Heads	Percentage	Academic Leaders	Job Title
86	41.2%	61	32.5%	25	Male
139	58.8%	87	67.5%	52	Female
225	100%	148	100%	77	Total

Study Instrument: A questionnaire was developed to explore the practice of academic leadership in strategic planning. The questionnaire comprised two axes: strategic planning practices, which include three stages: the ideal phase, the planning phase, and the execution phase; and the second axis, challenges in practicing strategic planning.

Validity of the Study Instrument: The validity of the instrument was verified by presenting it to a group of judges and specialists who were selected to evaluate the appropriateness of the items, or suggest modifications, deletions, or additions. Consequently, the instrument consisted of (47) items in its final form.

Table (3): Reliability of the Study Instrument: To verify the reliability of the study instrument, Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach Alpha) equation was applied.

Performance Axes	Number of Items	Internal Consistency Coefficient
Reality of Strategic Planning Practices	34	0.95
Challenges of Planning Practices	13	0.81
Total Consistency Coefficient		0.97

Reliability Coefficient

The questionnaire's internal consistency ranged between (0.81 - 0.95), and the overall reliability coefficient for all items reached (0.97), indicating that the instrument enjoys high reliability. Reliability is considered acceptable when its value is 0.70 or higher. After verifying the instrument's validity and reliability, it was distributed among the study sample members. The degree of practice was divided into three levels according to the tripartite Likert scale as follows: a high degree of practice if the mean averages ranged between (2.34 - 3.00). A moderate degree of practice had mean averages ranging between (1.67 - 2.33). A low degree of practice had mean averages ranging between (1.00 - 1.66).

Table (4): A presentation of the findings of the study. The mean scores and standard deviations for the study sample regarding strategic planning practices.

Axis	Mean	Arithmetic mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Practice
1	Planning Phase	2.35	0.389	Moderate
2	Vision Setting Phase	2.26	0.317	Moderate
3	Implementation and Continuous Improvement Phase	2.17	0.315	Moderate
4	Reality of Strategic Planning Practices	2.26	0.260	Moderate

Study Results and interpretations

In the ranking, the Planning Phase axis occupied the first position with a mean score of (2.35), followed by the Vision Setting Phase axis in the second position, with a mean score of (2.26). The Implementation and Continuous Improvement Phase axis ranked third, with a mean score of (2.17). The current study's findings revealed that the reality of strategic planning practices among school leadership was of a moderate level of practice, with the overall axis mean score reaching (2.26). This result is attributed to the existence of a gap between practices across the stages of strategic planning. And the inability to link them by the planning leaders. This result is also attributed to the weak reliance on successful international models in the practices of the strategic planning stages, and the lack of training programs to which the leaders are subjected. The results of the current study are consistent with the findings of Al-Arfi (2019), in the reality of practicing strategic planning was moderate.

Table (5): Mean scores, standard deviations, and ranks for the sample members' estimates for each item of the Ideal Vision Phase.

Practice Level	Standard Deviation	Mean	Items	Rank	Statement Number
High	0.551%	2.67%	Participation in preparing a strategic plan that supports the main goals and objectives of the university	1	5
High	0.615%	2.58%	Directing employees towards achieving strategic goals	2	3

High	0.706%	2.55%	Participation in creating a vision to bring about the desired change in the university	3	15
High	0.620%	2.52%	Working on building and sustaining the institutional culture among employees to improve performance	4	2
High	0.682%	2.48%	Contributing to the development of strategic planning skills	5	1
High	0.647%	2.45%	Anticipating future issues and positively challenging current thinking	6	14
High	0.701%	2.40%	Leveraging best practices and innovation for strategic development	7	4
Moderate	0.656%	2.27%	Identifying needs at three levels: individual, institutional, and community	8	13
Moderate	0.607%	2.27%	Defining needs as gaps between current results and desired outcomes	9	11
Moderate	0.778%	2.17%	Committing to achieving a balance between capabilities and requirements when formulating strategic goals		9
Moderate	0.623%	2.12%	Considering the mission's investment potential	11	7
Moderate	0.633%	2.08%	Ensuring strategic goals are scheduled over time	12	10
Moderate	0.506%	1.87%	Leadership reconciling between ends (results) and resources and methods when identifying needs	13	12
Moderate	0.601%	1.76%	Community experts participate in formulating strategic goals	14	8
Moderate	0.632%	1.72%	All employees participate in formulating the vision and its message	15	6
Moderate	0.317%	2.26%	Overall, Domain		

The table reveals that the mean scores for the Ideal Vision Phase ranged between (2.67 - 1.72), indicating that the practice level for the Ideal Vision domain was considered moderate; the overall mean score for the domain reached (2.26). This result can be attributed to a lack of awareness of the practices in the first phase of strategic planning and the absence of a clear framework for understanding the processes and stages of planning, where leadership practices planning in developing a clear vision and mission and formulating an execution plan without focusing on the fact that planning proceeds according to sequential and well-considered stages. Paragraph (1) received the highest arithmetic average of (2.67), and this is attributed to the presence of a real tendency to adopt a clear vision and message, and to announce and disseminate them to the community. It is also clear from the arithmetic averages that the lowest arithmetic average of (1.72) is for the paragraph, and this is due to the presence of a gap between the vision declaration and the message. This may be attributed to: the lack of experience of some leaders in engaging employees to develop a vision and mission. The results of the current study are consistent with the findings of Al-Arfi (2019), The arithmetic averages of the ideal field of vision show that the degree of practice was average.

Table (6): Mean scores, standard deviations, and ranks for the sample members' estimates for the Planning Phase.

Practice Level	Standard Deviation	Mean	Items	Rank	Statement Number
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High	0.594%	2.62%	Ensuring that operational goals are measurable and applicable	1	25
High	0.600%	2.59%	Conducting research and developing business proposals that lead to a high return on investment	2	17
High	0.655%	2.48%	Developing programs considering diverse viewpoints and needs	3	22
High	0.626%	2.45%	Innovating methods and procedures that impact the university-wide	4	21
High	0.581%	2.44%	Proposing and developing solutions to contribute to performance development in the work environment	5	18
High	0.668%	2.36%	Thinking logically, creatively, and methodically to achieve future success	6	23
High	0.645%	2.35%	Adopting a system of diverse goals (long-term and short-term)	7	26
Moderate	0.773%	2.33%	Developing a remedial plan to address weaknesses	8	19
Moderate	0.710%	2.15%	Leaders participating in setting operational goals	9	16
Moderate	0.715%	2.10%	Monitoring available resources when analyzing the internal and external environment	10	24
Moderate	0.759%	2.01%	Committing to the necessity of adapting to the changing environment during the analysis process	11	20
High	0.389%	2.35%	Overall, Domain		

The mean scores for the Planning domain indicate that the practice was highly favorable, with the overall domain mean score reaching (2.35). This can be attributed to the leadership possessing skills in analyzing the internal and external environment, recognizing strengths, and working to enhance them, as well as identifying weaknesses and working to mitigate them. Paragraph (10) It is necessary to adapt to the changing environment during the analysis process. As the lowest item for the level of leadership planning practices for the planning stage, with an arithmetic mean of (2.01). This is due to the lack of human resources trained in the practices of the planning process. The result was consistent with the results of the study by Muhammad and Al-Shaili (2016), which came with a high degree of agreement in the axis of analyzing the internal and external environment.

Table (7): Mean scores, standard deviations, and ranks for the sample members' estimates for the Implementation Phase.

Practice Level	Standard Deviation	Mean	Items	Rank	Statement Number
High	0.645%	2.44%	The implementation plan includes operational goals derived from strategic objectives	1	27
High	0.588%	2.39%	Enhancing success stories and achievements in the work environment to foster acceptance of change	2	29
Moderate	0.623%	2.24%	Setting a time duration for each action in the implementation plan	3	30

Moderate	0.619%	2.21%	Comparing the goals of the implementation plan with the achieved results	4	31
Moderate	0.647%	2.21%	The planning team reviews the evaluation phase of the operational plan	5	32
Moderate	0.490%	2.03%	Utilizing feedback in constructing future plans	6	34
Moderate	0.578%	1.97%	Improving and developing the operational plan considering the results	7	33
Moderate	0.577%	1.90%	Effectively dealing with potential obstacles to change at the university and with key partners	8	28
Moderate	0.315%	2.17%	Overall, Domain		

The table illustrates that the mean scores and standard deviations for the domain of Implementation and Continuous Improvement ranged between (2.44 - 1.90), indicating that the level of planning practices for the Implementation and Continuous Improvement phase was considered moderately agreeable, with the overall domain mean score reaching (2.17). This result can be attributed to a lack of awareness among some leaders.

This outcome is due to some leaders' lack of awareness of monitoring processes and the absence of formative and summative evaluation practices, along with a scarcity of training programs offered in the field of evaluation and the monitoring and improvement of plan implementation as required. The item concerning the implementation plan had a mean score of (2.44) and a standard deviation of (0.654), attributed to the recognition of the components of the implementation plan (Ministry of Education, 2009). This is what makes it obtain the highest arithmetic average.

In light of the above, a number of training needs can be extracted from analyzing the reality of leadership planning practices

- -Achieving a balance between capabilities and requirements when formulating strategic objectives
- Identifying needs as gaps between current results and desired results
- Improving and developing the executive plan in light of the results.

The results of the current study are consistent with the findings of Al-Arfi (2019), In the implementation and continuous improvement phase, it came in at an average level.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Focus on developing leadership skills in the areas of creativity and innovation among department heads at the University of Baghdad. Conduct studies addressing other areas of leadership, such as deans. Promote the culture and philosophy of strategic planning and global models through seminars, conferences, and educational journals. Coordinate between different management levels in terms of legislation and laws. Implement a training program targeting outstanding professors at times suitable for leadership.

- The current study indicated that there are differences in the practice of leadership skills by department heads for strategic planning.
- There are no statistically significant differences between the average estimates of the study sample members regarding the degree to which department heads practice leadership skills, attributable to the college variable.

Disclosure Data:

- **Ethical approval and consent to participate:** The participants have given consent to participate in this study. Their personal details were kept anonymous.
- **Availability of data and materials:** The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request.
- **Author contribution:** I take public responsibility for the content of the work. It is not a split of a thesis or dissertation.
- **Conflict of interest:** The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.
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Appendix: Names of experts

N	university	College	Specialization	Name of expert
1	Baghdad	Administration and economics	business management	Prof. Dr. Marwan Abdel Hamid
2	Mustansiriya	Administration and economics	business management	Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kamel
3	Baghdad	Administration and economics	business management	Prof. Dr. Ahmed Hussein Jarallah
4	Baghdad	Administration and economics	business management	Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali Adnan Hassan
5	Ministry of Higher Education	Ministry of Higher Education	business management	Prof. Dr. Abdel Nasser Hafez Alak
6	Mustansiriya	Administration and economics	business management	Asst. Prof. Dr. Baraa Hamid

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