



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Model towards Achieving Sustainable Competitive Advantage through Human Resource Empowerment in the Banking Industry in Iraq: Explaining Antecedents and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

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This research is dedicated to the development of a comprehensive model aimed at promoting sustainable competitive advantage through human resource improvement in the Iraqi banking sector. To achieve this goal, we conducted in-depth interviews with 11 experienced industry experts using both grounded theory and theoretical sampling strategies. The investigation focused on key players in the Iraqi banking sector, including TBI Bank, Rashid Bank Rafidain Bank and Bank of Baghdad. Our study placed particular emphasis on sophisticated leadership styles, training programs and organizational culture as critical factors in the pursuit of sustainable competitive advantage. The results of this focus have been particularly evident in increased employee satisfaction, improved customer service standards and a significant increase in innovative practices within the industry. These results provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of the Iraqi banking sector. Additionally, the findings have practical implications for industry leaders, providing them with actionable insights to optimize their strategic approaches. Furthermore, this study creates a solid basis for further research and investigation into various aspects of the Iraq banking sector. In essence, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interactions within the Iraqi banking sector. By presenting practical insights to industry leaders and laying the foundation for future explorations, it serves as an important resource for understanding and navigating the complex landscape of the Iraqi banking sector.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary discourse, the statement that “human resources constitute the most important competitive advantage and organizational capital” has evolved into an indisputable and universally accepted truth. As a result, there is a greater emphasis on recognizing the invaluable role of

individuals within an organization. In today's highly competitive landscape, success in generating wealth is reserved for organizations that not only understand the strategic significance of their human resources but also host a group of capable individuals.

In highly competitive markets, companies are constantly striving to achieve competitive advantages, including gaining a significant market position and gaining advantages over available resources and utilities.

The concept of dynamic capabilities has been widely studied to examine how firms navigate dynamic and rapidly changing environments (Pu & Bai, 2023). Organizations seeking a sustainable competitive advantage will adopt strategies that depart from traditional approaches, which will be a critical determinant of long-term business profits.

The ability to maintain this advantage is a key factor in the success and survival of an organization in a competitive environment, with positive implications for growth and the economic and social environment (Mäenpää & Voutilainen, 2012).

In this context, effective resource management, focusing on intellectual rather than physical and financial assets, is essential for achieving competitive advantage (Sengupta, Venkatesh, & Sinha, 2013). In today's competitive environment, human resources are recognized as permanent and fundamental assets and are considered a critical success factor for organizations (Mäenpää & Voutilainen, 2012).

The importance of human resources with unique skills and abilities that are difficult for competitors to imitate has increased (Al-Qatawneh¹ & Mobaideen, 2017).

Acceptance of the importance and effectiveness of human resources has increased at individual, corporate and economic levels, highlighting the role of employee empowerment as a strategic tool for business improvement (Aalie & Noor, 2019).

As Iraq's banking sector struggles with political instability, security concerns, economic sanctions and historical mismanagement, the need for sustainable competitive advantage through human resource development is essential (Central Bank of Iraq official website, CBI, 2023¹).

The basic research questions of this study are: How can sustainable competitive advantage be achieved by strengthening human resources in the Iraqi banking sector? The innovative aspect of this study is that it explores the dynamic interactions between major Iraqi banks and recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities of this sector.

The purpose of this study is to provide insights and strategies tailored to the unique environment of the Iraqi banking sector to promote sustainable competitive advantage through human resource development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In business, competitive advantage refers to the characteristics that enable a company to perform better than its competitors.

This advantage can be achieved through various means, such as access to natural resources, highly skilled labor, advantageous geographical location, introduction of barriers to entry, and compliance with modern technology (Hossain et al., 2022, Jibril & Yeşiltaş, 2022). The overarching goal of any business strategy is to gain competitive advantage by offering a superior solution to a particular problem or by offering an equivalent solution at a lower price. Michael E. Porter, in his influential work *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*, identifies his two basic

¹ <https://cbi.iq/news/index/10>

categories of competitive advantage: cost strategies and differentiation strategies We have explained (Ankli, 1992).

The concept of competitive advantage is closely related to the overall competitiveness within an industry and can be achieved by creating value for buyers that exceeds the cost expended by the company to create that advantage.

Empowering employees stands as a foundation within the complex scene of capable human resource administration, and its affect amplifies distant past the prompt domains of customer and worker fulfillment. This key approach saturates organizational operations, fueling increased operational efficiency and coming full circle within the foundation of an interesting and unmistakable competitive position (Ntwiga et al., 2021).

Inside the energetic segment of the nourishment industry, the part of Human Asset (HR) strengthening programs is nothing brief of essential. These programs serve as the spine, not as it were in tending to the predominant challenges of aptitude deficiencies and bungles but too in cultivating strong and positive business connections (Rusdiyanto & Tandelilin, 2019).

As companies explore the complexities of an ever-changing and furiously competitive market, the esteem of well-trained and learned human resources cannot be exaggerated. This resource gets to be a directing force, directing companies through challenges and situating them deliberately inside the advertising scene. Drawing closer to human asset administration as a venture unleashes a cascade of benefits, permitting organizations to effectively use and control a range of assets (Paramarta et al., 2021).

The capable administration of human assets serves as the speculative chemistry that transmutes these ventures into a supported competitive advantage. Vital activities, such as ensuring work security, advertising competitive compensation, championing representative strengthening, and prioritizing internal promotions, collectively change human assets into a set of resources that are not as it were profitable but too uncommon and challenging to duplicate or substitute. These variables unpredictably weave together, invigorating a company's competitive standing and fortitude (Setiawan, 2017).

Recognized as a powerful implies of viably overseeing organizations, representative strengthening goes past the quick focal points. It gets to be a catalyst for fast decision-making, cultivating a culture of solidarity inside the working environment. This, in turn, contributes altogether to the foundation of a feasible competitive advantage, as the enabled workforce gets to be a driving constraint in exploring the advancing scenes of industry elements (Kar, 2017). In substance, worker strengthening gets to be the linchpin that not as it were upgrades person and collective execution but moreover cements the organizational resilience fundamental for proceeded victory within the competitive field.

Iraq's banking industry has undergone significant changes in recent years due to globalization, technological advances and changing customer expectations.

In this dynamic environment, achieving sustainable competitive advantage has become a priority for banks seeking long-term profitability and success.

An important approach considered in this study is the development of a comprehensive model focused on human resource empowerment.

Human resource enhancement is an important factor that can influence organizational performance and competitiveness in the banking sector.

As various scholars have pointed out, employee empowerment contributes to increased job satisfaction, increased work efficiency, and improved customer service (Alalie et al., 2018).

In the unique context of the banking industry, where customer relationships and service quality are of paramount importance, understanding the antecedents and consequences of human resource enhancement is essential.

To establish a robust model for sustainable competitive advantage, it is important to address the antecedents of human resource empowerment in Iraq's banking sector.

Factors such as leadership initiatives, training programs, and organizational culture play important roles in shaping the empowerment context (Abunaila, 2022).

Examining this history will provide valuable insight into the mechanisms by which Iraqi banks are able to develop a talented workforce. At the same time, it is important to consider the implications of human resource enhancement to understand its impact on sustainable competitive advantage. Previous research suggests that empowered employees are more likely to exhibit proactive behavior, innovative thinking, and stronger commitment to organizational goals (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013).

Research background

In the context of the evolving banking landscape in Iraq, the quest for sustainable competitive advantage has become a central concern for financial institutions. Drawing upon recent field research findings, this study aims to explore and elucidate the critical role of human resource empowerment in achieving sustained competitive advantage within the Iraqi banking sector.

The investigation is informed by multiple research studies that shed light on the intersection of human resource management and competitive advantage. Firstly, Hassan and Ismael's (2023) field research delves into the correlation between knowledge-based human resource management and sustainable competitive advantage in internet companies. The findings underscore the significance of knowledge-driven strategies, revealing a direct link between knowledge-based human resource management practices and the attainment of sustainable competitive advantage. Additionally, the study unveils a critical challenge faced by internet companies in Baghdad—namely, the absence of mechanisms to cultivate loyalty among valuable resources. Arsawan et al.'s (2022) research contributes valuable insights into the pivotal role of knowledge sharing for achieving sustainable competitive advantage in organizations. The study emphasizes the importance of empowering workers, providing task flexibility and autonomy, and establishing flexible reward systems based on team contributions. By integrating these factors into the exploration of human resource empowerment strategies in the banking industry, this research aims to identify actionable approaches that can foster sustainable competitive advantage while mitigating barriers to effective knowledge utilization.

While Hamadamin and Atan's (2019) research underscores the correlation between human resource strategies and sustainable competitive advantage, it does not explicitly delve into human resource empowerment. Nevertheless, the findings offer a foundational understanding of the broader implications of human resource strategies on organizational success.

The study further considers Kumar's (2023) exploration of strategic human resource management (SHRM) and its link to organizational performance, reinforcing the idea that leveraging HRM strategically is pivotal for organizational success and competitive advantage.

In the field of sustainable competitive advantage, Le's (2023) research provides a solid foundation by examining the field of knowledge-based human resource management (KHRM) and its impact on innovation capabilities. Using structural equation modeling, Le's study examines the complex relationships between KHRM practices, knowledge sharing (KS) behavior, and two important dimensions of innovation capabilities: product innovation and process innovation.

The results not only confirm the mediating role of KS behavior between KHRM practices and innovation capabilities, but also reveal the moderating role of competitive intensity in the relationship between KS and product innovation.

This study highlights the critical importance of creating a KHRM environment to encourage knowledge sharing behavior among employees and ultimately to promote organizational innovative capabilities.

Based on these insights, the current study aims to extend these insights in the context of the Iraqi banking sector to assess how KHRM practices can be strategically applied to promote sustainable competitive advantage.

Vujarso et al. (2021) provide additional insight highlighting human capital management (HCM) as a strategic resource for achieving competitive advantage.

The study highlights the importance of strategic investments in human capital, including attraction, retention, and talent management, and training and development programs.

The results confirm the importance of human capital in increasing profitability and competitiveness, also indicating the important role of strategic actions in influencing organizational success.

Taking these findings together, this study investigates whether strategically managed human capital can be a catalyst for sustainable competitive advantage in the Iraqi banking sector.

Keffan et al. (2021) focus on the role of human resource management (HRM) and quality assurance systems in achieving competitive advantage.

This study demonstrates the inextricable link between hiring practices and competitive advantage by examining the recruiting tools and techniques organizations use to attract the best employees.

Furthermore, this study confirms that a strong employee quality assurance system is closely related to achieving a competitive advantage.

These insights are consistent with the broader objective of understanding how HRM practices related to quality assurance contribute to sustainable competitive advantage in the Iraqi banking sector.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into various aspects of human resource management and its impact on competitive advantage, there is a significant gap in directly examining human resource development strategies in the Iraqi banking sector.

Le's (2023) study focuses on KHRM practices, but mainly on innovation capabilities.

Vujarso et al. (2021) study focuses on HCM but does not specifically address the empowerment aspect.

The need for targeted research on how to strategically leverage human resource development in the Iraqi banking sector remains unexplored.

Although the existing literature focuses on knowledge-based practices, strategic human resource management and HR strategies in general, there is a need for a thorough investigation of empowerment strategies and their impact on competitive advantage in the specific context of Iraqi banks.

The identified gaps therefore indicate the need for specific research that directly examines and investigates human resource development strategies and their role in promoting sustainable competitive advantage in the Iraqi banking sector.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Utilizing a qualitative approach and acknowledging the existence of diverse realities are deemed suitable for delving into the intricacies of individuals' experiences (Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2011). Grounded theory, as a qualitative method, is employed for delving into social processes and human interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the context of this research, the grounded theory methodology was applied to gain antecedents and consequences of sustainable competitive advantage through human resource empowerment in the banking industry in Iraq.

Data collection and participants

We started by choosing participants on purpose, looking for people who really knew about gaining a competitive edge through empowering employees in banks. Later on, we gathered more data in a way that helped us come up with new ideas instead of just getting general information. We collected this information from August 2023 to November 2023. We looked for people with over 8 years of experience, especially in human resource management or banking, who could talk about gaining an advantage through human resource empowerment, and who had managerial roles or were responsible in the matter of human resources management or competitiveness issues in banking.

First, we picked some famous banks in Iraq, like TBI, Rasheed bank, Rafidain and bank of Baghdad, based on expert opinions. Then, we interviewed a manager at Bank of Baghdad, who then suggested someone else for the next interview. This chain continued until we spoke to a total of 11 people.

We mostly collected information through detailed, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. We started with open-ended questions like:

1. How would you describe the current state of human resource development practices within your banking institution?
2. Which factors do you think that affected sustainability of competitive advantage?
3. How human resource development can affected sustainable competitive advantage?
4. Can you share your perspective on the significance of human resource empowerment in gaining a competitive advantage in the banking sector?
5. From your experience, what do you believe are the key factors or practices that contribute to sustainable competitive advantage in the banking industry?
6. In your role, how do you perceive the relationship between leadership styles and the empowerment of human resources for achieving sustainable competitive advantage?
7. Can you provide examples of specific strategies or initiatives that have been successful in enhancing the competitive position of your bank through human resource development?
8. Please talk about anything else that you think are important for this research. At the end of each interview, we asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to share.

Throughout each interview, we tried to avoid complicated questions. Each interview took about 40 to 80 minutes, averaging around 60 minutes. We carefully listened to, transcribed, and wrote down exactly what was said in each interview to fully understand the data. All interviews were recorded, typed, and transcribed before moving on to the next one. The analysis of each interview determined the path for the next interview. We also took field notes and used memoing. This process continued until we had enough information and didn't learn anything new. We stopped when we felt we had a good understanding of the topic.

Table 1: Profiles of interviewees from Iraqi selected banks

Interviewee number	Level of education	Work Experience	Organizational position	gender
1	BA in banking	21	Head of HR Department	male
2	BA in banking	20	HR management	male
3	Master of business	22	Board of Directors	male
4	BA in management	20	Head of marketing Department	male
5	BA in economics	15	Managing director	male
6	BA in management	19	Mnager of HR Automation	male
7	Master of management	25	Training and Development Manager	male
8	BA in economics	18	Head of risk management department	male
9	Master of management	22	Board of Directors	male
10	Economics expert	26	Board of Directors	male
11	Master of Accounting	21	Board of Directors	male

Data analysis

The researchers transcribed all interviews word for word. Data analysis occurred simultaneously during the data collection phase. The constant comparative analysis method, involving the continuous comparison and contrast of data and results, was applied at every stage.

The effective application of constant comparison in Grounded Theory results in the emergence of categories, a higher level of data abstraction, and the integration of various interconnected concepts (Gandomani and Nafchi, 2016). In this study, the collected data underwent a three-phase analytical process. In the initial step, known as transparent or substantive coding, transcripts from participants and researchers' notes underwent multiple readings to extract codes. Codes, utilized for crafting definitions, categories, and subcategories, were refined and incorporated during weekly research team meetings. In the third and final phase, through selective coding involving the saturation of concepts, categories, and subcategories, a core category was identified. Subsequently, other categories were linked to it (Khoshnami et al., 2017; Mustapha et al., 2024). This process enabled us to articulate the causal conditions, meanings, circumstances, strategies, and implications that emerged. Ultimately, it facilitated the development of a conceptual model based on participants' responses.

Conceptual modeling offers researchers the capability to systematically comprehend the phenomena being investigated (Shannak and Aldhmour, 2009). Throughout the data analysis process, the research team sampled and directed questions, constantly comparing the evolving structure with accumulating evidence. All stages underwent multiple checks and rechecks, aligning with the recommendations of the Grounded Theory approach. Finally, a coding paradigm or a framework focusing on sustainable competitive advantage through human resource empowerment in the banking industry in Iraq was introduced.

Trustworthiness

The credibility of our study was evaluated utilizing the four parameters proposed by Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007), including creditworthiness, conformability, transferability, and dependence. The use of triangulation assured the authenticity of the findings. Alongside semi-structured interviews, both field notes and extensive engagement in the subject matter contributed to establishing credibility (Mohajan, 2018). Furthermore, involving multiple perspectives was facilitated by triangulating the viewpoints of the study team participants during the tests (Richards and Hemphill, 2018). Peer checks were conducted through weekly research team meetings, where experts and ourselves discussed and reviewed emerging data and its analysis within our community. Member tests involved providing participants with a description of the interviews and extracted codes, enabling the incorporation of their feedback and correction ideas. In instances where participants disagreed with the extracted codes, additional details were sought, and coding procedures were adjusted. Emphasis was placed on refining the new codes. This analysis achieved data conformability, incorporating ideas and concepts from various researchers. Data transferability was supported by furnishing a comprehensive description of the subject, participants, data collection, and analysis processes (Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba, 2007). Dependency is assured by the present text, providing other researchers with extensive knowledge for reproducing and expanding upon the analysis.

Coding process

The coding process in Grounded Theory, particularly following the approach developed by Strauss and Corbin, is a fundamental step that involves systematically organizing and categorizing data to derive meaningful concepts and patterns. The coding process generally consists of three main types: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, (2008).

Open coding involves initially examining the data to identify concepts, ideas, or themes. It entails breaking down the data into smaller units and assigning descriptive labels or codes to them. The

codes are generated inductively from the data itself, without preconceived categories or theories. Researchers may use techniques such as line-by-line coding or focused coding to identify significant ideas or patterns within the data. The similar open (first-level) codes were then grouped to form the selective (second-level) codes (Goulding, 2002; Urquhart & fernandez, 2013; Aderibigbe et al., 2024). In this study the 48 selective codes are derived from the open codes. Theoretical coding is the third stage of grounded theory data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The process identifies the themes from the selective codes by grouping them into similar Themes (Goulding, 2002; Urquhart & fernandez, 2013; Yu et al., 2024). The analysis and grouping of the selective codes has identified 20 Themes. Table 2 shows the set of codes, concepts subcategories and main categories obtained during the coding process

Table 2: Codes, concepts subcategories and main categories obtained during the coding process

Primary Codes	Concepts	Subcategory	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal Communication • Nonverbal Communication 	Communication Style	Leadership styles	Antecedents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autocratic Decision-Making • Participative Decision-Making 	Decision-Making Approach		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Conflict Resolution • Authoritarian Conflict Resolution 	Conflict Resolution Style		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentive-Based Motivation • Inspirational Motivation 	Motivational Techniques		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity • Values-Based Leadership 	Ethical Leadership		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive Feedback • Recognition and Appreciation 	Feedback and Recognition		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Training • In-Person Workshops • Blended Learning 	Delivery Methods	training programs	Sustainable Competitive Advantage through Human Resource Empowerment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill Development Programs • Leadership Training • Compliance and Regulatory Training • Employee Training and Development 	Content and Curriculum		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with Organizational Values • Impact on Employee Engagement 	Cultural Alignment and Employee Behavior		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication Practices • Onboarding and Integration Programs 	Communication and Cultural Transmission		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession Planning • Talent Development 	Talent Management	HR Practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal Setting and Alignment • Feedback and Evaluation 	Performance Management		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real-Time Feedback Practices • Agile Goal Setting 	Agile HR Practices		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and Rewards • Work place atmosphere 	Motivation and Morale	Employee Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible Work Arrangements • Time Management and Boundaries 	Work-Life Balance		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Communication Tools • Face-to-Face Communication • Performance Feedback • Employee Input and Suggestions 	Communication and Feedback		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR Information Systems • Automation of HR Processes 	HR Technology	Technological Integration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Onboarding • Digital Training and Development • People Analytics 	Digital Transformation		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • future needs forecasting • Succession Planning 	Strategic Workforce Planning	Strategic Alignment	

Table 2: Codes, concepts subcategories and main categories obtained during the coding process			
Primary Codes	Concepts	Subcategory	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Goal Alignment • KPIs and Metrics Alignment 	Performance Management and Goal Alignment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and Rewards for Wellness • Family-Friendly Policies 	Health and Wellness Programs	Employee Well-being	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible Work Arrangements for Inclusion • Diversity Recruitment Strategies 	Diversity and Inclusion		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual Reality (VR) Training • Gamification in Learning 	Interactive Learning Platforms	innovative training and development programs	Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bite-Sized Learning Modules • Mobile Learning Platforms 	Micro learning Initiatives		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills Enhancement Workshops • Coaching and Mentoring Programs • Participatory Decision-Making Models • Diversity and Inclusion Training 	Empowering Leadership Training Programs	Leadership empowerment initiatives	
	Inclusive Decision-Making Processes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Communication Channels • Feedback Mechanisms 	Communication and Transparency Initiatives	Employee engagement strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Recognition Programs • Performance-Based Rewards 	Recognition and Rewards Programs		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of Economic Stability on Banking Operations • Credit and Investment Climate 	Market Stability and Banking Performance	Economic conditions in Iraq	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of Economic Conditions on Employee Productivity • Financial Incentives in a Changing Economy 	Workforce Productivity and Financial Incentives		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adherence to Banking Regulations • Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Compliance • Data Protection and Privacy Compliance 	Legal Compliance	Regulatory environment	Contextual factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Policy Influence • Financial Inclusion Initiatives 	Government Policies Impact		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal Collaboration and Teamwork • Social Bonds and Networking 	Collectivism and Relationship-Oriented Culture	Cultural aspects	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Ethics and Moral Values • Community Trust and Reputation 	Traditional Values and Ethical Considerations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User Experience Enhancement • Multichannel Banking Accessibility 	Digitalization and Online Banking Platforms	Technological landscape in the banking industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encryption and Data Protection • Continuous Threat Monitoring and Response 	Cyber security Measures and Threats		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new Technology Implementation • innovations in Banking Operation 	Fin tech Integration and Innovations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment Challenges • Training and Knowledge Drain • Disruption in Team Dynamics 	High Employee Turnover	Talent Attrition Challenge	Intervening factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation Disparities • Lack of Professional Development Opportunities • Inadequate Work-Life Balance 	Difficulty in Retaining Skilled Workforce		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to Adopt Digitalization • Insufficient Training on New Technologies 	Employee Resistance to New Technologies	Resistance To Change	

Table 2: Codes, concepts subcategories and main categories obtained during the coding process

Primary Codes	Concepts	Subcategory	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Barriers to Innovation 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited Investment in Technological Upgrades • Obsolete IT Infrastructure 	Technological constraints in Iraq		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement Initiatives 	Market Positioning and Industry Recognition	Reputation and Brand Image Enhancement	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Wellness Campaigns • Community Development Projects • Community Outreach Programs 	Community Engagement Initiatives		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User-Friendly Applications • Customizable Account Management • Innovative Banking Solutions 	Personalized Customer Experiences	Employee and Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Job Satisfaction • Recognition and Rewards Programs • Continuous Professional Development • Healthy Work-Life Balance • Employee Well-being Initiatives 	Engaged and Productive Workforce		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Engagement • Customer Feedback Mechanisms 	Openness to Change		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent Financial Growth • Sound Financial Practices • Investment in Future Sustainability 	Financial Stability and Performance	Financial Performance Improvement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Acquisition and Retention • Market Expansion 	Revenue Growth		

After identifying and exploring the main categories or themes in the data, researchers in the Strauss and Corbin approach move on to the stage of axial coding. Axial coding involves making connections between categories and subcategories, establishing relationships and patterns, and developing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between various elements. As the result of this stage we can gain a theoretical framework as shown in Figure 1:

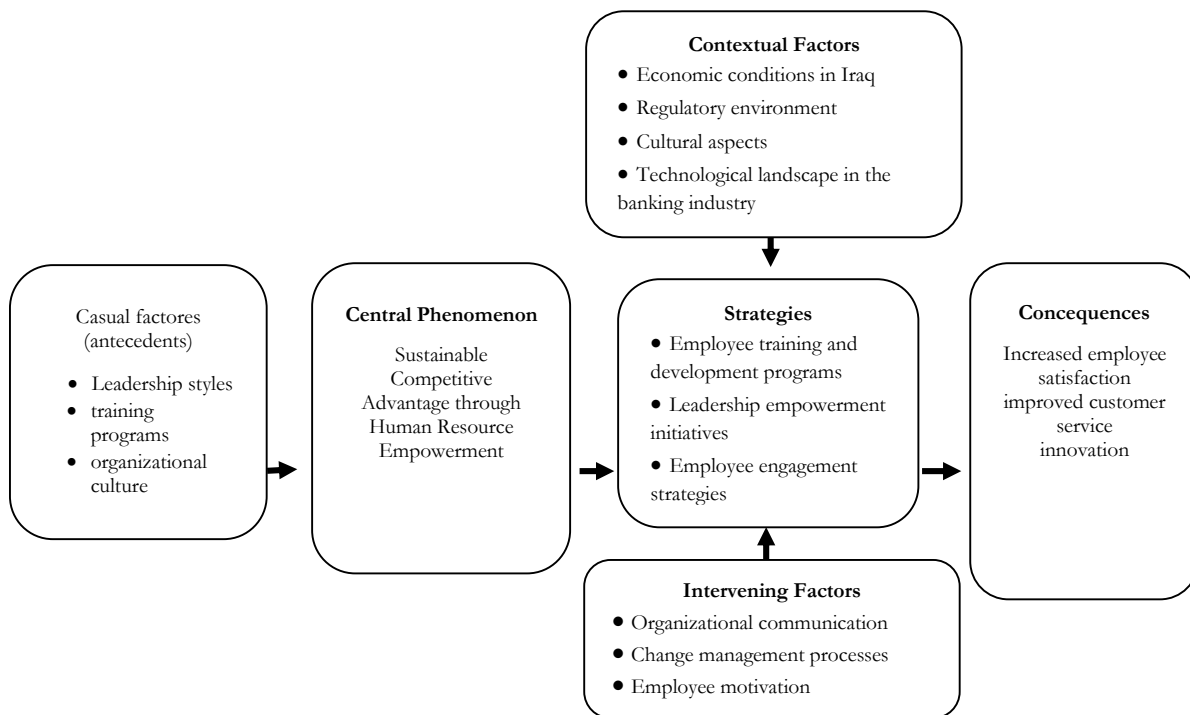


Figure 1: Sustainable competitive advantage through human resource empowerment

Explaining the model components

Casual factors or antecedents

Causal factors in this research refer to the elements or conditions that contribute to the achievement of sustainable competitive advantage through human resource empowerment in the banking industry in Iraq. These factors include various aspects such as leadership styles, organizational culture, training program. These causal factors collectively contribute to creating an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and equipped to contribute effectively. They represent the foundational elements that empower human resources, leading to sustainable competitive advantage in the banking industry in Iraq. During interviews, further exploration of specific leadership styles, cultural practices, and training initiatives can provide richer insights into their impact on empowerment and competitive advantage.

Leadership styles

Authority styles play a significant part in engaging workers inside an organization. Transformational administration, for case, centers on motivating and persuading workers to attain their full potential. As an illustration of the individual met here, able to cite the words of one of the directors: "Our administration cultivates an environment in which representatives feel motivated and bolstered. This fashion energizes development and collaboration and contributes to our competitive advantage. » Another chief here said: "Our administration takes after a transformational fashion that has demonstrated basic in fostering a culture of development and versatility. Our center on rousing and propelling representatives features a coordinate effect on our competitive advantage. This authority approach energizes a shared vision and sense of reason among staff. As a result, our representatives not as it were contribute but are moreover supporters of our organizational goals. This cohesion and commitment interpret into versatility to advertise changes and the capacity to seize rising openings. The transformational administration fashion isn't basically a administration approach, but a driving constrain behind our maintainable competitive advantage."

In this case, the interviewee highlights the significance of a transformational administration fashion in developing a culture of development and flexibility. A center on a shared vision and reason adjusts workers with organizational objectives, contributing to flexibility and the capacity to seize openings. This highlights how leadership styles can speak to a key lever for obtaining and keeping up a competitive advantage.

Training programs

Preparing programs are instrumental in improving the aptitudes and information of workers. Persistent learning and improvement contribute to their strengthening, empowering them to adjust to changing industry flow. Interviewee Knowledge: "Our commitment to progressing preparing guarantees that our workforce remains ahead of industry patterns. Engaged representatives, prepared with the most recent aptitudes, provide us a particular competitive edge." Another interviewee stated that: "Contributing in strong preparing programs has been a linchpin in our methodology for keeping up a competitive advantage. These programs are planned not fair to confer specialized abilities but to instill a culture of flexibility and advancement. Persistent learning is the foundation of our approach, guaranteeing that our workforce is prepared to explore the advancing scene of the managing an account industry. Through focused on preparing activities, we enable workers to grasp unused innovations, remain side by side of administrative changes, and improve customer-centric aptitudes. The result may be a workforce that's not as it were capable but too dexterous, contributing essentially to our supported competitiveness." In this case, the interviewee emphasizes the vital part of preparing programs in cultivating versatility, advancement, and persistent learning. The center on specialized abilities, coupled with a broader social accentuation on remaining side by side of industry changes, exhibits how preparing programs contribute to the bank's capacity to support a competitive edge.

Organizational culture

Organizational culture sets the tone for how workers connected, make choices, and see their parts. A positive and engaging culture can make a conducive environment for human asset strengthening. Interviewee Understanding:

"Our comprehensive culture values differences of thought and energizes workers to voice their thoughts. This sense of having a place upgrades strengthening and eventually our competitive quality."

The moment chief here attested that:

"Our organizational culture is profoundly established in collaboration, deftness, and a commitment to persistent advancement. This social establishment incorporates a significant affect on our capacity to preserve a competitive edge. The accentuation on collaboration breaks down silos and empowers cross-functional advancement. Nimbleness permits us to quickly adjust to advertise changes, guaranteeing we remain ahead of patterns. The culture of ceaseless advancement cultivates an environment where workers are enabled to distinguish and actualize productivity improvements. Inside and out, our organizational culture acts as a catalyst for supported competitiveness, giving the adaptability and advancement required within the energetic keeping money industry." In this case, the interviewee underscores the significance of organizational culture, particularly centering on collaboration, nimbleness, and persistent enhancement. The culture's affect on breaking down silos, adjusting to advertise changes, and cultivating a attitude of nonstop change outlines how organizational culture gets to be a key driver for feasible competitive advantage.

Central phenomenon

In this research, the central phenomenon refers to the main focus or core concept that this study aims to explore and understand. In the context of "A model towards achieving sustainable competitive advantage through human resource empowerment in the banking industry in Iraq," the central phenomenon is the process or mechanism by which human resource empowerment contributes to the attainment of sustainable competitive advantage within the banking sector in Iraq.

Here's a breakdown of the central phenomenon components that had identified are HR Practices, Employee Engagement, Technological Integration, Strategic Alignment, and Employee Well-being.

HR practices

HR practices encompass policies and strategies for effective workforce management. In our research, these practices are pivotal for achieving sustainable competitive advantage through human resource development. For instance:

- **Talent management:** Identifying and nurturing high-potential employees secures a continuous pool of skilled individuals, proving invaluable during organizational growth.
- **Performance management:** Tied to strategic objectives, it fosters a culture of continuous improvement, enhancing individual performance and contributing significantly to overall competitiveness.
- **Agile HR practices:** Embracing flexibility and adaptability ensures swift responses to market changes, technological advancements, and customer needs, providing a distinct competitive advantage. Together, these practices create a well-rounded framework driving sustainable competitive advantage through human resource optimization.
- **Employee engagement:** Employee engagement is a holistic concept that includes commitment, passion, and connection to the organization.

It goes beyond mere job satisfaction and requires emotional investment and a sense of purpose. Engaged employees align their personal goals with the organization's mission and foster innovation, collaboration, and engagement.

The components extracted from the interviews were:

- **Motivation and morale:** Engaged employees provide initiative and positively impact innovation and excellence. Recognition programs, career development, and a positive work culture boost morale and competitiveness.
- **Work-life balance:** Supporting work-life balance increases job satisfaction, reduces turnover costs, and ensures a qualified and knowledgeable workforce.
- **Communication and feedback:** Effective communication and feedback fosters a culture of continuous improvement and aligns efforts with organizational goals. Open channels and robust feedback mechanisms improve collaboration and strategic positioning in the market.

Technological Integration

Technological integration in HR involves seamlessly incorporating advanced tools and systems, utilizing digital solutions to improve HR management. Two key themes emerged:

- **HR technology:** Utilizing digital tools, software, and platforms for streamlined HR functions, including recruitment, employee management, performance tracking, and training. A manager highlighted the efficiency gained in talent acquisition through cutting-edge HR technology, providing a competitive edge in securing top talent faster than industry peers.
- **Digital transformation:** The comprehensive integration of digital technologies across HR, fundamentally altering work processes, improving employee experiences, and fostering innovation. A manager emphasized the transformative impact of AI-driven analytics tools in making data-driven decisions, aligning the workforce with organizational goals, and positioning the company as an industry leader in innovative HR practices.

Strategic alignment

Strategic alignment in HR involves integrating practices with the organization's overall strategic objectives, crucial for sustainable competitive advantage through HR development. Two key themes identified are:

- **Strategic workforce planning:** Proactively identifying and addressing future talent needs to align the workforce with long-term business objectives. A respondent highlighted the impact of strategic workforce planning in investing in employee training programs, positioning the organization ahead of competitors with a prepared workforce.
- **Performance management and goal alignment:** A systematic approach to managing employee performance by aligning individual goals with organizational objectives. A manager emphasized that their performance management system goes beyond evaluations, focusing on clear goal alignment. This approach has resulted in a more cohesive and motivated workforce, creating a competitive advantage in collective performance.

Employee well-being

Employee well-being is integral to sustainable competitive advantage, influencing overall workforce health, satisfaction, and productivity. Two key components identified are:

- **Health and wellness programs:** Initiatives and benefits focused on enhancing both physical and mental well-being among employees. A manager highlighted the impact of comprehensive health and wellness programs, including fitness incentives, mental health support, and regular check-ups. This has fostered a caring culture, resulting in fewer sick days, elevated morale, and a resilient and productive workforce.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Cultivating a workplace culture that values differences and ensures employees from diverse backgrounds feel included. A manager emphasized that their commitment to diversity and inclusion is a cornerstone of their competitive advantage. A diverse team brings varied perspectives, fostering creativity and problem-solving. The emphasis is on creating an inclusive environment where everyone contributes to a stronger and more innovative organization.

Strategies

In this study, strategies emerge as pivotal elements shaping the trajectory towards sustainable competitive advantage through human resource development. These strategies encompass innovative training and development programs, leadership empowerment initiatives, and employee engagement strategies, collectively forming the backbone of organizational success.

Innovative training

The result of data analysis underscores innovative training as pivotal for sustainable competitive advantage, fostering constant up skilling and engagement. The integration of interactive platforms and micro learning reflects a forward-looking strategy in the evolving landscape of the banking industry.

- **Interactive learning platforms:** These platforms, including virtual reality simulations and gamified modules, engage employees actively. A successful example is a virtual banking simulation that enhances decision-making skills through real-world scenarios.
- **Micro learning initiatives:** Targeted, bite-sized learning experiences address specific skill gaps. For instance, brief modules on regulatory updates or technological advancements ensure employees stay informed without overwhelming them.

Leadership empowerment initiatives

Analysis of data underscores the importance of leadership empowerment initiatives in achieving sustainable competitive advantage through human resource development. These initiatives involve empowering leadership training programs and promoting inclusive decision-making processes to cultivate a dynamic and resilient organizational culture. Leadership training programs focus on transformative coaching and mentorship, encouraging leaders to inspire teams through guidance rather than strict directives. Inclusive decision-making involves actively seeking input from diverse team members for more effective and well-rounded strategic choices. Overall, data analysis suggests that by investing in these initiatives, organizations in the Iraqi banking sector can foster a culture where employees feel valued and empowered to contribute to strategic goals, ultimately gaining a competitive edge.

Employee engagement strategies

This study emphasizes the strategic importance of employee engagement strategies in achieving sustainable competitive advantage through human resource development. The focus includes communication and transparency initiatives, as well as recognition and rewards programs, contributing to a thriving and engaged workforce. Communication and transparency efforts, such as regular channels and town hall meetings, enhance trust and connection to organizational objectives. Recognition and rewards programs, acknowledging individual and team achievements, play a crucial role in fostering a positive work environment. The findings highlight that a comprehensive approach to employee engagement is essential for sustainable competitive advantage, positioning

organizations in the Iraqi banking sector for long-term success and resilience in a competitive environment.

Intervening factors

In this study, intervening factors play a critical role in influencing the attainment of sustainable competitive advantage through HR development. Two key components, namely the Talent Attrition Challenge and Resistance to Change, emerged as pivotal aspects shaping the effectiveness of HR strategies.

Talent attrition challenge

Interviewees consistently highlighted talent consumption as a major obstacle to achieving a sustainable competitive advantage through talent development. The study identifies two main themes:

1. High staff turnover and retention issues
2. High instability of workers

High staff turnover and retention issues: High employee turnover poses serious challenges to sustainable competitive advantage and impacts organizational sustainability and the implementation of strategic HR initiatives.

The departure of skilled staff leads to a loss of institutional knowledge and experience, which disrupts the continuity of staff development efforts.

Managers emphasize the importance of implementing retention strategies such as competitive compensation packages and professional development opportunities and understanding the root causes of employee turnover through employee feedback mechanisms.

Difficulty in retaining qualified personnel: The intense competition in the labor market and the lack of opportunities for career growth within organizations make it difficult to retain qualified workers. Skilled professionals are often sought after by competitors, making them difficult to retain despite HR development efforts.

Lack of a clear career path causes loss of talent and disrupts leadership pipeline and succession planning.

This study highlights the need to focus strategically on addressing high staff turnover and retaining a skilled workforce. Organizations can build a sustainable competitive advantage by implementing strategies to support goals, promote a positive work environment and address specific challenges identified by interviewees.

Continuing to develop and create an environment where skilled employees feel valued is critical to long-term success in a competitive environment.

Resistance to change

The theme of resistance to change in the context of Iraq's human resources strategy includes two important aspects: employee resistance to new technologies and technological constraints. Employee resistance often stems from unfamiliarity, fear of workplace changes, and concerns about the learning curve associated with new technologies.

For example, when employees implement human resource management software, they fear a potential job change or increased responsibilities because they are used to traditional methods.

Iraq's technological constraints make effective implementation of HR technologies difficult.

A unique technology environment characterized by infrastructure challenges, limited high-speed Internet access, and potential cyber security issues hinders the seamless integration of digital HR tools.

In some regions, human resource development initiatives are frustrated by the complexity of insecure internet connections and cyber security issues that plague the country's technology efforts.

Contextual factors

Understanding the contextual factors that shape sustainable competitive advantage through HR development is crucial. In the banking industry, contextual elements such as economic conditions, regulatory environment, cultural aspects, and the technological landscape play pivotal roles in influencing HR strategies and their impact on competitiveness.

Economic conditions in Iraq

Economic conditions play a significant role in influencing the banking sector and in influencing the availability of resources, customer behavior and overall financial stability.

Two important topics in this context are market stability and banking efficiency, as well as labor productivity and financial incentives.

In response to economic disruptions, a manager emphasizes an adaptive HR strategy that includes flexible workforce scheduling to accommodate fluctuations in demand. He said that:

"We also focus on training programs to increase the adaptability of our employees in the face of a changing economic environment".

Regulatory environment

In Iraq, the regulatory environment plays a key role in shaping banking operations, compliance and governance, which in turn influences HR policies and practices. Emphasizing the centrality of compliance in human resources initiatives, one of interviewees emphasized that compliance with the law not only ensures legal compliance, but also builds trust among stakeholders.

The general category includes two themes: Legal Compliance and the Impact of Government Policies on HR practices. Alignment of HR policy with regulatory frameworks is essential to reduce risks and maintain competitive advantage in the banking sector.

Cultural aspects

Cultural aspects significantly impact employee behavior, communication norms, and leadership styles, ultimately shaping organizational culture and its influence on competitive advantage. A manager emphasizes the importance of cultural nuances in their HR approach, highlighting the incorporation of cultural sensitivity in leadership training to foster a harmonious work environment. This category encompasses two main themes: Collectivism and Relationship-Oriented Culture, and Traditional Values and Ethical Considerations.

Technological landscape in the banking industry

In the context of the banking industry's technological landscape, HR strategies are influenced by digitization, cybersecurity, and innovation. Another manager notes a shift in HR focus toward digital literacy, introducing training programs to equip employees with essential skills in response to evolving technology. The category includes three main themes: Digitalization and Online Banking Platforms, Cybersecurity Measures and Threats, and Fintech Integration and Innovations. Understanding and adapting to these contextual factors contribute to the formulation of HR strategies that enhance sustainable competitive advantage in the banking industry. Organizations that navigate these nuances strategically position themselves for success.

Consequences

Examining the consequences of sustainable competitive advantage through HR development is essential for understanding the broader impact on organizational success. In the context of the banking Industry, three key consequences are Reputation and Brand Image Enhancement, Employee and Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty, and Financial Performance Improvement.

Reputation and brand image enhancement: A robust HR development strategy plays a crucial role in shaping a positive organizational reputation and enhancing brand image, fostering trust among stakeholders. According to a manager, the commitment to employee empowerment and development has not only improved the internal culture but has also positioned the organization as an employer of choice, reinforcing a brand that values growth and professionalism. This category includes two main themes: Market Positioning and Industry Recognition, and Community Engagement Initiatives.

Employee and customer satisfaction and loyalty: Effective HR development positively influences employee satisfaction, leading to improved customer service and, consequently, increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. Another manager emphasizes the interconnectedness of employee satisfaction and customer experience, citing tailored training and engagement initiatives that empower and motivate employees, translating into enhanced customer service and building strong relationships. This category encompasses three main themes: Personalized Customer Experiences, Engaged and Productive Workforce, and Openness to Change.

Financial performance improvement: Contributing to sustainable competitive advantage, HR development leads to increased productivity, efficiency, and innovation, resulting in improved financial performance. A manager highlights the evident link between HR development and financial performance, noting investments in employees' skills and well-being have led to heightened productivity and innovation, directly impacting the financial bottom line. This category includes two main themes: Financial Stability and Performance, and Revenue Growth. Recognizing these consequences underscores the holistic impact of HR development on the banking industry's overall performance, illustrating that investments in employees yield far-reaching benefits beyond the immediate organizational context.

CONCLUSION

The foundational elements, recognized as antecedents, comprise Leadership Styles, Training Programs, and Organizational Culture. These elements, acting in harmony, lay the groundwork for the central category, the linchpin of the model. First of all there are some antecedents that lead to sustainable competitive advantage in banking Industry. For example Visionary leadership sets the tone for the organization, establishing a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. This leadership approach instills a sense of purpose among employees, aligning their efforts with the strategic goals of the bank. At the other hand he investment in comprehensive training programs forms the bedrock of skill development. These programs are meticulously designed to equip employees with the latest industry knowledge and foster adaptability in a rapidly evolving banking landscape. also, The prevailing organizational culture, shaped by leadership and reinforced through training, becomes the ethos of the bank. A culture of innovation, collaboration, and adaptability becomes ingrained in the employees' mindset.

After this part we attain central phenomenon. The central category, aptly titled "Strategic HR Development," encapsulates the essence of the model. It comprises four critical components: HR Practices, Employee Engagement, Technological Integration, and Strategic Alignment. Talent Management, Performance Management, and Agile HR Practices collectively constitute the practices that form the backbone of HR development. These practices are not isolated but intricately linked, creating a seamless flow in talent cultivation and performance optimization. Recognizing employees as active contributors to the bank's success, Employee Engagement becomes a focal point. Motivation

and Morale, Work-Life Balance, and Communication and Feedback mechanisms synergize to create an engaged and committed workforce. In an era of digital transformation, the integration of technology becomes paramount. HR Technology and Digital Transformation seamlessly intertwine, creating an ecosystem where data-driven decision-making and streamlined processes become the norm. Ensuring that HR initiatives are not in isolation but strategically aligned with organizational goals becomes a cornerstone. Strategic Workforce Planning, Performance Management, and Goal Alignment work cohesively to steer HR efforts toward overarching objectives.

To implement the central category effectively, three strategic interventions come into play: Innovative Training and Development Programs, Leadership Empowerment Initiatives, and Employee Engagement Strategies. Recognizing that learning is a continuous journey, the bank invests in Interactive Learning Platforms and Microlearning Initiatives. These programs ensure employees are not just equipped with current skills but are agile learners, ready for future challenges. Empowering leaders at every level becomes a strategic imperative. Leadership training programs and inclusive decision-making processes create a culture where leadership is not hierarchical but distributed. Recognizing that engaged employees are the backbone of competitiveness, communication and transparency initiatives, along with recognition and rewards programs, become strategic tools to foster commitment and a sense of belonging.

The implementation of strategies is influenced by the context in which the bank operates. Economic conditions, regulatory environment, cultural aspects, and the technological landscape are the backdrop against which strategic HR development unfolds. Economic shifts necessitate agile responses in HR strategies. Adapting to economic conditions ensures the bank's competitiveness even in challenging times. Also, Navigating the regulatory landscape is a strategic necessity. Compliance becomes foundational, ensuring the bank operates within the regulatory framework while maintaining a competitive edge. At the other hand, Understanding and respecting cultural nuances are embedded in HR approaches. Cultural aspects influence employee expectations and behaviors, shaping the success of HR initiatives. Being tech-savvy in HR is not a choice; it's a requirement for staying competitive in the dynamic banking industry. The technological landscape shapes the adoption of HR technologies, influencing the organization's competitiveness.

As the model unfolds, two intervening factors emerge: Talent Attrition Challenge and Resistance to Change. These factors have the potential to limit the effectiveness of HR strategies if not managed strategically. Recognizing that talent attrition is a reality, the bank strategically focuses on retention strategies. Retaining key personnel becomes a strategic move to sustain the competitive edge. Acknowledging resistance to change as a potential hurdle, the bank adopts strategic change management. Navigating resistance becomes an integral part of HR strategy.

The culmination of strategic HR development efforts yields impactful consequences for the banking industry. These consequences affirm the success of the model. These consequences conclude Reputation and Brand Image Enhancement. The bank's commitment to strategic HR development enhances its reputation and brand image. The workforce becomes a testament to the bank's commitment to excellence. Another result is Employee and Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty. Sustained competitive advantage translates into high levels of employee and customer satisfaction. The workforce becomes loyal, and customers trust in the bank's commitment to delivering excellence. And the last one is Financial Performance Improvement. The ultimate consequence of sustained competitive advantage is reflected in financial performance. The strategic alignment of HR development initiatives directly contributes to the bank's financial prosperity.

In conclusion, the narrative of the Sustainable Competitive Advantage Model through HR Development in the banking industry paints a holistic picture. It showcases the intricacies of how antecedents lead to the central category, strategies are implemented, contextual and intervening factors come into play, and the impactful consequences are realized. This model is not just theoretical; it is a dynamic framework that guides the bank's journey toward sustained excellence in the challenging landscape of the banking industry in Iraq.

RESEARCH LIMITATION

While the research has provided valuable insights into achieving sustainable competitive advantage through human resource empowerment in the banking industry, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations:

Sample size and generalizability: The study was conducted with a limited number of participants from the Bank of Baghdad. The findings may not be fully generalizable to other banks or industries, and a larger and more diverse sample could enhance the external validity of the results.

Contextual specificity: The research focused specifically on the banking industry in Iraq. Consequently, the contextual factors identified may not fully capture the complexities of different cultural, economic, or regulatory environments in other regions or industries, limiting the broader applicability of the model.

Subjectivity of interviews: The qualitative nature of the study relied on interviews, which are subject to the perspectives and interpretations of the participants. While efforts were made to ensure reliability through coding and analysis, the inherent subjectivity of qualitative data collection methods should be acknowledged.

These limitations are important considerations for future research and should be taken into account when interpreting and applying the results of the current study.

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