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STRATEGIC RESPONSE AND ITS ROLE IN ENHANCING STRATEGIC SUPERIORITY: A STUDY OF THE KIRKUK CEMENT PLANT

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of strategic response in establishing strategic superiority through the application of a study in the Kirkuk Cement Plant. The research problem was directed towards the level of contribution strategic response gives to strengthening the plant's strategic superiority. The entire employees' population of the Kirkuk Cement Plant was considered as the study population and 90 employees were selected as samples. The study used descriptive-analytical approach and questionnaires were used to gather data with a 5-point likert scale. The data were analyzed using SPSS. The results showed that there was a strong and positive effect of strategic response and its four components (resource fluidity, business process maturity, business responsiveness to the environment, and business proactiveness to the environment) on the strategic superiority at the Kirkuk Cement Plant. Some of the most significant ones include further strengthening of flexible and proactive strategies at all levels, with emphasis on the creation of resources and internal processes which will support sustainable strategic superiority and improve competitive capacity.

Keywords: Strategic Response, Strategic Superiority, Kirkuk Cement Plant.

Introduction

Given the current business landscape of constant change, heavy competition, and economic and technological uncertainty, it's critical for organizations to have flexible and adaptive plans that can help them face challenges and seize opportunities appropriately. Taking this viewpoint, strategic response has become one of the core elements that enable organizations to track external change, identify risks and opportunities, and respond to them in a timely and effective way. In turn, this guarantees organizational continuity and flexibility, an overall enhancement in performance and support to achieve organizational goals. Therefore, strategic response can be seen as a crucial tool which provides organizations with the ability to respond quickly and effectively to new challenges, especially those defined by changes in demand, competition, technology or even unpredictable economic and environmental circumstances.

However, strategic superiority is regarded as one of the main goals of an organization. It defines the capability to convert internal resources and capabilities into a competitive advantage that can be sustained and is reflected in the ability to perform better at both an operational and strategic level. Strategic superiority is gained by implementing innovative processes, products and services, increasing efficiency levels, taking strategic moves ahead of the competition and thus increasing the strength of the organization to sustain growth and continue competing in the dynamic markets.

The aim of the present study is to study the relationship between strategic response and strategic superiority in a practical context (Kirkuk Cement Plant). The industrial market is a fiercely competitive landscape in which being able to pivot quickly to changes in the market and customer demands is crucial, as well as meeting a range of operational and technological challenges. In this study, the strategic orientation of the plant is considered, the effectiveness of which is analyzed in the context of strengthening its competitive advantage; special attention is paid to the role of strategic response as one of the main factors that contribute to adaptability and the perpetual renewal of competitive advantage.

Methods

Previous Studies

Lin et al. [1]

The aim of this study was to analyze the strategic reaction to the Fourth Industrial Revolution from the Chinese car industry and to determine factors that would be essential for the successful implementation of this revolution within the automotive industry. Factors obtained from the questionnaire were analysed using the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) method. The results revealed that the strategic response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution plays an important role in improving the competitiveness of enterprises.

Abdulhadi et al. [2]
The purpose of this study was to analyze the correlation between organizational harmony and strategic response. The study sample was Iraqi service organizations, which were represented by a particular problem that is weakness of strategic response in Iraqi service organizations, which was the basis for the present research. The survey was conducted on the employees of the tourist cities affiliated to the Al-Abbas Holy Shrine with the distribution of 370 questionnaires. The theoretical results revealed that there was a gap in understanding the relationship between the research variables in organizations in general and study samples in particular. The empirical results also showed the positive and significant relationship of research variables.
Kashkool et al. [3]
This study was designed to investigate the effect of rapid strategic response that leads to sustainable competitive advantage through surveying a sample of faculty members at the University of Warith Al-Anbiyaa. The main data collection tool used was a questionnaire which yielded 75 valid responses. The results showed that there is a high correlation between rapid strategic response and the sustainable competitive advantage, especially in the context of the rapid changes occurring in the environmental context of different business sectors in Iraq. One of the main recommendations was that organizations should implement the strategic response model by training their senior-level leaders, to improve their understanding and application of the model, so that they can obtain sustainable competitive advantage and adjust to the continuous environmental changes, which are deemed as the basic foundation of economic development and organizational success.
Mohammed and Al-Mohammadi [4]
This study had two aims: the first was to determine the nature of the relationship and impact of the independent variable (strategic clarity) on the dependent variable (strategic superiority) in Iraqi private banks, while the second was to determine the impact of the independent variable (strategic clarity) on the dependent variable (strategic superiority) in Iraqi private banks. The descriptive-analytical approach was used in the study. The number of research samples consisted of 107 Managers in the position of Managing Director. The main tool used in the collection of data for the practical aspect of the study was a questionnaire. The data was analyzed statistically using SPSS and AMOS V.24. The results showed that there is a high correlation between strategic clarity with strategic superiority. From the results, several recommendations are proposed, the most important being the interrelationships between the dimensions of the research and how they are interrelated positively to achieve strategic superiority through a holistic approach to the research dimensions.
Alali and Hammadi [5]
The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of artificial intelligence as one of the key foundations to gain strategic advantages in companies based on an applied field study at Earthlink Company. A descriptive analytical study method was used and an electronic questionnaire was designed and disseminated to the employees of the Earthlink. A total of 77 employees were used for the study. The findings showed that the adoption of AI positively influenced the company's competitive edge and helped advance their innovation within their business and products. The study suggested that it is necessary to invest more in the technologies of artificial intelligence in the Iraqi big companies to achieve strategic superiority and enhance their competitiveness.
Alwan and Al-Najjar [6]
This study aimed to look at how strategic capabilities relate to strategic superiority as an independent and dependent variable, respectively in the Training and Energy Research Directorate of the Ministry of Electricity. The total population of employees was 240 and a stratified random sample of 148 employees was taken. The descriptive analytical method was used and the questionnaire as the basic data collection tools to realize the research objectives. SPSS was used for data analysis. The study has been able to come up with a few findings, the most important of which was the finding that there is a strong correlation and significant impact of strategic capabilities on strategic superiority in the context studied.
Research Methodology
Research Problem
Industrial organizations currently face significant challenges due to continuous changes in the business environment, including economic fluctuations, technological advancements, and variations in market demand. In light of these changes, organizations must be capable of responding strategically in a rapid and effective manner to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. The Kirkuk Cement Plant is not exempt from these challenges, as difficulties have been observed in aligning operational strategies with rapidly changing environmental conditions. This situation may negatively affect the plant’s overall performance and limit its ability to achieve the desired level of strategic superiority.
To address this issue, the following research questions were formulated:
1. To what extent does the plant's management consider strategic response when developing its strategic plans?
2. What is the level of strategic superiority at the Kirkuk Cement Plant?
3. Does strategic response have an effect on strategic superiority at the Kirkuk Cement Plant?

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of strategic response in enhancing strategic superiority through an applied study at the Kirkuk Cement Plant. Based on this main objective, the following sub-objectives were identified:

1. To analyze the ability of the Kirkuk Cement Plant to respond strategically to environmental and operational changes.
2. To identify the challenges that hinder the implementation of strategic response and strategic superiority requirements within the plant.
3. To measure the level of strategic superiority achieved under the current strategic response practices.
4. To provide practical recommendations for enhancing strategic response in a manner that contributes to achieving sustainable competitive superiority.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be highlighted through the following dimensions:

1. Academic Significance:

This study contributes to enriching the theoretical knowledge concerning the relationship between strategic response and strategic superiority, particularly within the local industrial sector.

2. Practical Significance:

The study provides recommendations that may assist the management of the Kirkuk Cement Plant in improving its strategic and operational processes and enhancing its competitive performance.

3. Strategic Significance:

The study helps develop a clear understanding of how strategic response can be utilized as a tool for enhancing strategic superiority, thereby enabling the plant to adapt to future changes with greater speed and efficiency.

Research Hypotheses

The study is based on one main hypothesis and several sub-hypotheses:

Main Hypothesis (H1):

Strategic response has a significant effect on strategic superiority.

The following sub-hypotheses are derived from the main hypothesis:

1. H1.1: Resource fluidity has a significant effect on strategic superiority.
2. H1.2: Business process maturity has a significant effect on strategic superiority.
3. H1.3: Environmental business responsiveness has a significant effect on strategic superiority.
4. H1.4: Environmental business proactiveness has a significant effect on strategic superiority.

Population and Sample of the Study

The study population consists of all employees of the Kirkuk Cement Plant who occupy administrative and operational positions that influence strategic and operational decision-making within the plant. The study sample comprised 90 employees selected from various professional specializations and administrative and engineering positions to ensure adequate representation of the research population.

Research Method and Instrument

The study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach, as this method allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data from the research population in order to identify the relationship between the study variables and understand the nature of their practical effects within the plant environment.

The primary data collection instrument was a questionnaire designed according to a five-point Likert scale, as follows:

1. Strongly Agree = 5
2. Agree = 4
3. Neutral = 3
4. Disagree = 2
5. Strongly Disagree = 1

The hypothetical mean was set at 3. Table 1 presents the components of the questionnaire and their respective sources for both the dimensions of strategic response and the dimensions of strategic superiority.

Table 1. Components of the Questionnaire and Their Sources

Study Variables	Sub-Dimensions	Number of Items	Source
Strategic Response	Resource Fluidity	5	[2]
	Business Process Maturity	5	[7]
	Business Environmental Responsiveness	5	[8]
	Business Environmental Proactiveness	5	[9]
	Sphere of Influence	5	[10]
Strategic Superiority	Competitive Pressure	5	[10]
	Competitive Configuration	5	[5]

Reliability and Correlation Measurement

The results of Table 2 indicate that all dimensions of the strategic response and strategic superiority variables exhibit a good level of internal consistency, as Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the acceptable threshold of (0.70). This reflects the consistency and reliability of the questionnaire in measuring each dimension.

Furthermore, the correlation coefficients show that the items are well associated with the underlying variables, as they recorded acceptable values that reflect the ability of the items to represent the theoretical construct of each variable.

Overall, the results demonstrate good reliability of the questionnaire, with the possibility of further developing some dimensions to enhance the accuracy of variable measurement.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Results and Correlation Relationships Between the Overall and Sub-Variables of the Study

Study Variables	Sub-Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	Correlation Coefficient
Strategic Response	Resource Fluidity	0.81	0.71
	Business Process Maturity	0.79	0.69
	Business Environmental Responsiveness	0.77	0.66
	Business Environmental Proactiveness	0.80	0.70
	Sphere of Influence	0.78	0.68
Strategic Superiority	Competitive Pressure	0.76	0.67
	Competitive Configuration	0.80	0.70

Theoretical Framework

Strategic Response

Developed by Hitt and Hoskisson [11], strategic response refers to the organization's capacity to: a) detect external environmental changes (economic, technical, social, and political); b) anticipate changes; and c) adapt its strategies and operation processes accordingly, to maintain continuity and competitive advantage. Other key components of this response are the speed of decision-making, being flexible in the organization, and constantly keeping an eye on opportunities and threats.

In line with this, Mikalef and Krogstie [12] equate strategic response to the dynamic capability that helps the organization quickly react to the changes in the environment and take advantage of new opportunities or avoid potential risks, which reflects strategic agility. This capability encompasses the ability to re-configure resources, realign the priorities and turn out innovations rapidly that add value to the firm's performance.

It has also been described by Abdulhadi et al. [2] as a group of decisions and procedures that set out and execute plans to reach the goals of the organization. This requires changes in strategic behaviour of the organization to ensure success when influencing future environmental conditions. Therefore, it is a response to the environmental change that is currently occurring or is expected to occur.

Results and Discussion

Strategic response consists of the following key dimensions:

1. Resource Fluidity

Resource fluidity is the capacity of the organisation to reallocate its resources – either it is resources which are available or resources which are to be mobilised to meet the organizational goals, thereby taking advantage of opportunities in the marketplace and lowering costs and raising profits. It requires the right resources to be put in place and re-arranged in time, and systems within the company to be re-organised in accordance with their internal capacity and external environment. It is the capacity of the organization to reconfigure internal processes to direct resources across business units; the ability to reallocate and reshape available resources from one area to another, depending on the needs of organizational subsystems [2].

2. Business Process Maturity

Business process maturity is the level of development, organization and integration of internal processes that enable process measurability, process continuous improvement, and process support of the strategic directions. Performance is more easily controlled and variability reduced, operational efficiency more easily achieved, and reaction to environmental changes more easily accomplished, in organizations that are more process mature. According to Gartner reports, maturity is directly related to organizational transformation capabilities and operational success [13]. Likewise, McKinsey & Company [7] reports that companies with well-established processes have greater productivity and more sustainable performance results than others.

3. Business Environmental Responsiveness

Business environmental responsiveness is the capacity of the business to sense the external business environment, identify the early signs of change and make strategic, structural and decision changes to reflect the dynamics of the environment. This helps to make the system more flexible, decreases the risk and helps to take advantage of opportunities. It is believed to be a major measure of strategic success because it has been linked to resource flexibility and fast decision making, as well as to future direction clarity. An organization's capacity to perform sustainably in dynamic environments is enhanced when they build mechanisms that allow them to be responsive to its environment [8].

4. Business Environmental Proactiveness

Business environmental proactiveness is the behavior of the organization of expecting and forecasting the changes of the environment before the environment changes or before the early signs and symptoms are detected by the organization. Business organizations have adopted proactive practices, one of which is to adopt a savings-oriented strategy designed to improve readiness to address potential crises. Precautionary measures include reducing or postponing high-risk investments as well as adopting flexible operational models to help with liquidity and lower exposure to potential shocks from the future. In this way, they also do a lot to increase the efficiency of the operation, free up working capital, and delay unnecessary spending, as a result of being able to prepare in advance for environmental changes that are to come [9].

Strategic Superiority

Strategic superiority, said Barney and Arikan (2023, p. 50), is the capacity of the organization to develop and execute a system of resources and capabilities that allows it to provide superior value to customers and stakeholders, and make it hard for foreign companies to duplicate its strategic advantage to sustain it in a dynamic and evolving competitive landscape. This means constant innovation, excellence in products or services and strategy and operations integration, all of which are manifested in market.

Teece [14] sees strategic superiority as an ability to "sense and respond," or "sense and reshape" resources and strategies, to adapt quickly to market and technology shifts. Therefore superiority is not just a matter of having an existing advantage, but of continually increasing that advantage over others, in a more effective way.

The concept of strategic superiority is defined by Alali and Hammadi (2025, p. 417) as the ability to convert knowledge, experience and insight into meaningful action that generates value for the organization. The strategic success is due to different processes of strategy formulation, planning and implementation, in which the companies come up with innovative and creative ideas that are carried out in such a way that it creates a competitive advantage for the company and it does not give its competitors any advantages.

Strategic superiority includes the following key dimensions:

1. Sphere of Influence

Sphere of influence is the whole portfolio of an organization's products in the geographic area in which it operates, and the development of the future-oriented vision that gives them strategic superiority by allocating resources toward the product portfolio. This includes the competition challenges and managing the competitive pressures from the competition [10].

2. Competitive Pressure

The intensity of competition in the industry in which firms compete is referred to as competitive pressure. In situations of heavy competition, organizations are more likely to use innovation.

In these settings, companies can invest in new products or services that meet market demand or react to market changes and competition in a volatile and changing market [10].

3. Competitive Configuration

The process of developing and building up competitive advantage is rooted in the competitive configuration. It is frequently seen as the ability to combine the organization's resources and skills in a manner that generates added value and creates competencies that it is hard for other organizations to replicate. Competitive configuration is the starting point for the spheres of influence for strategic advantage over competitors. The goal of superior competitive configuration is to develop a highly skilled and motivated staff that can work with the customer, and this means that organizations should implement modern management practices to ensure their efficiency and the optimization of resources [5].

The relationship between Strategic Response and Strategic Superiority as seen as ideas in the field of Intellectuality.Strategic Response Strategic Superiority Relationship as an idea in the field of Intellectuality.

Strategic response and strategic superiority are regarded as the key elements of organizational success in dynamic business settings. Strategic response describes how well the organization identifies signals of opportunities and threats, how well it analyzes the threats and opportunities, and how well it adapts and adjusts the organization's strategy, structure, and processes to ensure strategic adaptation and continuity [11].

In contrast, strategic superiority is the capacity to develop more and lasting value with the resources and capabilities of the organization in ways that are hard for other organizations to replicate. It involves innovation, operational efficiency and a continuous evolution of competitive advantage [15], [14].

In this context the intellectual connection between two dimensions appears in that strategic response is seen as a prerequisite for strategic superiority. An organization is not able to maintain or sustainably develop its competitive advantage without being able to adapt to the changes in the environment and anticipate opportunities and threats.

Recent research has verified that the combination of rapid response mechanisms and building dynamic capabilities and effective exploitation of emerging opportunities significantly boosts performance and sustainability in volatile markets [12].

Field Framework

Analysis of the Overall Index Results for Strategic Response Dimensions

As presented in Table 3, the study sample had a fairly high consensus on the dimensions of strategic response. The overall agreement ratio obtained was around (0.712) and the general responsiveness rate obtained was (0.758). This was found to have a positive perception amongst the respondents with the overall mean value of (3.79) and a standard deviation of (1.01).

However, the gap ratio was achieved at (0.242), and still has potential for enhancement of the plant's readiness for strategic response to meet the challenges of the industrial environment. The results also demonstrate that (0.137) were neutral responses and (0.15) disagreed. This means that there was an acceptable level of variation amongst the respondents, as can be seen in the Standard Deviation value, and there were moderate differences in perception of the strategic dimensions for responding.

On the sub-dimensions level, the Business Environmental Proactiveness had the highest response rate at (0.78), high mean score at (3.90) and the lowest gap ratio at (0.22). This is a manifestation of the plant's proactive nature, making it aware of the environment and take steps to respond to it beforehand, which is one of the orientations of management's strategic foresight.

The second highest mean score of (3.80) with a response rate of (0.76) and a relatively low gap ratio of (0.24) was Resource Fluidity. This reflects some degree of effectiveness in the management and allocation of resources to facilitate a quick response to changes in operations.

In Business Process Maturity, the response rate was (0.75), the mean score was (3.75) and the gap ratio was (0.25) which was relatively good. This indicates that organizational processes are well structured and clear, but still need improvements to increase flexibility of the organization in operation.

Meanwhile, the smallest response rate was obtained on the dimension of Business Environmental Responsiveness (0.74) and the mean score was also the lowest (3.70) but the gap ratio was the highest (0.26). This indicates a relative deficiency in the interaction speed of the plant with environmental and competitive changes, thus requiring enhancing of environmental monitoring mechanisms, development of information systems and strategic capabilities for timely and effective response.

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Table 3. Overall Index Results of Strategic Response Dimensions

Strategic Responsiveness Dimensions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Std. Dev	Response Rate	Gap Rate
Resource Fluidity	0.30	0.40	0.15	0.10	0.05	3.80	1.02	0.76	0.24
Business Process Maturity	0.25	0.45	0.15	0.10	0.05	3.75	0.999	0.75	0.25
Business Response to Environment	0.20	0.50	0.15	0.10	0.05	3.70	1.00	0.74	0.26
Business Proactiveness Environment	0.35	0.40	0.10	0.10	0.05	3.90	1.04	0.78	0.22
Average	0.275	0.437	0.137	0.10	0.05	**3.79**	**1.01**	**0.758**	**0.242**
Total	**0.712**		**0.137**	**0.15**					

The gap percentages in each dimension of strategic response as presented in Table 3 are to be interpreted as shown in Figure 1. The results reveal that Business Environmental Responsiveness dimension has the largest gap with (0.26), making it the most needed to be improved and developed among the other dimensions.

Then comes the Business Process Maturity dimension with a gap of (0.25) and then the Resource Fluidity dimension with a gap of (0.24). These are close values which show a moderate level of deficiency that needs organizational and managerial interventions.

The gap value was the lowest for the Business Environmental Proactiveness dimension, which was (0.22), indicating that the performance and alignment were relatively good.

The results generally show a narrowing of gap levels for all dimensions. Priority improvement should be directed primarily to filling the gap and maximizing the impact on the environment by reinforcing the ability of the organization to respond to changes in the environment.

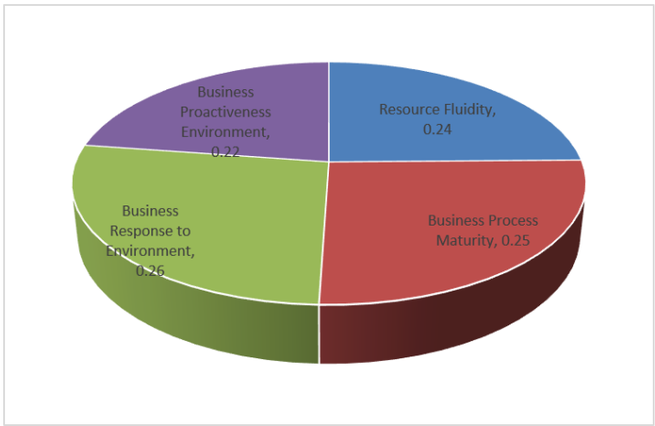

Figure 1. Gap ratio for strategic response dimensions

Analysis of the Overall Index Results for Strategic Superiority Dimensions

The results in Table 4 have shown that the study sample had in general a good agreement about the dimensions of strategic superiority. The overall agreement rate was about (0.616) and an overall response rate of (0.658) was recorded. This was confirmed by a mean response of (3.69) with a standard deviation of (1.10) which indicates a positive attitude amongst the respondents towards the level of strategic advantage that their plant had over the competitors.

For this reason, the gap ratio for the competitive superiority elements and the consolidation of the plant's position in the market has yet to be improved, as it reached (0.342). The results also indicate that (0.133) obtained neutral responses, and (0.25) obtained disagreeing responses. This suggests a moderate difference in respondents' views, which is reflected in the standard deviation and shows the differences in the assessment of the degree of achievement of strategic superiority.

Competitive Configuration was the highest among the sub-dimensions in terms of response rate (0.674) with highest mean score (3.77) and lowest gap ratio (0.326). It reflects the relatively strong industrial competitive foundations of the plant, in terms of strategic structure and organizational capabilities, which help the plant to achieve a higher level of relative distinction in its industrial environment.

Sphere of Influence was second with a gap ratio of (0.344), a mean score of (3.68), and a response rate of (0.656). This means that the plant has moderate market influence, either in terms of market shares or relationship with stakeholders.
Finally, Competitive Pressure had the lowest mean score (3.62) and the lowest response rate (0.644), but the highest gap ratio (0.356) among the dimensions. The competitive environment is a relative challenge in the plant, either through a growing competitive environment or an increase in the demands of the market. This, in turn, requires strengthening strategic flexibility, optimizing operational efficiency and implementing more competitive strategies that are innovative in nature to meet the competitive pressures.

Table 4. Overall Index Results of Strategic Superiority Dimensions

Strategic Superiority Dimensions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Sphere of Influence	0.28	0.32	0.15	0.15	0.10	3.68	1.1	
Competitive Pressure	0.22	0.38	0.15	0.20	0.05	3.62	1.0	
Competitive Configuration		0.32	0.33	0.10	0.13	0.12	3.77	1.13	0.67
Average		0.273	0.343	0.133	0.16	0.09	**3.69**	**1.10**	**0.65**
Total		**0.616**		**0.133**	**0.25**				

The gap ratio obtained for each dimension of strategic superiority is presented in Figure 2 and it shows that the maximum gap was obtained in the Competitive Pressure dimension of (0.356). This indicates that it's the most vulnerable toward intervention and development to become competitive and fit the market challenges.
The Sphere of Influence dimension is followed by (0.344) which is at a fairly high level and indicates that the organization's capacity to extend its Sphere of Influence and develop its strategic presence needs to be strengthened.
The Competitive Configuration dimension had the smallest gap with a value of (0.326), which is relatively the best among the three dimensions, but it has a gap that will need to be addressed.
Overall, a convergence is seen in gap values in all dimensions. But, the main thrust of improvement should be on the reduction of the gap of Competitive Pressure because it is the most influential dimension to secure strategic superiority.

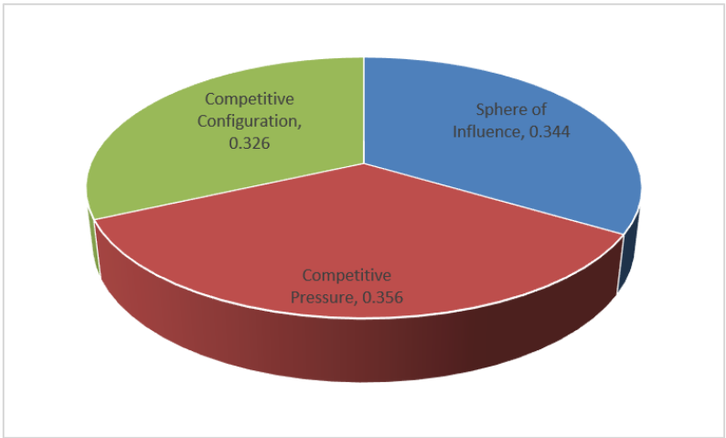

Figure 2. shows the gap ratio for the dimensions of strategic superiority.

General Analysis of Study Variables
The mean values of the overall results in Table 5 show that the level of strategic response and strategic superiority in the Kirkuk Cement Plant is clearly positive.
The highest level of agreement was for strategic response (0.712), and the mean value was (3.79) for this response, with a response rate of (0.758). This indicates that the respondents have a positive view on how fast and responsive the plant was to changes in their environment and operations. A gap of (0.242) indicates however that there is room for improvement.
A relatively low level of agreement was observed for strategic superiority at (0.616), mean (3.69) and a response rate of (0.658). This is indicative of the fact that the plant has a good degree of competitive superiority, but not as strong as its strategic response capacity. (0.342) shows an opportunity to address challenges in order to improve its competitive strength.

Taken together, the overall degree of agreement from the results of the studied variables is (0.664), the mean score is (3.75), the degree of response is (0.708) and the gap is (0.292). The results show overall good performance of the plant in both strategic response and strategic superiority as well as areas for development and increased linkage between the two to enhance both operational and strategic results.

Table 5. Overall Results of the Study Variables

Overall results of the study variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Mean	Std. Dev	Response Rate	Gap Rate
Strategic Responsiveness	0.712	0.137	0.15	3.79	1.01	0.758	0.242
Strategic Superiority	0.616	0.133	0.25	3.69	1.10	0.658	0.342
Average	**0.664**	**0.135**	**0.2**	**3.75**	**1.055**	**0.708**	**0.292**

Hypotheses Testing

Testing the Main Hypothesis (H1)

The findings presented in Table 6 showed that strategic response has significant positive effect on strategic superiority with its path coefficient (β) equal to 0.57. The result is that for every one-unit boost of strategic response, strategic superiority increases by 57%. The model also has an explained variance (R^2) of 0.45 which shows that 45% of the variance in strategic superiority is explained by strategic response.

Additionally, the F-value is 86.5 and the significance level (P = 0.000) indicate that this relationship is statistically significant. Thus, the main hypothesis (H1) is accepted, which suggests that strategic response is a key element in improving strategic superiority.

Testing the First Sub-Hypothesis (H1.1)

The results indicate that resource fluidity has a positive relationship with strategic superiority and the value of the coefficient (β) is 0.59. This suggests that a one unit improvement (increase) in resource fluidity results in a 59% improvement in strategic superiority. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.48, indicating that 48% of the variation in strategic superiority is explained by resource fluidity.

The F-value for the relationship is 81.7 and the significance level (P = 0.000) indicates that the relationship is statistically significant. Thus, the Hypothesis H1.1 is accepted and it is established that flexing resources and allocating them efficiently improves strategic competitiveness.

Testing the Second Sub-Hypothesis (H1.2)

The results show that business process maturity has a positive impact on strategic superiority with a coefficient (β) of 0.52. This shows that the strategic superiority increases by 52% when the process maturity is increased by one unit. The R^2 value of 0.40 shows that 40% of the variation is explained by this dimension.

The F value is 80.9 and significance level (P = 0.000), the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis H1.2 is accepted, and the development of organizational processes is a factor related to strategic excellence.

To test the Third Sub-Hypothesis (H1.3)

The results indicate that the business environmental responsiveness has positive impact on strategic superiority with a coefficient (β) of 0.49. That is, responsiveness goes up by 1 unit, and strategic superiority goes up by 49%. The value of R^2 is 0.34 which means that 34% of the variation is explained by this dimension.

The F value is 79.4, the significance level is P = 0.000 thus the relationship is statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis H1.3 is confirmed and the necessity of quick adaptation to the environment to gain strategic advantage is noted.

Testing the fourth sub-hypothesis (H1.4)

According to the results obtained, the business environmental proactiveness has a positive effect on strategic superiority, namely 0.51 (coefficient β). This means that an increase in proactiveness of 1 unit is associated with a 51% increase in strategic superiority. This dimension has an R^2 value of 0.39, indicating that it accounts for 39% of the variation.

The relationship is statistically significant based on the F value of 77.2 and significance level (P value = 0.000). Therefore, the following hypothesis H1.4 is accepted: "Adopting a proactive approach is one of the factors to enhance competitiveness and strategic superiority.

Table 6. Results of the Impact Relationship Between Strategic Response and Its Dimensions on Strategic Superiority

Study variables	Dependent variable: Strategic superiority				
Independent Variable	**Hypothesis**	**β**	**R^2**	**F**	**P-value**
Strategic Responsiveness	H1	0.57	0.45	86.5	0.000
Resource Fluidity	H1.1	0.59	0.48	81.7	0.000
Business Process Maturity	H1.2	0.52	0.40	80.9	0.000
Business Response to Environment	H1.3	0.49	0.34	79.4	0.000
Business Proactiveness toward Environment	H1.4	0.51	0.39	77.2	0.000

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

1. The findings of the study showed that the strategic response at the Kirkuk cement plant is in the middle level, which shows that the respondents had a positive perception of the importance of applying strategic response to strengthen the ability of the cement plant to cope with environmental and competitive changes, but their perception is still in the middle level, which means there is room for improvement.
2. In the sub-dimensions of strategic response, it was discovered that the most prominent dimension is business environmental proactiveness, which means that the plant is able to anticipate the changes and prepare to meet them in advance. On the other hand, the responsiveness of businesses to environmental changes has been relatively low in terms of how quickly they interact with environmental and competitive changes, and this requires improving monitoring systems and strategic decision-making processes.
3. Gap analysis results show that there is a relative lack of strategic response within the organization, among others related to the handling of environmental changes, process maturity and flexible resources. This indicates some deviation from actual performance and the desired level, but relatively strong was the proactive orientation. However, there is still a gap that needs to be closed to better integrate the strategic response dimensions in order to increase preparedness.
4. The findings indicate that the strategic superiority level of the Kirkuk Cement Plant is relatively good as it shows that the plant has a positive perception about it in the eyes of the respondents and it has the ability to gain a competitive advantage. A gap, however, is obvious, suggesting that performance still has some way to go, and that additional work is needed to build on strategic assets and further solidify the plant's market position.
5. Competitive configuration was the first strategic superiority dimension, suggesting that there are organizational and strategic resources available to support relative superiority. Sphere of influence was second, showing a level two capability to have an impact on markets. In contrast, competitive pressure came in last, pointing to competitive pressures that can be mitigated through enhancing strategic flexibility and improving operational efficiencies.
6. Gap ratios show that there are clear gaps in strategic superiority, mainly in reacting to competitive pressure and not too much strategic influence, thus showing that the overall competitiveness is relative weak. While competitive configuration is the relatively best performing dimension, it is clear that the gap persists, and that integrated strategic efforts are needed to clamp down these gaps and establish sustainable strategic superiority.
7. Overall results show that the Kirkuk Cement Plant has a generally good performance in Strategic Response and Strategic Superiority. It demonstrates a capacity to react rapidly and proactively to changing environmental and competitive conditions but has room for improvement, especially in terms of further developing competitive advantage and consolidating its market position.
8. The hypothesis testing results showed that strategic response and its four sub-dimensions (resource fluidity, business process maturity, business environmental responsiveness, business environmental proactiveness) have a strong positive effect on strategic superiority of the Kirkuk cement plant. These dimensions account for a large amount of strategic superiority and the competitive capability of the plant and show that flexible and proactive approaches are a basic component of the improvement of strategic excellence.

Recommendations

1. The plant is recommended to strengthen strategic response programs by formulating flexible policies that can facilitate adaptive actions to changes in environmental and competitive factors
2.

3. with particular attention to the reduction of the performance gap by strengthening planning and monitoring processes.
4. The plant should strengthen environmental monitoring systems and strengthen environmental information collection and strategic decision making processes to be able to respond to environmental change and competition in time and use proactive orientation effectively.
5. Strategic plans should be formulated to further strengthen the elements of competitive superiority: innovation in operations and production, product quality improvement, market share expansion, etc., that will improve the market position of the plant.
6. The solution to 4 is suggested to be strengthening the Competitive Configuration and increasing the Sphere of Influence (SOI) with the goal of enhancing production efficiency and operational flexibility, and finding innovative solutions to overcome competitive pressures.
7. The integrated developmental programs are recommended to link strategic response with competitive superiority, to consolidate the market position of the plant and to make it more adaptive and responsive to challenges.
8. The plant should keep on applying flexible and proactive measures at all levels, especially on building up own resources and process to achieve sustainable strategic premium and to strengthen its competitiveness.

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