**University of Reading**

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS TO THE GOVERNANCE PROCESS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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# Declaration

"I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all the material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged."


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# Abstract

This qualitative research was undertaken through a case study to explore the contribution of council members of King Saud University (KSU) to their institutional strategy. It is the first study to consider the impact of governing body members of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. The study involved conducting 26 elite interviews with KSU council members and collecting 9 relevant documents. Through thematic analysis, the study elucidated how board members fulfill their responsibilities in alignment with KSU's strategic plan. Firstly, board members were identified as holding official positions that require role-based contribution and accountability. Secondly, the effective contribution of board members was facilitated by the use of technology through the KSU's board portal *Majales*. Thirdly, the engagement of KSU council members at various decision-making levels, including the college council or equivalent level, in addition to the university council level, was found to positively influence the institutional strategy. Fourthly, the crucial role of the KSU president in enhancing collaborative efforts between the board and the institution to achieve strategic objectives was highlighted. Lastly, the efforts of KSU council members in developing new regulations and enforcing implementation compliance were essential in reflecting their contribution to realizing the objectives of KSU's strategic plan.

The study concludes by proposing a model that outlines the process through which board members contribute to their institutional strategy. The model emphasizes the importance of employing a distributed system of specialized experts in their respective roles to make an effective contribution. Additionally, it underscores the involvement of board directors in discussions at multiple levels within the institution contributing to the improvement of decision-making processes across the governance system. Furthermore, the model not only advances the understanding of governance and strategic dynamics within KSU but also provides valuable insights with broader applicability to higher education institutions.

# Acknowledgements

I have come to realize that finishing the PhD is not an endpoint but rather the starting point of a continuous journey characterized by discipline, hard work, and determination. This thesis could not have been successfully completed without the support of many people, which I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude for their help.

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **KSU** | King Saud University |
| **CEO** | Chief Executive Officer |
| **CFO** | Chief Financial Officer |
| **COO** | Chief Operating Officer |
| **NED** | Non-Executive Director |
| **CSR** | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| **NPM** | New Public Management |
| **RBV** | Resource-Based View |
| **AGB** | Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges |
| **SCGR** | Saudi Corporate Governance Regulation |
| **CEDA** | Council of Economic and Development Affairs |
| **CBA** | College of Business Administration |
| **KAI** | King Abdullah Institute for Research and Consulting Studies |

# Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

This chapter introduces the thesis that seeks to explore how board directors contribute to their organization's strategy within the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this thesis is to study the case of King Saud University (KSU).

 The chapter begins by discussing the rational of the study which consists of personal, theoretical, and practical perspectives that have driven the conduct of this research. It is followed by presenting the scope of the study, including the key question that this research intends to address. The subsequent sections introduce the aims and objectives of the study. The chapter continues by providing a brief explanation of the main contributions of this thesis to literature, theory, and practice. Lastly, the outline of the thesis structure is provided at the end of the chapter.

## 1.2 Rationale of the study

The governing body (boards, councils, or equivalent) of higher education institutions is defined as the board of directors (Zald, 1969). The board of directors is a crucial factor in determining the strategic direction of organizations in both private and public sectors (Garcia-Lacalle et al., 2023; McLeod, 2020). This puts high emphasis on the role of board directors in successfully leading their organizations. Thus, this study concentrates on the role of KSU's council members in relation to the strategy of their institution.

The rationale for conducting this study is motivated from personal, theoretical, and practical perspectives.  From a personal standpoint, I work as a faculty member at KSU in Saudi Arabia. It is my ambition to know how strategic decisions are developed and delivered in higher education institutions. This requires considering the internal work of the board of directors of these institutions as the place where the most important decisions originate. Therefore, it is

essential to study the efforts of the university's leaders towards the organizational strategy. This includes the university's president, vice presidents and deans since they are members of the university board.

From a theoretical perspective, the involvement of board directors in strategy has not yet been fully addressed. Previous studies have highlighted various reasons for this. For instance, most of the previous studies rely on a single theoretical perspective of corporate governance (e.g., agency theory) to analyze the strategic role of board directors. The restrictions on access to the board of directors are a major reason why this topic is still unfulfilled.

Another theoretical perspective is strategic management, which is a concept that has multiple dimensions and contains different stages involving formulation, implementation, and evaluation. This makes it difficult to come up with a specific definition of the strategic role of board directors. That is why most strategic management studies have focused on the formulation stage, while the implementation and evaluation of these strategies have been neglected.

In addition, the private sector has been the main focus of scholars and researchers on the board of directors. There was a lack of attention given to the public sector and how the board of directors operates in public institutions. In particular, the number of studies conducted on the board of directors at higher education institutions is still minimal. Moreover, the majority of previous studies and research on corporate governance and strategic management have been conducted in Western countries. Few empirical studies that have been carried out in the Middle East, and even fewer that concentrate specifically on the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia.

From a practical standpoint, examining the efforts of the governing body members within a higher education institution as part of the organization's strategy allows for finding an effective approach to the formulation and implementation of its strategic objectives. In particular,

analyzing the tasks and efforts that board members perform to exercise their responsibility towards their organization's strategy enables to gain a better understanding of the proper process for making strategic decisions and applying them in higher education institutions. Lastly, this study offers valuable insights that could improve the practice of the internal functions of the board of higher education institutions through the analysis of the manner in which board meetings are organized, the strategic decisions made by the board, and the involvement of board directors on the board's strategic agenda.

## 1.3 Scope of the study

The scope of the study is board directors of a higher education institution in the context of Saudi Arabia. This research focuses specifically on the role of council members in strategy within the context of King Saud University. After a thorough review of related literature, the main question of this case study is: *How do council members of King Saud University contribute to their institutional strategy?*

## 1.4 Aims of the study

The aim of this study is *to explore the nature in which council members of King Saud University exercise their responsibility in relation to their institution's strategy.* In addition, this study aims to fill a number of knowledge gaps regarding the strategic role of board directors, particularly in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia. This study seeks to determine the internal functions of the board and how the directors make effective participation as well as the involvement of board directors in making strategic decisions of the institution. The aim of this study is also to find out how board directors ensure that the institution's performance is consistent with its strategic plan. Lastly, one more aim of this study is to determine the influence of board leadership on the institution's performance towards its strategic objectives.

## 1.5 Objectives of the study

- To explore the manner in which board directors exercise the duties that are associated with their roles as part of the institution's strategy.

- To determine the extent to which board directors are involved in making institutional strategic decisions.

- To explore the approach in which board directors utilize the organization's resources to implement the institutional strategy.

- To identify the extent to which board directors ensure that implementation is performed in accordance with the organizational strategic objectives.

- To propose a model that outlines the contribution of board directors to their institutional strategy.

## 1.6 Contributions of the study

There has been a lack of in-depth research on the board of directors at higher educational institutions, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the absence of research to determine the influence of board directors on strategy in these institutions. This study has made three pivotal contributions to address this gap.

### 1.6.1 Contributions to literature

This study is the first empirical study to provide in-depth analysis of the board governing of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. The majority of studies on higher education governance in Saudi Arabia are theoretical studies that focus on the governance mechanisms and dynamics of the higher education sector (e.g., Al-Eisa & Smith 2013; Lebeau & Alruwaili, 2022), or offering recommendations for performance with respect to Saudi Vision 2030 (e.g., Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020; Asel, 2020). This study makes a significant contribution to the

literature by proposing a model that offers a comprehensive explanation of how the board directors of KSU contribute to their institutional strategy (see **Section 5.7**).

In addition, this is the first study that concentrates on the board directors within the context of higher education sector in Saudi Arabia. This qualitative study was conducted by interviewing the members of the governing body of a higher education institution through elite interviews. It is the first research to study the impact of university council members on their institutional strategy in the higher education field in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the outcomes of this study will make a major contribution to Saudi researchers in this field.

## 1.6.2 Contributions to theory

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of the application of role theory by exploring the strategic role of board directors within the context of a higher education institution in Saudi Arabia. The theory is found to be inadequate in considering the nature of the strategic role of members of a university council in relation to their institutional strategy. Therefore, this requires repositioning the theory to accommodate the differences in the results of this study. The following are the specific unique findings of this study that determine the strategic roles of board members within the context of KSU.

This study identifies that the strategic role of board directors is principally associated with their official positions within the institution, as discussed in **Section 5.2**. This was observed through the authorities and obligations that a member of the council is held accountable to perform as a president, vice president, dean of supporting deanship, or dean of college. This study also found that board directors carry out their strategic role by engaging at various levels in the decision-making process of strategy across the institution (see **Section 5.4**). Furthermore, the board directors' commitment to developing regulations and implementing compliance to follow the strategic objectives as planned demonstrates their strategic role (see **Section 5.6**).

As discussed in **Section 5.5**, this study contributes to role theory by providing insights into the role of board leadership. It finds that the president of the institution plays a pivotal role in the strategy of the institution. By taking on the roles of CEO and chair of the board, the university president enables effective performance of both the board and the institution, particularly, in terms of making strategic decisions and facilitating operations to comply with the institution's strategic plan.

Furthermore, this study finds that adopting technology in the boardroom allows board directors to effectively perform their strategic roles. It identifies technology that benefits the effective participation of board members during and before board meetings, originating board operations and agendas, and restoring the board documentation. This enables the board members to fully participate in the board agendas and involves making strategic decisions effectively. Thus, the board portal is vital for board members to fulfil their strategic roles successfully (see **Section 5.3**).

Based on the analysis of this case study, it was found that role theory needs to be extended to gain more understanding of the strategic role of board directors within the context of the study. Thus, this study contributes to role theory by adding insights to the strategic role of board directors, as it focuses on determining the manner in which the board directors contribute to the strategy in their institution.

## 1.6.3 Contributions to practice

This is the first study to be conducted in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector, and it provides valuable insights not only into the mechanisms of the university governing body, but also into the functions of the board and the approach in which board directors exercise their duties in relation to the strategic plan of the university. This study will make a significant contribution to identifying methods that can be used by the board members to successfully carry out the organization's strategy.

Furthermore, the findings of this study shed light on approaches that board members can use to ensure the success of their organization's performance plan. In addition, the findings of this study indicate that the use of technology to facilitate board operations and activities can be a factor to increase the effectiveness of board functions. In summary, this study outlines effective practices that board directors can apply to fulfil their responsibility of institutional strategy within the context of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia.

## 1.7 Structure of the thesis

**Table 1 Structure of the thesis**

| Chapters | Contents |
|---|---|
| Chapter 1 | Introduction |
| Chapter 2 | Literature Review |
| Chapter 3 | Research Methodology |
| Chapter 4 | Analysis |
| Chapter 5 | Discussion |
| Chapter 6 | Conclusion |

The structure of this thesis is divided into six chapters, as depicted in **Table 1**. This chapter is intended to present an introduction of the study. This includes providing a brief overview of the background and information about the rational reasons for conducting the study. Additionally, it offers a summary of the study's scope, aims, and objectives. The chapter also outlines the main contributions of this study to the field.

Chapter two provides a critical review of current literature that is relevant to the study. Through the chapter, the concept of the board of directors is thoroughly reviewed, with attention to its functions and roles of board directors. It also offers a comprehensive analysis of the main

theories of corporate governance and governance in the public sector, specifically in higher education. Furthermore, the chapter contains in-depth reviews of the existing literature on strategy and various schools of strategic management. The chapter concludes by presenting the gaps that the study aims to fill, the key questions that the study intends to address, and the theoretical framework that the study is based on.

Chapter three consists of detailed information that justifies the method used to conduct the study. It outlines the study's position from the standpoint of research philosophy, with a focus on ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives. The chapter also provides a thorough discussion on the inquiry logic and research design of the study. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the study's quality and the ethical concerns associated with conducting it. The pilot study's details and findings are presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter four contains in-depth analysis of the findings of the study. It consists of an analysis of interview transcripts and a documented analysis that includes collected documents related to the research inquiry. The chapter defines the scope of the analysis of the study and the KSU strategic plan document. The entire chapter provides a detailed explanation of the themes that emerged from the findings. It presents the analysis process and how themes are developed from codes, categories, and then to a theme.

Chapter five presents detailed discussions on the study's findings. Each theme of the findings is discussed in the chapter along with relevant literature. This entails providing a comparison of the study's findings with various perspectives from previous studies. This chapter identifies which literature is consistent or contradictory with the findings of this study. It also determines areas where this study can expand on the existing literature. The chapter concludes by suggesting a model that outlines how board directors can contribute to their institution's strategy.

Chapter six summarizes the discussion of the findings and presents the conclusion of this thesis. It also offers a summary of the study' findings, an assessment of the study's quality and a discussion of its approach to addressing the research question, along with the aims and objectives of the study. The subsequent sections cover the implications of the study, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research. The chapter ends with presenting a personal reflection about the doctoral journey.

## 1.8 Chapter summary

The introduction of the thesis is presented in this chapter by giving an overview of the research background. It discusses the rationale of the study from personal, theoretical, and practical perspectives. The chapter proceeds with outlining the scope of the study and presenting the key question of the research. It is followed by defining the aims and objectives of the study. The subsequent sections discuss the key contributions of the study to literature, theory, and practice. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

In **Chapter 2**, a critical review of the current and relevant literature to the study is provided.

# Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an introduction that presents the research topic and relevant literature. The second section includes a review of literature on the board of directors. This includes the board functions–composition, structure, leadership, and process; roles of board directors–chairmen, chief executive officers (CEOs), executive directors, non-executive directors (NEDs), and company secretaries; and roles of board directors in strategic management–formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The third section provides analysis of literature on corporate governance. This includes the main theories of corporate governance–agency, stewardship, stakeholder, and resource dependence; governance in the public sector; and governance in higher education–across the world, Saudi Arabia, and KSU. The fourth section offers a critical review of the strategy literature. This contains definitions of strategy; schools of thought for strategy; and strategic management–focusing on formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The next three sections discuss the research opportunity followed by the research questions. Then a theoretical framework of this study with the statement of the research question is provided. **Figure 1** provides a description of the literature that is relevant to this study.

**Figure 1 Overview of the study's relevant literature**

| 2.2 Board of directors | 2.3 Corporate governance | 2.4 Strategy |
|---|---|---|
| 2.2.1 Board functions<br><br>2.2.2 Roles of board directors<br><br>2.2.3 Roles of board directors in strategic management | 2.3.1 Main theories of corporate governance<br><br>2.3.2 Governance in the public sector<br><br>2.3.3 Governance in higher education | 2.4.1 Definitions of strategy<br><br>2.4.2 Schools of thought for strategy<br><br>2.4.3 Strategic management |

## 2.2 Board of directors

The literature on corporate governance consistently highlights the central significance of the board of directors (Andrews, 1980; Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990; Berle & Means, 1991; Bordean et al., 2011; Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Daily et al., 2003; De Andres & Vallelado, 2008; Fama, 1980; Freeman, 2010; Heracleous, 1999; Johnson et al., 1996; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007; O'Neal & Thomas, 1996; Pfeffer, 1972; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, 2015; Pugliese et al., 2009; Ruigrok et al., 2006; Stevenson & Radin, 2015). This attention has been given because the board of directors holds the final responsibility for the functions across the organization (Jensen & Meckling, 2019), while also having the official and legal obligation to control and maintain the effectiveness of organizational operations (Zald, 1969). In organizations, the board of directors is regarded as the most powerful authority capable of balancing objectives and guiding forward strategic orientation (Molz, 1985).

### 2.2.1 Board functions

Although there is a consensus agreement in the literature that the board of directors plays crucial roles in organizational performance (Jensen & Meckling, 2019; Pugliese et al., 2009; Zald, 1969), it has also long been acknowledged that a deeper understanding of how the board functions is essential (Woodman, 2011). Hence, it is important to analyze the dimensions that influence the way the board carries out its functions. In this regard, Zahra & Pearce (1989) argue that the effectiveness of the board depends on its composition, structure and process. Moreover, other scholars consider that the board leadership has a fundamental influence on the board operations (Bordean, et al., 2011; Dalton et al., 1998; Kang & Zardkoohi, 2005; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007). Therefore, the following sections address the composition, structure, leadership, and process aspects of the board of directors.

**2.2.1.1 Board composition**

The composition of a board of directors can be determined by the size of the board and the different types of directors, including inside and outside members (Pearce & Zahra, 1992). Scholars have not agreed on a particular size of the board composition (Johnson et al., 1996). In addition, Dalton et al. (1998) argue that the corporate governance literature has lacked consensus about the relationship between the size of the board of directors and the performance of the organization. For example, resource dependence theorists have pointed out that larger boards tend to lead to higher performance (Johnson et al., 1996), Zahra & Pearce (1989) agree that larger boards are helped by having high-quality advice and consultations. Other scholars meanwhile claim that small boards make it easier for directors to perform better, especially in terms of strategic actions (Goodstein, et al., 1994; Yermack, 1996). Therefore, the composition of the board depends on factors that impact a surviving organization within its external environment (Pfeffer, 1972). Thus, Kiel & Nicholson (2003) argue that the link between the size and composition of the board of directors is very distinctive. The authors found that large companies have bigger and more complex boards. Also, boards of large organizations seem to be accompanied by a high number of directors with more tasks and responsibilities. Besides, the study shows that larger companies rely on resource dependence theory as they need to link with other organizations (Kiel & Nicholson, 2003). Also, Hermanson et al. (2020) suggest that company size and the experience of board directors are important factors in deciding how the board should oversee strategy. In this regard, it is important to note that in some cases of working environments, a company may make significant changes to its board composition when responding to the external environment (Hillman et al., 2000).

In contrast, Dalton et al. (1998) conducted a meta-analysis on the board of directors and found no positive correlation between board composition and financial performance. Likewise, Pfeffer & Salancik (1978) emphasize that the board composition can be flexible and effectively

consistent with the external environment conditions. The composition of the board of directors is crucial as it determines the highest form of the group that runs the entire organization. Thus, all members of the board including the chairman, the CEO, executive directors, and non-executive directors should be carefully appointed. From this point of view, some scholars suggest that boards should be composed of a high number of external directors to have a better performance (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Schellenger et al., 1989). This aligns with the general preference among agency theorists for boards to be composed of independent outside directors (Daily et al., 2003; Dalton et al.,1998). However, Carpenter & Westphal (2001) argue that outside directors are usually less prepared to be involved in board meetings and discussions, and this can make it hard for them to recognize the organization performance matters. Therefore, there has been a tendency among scholars to argue that inside directors have a positive impact on their organization's performance (Adams & Ferreira 2007; Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Mace, 1986, as cited in Hermalin & Weisbach, 1991; Palmer et al., 1993; Raheja, 2005; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). While Wagner et al. (1998) found that both inside and outside directors can improve the performance of the company. However, other scholars found no relationship between board composition and organization performance (Bathala & Rao, 1995; Fosberg, 1989; Hermalin & Weisbach, 1991; Molz, 1988; Schmidt,1977; Zahra & Stanton, 1988, as cited in Adusei, 2011). As a significant part of this study, the different roles among board directors will be discussed intensively later in **Section 2.2.2**.

**2.2.1.2 Board structure**

In recent years, the corporate governance literature has given special attention to the structure of the board of directors (Salem, 2019). The structure of the board of directors can be defined as the way of organizing the board operations and its work effectively through divisions and committees (Zahra & Pearce, 1989). The structure of the board of directors is vital to determine

the roles of directors and collaborations between them in terms of performing their tasks (Band, 1992). Accordingly, it is important to know how the board's internal frameworks are established in order to know how the work is performed (Clarke, 1998; Filiz, 2013). Wan & Ong (2005) indicate that board structure differentiates between directors who hold management positions (executives) and those how do not (non-executives). It should be mentioned that these two terms are further discussed in **Sections 2.2.2.3** and **Section 2.2.2.4** respectively. According to Rezaee (2009), there are no generally accepted principles that suit the structure of the board of directors. Salem (2019) concurs, highlighting that scholars have diverse opinions on the impact of the board of directors' structure on organizational performance.

The committee structure plays a significant role on the board operations (Horner, 2011) and the formation of committees of the board of directors affects the way the board operates. For example, Lorsch & MacIver (1989) indicate that the board of directors is increasingly dependent on committees to assist its decision-making processes. These committees are supposed to consider important matters, make suggestions, and provide these recommendations to the board (Zahra, 1990). Thus, Henke (1986) indicates that committees can be effectively used by directors to develop strategic plans. In this regard, Klettner et al. (2014) suggest that the board of directors can set up committees to guide and oversee the process of developing and implementing the organizational strategy. Also, Zahra & Pearce (1990) suggest that formulating specialized committees and the flow of information among these committees are important to improve the effectiveness of the board operations.

Indeed, Lorsch & MacIver (1989) insist that committees perform the top functions of boards. The key to the board of directors is to ensure that all activities are executed effectively through nomination, audit, and compensation committees (Cadbury, 1992; Clarke, 2007; Kaczmarek & Nyuur 2016). The nomination committee appoints, recruits, and selects individuals who can ascend to specific positions. The audit committee oversees all financial affairs and monitors

the organization expenditures, while the compensation committee ensures that every member of the organization is rewarded fairly (Kaczmarek & Nyuur 2016). For example, while the nomination committee outlines the roles of chairman, the audit committee is obligated to the oversee this function. In contrast, the compensation committee becomes responsible for setting the CEO's salary (Laux & Laux, 2009).

The underlying notion behind the foundation of committees of boards is to distribute duties and specialize processes that should be executed by the board of directors (Kaczmarek & Nyuur, 2016). According to Laux & Laux (2009), the board functions are distributed through allocating directors to various committees to perform its essential tasks. As such, the board of directors is largely dependent on delegating tasks to the right people as well as tracking and correcting deficiencies to function well. In this regard, Zahra (1990) suggests that it does not matter how many committees there are on the board. Instead, it is important these committees work properly in accordance with the purpose of establishing them. In this regard, Kajee et al. (2019) insist that the board of directors in the public sector should be realistic about the number, size, and membership of the organization's committees.

### 2.2.1.3 Board leadership

Board leadership has an important effect on the governance of boards (Hyväri, 2016; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007). It has been proven that the leaders of the board of directors are accountable to ensure that directors and managers participate in developing strategies and monitoring organizational performance (Klettner et al., 2014) Furthermore, the performance of a board can be greatly influenced by the relationship between the chairman and CEO (Kakabadse et al., 2006).

Power is distributed among the chairman and the CEO, along with other directors on boards. This structure suggests a separation between roles of the board chairmen and the CEOs. This steam comes from agency theorists who suggested the separation of board leadership roles

(Berle & Means, 1991). Accordingly, the chairmen are primarily responsible for the board leadership as the *UK Corporate Governance Code* report points out that "*The chairman is responsible for leadership of the board and ensuring its effectiveness on all aspects of its role*" (FRC, 2016, p.5). This is in line with the *Cadbury Report* (1992) which underlines that the combination of the roles of CEO and board chair could result in conflicts due to the use of power. Therefore, scholars claim that it is essential to define titles and responsibilities for positions of the CEO and the chairperson before their appointments (Dalton et al., 1998). In this regard, previous studies claimed that the joint structure of the board leadership may reduce both the effectiveness of monitoring and the performance of the board (Finkelstein & D'aveni, 1994; Rechner & Dalton, 1991). Moreover, Goyal & Park (2022) found that the combination of the CEO and chairman roles by one individual has negative impact on the organization performance. For instance, performance of the dual roles of the CEO and board chairman by one person is not sufficient for companies since that individual will be responsible for making and taking their own exams (Ong & Wan, 2001). Therefore, Lorsch & MacIver (1989) do not support the simultaneous roles of the board chairman and the CEO because independent monitoring of the board's work may be dismissed. In this respect, Wan & Ong (2005) argue that performing both the chairman and CEO roles concurrently may decrease conflict levels but could also diminish effort norms in the boardroom. Their conclusion is that the board leadership structure has no impact on either the board process or performance.

The separation between CEO and chairman roles is common in the UK and Australia (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007). However, it is broadly found in U.S. companies that the CEO may also serve as chairman of the board (Jensen, 1993). In this regard, scholars argue that the joint leadership of the board by the same individual can help the board perform effectively and eliminate any conflict that may occur between the CEO and the chair of the board (Davis et al., 1997). Similarly, Donaldson & Davis (1991) found that the duality of the CEO role could

prevent any internal inconsistencies that could lead to distrust in the organization's operations and its outcomes. They also proposed that it assigns a right direction for individuals to perform their tasks in an optimal environment. In this respect, it is suggested by Pfeffer & Salancik (1978, 2015) that the board's joint leadership can increase the efficiency of board decision-making, clarity of accountability, and response to external events. Thus, the practice of having a joint structure of the board leadership structure can enhance the performance of the board and the entire organization (Davis et al., 1997; Donaldson & Davis, 1991).

### 2.2.1.4 Board process

Board processes can be defined as a group of activities that are designed for correctly applying accurate methods of decision-making in the boardroom (Ong & Wan, 2001; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). For example, Forbes & Milliken (1999) view the board of directors as promoting high standards and expectations of behaviors to allocate decision-making. This indicates that the degree of priorities among these activities can be defined differently depending on the organization's purpose. The key processes of the board include the formal board meetings, informal conversations, outsider review meetings, and information exchanges between directors that influence the direction of making decisions in the board (Farrell, 2005; Stevenson & Radin, 2015). In this respect, Zahra & Pearce (1990) point out the quality of the board meetings efficiently impacts on the board operations.

The board's processes ensure that board directors acquire the necessary knowledge about organizational operations and perform their duties, particularly those who lead the board at the top (Zhu et al., 2016). Therefore, Boulton (1978) suggests that the board members should focus on the issues that impact on the board operations and not just rely on management to provide the needed information for the board operations. Therefore, many scholars emphasize that the board of directors must obtain the necessary information, so directors can actively function in their roles in decision-making (Adams, 2010). In general, Forbes & Milliken (1999) emphasize

that board processes involve three essential elements: effort norms, representing a set of beliefs guiding individuals as they collaborate toward a specific objective; cognitive conflict, involving task-based judgmental perspectives among group members; and the adoption of knowledge and skills to perform tasks

## 2.2.2 Roles of board directors

A growing stream of corporate governance literature has confirmed that the majority of the board functions are in fact made by the individual roles of directors (Petrovic, 2008). According to the *Cadbury Report* (1992), it is crucial to evaluate the work of the board of directors and its members in order to improve the board's effectiveness (Clarke, 1998). Thus, understanding the responsibilities of board directors is necessary as they represent the board collectively and have different duties as directors individually (FRC, 2018). Therefore, the next sections review the role of individuals who hold specific positions on the board. They provide an overview of the roles of the chairpersons, the chief executive officers (CEOs), executive directors, non-executive directors (NEDs), and it ends with the roles of the company secretaries which are closely linked to the board's functions.

### 2.2.2.1 Roles of chairpersons

The chairpersons of board of directors are essential for leading and directing their organizations during the formulation and implementation of their organizational strategy (Nahum & Carmeli, 2020; Banerjee et al., 2020). The majority of previous studies indicate that the quality and capability of chairmen are crucial for the success of boards and organizations (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007). In this regard, Petrovic (2008) insists that the chair positions of boards require one to have the essential skills to effectively manage complexities where different views on a strategy arise among directors on the board. These skills may include handling the boardroom interactions, maintaining respect among members, being assertive with key board

members like the CEO, and demonstrating maturity among the executives, all of which have been considered the primary elements of effective chairmanship (Roberts, 2002).

The board chairmen are responsible for taking the lead role in overseeing the board's affairs and taking necessary actions to monitor the board's work (Bezeme et al., 2018). The board chairman is also responsible for creating strong accountability dynamics and enhancing positive behaviors that build trust among directors on the board (Roberts et al., 2002) Moreover, Bezeme et al. (2018) point out that the responsibility of holding such position assigns the chairman to managing the mechanisms of information flows in a manner that facilitates the work of all members on the board. According to Roberts, et al. (2005), the chairperson has command of ensuring that the quality of discussions and negotiations is maintained so that the divergent viewpoints and skills of the board members generate unique perspectives that offer a variety of solutions to a given set of dilemmas. Also, the chairperson of board of directors is a key player for developing stable relationships with shareholders and discussing their views in the board meetings (FRC, 2018). In addition, Nahum & Carmeli (2020) highlight that chairmen can formally and informally influence other members to become involved effectively in the board activities. As mentioned above, the role of chairman is extremely important in developing the operational aspects of the organization and losing the effective functions that are implemented by the chairmen is likely to harm the performance of the entire organization.

**2.2.2.2 Roles of CEOs**

The chief executive officer (CEO) is an individual who works as the head of the organizational executive body (Daily & Johnson, 1997). Further studies indicate that CEOs are generally considered the most powerful among members of the organization (Finkelstein, 1992; Pollock et al., 2002). Specifically, Tang et al. (2011) found that CEOs have a dominant power over strategic choices and performance matters in their organizations. However, the CEO's duties

and responsibilities vary depending on the structure and purpose of the organization. According to Hyväri (2016), CEOs are responsible for the operational management and supervision accepted by the board of directors. Additionally, Carmeli et al. (2012) found that CEOs play an essential role in improving the quality of formulating strategies and facilitating the process of carrying out these strategies in their organizations.

Empirical previous studies have categorized the CEO roles into three main subdivisions: interpersonal, informational, and decisional (Mintzberg, 1971, 1973, 1975). First, interpersonal roles consist of figurehead, liaison, and leadership tasks. The figurehead functions may include signing legal documents, presiding over ceremonies, meeting visitors, and assisting other individuals who require specific services. While the liaison role treats a CEO as a networking agent who secures favorable resources from external and internal contacts. When acting as a leader, the CEO is expected to engage in a variety of staffing and motivational roles. Second, the informational roles of the CEO can be determined as a nerve center, disseminate, and spokesman tasks. As a nerve center, the CEO is seen as an informed agent who has precise information that places one in a unique position to bring insights into the overall organizational performance. The CEO is responsible for disseminating key information to subordinate staff on relevant external events and organizational requirements and conveying information on the organizational performance to various external parties. Third, the decisional roles of the CEO are tied to entrepreneurial, disturbance handler, and resource allocator functions. While executing entrepreneurial roles, the CEO is seen as the change initiator based on how one perceives potential threats and opportunities in the organization. As a disturbance handler, the CEO assists their organizations in coping with unique stimuli that disturb prevailing practices through slight improvements and structural changes. The CEO role as a resource-allocator is to control the distribution of organizational resources effectively and efficiently (Mintzberg, 1971, 1973, 1975).

In general, CEOs are perceived as the sole strategists within organizations, necessitating their fulfillment of fundamental responsibilities through active engagement in the organizational strategy process (Ansoff, 1991). For that reason, Glick (2011) claims that CEOs can thus influence the course of organizations, employees, markets, and whole countries in some parts of the world.

**2.2.2.3 Roles of executive directors**

The essential contribution of executive directors in the board operations can affect the performance of their organization (Finkelstein et al., 2009; Ruigrok et al., 2006). The *UK Corporate Governance Code* report emphasizes the importance of executive directors in improving their board performance by sharing information with other members and becoming involved in resolving operational matters (FRC, 2018). The extensive knowledge of the organization's internal operations makes executive directors perceived as facilitators of organizational performance by developing and evaluating its strategies (Ingley & Van der Walt, 2001). The term of executive directors has been a topic of major interest in strategic management research as they are responsible for implementing corporate strategy (Cannella et al., 2009). However, Boulton (1978) indicates that corporate governance literature has overlooked the work of executives and directors within board operations.

According to Stiles & Taylor (2001), executive directors can boost their boards through three fundamental roles: monitoring the board work process, being involved in strategic decisions, and providing services and support to other members on the board. On this point, Hung (1998) summarizes the primary functions of directors on the board through the following six roles: building connections between their organization and the external environment, collaborating with the shareholders and other agencies, monitoring the management's work to ensure that the organization is achieving its goals, participating in the strategy formulation process of their

organization, ensuring stability within their organization, and supporting the management to improve the organization's performance (Hung, 1998).

The performance of the organization is greatly affected by senior executives on the board, including the chief financial officer (CFO) and chief operating officer (COO) (Certo et al., 2006). Previous research has revealed that CFOs and COOs actively contribute to making strategic decisions for their organizations (Cannella et al., 2008; Menz, 2012). According to Caglio et al. (2018), CFOs are considered the second-highest leaders in many organizations. The vital functions of CFOs are determined by their in-depth participation in the decision-making process, which can impact the entire performance of a given organization (Datta & Iskandar-Datta, 2014). Specifically, CFOs are primarily seen as financial experts with the ability to assess the effectiveness of formulating and executing corporate strategy (Caglio et al., 2018).

In contrast, the position of COOs is often perceived as the second most powerful after CEOs (Hambrick & Cannella, 2004). Past studies suggest that CEOs wield a significant influence in nominating COOs (Cannella & Shen, 2001; Levinson, 1993). In this respect, Zhang (2006) conducted a study examining the relationship between the roles of the CEO and COO in various organizational settings. He found that in conditions of high firm performance, the likelihood of strategic changes decreases, thereby favoring and promoting the CEO position. Conversely, under conditions of low firm performance, the CEO is more likely to collaborate with the COO, leading to an increased tendency for strategic changes (Zhang, 2006).

### 2.2.2.4 Roles of non-executive directors

Corporate governance literature underscores the crucial role of a non-executive director (NED) in critically evaluating management performance (Clarke, 2007). Some scholars argue that the board of directors has a wider and more inclusive role, where NEDs get involved in advising

the managerial operations and the decision-making processes (Roberts et al., 2005). Other scholars argue that NEDs should be heavily engaged in monitoring the organization's performance and acting in accordance with the interests of stakeholders (Hooghiemstra & Van Manen, 2004; Lorsch & MacIver, 1989). Some scholars claim it is essential for several of the NEDs to provide an independent assessment of the standards of strategic performance (Solomon, 2020). For that reason, Clarke (2007) assures that boards should always invite the NEDs to the process of making strategic decisions, which can influence the whole organizational directions. Also, the boards should take advantage of the NEDs' experiences and their external networks by making proper strategic decisions and avoiding potential threats or risks in the organization's performance. Kakabadse et al. (2001) further highlights that NEDs play a vital role in strategy formulation by offering independent advice and support to board directors, including the CEO/chairman of the board. Additionally, McNulty & Pettigrew (1999) point out that the NEDs help develop and implement their organization's strategies.

According to Stiles & Taylor (2001), the key function of NEDs depends on other executive members on the board, particularly in terms of gathering information and providing advanced data about the organizational operation aspects. Besides, NEDs should work hand in hand with the management team to have a complete overview of the overall organizational performance level (Keasey & Hudson, 2002). However, according to the *Cadbury Report* (1992), the prime role of NEDs is monitoring other executives in the boardroom. Furthermore, NEDs can only be effective if they become more engaged in the board meetings, appropriately questioning or challenging any element of mismanagement within the board (Chandrakumara & Walter, 2015). In contrast, it has been confirmed by previous studies that the efforts of the NEDs significantly help the boardroom in accomplishing its functions successfully (Clarke, 2007).

**2.2.2.5 Roles of company secretaries**

Although the organizational hierarchy does not identify the company secretary positions among the executive roles of the board of directors of organizations, previous research has indicated that the role of company secretary is essential in terms of keeping the work of boards effective (McNulty & Stewart, 2015). For example, the company secretary is responsible for assisting the board of directors with necessary legal and governance producers (Kakabadse et al., 2017). Moreover, Peij (2017) found that the corporate secretary can play an important role within the overall organizational governance framework, particularly with respect to board effectiveness. The company secretary role is responsible for providing support to directors through legal information and advice about the operation aspects, continually interpreting governing instruments and adhering to them, and preparing standing orders whenever appropriate (Kakabadse et al., 2016). One of the crucial duties of the company secretary is to ensure that accessible information to the governing body is available, accurate, appropriate, and timely. The main responsibilities of company secretaries include maintaining a direct relationship with other board members, remaining consistently effective as required, and acting as protectors of the interests of the board of directors and management (Kakabadse et al., 2017).

The corporate secretary has a dual administrative role associated with the board of directors (Lamm, 2003, as cited in Kakabadse et al., 2017). This requires the corporate secretary to engage in the internal governance framework of the organization (Filiz, 2013). In general, Kakabadse et al. (2017) summarize the primary corporate secretary roles within the board including organizing the board meetings; supporting the chairman/CEO, directors, and stakeholders; inducting or training NEDs; dealing with latest governance developments; conducting board evaluations, annual reporting, statutory compliance issue, and administrative duties. Additionally, the company secretary plays a crucial role in ensuring the compilation of board activities and assisting the board in functioning professionally (FRC, 2018). On this note,

Kajee et al. (2019) emphasize that the corporate secretary is very important in the public sector because it enables good governance practices in the organizations. Thus, Kakabadse et al. (2017) argue that the company secretary has a unique leadership role that differentiates them from other roles of the board members.

## 2.2.3 Roles of board directors in strategic management

The strategic role of board directors has been a topic of long debate in corporate governance literature (Tricker, 2012). However, it is still undefined how directors are involved in strategy and the scope of their participation in the strategic process is largely unexplored (Bordean, et al., 2011; Brauer & Schimdt, 2008; Nicholson & Newton, 2010; Pugliese et al., 2009; Ruigrok et al., 2006; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). In this regard, Hendry & Kiel (2004) suggest that the first step towards exploring the role of board of directors in strategy is to discuss the concept of strategy itself (which will be discussed later in **Section 2.4**). Furthermore, Zahra & Pearce (1990) emphasize, the strategic contribution of the board of directors is a multi-dimensional concept that can be applied to different stages of strategic management. Moreover, Bordean et al. (2011) argue that the majority of studies on governance have relied on a single theoretical perspective such as agency theory to describe the board involvement in strategy. Thus, this chapter critically review the literature on the main theories of corporate governance in **Section 2.3.1**.

In general, the strategic roles of the board can be determined by advising and monitoring senior management as well as making a real commitment to the organizational strategy (O'Neal & Thomas, 1996). Other scholars consider the board directors to be involved in reviewing initiatives and participating in all the strategy stages of the organization, starting from formulation to evaluation (Johnson et al., 1996; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999). Furthermore, Tashakori & Boulton (1983) found that the board of directors has increasingly involved in all stages of the strategic management process. However, Boulton (1978) concludes that board

members who are not actively involved in the work with management or shareholders tend to have little incentive to do more than what they are legally obligated to do within their organization.

Nicholson & Newton (2010) argue that the strategic role of the directors on the board is determined by the board itself. In this regard, board directors are engaged in the strategy process through direct and indirect methods, where boards are actively involved in setting strategic direction, and they are involved indirectly where boards are responsible for an effective overview of the performance of the company (Helmer, 1996, as cited in Ingley & Van der Walt, 2001). For example, Golensky (1993) found that the level of involvement of directors on the board depends on the kind and priority of tasks.

Some scholars have outlined the strategic role of board directors as approving, monitoring, and reviewing strategy, and in some cases, actively participating in the strategy process (Farrell, 2005; Hendry & Kiel, 2004; Heracleous, 1999; Ingley & Van der Walt, 2001). In this respect, Zahra & Pearce (1990) argue that boards can achieve effective internal operations when their directors are insiders with significant experiences as they are more likely to be involved in the strategic process. However, Pugliese et al. (2009) point out some scholars argue that the involvement of the board of directors in strategy is relatively restricted because of their distance from daily activities in their organization. In general, scholars have identified two major schools of thought regarding the involvement of directors in strategy (Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Golden & Zajac, 2001; Hendry & Kiel, 2004; Weitzner & Peridis, 2011). **Table 2** outlines these two schools of thought regarding the involvement of the board of directors in strategy.

**Table 2 Schools of thought on board directors' involvement in strategy**

| Schools of thought | Principles |
|---|---|
| **Active Role** | • It posits that directors on the board play a dynamic role in determining and carrying out the strategic direction of their organization. |

| Passive Role | • It considers the role of board directors to be a formality and seeks only to meet the legal requirements of their organization. |
|---|---|

The next sections present a critical review of the literature regarding the strategic role of the board of directors. This includes the role of board directors in strategy formulation, the role of board directors in strategy implementation, and the role of board directors in strategy evaluation.

### 2.2.3.1 Role of board directors in strategy formulation

Strategy should be a core responsibility of board functions within the organization (Andrews, 1980; Zahra & Pearce, 1989; Forbes & Milliken 1999; Carpenter & Westphal 2001). In this regard, some scholars claim that board directors have legal responsibility for the strategy of their organizations (Andrews, 1981; Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Pugliese et al., 2009; Tricker, 2012). Further, other scholars indicate that the involvement of the board of directors in strategy is essential to represent shareholders (Zahra, 1990). For this purpose, some scholars argue that directing and planning reflect the strategic functions of the board of directors (Ong & Wan, 2001).

The corporate governance literature has identified decision-making as the main task of directors on the board (Adams, 2010; Farrell, 2005; Hendry & Kiel, 2004; McNulty & Pettigrew,1999; Ruigrok et al., 2006). In this regard, Lembinen (2018) explains the way that directors are involved in decision-making processes as "*directors consider seeing the bigger picture or end goal as one of the most important factors in strategic decision making*" (p. 10). Melone (1994) further describes that most of the directors are professional in making decisions because they process available information more efficiently and follow reasonable thinking that allow them to reach optimal decisions with incomplete information. In relevant to this,

Kroll et al. (2008) point out that board directors usually take advantage of previous career experiences to make better decisions. The *Corporate Director's Guidebook* (ABA, 2007) highlights two essential roles of board directors as "*Directors provide leadership toward this objective through primary functions: decision making and oversight*" (p. 11). However, the literature on corporate governance suggests that there is significant variation in the extent to which board directors actually influence organizational strategic decision-making (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001).

According to Nahum & Carmeli (2020), the actual involvement of individual members depends on the specific context and the environment of the board. McDonald et al. (2008) further illustrate that individual board directors may be directly involved in the board process in certain situations depending on their professional expertise. On the other hand, Sundaramurthy & Lewis (2003) suggest that the optimal engagement of board directors in the decision-making process of the board can be achieved through successful use of both control and collaboration. However, Ravasi & Zattoni (2006) claim that most previous studies have not directly observed the actual behavior of the boards. Brauer & Schmidt (2008) support this argument by pointing out the limited access of academics to the board's decision-making process, which has hindered the generation of more in-depth information in this particular area

In contrast, Hendry & Kiel (2004) indicate that directors should regularly get involved in making strategic decisions on the board. Moreover, Farrell (2005) argues that all directors are involved in the board's decision making when they frequently have to approve, reject or modify proposals. The author furthers states that informal networks between board members outside the boardroom have an impact on board decision-making. For example, Rigby et al. (2021) found that conversations outside the board with leaders of the board influenced the way these decisions are communicated. Stevenson & Radin (2015) illustrate a strong link between the informal networks of the directors and the decision-making process through interactions

established in conversations and meetings external to the board. From this point of view, most decisions made by directors are influenced through their personal social relations with other actors and with other institutions in their environment (Ruigrok et al., 2006).

Consulting and problem solving are common practices frequently engaged in by the board members (Godos-Díez et al., 2018). In this regard, the methods of acquisition and exchanging information between directors may highly affect the level of the board engagement (McDonald & Westphal 2003). According to Adams (2010), many researchers point out that board directors need to have advanced information in order to play a more active role in decision-making. Thus, inter-organizational learning networks can be a key in helping board members to be effectively engaged in the decision processes (Harrison & Miller, 1999). Other scholars found that the diversity of solutions and cognitive conflicts have a positive influence on the quality of the board decisions (Forbes & Milliken, 2008). More specifically, Goodstein et al. (1994) identify the role of the board of directors in strategy as making important decisions in adopting environmental changes. Also, Harrison & Miller (1999) outline the responsibility of board directors to identify a logic of thinking in developing strategic decisions.

Davies (1999) assumes the responsibility of board directors is beyond only approving the strategic direction, also they should take a leadership role in setting the organization's strategic direction. In this respect, Volonté & Gantenbein (2016) consider the strategic vision and leadership skills of directors as valuable human capital that endorses the strategy process. Meanwhile, Finkelstein (1992) specifies that the power of expertise among board directors can play a significant role in a particular strategic choice, and some scholars note that most of the board functions are increasingly carried out through the formation of committees (Ellstrand et al., 1999; Lorsch & MacIver 1989). From this perspective, Helmer (1996) asserts that the role of the board in strategy is to set performance standards and to approve and review the development of strategy.

**2.2.3.2 Role of board directors in strategy implementation**

The management and governance literature indicates that the role of the board of directors in implementing the strategy includes overseeing the procedures for executing these strategies within the organization (Hendry & Kiel, 2004). There is general agreement among scholars that board directors are supposed to somehow participate in the implementation of strategy (Chakravarthy & White, 2002; Hendry & Kiel, 2004; Letendre, 2004; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1996; Ruigrok et al., 2006). Moreover, Altinay & Roper (2001) assert that implementation strategy requires the contribution of different disciplines, therefore, the board members ought to possess entrepreneurial and other different skills to successfully implement strategy.

In contrast, the literature on governance has shown how boards discharge the responsibility of directors in strategy implementation (Hendry & Kiel, 2004; Hyväri, 2016; Stiles & Taylor, 2001). This requires first to determine the roles of directors with regard to the strategic process (Ingley & Walt, 2001). However, the exact role of directors in implementing strategy has remained largely undefined in corporate governance practice and research (Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Westphal, 1999; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). In addition, Volonté & Gantenbein (2016) indicate that the agency theory perspective does not distinguish that fact that some directors require different skills to perform their functions. In this regard, O'Neal & Thomas (1996) indicate that board members ranked protecting stakeholder interests and approving strategy as the most important board responsibilities.

Alternatively, Zald (1969) points out that board directors are not personally responsible for organizational failures, but they are responsible for implementing corrective actions on behalf of the owners. Moreover, Farrell (2005) found that the majority of board directors are, in fact, not significantly involved in the implementation of strategies. Likewise, other scholars emphasize that the roles of board directors in strategy implementation are constrained by their distance from day-to-day operations and by limited access to information (Hermanson et al.,

2020; Pugliese et al., 2009). In contrast, Brauer & Schmidt (2008) indicate the role of board directors in strategy implementation is to ensure that the planned strategy is actually achieved. The authors also point out that while the directors are expected to be able engage in strategy without restrictions, their involvement in strategy should be disciplined to avoid creating any conflicts with management. Thus, Volonté & Gantenbein (2016) propose that the involvement of board directors in strategy implementation should be restrained rather than limitless.

Some scholars insist that board directors generally have a legal responsibility to be involved in strategy by approving, reviewing, and monitoring the strategy process (Hermanson et al., 2020; Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Pugliese et al., 2009; Stiles & Taylor, 2001). The engagement of board members in implementing strategies seems to be beneficial, as they are often professionals operating at the interface of the internal and external environment of the organization (Massicotte & Henri, 2020). Also, O'Neal & Thomas (1996) suggest that the responsibilities and obligations of board directors in strategy implementation should be based on their experience, skills, and outside networks that endorse the implementation of their organizational strategy. Furthermore, Molz (1985) states that taking control of the organizational performance is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the directors on the board and that they can use their authority to resolve possible operational conflicts and set achievable goals.

Sillince & Mueller (2007) identify three main roles of directors on the board to implement strategies include utilizing their capacities, balancing potential conflicts, and avoiding failures in their organization. In attempting to address this matter, Kelly & Gennard (1996) point out that board directors play a major role in shaping the policies of implementation strategies to meet their organizational goals. Additionally, the functions of board directors can have an impact on the performance not only of the board itself but also on the organization and the broader system (Nicholson et al., 2004). For instance, Pfeffer & Salancik (1978) suggest that

the relationships of individual board directors can play a crucial role in the execution of corporate strategy. According to Harrison & Miller (1999) skills, abilities, and knowledge of individual board directors can make a great contribution to achieve the organization's objectives. In particular, board directors are able to access essential information which reflects their responsibility to take necessary actions based on their experience to improve the organization performance (Druckeriv,1992, as cited in Shukeri et al., 2012).

### 2.2.3.3 Role of board directors in strategy evaluation

The role of the board of directors in evaluating organizational strategy is essential to clarify strategic direction, improve decision-making, and achieve organizational objectives (Davies, 1991; Hendry & Kiel, 2004). One primary function of board directors is to assess organizational performance by evaluating strategic plans and monitoring management accordingly (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). In this context, some scholars argue that the board of directors has a fiduciary responsibility to appraise the organization's strategy, as directors are accountable for overseeing managers on the shareholders (Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Hendry & Kiel, 2004). In addition, Baysinger & Hoskisson (1990) indicate that board members have formal authority to assess management's performance by offering rewards and sanctions to managers. This goes back to the agency theorists who emphasize that the main responsibility of the board of directors is to control the organization's performance. For example, Ingley & Van der Walt (2001) suggest that the board of directors plays a key role and has important responsibilities in monitoring and controlling the performance of their organization.

The control function of the board of directors encompasses various activities and duties, including overseeing, assessing, and rewarding the performance of managers in accordance with performance-oriented control strategies (Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990; Eisenhardt, 1989a). To that point, Ong & Wan (2001) further illustrate that board directors fulfill their monitoring duty by evaluating the work of the CEO and the overall organizational

performance. Meanwhile, Lauenstein (1982) contends that a primary strategic responsibility of the board of directors is to review the overall policies of the organization. Forbes & Milliken (2008) note that the role of board directors in the strategic process includes overseeing not only the financial aspects but also the associated organizational performance.

The board of directors is obligated to evaluate the organizational performance and make sure it follows the organizational strategic plan (Woodman, 2011). Specifically, effective boards can be determined by evaluating performance and overturning mistaken decisions (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001). In addition, the board of directors' evaluation function includes assessing how the strategy development process is being carried out (Kiel & Nicholson, 2005). Therefore, board members are required to have a clear understanding of the organizational strategy in order to evaluate the management on how the objectives are accomplished and how the strategic plan is performed (Boulton, 1978). As noted above, the role of the board of directors is central to assessing organizational efficiency. However, the literature shows a lack of consensus in determining a specific role for the board in strategy evaluation.

## 2.3 Corporate governance

Corporate governance is characterized by various definitions, reflecting diverse perspectives across different disciplines (Gillan, 2006; Ho, 2005). Indeed, the ongoing pursuit of a precise definition for corporate governance remains elusive (Rezaee, 2009). The concepts of corporate governance have evolved within various disciplines, encompassing law, finance, economics, and management (Mallin, 2016). Nevertheless, each academically accepted definition incorporates certain key elements. For instance, corporate governance can be defined as specifying rights and responsibilities of various parties in the firm (Aoki, 2000, as cited in Aguilera & Jackson, 2003). Jensen (2003) further elaborates on the aspects that lead to a clear understanding of corporate governance, including how power and responsibilities are determined among shareholders, directors, and managers in the organization.

Generally, governance entails a collection of methods designed to establish a balance between the management of a firm and its shareholders (Berle & Means, 1991). There are two predominant schools of thought that have been put forward by scholars to define the concept of governance. These schools of thought can be categorized as narrow and broad perspectives (Olayiwola, 2010). According to the author, the narrow perspective particularly focuses on studying the organizational internal structure, including processes of directing and managing the organization. This position further holds that corporate governance is an instrument that addresses problems associated with the separation of ownership and management in corporations (Tricker, 2012).

In contrast, Lin et al. (2015) define corporate governance from a broader perspective where it is perceived to regulate relationships between various stakeholders and corporations. This perspective considers a wider sense as the relationship of the enterprise to society as a whole. (Olayiwola, 2010; Oyejide & Soyibo, 2001). Overall, this broad perspective covers a wide range of aspects that go beyond the issues within the organization. The *G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance* summarize the two perspectives as "*Corporate governance involves a set of relationships between a company's management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders. Corporate governance also provides the structure through which the objectives of the company are set, and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance are determined*" (OECD, 2015, p. 9).

### 2.3.1 Main theories of corporate governance

The majority of studies on corporate governance are undertaken according to the agency theoretical framework (Aguilera & Jackson, 2003; Brauer & Schmidt, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative to know different theoretical frameworks of corporate governance (Bordean et al., 2011; Solomon, 2020). This can help us to have a better understanding of how the board of directors operates in accordance with different perspectives (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001;

Kroll et al., 2008), and why, some scholars argue, boards are obligated to perform various functions (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003; Wagner et al., 1998). This section reviews the most prominent concepts of corporate governance including agency, stewardship, stakeholder, and resource dependence theories.

**2.3.1.1 Agency theory**

Agency theory has been a dominant design of corporate governance since it was first introduced by Berle and Means in 1932 (Roberts et al., 2005). The concept of agency theory is to separate the organization's ownership from its operational control (Berle & Means, 1991). Thus, agency theory can be defined as a contractual agreement between two parties where one or more persons who own the property called *Principals* engage with another one or more persons known as *Agents* to act on behalf of the principals (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). However, the agency problem may be caused by conflicts between managers and stakeholders, as it presumes that the stakes are driven by self-opportunism (Jensen & Meckling, 1979). From this perspective, shareholders are seen as owners and their interests take precedence over employee interests, which is supposed to be a second priority (Berle & Means, 1991; Hillman et al., 2000). This is due to the agency costs which arise as the shareholders are confronted with the management in monitoring issues (Aguilera & Jackson, 2003; Fama, 1980). Resolving this issue becomes possible when managerial activities are placed under control (Shen, 2003). Therefore, agency theorists assert that monitoring is the most primary function of the board of directors (Berle & Means, 1991; Fama, 1980; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Hillman & Dalziel, 2003; Johnson et al., 1996; Roberts et al., 2005).

Agency theorists claim that the control role of the board of directors is efficient mechanism to secure the interests of the shareholders (Aguilera & Jackson, 2010; Eisenhardt, 1989a; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Johnson et al., 1996; Shen, 2003; Rindova, 1999). Moreover, they assert that the board of directors with legal authority should determine appropriate decisions resulting

from the separation of ownership and control of the organization (Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990; Berle & Means, 1991; Jensen & Meckling, 1979). For this purpose, the board of directors is responsible for monitoring the management activities on behalf of shareholders (Bathala & Rao, 1995; Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Without implementing the control function by the board of directors, managers are likely to vary their work with the interests of shareholders (Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990; Fama & Jensen, 1983). Therefore, agency theory views the internal control of the organization as an effective element to improve organizational performance by decreasing agency costs (Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Jensen & Meckling, 1979).

There is a consensus among agency theorists regarding the preference for the board of directors to be composed of independent *Outside* directors (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003; Carpenter & Westphal, 2001). They assume that dependent *Inside* directors have less motivation to monitor the performance of managers (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Also, agency theory proposes that directors must be independent of management in order to effectively monitor the work of managers and protect the interests of shareholders, which leads to better performance of the organization. (Clarke, 2007; Daily & Johnson, 1997).

Even though the agency theory has dominated the literature on corporate governance over the past few decades, the theory has inadequate information on accurate functions of board directors individually (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Some argue that the board's effectiveness is based on the actual behaviors of its directors, whereas the board composition, autonomy, and structure can only serve to condition it (Eisenhardt, 1989a). Also, Hillman & Dalziel (2003) argue that agency theorists did not specifically discuss the idea that the capacity of boards of directors to monitor varies.

According to Volonté & Gantenbein (2016), agency theorists have totally overlooked the fact that the directors may require different skills to perform their roles on the board. In addition,

the theory does not highlight the particular roles of individual directors on the board (Zahra & Pearce, 1989). Additionally, external risks that accrue from unstable political and economic conditions are neglected by agency theory (Berle & Means, 1991). Zahra & Pearce (1989) highlight that, despite agency theory's emphasis on the strategic role of board directors, there is a limited body of literature addressing this particular aspect. Instead, it underlines the control function as the most crucial function of the board of directors (Shen, 2003), even though it has been observed that board directors participate in numerous activities that are not restricted to only monitoring functions (Korn & Ferry, 1999, as cited in Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Thus, agency theory has received significant criticisms from various scholars as placing too much emphasis on the internal aspects, while overlooking the effect of other parts in the internal and external environments that my impact on an organization's performance. Thus, agency theory is not applicable for use as guidance in this case study, the main purpose of which is to explore the contribution of individual directors to strategy.

### 2.3.1.2 Stewardship theory

 Stewardship theory considers collaboration and cooperation between all parties across the organization as essential for effective functioning (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). The rationale of stewardship theory contrasts with agency theory, which emphasizes potential organizational conflicts and control aspects. However, stewardship theory suggests that owners and managers share allied interests in achieving both short and long terms of the organizational targets (Daily et al., 2003). Bordean et al. (2012) further elaborate that stewardship theory emphasizes the involvement of board members in managing and overseeing the performance of their organization. Moreover, Petrovic (2008) indicates that stewardship theorists suggest that directors can benefit the organization by advising managers to perform better and to choose proper strategic decisions. Furthermore, it proposes that the roles of chairman and the CEO of the board should be held by one individual simultaneously. Stewardship theory assumes the

critical elements of high performance are protected by merging the chairperson roles with those of the CEO, as discussed earlier in **Section 2.2.1.3**. Thus, stewardship theory emphasizes that combining the leadership roles of the board of directors will increase authority and administration across the organization (Davis et al., 1997).

In other words, stewardship theory gives a different view of the relationship that exists between owners and managers by assuming that the motivation of managers does not emerge from self-interest but is instead in line with shareholders objectives (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). Thus, stewardship theory holds that managers are trustworthy. However, criticism arises whereby the assumption that managers are true stewards of the interests of owners is not valid, and this is a reality of life (Band, 1992). It can also be criticized for its lack of explanations regarding certain patterns and behaviors that board directors take when engaging in the process of decision-making (Bordean et al., 2012). Therefore, it supports the need to address how board directors perform their important functions inside the boardroom.

### 2.3.1.3 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory was first introduced by Freeman in 1984 when it emerged following criticisms of agency theory to address the issue of agency problems (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2005). It draw a distinction both agency and stewardship theories by assuming that a relationship exists among all stakeholders rather than just a relation between principals and agents (Freeman, 2010). In contrast, stakeholder theory adopts a broad perspective by considering any individuals or groups affected by the organization as stakeholders (Buchholz & Rosenthal, 1997). Stakeholder theory suggests that the board of directors should embrace the perspective of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), emphasizing the importance of prioritizing the interests of all stakeholders and fulfilling corporations' obligations to social sustainability and development (Smith, 2003). For instance, the governing body of a higher education institution should function as representatives on behalf of all stakeholders. In this context, stakeholders

encompass faculty members, administrative managers, employees, students, government agencies, and society at large.

Stakeholder theorists argue that board members may actively participate with managers in decision-making through their service role (Bordean et al., 2012). However, it has recently drawn several criticisms from scholars regarding its managerial mechanism. According to Smallman (2004), stakeholder theory lacks a clear set of criteria for determining who should be considered as actual stakeholders. Additionally, Key (1999) argues that the stakeholder theory framework fails to identify the relationships between external and internal stakeholders. Furthermore, it asserts that all stakeholders' interests should be taken into consideration without specifically focusing on the interests of equity owners (Orts & Strudler, 2002). Therefore, the practical application of stakeholder theory faces limitations when requiring boards to address the needs of all stakeholders, while corporations often prioritize profit generation (Galant, 2017; Smallman, 2004). For this reason, it appears irrelevant to delineate specific roles and responsibilities of the board of directors in this case study.

**2.3.1.4 Resource dependence theory**

Resource dependence theory insists that an organization relies on its resources to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, 2015). It assumes that the successful progression of an organization is contingent on the effective utilization of both internal and external resources (Campling & Michelson, 1998). Resource dependence theory specifically recognizes board members as a driving force in determining the organizational needs for success; therefore, organizations should efficiently utilize their role in resource dependence (Johnson et al., 1996). For instance, external board directors serving as executives in other financial institutions can facilitate quick access to loans and credit for their firm. Thus, organizations should take advantage and be well connected with essential resources from the external environment to achieve desirable outcomes (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, 2015). From the governance point of view, resource

dependence theory emphasizes the important resources that board directors can provide and bring to their organization.

Resource dependence theory also focuses on the inside environment within the organization by considering how members can provide important and valuable resources (Campling & Michelson, 1998; Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). From this point of view, Volonté & Gantenbein (2016) highlight that some recent studies found that resource dependence theory benefits both the operation of the board of directors and the management of the organization. Accordingly, the board of directors is considered one of the very crucial resources that helps an organization to achieve its objectives (Hillman et al., 2000). An organization can use its board directors as a vehicle for offering solutions to uncertainty and external issues (Pfeffer, 1972). In relation to this, scholars assert that four benefits can be provided by the board directors which include providing advice and consultations, legitimacy, communications with important external parties, and preferences to significant commitments or support from external parties (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). In other words, the board of directors serves as an instrument that deals with its environment to improve the overall organizational performance. According to Hillman et al. (2000), directors on the board are classified into four types based on resource dependence theory: insider, business expert, support specialist, and community influential. The authors emphasize that these roles significantly influence the organization's future direction. They also underscore that external changes can prompt boards to diligently offer strategic solutions for their organizations (Hillman et al., 2000).

The connection between resource dependence and role theories becomes apparent when examining the strategic role of boards (Bordean et al., 2012). Board members contribute valuable resources to the organization, encompassing their knowledge, skills, experience, information, and reputation, all of which play a pivotal role in shaping the organization's strategic processes (Hillman et al., 2000; Raffo et al., 2016). Despite these contributions,

criticisms of resource dependence theory highlight concerns about potential conflicts arising

from the external contacts of board directors and their impact on organizational performance

(Codina & Córdova, 2021). Moreover, resource dependence theory places a notable emphasis

on acquiring resources to enhance organizational performance, rather than addressing the

crucial aspect of how to effectively use these resources (Provan, 1980). Specifically, it

characterizes board directors more as resource providers than as evaluators of administrative

management (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003)

In conclusion, **Table 3** summarizes the main theories of corporate governance covered in this

section. Roles of the board of directors is discussed in terms of the principles and limitations

of these theories.

**Table 3 Summary of main theories on corporate governance**

| Main corporate governance theories | Roles of the board of directors | Limitations |
|---|---|---|
| **Agency Theory** | • It principally underscores that the primary duty of the board of directors is to oversee and control organizational performance on behalf of its shareholders. | • It does not consider various factors that impact the organization and should be addressed by the board of directors, particularly those from external resources. Additionally, it overlooks the diverse tasks undertaken by board members that extend beyond their control-oriented roles. Furthermore, it does not acknowledge that board members possess different capacities to fulfil their oversight obligations. |
| **Stewardship Theory** | • The board of directors is perceived as a partnership with the management, wherein all parties within the organization, including managers, share common goals related to organizational performance. | • It lacks specificity in defining the roles of the board of directors, especially in terms of leadership positions. The internal processes guiding the board's operational duties are not adequately covered. Additionally, it overlooks the inherent tendency of managers to prioritize their own interests over those of the shareholders. |
| **Stakeholder Theory** | • It offers a broad perspective in determining the board of directors' role in serving various stakeholders. In this view, the board is responsible for considering the interests of | • In practice, dealing with the wide and complex interests of stakeholder groups makes it less applicable for the board of directors to consider. Furthermore, this perspective overlooks the fact that the board of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | owners, employees, managers, clients, and society as a whole. | directors has a legal obligation to primarily serve the owners and prioritize their interests. Additionally, there is insufficient attention given to internal and external participants and the relationships between the board of directors and its stakeholders. |
| **Resource Dependence Theory** | • It suggests that the board of directors can bring substantial value, influencing the organization's performance. From this standpoint, board members can enhance their organization through interactions with the external environment. Additionally, it assumes that board members can proficiently support organizational operations by providing valuable services and advice or by drawing upon their extensive experience, skills, and expertise in the marketplace | • It gives priority to resource acquisition through the directors but overlooks the significance of their involvement in assessing and managing the organization's operations. Furthermore, interlocking boards may give rise to conflicts of interest and create a potential challenge for board members who could encounter time constraints in fulfilling their roles. |

**Source:** Assembled by the author in accordance with Band (1992); Berle & Means (1991);

Bordean et al. (2012); Buchholz & Rosenthal (1997); Codina & Córdova (2021); Daily et al. (2003);

Donaldson & Davis (1991); Freeman (2010); Gomez-Mejia et al. (2005); Hillman & Dalziel (2003);

Johnson et al. (1996); Key (1999); Orts & Strudler (2002); Pfeffer & Salancik (1978, 2015); Provan

(1980); Roberts et al. (2005); Smallman (2004).

## 2.3.2 Governance in the public sector

Governance has become a vital topic within public organizations over the past decades (Alsharif, 2019). As Zald (1969) states, "*the corporate form with its board of directors (governing boards) has been applied to many types of organizations, for example, businesses, voluntary welfare associations, private schools, public school systems, hospitals, and governmental agencies with 'autonomous' or independent functions*" (p. 97).The main apparent difference between public and private organizations is their ownership since private companies are owned by entrepreneurs and public institutions are jointly owned by public agencies (Rainey et al., 1976; Woodman, 2011). The role of the board of directors in their organization

is very essential in the public sector as it accounts for 35 % of the world's national product (Pettigrew et al., 2002).

On the other hand, Clatworthy et al. (2000) argue that new governance models need to be developed for the public sector. Thus, an increasing number of studies indicate that public sector organizations should be more business oriented (Chenhall et al., 2016; Waugh, 2000). In this respect, organizations in the public sector tend to apply the New Public Management (NPM) by shifting from traditional bureaucracies to adopt business-like management practices (Chenhall et al., 2016; Farrell, 2005; Rhodes, 1999). According to Kelly & Gennard (1996), these organizations move from relying on government operating based on the governance theories that are used in the private sector (as previously analyzed in **Section 2.3.1**). In recent decades, NPM has become a common practice in the public sector, including higher education institutions (Jacquette et al., 2018; Mahoney, 1997, as cited in Chenhall et al., 2016; Sheikh et al., 2022). By adopting the NPM model, Rigby et al. (2021) point out institutions can perform well in the public sector and utilize resources efficiently, improve internal control, and increase transparency in their organization. However, some scholars found it difficult to adopt these theories because organizations in the public sector are fundamentally different from those in the private sector (Boyne, 2002).

The role of boards in the public sector is perceived differently by scholars. Hood et al. (2000) suggest that the role of governing bodies in the public sector includes the oversight and supervision of the organizational operation by expert boards. Additionally, Inglis (1997) argues that the public sector board is charged with developing the strategy and accessing the organization resources. Greer & Hoggett (1999) meanwhile, point out that boards in public sector boards have enormous responsibility for delivering public policies and services. Moreover, Farrell (2005) outlines how the key role of the board of directors in the public sector is to provide strategic guidelines and policies that determine organizational performance. In

contrast, Chambers and Cornforth (2010) point out that there is a lack of accountability among board members who rely on management and participate voluntarily on boards within public organizations. In addition, Farrell (2005) found that most board directors, excluding the board chair, are not consistently engaged in implementing organizational strategies in the public sector. Zald (1969) further highlights that governing bodies in the public sector often exhibit less independence in terms of organizational functions. However, Kajee et al. (2019) point out that most of the challenges concerning the board of directors in the public sector particularly originate from poor governance practices within their organizations. These practices include a lack of clarification and transparency. Nevertheless, the authors assert that overcoming these challenges is possible with the right knowledge and leadership. Meanwhile, the majority of public sector studies have analyzed the role of board directors in a generic manner, which fails to make any real contribution to the body of knowledge (Huse, 2007; Woodman, 2011).

In summary, previous studies have identified three primary functions for the board of directors in the public sector (Hinna et al., 2010; Woodman, 2011). These roles of the board of directors in the public sector are outlined in **Table 4** below.

**Table 4 Summary of board of directors' roles in public sector**

| Roles of board of directors | Perspectives |
|---|---|
| **Performance Management** | • The main responsibility of the board of directors is to ensure compliance through overseeing the management's work in their organization. |
| **Network Governance** | • The principal duty of the board of directors is to establish partnerships on behalf of the organization. |
| **Strategic Leadership** | • The main obligation of the board of directors is to define the strategic direction and assess the performance of the organization. |

**Source:** Compiled by the author from Hinna et al. (2010); Woodman (2011).

### 2.3.3 Governance in higher education

Governance in the higher education sector is based on a variety of definitions and applications as well as theoretical and conceptual foundations (Middlehurst, 2013). In general, governance in the education sector can be defined as a method for improving decision-making processes and policies aimed at developing and achieving organizational objectives and overall performance progress of institutions (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). However, boards of directors differ in their approach towards performing both external and internal functions (Zald, 1969). Furthermore, the *Higher Education Code of Governance* report does not recommend a specific number of governing bodies for higher education institutions (CUC, 2020). Gul & Tsui (2004) further describe that governance principles in various contexts and countries can only serve as guidelines and cannot be adopted as basic rules of corporate governance.

Adopting governance principles can help the institution to distinguish and manage the potential institutional risks by improving the access of control (CUC, 2020). Vidovich & Currie (2011) elaborate on the function of governing boards in higher education as "*University governing bodies, variously referred to as senates, councils and boards in different contexts, occupy an increasingly powerful position at the nexus of internal and external environments of universities, where different influences converge*" (p. 44). Thus, excellent governance can be attained by having a governing body that strategically directs the performance of their institutions (NCIHE, 1997; Shattock, 2013). In relation to this, Waugh (2000) highlights how the leadership of the governing board in higher education is greatly responsible for defining and implementing strategies for their institution. Therefore, it can be seen that the roles of president or vice-chancellor in universities are similar to those of CEOs of private sector companies (Breakwell & Tytherleigh, 2008; Schofield, 2009).

Rigby et al. (2021) identified three points that the governing body can successfully contribute to strategy implementation in the higher education institutions. First, the governing body is

accountable for reviewing the organization's performance and exchanging information with other members on implementation issues, such as goals, accomplishments and timelines. Second, it is the responsibility of the governing body, and particularly its leaders, to communicate with shareholders and other parties about implementation issues. Thirdly, the governing body is responsible for improving and adapting the implementation process in response to feedback (Rigby et al., 2021). According to Schofield (2009), having an effective governance body in a higher education institution can enhance the decision-making process, improve organizational performance, monitor activities more effectively, and establish a strong mission and values for the organization.

However, Levacic (1995) point out that members of governing bodies in higher education institutions tend to not fully practice roles and responsibilities. *A Review of Governance of the Universities in Wales* indicates that board members have a lack of clarity in how to handle strategic matters in their institutions (Gillian, 2019). In contrast, other scholars argue that universities were operated as corporations in the past decade (Mahoney, 1997, as cited in Chenhall et al., 2016; Shattock, 2017). Despite differences, it has been proven that the governing bodies of higher education institutions operate to a certain extent similar to those of private sector corporations (Schofield, 2009). Thus, these governing bodies could have an overall view of all initiatives and ensure that the strategy is actually implemented (CUC, 2020). In the next sections, reviews of the literature on higher education across the world, governance of higher education in Saudi Arabia, and an overview of the governance mechanism within King Saud University (KSU) will be provided.

**2.3.3.1 Governance in higher education across the world**

The concept of multi-level governance in universities was proposed to clarify the responsibilities for institutional operations through contracts, alliances, and partnerships in the higher education sector. (Paradeise et al., 2009). According to the authors, this has led to the

shift of the governance structure in educational institutions has changed from a centralized to a network-based approach. Hence, it is important for the governing bodies of a university to make sure that its executives take responsibility for the hiring, firing, and funding decisions of the institution (Waugh, 2000). Thus, governance is crucial to prioritize the professional development of board members and executives of higher education institutions (CUC, 2020). Hines (2000), meanwhile, suggests that effective performance and governance practices can be attained if an educational institution observes three fundamental principles of governance: autonomy, openness, and academic freedom.

Based on these principles, universities can be regarded as a republic of scholars or a stakeholder organization (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). When considering governance as a republic of scholars, it implies that both leadership and decision-making processes are converging towards institutional autonomy and an academic freedom of self-governing scholars. However, when governing is considered as a stakeholder organization, the decision-making is processed by institutional collaborations. Managers, meanwhile, are responsible for satisfying the interests of the key stakeholders. In this case, power is strictly centralized towards one group of stakeholders (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). In this regard, Waugh (2000) emphasizes the importance of centralizing authority to increase accountability and improve the governing councils. However, the notion of universities as a community of scholars has still been widely accepted in the UK higher education institutions (Docherty, 2015).

According to Bleiklie & Kogan (2007), governance within the higher education context can be related to internal and external aspects. The internal governance is associated with powers bestowed on university authorities such as the presidents, deans, and faculty members including lecturers within universities (Kezar, 2004). On the other hand, external governance relates to the nature of controls that outsiders exercise over the internal operations of a university. This comes when the governing body deals with external issues such as appointing

the public administrators, attaining the academic accreditations, and funding the university activities (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

The governing bodies of the higher education sector have taken various forms in different parts of the world over the past few years. In the early 2000s, there were significant changes in higher education in Australia, particularly due to the restructuring of the governing bodies (Vidovich & Currie, 2011). Structurally, most Australian universities are funded and controlled by the government. Therefore, national governing protocols introduced legislation to impose financial sanctions if universities fail to comply (Vidovich & Currie, 2011).

The higher education sector in European countries underwent a shift to new governance in 1990 (De Boer et al., 2008). The aim of this modern governance system is to increase student freedom and creativity (Erickson et al., 2021). In the early 1990s, nations such as France adopted a policy called *University 2000* (Paradeise et al., 2009). The aim of this policy was to develop policies that support the planning and funding of the higher education sector. By the end of the 1990s, French universities have switched from hierarchical to more horizontal organizations as a result of proactive steps taken by university presidents and boards (Paradeise et al., 2009).

The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) provides instructions for operating and defining the duties of governing bodies in US higher education (Hénard & Mitterle, 2010). The authors further elaborate that AGB provides governing bodies with principles that aim to establish standards of good governance practices and manage relationships with external stakeholders (Hénard & Mitterle, 2010). The US higher education sector is distinct due to its expanding size and diversity, with more than 4000 universities (Vidovich & Currie 2011). According to Gayle et al. (2011), the US has seen a significant increase in the number of high school graduates continuing to enroll in higher education institutions since 2001. Thus, each state differs considerably in terms of the number and size

of institutions (Lingenfelter, 2006). These variations within institutions have allowed some university boards to function differently and assume diverse roles. On the whole, as the author indicates, members of university governing bodies are in charge of budgeting, planning, reviewing, and implementing new programs for their state universities. Also, Vidovich & Currie (2011) further indicate that each state has the power to enact various legislations that manage the structure of universities independently.

The main structural changes in governance within various universities can be attributed to several factors (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). Firstly, central authorities have played a significant role in shaping the management processes and goals of higher education institutions. Secondly, the gradual replacement of traditional academic structures, such as those led by faculty heads, deans, and professors, by emerging managerial infrastructures signifies a notable shift in higher education management. Thirdly, university academic senates have experienced a reduction in power, with some cases where they have been superseded by the council. Lastly, traditional university leadership roles such as president, rector, or vice-chancellor have seen a transfer of authority (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). Those leaders were traditionally responsible for maintaining their institutional culture and responding to public policy expectations (Bleiklie, 2009). Also, they are currently considered as the CEOs of their institutions. For example, a former rector was responsible for coordinating and promoting the initiatives of higher education institutions at the national level in the Norwegian higher education system (Bleiklie, 2009).

The literature highlights that governance in higher education is critical because the degree of control and authority is blurred among various actors and parties in the sector (Chou et al., 2017). The improvement of performance can be achieved by implementing good governance practices that clarify processes, procedures, and responsibilities of governing bodies in the higher education sector (CUC, 2020). Thus, The Higher Education Code of Governance is

designed to assist members of governing bodies in fulfilling the highest standards of governance in the sector (CUC, 2020). Furthermore, Alsharif (2019) outlines a summary of the fundamental objectives of good governance practices such as:

- Enhancement of equity and justice among all stakeholders.

- Improvement of transparency, efficiency, and integrity.

- Protection of the rights of stakeholders and prevention of the exploitation of power.

- Improving responsibility, accountability, legitimacy, and equality in a society.

- Attraction and encouragement of investments and financial flow (p.91).

Effective governance practices in higher education can be achieved through the clear clarification of policies and procedures, regardless of the type of institution in which they are applied. Thus, it is the responsibility of the governing bodies in the higher education sector to ensure that these governance practices are followed in their institutions.

**2.3.3.2 Governance in higher education in Saudi Arabia**

In Saudi Arabia, the structure of the education sector is under the process of governance reforming and development (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). The term corporate governance is primarily based on the Anglo-American model, which includes most legislation derived from the British corporate law (Hussainey & Nodel, 2008). The Saudi Corporate Governance Regulation (SCGR) was adopted in 2006 as the first movement towards capital market governance (Meteb, 2015). Accordingly, the construction of governance is still not fully acknowledged in institutions in the higher education sector (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). However, the government of Saudi Arabia puts high efforts to reform governance in the public sector. For example, Alamri (2011) argues the trend of increasing funding from the Ministry of Education to develop the higher education sector is the main strength factor of the system in Saudi Arabia. This implies that the Saudi government tries to adopt effective governance

practices in order to improve the higher education sector. According to Kentab (2018), it is necessary to employ governance policies that boost professional and effective management practices through boards of higher education institutions.

The Saudi council of ministers has declared a new regulation for universities that enables the university councils to fully make key decisions regarding their universities (Alsharif, 2019). In addition, new regulations have recently been authorized by the Council of Economic and Development Affairs (CEDA) to follow ideal procedures and measures according to the Saudi Vision 2030. Hence, the CEDA has developed a comprehensive governance model aimed at institutionalizing and strengthening the government work by facilitating coordination efforts among relevant stakeholders and effectively monitoring the overall progression in the higher education sector (KSA, 2021).

### 2.3.3.3 Governance of King Saud University (KSU)

King Saud University (KSU) was inaugurated in 1957 as the first public university in Saudi Arabia (Hamdan, 2015). KSU ranked as the top university among Arabic universities in 2019 (USN, 2019). The number of faculties within KSU also increased to 21 (KSU, 2019). The KSU council is the oldest governing body of Saudi universities and was first known as the *University Supreme Council* (KSU, 2021). It is responsible for implementing and managing policy for the university as it is the top governing authority across the organization (KSU, 2021). Al-Eisa & Smith (2013) define the role of the university council, "*which has overall responsibility for the academic policy and strategic direction of the university*" (p. 30). These responsibilities include controlling the university affairs, making critical decisions to promote its mission, establishing new departments and colleges, and budgeting compensation and bonuses for employees. This implies that accomplishing the KSU strategic goals depends on the performance of its council members in this regard.

The KSU council is composed of 46 members including the minister of education, the president of the university, vice presidents, deans of departments, and deans of colleges (KSU, 2021). The KSU council also consists of two other individuals who are not members of the KSU (KSU, 2021). The KSU council has high-status members, reflecting a significant impact on the functioning of the council (Zald, 1969). Therefore, the university council has a main control in terms of directing, planning, and operating the organization (KSU, 2021). The administrative authority across the organization, including decision-making and regulation-making, explains the distinct functions of the KSU council. The KSU council is also accountable for adopting policies that guide the process of strategic direction of the university (KSU, 2021).

**2.3.3.3.1 Roles of KSU council president**

The president of the KSU council is officially responsible for approving the final decisions of the university council. According to the (MoE, 2015), the Minister of Education is the president of the council at every university in Saudi Arabia. However, the Minister of Education is not obligated to attend the meetings of the university council (MoE, 2015). In the case of the KSU council, this study reveals that the Minister of Education rarely attends any of the council meetings. Instead, the president of the university is often delegated by the minister to perform these tasks.

**2.3.3.3.2 Roles of KSU president**

The president of the university is the individual who is most responsible for the overall university performance (MoE, 2015). The president of the university officially holds the position of vice president of the KSU council (MoE, 2015). However, this goes back to the old system of the Ministry of Education that is no longer adopted by the university. Currently, the president of the university acts as the president of the council as he chairs all the council meetings, attends other official conferences, signs agreements and corporations with external

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agencies. This research provides new insights into the leadership role on the KSU council which will be further discussed in the research findings chapter.

## 2.4 Strategy

The term strategy was first used by the Greeks to describe a plan for efficiently employing resources to overcome rivals (Ferreira et al., 2014). Since then, the concept has evolved to encompass a variety of definitions used across different disciplines (Bracker, 1980). Hence, the field of management cannot rely solely on a single definition of strategy, given its long history of being used for various purposes (Mintzberg, 1987). As such, the next section begins by offering common definitions that are generally agreed upon. Subsequently, a critical review of the schools of thought for strategy is presented, followed by a thorough analysis of strategic management, including formulation, implementation, and evaluation phases.

### 2.4.1 Definitions of strategy

There is a wide range of commonly accepted definitions of strategy in management literature. For example, Porter (1996) defines strategy as "*the creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities*" (p. 43). Strategy involves the systematic and objective application of appropriate skills, qualifications, and internally available resources to prepare an organization for confronting its current and future business environment (Ferreira et al., 2014). Additionally, Chandler (1962) provides another definition of strategy from the perspective of management theory. The author argues that strategy refers to the establishment of fundamental long-term goals and objectives, adopting necessary courses of actions, and allocating proper resources (Chandler, 1962). Drawing from a pioneering study, Mintzberg (1987) developed five definitions of strategy, known as the *Five Ps for Strategy*. **Table 5** further elaborates on these definitions.

**Table 5 Five Ps for strategy definitions**

| Items | Definitions |
|---|---|
| **Plan** | • Strategy is seen as deliberate actions and a set of guidelines for handling situations. |
| **Ploy** | • Strategy refers to a direct competitive approach where descriptive movements are employed to gain a competitive advantage. |
| **Pattern** | • Strategy can be defined as a sequence of interconnected actions and consistent behavior over time. |
| **Position** | • Strategy considers how the organization finds an appropriate position within its environment by assessing and aligning with external forces. |
| **Perspective** | • Strategy involves an internal analysis of the organization and the characteristics of its members. |

**Source:** Organized by the author in keeping with Mintzberg (1987).

## 2.4.2 Schools of thought for strategy

A school of thought can be defined as "*intellectual tradition collectively drawn by a group of people who share common characteristics of opinion or outlook of a philosophy, discipline, belief, social movement, economics, culture, or art*" (Hattangadi, 2017, p. 32). According to Mintzberg et al. (2020), strategy comprises of ten schools of thought and can be divided into three groups as prescriptive, descriptive, and configuration. Each of these perspectives entails various concepts and insights into schools of strategy.

First, the prescriptive category includes the design, planning, and positioning of schools of thought for strategy. These schools seek to address how strategies should be formulated. Therefore, these schools are associated with strategic management which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Second, the descriptive category calls attention in terms of understanding the actions of individuals through the stages of developing strategies. According to this point view for strategy, it includes entrepreneurial, cognitive, learning, power, cultural and environmental schools (Mintzberg et al., 2020). The entrepreneurial school sees the formation of strategy as a visionary process developed by senior executives and managers as the natural design of strategies. The school squeezes the strategy formation process by the role of mental attributes such as experience, judgment, and wisdom (Mintzberg et al., 2020). The authors assert that the entrepreneurial school perceives strategy as a perspective or vision that is held within the minds of strategists. Personal leadership and strategic vision are prioritized by the entrepreneurial school (Peleckis, 2015). The fundamental premises of entrepreneurial school suggest that strategies are born from the minds of leaders, developed through a semi-conscious process determined by leaders' experiences, and championed by leaders who keep them under control and look for improvements. Both strategy and vision are flexible and subject to change after a certain period, requiring organizational flexibility to allow leaders to creatively operate tasks (Mintzberg et al., 2020).

Similarly, the cognitive school views strategy formation as a mental process that is developed in individuals' minds through understanding, charts, models, and other forms (Mintzberg et al., 2020; Peleckis, 2015). It emphasizes that strategists use a creative manner of thinking to develop strategies (Peleckis, 2015). According to Mintzberg et al. (2020), the main premises of the cognitive school involve a thinking process occurring in the strategist's mind. The development of strategies relies on patterns and concepts, ultimately influencing individuals' perception of their environment. Additionally, environmental inputs are simplified understandings within the strategist's worldview.

In contrast, the learning school considers strategy as an emergent process (Mintzberg et al., 2020). The authors argue that strategies are considered as an evolving learning progression.

According to Jofre (2011), The learning school indicates that strategies emerge as a result of people's efforts to learn from a particular situation in different ways, creating a common understanding to deal with it. Similarly, the cultural school asserts that the formation of strategies is a collective process that is driven by shared values among the members of the organization. (Mintzberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, the culture school suggests that strategy formation is a social process that is characterized by shared values and norms that could potentially have significant effects on strategic changes (Peleckis, 2015).

The power school perceives strategy formation as a negotiation process that is influenced by politics and power to favor certain interests (Jofre, 2011). According to the author, power and politics play a significant role in the process of formulating strategies, whether it's in an internal or external organizational context. Thus, micro-power can be seen as an interactive process that takes place through indirect and direct bargaining and persuasions of interests between the firm and its partners. While macro-power provides opportunities to enhance the organization's welfare through cooperation in alliances and networks (Jofre, 2011; Mintzberg et al., 2020).

The environmental school, meanwhile, conceptualizes strategy formation as a process that is influenced by the organization's environmental surroundings (Mintzberg et al., 2020). Thus, the formation of a strategy involves a process influenced by the organizational environment, ultimately shaping its strategic direction (Jofre, 2011). The environmental school is also derived from behavioral and contingency theories as it maintains a better way to organize a corporation, depending on the balance between its internal and external aspects (Peleckis, 2015).

Third, the configuration category examines the integration of preceding actors and focuses on the working mechanisms of adopting a new strategy. This category contains only the configuration school, which it considers the strategy formation as a process of transformation (Mintzberg et al., 2020). The configuration school perceives strategy formation as a process

that involves organizational strategic change, incorporating key aspects from various strategic

schools (Jofre, 2011; Mintzberg et al., 2020; Peleckis, 2015). A summary of the ten schools of

thought for strategy proposed by Mintzberg et al. (2020) is provided **in Table 6**.

**Table 6  Mintzberg's schools of thought for strategy**

| Category | Schools of thought | Key premises |
|---|---|---|
| **Prescriptive** | **Design School** | • Strategy is shaped by an adaptive design and conception process by considering the matching of internal and external environmental aspects. This approach aims to align these aspects deliberately to achieve organizational goals. |
| | **Planning School** | • Strategy is formulated as a formal procedure that includes several hundred different models available for strategic planning. It is a systematic and structured process aimed at defining and achieving the organization's objectives. |
| | **Positioning School** | • Strategy is crafted through development in an analytical process, which includes employing an analytical calculation method to select strategic positions. This analytical approach seeks to gain a competitive advantage by strategically positioning the organization within its context. |
| **Descriptive** | **Entrepreneurial School** | • Strategy is developed through a visionary process by focusing on the individual leader's perspective and worldview. It represents a distinct and forward-thinking approach shaped by the leader's unique understanding of the world. |
| | **Cognitive School** | • Strategy is shaped through a mental process, formulated by thoughts and decision-making processes taken by the strategist. It emphasizes the role of cognitive activities in the formulation of organizational strategies. |
| | **Learning School** | • Strategy unfolds through an emerging process, involving collective reflections to address specific situations. This dynamic approach focuses on continuous learning and adaptation to respond to changing circumstances. |
| | **Power School** | • Strategy is formed through a negotiation process by taking into account various forces such as authority and politics. The process |

| | | of formulating strategies is influenced by power dynamics and negotiation. |
|---|---|---|
| | **Cultural School** | • Strategy involves a collaborative process shaping through social interaction among people, including their beliefs and understanding. It emphasizes the cultural aspects that influence strategy development and implementation. |
| | **Environmental School** | • Strategy is propelled by a responsive process that begins with a thorough analysis of the organizational environment and shaping accordingly. This approach underscores the importance of adapting strategies to external factors and changes within the organizational setting. |
| **Configuration** | **Configuration School** | • Strategy takes shape through a transformation process by recognizing the constant changes in situations. Consequently, the organization must adapt effectively to these changes by formulating a new set of strategies. |

**Source:** Created by the author in conformity with Mintzberg et al. (2020).

### 2.4.3 Strategic management

There have been a variety of definitions and models for strategic management developed by scholars (Bracker, 1980). Ferreira et al. (2014) outline strategic management as a set of actions that enable a company to remain aligned with its surroundings and ultimately achieve its intended objectives. David (2011) characterizes strategic management as the art and science of framing, realizing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization to realize its targets. Drucker (2012) specifies strategic management as the process of enabling an organization to achieve its desired outcomes through the establishment of clear goals and objectives, as articulated by Zahra (2003). This contains organizational analysis, actions, and critical decisions aimed at creating and maintaining the organization's competitive advantage (Dess et al., 2014). For instance, strategic management seeks to combine various divisions such as operation, management, research and development, finance, marketing, and information systems that collectively work to reach the organization's set objectives. In general, the strategic management process encompasses three main stages: formulation, implementation,

and evaluation (David, 2011). Mintzberg (1978) defines strategic management as an approach to formulating, executing, and reviewing decisions that direct organizational ambitions towards performance improvement.

Strategic management has received extensive attention and is commonly considered vital for organizations to achieve their objectives (Ferreira et al., 2014). In this regard, Jelenc (2009) proposes four different schools of strategic management including classical, environmental, competitive, and contemporary schools of strategic management.

Firstly, the classical school concentrates on the evaluation and selection of the best choices that align with both the internal capabilities of the organization and its external environment to ensure successful survival (Jelenc, 2009). The process includes internal assessment of the organization's strengths and weaknesses with respect to opportunities and threats from the external environment to determine the key success factors of the organization. The classical school aims to maximize profitability by assessing the factors that contribute to the success of the organization (Jelenc, 2009). The author also points out that it also suggests that the strategy formulation and implementation should be carried out separately in order to have a rational long-term strategy and to use resources effectively (Jelenc, 2009).

Secondly, the environmental school considers the effectiveness and suitability of the environment surrounding an organization to be the key to formulating and implementing strategies (Jelenc, 2009). This school suggests that an organization's environmental factors, encompassing political, cultural, social, power, and other elements, are crucial in developing and implementing a strategy, and they are perceived to impact the role of strategists within the organization (Jelenc, 2009). For this purpose, Ansoff (1991) contends that the success of an organization's strategy depends on the extent to which it is linked to its environment.

Thirdly, the competitive school of strategic management emphasizes competition as the most crucial factor in the success of an organization (Jelenc, 2009). Thus, organizations should focus

on developing a unique method of performance to gain a competitive advantage from others. According to this school, all organizations need to establish their competitive advantage to compete with other companies in the market successfully (Jelenc, 2009). The author also argues that the primary foundation for an organization is the source of competition, which can only be achieved by linking the firm with its environments after maintaining its competitive advantage. Fourthly, the contemporary school views that that difficult competition will weaken all those who participate, therefore, collaboration and sharing information are essential in the process of creating and executing strategies (Jelenc, 2009). Thus, people should learn to stand out from others, but they should also work and help each other (Jelenc, 2009). According to the author, the most important aspect of this school is the cooperation among the members of the organization. **Table 7** provides an overview of these four schools of strategic management proposed by (Jelenc, 2009).

**Table 7 Summary of schools of strategic management**

| Schools of strategic management | Key premises |
|---|---|
| **Classical School** | • Concentrating on the assessment of internal and external factors, it formulates and implements strategies accordingly by ensuring the organization performs effectively in pursuit of its strategic goals. |
| **Environmental School** | • Emphasizing the significance of environment factors, it highlights their crucial role in the success of strategy development and implementation within the organization. |
| **Competitive School** | • Proposing that a competitive market enhances organizational performance, it asserts that formulating and implementing strategies should drive the organization toward sustainable competitive advantage. |
| **Contemporary School** | • Encompassing collaboration and support among members, it emphasizes the organization's reliance on its employees for the successful development and implementation of strategies. |

**Source:** Arranged by the author to adhere to Jelenc (2009).

**2.4.3.1 Strategy formulation**

Strategic planning is interchangeably used to refer to the formulation phase of strategic management (David, 2011). It involves analyzing the organization's environment, defining its mission and vision, setting long-term targets, and selecting an appropriate strategy from the proposed alternatives (Thongsookularn, 2019). Mintzberg et al. (2020) claim that the design of strategies involves a deliberate process to create a strategy that fits both the internal and external conditions of the organization. This includes assessments that an organization should conduct in its internal environment to determine strengths and weaknesses, and through its external environment to find opportunities or avoid threats (David, 2011).

According to Grant (1991), strategy formulation involves matching the organization's internal resources and skills with the identification of opportunities and risks created by its external environment. Additionally, the strategy positioning school offers an analytical perspective on external factors within the industrial context drawing from *Porter's Five Forces* framework (Porter, 2008). This perspective reflects the process of determining the optimal position for the organization to compete in its market (Mintzberg et al., 2020).

Importantly, Hoskisson et al. (1999) argue that internal resources are increasingly being perceived as the key drivers of an organization's success and progress. Barnard (1938) introduced *The Functions of the Executives*, an early study emphasizing the internal competitive advantage of organizations, as reported by Hoskisson et al. (1999). As Ferreira et al. (2014) point out, the purpose of strategy for an organization is to overcome its challenges by arranging internal resources including proper skills and qualifications. This view can be simplified when an organization optimally uses it allocate resources to achieve long-term competitive advantages. Moreover, some researchers argue that the internal environment analysis in the organization is the foundation of the strategy formulation (David, 2011).

Furthermore, Grant (1991) stated that "*recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of the firm's resources as the foundation for firm strategy*" (p. 114). Thus, the logic of Resource-Based View (RBV) suggests that the maximum value of an organization is created through the utilization of its optimal resources (Das & Teng, 2000). According to Raffo et al. (2016), there has been a shift in strategy formulation analysis that encourages organizations to focus on internal resources rather than the external marketplace. The RBV proposes that the internal resources of an organization are more important than external factors to achieve and maintain competitive advantage (David, 2011). According to Reed & DeFillippi (1990), resources are closely linked to competitive advantage in the strategy literature. It conceptualizes resources as anything that can strengthen the performance of a given organization (Wernerfelt, 1984).

In addition, Olavarrieta & Ellinger (1997) consider resource-based theory a central concept in strategy formulation, relying on sustainable competitive advantages as the foundation of its approach. These resources contain all inputs that help the organization successfully execute the strategies as intended (Olavarrieta & Ellinger, 1997). Organizational resources are perceived assets of the organization, which can be either tangible or intangible (Wernerfelt, 1984) According to David (2011), the RBV perspectives classifies resources into three categories including physical resources (e.g., raw materials, machines), human resources (e.g., employees, experience), and organizational resources (e.g., trademarks, information systems). From another perspective, the success of organizational strategies is greatly influenced by the people working in them, known as human resources (Lemarleni et al., 2017). These human resources include employees, skills, knowledge, training, experience, skills, intelligence, and abilities which are all essential factors for formulating and implementing strategy (David, 2011; Murithi, 2009, as cited in Lemarleni et al., 2017). In addition, such capabilities are considered knowledge-based resources, comprising a combination of individual skills and knowledge

applied through organizational processes to enable efficient resource utilization within an organization (Olavarrieta & Ellinger, 1997). From the RBV perspective, board directors with extensive experience, skills, knowledge, and quality can positively contribute to the strategic decision-making process in formulating strategies for their organization (Bordean et al., 2012) Strategically, various scholars hold that the key part of an organization, such as top executives, is one dimension that highly impacts the performance of a given organization (Lunenburg, 2012; Mintzberg, 1993). David (2011) further describes the role of board directors in strategy as " *Strategists are the individuals who are most responsible for the success or failure of an organization. Strategists have various job titles, such as chief executive officer, president, owner, chair of the board, executive director, chancellor, dean, or entrepreneur* (p. 10). Thus, the formulation of strategy within the organization is greatly influenced by the role of board directors.

In this context, the undertaken critical review of governance literature has highlighted that board directors play a significant role in organizational performance, as discussed in **Section 2.2** – **Board of directors**. Particularly, they are perceived to be closely involved in determining the strategic direction for their organization, as indicated in **Section 2.2.3** – **Roles of board directors in strategic management**.

### 2.4.3.2 Strategy implementation

Strategic management studies have revealed a range of perspectives in defining strategy implementation, indicating a lack of understanding of the concept (Noble, 1999; Okumus, 2001). However, Abdalkrim (2013) argues that strategy implementation simply refers to the process of turning intentions into actions. Noble (1999) defines strategy implementation *"as the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of strategic plans*" (p. 120). Moreover, Yang et al. (2010) conducted a literature review of 60 articles and found that there are three different approaches to implementing a strategy. The first approach is a process

perspective that involves the implementation of the strategy as a series of well-established stages. The second approach is a behavioral perspective which considers strategy implementation as a chain of real actions and analysis. The third approach is a hybrid perspective which comprises both of the process and behavior perspectives (Yang et al., 2010). According to Franken et al. (2009), 70% of strategies developed by organizations are not actually implemented. Therefore, Porter, (1991) asserts that adopting an effective strategy requires making important decisions to ensure that the organization operates optimally in line with its industry. In this particular aspect, David (2011) emphasizes that establishing and achieving strategic objectives for an organization is the responsibility of the board of directors. In this case, the board of directors is accountable for making necessary decisions and putting in effort to achieve the institution's objectives.

According to Higgins (2005), the *Eight 'S's* model of strategy implementation was developed based on the influential work of Peters and Waterman in 1982. This model is designed to concentrate on achieving an organization's strategic objectives through a distinctive organizational structure, system, management style, staff, resources, common shared values, and strategic performance. (Radomska, 2014). A detailed discussion of the eight elements of the model in relation to the board of directors is presented below (Higgins, 2005; Radomska, 2014):

1. Strategy and Purpose: Strategies are developed to deliver on the organization objectives. The reasons and ways in which a strategy is formulated will greatly affect its potential for implementation (Higgins 2005; Radomska, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of these strategies should be aligned with the organizational and objectives. Frigo (2003) asserts that it is crucial for organizations to develop a strategy that can be successfully implemented. According to Davies (1991), the fundamental function of the board of directors is to establish strategy and direction for the organization. In this

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context, the corporate governance literature has extensively emphasized the importance of the board of directors in relation to their organization's strategy, as described in **Section 2.2.3**.

2. Structure: The organizational structure is seen as a vital element in filling the gap between strategy and implementation (Radomska, 2014). The organizational structure consists of five main components: jobs, the authority to carry them out, the logical combining of these jobs into departments or divisions, level of management control, and cooperation mechanisms (Higgins, 2005). In this particular aspect, Molz (1985) points out that the board of directors holds the most powerful authority within the organizational structure and should take control to effectively handle the organization's strategic plans.

3. Systems and Processes: These terms can identify how the organization operates on a day-to-day basis. Include the informal and formal procedures that are followed in a given organization to manage the planning, information, budgeting, and resource allocation systems (Higgins, 2005) Therefore, according to Radomska (2014), aligning the process and system within an organization is key to supporting appropriate conducts and results. This is closely related to the primary role of the board of directors, which includes linking resources, coordinating, strategic planning, controlling, maintaining, and supporting functions (Hung, 1998).

4. Style: This term is used to describe the consistent behavior of leaders and managers towards their subordinates and employees (Higgins, 2005). Leadership style is a reflection of the way leaders perform their tasks, prioritize attention, make decisions, and endorse dominant values, beliefs, norms, and actions (Kumar, 2019). Hence, it is imperative to take into account the behavior of leaders within their organization.

According to Kakabadse & Kakabadse (2007), the function of boards and organizations is greatly influenced by the quality and capacity of their board chairpersons. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the human capital of board directors directly influence the organization's performance through its strategy (Volonté & Gantenbein, 2016).

5. Staff: The size of the organization's employees and their skills and capabilities are considered to achieve its strategic objectives (Higgins, 2005). Kumar (2019) highlights that organizations are created by people who can make a genuine impact that leads to the success of their organization. The board of directors is obligated to ensure that managers and staff perform well. Baysinger & Hoskisson (1990) indicate that an effective control and governance structure grants the board of directors the highest level of authority in the organization to assess strategies and choose the proper system of evaluations and awards.

6. reSources: The organization's strategy can be successfully implemented through the proper utilization of resources (Radomska, 2014). These resources include employees, funds, skills, technology, and others (Higgins, 2005). As such, board directors are viewed as crucial players in the provision of external resources to the organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, 2015). Additionally, board members possess valuable resources including professional knowledge, skills, and expertise, which are vital for organizations in making strategic decisions (Barroso-Castro et al., 2017; Hillman et al., 2000).

7. Shared Values: The shared values among members of the organization distinguish it from others, indicating that this culture is an important factor for the organization's success (Higgins, 2005). The organization's execution strategy is influenced by its

strategic objectives, values, and principles. (Radomska, 2014). In relation to this, establishing rules of conduct and standards for the organization's corporation falls under the authority of the board of directors (Davies, 1991; Hung, 1998) Moreover, board leadership, particularly the CEO's role, has a significant impact on leading the operations of the organization (Glick, 2011).

8. Strategic Performance: This encompasses a comprehensive evaluation of the company's overall performance (Radomska, 2014). Becher (2005) emphasizes importance of monitoring the implementation strategy process to quickly address problems and take corrective actions, as well as to identify which areas work well for further advancement. In this aspect, setting standards for organizational implementation strategies and evaluating performance in accordance with these standards is the responsibility of the board of directors (Helmer, 1996, as cited in Hendry & Kiel, 2004).

In conclusion, the success of strategy implementation is intricately tied to the efforts of individuals and groups within the organization (Enrique et al., 2005). As outlined above, this achievement heavily relies on the board of directors. Particularly, the directors on the board are perceived to play an important role in deciding how strategies can be implemented.

**2.4.3.3 Strategy evaluation**

Strategy evaluation is the final stage of the strategic management process, which comes after strategy formulation and implementation (David, 2011). Organizations can determine how current performance contributes to strategy implementation through a continuous assessment process of strategy evaluation (Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019). Barney (2001) suggests that an efficient evaluation process involves assessing organizational performance by measuring the resources used to maintain and gain potential competitive advantage. Thus, the objective of strategy evaluation is to ensure that the organizational strategy is executed in accordance with the organization's objectives during both formulation and implementation (Ivančić, 2013).

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According to David & David (2017), strategy evaluation encompasses three key activities of the organization's strategy undertaken. These tasks involve examining both internal and external aspects, measuring the actual implementation outcomes, and taking the necessary actions (David & David, 2017). Van Wyk (2018) highlights that assessing organizational performance may require taking corrective actions and making appropriate decisions, which involves modifications to standards, objectives, strategies, structure, or activities. David (2011) proposes that responding to consistent changes in both the external and internal environments of the organization may be necessary during the evaluation process. As a consequence of these changes, the organization's structure may be altered; key individuals may be replaced; or the mission, objectives, and strategies may be revised (David, 2011)

Determining strategic objectives through quantitative performance metrics is a fundamental step in an effective strategic evaluation process (Ivančić, 2013). Kaplan & Norton (2016) developed a measurement method widely known as the *Balanced Scorecard* to guarantee that organizational performance is based on its strategy. The method consists of five key elements as follows:

1- Converting the strategy into an organizational operation process.

2- Integrating organizational functions into the strategy.

3- Ensuring that the strategy is understood by all members of the organization.

4- Creating a consistent process for linking, reviewing, and developing the strategy.

5- Implementing the change by the executive leaders of the organization (Kaplan & Norton, 2001).

The first part of this chapter is presented in previous sections, which covers the critical analysis of literature on the board of directors including board functions, roles of board directors, and roles of board directors in strategic management. It is followed by presenting a critical review of corporate governance literature, focusing on the main theories of corporate governance, governance in the public sector, and governance in higher education. The analysis of strategy literature is provided next, including definitions of strategy, schools of thought for strategy, and strategic management.

After critically reviewing these areas of literature, the second part of this chapter introduces sections on research opportunity and research questions. The theoretical framework and guiding theory of this thesis will be discussed afterward. Lastly, the chapter will be concluded with a summary at the end. **Figure 2** give a brief overview of the chapter's structure.

**Figure 2 Structure of the literature review chapter**
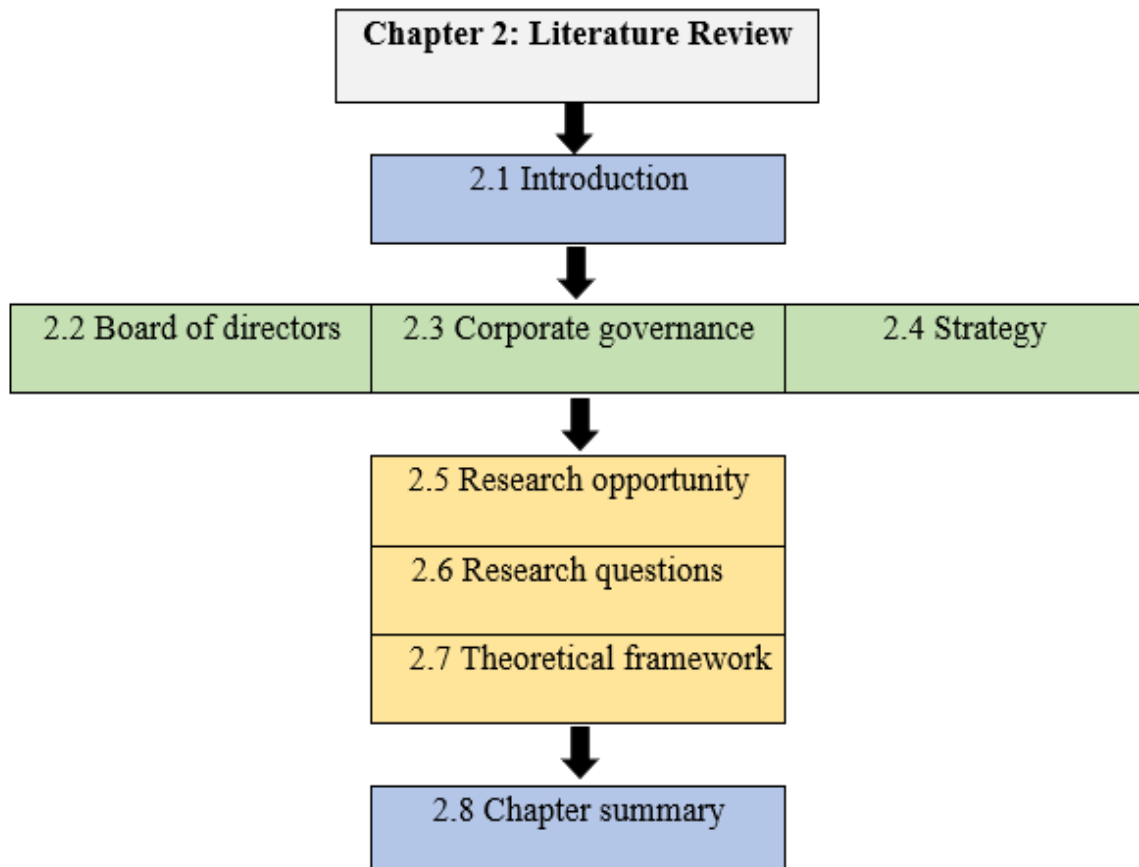
## 2.5 Research opportunity

The literature on corporate governance implies that the majority of studies have been undertaken in North America and Europe (e.g., Berle & Means, 1991; Cornforth, 2001; Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Fama, 1980; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Freeman, 2010; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007; Luoma & Goodstein, 1999; McNulty et al., 2013; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, 2015). Moreover, Salem (2019) highlights that corporate governance studies are less often carried out in developing countries. This is true particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia, as the corporate governance codes were only established in 2006 (Al-Janadi et al., 2013). Also, researchers claim that conducting studies on the board of directors is challenging because of the difficulty in accessing information (Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Ong & Wan, 2001; Zald, 1969). In this regard, Woodman (2011) points out that studying the board of directors in the public sector is even harder. Furthermore, some scholars argue that the work of board directors has not received sufficient attention from researchers (Ingley & Van der Walt, 2001; Johnson et al., 1996; Ruigrok et al., 2006).

There is still a lack of consensus in the corporate governance literature about the role of the board of directors and the role of the board members (Ruigrok et al., 2006; Petrovic, 2008). Additionally, many scholars in corporate governance argue that determining the responsibility of board directors in strategy remains unclear (Bezemer et al., 2018; Bordean et al., 2011; Daily et al., 2003; Farrell, 2005; Hyväri, 2016; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999; Pugliese et al., 2009; Zahra, 1990; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). This ambiguity highlights the evident difficulties in conceptualizing the roles of the board of directors (Nicholson & Newton, 2010; Pettigrew et al., 2002). Brauer & Schmidt (2008) further explain that there is no clear explanation of the strategic role of the board of directors as most studies in corporate governance literature rely solely on a theoretical standpoint such as agency theory. In addition, many scholars argue that the board of directors in the public sector requires researchers to conduct further research to

develop a better understanding of boards (Woodman, 2011). Particularly, finding sufficient literature on the governance of the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia is challenging, which indicates that more research and studies are needed in this field (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013; Alkhazim, 2003). There has also been a scarcity of studies focusing on the context in which governing bodies of higher education institutions exercise their strategic role (Schofield, 2009; Gillian, 2019).

In relation to strategy, most research and studies concerning strategic management are predominantly conducted in the United States and United Kingdom (Fuertes, 2020), with a significant concentration of empirical studies originating from these regions (e.g., David, 2011; Hardy et al., 1983; Jelenc, 2009; Mintzberg, 1978, 1987; Mintzberg et al., 2020; Porter, 1991, 1996). However, the majority of strategic management studies and models predominantly focus on the private sector, leaving the public sector with insufficient attention (Bryson & George, 2020; Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022). Furthermore, numerous scholars have argued that while the existing literature on strategy predominantly focuses on the formulation stage of strategic management, there is a noticeable shortage of studies concentrating on the implementation stage (Alexander, 1985; Noble 1999; Srivastava & Sushil, 2015). Research publications indicate that there is an absence of theoretical concepts to guide strategists in performing their strategic roles (Fuertes, 2020). In addition, the process of developing strategies for public sector organizations is a topic of ongoing debate (Plant, 2009; Rose & Cray, 2010). However, there has been a growing focus on strengthening the governance of organizations in the public sector in the Saudi Arabian context (SGN, 2016), driven by initiatives such as the Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to develop human capital by improving the education sector (Fattouh, 2021).

It is important to take into consideration that this case study does not focus on the relation between the board of directors and the shareholders in accordance with agency theory. Besides, the literature on corporate governance is insufficient in identifying the extent of board directors'

involvement in strategy. Instead, this study aims to explore the manner in which the members of the KSU council carry out the strategy of their institution. Given that the board of directors is socially constructed within the organization allows one to explore the views and experiences of the directors on the board. This can be seen as a reflection of their contribution to carrying out their duties.

In conclusion, this research proposes to bridge the knowledge gap in the literature by identifying how governing body members contribute to strategic direction of their institution in the higher education sector. This study will be the first to provide a comprehensive analysis of the contribution of members of a governing body to their institutional strategy in the field of higher education in Saudi Arabia, since no previous studies have been carried out on this specific topic.

## 2.6 Research questions

The research question is intended to explore a specific area that has not yet been clarified in the literature. The literature review conducted in this chapter has unveiled an opportunity for research by investigating how board directors fulfill their responsibilities in executing institutional strategy within the higher education context in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the central question of this study is:

*How Do Council Members of King Saud University Contribute to their Institutional Strategy?*

In order to answer this substantial question, the following four sub-questions are taken into consideration:

- How do council members of King Saud University exercise their responsibilities in relation to institutional strategy?

- How do council members of King Saud University engage in strategic decision-making of their institution?

- How do council members of King Saud University utilize their organization's resources to execute strategies?

- How do council members of King Saud University ensure that strategies are implemented efficiently in their institution?

## 2.7 Theoretical framework: role theory

As discussed in the previous section, the main objective of this study is to determine how members of the KSU council contribute to the strategy of their organization. Accordingly, there are three approaches that should be considered to answer the main research questions in this study. The first approach is to determine the role of the board of directors in strategy. To achieve this purpose requires critically reviewing the literature on the board of directors. This includes the board functions, roles of board directors, and roles of board directors in strategic management as discussed earlier in **Section 2.2**.

The second approach is to analyze the literature on corporate governance within the research context, as reviewed in **Section 2.3**. The corporate governance section begins by reviewing the main theories of corporate governance to understand the different perspectives of the board of directors. The analysis of literature on governance in the public sector is then presented. In order to cover the context of the board of directors in this study, a critical review of the literature on governance in higher education, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia and KSU, is provided.

The third approach is to review the literature on strategy as this research aims to explore the strategic contribution of members on the KSU council to their institution. Therefore, **Section 2.4** offers an extensive review of the strategy literature. It begins with providing an overview

of the definitions of strategy followed by a critical review of schools of thought for strategy. After that, strategic management including formulation, implementation, and evaluation is thoroughly discussed.

A critical review of literature on the board of directors, corporate governance, and strategy was utilized as a guideline to determine how members of the KSU council could contribute to the strategy of their organization. Additionally, this will help to extend the understanding of this area within existing literature.

**Figure 3** depicts the framework for studying how members of the KSU council contribute to their organization's strategy.

**Figure 3 Theoretical framework of the study**
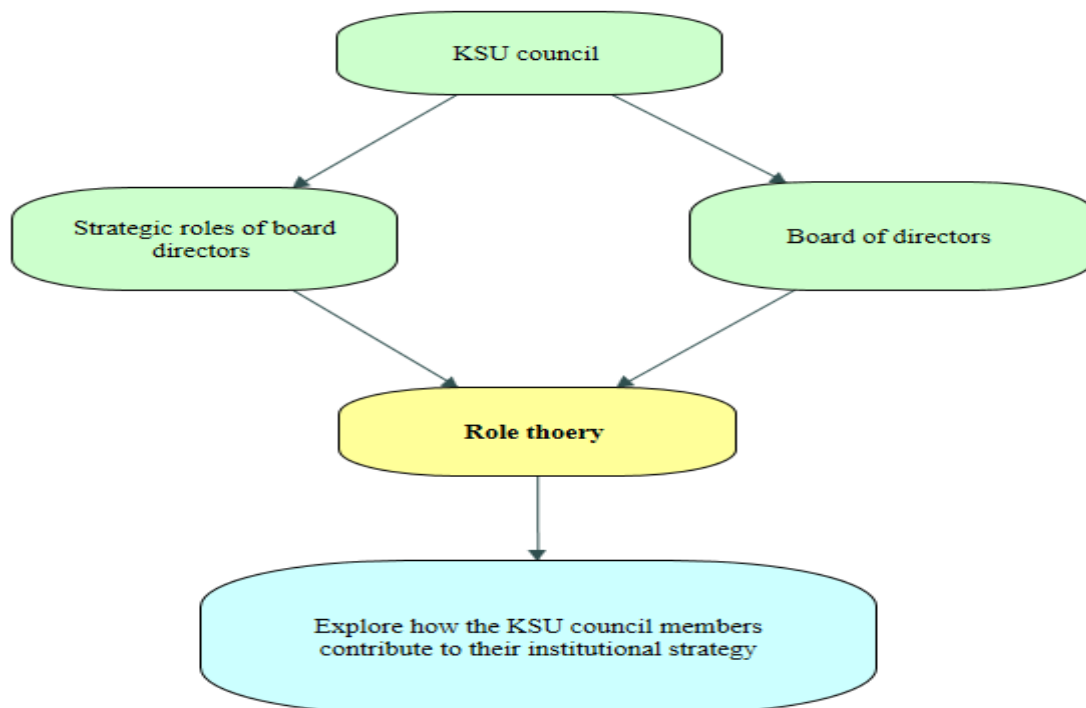


**Source:** Developed by the author.

Role theory served as the foundational framework throughout the analytical process of this study, with a specific emphasis on investigating the contribution of KSU members to their institution's strategic plan.

Role theory emphasizes the significance of behavioral patterns or roles as one of the important aspects of social life by assuming that individuals are part of social positions and have expectations for their own and others' behaviors (Biddle, 1986). The role perspective was first introduced to various disciplines in the 1920s (Campbell, 1999). According to Solomon et al. (1985), role theory aims to recognize the extent to which an individual behaves appropriately based on the reactions of other individuals, which explains the concept of role enactment. On this point, Fondas & Stewart (1994) argue that roles of a given position can be altered by the individual who occupies it. Thus, roles are continuously formed and reformed as individuals engage in creating these roles. (Turner, 2001).

According to Veloutsou & Black (2020), there are three perspectives of role theory that aim to explain the social interaction between individuals and consequently determine proper behaviors for those who occupy positions in society. These include the functional, symbolic interaction, and structural perspectives of role theory (Biddle, 1986).

First, the functional role perspective emphasizes the set of expectations, such as rights, privileges, and responsibilities, that individuals have by holding specific positions within the social structure (Lynch, 2007; Solomon et al., 1985). According to Biddle (1986), role expectations are driven by different individual experiences that shape their norms, beliefs, and preferences.

Second, the symbolic interactionist perspective assumes that roles under social construction are shared among actors through interpretations and negotiations (Veloutsou & Black, 2020). In accordance with this approach, roles are evolved through the degree of conformity between actors through the shared norms, attitudes, negotiations, as they individually understand a certain situation (Biddle, 1986). The interactions between actors can lead to the formation, arrangement, or modification of roles (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013).

Third, the structural role perspective places emphasis on social environment, as it recognizes that stable organizations consist of individuals who share similar behaviors or roles (Biddle, 1986). Eventually, these patterned behaviors or roles become role sets in other contexts of interaction (Solomon et al., 1985; Veloutsou & Black, 2020).

Carpenter et al. (2016) define an organization as "*a complex system in which individuals adjust their behavior to meet the role expectations of leadership, coworkers, and social groups*" (p. 450). Thus, role expectations determines how individuals carry out their work in the organization (Katz & Kahn, 2015). In this respect, various studies argue that the importance of individual efforts is crucial for organizational success (Lemarleni et al., 2017; Kumar, 2019). Furthermore, other scholars within this context have claimed that fundamental roles of the board of directors can be determined by its individual directors (Hues, 2005; Petrovic, 2008; Roberts et al., 2005). This implies that the contribution of individual directors on the board is key to establishing roles that the board must fulfill (Petrovic, 2008). Johnson et al. (1996) identified the roles performed by board directors including monitoring the performance of the CEO and management, developing strategies, and providing crucial resources for organizational success. Moreover, board directors play a key role in the long-term success of organizational performance because they are responsible for the overall strategic direction of their organization (Ingley & Van der Walt, 2001). In this study, the contribution of individual board directors to their organization's strategy will be assessed by applying role theory to find out how they fulfill their strategic roles.

Role theory provides a suitable framework for analyzing managerial and individual behaviors within the organization (Fondas & Stewart 1994; Hales, 1986) In fact, it is widely used in social science studies, including sociology, psychology, and organizational disciplines (Biddle, 1986; Carpenter et al., 2016; Hales & Nightingale, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 2015). Hales (1986) further suggests that "*the concept of role might be more systematically used as a framework of*

*analysis, with greater emphasis upon the inter-relation between expectations and performance*" (p.111). Thus, the application of role theory has been common in previous studies that seek to study individual behaviors in organizational contexts (e.g., Knight & Harland, 2005; Lambert et al., 2003; Wickham & Parker, 2007). Moreover, there has been significant research focused on developing theoretical perspectives on the role of the board of directors (e.g., Hendry & Kiel, 2004; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007; Stiles & Taylor, 2001; Zahra & Pearce, 1989).

In conclusion, role theory is certainly appropriate for achieving the objectives of this research. Thus, it was adopted to provide insight and knowledge regarding the contribution of members of a governing body to the strategy of their higher education institution.

## 2.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the literature on board of directors and strategy in the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia is critically reviewed. It begins with an introduction the areas of relevant literature to this study. The second section provides an in-depth review of the board of directors' literature. This includes board functions and roles of board directors, particularly in strategic management. The third section concentrates on the corporate governance literature including main theories of corporate governance and governance in the public sector, particularly in higher education. The fourth section critically reviews the strategy literature including definitions of strategy, schools of thought for strategy, and strategic management. Then, the next three sections present an extensive discussion on the research opportunity, research questions, and theoretical framework of this study.

Afterwards, **Chapter 3** demonstrates a clarification and analysis of the methodology used in this research.

# Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview and justification of the methodology adopted in this study. It begins with a concise presentation of the main questions of this research. It then explores the research philosophy section where the researcher classifies his position based on the philosophical perspectives of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. In the subsequent sections, the chapter investigates approaches to scientific inquiry logics, with a specific focus on identifying the inquiry logic for this research. This is followed by extensive discussions and in-depth details that explain the research design for this study. This includes research methodology, research methods, research context, level of analysis, unit of analysis, unit of observation, methods of data collection, sample selection, time horizon, and methods of data analysis. Then, a summary of each part of the research design is presented. This is followed by outlining the quality of the research and discussing ethical considerations for this study. The next sections delve into detailed discussions about the pilot study for this research. Finally, a summary of this chapter is presented at the end.

## 3.2 Research questions

As discussed earlier in the literature review chapter, the main question in this research concerns the manner in which the board members carry out their duties in responding to their institutional strategy. Thus, the research question is stated as:

*How Do Council Members of King Saud University Contribute to their Institutional Strategy?*

The following four sub-questions are taken into consideration to address this essential question:

- How do council members of King Saud University exercise their responsibilities in relation to institutional strategy?

- How do council members of King Saud University engage in strategic decision-making of their institution?

- How do council members of King Saud University utilize their organization's resources to execute strategies?

- How do council members of King Saud University ensure that strategies are implemented efficiently in their institution?

## 3.3 Research philosophy

Research philosophy in research refers to the assumptions regarding the development of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019). These assumptions include ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Ponterotto, 2005). It is essential for researchers to know philosophy terms to identify the appropriate research design for the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Thus, the research methodology, including all the producers involved in conducting the research, can be properly determined once the researcher's position is clearly defined from the philosophical perspective (Ponterotto, 2005). The following sections provide a brief overview of the philosophical underpinnings of ontology, epistemology and axiology. It also specifies the position of the researcher in conducting this research accordingly.

### 3.3.1 Ontological position

Ontology can be defined as the nature of reality and things that can be recognized in that reality (Ritchie et al., 2013; Wilkins et al., 2019). It incorporates assumptions from existing and being entities (Ponterotto, 2005). Importantly, determining a study's ontological position is one of the early bases of any scientific inquiry (Slevitch, 2011). According to the author, ontology is the

foundation of knowing that defines epistemology, so it is important for researchers to determine their positions in accordance with ontological perspective.

The positivist worldview posits that only one true reality can be identified (Ponterotto, 2005). On the other hand, the constructivist worldview, combined with an interpretivist philosophical perspective, assumes that there are multiple constructed realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ponterotto, 2005). In this research project, the particular studied phenomenon can provide a multiple of possible answers and meanings reflecting the participants' views. This case study explores the reality of the KSU council members' views and perspectives with respect to their institution's strategy. Therefore, this case study is based on a constructivist perspective.

## 3.3.2 Epistemological position

Epistemology can be defined as the study of knowledge and forms of the knowledge foundation (Slevitch, 2011) Furthermore, it constitutes what is considered as accepted knowledge in a given discipline (Saunders et al., 2019; Wilkins et al., 2019). It determines a way of acquiring knowledge including the involvement of the researchers in this process (Ponterotto, 2005). The epistemology which underlies a positivist position adopts an objective worldview (Wilkins et al., 2019). It assumes that knowledge can be found through evident and measurable assessments of a stable and objective reality (Moriarty, 2011). According to this perspective, the research process is implemented independently from the researcher involvement (Ponterotto, 2005). On the other hand, epistemology takes a subjective view of the world from a constructivism position (Creswell & Creswell, 20017). Epistemological constructivism emphasizes that there are multiple constructed realities that can be interpreted differently (Slevitch, 2011). On this point, Gioia et al. (2013) argue that most organizational studies concentrate on socially constructed views and less on measures of numbers or frequencies. This perspective also indicates that interactions between researchers and participants are necessary to reflect their constructed reality (Ponterotto, 2005).

In this case study, exploring the contribution of the KSU council members to their institution's strategy relies on subjective views. Moreover, the researcher was involved in the research process by interviewing the participants and interpreting their constructive views and experiences. Therefore, the contribution of knowledge from this study is based upon subjective worldviews.

### 3.3.3 Axiological position

Axiology can be defined as the values and ethics that take place within a scientific research process (Saunders et al., 2019). It considers the way that the researcher can add value during the research process (Ponterotto, 2005). According to the author, the positivist position holds that values are not part of the research process. This is because the research process is conducted through a systematic process, which is value-free and independent of researchers (Saunders et al., 2019). On the other hand, the constructivist position indicates that the research process cannot be separated from the researcher's values (Ponterotto, 2005). In this regard, the personal skills of researchers added value to the research process by making judgments about the procedures and justifying the choices accordingly (Heron, 1996, as cited in Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, interpersonal communication between the researcher and the participants is necessary to facilitate their constructed views of the phenomena being studied (Ponterotto, 2005). In this case study, the researcher is required to be actively involved in the research process while adhering to both academic and ethical standards in conducting such research.

By completing the section on research philosophy, it becomes apparent that a subjective constructivist is at the root of this study.

## 3.4 Inquiry logics of scientific research

Understanding the inquiry logic approach at the beginning of research is crucial for determining the research design properly (Saunders et al., 2019). The authors further suggest that the best approach is the one that fits logically with the phenomena being studied. These approaches include deductive, inductive, abductive, and retroductive will be discussed in this section (Blackstone, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Kovács & Spens, 2005; Mukumbang, 2023; Saunders et al., 2019; Wilkins et al., 2019; Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018).

First, the deductive approach starts from a general level to a specific one by selecting an existing theory, generating hypotheses, examining them, and then modifying the theory accordingly (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018). The deductive approach is appropriate to use for studies that aim to examine hypotheses by using data to approve or reject propositions that relate to existing theory (Saunders et al., 2019; Thorne, 2000). Furthermore, Kovács & Spens (2005) explain that studies which utilize the deductive approach begin by conducting literature review to analyze a specific theory, formulating possible hypotheses from that theory, testing these hypotheses against the collected data, and presenting a conclusion that can either be verified or falsified. Thus, deductive studies begin by focusing on the theoretical framework as it is the basis for developing hypotheses (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018). According to the authors, however, the deductive approach does not apply to studies that examine how individuals think and interact with their environment.

Second, the inductive approach moves from a specific or data-driven perspective to a general or theoretical one (Blackstone, 2018) It focuses on formulating a new theory or generating insights by constructing an existing theory based on the collected data (Wilkins et al., 2019). The process of this approach starts with creating well-defined questions, consulting with relevant literature, collecting data, and analyzing the collected data by looking for patterns that could develop a new theory or a set of propositions for an existing theory (Gioia et al., 2013;

Saunders et al., 2019). Inductive studies do not require to create hypotheses as they aim to discover a new direction (Locke, 2007). Also, the inductive approach is a suitable approach for studying human behaviors, which cannot be captured through the deductive approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019).

Third, the abductive approach process involves moving between deductive and inductive approaches (Suddaby, 2006). The abductive approach follows a pragmatic process that addresses the limitations of inductive and deductive approaches (Wilkins et al., 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2019), abductive studies begin with real-life observations that lead to a new conclusion, which establishes a group of possible hypotheses that can be tested to explain that conclusion. The objective of the abductive approach is to develop new knowledge by relaying creativity or intuition (Kovács & Spens, 2005). Furthermore, the abductive approach is applicable to studies that attempt to describe curiosity or complex phenomena (Silverman, 2016).

Fourth, the retroductive approach involves the process of fully combining deduction, induction, and abduction into a general logic (Mukumbang, 2023). Retrodiction focuses on reasoning backwards to understand a given phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019). It relies on inference logic that is based on critical realism (Downward & Mearman, 2007). This requires researchers to interpret and recontextualize incomplete observations to provide the best possible explanation (Mukumbang, 2023). According to Ladyman (2007), the retrodictive approach aims to study patterns that lead to the discovery of new knowledge.

### 3.4.1 Study's inquiry logic

The inquiry of this case study is based on inductive reasoning. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), the inductive approach is used to conduct the vast majority of social and human studies. It was chosen as it is appropriate for the study's inquiry reasoning, which is driven from collected data to the theory's propositions. This case study aims to explore the

contribution of the KSU members to their institution's strategy. This aligns with the methodological literature, suggesting that the type of this study is compatible with the inductive logical reasoning approach (Blackstone, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989b; Gioia et al., 2013; Kovács & Spens, 2005; Saunders et al., 2019; Silverman, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2019; Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018).

While role theory was employed as the guiding framework for this study, it's important to note that the research process is not purely inductive. Instead, role theory affects the process of analysis, which was carefully considered prior to conducting the study.

Overall, the inquiry of this case study is to explore the manner in which the KSU council members contribute to the strategy of their institution. It begins with reviewing the relevant literature. Then it is followed by collecting data from the council members who are considered to play an essential part in the study. The researcher acquires knowledge from the participants by exploring their constructed views and experience that clarifies the phenomena associated with the study.

As the study's logical inquiry is addressed in this section, the research design will be explained further in the next section.

## 3.5 Research design

The research design refers to the plans and procedures for conducting research ranging from broad assumptions to specific methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This section provides a thorough and detailed discussion on the approach to conducting this research project, covering research methodology, research methods, research context, level of analysis, unit of analysis, unit of observation, methods of data collection, sample selection, time horizon, and methods of data analysis. Then, a summary of the research design for this research project is presented at the end of this section.

### 3.5.1 Research methodology

Methodology is a set of principles and structures derived from theories that guide the research process and the way research should be conducted (Saunders et al., 2019; Slevitch, 2011). Research methodology includes three common approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research (Williams, 2007).

The process of quantitative studies involves analyzing the relationships among variables to deliver measured and numerical data that can be statistically examined (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The use of statistical and mathematical techniques is employed to establish whether something is true or not (Hancock et al., 2009). Saunders et al. (2019) point out that quantitative studies often rely on adopting data to examine theory using the deductive approach. Therefore, quantitative research is mostly characterized by the use of closed-ended questions to gather numerical data for the study (Williams, 2007). Moreover, the researcher is expected to not be involved with the respondents in a qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Hancock et al. (2009), the process research for conducting quantitative studies should be planned in the early stages of the study. Creswell & Creswell (2017) further elaborate that quantitative studies tend to focus heavily on literature at the outset to develop deductive hypotheses that can objectively test theories. The main purpose of quantitative studies is to seek generalization of their results (Slevitch, 2011).

On the other hand, qualitative methodology aims to study social phenomena from the perspective of involved participants (Williams, 2007). Thorne (2000) indicates, *"... (interpretation) may be a more effective way to distinguish quantitative from qualitative analytic processes involved in any particular study"* (p. 68). Furthermore, Hancock et al. (2009) assert that the primary focus of qualitative studies is to interpret and describe data, aiming to develop new concepts and theories while analyzing organizational functions. In this respect, Bowen (2009) argues that organizational studies have been considered a key component of

qualitative research for a long time. Qualitative studies involve observing the world that constantly changes, leading to a set of interpretations that can be analyzed (Denzin & Lincoln (2008). Polkinghorne (2005) asserts that qualitative research is closely associated with studies that focus on human experience and describe individuals' lives. Qualitative research, as stated by Lietz & Zayas (2010), is intended to gain an understanding of social practices, experiences, relationships, and beliefs from the perspectives of participants—none of which can be measured through numerical tests (Hancock et al., 2009). The authors suggest that qualitative research can enhance explanations of a given phenomenon by allowing for multiple meanings based on participant experiences. This requires researchers to be greatly involved in the research process while conducting qualitative research (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

The last approach of research methodology is mixed methods, which consist of adopting methods and analysis that combine the quantitative and qualitative methods in a given research study (Mukumbang, 2023). Additionally, Creswell & Creswell (2017) indicate that mixed methods do not adhere strictly to either a quantitative or qualitative process when conducting research. The mixed methods approach involves collecting and analyzing both numerical and narrative data to address a specific research question (Williams, 2007)

Methodological research has accentuated various benefits associated with utilizing qualitative studies. Qualitative research aims to offer in-depth data for comprehending a phenomenon or research topic, surpassing the analysis of mere numbers and counts advocated in quantitative research (Silverman, 2015). This involves analyzing various groups of data, such as words, opinions, attitudes, emotions, experiences, and feelings. These data can enable researchers to develop a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon or research topic when compared to quantitative research (Silverman, 2013). Additionally, qualitative research helps understand how individuals perceive reality differently based on their experiences and points of view

(Hancock et al., 200), enabling researchers to interpret participants' constructed reality along with their views and attitudes (Saunders et al., 2019).

### 3.5.1.1 Selected research methodology

The purpose of this study focuses on exploring how the KSU council members contribute to their institutional strategy, aligning with the adoption of a qualitative research approach. The objective of qualitative studies is to seek an understanding of the particular phenomenon being studied (Silverman, 2015). In this study, the specific phenomenon, which aims to understand the contribution of KSU council members to their institutional strategy, requires further clarification. As emphasized by Saunders et al. (2019), researchers undertaking qualitative studies are encouraged to actively engage in the research process, gathering information to address research questions. This requires developing profound insights beyond the scope of what a quantitative design can provide from the participants' points of view. Thus, the qualitative methodology is instrumental in comprehending the experiences of participants in fulfilling their duties, making it the appropriate research design to meet the study's objectives. Silverman (2013) recommends the use of qualitative research to analyze how social phenomena are perceived and interpreted in people's daily activities. In this study, the qualitative research approach facilitates exploring and understanding the efforts of the KSU council members in making key decisions, performing tasks, and exercising their responsibilities.

In summary, the qualitative research methodology is deemed suitable for achieving a deeper understanding of the specific issue that is being studied in this research project. The next section will provide details of the range of different methods and then justify the one that is chosen in this research.

## 3.5.2 Research methods

The term of research methods encompasses a diverse array of tools and procedures employed in the execution of research studies (Walliman, 2021). Within this broad range, each research

method possesses its unique set of methods for both collecting and analyzing data (Slevitch, 2011). This section illuminates the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research methods, clarifying their distinctions and highlighting their individual merits. Subsequently, the chosen method for this particular research project will be unveiled, offering insight into the specific approach taken.

Quantitative research methods are categorized into three widespread approaches: descriptive, experimental, and causal comparative (Leedy & Ormrod, 1980; Williams, 2007). The descriptive approach, as described by Williams (2007), is employed in a simple method that assesses the current state of a phenomenon. For instance, it is instrumental in providing a snapshot of the existing conditions or characteristics of a given phenomenon. In contrast, the experimental approach, as outlined by Creswell & Creswell (2017), aims to examine whether specific conditions of a treatment impact the outcome of one group when held in conjunction with another. Finally, the causal comparative approach investigates how independent variables influence dependent variables, exploring the causes and interactions among these variables (Williams, 2007).

In the domain of these broad quantitative research approaches, diverse methods are utilized to thoroughly investigate phenomena. Notable among these methods are correlational, observational, development, and survey designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Williams, 2007). The correlational design of quantitative methods seeks to describe and evaluate relationships and connections among two or more variables by employing correlation statistical techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Williams (2007), the observational design of quantitative methods focuses on the study of specific human behaviors to gather data that can lead to an objective outcome. The author also discusses the development design of quantitative methods, which seeks to analyze how the characteristics of a study group are likely to change over time (Williams, 2007). Lastly, the survey design in quantitative methods allows for a

numerical description of a sample population's viewpoints and attitudes towards a given phenomenon, with the aim of generalizing outcomes. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In addition, it is worth noting that the case study method can be utilized in both quantitative and qualitative research (Yin, 2009).

While these quantitative methods are associated with studies employing numeric and static techniques, seeking objective and generalized conclusions based on the quantitative methodology discussed in the previous section, they are considered inappropriate for the purpose of this research.

In contrast, qualitative methods offer a suitable approach for conducting this study. Qualitative methods can be categorized into *"… five different approaches to qualitative inquiry—narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies…"* (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 2). The subsequent paragraphs will offer a detailed discussion and analysis of each of these qualitative approaches.

Firstly, the narrative inquiry method focuses on studying the stories of people, which describe the way individuals experience the world (Connelly et al., 1990). The process of narrative inquiry involves in-depth collection of stories from participants, analyzing these stories within the context of the participants' constructed worldview, and then interpreting the meanings derived from these narratives (Moriarty, 2011). According to Connelly et al. (1990), the narrative inquiry method is frequently employed in studies related to educational experiences, often including listening to people as they share stories about their experiences concerning a particular phenomenon. Moriarty (2011) highlights that the ability to allow people to express their voices and share stories of their lived experiences is a key advantage of the narrative inquiry method. However, the author notes that the main disadvantage of the narrative inquiry method is the lengthy time required to collect data.

Secondly, the phenomenology method seeks to conduct in-depth studies and analyses of human

experience, aiming to understand how meanings are derived from it (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Van Manen (2016) emphasizes the applicability of the phenomenological method in studies focusing on human experiences, particularly those relevant to education and practice. Creswell & Poth (2016) categorize phenomenology into two types: hermeneutical phenomenology, involving interpretations of the meaning of a lived experience (Van Manen, 2016), and transcendental phenomenology, which is more concerned with describing individual experiences of a particular phenomenon and others who have undergone the same (Moustakas, 1994). The research process includes collecting data from individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon and developing an intensive description that can answer questions about the core of that experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016). One limitation of the phenomenology method relates to the potential influence of the researcher's personal contacts, experiences, or interests on the research process and its outcomes (Williams, 2007).

Thirdly, the grounded theory method, pioneered by Glaser and Strauss in their influential 1967 publication *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, aims to analyze patterns of human connections and understand how individuals recognize their reality through social interactions (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Moriarty, 2011). The collected data represents diverse realities perceived by individuals who view the world differently (Charmaz, 2000). Hodkinson (2015) defines grounded theory as an approach heavily reliant on inductive reasoning to generate theoretical explanations for a social topic based on emerging collected data. Consequently, it is recommended to conduct a literature review after data analysis to scrutinize the emergent theory, as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989b). Moriarty (2011) highlights that studies employing the grounded theory method receive high acceptance in scientific and academic journals, with two out of three published papers using this method, as reported by Wodak et al. (2000). However, the main disadvantage of applying the grounded theory method lies in the small sample size used in the study, which may not accurately reflect the larger population

(Hodkinson, 2015). Additionally, the process of the grounded theory method is challenging to follow, and securing financial funding can be difficult (Moriarty, 2011).

Fourthly, unlike grounded theory method, which focuses on theory development, the ethnography method centers on describing a whole group that shares common values or interests through their culture (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research process involves in-depth engagement in the daily interactions of participants' lives, with the aim of identifying patterns in their culture, including norms, customs, social interactions, beliefs, and other aspects, to understand changes in the culture of the group over time (Williams, 2007). Thud, Moriarty (2011) emphasizes the substantial reliance of the ethnographic method on observational techniques in conducting research and studies. Several scholars have noted that the use of observational methods is crucial for gaining additional insights not solely attainable through interviews (Moriarty, 2011). According to Delamont (2004), the ethnographic method requires a substantial time commitment dedicated to observing individuals' expressions, actions, and thoughts in order to capture their perception of the world. According to Moriarty (2011), the ethnography method proves especially valuable in studies centered on healthcare and child protection, professional knowledge and teaching, and the implementation of government policies. Nevertheless, the utilization of the ethnography method comes with certain drawbacks, including the potential for researchers' biases to influence the research process and challenges related to time constraints in preparing and conducting the research (Moriarty, 2011).

Fifthly, the case study method is employed in qualitative studies, entailing a comprehensive exploration of a topic through one or more cases within a specific context or setting (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to Tellis (1997), case studies enable in-depth analyses of particular research situations, events, or activities, which can be conducted through a single case or multiple cases. Yin (2009) recommends employing a single case study when the objective is to

analyze a unique or critical case, while the multiple case method is considered appropriate when aiming to generalize outcomes by applying identical procedures across additional cases. Zainal (2007) emphasizes that the choice between a single or multiple case approach is fundamentally determined by the research question. Case studies are utilized in social science research and prove valuable for explaining and analyzing subjects, particularly in the fields of education and management (Scapens, 1990; Zainal, 2007).

The case study method is broadly employed in qualitative research through a purely inductive approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Eisenhardt (1989b) suggests that the case study method is effective for studying new topics by developing grounded theories or propositions for existing theories, enhancing the understanding of a given social phenomenon. Gioia et al. (2013) underscore the significant value of this method in refining existing concepts, generating new insights, and expanding current theories through the application of case studies. Zainal (2007) asserts that a primary advantage of employing case studies lies in their ability to closely investigate specific phenomena, offering insights beyond the confines of numerical and statistical methods. The case study design enables researchers to study specific socially constructed phenomena by focusing on the way people perform their work within organizations, capturing their constructed views, and analyzing their experiences, thereby reducing reliance on numerical and quantitative measurements (Gioia et al., 2013). Additionally, Yin (2009) highlights that the case study method facilitates researchers in accessing and collecting diverse sources of data.

A limited number of studies have established widely accepted approaches for conducting case studies by developing theories from case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989b), increasing rigor in qualitative studies (Gioia et al., 2013), and offering comprehensive research designs (Yin, 1981). **Table 8** encapsulates these approaches for case studies (Eisenhardt,1989b; Gioia et al., 2013; Yin, 1981).

**Table 8 Approaches for case studies**

| Author | Year | Approaches of case studies |
|---|---|---|
| **Eisenhardt** | **1989** | This approach follows a comprehensive inductive inquiry that aims to build new theories by using case studies. It clarifies the research process from research questions until the closure stage of the research.<br><br>• Research design begins by identifying research questions and selecting cases.<br>• Various methods for collecting data can be applied (interviews, observations, etc.).<br>• Familiarity with the overlapping data is required for data analysis.<br>• Formulating assumptions and comparing them with different and similar literature until theoretical saturation can be reached. |
| **Gioia et al.** | **2013** | This study provides a systematic approach to developing new concepts and theories inductively with high standards of rigor through case studies. It ensures that the data structure considerably increases rigor by illustrating how research progresses from raw data to models during the analysis stage.<br><br>• Research design starts with identifying a specific phenomenon and formulating a research question.<br>• It involves an initial review of the existing literature to facilitate the discovery of new insights.<br>• Data collection should prioritize focusing on participants' views, and the interview protocol should be flexible.<br>• Data analysis involves correlating data structure with a theoretical model, followed by consulting literature on emerging concepts and relationships. |
| **Yin** | **1981** | This analysis offers an extensive detailed research design for conducting case studies. It is applicable to both quantitative and qualitative studies and can be used for explanatory, descriptive, and exploratory purposes.<br><br>• It begins by defining how case studies can be adopted to examine unclear phenomena in its context.<br>• The case study design includes the selection of either single or multiple cases.<br>• Determining the case topic, participants, and level of analysis is crucial in the early stages.<br>• Data collection processes involve various methods such as interviews, illustrative materials, and observations.<br>• Analytical procedures vary based on the type of case under consideration. |

**Source:** Collected by the author from Eisenhardt (1989b); Gioia et al. (2013); Yin (1981).

### 3.5.2.1 Selected research method

In this research, a single case study is chosen because the specific inquiry centers on exploring

the extent to which the KSU council members contribute to their organization's strategy.

Several scholars have proposed specific classifications for case studies. Stake (1995), for instance, categorizes case studies into three types: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective cases. Intrinsic case studies involve researchers delving into a particular study with the motivation to understand it profoundly. On the other hand, instrumental case studies are conducted when the phenomenon within its context is not clear, necessitating observation for valuable insights and comprehension. Collective case studies involve examining multiple cases to address specific research questions (Stake, 1995; Tellis, 1997). In this research project, the objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the explored phenomenon, aligning with the characteristics of an intrinsic case study.

Furthermore, McDonough & McDonough (1997) categorized case studies into two types: interpretive and evaluative. Interpretive case studies involve a process of data analysis through interpreting patterns, constructing conceptual categories, and subsequently supporting or challenging outcomes (Zainal, 2007). Evaluative case studies, on the other hand, entail making judgments about the studied phenomenon based on the collected data (McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Zainal, 2007). This research project aims to explore how the members of the KSU council contribute to their institution's strategy by interpreting this issue from the participants' standpoints, conforming to the interpretive case study approach.

In addition, Yin (2009) classifies case studies into three groups: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory case studies aim to investigate a given phenomenon in its context. Moving on to descriptive case studies, these involve analyzing a phenomenon in its natural setting, utilizing the examined data to describe the situation (Yin, 2009). Explanatory case studies, on the other hand, closely examine the data to explain a very complex phenomenon and draw causal conclusions (Yin, 2009; Zainal, 2007). This study can be primarily classified as an exploratory case study, with the aim of acquiring insights into how members of the KSU council contribute to their institution's strategy.

Case studies are commonly employed in the field of management, particularly in studies concerning the board of directors (Cornforth & Macmillan, 2016; Dicko & Breton, 2011; Penn, 1991). Moreover, other scholars, such as Gross et al. (1971) and Levy (1988), emphasize the suitability of the case study method for conducting studies in education. The case study method is generally adopted to gain insights into the nature of real-life practices (Scapens, 1990). By employing a variety of data collection methods, case studies facilitate researchers in acquiring a deep understanding of the specific case being analyzed (Kovács & Spens, 2005).

According to Yin (2009), the case study is an applicable research method that aims to explore a particular phenomenon remaining unclear within its context. Given the current absence of clarification regarding the extent of board directors' involvement in strategy within the context of KSU, this research seeks to address the ambiguity surrounding the contribution of KSU council members to their organization's strategy. In conclusion, this study aims to explore how members of the KSU council contribute to their organization's strategy by adopting the case study method.

The choice of KSU as a case study of this research was guided by several key considerations aligned with the criteria of council membership, strategic involvement, expertise and experience, institutional representation, and accessibility.

Firstly, KSU's council holds a significant historical distinction as the oldest council within Saudi Arabia's higher education. The council consists of influential individuals who hold pivotal positions within the university's governance structure which impacts the university's performance.

Secondly, the KSU council plays a crucial role in shaping and implementing institutional strategies. Thus, council members bear significant responsibilities within the council in this regard.

Thirdly, The KSU council is comprised with elite members with high level of expertise in their fields, as well as extensive work experience leading to their highest institutional positions such the university president, vice presidents of vice rectorate, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges, other key roles.

Fourthly, KSU boasts a distinguished reputation as the oldest and one of the largest universities in Saudi Arabia, with top rankings among Arab universities. As a result, the KSU council members are widely regarded as highly professional in the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia, having served in advanced positions both internally at KSU and externally within government ministries and agencies. For instance, a former vice president of the KSU council recently assumed the presidency of another Saudi university.

Lastly, accessing the board of directors was identified as a critical challenge in conducting the study. Therefore, the ability to access the KSU council and conduct interviews with its members was one of the factors influencing the choice of KSU as a case study.

Overall, the selection of KSU as the case study offers an insightful opportunity to explore the contribution of council membership to their institutional strategic decision-making processes within the context of higher education governance.

### 3.5.3 Research context

**3.5.3.1 Saudi Vision 2030**

Saudi Arabia has recently put forth several development plans to become a global leader in the future. In 2016, Saudi Arabia launched the Saudi Vision 2030—A comprehensive project designed to improve entrepreneurial opportunities, business environments, and economic performance over the next 15 years (Alshuaibi, 2017). The Saudi Vision 2030 is structured around three fundamental pillars: a dynamic society, a prospering economy, and an aspirational nation (KSA, 2021). These economic pillars form the foundation of Saudi Arabia's development targets, emphasizing the implementation of effective management strategies

across various public sectors, with a particular focus on higher education training and programs.

The Saudi Vision 2030 underscores the importance of establishing economic objectives to position the Saudi market as a global powerhouse for investment (Grand & Wolff, 2020). According to KSA (2021), the vision places a concentrated effort on aligning the education sector with market demands, fostering collaboration between large and small enterprises to achieve this goal. Consequently, the Saudi Vision 2030 emphasizes education by providing comprehensive training programs for students that align with market requirements (KSA, 2021). Alshuaibi (2017) describes the fundamental concept behind this vision as fostering partnerships between the private sector and the government in key economic sectors such as healthcare, construction, and education. Additionally, it aims to advance the education system by integrating industry-based knowledge into students' learning skills (KSA, 2021). Moreover, the education sector plays a pivotal role in the Saudi Vision 2030, contributing to the enhancement of the overall quality of society (KSA, 2021).

### 3.5.3.2 Higher education in Saudi Arabia

The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia was initially established in 1953 (Saleh, 1986). Currently, the higher education sector is managed and regulated by the Ministry of Education, following its merger with the Ministry of Higher Education in 2015 (MoE, 2023). This shift aims to improve the workplace environment and readjust policies in both the higher and primary education segments (MoE, 2023). Moreover, the title of university leaders, previously defined as *Rectors*, has recently been changed to *Presidents* to foster greater autonomy for each university as part of the restructuring of the higher education sector (SOP, 2020). The country's King appoints presidents of universities for a four-year term. Similarly, the Minister of Education appoints deans of colleges for a two-year term (MoE, 2015).

The higher education system has undergone rapid development in the last decade, marked by the establishment of 23 state universities (Alamri, 2011). According to MoE (2023), there are currently 29 state universities and 38 private universities and colleges in operation. As discussed in the previous section, the education sector stands as a crucial pillar of the Saudi Vision 2030. Its primary goal is to reform the education system by enhancing the working environment and educational practices, ensuring efficiency through administrative changes and technological advancements (KSA, 2021). Recognizing that professionals in diverse fields, including engineers and doctors, emerge from the educational system, the nation's education level significantly influences other sectors (MoE, 2020). Therefore, the Saudi government places a strong emphasis on the education system to achieve the 2030 vision, evident in the highest expenditure in 2019, accounting for 17.5% of the annual budget (KPMG, 2019).

### 3.5.3.3 KSU council

The KSU council is the first university council in Saudi Arabia, possessing the administrative, scientific, and financial power to implement public policies in the institution (KSU, 2021). Overall, the university council holds the final authority within the entire institution (MoE, 2015). According to KSU (2021), the KSU council has nine core objectives, which include advancing university strategic plans, enhancing education and research studies, improving university performance, strengthening academic capacity, adopting national plans to position the university as a leader, fostering cooperation with other educational institutions, supporting modern technology for academic and administrative purposes, promoting the university's ambitions both locally and internationally, and emphasizing basic skills to review proposed plans and programs to realize the university mission

In this respect, KSU has actively participated in several strategic programs, promoting development not only within the university but also across the country. The former Vice President for Planning and Development, who was a member of the KSU council, stated:

*The university's strategic role contributes to supporting the country's developmental movement … its keen interest in actively participating in achieving the Kingdom's 2030 vision confirms a commitment to a distinguished position, consistently working to strengthen it and increase its outputs* (KSU, 2020).

In conclusion, this research aims to explore how board directors exercise their responsibilities regarding the organizational strategy within the context of the KSU council.

### 3.5.4 Level of analysis

According to Yurdusev (1993), the level of analysis can be identified as the context of the research and the manner in which it is conducted. In this study, the level of analysis is the board of directors, specifically the context of the KSU council.

### 3.5.5 Unit of analysis

According to Yurdusev (1993), the unit of analysis refers to the kind of objects and actors being analyzed in the research. In this study, the unit of analysis focuses on the processes through which board members contribute to their organization's strategy, particularly exploring how members of KSU council exercise their responsibilities in relation to the institutional strategy.

### 3.5.6 Unit of observation

According to Sedgwick (2014), the unit of observation in research can be defined as a unit of measurement. Roy et al. (2015) explain further that in qualitative studies, the unit of observation refers to the individual participants who are interviewed during data collection. Therefore, the unit of observation in this study is the individual members of the KSU council.

### 3.5.7 Methods of data collection

There are various approaches to data collection in qualitative research design, including interviews, focus groups, observation, document collection, and others (Hancock et al., 2009). For this research project, the case study method has been chosen, allowing the utilization of

multiple data collection techniques. Consequently, both primary and secondary methods are employed. This approach enhances the research by facilitating a comparison of data from different sources, thereby increasing the credibility and validity of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2019). The primary method for data collection in this research involves semi-structured and in-depth interviews, while the secondary method includes the collection of relevant texts and documents.

In accordance with the classification by Gill et al. (2008), interviews can be categorized into three types: unstructured, structured, and semi-structured. Unstructured interviews may occur without specific arrangements or procedures, while structured interviews consist of a strict list of questions presented by the researcher. In semi-structured interviews, predefined questions are included for assisting the researcher in exploring specific areas, but they also allow an opportunity for interviewees to express their views (Gill et al., 2008).

**3.5.7.1 Primary method: elite interviews**

In this case study, 26 semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted as the primary method for data collection. There are some precedent procedures that have been completed by the researcher. Firstly, the researcher has granted approval from the University Research Ethics Committee at University of Reading for conducting the interviews (refer to **Appendix 1**). Secondly, the researcher has received confirmation to take a scientific journey to Saudi Arabia for 90 days (see **Appendix 2**). Thirdly, the researcher has obtained permission from the Committee for Scientific Research Ethics at King Saud University to conduct interviews with the KSU council members (check **Appendix 3**).

The format of the interview protocol questions can be either closed-ended or open-ended depending on the research inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Saunders et al. (2019), the closed-ended questions are presented along with a list of options for participants to choose. In contrast, open-ended questions encourage participants to freely express their views

when responding to the questions. In this regard, Kakabadse & Louchart (2012) note that interview protocols are less important in conducting elite interviews but could be valuable for researchers with limited experience.

The interview protocol for this study consists of open-ended questions. The researcher has developed specific questions to guide interviews in addressing the research question. In addition, the interview protocol is provided in both English and Arabic to ensure that participants can clearly understand and express their views effectively. The interview protocol is outlined in **Appendix 5**. The interviews were conducted in locations preferred by the participants. All participants received the study information sheet in advance. Furthermore, the interview consent form was signed by each participant. Lastly, all interviews were recorded, transcribed into a Word document, and securely stored for the analysis stage, along with other interview notes.

### 3.5.7.2 Secondary method: collection of documents

In this case study, the secondary method of data collection involves gathering documents related to the research topic. According to Bowen (2009), this encompasses a collection of printed or electronic materials such as reports, journals, books, newspapers, and other sources. The method of document collection includes selecting the most relevant and up-to-date documents that support primary data (Saunders et al., 2019). This involves systematically analyzing documents to identify relevant sources of evidence (Bowen, 2009). While Silverman (2016) points out the widespread neglect of document collection method among social studies researchers, Hancock et al. (2009) argue that documentation can significantly enhance research by offering invaluable additional insights into the studied issues. However, collecting documents is crucial for obtaining extensive, substantial, and complex data about the research topic (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, the researcher ensures that only significant and relevant documents are gathered for this study.

In conclusion, the secondary data collection method for this study involves assembling relevant documents associated with the research question. These documents are gathered from several sources, including internal entities of KSU such as its vice rectorates, supporting deanships, and colleges, as well as external documents from the Ministry of Education and newspapers. **Table 9** provides details on the types and number of documents that were utilized in the analysis process.

**Table 9 Types and number of collected documents**

| Types of documents | Number of documents |
|---|---|
| Reports and files from KSU including its affiliated entities | 7 |
| Documents form Ministry of Education | 1 |
| Newspaper articles | 1 |
| Total | 9 |

## 3.5.8 Sample selection

Sampling can be defined as the method of selecting the population for research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Sampling is broadly categorized into probability sampling—providing equal chances for selecting participants and they can be chosen randomly, including simple random, stratified random, systematic random, and other techniques; and non-probability sampling—employing selective techniques of choosing samples in accordance with the study requirements, including convenience, theoretical, typical case, critical case, snowball, purposive, and other techniques (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Hancock et al. (2009), it is not appropriate to adopt probability sampling for conducting qualitative research. This study follows the qualitative methodology, as indicated earlier in **Section 3.5.1**; thus, nonprobability sampling is not suitable. Furthermore, selecting a specific group (e.g., members of the KSU council) is necessary to answer the research question (Saunders et al., 2019).

There are several techniques of nonprobability sampling in qualitative research. For instance, convenience sampling considers the selection of participants depending on their availability; theoretical sampling is chosen in research using the grounded theory method; typical case sampling includes a process of creating characteristics for selecting participants; critical case sampling involves selecting cases based on the researcher's views and importance; snowball sampling entails choosing participants through the researcher's informal networks; and purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on the researcher's justification and judgment regarding what best fits for answering the research question and meeting its objectives (Hancock et al., 2009; Saunders et al., 2019)

Therefore, this study employed purposive sampling, selecting participants deemed crucial to the study for their ability to provide essential information that addresses the research question.

### 3.5.8.1 Sample size for the main study

One of the challenges associated with qualitative studies is determining a suitable sample size. According to Tuckett (2004), a small number of participants is usually appropriate for qualitative research due to its focus on exploring in-depth phenomena. However, there is no definitive sample size for conducting qualitative research since it depends on when data saturation is achieved, where no additional data can offer further insights into interpreting the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hancock et al., 2009; Saunders et al., 2019; Thomson, 2011; Tuckett, 2004).

In this respect, Saunders et al. (2019) recommend a sample size ranging from 5 to 25 interviews for participants in general qualitative research. Creswell & Poth (2016) further suggest that 20 to 30 participants can provide adequate detail in qualitative studies. These recommendations are consistent with prior studies in the management field. Notably, Cohen et al. (2013) conducted 22 interviews with corporate directors, Penn (1991) had 27 interviews with active

board directors, and Bolade-Ogunfodun (2017) completed 24 interviews for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in organizational studies.

In this study, the sample size consists of 26 members of the KSU council. Following the recommendations of research scholars and previous studies, the chosen sample is deemed appropriate to fulfill the research objectives. This sample enabled the researcher to obtain significant information from elite participants with considerable professional experience. In addition, the researcher observed that data saturation was reached, and no further information could add significant impact.

All individuals who participated in the main study are members of the KSU council. This includes four participants served as vice presidents of vice rectorate, seven participants as deans of supporting deanships, and fifteen participants as deans of colleges. **Table 10** offers an overall view of the sample selection for the main study in this research.

**Table 10 Main study: elite interviews**

| Roles of participants | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| Vice president of the vice rectorate | 4 |
| Dean of the supporting deanship | 7 |
| Dean of the college | 15 |
| Total | 26 |

### 3.5.9 Time horizon

Time horizon in research refers to the period over which researchers collect data from their participants to study a particular phenomenon, using either cross-sectional or longitudinal approaches (Saunders et al., 2019). Cross-sectional studies tend to gather data at a specific point in time to examine a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Kesmodel

(2018) points out that the majority of descriptive or analytical studies employ a cross-sectional approach. In contrast, longitudinal studies adopt multiple and frequent processes of gathering data from specific individuals over a long period of time to study a particular phenomenon (Caruana et al., 2015). According to the authors, these processes of gathering data may take years or even decades to be accomplished. Moreover, Saunders et al. (2019) suggest that the longitudinal approach is valuable to use for studies focusing on aspects of human development and change.

The purpose of this study aligns with cross-sectional approach, aiming to explore the phenomenon as it exists. Specifically, the study aims to describe how board members exercise their duties concerning the exaction strategy of their organization, without focusing on analyzing the improvement of their performance over time. Furthermore, some scholars argue that the longitudinal approach can be both costly and difficult to follow (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Additionally, the frequent use of the longitudinal approach is hindered by time constraints in many research projects conducted through academic courses (Saunders et al., 2019). As noted by Rindfleisch et al. (2008), "*... longitudinal survey research is easier to advocate than to implement*" (p. 262). Therefore, this study adopted a cross-sectional approach, determining its time horizon for data collection

## 3.5.10 Methods of data analysis

There are various types of data analysis methods used in qualitative research, including thematic analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and others (Moriarty, 2011; Hancock et al., 2009; Saunders et al., 2019). The choice of a particular analysis method depends on factors such as the nature of the data and the research objectives (Hancock et al., 2009). For instance, content analysis involves classifying data into categories related to the main research question (Bowen, 2009). Conversely, thematic analysis is a process of classifying, analyzing, and identifying patterns within data (Castleberry

& Nolen, 2018). Castleberry & Nolen (2018) assert that thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research, emphasizing the interpretation process of the phenomenon (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Additionally, Terry et al. (2017) highlight that thematic analysis differs from other methods of data analysis in that it is flexible, accessible, and relevant to the most qualitative research frameworks. Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that "*thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis*" (p.78)

Themes are derived from identifying specific patterns in the data that capture crucial information related to the research question (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The thematic analysis process begins by identifying passages and texts with similar meanings, which are then categorized together to form codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Subsequently, categories are contextualized to formulate themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). One weakness of employing the thematic analysis approach is the potential lack of transparency in theme development (Terry et al., 2017).

However, Yin (2015) suggests five steps to improve the quality of interpretations. These steps include ensuring that interpretations are comprehensive, allowing readers to follow the process from start to finish. Secondly, interpretations should be fair in a way that another researcher could draw the same conclusion. Thirdly, interpretations should be accurate as they reflect the data. Fourthly, they should add value to the current literature. Fifthly, interpretations should be trustworthy and acceptable (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2015). In addition, thematic analysis can be systematically applied to analyze various types of data, such as interview transcripts and document materials, thereby enhancing the accuracy of understanding and interpreting a specific topic (Bowen, 2009).

### 3.5.10.1 Selected method of data analysis

In this study, the thematic analysis method was chosen for analyzing the data. Thematic analysis is widely recognized as suitable, flexible, and valuable for organizing complex and

unstructured data, as well as for interpreting data to gain insights into specific phenomena in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989b; Gioia et al., 2013; Smith & Firth, 2011; Terry et al., 2017).

Following the six steps proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) for conducting thematic analysis, the researcher began the analysis process by familiarizing himself with the collected data and thoroughly reviewing transcripts. Subsequently, initial codes were developed by categorizing similar data relevant to the research context. For the third stage, the focus was on identifying essential patterns that represent critical connotations of codes, distinguished from those in the second stage. In the fourth step, the researcher validated each theme using the data analyzed in step three. During the fifth stage, the researcher evaluated the results of the themes and assigned a name to each. Lastly, the sixth step entailed producing a thorough report of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). **Table 11** provides a description of the stages that the researcher has employed through the thematic analysis process.

**Table 11 Thematic analysis process**

| | |
|---|---|
| **STAGE 1** | <ul><li>The researcher was deeply immersed in the data.</li><li>The researcher read the interview transcripts multiple times.</li><li>The researcher sorted through the collected documents to determine which ones were pertinent to the research questions.</li></ul> |
| **STAGE 2** | <ul><li>Initial codes were created by the researcher through grouping similar data together (such as responsibility, decision-making, president, etc.).</li></ul> |
| **STAGE 3** | <ul><li>The researcher identified key patterns that convey important meanings and connotations and categorized their similarity.</li></ul> |
| **STAGE 4** | <ul><li>The researcher matched categories and created connections between them to generate themes.</li></ul> |
| **STAGE 5** | <ul><li>The researcher examined the relationship between the categories and their strengths in identifying the themes.</li><li>The overall process of theme development was methodologically evaluated.</li><li>The researcher established a title for each theme.</li></ul> |
| **STAGE 6** | <ul><li>A comprehensive report of the thematic analysis findings was presented in this thesis.</li></ul> |

**Source:** Developed by the author in accordance with Braun & Clarke (2006).

## 3.5.11 Summary of research design

**Figure 4 Summary of the study's research design**

| Research methodology | Research method | Research context | Level of analysis | Unit of analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Qualitative research | Case study | KSU | KSU council | Members of KSU council |

| Unit of observation | Methods of data collection | Time horizon | Sample selection | Methods of data analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individuals of KSU council | 26 In-depth elite interviews<br><br>9 Documents | Cross-sectional | Purposive sampling<br><br>26 participants | Thematic analysis |

**Source:** Developed by the author.

As depicted in **Figure 4**, qualitative methodology was considered suitable for this study. The researcher's role in the study involved interpreting the constructed views of the participants in alignment with the philosophical perspective. A single case study method was employed for this research, enabling the researcher to implement triangulation by utilizing multiple data collection methods, such as conducting in-depth interviews and gathering documents, within the research context of KSU. The level of analysis in this research centers on the KSU council, with the unit of analysis exploring the processes by which its members contribute to their institutional strategy, while the unit of observation comprises the individual members of the KSU council. Purposive sampling was chosen as the approach for selecting participants for this study, comprising 26 members of the KSU council. The cross-sectional approach was deemed appropriate, considering the time constraints for completing this research project. Lastly, thematic analysis was identified as a fitting method for analyzing the data in this research.

## 3.6 Quality of research

It is broadly recognized that using criteria accepted in quantitative research to evaluate qualitative research findings is inappropriate (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Consequently, qualitative research places emphasis on credibility, reliability, and validity to enhance the overall quality of studies (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Gioia et al., 2013; Johnson & Waterfield, 2004; Pratt et al., 2020; Rolfe, 2006; Saunders et al., 2019; Smith & Firth, 2011; Whittemore et al., 2001). Credibility in qualitative findings is attained when interpretations accurately reflect the data (Yin, 2015). Therefore, researchers should follow systematic methods of data analysis to reinforce the credibility of their research findings (Smith & Firth, 2011). While reliability in qualitative research is associated with the extent to which the findings remain consistent or stable (Whittemore et al., 2001). Saunders et al. (2019) consider mistakes or biases of participants or researchers as threats to reliability in qualitative research. For these reasons, Whittemore et al. (2001) argue that peer review is a useful way to enhance the reliability of research findings.

According to Rolfe (2006), various methods of qualitative research require different standards of validity. In qualitative research, validity is often defined as the truthfulness of the research findings (Whittemore et al., 2001). Johnson & Waterfield (2004) suggest that the validity of findings in qualitative research is closely linked to the researcher's involvement in each process of a particular study. In this study, the researcher adhered to the recommended academic procedures to strengthen the quality of the research. This commitment was realized through expert guidance from the supervisory team and adherence to academic and ethical standards.

## 3.7 Ethical considerations

This study is guided by the highest standards of academic ethics and research. The researcher has submitted formal documents detailing each phase of this project to meet the ethical

standards required at the University of Reading (see **Appendix 1**). In addition, official permission to conduct the study has been obtained from the King Saud University Scientific Research Ethics Committee (refer to **Appendix 2**).

During the interview process, participants were provided with the information sheet and consent form to secure permission for their involvement in the study. They were informed of their right to voluntarily participate in the interview and to terminate their involvement without providing an explanation. The researcher is committed to protecting the identity and privacy of participants, and their personal information will not be disclosed without written permission. All collected data is carefully stored and handled to prevent access by unauthorized persons. Notably, the researcher does not directly benefit from conducting this study, and a copy of the research findings will be provided to any participant who requests it.

The research process carefully considers several cultural issues. Initially, the researcher acknowledged the challenges faced by producers in obtaining permission to conduct interviews with the KSU council members, necessitating the submission of all required documents and explanations for the research. Subsequently, accessing the KSU council proved challenging due to classified information. Nevertheless, after clarifying the research purpose to the secretary of the KSU council, the researcher managed to proceed. Additionally, the researcher took steps to ensure that the research findings would not be used to harm either the participants or the researcher.

In conclusion, the researcher is fully committed to upholding the highest ethical research standards throughout the completion of this study.

## 3.8 Pilot study

The primary purpose of a pilot study in qualitative studies is to assess the feasibility of the research question and enhance the overall quality of the research, encompassing essential preparatory processes for conducting interviews for the main study (Gillham, 2005; In, 2017).

There are several advantages to conducting a pilot study, including providing an opportunity for the researcher to practice conducting interviews, gaining a better understanding of how to acquire essential information from participants, designing interview plans, and becoming familiar with the interview process (Silverman, 2013). In addition, employing a pilot study can be useful in mitigating interviewee influence, especially in studies requiring thorough preparation for elite interviews (Zuckerman, 1972). According to In (2017), a pilot study can be conducted as an internal study in which the data collected are intended for use in the primary study. Alternatively, it can be carried out as an external study, where the focus is on practicing interviewing skills before formally commencing the main study (In, 2017).

In this research, an internal pilot study was undertaken. The data collected through this pilot study are relevant to and provide additional insights for the main study. The following sections will offer details on the sample of the pilot study, along with the chosen method for data collection and analysis. Subsequently, a thorough discussion on the findings and learning points from the pilot study will be presented.

### 3.8.1 Pilot-study sample

The sample for the pilot study was chosen in the same organization as that for the main study. Thus, members of the council of College of Business Administration (CBA) at KSU were selected to take part in this pilot study. The College council is comprised of professionals with significant experience that are similar to the sample selected for the main study which were previously discussed in **Section 3.5.7.1**. The CBA council consists of 23 members, including the dean of the college, vice deans, chairs of departments, and administrative officers. In this pilot study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five members of the CBA council. Interviews took place with two participants who held the position of vice deans of the college, and three participants who served as chairpersons of departments. **Table 12** presents an overview of the participants in the interviews for the pilot study.

**Table 12 Pilot study: interviews**

| Roles of participants | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| Vice dean of the college | 2 |
| Chairperson of the department | 3 |
| Total | 5 |

Participants in this study were asked questions regarding the strategic plans of the college and their strategic roles on the college council. In addition, participants were generally familiar with the research subject, which will be discussed in more detail in the next sections.

In this case study, it should be noted that the researcher has conducted a total of 31 interviews: 26 interviews with the KSU council members for the main study, and 5 interviews with the CBA council members for the pilot study (refer to **Appendix 4**)

### 3.8.2 Pilot-study data collection

The primary data collection method employed in this pilot study involved conducting interviews. The secondary method involved collecting official documents from CBA as supporting evidence. In terms of the primary method of data collection, the researcher was officially approved by the King Saud University Scientific Research Ethics Committee to carry out the pilot study (refer to **Appendix 2**). Then, participants were contacted by the researcher. Both the participant information sheet and the consent form were sent to the participants prior to the interviews. Notes were taken during the interviews about the key points of the participants and their responses to specific questions. The five interviews in the pilot study covered elements that could help address the research questions. The interview process concentrated on the following aspects:

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- The general and specific level at which members exercise their responsibilities within the council.

- The context in which board members are involved in the decision-making process.

- The extent to which members participate in executing the strategic plan for their college.

- The approach through which council members ensure effective implementation of the strategies.

The interviews were conducted using an approach that allowed participants to freely express their views on their personal experience as council members of the college. Therefore, the interviews were performed in a method that allowed participants to speak about their perspectives rather than confining themselves to predetermined questions that could prematurely end the inquiry process. The interviewer guided the conversation based on the overall themes of the interview with the goal of gradually gaining the participants' trust. For example, interviews began with general questions about the participants' work experience and the overall view of the college council. Afterwards, the interviews became more specific about the views, responsibilities, and decisions of the participants as vice deans or chairpersons.

### 3.8.3 Pilot-study data analysis

The gathered data underwent thorough analysis as the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to establish familiarity. The data was analyzed through an inductive approach, relying on a data-driven, bottom-up method to generate codes. The research questions, along with the guiding theory and initial literature review, had been taken into account beforehand. The data analysis involves several stages:

1) Undertake a comprehensive review of the data by reading the transcripts multiple times and summarizing the duties of each participant of the council. This stage allows the researcher to immerse himself in the research project (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2) Perform first-order coding through open coding. This initial level of coding is structured by identifying key areas that emerged from the data, as the researcher defines different concepts for categorization (Williams & Moser, 2019).

3) Conduct second-order coding guided by selective coding. This involves selecting and integrating defined categories into cohesive and meaningful expressions, such as program development, dual roles, academic accreditation, and others. This process is referred to as the formation of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4) Subsequently, group categories by identifying relationships among them. As stated by Williams & Moser (2019), "*with the work of selective coding done, the researcher can move toward developing theory and ultimately constructing meaning*" (p. 52). Accordingly, the last step was to name the themes.

As part of this pilot study, a review of institutional documents was conducted simultaneously. Analyzing documents assists researchers in gaining insights pertinent to the research inquiry (Merriam, 2002). Furthermore, Bowen (2009) underscores that "*documents can be analysed as a way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources*" (p. 30).

### 3.8.4 Pilot-study findings

The findings from the pilot study are discussed extensively in this section. As shown in **Table 13**, the selected codes were grouped into the following six categories: dual roles, collective approach, program development, academic accreditation, council meeting frameworks, and technology adoption. These categories are composed of three themes for the inquiry of the contribution of CBA council members to their college strategy: involvement in decision making, participation in strategy implementation, and council process effectiveness. The key

themes will be discussed in the following sections with inclusion of each category based on the analysis of the codes. Quotations are provided to indicate the source of the codes.

**Table 13 Summary of findings that emerged from the pilot study**

| Codes[1] | Categories | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| *The **responsibility** of each person in the college council is to know the topics of his department, and to have an active participation in the discussions of the college council in general ... thus, **you work in two parts, one part that relates to your department, and another part is concerned with your active participation** in the discussions that take place in the college council. (CBA5)* | Dual roles | Involvement in decision-making |
| *There is a **democratic decision-making process** in the council, because we often tend to have consensus in the selected decision. Some topics have different views, so your first role comes in the discussion as you will be asked to speak and indicate your point of view because **we do not resort to voting until we hear all opinions**. (CBA4)* | Collective approach | |
| *We have recently **worked in the department on a complete development of our program**s. For example, we are **working on developing the study plan**, and there is a specialized committee that made many visits to external parties based on taking feedback on the market requirements and what things one could focus on. (CBA3)* | Program development | Participation in strategy implementation |
| *There is academic accreditation at the college level. **The college council discusses the academic accreditation of the college during the whole year**. At each meeting of the college councils, especially by the Vice Dean for Development and Quality. The Vice Deanship for Development and Quality is entrusted with this matter, and the accreditation requirements are discussed and presented to the college council which require the **participation of departments in academic accreditation**. (CBA1)* | Academic accreditation | |
| *I think that we also **adopt a good method** in which the dean gives a speech, and the vice deans give a speech at the beginning of each meeting, to **inform the council** of what has been done in the matters of the college. (CBA2)* | Council meeting frameworks | Council process effectiveness |
| *The system of councils is **very excellent** and has all the authorities, adding comments and participation. I think that the system of councils has **changed the way that*** | | |

---

[1] Note: Codes are highlighted in bold within quoted text to clarify their origination, thereby facilitating understanding of how quotations contain multiple codes, which subsequently lead to the formation of categories in the analysis.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *councils work at the university. Let us say that the method of convening the council has changed and has become according to the matters that require the convening of the council, and the council is not convened because it is obligated to do so. (CBA1)* | Technology adoption | |

### 3.8.4.1 Involvement in decision-making

The first theme that emerged from the pilot study concerning the contribution of college council members to CBA's strategy is their involvement in decision-making. This theme is composed of two categories, dual roles and collective approach. Each category will be analyzed further below.

### 3.8.4.1.1 Dual roles

In terms of dual roles, it is the first category of decision making. It indicates the importance of the roles of the council members in the decision-making process. The findings show several different codes that indicate that board members have a dual role in decision-making. One chairperson of a department stated:

> *By virtue of being the head of the [department name], I present the topics of the department council and discuss them with colleagues in the college council. At the same time, any topics about other departments, I can discuss them with colleagues in the college council. (CBA1)*

Another member of the council further explained his role as:

> *As for the college council, I am the representative of the department in the college council ... any request that we discuss it here in the [department name], once the department approves the request, we submit it to the college council, and it is re-discussed again by the college council ... also, when they are raised in the council, I explain those topics. (CBA3)*

A vice dean expressed his role in the decision-making process both inside and outside the council as follows:

*I am responsible in the council for academic affairs in undergraduate programs and everything relating to students is my responsibility ... all undergraduate programs in the college. But in order to preserve the time of the council at the beginning of each year, the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs is authorized to make decisions on many things. So, I work on behalf of the college council because certain things are considered to be the responsibility of the college council, but I am authorized to do them. (CBA2)*

The following quotation explains that members of the college council work on behalf of their units:

*In fact, the two councils are involved in many works. For example, the college council is represented by the heads of departments. So, it discusses the decisions of the department council ... the head of the department council mentions all the decisions of the department council and clarifies them in the college council, and therefore he is a member who has the voice for the department council. (CBA4)*

One participant further emphasized the importance of this role as:

*When you present topics to the college council, sometimes you have to explain the department's point of view better. Because you present your point of view and your colleagues in the department. Because always the department council is supposed to be stronger and more knowledgeable about the specialty. (CBA5)*

Those dual roles of the council members are clearly described by a vice dean:

*My role is to refer proposals and recommendations from these sections to the college council ... also, my role is not only related to the proposals that are submitted from my department, but I may also discuss other topics from other departments according to my overlap with these topics ... therefore, the role of the vice dean is more advisory in some decisions. (CBA4)*

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This emphasis on the dual roles of members of the council is strongly linked to the college council's decision-making process.

### 3.8.4.1.2 Collective approach

The second category of this theme that emerged from the findings is the collective approach. It reflects the way decisions are made by the members of the council. These codes will be analyzed with sample quotations below.

The council's approach to decision-making was evidently expressed by one member from the college council:

> *The college council is important, because the work of the college council is the controller of the work of the departments ... so, the decision of the department council must be presented in the college council to discuss from a holistic perspective.* (CBA4)

The council members engage in lengthy discussions prior to making a decision, as one participant explained:

> *We review and discuss these topics. Before voting on any topic presented, there is usually a lengthy discussion that precedes it. Then, if the general tendency in the council goes to bring the topic for voting. So, the council members vote, and the decision will be based on majority, whether by acceptance or rejection.* (CBA1)

Another participant described these topics as follows:

> *But it is possible to see one or two topics in which they take a full hour of discussion ... we can say that they are strategic topics, such as topics of new decisions, creating new programs, things like that.* (CBA3)

The following quotation clarifies the council's authority to take decisions on the department's proposals:

*The college council has the right to recommend approval of the department's decision, or it may reject the decision, which can be judged by the higher authorities in the university if there is a difference.* (CBA2)

Another participant explained this further:

*But when the topic is rejected by the council, justification for the rejection are required. In some instances, these reasons are quite convincing to the council, resulting in the request being granted.* (CBA5)

The decision-making approach provides the council members with certain options, as one participant described:

*Sometimes your role in the decision becomes to bless, vote on, or sometimes even reserve certain decisions. Because the reservation on the decision is a statutory tool, if you reserve the decision of the council, your reservation is sent directly to the president of the university and the council's decision does not become effective until the reservation is addressed. This is the voice of each member of the council.* (CBA4)

The above quotations illustrate that council decisions are made by the membership through a collective approach.

Thus, council members' involvement in decision-making is largely determined by their dual role and the collective approach to decision-making within the council.

### 3.8.4.2 Participation in strategy implementation

Participation in strategy implementation was the second theme that emerged from the pilot study's data, reflecting the contribution of council members to their college's strategy. It combines two categories: program development and academic accreditation. Each category will be discussed in the following sections.

**3.8.4.2.1 Program development**

This category highlights the efforts of CBA council members in developing programs for their college. An analysis of an official document identified one of the core objectives of the college's strategic plan as:

> *Support academic programs and effective teaching practices that are in line with both national and international academic standards to meet market/stakeholder needs.* (DOC1)

This objective was planned to implement through:

> *Periodically review, update, and develop academic programs.* (DOC1)

Thus, one of the participants explained the process of creating a program as follows:

> *All these programs are approved by several councils, including the college council. There are two documents for the regulations in terms of their establishment and how to create these programs ... the process of offering programs in the college goes through several councils and many procedures at the level of the department, the college, and then the university.* (CBA1)

Another member of the council clarified that the process of creating and developing programs is overseen by the college's vice deanships:

> *The Vice Deanship for Academic and Educational Affairs is responsible for undergraduate programs, but graduate programs are under the responsibility of the Vice Deanship of Graduate Studies.* (CBA2)

The college's departments are also accountable for reporting on the performance of these programs as indicated in these quotations:

> *For the master's programs, every semester we have to report it. We submit it to the dean, and it is also presented to the college council, and then it is sent to the Deanship*

*of Graduate Studies at the university. It is known as a performance report. This report*

*is different from the annual report.* (CBA2)

*... the reports of graduate programs are submitted at the end of each semester to the*

*department council and then to the college council.* (CBA5)

Another participant further elaborated that the process is undertaken through committees within the department of the college:

*Monitoring starts from the department, because within the department there are several*

*committees. For example, a graduate committee, a program committee, and a*

*development committee. These committees are responsible for the work of the*

*departments.* (CBA4)

One participant highlighted that the programs are strategically established and undergo regular reviews to align with industry demands:

*For example, we have a precise program, which is the executive program in business*

*data analysis, this qualitative program is really required by the labor market, and it is*

*100% in line with Vision 2030. Also, there are other programs which their study plans*

*have been updated to match Vision 2030. The program was offered, and students*

*enrolled in it. It is a joint program between the Department of Management Information*

*Systems and the Department of Quantitative Analysis.* (CBA5)

The above quotations demonstrate that the council members play a significant role in developing, updating, and implementing the college programs, and that they are a key element of the college's strategic plan.

### 3.8.4.2.2 Academic accreditation

The second category, as revealed by the data, that reflects the involvement of CBA council members in strategy implementation is academic accreditation. It serves as the primary

objective of the college's strategy. The following code is extracted from an official document of the college's strategic plan:

> *The CBA views accreditation as a validation of its core mission and objectives and as a benchmark for maintaining superior educational output.* (DOC2)

In this regard, one college council member emphasized that the college accreditation is crucial:

> *This is one of the important objectives of the college council which we promote the issue of quality as we represent the King Saud University ... this is clear and therefore attention to the quality is very important in obtaining local and international accreditations. This is an important requirement as well.* (CBA5)

Thus, a council member stated that the responsibility to oversee overall accreditation at the college level is as follows:

> *Academic accreditation is the responsibility of the Vice Deanship for Development and Quality.* (CBA2)

Another participant explained how departments were undertaking specific measures to ensure the continued academic accreditation of the college:

> *In terms of college accreditation, our current focus is on the upcoming visit by AACSB representatives. The college is actively preparing for their arrival in the near future, conducting comprehensive reviews of departmental summaries, including academic achievements and how we are progressing in this regard.* (CBA3)

One participant described the college and department academic accreditation process as follows:

> *Of course, the international accreditation at the college level relates to the college with its programs, as we work as a team ... for example, we in the [department name] have reached full program accreditation which is done by a few departments in the university.* (CBA4)

The next quotation specifies the role of CBA council members in relation to the college's academic accreditation:

> *Now, the dean requires progress on the work of departments regarding academic accreditation of quality. So, the head of each department at the meeting of the college council explains how the department has been running since the previous year ... we are currently reviewing and discussing the issue of quality continuously.* (CBA5)

The above excerpts indicate that the college academic accreditation is achieved through the contributions from its council members.

Thus, the college council members have proven their participation in implementing the college's strategic plan through their inputs on both program development and academic accreditation.

### 3.8.4.3 Council process effectiveness

The third theme that emerged from the pilot study data identifies the CBA's council process effectiveness. This theme is comprised of two categories, council meeting frameworks and technology adoption. Each category will be analyzed in the following sections.

### 3.8.4.3.1 Council meeting frameworks

The first category of this theme focuses on the CBA's council meeting frameworks. The frameworks of college council meetings promote the performance of the council, as one participant stated:

> *I think that the college council works like most councils, but what distinguishes the college council is that it usually works in a smooth manner.* (CBA3)

Another participant detailed how the dean and vice deans of the college keep the members of the college council informed regarding the college matters:

*Usually at the beginning of each meeting of the college council, the dean begins to speak if he has remarks, for example, to talk about the college affairs as well as the vice deans of the College.* (CBA2)

Further explanation on this point was provided by a vice dean of the college:

*As a college vice dean, I give a briefing on macro matters in the college by virtue of my communication with the Deanship of Graduate Studies, the university's Vice Rectorate for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, or the competent committees such as scientific research and others.* (CBA4)

One member of the college council articulated the framework of the college council meetings quite clearly:

*At the beginning of the council, the dean talks about what happened between the previous council meeting and the current one. For example, he raises the issues that happened in the college, and what happened with the college proposals that were sent to the university. Then, the Vice Dean for Graduate Studies speaks and reviews all issues that relate to graduate studies and scientific research. Next, the Vice Dean for Educational and Academic Affairs reviews educational affairs, curricula, students and everything that relates to students, and finally the Vice Dean for Development and Quality talks about the quality and standards which are followed in the college and of course urging the continuity of content development and curriculum development as the College of Business Administration is considered a pioneer in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world. Then after this is done, we shift into the work schedule.* (CBA1)

The above excerpts indicate that the council meeting frameworks facilitate the work in a way that allows the council members to perform their duties effectively.

**3.8.4.3.2 Technology adoption**

The second category of the CBA's council process effectiveness theme centers on technology adoption. The college council operates in part through the system of councils *Majales*. One participant explained this:

> *Normally, before the beginning of each meeting, there is a presentation of the topics which will be discussed at the council meeting through the Majales system which is affiliated with the university. The day before the council meeting, they put up all the topics which will be discussed.* (CBA3)

The following quotations highlight the advantage of using the system of councils:

> *Usually in the college council, topics are uploaded through the Majales website. So, we have an opportunity to review them even a day before the council. If you have notes or any comments, you may write them on the topic within the system. When this is discussed in the meeting, you can explain your point of view.* (CBA5)

> *As a member, you should review the topics before attending the council meeting to facilitate the discussion.* (CBA4)

The KSU's *Majales* system contributed to the effective management of the council meetings, as stated by one participant:

> *The current method of the work of the college council, I think, is the way that it's supposed to be followed. It saves time in meetings since topics with no comments are considered approved. But if one of the members has an inquiry, he can make this inquiry and then we will discuss the issue in the council meeting.* (CBA1)

A council member from the college emphasized that this enables council members to concentrate on important topics:

*Sometimes the council only discusses topics that include comments from the members of the council in the system of councils and here it takes one hour.* (CBA2)

In some cases, the CBA council meetings can be held online. One participant mentioned:

*... If there are simple topics that do not require much discussion, the entire council can convene online.* (CBA1)

The above quotations indicate that the system of councils *Majales* organizes the work of the council in an optimal manner.

In summary, it is evident that the CBA council followed an effective process through the organization of council meetings and the use of technology, which assisted the council members in working in alignment with the college's strategic goals.

### 3.8.5 Learning points from the pilot study

This pilot study successfully met several objectives. Firstly, the researcher identified key themes within a smaller sample that resembled the main study. Secondly, it confirmed that the research protocol questions were aligned with the research logic. This alignment was assessed by determining whether the answers would provide relevant and adequate information (Gillham, 2005; Kim, 2011). Thirdly, it involves evaluating the analysis process, as the pilot study was designed to test the effectiveness of the methods used, thereby enhancing the rigor of the main study (Lowe, 2019). Therefore, conducting the pilot study was essential for improving the quality of the main study (In, 2017).

The findings of the pilot study provided valuable insights into the methods used in the main study. Specifically, it was found that the roles of council members were linked to their contribution to the institutional strategy. Exploring participants' expressions of their responsibilities outside the council emerged as a noteworthy aspect for further search in the main study. Additionally, the descriptions provided by of participants regarding their supervision of the programs as part of the implementation of the college's strategic plan as well

as the importance of college's academic accreditation prompted the researcher to explore this point further in the main study. Lastly, the pilot study revealed that part of the internal work of the college council was based on technology, introducing a factor that requires consideration in the main study.

One of the primary advantages of conducting the pilot study was to significantly boost the researcher's confidence and facilitate elite professional interviews. For instance, the researcher became adept at employing appropriate language and tone to effectively engage with the subjects. The pilot study also aided the researcher in discerning the optimal timing for posing questions and when to allow participants to speak freely. Thus, the pilot study enabled the researcher to prepare thoroughly for the main study. As a result of the pilot study, the main research was ready to be carried out.

## 3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the approach employed in conducting this research. It begins by outlining the research questions as a starting point and proceeds to clarify the research philosophy, incorporating perspectives on ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Subsequently, the inquiry logic of this research is presented, considering different inquiry logics in scientific research. The research design is thoroughly discussed, explaining and justifying the selected approach to research methodology, research methods, research context, level of analysis, unit of analysis, unit of observation, methods of data collection, sample selection, time horizon, and methods of data analysis. This is accompanied by a brief summary of each part of the research design. A detailed discussion follows to clarify the quality of the research and the ethical considerations associated with conducting this study. The subsequent sections explain how the pilot study was performed in this research project and present its findings.

Next, **Chapter 4** offers an intensive analysis of the findings using the thematic method.

# Chapter 4: ANALYSIS

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings of this case study exploring the contribution of KSU council members with regard to their institutional strategy. It is intended to follow a logical and clear approach to analyzing the findings of the research. The findings of this study are identified in five key themes:

**Theme I.** Role-based contribution /accountability for the institutional strategy

**Theme II.** Technology as a driver to foster effective contribution

**Theme III.** Engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making

**Theme IV.** Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization

**Theme V.** Developing/enforcing regulations and compliance

The purpose of starting this chapter with the introduction of themes is to show a coherent chain of evidence to develop themes and these themes are comprised of categories that emerged from in-depth analysis of the findings. The analytical process was conducted in an inductive approach using the thematic framework, which is based on codes, then codes to categories, and finally categories to themes.

In this chapter, there are several sections that independently analyze the themes and their corresponding categories. Thus, each theme forms an essential component of this thesis as it explores the contribution of KSU council members to their institutional strategy.

## 4.2 Scope of analysis

This chapter provides an analysis of the data from semi-structured interviews intended to address the research question: *How do council members of King Saud University contribute to their institutional strategy?* Participants were asked about their duties and performance as members of the board of the institution with regard to the institutional strategy. The views of

participants suggest that council members should assume various responsibilities related to institutional strategy given that council members have different positions and are seen as leaders within their institutional entities. Thus, this research has gained valuable insights from the participants' perspectives, offering additional understanding of how council members execute their strategic roles. An example of the interview transcripts is presented comprehensively in **Appendix 6**.

This chapter also offers an analysis of official documents collected from the institution and other sources that are relevant to the research question. This includes internal reports, such as a university strategic plan, along with documentation from colleges and deanships. These official documents were analyzed in conjunction with the data collected through the interviews. This allows for the provision of additional information to the interview data within the context. For instance, documentary official analysis was used to further clarify some of the key points raised by the interviewees. Therefore, these official documents will be cited during the theme development phase as evidence, where applicable.

## 4.3 Documentary analysis: KSU Strategic Plan

The documentary analysis was conducted as a supplementary technique in this study. This includes gathering official documentation from the institution and other sources. The documentary evidence reviewed as part of the study includes both private and public documents. Applying the documentary analysis serves to increase the validity of the research findings. Furthermore, the use of documents in this study provided the researcher with an opportunity to contextualize the data collected through interviews (Brown, 2009). It also provides sufficient breadth and depth to the research study. In particular, the institutional documents which set out the elements of the institution's strategic agenda are highly applicable to this study. Therefore, one of the key internal reports collected in this study concerning the institutional strategic plan known as *The Summary of King Saud University Strategic Plan*

(DOC3). This report outlines the strategic objectives of the institution as well as the pillars of the updated strategic plan. The institutional strategic objectives contain eight elements. These objectives as extracted from the document are listed below.

**KSU strategic objectives:**

1. Creativity and innovation in scientific research.

2. Proficiency academic programs and their outputs.

3. Contribute to community service and improve the quality of life.

4. Supportive and enabling governance of the university.

5. Increase the efficiency of human resources at the university.

6. Self-revenue development.

7. Investment diversification and asset growth.

8. Improve spending efficiency for a sustainable financial future. (DOC3)

To achieve these strategic objectives, the institution has drawn up six key pillars of the institutional strategic plan. Each of these pillars contains a number of initiatives designed to respond to the university's strategic plan. These pillars are derived from the document as follows:

**Pillars of the updated KSU's strategic plan:**

1. Scientific research.

2. Teaching and learning.

3. Community service.

4. Institutional work environment.

5. Self-revenue and investment diversification.

6. Fiscal balance and spending efficiency. (DOC3)

Given that the main purpose of this study is to explore the contribution of council members to their institutional strategy, this official report was utilized to identify the strategic objectives of

the institution. Accordingly, it assists in understanding the performance of council members against these strategic objectives.

According to Morgan (2022), documentary analysis can be used in conjunction with interview data because these documents contain equivalent information. For this reason, the theme development phase of this study provides references to other relevant documents where appropriate.

## 4.4 Theme development

The thematic analysis of the data identified several categories from which five key themes emerged. The first theme focuses on the context in which council members are obliged to contribute to their institutional strategy in accordance with fulfilling their official role within the institution. . This includes the roles of university council members as vice presidents of vice rectorates, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges (**Theme I. Role-based contribution /accountability for the institutional strategy**). The second theme considers the use of technology in the council's internal operations to the extent that it enables council members to carry out their functions effectively. Technology is regarded to be an engine leading to effective participation, organizing council meetings, and archiving council documents (**Theme II. Technology as a driver to foster effective contribution**). The third theme discusses the engagements of council members at different stages of the decision-making process of the institutional strategic plan. It takes into account the involvement of members at the college or equivalent level alongside the university council (**Theme III. Engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making**). The fourth theme concerns the president 's leadership role in relation to institutional strategy. This includes the functions of the president within the university council and those not attached to the university council. The Higher Coordinating Committee is also found to play an important role in institutional strategy (**Theme IV. Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization**). The

fifth theme deals with regulations and compliance that are formulated and implemented by the university council in the context of adherence to the institution's strategic plan. It contains new regulations and mandatory workplace compliance that are followed and applied by council members (**Theme V. Developing/enforcing regulations and compliance**). An overview of the themes and categories that emerged from the study's findings is presented in **Table 14**.

**Table 14 Summary of themes that emerged from the study's findings**

| Themes | Categories |
|---|---|
| **4.5 Theme I.** Role-based contribution /accountability for the institutional strategy | **4.5.1** Roles of vice presidents of vice rectorates<br>**4.5.2** Roles of deans of supporting deanships<br>**4.5.3** Roles of deans of colleges |
| **4.6 Theme II.** Technology as a driver to foster effective contribution | **4.6.1** Leading to effective participation<br>**4.6.2** Organizing council meetings<br>**4.6.3** Archiving council documents |
| **4.7 Theme III.** Engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making | **4.7.1** College council or equivalent level<br>**4.7.2** University council level |
| **4.8 Theme IV.** Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization | **4.8.1** Internal to university council<br>**4.8.2** External to university council<br>**4.8.3** Higher Coordinating Committee |
| **4.9 Theme V.** Developing/enforcing regulations and compliance | **4.9.1** Regulations<br>**4.9.2** Compliance |

# 4.5 Theme I. Role-based contribution /accountability for the institutional strategy

This theme highlights the role of council members in relation to their institutional strategy, which is based on the role expectations of holding a specific position. It identifies various manner in which the council members contribute to the execution of the institutional strategy.

It also outlines the different obligations among the council members according to their positions. Three categories form this theme, including roles of vice presidents of rectorates, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges. **Table 15** demonstrates the codes and categories that emerged from the analysis of the role of the council members with regard to their contribution/accountability for the institutional strategy.

**Table 15 Codes and categories that formed Theme I**

| Codes[2] | Categories | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| *We have the university's vice rectorates: The Vice Rectorate for Educational Affairs, the Vice Rectorate for Graduate Studies for Scientific Research, and the Vice Rectorate for Development and Quality. **Each university entity is affiliated with its corresponding vice rectorate**. These vice rectorates, in turn, are **responsible for implementing the university's strategies**.* (KSU7) | Roles of vice presidents of vice rectorates | Role-based contribution/ accountability for institutional strategy |
| *The Deanship of [deanship name] is **an arm of the university** to **lead**, **follow up**, and **organize** scientific research ... we are **responsible** for setting the policy for scientific research, following up on scientific research at the university, **communicating** with external parties regarding scientific research, setting frameworks and regulations, and **facilitating** these tasks. This is our mission; we call ourselves assistants and service providers.* (KSU12) | Roles of deans of supporting deanships | |
| *The dean **works as a link** between the university and the faculty members, which does not mean that this role is simple ... you are **responsible** for the work and **accountable** even if it is not implemented. For example, you cannot inform the president of the university that it was not completed just because the head of the department or the vice dean of the college did not carry out the task; **in the end, the dean is responsible** to the president of the university for this matter.* (KSU15) | Roles of deans of colleges | |

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[2] Note: Codes are highlighted in bold within quoted text to clarify their origination, thereby facilitating understanding of how quotations contain multiple codes, which subsequently lead to the formation of categories in the analysis.

Each of these categories of this theme will be analyzed further in the following sections. Quotations are provided to indicate from where codes have been extracted.

### 4.5.1 Roles of vice presidents of vice rectorates

The first category extracted from the findings within this theme is the roles of vice presidents through the university vice rectorate. The findings of this study shows that the vice presidents have certain accountability toward the performance of their institution. In particular, their contribution to institutional strategy is strongly linked to their hierarchical position. The vice presidents play executive roles within the university council, as one participant stated:

> *The implementation is usually done by each university vice president within one's own administration.* (KSU1)

One vice president described how the strategic plan of the institution is initially developed through the vice rectorate:

> *The strategic plan must be on specific foundations ... in fact, it begins with the university Vice Rectorate for Planning and Development.* (KSU21)

In particular, the role of the Vice President for Planning and Development is vital with respect to the institutional strategy. One participant emphasized that:

> *The Vice President for Planning and Development is authorized to review the reports of the colleges ... the Vice Rectorate of planning and development is directly responsible for the strategic matters.* (KSU25)

However, this does not imply that only the Vice President for Planning and Development is accountable for the institutional strategy. Another vice president of the university further explained the extent to which each vice president has an obligation to implement the institutional strategy as follows:

> *The updated strategic plan was approved by the university council recently. Now, the university, with all its faculties, architecture, and programs is working according to the*

*university plan ... we have several vice rectorates in the university; each vice rectorate specializes in a specific work. For example, the Vice Rectorate for Educational Affairs is responsible for everything that relates to educational and academic programs, courses, diplomas, etc. The Vice Rectorate for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research is responsible for everything that relates to graduate studies and scientific research, master and doctoral programs. Of course, each vice rectorate operates in accordance with the nature of the work and has its own partnerships and agreements with external bodies based on its specialization. The university's vice rectorates also have several supporting deanships such as financial affairs, administrative units, human resources, and so on.* (KSU20)

In particular, one participant provided a detailed description of the process of assigning tasks to entities of the university based on their specialization within the framework of implementing the university's strategic plan.

*The strategic topics are presented to the council as an implementation mechanism. For instance, how to be among the best ten universities, and the decisions of the council are always like the coordinator, whether it is a rectorate of university, the deanship of a college, the King Abdullah Research Institute, the office of his excellency the president, or any party. It begins by distributing tasks to the rest, and each party performs its role. For example, the strategic plan for the university, it was determined by the Rectorate for Planning and Development, stating that we are responsible for implementing the university plan 2030, the vice president conveys the plan and allocates these tasks internally to entities based on the decision of the university council, like the deanship is assigned certain tasks. It then reviews and works on them accordingly.* (KSU9)

Another participant explained how strategic decisions of the university council are delivered as:

*A strategic decision is made when the university council adopts and approves the strategic plan. In our university, specifically at the Vice Rectorate for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research and the Deanship of Scientific Research, we have developed scientific research plans aligned with the goals of Vision 2030. Currently, our research priorities are closely aligned with the priorities of the Kingdom.* (KSU3)

The university's vice rectorates encompass a range of tasks and assignments. The following quotation elucidates the extent to which the Vice President for Projects is required to manage and execute duties of the university's vice rectorate.

*The Vice Rectorate for Projects is responsible for overseeing maintenance and operational activities, as well as supervising projects related to the construction of facilities and equipment for public services. Its primary role involves the maintenance of public facilities and infrastructure. (*KSU13)

The position of the vice president of the university enables holders to exercise their responsibility to work on behalf of the university council. An example was provided by one participant when he became head of an affiliated council.

*When we consider the Vice Rectorate for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at the university, I am responsible for the scientific council in my capacity as the Chairman of the Scientific Council.* (KSU3)

Furthermore, the operations and duties of the university's vice rectorate are divided into different divisions. These divisions include supporting deanships, which are supervised and controlled by the vice rectorate. One participant specified this structure as part of the process of obtaining accreditations for colleges.

*The accreditations, as we said, relate to the concerned authority, the University Vice Rectorate for Planning and Development followed by the Deanship of Development and Quality, in cooperation with the colleges.* (KSU19)

Moreover, each college across the university has affiliated divisions, including academic affairs, development and quality, and graduate studies, under the purview of the vice rectorates, which oversee the work of the colleges. One participant provided further explanation of the administration structure of the university.

> *Typically, topics are categorized based on the administrative units within the university. The administrative structure of King Saud University ensures consistency across all administrative units in the colleges; each college adheres to the same administrative framework as the university. This includes the Vice Deanship for Academic Affairs, the Vice Deanship for Development and Quality, and the Vice Deanship for Graduate Studies. This uniform system is maintained when proposals are submitted, either from the colleges to the university or vice versa, aligning with the established administrative structure.* (KSU 15)

The university' vice rectorates are also responsible for following up the implementation of the council decisions. One participant stated that:

> *After the council decision is issued, it is referred to the executive body that is responsible for the follow-up. Let's say, the university's Vice Rectorate for Academic Affairs is the competent executive body. For example, if we have a proposal and the university council refers it to the university vice rectorate, this means that it is the one that instructs us to implement it, and the vice rectorate follows up with the deanship.* (KSU6)

Another participant emphasized that the university's vice rectorates are delegated by the university council to monitor the performance of associated entities.

> *Following up on the work is usually carried out by the vice rectorate, the university council usually does not supervise the work. For example, the relevant vice rectorate*

*at the university must oversee the work and ensure that the college functions effectively.*

(KSU7)

In addition, one participant indicated that the university's vice presidents are responsible for briefing the university council on the performance evaluation of affiliated institutional entities:

*Of course, monitoring goes through the deanship or the vice rectorate ... regarding the progress of the work, the relevant vice president may raise an update to the council.*

(KSU2)

## 4.5.2 Roles of deans of supporting deanships

The second category under this theme is the roles of deans of supporting deanships. The university council is comprised of ten members who are in charge of supporting deanships, including the Deanship of Skills Development, the Deanship of Scientific Research, the Deanship of Human Resources, and others (DOC4). This category takes into account the functions of being a dean in a supporting deanship, which require one to take responsibility for implementing the institutional strategy. It also outlines how the incumbents of those positions add value to the institutional strategy. A dean from the university's supporting deanships explained his role in relation to the institutional strategy as follows:

*Because I am the Dean of [deanship name], I have two main parts: the development part and the quality part. The development part, which is the rate of the university's strategic plan, is the one responsible for following the strategic plan, which we developed less than a year ago due to the development of some events. And of course, King Saud University is one of the first Saudi universities to have a strategic plan that was established in 2010 and then developed in 2020. The plan was for a period of 20 years, called KSU 2030 ... the university's strategic plan was founded in 2010 and had very strong support at that time because it was one of the first universities to establish and launch a strategic plan, and the university created its own identity, not only*

*excellent but more than excellent, and it had 9 goals, roughly 40 or 44 initiatives. It was measured every year. The extent of excellence in each initiative was measured, and it was transferred to ten projects from these initiatives, and we have a team in the office called the project management office.* (KSU5)

Likewise, another dean of supporting deanship emphasized that the strategic plan of the deanship has been developed according to the organization strategic plan.

*As the Deanship of [deanship name], all plans and activities offered to students have been aligned with the goals of the vision ... the entire deanship, its strategic plans, activities, events are in line with the vision in a way that contributes to its achievement. For example, the deanship specializes in student services, including housing, dining, and clubs. It also provides care to students, offering housing services, and overseeing university restaurants.* (KSU10)

The supporting deanships have substantial various duties and tasks that are taken in order to meet the objectives of university strategic plan. An example of these duties of a supporting deanship is captured in the following quotation:

*The deanship is responsible for graduate programs in those colleges. Anything at the university that pertains to education beyond the bachelor's level, including higher diplomas, master's degrees, or doctorates, the Deanship of [deanship name] is responsible for it. The deanship is responsible for organizing and supervising it, but it is not the one implementing these programs, the colleges are the ones who implement the academic process. But the Deanship of [deanship name] contributes to ensuring the integrity of the statutory procedures. In addition, it contributes to ensuring the raising of academic quality and forming partnerships with other bodies outside the university ... the deanship sets the standards of the programs through the standing*

*committee for graduate studies. It also sets the criteria and conditions of admission together with communication with other colleges.* (KSU26)

On this detail, another participant highlighted the oversight functions that he is required to carry out through the university council delegation:

*I have matters that relate to the regulations which must be reported to the council, I have the faculty staff, I have the general staff, I have the health care, and I have the scholarships.* (KSU1)

Correspondingly, one participant explained how the system of councils *Majales* was delivered by the deanship. He also referred to the advantages of the system in carrying out administrative work throughout the university:

*The system was introduced by the deanship nearly twelve years ago, and the system helps the university greatly in managing its governance. It involves thousands of meetings, including department councils, college councils, committees, and human resources committees, among others. It also extends to the university council level, where it assists in managing administrative tasks.* (KSU6)

Another participant account indicated that the dean of supporting deanship positions allows the holders to exercise the authority on behalf of the university council by taking key decisions in the context of the institution's strategy, particularly as regards the financial aspects with external parties.

*Thus, parts of this article, the authorities are left from the university council to the board of directors of the institute ... this means that the authorities became delegated to the dean of the institute ... there are certain authorities for the dean of the institute, including concluding contracts and matters of financial specialties ... we do not have an overlap except in memorandums that are intended to provide service ... we are dealing with multiple agencies, government and private, such as ministries, bodies, and*

*institutions ... sometimes, they request to be included in a memorandum that serves as*

*a cover for paid services, and this is the type of memorandum that we use.* (KSU13)

Furthermore, two participants' accounts point out that one of the major duties of the supporting deanships includes chairing sub boards within their deanships, which have an independent list to deal with executive issues of the institutional strategy.

*The approval comes from the board of student fund. The board of student is chaired by*

*the [deanship name] and its supreme president is the university president ... The board*

*of student is made up of members from the university and outside the university, from*

*the private sector ... the structure of the board of student fund and the student fund*

*regulations are approved by a royal order and has its own list.* (KSU10)

*The committee is responsible for approving the plans for digital transformation and*

*such things. It is not the university council because there is a supreme command ... The*

*executive plans do not require approval from the university council, and the strategic*

*plan for digital transformation originates from the university's overall strategic plan,*

*ensuring alignment without conflicts with the university's plan.* (KSU6)

Some of the broad strategic decisions of the university council are carried out through the supporting deanships. One example is the university's academic accreditations process as explained in the following extract from one participant's account:

*Accreditation can actually be achieved without the direct involvement of the university*

*council; however, the university council becomes involved because accreditation is a*

*requirement for the university. But this is one of the executive things that the university*

*council is not the one who decides, meaning the college is the one who seeks to attain*

*excellence, each of the university colleges is looking for this. But this is one of the goals*

*that the university seeks in general. So, the colleges achieve it through these*

*accreditations, the procedures are carried out by the college in coordination with the Deanship of Development and Quality to obtain academic accreditation ... but the starting point of that is one of the main goals of the university. Because there is a trend such accreditations are necessary to raise the university's ranking and scientific research. I mean it is one of the university's strategic goals.* (KSU19)

In this respect, another participant asserted that the last stage of most of the decisions of the university council followed the administrative procedures through the supporting deanships.

*The subject is directed to the concerned deanship. For example, if it is an approval of a program, it is directed to the supporting deanship, the Deanship of Admission and Registration needs to be informed about the approval of the new program for the college and to enter it into the system. If the subject is the resignation of a colleague, it is forwarded to the Deanship of Human Resources for a decision on the administrative procedures. Most of the topics are completed by directing them to the supporting deanships for the executive authority at the university level.* (KSU25)

Additionally, the supporting deanships play a significant role in assisting and mentoring the performance of the colleges at the university. One participant explained the process of establishing a graduate program of the college, which can be accomplished by cooperation with relative supporting deanships.

*The college is administratively and procedurally linked to certain vice rectorates. For example, if it is related to a graduate program, we have the Deanship of Graduate Studies and also the admission is not directly submitted to the Deanship of Admission and Registration. We have joint councils with these deanships related to programs, ensuring that any accepted programs are coordinated and agreed upon with the relevant deanships. The college is never concerned except with the academic aspects*

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*of the program. The admission mechanism and the central admission procedures are done through an independent deanship.* (KSU17)

One participant stated that the deans of supporting deanships, like other members of the university council, take responsibility by leading and directing their entities. This involves the fulfilment of the executive aspects of the university's strategic plan.

*Of course, without a doubt, because each of the members of the council leads an entity whether it is colleges, deanships, or institutes. Therefore, its operational and executive role is great in this position ... everyone works and has their own role. I convey such directions at the council level to executive colleagues ... its status dictates that anyone who sits on the seat of this council bears greater responsibilities.* (KSU13)

## 4.5.3 Roles of deans of colleges

The third category which emerged from the analysis of the role-based contribution /accountability for institutional strategy theme is the roles of deans of colleges. This category highlights the duties of the deans of colleges with regard to their institution strategy. It also identifies the manner to which the deans of college contribute to the institutional strategy based on their formal positions. Analysis of an official document from the Ministry of Education states that the college councils are chaired by deans of the colleges (DOC5). In the light of this, one dean of the college explained his duties with respect to the university strategy as follows:

*As the dean of the college, you apply the university strategy based on your own authorities and responsibilities, particularly in terms of education, scientific research, and community service. And when I talk about education, I mean developing education, developing faculty members, qualifying them, and focusing on scientific research. We work on all these things in the colleges. We apply the university strategy, for example, the university strategy aims to improve its international standing through scientific research; what are the colleges doing in this regard? All of these colleges follow the*

*strategy and implement it, each according to his or her own responsibility … as dean of the college, I am required to implement a strategy. This is my job; I apply the university strategy with regard to my college and I evaluate my work as the dean of the college based on this factor. I evaluate my performance in the administrative aspect within the college administration, and I evaluate my own work on research and publications, and everything relates to my work. Also, I assess how far I've added value to my college.* (KSU7)

The responsibility of deans of the colleges is greater because the majority of the implementation phase of the university's strategy is delivered by colleges. One dean of the college account outlined the college functioning and the role of the deans.

*Implementation largely takes place at the college, through performance, teaching, and research. The supervisor for implementing the university plan is the dean of the faculties.* (KSU17)

On this point, the next two participants highlighted that the strategic plan of colleges must be part of the university's strategic plan.

*It is often at the level of their colleges. What the university emphasizes and focuses on is the fact that the vision, goals and mission of any college must be fully compatible with the vision and objectives of the university. While the development of the broad and strategic outlines, each college has its own strategy in a way that does not conflict with the vision and objectives of the university.* (KSU25)


*The strategic plan of the university has been recently changed, and the members of the university council were contributing to this topic with their opinions, and in light of this, the strategic plans of the colleges have been updated to comply with the university strategic plan.* (KSU18)

Moreover, another participant emphasized that the process of developing the college strategic plan is one of the deans' responsibilities.

> *All university units have a strategic plan, for example, we have here the strategic plan of the [college name] ... it must be compatible with the university's plan, the college plan is in line with the university plan and the university plan is compatible with the vision. And we developed workshops for every plan. We first reviewed the quadruple analysis, strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, and we set the goals. Then the initiatives came out of them, and we made the executive plan ... and after that, we started to implement it. Thankfully, most of the initiatives that we set in the plan have been implemented during the past four years, because we had a clear vision and implementation process.* (KSU15)

Another dean of college discussed the benefits of developing a strategic plan of the college, the initiatives of the strategic plan such as executive programs, and how these initiatives are delivered.

> *As I said, the college council has developed a strategic plan for the college. In general, the strategic plan of the college is a direction for the college. For example, over the next five years, what will be the level of the college in terms of its programs? ... we have also worked with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs on a project or an executive master's degree for the employees ... these started as initiatives through the college, a team from the college has developed a plan, or a proposal in coordination with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Housing to offer an executive master's program for leaders in the ministry ... I mean, now many cadres who work in the city administrations are our college graduates ... the proposal was raised by the ministry, through the work team, and this proposal was approved. It was sent to the college departments and the college council and then it was submitted to the Deanship*

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*of Graduate Studies to approve the program, of course because it is an executive program that is funded, the university administration also has a role in the process.* (KSU11)

The following quotation outlines the process of developing the executive program. It begins with the department council followed by the college council before it is sent to other entities in the university:

*Executive graduate studies in general have a path that starts from the department. The department proposes a program which is approved by the department council. Subsequently, it is presented to the college council before proceeding to the deanship of graduate studies.* (KSU9)

A further example was given by one participant explaining the approval process for particular training courses:

*We offered specific courses during the previous semester for trainees from the Ministry of Defence. It is an intensive course in English language program, we placed an initial placement exam for them, and accordingly, the applicants were classified into several levels. And this program was already completed.* (KSU14)

Those courses and programs are evaluated at the college level. Therefore, the deans of colleges have a responsibility to take on the role of reviewing the performance of these programs. One participant said:

*The college monitors this executive program. Like any other program, it is reviewed by the department council … so it is handled within the department. Of course, it reaches the university council, the college council, and it is referred to the council of graduate studies, the deanship of graduate studies.* (KSU11)

Moreover, the deans of colleges are highly accountable for implementing the decisions of the university council that are relevant to their college. This implies following the performance process and executing decisions accordingly. One participant reported:

> *This is the responsibility of the deans of colleges. As dean of the college, the decisions are issued by the university council, so I am directly responsible for the execution. Meaning the university council' decisions come to me to the college, and I must follow it, and each bears his responsibility according to the administrative hierarchy ... as the dean, I personally follow any decision made by the university council. I have a secretary in my office, all the matters that require follow-up, I review them on a weekly basis, and I meet with the heads of departments every week.* (KSU14)

The deans of colleges exercise their responsibilities with regard to implementing the university council decisions in different patterns. One participant emphasized that deans of colleges have a significant effect on the performance of their colleges.

> *In fact, when the dean returns to his college after the university council meetings, he must carry out the proposals and decisions of the council. So, these are direct speeches, decisions, incentives, messages. Also, the direction of the college depends on the dean. The dean has to possess the strength to assume the position and the ability to enhance the work. A failure on the part of the dean could potentially squander significant opportunities for the university and even the country, such as the introduction of new programs or the appointment of faculty members, for example.* (KSU17)

Another dean of college explained his role in improving the college's performance by using an internal governance system within the college. This approach assigns proposals to go through specific procedures before they can be sent to the university council.

> *We formed a committee for the college governance. This committee worked to its full capacity, and we adopted an internal system of governance. It consists of two parts:*

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*one regulation and one systemic. The legal part relates to the rules, regulations and what is issued; and the organizational part is procedural, meaning that any transaction must be submitted in 1, 2, 3, 4 steps to meet the conditions. Why this introduction? This frankness helped me reduce the number of returned proposals, as my role in the college to be ready to review, put forward and discuss topics, when our topics were raised, especially in the recent period, to the university council. I tried at the college to organize the internal process in a way that there are no shortcomings or notes for the proposals that refer to the university council. These things that we are proud of, the topics that are raised to the university council by the [college name] are rarely sent back.* (KSU9)*

The deans of colleges play an important role in making agreements between the university and other external agencies, primarily at the college level. There are a number of boards and committees that review these agreements at both the college and university levels. But the implementation of the agreements takes place through the colleges. One participant discussed this process:

*Agreements are prepared in the departments, discussed in central committees within the college, and subsequently submitted to the college council. After reviewing the agreements, the college council makes recommendations for approval. And then it submits it to the university council as a recommendation ... if the decision is approved, the implementation will proceed as initially requested, and the supervision will be under the purview of the college if affiliated with it.* (KSU18)

In addition, another dean of the college described how he draws up an agreement between his college and an external organization:

*It starts mostly at the college, as today we had a meeting with a company specialized in genetic testing. It starts from the college, for example, chat meetings in a regular*

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*meeting with the CEO of the company. Then, we visit them and see what they have and what we have, then we see what we can offer to them and what they can offer to us. We can determine whether there is really an added value to this partnership or not after one or two visits. We start now writing the terms of the agreement, and then we send it to the legal department. And if legal department deems that it does not conflict with the university's rules and regulations, and it does not cost any legal or financial consequences, so it can be submitted to the president of the university, and then it is returned to us to start implementing it.* (KSU25)

Similarly, another dean of college discussed how he personally worked through the process of concluding an agreement with an international organization and its advantages.

*For example, Germany has prestigious universities from which we can benefit in student exchange, scientific research, and consulting. In fact, when I started working on it, I began from scratch by creating a unit called the International Cooperation Unit because I found that there was no activation, and this was a treasure … as a result, the approval arrives from the ministry to the university, and from the university, it then comes to the college and goes to the concerned department to complete the necessary steps. (*KSU8)*

In light of the above, the next two participants accentuated the importance of the role of deans in the implementation of agreements between their college and external organizations.

*An agreement from the college department is submitted to the university council. Once it is approved by the university council, it is referred to the dean who is in charge of the college after signing an agreement between the university president and the head of the other party. It is followed up by the dean and it is implemented within the departments.* (KSU 16)

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*If it is an agreement for a specific college, it is followed up by the deanship of the*

*college and so on* (KSU21)

The deans of colleges are also involved in establishing strategic partnerships between their

colleges and external organizations that generate mutual benefits. This includes student training

partnerships through cooperation between colleges with companies or agencies. One

participant talked about the college target of these partnerships:

*We target partnerships to train our students in institutions within the field of tourism,*

*hotels, aviation, travel offices ... the Department of [name of department] offers a*

*training partnership for a full semester of 60 days or more at an archaeological site,*

*with the Heritage Authority, museums, and restoration.* (KSU16)

On this point, another participant discussed how the college takes advantage of these

partnerships and how these partnerships proceed:

*For example, we had a cooperative agreement with the private health sector to offer*

*free training to our students, and the training agreement ended with employment. The*

*subject was discussed between us and the private sector, we presented it to the legal*

*department, then we submitted it to the university council, and it was approved. The*

*approval proposal has been returned to the college, granting us the freedom to*

*implement the merits of this decision in collaboration with the relevant entity based on*

*its term.* (KSU17)

These partnership agreements were developed to respond to the university's strategic plan. For

instance, a dean of college highlighted the different methods in which the current programs of

the college are delivered in comparison to the previous one.

*Our programs were offered without practical training in the past, the students were*

*studying the academic side for four years only. With the university strategic plan, the*

*programs of the college were developed. Now, there is a full semester of training, a full*

*semester of training with different parties, there is no doubt that this has a great impact.*

(KSU24)

In this respect, a formal document indicates that the development of training programs is one of the initiatives under the second pillar of the strategic plan (DOC3). These initiatives were designed to fulfill the strategic objective of enhancing academic programs and their outputs. Furthermore, the college deans contribute to the university's strategic plan by actively working towards the academic accreditation of their colleges. The process of obtaining accreditation depends significantly on how the college prepares for it, and the primary responsibility for achieving accreditation lies with the dean of the college. One dean mentioned that the entire process of obtaining college accreditation is managed through his administration.

> *Academic accreditation has various aspects, including internal and external institutional accreditation, as well as international accreditation. These matters are typically managed at the college level. Whether it has to do with obtaining accreditation for a specific entity or securing membership in a particular organization, the responsibility falls on the college ... for instance, I handle all the procedures, communicate with the entity, and complete their forms. Frankly, the university strongly supports this approach, and I cannot recall it ever happening differently.* (KSU9)

One participant emphasized the high level of cooperation between the vice deanship of the college and other university units, such as the Deanship for Development and Quality, in terms of supervising and facilitating the college's performance:

> *In each college, there is a Vice Deanship for Development and Quality. Additionally, each department has a quality unit that monitors whether the goals have been achieved and identifies any obstacles.* (KSU16)

On this matter, one dean of the college asserted that obtaining academic accreditation of the college for the college requires the cooperation of all its members under the dean's supervision.

*Our accreditation is the responsibility of everyone, not just one person. It is carried out by faculty members, students, graduates, and the heads of departments. There are workshops and everyone participates in them. The real accreditation is to raise the level of quality, and that is a useful pressure on the dean as it should be for everyone.* (KSU15)

Overall, this theme illustrates how the roles and responsibilities of council members are allocated based on the specialization of their entities within the institution. As vice presidents of vice rectorates, their duties entail overseeing the performance of their respective vice rectorates and affiliated entities, providing the council with regular updates and assessments. Similarly, deans of supporting deanships are tasked with managing their deanships and ensuring thorough review of proposals, as these proposals represent the views of all members. Deans of colleges also play a crucial role in enhancing their college's processes by carefully handling proposals before they are submitted to the university administration for consideration at a higher level. Each party involved has the opportunity to evaluate proposals and offer suggestions from their unique perspectives even before they reach the university council. Within the council, all members are encouraged to present and discuss their views, especially in cases where proposals are met with differing opinions. Decisions are not rushed but thoroughly explored and discussed. These processes within the governance system facilitate the accommodation of contradictory views and encourage debates in the council meetings.

The adoption of KSU's *Majales* enables effective communication among council members, allowing for diverse views and comments to be expressed through different channels. This contributes to the efficient organization of board functions by encouraging members to articulate and justify their views to one another, thus fostering collective decision-making within the council. Additionally, the processes discussed above within the governance system aim to optimize council decisions by developing regulations and enforcing compliance, thereby

preventing conflicts with previous decisions. These points will be further analyzed in subsequent themes.

## 4.6 Theme II. Technology as a driver to foster effective contribution

The second theme delves into the impact of council members on strategic matters within their organization. In this case, technology emerges as a driver of effective contribution. This study's findings demonstrate that the internal operations of the council highly rely on technology through the university electronic system. An analysis of an official document of the organization sets out the objective of establishing the university' system of councils *Majales* which is to facilitate the administrative work of the institution. The report also describes the features that are provided to users on the system. This evidence is captured in the following quotation:

> *The system of councils [Majales] is an electronic system that fully manages all meetings, streamlines communication between members, eliminates the need for paper documents, organizes participations, and schedules time for each topic. Additionally, it offers the opportunity for pre-meeting discussions and dialogues through the comments feature and allows electronic voting. The system is seamlessly integrated with mobile messages and email notifications for users.* (DOC6)

This theme is composed of three categories, namely leading to effective participation, organizing council meetings, and archiving council documents. **Table 16** outlines codes and categories that formed the theme of technology as a driver of effective contribution.

**Table 16 Codes and categories that formed Theme II**

| Codes[3] | Categories | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| *The **topics are presented** in the **system of councils [Majales]** and are **available** to the members. This is very important to **support the effectiveness** of the members of the council. These topics are presented sometimes **before the council meeting** and each member **can review** them. So, a member can **give his opinion** on the system of councils, and it also allows him to **clarify** his point of view during the meeting. There is no doubt this is **excellent** and **convenient** for members and gives them the opportunity to be **informed and updated**. When you compare, for example, if the topic is presented hours before the meeting, there is no doubt that it may not be flexible. But with a system of councils where you have topics **available before four to five days**, you can give your opinion and **add your comments**. This is good, and it helps each member to be **effective in performing** his duty. (KSU24)* | Leading to effective participation | Technology as a driver of effective contribution |
| *The **system** was initially developed about 12 years ago. The reason is that the council of the university **used to take five hours, sometimes six hours**, and sometimes the meetings of the university council **stopped today and finished tomorrow**. It took **a long time** because they were discussing each topic separately. I mean, the university council meetings have **consumed much of the time**. So, they decided to find **a necessary tool to help** them in the **governance of the work**, and then the university's system of councils [Majales] was introduced. (KSU6)* | Organizing council meetings | |
| *The university council is an **organized council** at the university level. The process is **arranged** as we use the system of councils [Majales]. The idea of the system is to become **paperless**. The system of councils works in the sense that the topics are specified, and each subject has **all the supporting documents**. These supporting documents **can be reviewed** on the basis that the decision is taken, and **all topics are listed**. (KSU2)* | Archiving council documents | |

These categories will be analyzed separately in the next sections. Quotations are provided to indicate where codes are derived from.

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[3] Note: Codes are highlighted in bold within quoted text to clarify their origination, thereby facilitating understanding of how quotations contain multiple codes, which subsequently lead to the formation of categories in the analysis.

## 4.6.1 Leading to effective participation

The theme of technology as a driver of effective contribution is seen as critical as it leads to effective participation of council members on matters under discussion by the university council. There are different ways that technology helps members get effectively involved in the council operations, which will be discussed in this section. The council secretary emphasized that *Majales* provides an excellent opportunity for all members to actively participate through written methods, significantly increasing the clarity of the topics:

> *But we allow members to express their opinions in writing during discussions, providing a platform for individuals to articulate their thoughts calmly and supportively. Unlike oral discussions where certain points may be overlooked, allowing individuals to write enables a clearer expression of ideas. For instance, as I am speaking with you now, I might unintentionally omit details related to the university. However, if given the opportunity to write, my communication would be more precise.*
> (KSU3)

On this point, the adoption of KSU's *Majales* has significantly strengthened the operations of the council, leveraging a high level of professionalism. Notably, a senior member underlined specific advantages associated with the utilization of the council system within the university council.

> *The advantage of the system of councils is that you have the topics available to you before you are surprised by them in the actual council meeting. Through my experience, both within Saudi Arabia and in the broader Arab context, if we compare the system of councils to certain parliamentary councils in Arab countries, the work is frankly excellent. You can work quietly on the presentation of the topics. Although they have been different for years, you can observe progress evolving from a conventional approach to the highest level of professionalism, avoiding confrontation.* (KSU16)

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The KSU's system of councils positively affects the internal functioning of the council. One participant described how it improves the effectiveness of the university council's performance.

> *Usually, in order for the council meeting to be effective, all members of the university council are informed of the topics in advance, and then they review the supporting documents before the council meeting. So, each member knows exactly this topic, its implications and concerns, allowing them to form an opinion before attending the council meeting. A member can make an inquiry about the points and whether he agrees or rejects the topic, and then one can write his comments in the council system.* (KSU2)

In this regard, another participant described the KSU's council of systems as:

> *It is very useful, and it provides all the details about the topics.* (KSU18)

The KSU's *Majales* offers a practical approach that encourages council members to engage in council discussions. An additional benefit of the council system, as discussed by a member of the KSU council, is that it facilitates members in expressing their views freely.:

> *In situations where a decision is unanimous, individuals may hesitate to express their opinions. However, the presence of an electronic system before the council meeting can be empowering. When your comment is submitted in advance, it fosters a sense of confidence that may not have been there before. This allows individuals to include specific notes. Frequently, during the council meeting, there is an opportunity to voice your opinion.* (KSU6)

On this detail, the KSU council members have the right to approve, reject or abstain from any topic presented in the system of councils. One participant stated:

> *The topics that relate to the council are usually available to each member who has the right to comment, to reserve, and to express his views, whether by approval, rejection or even abstention.* (KSU9)

Another participant accentuated that KSU's *Majales* actively assists the university council, contributing to an increased level of effective participation among its members in council discussion:

> *Generally, all topics are distributed to council members, granting everyone the right to participate, express their opinions, and express opposition. This accessibility is facilitated by modern technology and the council system [Majales]. Members can now review all council topics and record their initial observations. Subsequently, the council discussions revolve around these observations, maintaining an open avenue for ongoing discourse on council matters.* (KSU12)

The next two participant accounts delineated the choices offered by the university's *Majales* for council members. These options include engaging in discussions before the council meeting, writing comments on the topics, providing notes about the topic, or posing inquiries:

> *The members typically engage in discussions on each topic, and whoever wants to participate may request to do so. Those with inquiries can ask to add a comment, and whoever wishes to write a note in the electronic system of councils [Majales] about a topic is free to do so. The council members deliberate on these matters.* (KSU22)

> *Before the council convenes, topics are placed in the system of councils [Majales] and can be reviewed. Therefore, members have the opportunity to comment on any topic they review. This opportunity is available to everyone. Topics are presented to the council, sometimes with a suggestion, a specific observation, or an objection. Each member of the council has the right to make any observation on a specific topic directly.* (KSU11)

Furthermore, the council meetings calendar is posted ahead of time for members, and the topics of discussion are made available on the system, ensuring that council members are well prepared for the meetings. One participant said:

> *Of course, they send the schedule of the council meetings at the beginning of the university year, and the commitment rate is high. Before the meeting, there is a period of about a week less/ more, you can log in and write comments. The council members, in general, have sufficient time to consider all topic.* (KSU6)

Accordingly, the KSU's *Majales* enables council members to actively engage in the council agenda. Another participant talked about how he exercises his responsibility as a member of the council by reviewing and discussing the topics before the council meeting is held.

> *I usually read the topics well in advance and search for the information I need. If I have any inquiries, opinions, or proposals, I document them in the council system [Majales]. Subsequently, if there are questions seeking clarification about this participation, I provide explanations.* (KSU7)

The system of councils offers flexibility by allowing council members to virtually attend council meetings. One participant elaborated that:

> *Now, in any place in the world, you can participate in the council. The increased flexibility in accessing decisions and electronic materials is attributed to the electronic [Majales] system.* (KSU10)

Similarly, another member noted that the KSU's electronic system facilitates the participation of council members on the agenda of council meetings.

> *You can do this during the council meeting by requesting participation, or you can write down your opinion, which will then appear in the council systems [Majales]. The Secretary of the council will provide the opportunity for you express your opinion.* (KSU19)

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Furthermore, the next two participants highlighted that *Majales* system makes it easier for council members to focus on reviewing and discussing the council's topics before the meetings are held.:

> *All the topics submitted to the university council are placed in the system of councils [Majales]. This makes it more convenient for a member to read and review the topics before discussing them in the council meeting. They can delve into the topics, record their notes, and input them into the system of councils before the meeting.* (KSU23)

> *The system was paper-based, and it later became electronic. Electronic acceleration is more efficient, and it helps in saving paper. Now, everyone can read the topics on their mobile devices. These changes have made our work easier and simpler.* (KSU12)

One participant emphasized a key advantage of using the KSU's electronic system is to resolve any confusion or ambiguity in the topics by addressing members' inquiries, which leads to forming initial decisions about the topic during the actual meeting:

> *I observed that typically, all the issues identified before the council meeting are resolved before members join the session. As members present their views to the council secretary, he begins reviewing topics with comments and initiates discussions with those who have commented to explain their perspectives. Consequently, the discussion is, at the very least, progressing in a specific direction.* (KSU6)

The KSU's *Majales* also streamlines the management of council members' participation in discussions during council meetings, even for those who were not previously involved in the pre-meeting discussions. The next two participants further discussed this aspect:

> *For instance, if I have an inquiry, I can write it. There are times when I initially have no contribution to a topic, but after the discussion, I come up with an idea. In such*

*cases, I would request to participate, and I would be given the opportunity to express*

*my opinion.* (KSU15)

*Usually, only topics with comments are discussed. However, during the council*

*meeting, anyone can request to participate in a topic or add notes to topics without*

*comments.* (KSU18)

## 4.6.2 Organizing council meetings

The second category in this theme emerged from the findings focusing on the organization of council meetings. Technology plays a significant role in arranging the council's internal operations as most of the council's work takes place in the system of councils *Majales.* This has an impact on how the board members discharge their responsibilities. One participant explained how the system of councils has changed the work of the council as:

*Indeed, there has been a paradigm shift in the overall functioning of the university*

*council through the advanced electronic system [Majales]. This system enables the*

*presentation of topics, ensures confidential votes, and provides the option to include or*

*exclude specific groups. It has already made a significant contribution to the*

*functioning of the councils.* (KSU22)

The KSU's electronic system is extensively utilized in effectively managing the work of the council. The entire process of council operations is seamlessly handled through the system of councils. One participant stated:

*We have an electronic system of councils that manages the council process ... all the*

*work is placed in the system ... it seems to be positive; this way is excellent as everything*

*is managed through [Majales], and these are not individual decisions.* (KSU11)

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The system of councils is designed with distinct formats that allow users to present different topics that can be readily identified. One participant noted that the topics in the system of councils are divided into categories, making it easier to follow up:

*We have a classification in the program itself, a [Majales] program that categorizes topics according to what we call type. The system is crafted to be easy to classify and track.* (KSU5)

The primary purpose of the *Majales* system is to save time during council meetings. One participant asserted that this was the main reason the university developed the system. He compared the efficiency of the council's working process with and without the system of councils.

*The diverse services of the system of councils allow for effective tracking of administrative work, providing a convenient checklist for all topics and facilitating quicker decision-making. Previously, the council, without exaggeration, would require two consecutive days to complete its tasks. Now, with one monthly meeting, all topics are presented in advance, streamlining the review process. The automation of tasks has eliminated any unnecessary time wastage.* (KSU8)

In this respect, the KSU electronic system provides an effective and efficient environment for the management of council activities. One participant described in greater detail how the system positively affects the way the council operates.

*Without the system of councils, the traditional method required printing and distributing papers to thirty, forty, or fifty members, incurring costs in both materials and effort. Now, with everything being electronic, the process is significantly more efficient. Undoubtedly, this approach saves a considerable amount of time and allows members to express their opinions seamlessly whether through requesting participation*

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*or submitting written comments. All members can effortlessly review proposals and*

*share their perspectives on any topic. (*KSU24)

The system of councils enables the council members to deal in a professional manner with proposals and matters that are submitted to the council for decision. This takes place when council members review proposals before council meetings through *Majales* system. Then, only proposals with comments will be discussed during the actual council meetings. One participant discussed this further:

*We work professionally; in other words, during council meetings, we don't delve into*

*every raised topic due to their large number. Instead, we focus on discussing topics that*

*have garnered comments from some members. This approach, of course, gives members*

*full responsibility to review these topics.* (KSU7)

On this point, another participant provided an explanation of how the council handles proposals that do not have comments in the system as they are deemed approved by council members:

*Let me also add to the point related to the management of the council's work. Due to*

*the multiplicity of topics and the large agenda every month, usually when the meeting*

*begins and any topic does not have a comment on the system, we do not stop, and we*

*pass it as it is considered approved because each topic ends with a recommendation.*

*The topic that has no comments is considered that everyone agrees with it.* (KSU13)

Thus, proposals with a high level of participation in the *Majales* system will be given priority on the agenda of the council meetings. A university council member noted the following:

*Typically, topics with a large number of comments are presented at the council meeting*

*for discussion and take into account the views of members.* (KSU20)

The system of councils is also very useful in terms of carrying out the voting process of the council decisions. One participant stated:

*The decision-making process usually consists of a vote on the issues raised. Of course, the voting process is confidential to ensure the privacy of individual votes. (KSU7)*

With respect to that, the system of councils is used to facilitate the decision-making process. One participant discussed situations where the council votes through the system of councils

*Sometimes, the council may need to vote to make a decision. In such cases, there might be a confidential vote by the members through the system of councils on any subject where there is disagreement or multiple points of view. (KSU3)*

On this detail, council members have different options to choose in terms of participating in the voting process through the system of councils. One participant identified these options as:

*Which is done through a secret vote on the proposal to approve, disapprove, or abstain. (KSU8)*

The KSU's *Majales* assists in arranging council meetings in a manner that manages communication between members during meetings. The next two quotations provide further descriptions of how the council system is effectively used in handling participation among council members:

*Usually, during the meeting, for each topic you wish to discuss, you can select a request option. This notifies the Secretary of the council that someone requested to speak. The Secretary can then organize the participation, for example, by announcing, now, we have a contribution from Doctor So-and-So, rather than the situation being messy with everyone trying to speak at once or raising their hand. (KSU6)*

*Any member can request participation either before or during the meeting. These requests are submitted electronically through a designated box or button, indicating I have a comment, or I want a chance to speak. Consequently, participation requests from council members are scheduled in order of precedence. (KSU26)*

Another participant elaborated further how the system of councils is displayed when members request participation during council meetings.

> *When the meeting begins, it is indicated in the system that a certain member has registered with a note or for participation, allowing him to engage and present his opinion.* (KSU23)

In light of the above, the system of councils also facilitates the council secretary in managing discussions more effectively, especially when addressing comments posted on the system before the council meeting. One participant said:

> *During the meeting, the council secretary reviews the topics. When he reaches a topic with a comment, he pauses to allow participation from the colleague, initiating a discussion on the topic* (KSU9)

The KSU's electronic system ensures a high level of transparency in the council operations by sending notifications about the council meeting agenda and complete details on the topics intended to be discussed. One participant asserted this as an advantage of adopting the system of councils.

> *The advantage of the university council is that the Secretary of the university council provides the topics well in advance of the meeting. We receive notifications indicating the specific date of the university council meetings. Members of the council are fully informed about all topics with transparency and comfort through the [Majales] system.* (KSU14)

Another participant highlighted that the university council prevents any potential conflict with a high degree of transparency. This is because each member can express their opinions before the council meetings, free from any influence of other members' opinions.

> *The council and its topics are accessible through the [Majales] platform before the council meetings. As a member, you can submit your written opinions or input while in*

*your office or at home, allowing you to express your thoughts before the meeting. This*

*practice ensures high transparency and helps prevent any potential conflicts.* (KSU7)

## 4.6.3 Archiving council documents

The third category within this theme that emerged from the participants' accounts is archiving council documents. The KSU's *Majales* system is seen as an essential tool that saves and secures council documents. It includes many features that can be used to follow up and check the documents of the council. Preserving the documents of the council is the key to keeping the council's paperwork, saving the discussions between members, and recording the council meetings. One participant identified the benefits of using the system of councils.

*Usually, the university council deals with numerous significant topics. So, this system*

*helps in shortening time, arranging, improving accuracy and reliability, as well as*

*documenting the work. Also, all opinions and comments are preserved, and the entire*

*process is presented and recorded in the system.* (KSU22)

Additionally, another member explained that allowing council members to write their comments in the system is secure. Thus, the documentation of the council operations leads to an effective and efficient decision-making process:

*We do not have unilateral decisions at King Saud University. All of our work is done*

*through platforms, and these platforms guarantee your right to express an opinion.*

*They give you the full right to write, and even if you have an objection, you can write*

*it. All these inputs are reserved, and no one can delete them; they exist continuously.*

*The work is usually smooth with complete flexibility.* (KSU7)

Through the system of councils, members of the council can effortlessly share important documents and identify their source. For instance, one participant underlined that the KSU's electronic system enables users to upload a complete list of supporting documents for the council proposal:

*The system of councils [Majales] is undoubtedly very useful not only at the university level but also at the level of department and college councils, and even the standing committees ... certainly, it is beneficial for follow-up as it allows members to review topics, comment on them, and attach documents or files. All these documents are readily available to the council members.* (KSU24)

Attaching complete files of proposals to the KSU's system helps improve the quality of the council's decision-making process, allowing members to precisely review these proposals. Such documentation also saves time during council meetings. A university council member noted that:

*So, anyone can review all the documents of any topic. When we meet, it shortens the time because sometimes there are more than a hundred topics, and it is difficult to discuss them all, but they are shared in the system of councils [Majales].* (KSU15)

Furthermore, a senior council member underscored the immense utility of uploading comprehensive supporting documents for proposals on the KSU's *Majales* system to facilitate the internal operations of the council. This functionality empowers council members to concentrate on pivotal topics demanding discussion:

*In my simple experience with the university council, when I served as a vice dean of the college and attended meetings on behalf of the dean, I witnessed significant changes during the development and paradigm shift in the system of councils within King Saud University. Previously, council meetings could last seven to eight hours. However, with the introduction of the Majales system, the dynamics changed. The meetings are now more efficient, lasting only about an hour, during which 200, 400, or 350 topics could be concluded. The reason for this efficiency is the uploading of entire files onto the system. Members can write their comments directly in the system, and only topics with*

*unresolved controversies or deemed important are discussed in detail. The rest are*

*approved without much discussion, streamlining the process.* (KSU16)

The KSU's *Majales* system effectively safeguards council members' right to express views, preserving them within the system. Besides, documenting the council's work proves valuable for continuous improvement. One participant asserted these advantages of the system:

*I believe that this platform has made a significant contribution … technology effectively manages the process, saving time, and concurrently ensuring the protection of your rights. Even if I'm not given the opportunity to speak during the meeting, the topics are accessible a week before the council meeting. I can share my comments at any time, and no one can withhold them.* (KSU7)

In addition, the system of councils proves valuable in revisiting the history of the council's documents and decisions. One participant accentuated how the system streamlines the process, enabling council members to efficiently search for and access past documents:

*There is also a data warehouse available for users, allowing you to find the necessary information for meetings. It provides a well-organized data warehouse where you can easily locate what you need. Without it, you would have to search through various documents in different places. This ensures that you don't miss any important information from the past. The system of councils [Majales] is a brand of the university.* (KSU6)

In this context, another participant compared the internal operations of the council under the previous and current systems. The *Majales* system is considered a powerful tool for monitoring the implementation process of council decisions by tracking previous transactions in the system:

*The old system was in place through regular council meeting … but after the council meeting, you don't know what has happened regarding this matter; you don't know if it*

*was implemented or not. Now, with the Majales system's archive, you can refer to it even after two or three years. The topics and decisions are documented, it does not have higher transparency than this.* (KSU7)

This participant continued:

*This platform distinguishes King Saud University with its transparency in expressing opinions and preserving documents. All transactions, actions, and topics are easily accessible. For example, I can show you my actions and the first topic I proposed since joining as a member by opening the council system. I can retrieve this information at any moment.* (KSU7)

## 4.7 Theme III. Engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making

This theme as emerged from the findings explores the engagement of the council members at multiple levels of strategic decision-making. It consists of two key categories the college council level or equivalent and university council level. The manner in which council members are involved in the decision-making process regarding strategic matters of the institution is considered crucial, reflecting their contribution to the institutional strategy. This theme emerged from the codes and categories presented in **Table 17**.

**Table 17 Codes and categories that formed Theme III**

| Codes[4] | Categories | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| *The work of the university council is complementary to the **institutional work** within Saudi universities. It is based on the so-called three councils, the **department, college**, and university **councils**. These are the three well-known councils in the university that are **concerned with decision-making**.* (KSU17) | College council or | |

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[4] Note: Codes are highlighted in bold within quoted text to clarify their origination, thereby facilitating understanding of how quotations contain multiple codes, which subsequently lead to the formation of categories in the analysis.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Of course, the decision-making method is clear, usually a decision is made **only after a thorough study**. Many topics are **initially studied** by previous committees and **councils before** they reach the university council. This mean that the topics do not reach the **university council unless** they are in the **stage of maturity**.* (KSU23) | equivalent level | Engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making |
| *Precisely because of **my role** at the institute. Indeed, the institute is concerned with creating financial returns for the university through all its resources ... so, **I focus on topics that have an impact on resources** ... I have **another role**, as **the Head of the Investment Committee** on the university council ... sometimes, **I review and comment** on a topic from the role of **the Chairman of the Investment Committee** to differ from the role of **the Dean of the Institute**.* (KSU13) | University council level | |
| ***My role** on the university council is to **discuss** those topics that **relate to the college**, but this doesn't mean only my college's topics. We **discuss all topics** that are presented in the council. Of course, the decision-making takes place on a topic, or a **participatory decision** where **everyone shares their point of view**.* (KSU11) | | |

In a separate section, there will be a comprehensive presentation of the analysis of each of these two categories. Quotations from participant interviews will be provided to indicate the origin of the codes.

## 4.7.1 College council or equivalent level

The first category of this theme focuses on the involvement of council members in the strategic decision-making process at the college council level or equivalent. The university council decisions are developed through sub councils including the department and college councils. One participant noted this distinction in the decision-making process within the institution as:

> *The best thing about universities is that they depend on councils; department councils, college councils, and the university council* (KSU12)

Therefore, one college dean pointed out that proposals cannot be sent directly to the university council. Additionally, the input and perspective of college deans are essential in any decision concerning their respective colleges:

> *It is not possible that I submit it to the university council directly, the proposal must pass through several procedures, from this side things are clear. Mostly, for any topic related to the college, the views of the college dean are often considered, especially if there is a conflict in the proposal.* (KSU16)

The operation of department and college councils involves considering and discussing proposals related to the college. Subsequently, the recommendations of these proposals are sent to relevant units of the university to make the final decision, such as the university council. One dean of a college explained this further:

> *Typically, we hold two department councils and two college councils monthly. The department council submits proposals to the college council, which discusses and recommends them. The recommendations are then forwarded to various parties, including the university council.* (KSU11)

In this context, another participant emphasized that decisions of the college council are fundamental in shaping the decisions of the university council:

> *Indeed, the council operates in a consultative manner. Typically, the foundation for the council's activities lies within the colleges. Administrative matters undergo thorough review at the college level, while academic matters are forwarded to the university council. The university council engages in consultations and subsequently grants approval. The decision-making process is decentralized, placing significance on the colleges as the fundamental structural units of the council. The opinions of the colleges are consistently regarded with respect and given paramount attention in the decision-making process.* (KSU15)

One dean of the college further explained that the university council typically aligns with the recommendations from the college council, given that the proposals are thoroughly considered:

> *As I mentioned earlier, topics are usually accepted by the university council if they first go through the department council and then the college council. This is because these topics are generally very solid.* (KSU14)

Therefore, the importance of the college council lies in its authority to make decisions regarding academic subjects within departments before they are submitted to the university council. One participant underscored that this constitutes a regular part of the procedures for educational proposals:

> *We have academic and educational matters in the university which have different governance as stated, [Nothing is decided except through the competent councils]. So, it goes from the department council to the college council. Then, it passes to the scientific council and finally the university council. This means anything related to academic matter must pass through these four points.* (KSU6)

In this regard, the secretary of the university council emphasized that proposals must adhere to the formal decision-making procedures, including review by the college council, before being referred to the university council. Furthermore, any proposal requires approval from the dean of the college to be eligible for presentation to the university council:

> *There are specific conditions in place. If a topic requires presentation to other councils, such as the department or college, and is incomplete, I am unable to present it to the university council until it has been referred to the head of the department and college. Similarly, I cannot propose a promotion, appointment, or any other matter without prior presentation to the scientific council. It is imperative that the proposal be thoroughly completed, adhering to procedures from the bottom up, especially when it is associated with councils.* (KSU3)

The university council formulates the general elements of the institution's strategic plan, while the college council decides on specific elements of the institutional strategy. Consequently, these strategic decisions require endorsement from the deans of colleges. One participant further elaborated on this aspect:

> *Regarding the strategic plan, the advantage of the university is that decisions are built from the departments and colleges, the first thing of which means a complete vision of the university. The university works on a vision which is presented to the university council, and the university council directs it to colleges or the deans of the colleges. Then the deans of the colleges present it to the heads of departments. The vision of the university must be consistent with the vision of the college and the vision of the department.* (KSU 16)

A university council member emphasized that strategic subjects require more attention, discussion, and analysis because the decision is crucial.

> *Strategic matters typically require in-depth attention, study, and time due to their significant impact. This often involves extensive deliberations and discussions.* (KSU26)

In certain cases, the university council's decision may authorize an entity to make necessary decisions on its behalf, ensuring the completion of work. This is particularly applicable in the context of collaboration with external bodies and agencies. One participant provided an example of such a decision.

> *Keep in mind that some parties within the university are sometimes delegated by the university council with the authorities of the council. For example, the decision may state that [It authorizes the vice rectorate to make the necessary amendments according to what is needed with regard to the proposal of the royal commission of Riyadh].*

*Therefore, it is not necessary to return to the university council. The executives do not*

*need the university council to follow up.* (KSU6)

For instance, another participant described his role as the dean of the supporting deanship.

*I am responsible for secondments and assignments, so I must discuss them and verify*

*that they are correct or not. Although they may be reviewed by the scientific council*

*and other councils, my role is considered important and essential, because the final*

*decision is mine.* (KSU1)

It should also be noted that not all proposals from colleges are decided by the university

council. Certain decisions are left to the discretion of the college councils. This implies that

cooperation between the deans of colleges and other units within the university is essential.

This was clearly expressed by one participant.

*The recommendation is submitted to the college council, then the dean of the college*

*directs it in its own way, meaning he transfers it to the concerned party ... there are*

*some decisions which must be issued by a decision of the university council, and some*

*decisions are not required the approval from the university council.* (KSU14)

In light of this, one dean of the college discussed how the university and college councils

contribute to the formulation of the institution's strategic plan:

*Any strategic plan must be built from the inside of the organization and with the*

*participation of everyone. The university plan is drawn up by the leaders of the*

*university, the college deans. And the college plan is developed by the college councils,*

*department councils, employees, and faculty members. For the plan to succeed,*

*everyone should be part of it, and this is highly applicable at King Saud University.*

(KSU 18)

Thus, the university and college councils have a role in implementing the decisions of the university council. Moreover, the college is perceived as playing a major role in the early stage of the decision-making process of the university council. One participant stated:

> *Both councils have executive roles, as certain decisions and topics require implementation. The college council serves as the starting point in the organization's decision-making process.* (KSU11)

In this context, another dean of supporting deanship explained the process of submitting important topics from the deanship to the university council. This includes a comprehensive analysis as it reflects the views of the deanship's staff:

> *It is well considered, discussed, and prepared in a timely manner. Note that it is not the member who raises the proposals. Because at this point, when something is raised from the deanship, it is the deanship's opinion representing four hundred employees, not my personal opinion.* (KSU6)

Likewise, another participant emphasized that strategic decisions undergo a collective process within the deanship's councils, involving extensive discussions, before being presented to the university council:

> *These decisions don't solely originate from the Dean of [deanship name]; they go through careful consideration within multiple councils. Before reaching the university council, these decisions are presented and thoroughly examined. So, they aren't personal choices, but rather strategic decisions collectively shaped by the involvement of a large number of members.* (KSU10)

Hence, one of the college deans highlighted that decisions of the university council receive recommendations from a substantial number of faculty members within the college, encompassing members from department and college councils:

> *As I mentioned earlier, the recommended decision by the university is passed by at least a hundred faculty members.* (KSU17)

The decision-making process concerning strategic matters, such as the establishment of new colleges, departments, or postgraduate programs, follows specific procedures starting at the department level and progressing until it reaches the university council. One member of the council explained this further:

> *The decision to establish a college, create a department, establish an institute, or formulate a study plan for postgraduate programs goes through the main channels from bottom to top before being presented to the university council.* (KSU3)

In this regard, a college dean provided a comprehensive explanation of the academic program establishment process. It commences with the department council and progresses to the college council. Consequently, college deans are anticipated to play a pivotal role in this procedure, reviewing proposals within the college council and engaging in discussions with other university units. Eventually, the proposals are presented in a clear manner for the final decision of the university council.

> *The topics presented to the council typically undergo a series of procedures, starting at the department and being scrutinized by its committees, followed by evaluation at the college council and its committees. Subsequently, the submission is made to the Vice Rectorate for Educational and Academic Affairs, particularly if it pertains to an educational program. The program is then presented to the Standing Committee for Programs and Plans, where it undergoes thorough examination based on established standards. Communication is facilitated by the relevant college. On occasions deemed necessary, the dean may attend the meeting of the Standing Committee for Programs and Plans. By the time the topic reaches the university council, it has undergone comprehensive and detailed study.* (KSU24)

Another example of this is when a college introduces a new executive program. These executive programs must undergo review and receive recommendations from various councils, including the college council, before being presented to the university council. One dean of the college stated:

> *Any executive program must be presented to the university council and approved by the council. However, before it attains this stage, it goes through a series of processes, starting with the department and college council. Subsequently, it proceeds to the Council of the Deanship of Graduate Studies, and finally, it is submitted to the university council.* (KSU9)

The functions of college and university councils overlap in multiple aspects. Another participant talked about the process of obtaining approval for a program plan from the university council. The decision is the result of inputs from various levels of the institution, including the college council:

> *There are specific matters deliberated upon by the college council that are subsequently forwarded to the university council. The two councils share many areas of responsibility, each with its unique focus. For example, in the approval process of a program plan, it proceeds from the department council, through the college council, and then moves through the committees of program plans in the Vice Rectorate of Educational Affairs. Ultimately, it is submitted to the university council.* (KSU19)

## 4.7.2 University council level

The second category formed this theme as exploring the engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision making reflects the university council level. It identifies the manner in which the council members are involved in the decision-making process on the council. The findings of this study demonstrate that council members make different contributions to the development of the council's strategic decisions. The university council is distinguished by

representing all units across the institution. This helps council members to hear all views and to consider all perspectives from the different units of the university during the decision-making process. It enables the council members to actively participate in strategic decision-making like the university's strategic plan. One participant emphasized that this approach allows council members to develop a comprehensive plan that reflects all units of the university:

> *The university council is inclusive of representatives from all parties within the university, and these representatives actively contribute to its proceedings. All council members play a vital role in making crucial decisions. As a participant in the university council, when discussions arise regarding the strategic plan or agreements, you have the opportunity to voice your opinions, share observations, and provide written comments. Your viewpoints are duly considered.* (KSU10)

Another participant discussed how council members play a key role in the decision-making process by reflecting the views of their entities on the university council:

> *It is often the case that if the topic is related to a specific member's domain, he takes the lead in both speaking and presenting the subject. For instance, when we talk about the topic pertaining to the College of Engineering, the Dean of the Engineering College presents the matter. Similarly, if the discussion centers on the College of Education, the Dean of the Education College explains it to the council members.* (KSU22)

Hence, the active involvement of council members in formulating decisions advances the quality of those decisions, leveraging the expertise and experience of members serving as directors of their respective entities. A member of the university council reported:

> *Our participation in the council aims to improve the quality of decisions. This involves soliciting opinions from specialists, as the university council represents the highest level of decision-making within the university.* (KSU15)

The following quotations outline the different roles that council members play in the decision-making process within the university council, particularly in shaping and determining the organization's strategic matters. These encompass reports from the university's vice president of the vice rectorate, dean of the supporting deanship, and dean of the college.

*Typically, my work involves focusing on topics relevant to the vice rectorate. For example, I explain the topic to fellow council members, presenting my point of view. Then, we gather members' observations, taking positive feedback into consideration. Sometimes, when a topic is raised, the council may consider it differently with a majority. So, it is not a condition that the topic enters as it is and comes out as it is. Ultimately, the interest of the university is the most important.* (KSU20)

*Therefore, the role on the council sometimes involves speaking in the capacity of the as the Dean of Faculty and Staff Affairs in accordance with regulations. At other times, addressing matters related to the Deanship of Human Resources is undertaken as the Dean of Human Resources.* (KSU1)

*When a topic arises from the college, usually the dean is responsible for explaining and defending it. Unless the topic violates rules and regulations, discussions on these matters are required.* (KSU14)

In light of the above, council members are engaged in the decision-making process because these decisions relate to their entities and may ultimately affect them. The topics under discussion by the university council often pertain to the specialties of their entities. One participant explained this with the example of academic accreditation:

*The topics discussed by the council, in some way, the members bearing part of the decision-making process. For example, if something is related to accreditation, the*

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*responsibility is shared among the Vice President for Planning and Development, along*

*with the Dean of Quality and Development, and members of the deans of the colleges*

*are involved because this matter belongs to them as well.* (KSU19)

Another participant underlined that all council decisions are taken in line with the strategy of the institution:

*We do not consider any project, decision, or idea unless it is compatible with the*

*strategic plan. Any decision we take is compatible with the strategic plan.* (KSU5)

Thus, one member further explained that the university council follows a collective approach agreeable to all parties to reach an optimal decision in response to the institutional strategy.

*The decision is made by seeking the public interest and considering the university-level*

*vision. Sometimes, for instance, even two colleges may differ on overlapping topics. In*

*such cases, the council engages in overlapping discussions and seeks opinions that*

*reflect the general membership to arrive at a rational decision.* (KSU13)

Considering the above, another participant discussed the process of shaping the council's decision as a conclusion drawn from the inputs of individual members of the council:

*Of course, when one member presents a point of view, and another member puts*

*forward a different perspective, things become clearer and clearer.* (KSU23)

This is fundamental because decisions of the university council are taken by an absolute majority among the council members. A university council member reported:

*The decisions of the councils, including the university council, are taken by an absolute*

*majority.* (KSU4)

Additionally, one participant underscored that the university council follows a clear process for making decisions with effective governance and transparency. As a result, this encourages board members to actively engage in the strategic decision-making processes for their institution.

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*I can say that the work has become more organized and transparent, with improved governance. The decision-making process now follows clear stages, making it more evident and effective.* (KSU11)

For example, council members actively participate in the decision-making process both in council meetings and through their engagement in sub-committees. A university council member stated:

*Each member has a distinct role; the deans of the colleges and supporting deanships each play their part. Every council member contributes to a specific aspect, and an additional advantage is that the council sometimes issues decisions to form some subcommittees.* (KSU26)

In this context, another council member explained that these committees may be established when the university council tackles challenging issues in the process of making important decisions.

*Sometimes the issue becomes difficult, and we cannot reach a solution. Furthermore, instead of presenting the topic a second time to the university council, if we reach a discussion in which the topic is not clear, we form a committee. This committee studies the topic and gives its recommendations in the next meeting. So, the topic is studied by specialized people and becomes clear.* (KSU2)

Alternatively, another participant indicated that council members may be involved in the decision-making process in advance of council meetings:

*The process is a purely democratic one, before making a decision, some members may be contacted, and the topic may be discussed outside the framework of the meeting. If this follows academic ethics and being rational as well as focuses on the merits of the proposal, that's a good thing.* (KSU17)

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This is particularly the case in terms of working in the formulation stage of strategic subjects. This requires multiple reviews of council members to arrive at the most informed decisions. One member of the university council discussed this further.

> *The majority of the strategic topics require attendance at the council meeting, and we are familiar with the topic. We review it extensively, often going through it once, twice, third, fourth, and it is well revised. I think it is a good approach, even though it can be exhausting to review the topic multiple times. However, I believe that strategic decisions, in particular, are always made by the council after thorough and thoughtful study in all respects.* (KSU9)

Thus, a deep understanding of the specific details of the proposal is necessary when presenting strategic matters to the university council concerning a specific entity of the university. This is necessary for two reasons. First, members are required to respond to any inquiries that other council members may have about the proposal. Second, when the decision of the university council is confirmed, it shall apply to all other entities of the university. One participant shared insight into how members fulfill their roles by offering strategic topics to the university council, such as a new college program:

> *Making strategic decisions, such as introducing a new program, is a complex task. Before proposing a topic, ensure you are confident in your ability to handle it effectively. Committing to such decisions comes with accountability during council meetings. If you lack knowledge of the proposal's details, it could lead to time wastage for the entire council. As a presenter, it's crucial to be well-informed and confident, especially when dealing with subjects brought to the university council level. It means that a decision or a strategic topic for a particular college, unit, support deanship, or vice rectorate may affect another party.* (KSU8)

For instance, another dean of the college underlined the benefits of the council members' observations and views on the proposal to establish a new program:

> *Even with thorough study, one might overlook simple mistakes or formulations. In such cases, fellow council members can help by pointing out these issues. Everyone on the council prioritizes the public interest because the program will be associated with the university's name. As a member and dean of the college, I welcome these inquiries as they ultimately serve the program's best interests. I strive to avoid issuing a program that may have shortcomings. The council's role is crucial, serving as the final audit and ensuring excellence. The King Saud University's council achieves this through the unique insights of all its members who actively share their perspectives.* (KSU24)

The role of the council's secretary in organizing meetings is central to facilitating the decision-making process and ensuring well-informed decisions. One participant discussed how the council's secretary professionally handles proposals:

> *The council secretary is the one who introduces topics to the council, organizes the agenda for council meetings, and facilitates the expression of views by all members on the subjects. Ultimately, the council can reach a collective agreement.* (KSU7)

The agenda for university council meetings is carefully prepared in advance by the council secretary. There are no strict restrictions on its content. For instance, if a member wishes to bring up a significant issue before the scheduled time of the council meeting, they can collaborate with the council secretary to resolve this matter. One member of the university council elaborated on this collaborative process.

> *Indeed, inclusion in the council's agenda is specific and organized by the council secretary. However, if you have an important or necessary topic, you can contact the council secretary and request to bring it to the council's attention.* (KSU22)

## 4.8 Theme IV. Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization

This theme, as extracted from participants' perceptions, considers the advanced strategic leadership of the university president. A review of a newspaper article indicates that the university president has held this position since 2012 (DOC7). The study's findings indicate that the role of the university president is closely linked to the institutional strategy. It is also recognized to have a major impact on the approach by which the strategy of the institution is carried out. This theme consists of three key categories: internal to university council, external to university council, and Higher Coordinating Committee. **Table 18** displays the codes and categories of this theme.

**Table 18 Codes and categories that formed Theme IV**

| Codes[5] | Categories | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| The university council is **chaired** by his excellency the president of the university. (KSU25) | Internal to university council | Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization |
| In general, the **majority** depends on the **wisdom** of the university **president**. I must **commend the president** of the university for being **patient** and **listening** to **every discussion** in order to **unify the council's position**. (KSU1) | | |
| In other words, his excellency the president of the university **possesses all the authorities**, whereas each vice president holds distinct responsibilities or delegated authority. (KSU14) | External to university council | |
| His excellency the president **reviews the requirements**, if he **thinks** that it deserves to be **presented to the university council**, otherwise he may **decide** this can be **implemented without referring to the council**. (KSU5) | | |
| The **Higher Coordinating Committee** is **linked to only** the **president** and vice presidents of the university. (KSU13) | Higher Coordinating Committee | |
| The Higher Coordinating Committee normally **discusses the general directions** or **policies of the university**. (KSU20) | | |

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[5] Note: Codes are highlighted in bold within quoted text to clarify their origination, thereby facilitating understanding of how quotations contain multiple codes, which subsequently lead to the formation of categories in the analysis.

The subsequent sections will provide a detailed review of these categories one by one. Quotations are given to identify the origin of the codes.

## 4.8.1 Internal to university council

The first category in this theme reflects the advanced strategic leadership of the president within the university council. This includes identifying the role of the university president as well as the approach to managing the internal work of the council. The higher education system stipulates that the Minister of Education is the Chairman of the councils of all universities. However, the Secretary of the KSU council stated that has changed in recent years:

> *Previously, the university council was led by his excellency the Minister of Education, and the President or Rector of the university served as Vice President; this system was in place until recently.* (KSU3)

In this respect, one member of the university council reported that the primary function of the university president is to chair council meetings:

> *The council meetings are always held in the presence of the university president, who regularly serves as the president of the university council.* (KSU11)

Effective leadership within the university council distinguishes its work through fruitful discussions and collaborative development of strategic matters with council members. This takes place with a transparent approach that has an impact on the overall performance of the institution. This was well expressed by one participant:

> *What distinguishes the council, in my opinion, is that under the leadership of the president of the university and with the assistance of the university vice presidents, there is a kind of transparency in the discussion of strategic issues affecting the university. This largely reflects the academic level and the overall interest of students, faculty, and staff in general.* (KSU26)

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Therefore, one participant emphasized that the president along with vice president are responsible to present the strategic topics to the university council.

> *In general, strategic topics are, of course, raised by his excellency the president of the university and the vice presidents.* (KSU8)

In particular, the president of the council's role in strategic matters is to provide council members with crucial details influencing the institutional strategy. This encompasses processing applications and requests from external entities or addressing topics associated with specific colleges. A university council member delved deeper into this aspect:

> *Sometimes, the university president directs specific members to provide information on particular subjects, ensuring that all council members are informed about major news or essential information, even if it falls outside the agenda.* (KSU13)

The guidance offered by the university council plays a pivotal role in the successful execution of its strategic mission. One participant elaborated on the role of the university president, serving as the chairperson of the board of directors.

> *In any board of directors, the chairman typically introduces the issue, listens to opinions, and facilitates the decision-making process. The chairman is usually the one who presides over the proceedings.* (KSU20)

In light of this, the management of council meetings requires high-quality skills to follow an effective method of decision-making and ultimately arrive at optimal decisions. One participant noted some of these president's skills in leading the council meetings:

> *The president of the council manages the council in an excellent and efficient manner. He listens to everyone and actively engages in any conversation. He allows anyone who wants to contribute to the discussion until the idea is fully expressed, and then he makes the right decision. Every member who wishes to express their opinion is allowed to do so comfortably.* (KSU18)

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On important issues, where the majority of council members have different views on a specific proposal, the council's president has certain options for making adequate decisions. He may form a committee composed of council members and other administrative staff to review the topic and provide feedback at the subsequent meeting. An example of this situation was expressed by one university council member:

> *For example, when certain matters require more in-depth discussion, his excellency the president of the university forms a committee and selects its members from the deans of the colleges and other administrative members.* (KSU15)

Additionally, the president of the council has the authority to organize a vote for decision-making when necessary. The council then reaches a decision based on the majority of its members. One participant reported:

> *If they differ substantially, then generally the president of the council authorizes the vote, who from a legal point of view has the right to draw up a vote.* (KSU7*)*

However, one participant emphasized that the president's involvement in the council's decision-making process is primarily aimed at finding common ground among members:

> *The president of the university council usually seeks to find compromises, involving decisions like making a recommendation and reconsidering other opinions.* (KSU3)

Likewise, another participant expanded on this, asserting that the president's considerable experience in chairing council meetings equips him with the essential skills to guide the council in reaching optimal decisions.

> *His excellency the president of the university has long experience in managing meetings. With my limited experience, I find it challenging to evaluate him; he is, after all, our professor in this aspect. Undoubtedly, the president is attentive to all opinions and actively seeks input from everyone to make well-informed decisions on any*

*proposal ... he consistently strives to listen to diverse perspectives, aiming to reach a*

*consensus through the exchange of different opinions.* (KSU24)

The role of the university president requires strong leadership skills, a high degree of wisdom, and tolerance in dealing with other council members. This includes hearing from each member of the council, looking for the positive effects on each side, and then seeking an optimal decision. One participant discussed this further:

*His excellency the president handles a multitude of issues with remarkable wisdom and*

*patience. His high tolerance is evident, and I am often amazed at how he navigates*

*through challenges. He takes the time to delve into specific details, always searching*

*for the positive aspects and working to convince everyone involved. Consequently, our*

*discussions often extend for an hour or more, allowing each participant to contribute*

*with a broader perspective.* (KSU1)

In light of the above, the leadership style of the university president significantly and positively influences the council's decision-making process in several respects. This involves avoiding giving one's views at the beginning of the council meetings and allowing everyone to participate. It is also viewed as ensuring that all perspectives are presented, then taking the decision based on an overall view that serves the interests of the institution. The president's style of the council's decision-making process was well expressed by one participant:

*Dr. [president name]'s style allows everyone to participate in the decision-making*

*process; he refrains from expressing his opinion at the beginning. I have never seen*

*him give his opinion first, recognizing that the president's stance carries significant*

*influence. He prefers to let others speak and express their views. While he may*

*intervene to address a specific topic or when there are only a few participations, he*

*values the input of every member. When he observes a point being reiterated too*

*frequently and to save time ... he then provides his comments, clarifies the big picture,*

*and collectively, we decide to support the proposal. I noted this approach has been consistently followed at King Saud University from 2014 to the present ... this is because he adopts a broader perspective. At times, he introduces another opinion or proposes a third solution that proves beneficial for everyone.* (KSU4)

## 4.8.2 External to university council

The second category in this theme reflects on the president's contribution to institutional strategy outside of the university council. It defines the authorities of the university president regarding decision-making within the institution and outlines the responsibilities of the university president in acting as the university council for strategic decisions. The findings of this study demonstrate that the university has a high level of authority in making important institutional decisions. One participant discussed the manner in which authorities are distributed across the institution as follows:

> *Of course, all activities within the university faculties are conducted based on the delegation of authority from the university president. The president delegates authority to the deans, who, in turn, delegate authority to the vice deans, and further down the hierarchy to the heads of departments.* (KSU15)

Therefore, submitting proposals to the university council is not required in some cases because the authority resides with the university president. The institutional regulation that governs decision-making grants the university president the exclusive authority to make decisions outside of the university council. The next two quotations indicate that the university president has direct authority to make institutional decisions:

> *Sometimes if the authority is with the president of the university, he implements it and does not need to submit the subject to the university council.* (KSU13)

*The recommendations are made directly to the president, and they do not go to the*

*council, unless they have something that needs to be decided by the university council,*

*and these have own channels.* (KSU6)

In addition, an approach to submitting proposals to the university council is undertaken with the approval of the president. This does not guarantee the acceptance of the proposal, but it can be presented to the university council. One participant elaborated on this process:

*As a dean, you present the proposal to the vice president of the university, who holds*

*the authority. Subsequently, the vice president elevates it to his excellency the president.*

*Upon acknowledgment by the president, the proposal is then presented to the university*

*council. This represents one of the pathways.* (KSU12)

Crucially, the president of the university makes weekly decisions as part of overseeing the decision-making process throughout the institution. One participant elucidated the president's role by formally communicating these decisions to pertinent parties within the university.

*The university president delegates authorities to manage affairs and facilitate decision-*

*making, entrusting specific matters to agencies for implementation. Additionally,*

*certain decisions require the president's attention on a weekly basis.* (KSU3)

Furthermore, the university president and vice presidents supervise the decisions of the institutional units in alignment with the resolutions of the university council. This point was clearly expressed by a member of the university council:

*Here are decisions, and there are decisions, so only the council works to put them*

*together. This matter is left to the president and the vice presidents who are responsible*

*for implementing them.* (KSU1)

For this reason, to ensure that these decisions are in accordance with established laws and regulations, one participant pointed out that the president's office is supported by an independent legal department.

*The legal department is an independent department that reports directly to the president's office.* (KSU25)

The university president also has the legal authority to approve certain types of projects without reference to the university council. In this respect, one participant noted that construction projects only require the approval from the university president:

*These construction projects often only need the approval of the university president.* (KSU2)

One of the functions of the university president is to play a prominent role in representing the institution on policy issues with external bodies. For example, the university president is responsible for signing institutional agreements between any entity within the university and external organizations or agencies. This point was well expressed by a member of the university council:

*If I want to enter into an agreement with the ministry, I have to do so on behalf of the college. However, the agreement can only be signed by the university president and the minister.* (KSU16)

In addition, the university president takes a leading role in the strategic decisions of the institution. This involvement can be identified in two parts: either by making independent decisions or by referring proposals to the university council. This approach is considered effective, especially when prioritizing issues discussed in university council meetings. This point was notably stated by one participant:

*Every report that concludes from the strategic plan, for example, assessing the extent to which goals have been achieved, is submitted to his excellency the president of the university. If the president directs every topic to the university council, we will end up with 100 topics in every meeting. Therefore, as the leader of the institution, his excellency the president prioritizes what he views as important.* (KSU5)

Therefore, the university president, with the assistance of the vice presidents, is primarily involved in monitoring the institutional strategy. One member of the university council reported:

> *Many aspects related to the strategic plan are directly overseen by the president and the vice president of the university.* (KSU20)

In light of the above, the university is ultimately responsible for making decisions about issues related to the execution of the institution's strategy. One participant noted that the university president is accountable for resolving issues during the implementation phase:

> *So, if the vice president is authorized to resolve the issue, he will do so. If it is not within his prerogative, then the matter belongs to his excellency the president of the university until it is implemented.* (KSU23)

The principal role of the university president in relation to strategic matters takes various forms, as many decisions of the institutional sub-councils require the approval of the university president to be effective. For instance, the minutes of the college council must be approved by the university president. One dean of the college reported:

> *After the college council meeting is held, we must submit the minutes to his excellency the president of the university.* (KSU14)

Likewise, the minutes of sub-boards within the institution must be accepted by the university president to be considered official decisions. One dean of a supporting deanship stated:

> *We have a board of directors for the student fund, and the decisions taken are submitted to the authorized person, his excellency the president, for approval.* (KSU10)

## 4.8.3 Higher Coordinating Committee

The third category considers the Higher Coordinating Committee as a reflection of the university's president advanced strategic leadership. The findings of this study indicates that the committee is critical to managing the institution's strategic matters. It is also seen as playing

a key role in the work of the university council in the approach to presenting strategic proposals. The Higher Coordinating Committee is composed exclusively of the university president and vice presidents. It serves as an advisory council to discuss strategic decisions of the university council. This was clearly expressed by one participant.

> *In regard to the council's strategic decisions, we have an equivalent body at the university known as the Higher Coordinating Committee for his excellency the university president and the university vice presidents. These topics are presented to them as an advisory council for his excellency the university president.* (KSU2)

This committee is responsible for reviewing strategic subjects before submitting them to the university council. It also addresses issues that do not necessarily need to be brought forward to the university council. The main advantage of this committee is that it functions as a sub-council of the university council with a limited number of members on a daily basis. This greatly facilitates the management of the university council's work, considering its high number of members and regular monthly meetings. One member of the university council offered an in-depth elucidation:

> *The Higher Coordinating Committee may study strategic matters before submitting them to the council. However, they can be accepted after presentation to the members of the university council. The Higher Coordinating Committee functions like a mini-council, and the council relies on it due to its large number of members and the numerous issues. The council meets only once or twice a month, so certain topics may not require weekly discussions. In contrast, the committee convenes regularly at scheduled intervals.* (KSU5)

Due to the large number of university council members, effectively discussing strategic topics within the university council without prior preparation is challenging. One participant

emphasized that it is best to review these topics through the Higher Coordinating Committee before discussing them with members of the university council:

*The committee discusses strategic subjects that would be difficult to address at the level of a university council, which includes 40 or 50 faculty members, ending without reaching a decision about them.* (KSU3)

The Higher Coordinating Committee is not officially part of the system. Nevertheless, it was established by the president to promote collaboration between divisions of the organization. One participant elaborated on the purpose of this committee:

*The Higher Coordinating Committee was created by the president of the university and is not part of the official system. However, the president established this mechanism to facilitate coordination within the university administration. For instance, certain urgent issues arise at the university that require coordination with multiple parties* (KSU21)

One participant provided a detailed explanation of the role of the Higher Coordinating Committee in making strategic institutional decisions. This involves serving as an advisory and assistance body to the university president in two primary aspects. Firstly, it aids in organizing in advance the topics that require decisions by the university council. Secondly, it addresses specific decisions that can be made by the university president after discussing these issues within the committee:

*This practice supports the university administration, representing a recognized administrative pattern found in various organizations. Leaders require a mechanism to connect and stay informed about essential details needed for presentations to the university council or dissemination to colleges. Sometimes, when deans raise specific topics, they submit them to the university president to gather opinions from leaders and collect valuable perspectives. These insights are then examined by the Higher*

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*Coordinating Committee. Frequently, they involve preparatory subjects that are thoroughly studied before reaching a conclusion, ultimately leading to a decision either by the university council or the authority of the president.* (KSU13)

In addition, the committee reviews strategic proposals that cannot be referred to the university council due to containing elements requiring decisions and approval by the university president. This was further explained one of the vice presidents and the council's secretary by giving an example of graduate programs.

*It serves as an advisory committee to his excellency the president. Sometimes, even as the university's Vice President for [rectorate name], I do not have the authority to raise a proposal to the university council without consulting with his excellency the president and other vice presidents, despite it falling within my specialty. A relevant example is the oversight of graduate studies and programs for which I am responsible. When uncertainties arise regarding admission requirements or specific arrangements related to study times ... therefore, if certain matters are unclear in the regulations, the Higher Coordinating Committee takes the responsibility to address them.* (KSU3)

One of the primary tasks of this committee is to discuss strategic proposals with various stakeholders, including internal institutional entities such as colleges, and external organizations such as governmental agencies. Consequently, the proposal can be submitted to the university council once the committee and associated parties reach an initial agreement on important aspects. This situation was well expressed by one participant.

*With regard to the university committee, decisions on certain matters are delegated to this committee, which functions in an advisory capacity. There is no predefined agenda, and I will illustrate with an example. When topics are brought to the committee, some are deliberated by the Higher Coordination Committee. Once an agreement on the strategic aspects is reached, these matters are then presented to the university council.*

*Thus, proposals, whether introduced by the originating party or external proposals reviewed by the university committee, are then submitted to the university council for a final decision.* (KSU2)

Given the aforementioned, another member of the university council explained in detail the approach that the committee employs with internal parties before submitting significant proposals. This involves inviting the head of the division, such as the dean of a relevant college or deanship:

*There are always important things that are discussed in the committee. The competent parties shall submit their proposals to the Higher Coordinating Committee. In the end, the official decision is made by the university council. The committee discusses various urgent topics and important matters ... the Higher Coordinating Committee reviews issues related to the colleges and deanships, with the deans attending to provide clarification and engage in discussions. For instance, if the agenda includes a special topic related to admissions, the Dean of Admissions and Registration participates in the committee. Similarly, if the topic pertains to graduate studies, the Dean of Graduate Studies attends the committee.* (KSU20)

In particular, a member of the Higher Coordinating Committee emphasized that the topics discussed in the committee are crucial for the overall performance of the university:

*Sometimes urgent, sometimes exceptional, and sometimes strategic matters.* (KSU3)

## 4.9 Theme V. Developing/enforcing regulations and compliance

This theme explores the development and enforcement of regulations and compliance that council members lay down in fulfilling their responsibilities in relation to the university's strategic plan. It identifies certain regulations approved by the university council in order to increase the effectiveness of the council's operations and activities. It also demonstrates that council members have greater accountability for compliance performance in accordance with

these new regulations. There are two key categories that formed this theme, namely, regulations and compliance. **Table 19** illustrates the selected codes and categories that emerged from developing/enforcing regulations and compliance theme.

**Table 19 Codes and categories that formed Theme V**

| Codes[6] | Categories | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| *The **new regulation** stipulates that the King Abdullah Institute is responsible for all **financial matters** and **contracts** with parties outside the university.* (KSU7) | Regulations | Developing/ enforcing regulations and compliance |
| *Also, many **other plans** are built from the strategic plan. For example, the **spending efficiency plan** and the **investment plan**.* (KSU21) | | |
| *We have the Investment Committee, a **formal committee** formed under the **updated financial regulations** of the university.* (KSU20) | | |
| *Whoever tried to **avoid implementing** the new regulations. In the end, those **regulations were enforced anyway**.* (KSU1) | Compliance | |
| *All agreements **must go** through the **legal department**, so these **can be raised** from the **college to the university councils**.* (KSU15) | | |
| *There is an **annual report** that **must be submitted by all entities** within the university.* (KSU11) | | |

Both of these categories will be extensively reviewed through the thematic analysis process in the subsequent sections. Also, quotations are given as proof of the origin of the codes.

## 4.9.1 Regulations

This category reflects the regulations developed by the university council to improve performance standards in the pursuit of institutional strategy objectives. The new regulations of the university mainly focus on financial regulations, including spending efficiency and investments. For example, one division of the organization such as the King Abdullah Institute for Research and Consulting Studies (KAI), is now responsible for all fiscal arrangements

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[6] Note: Codes are highlighted in bold within quoted text to clarify their origination, thereby facilitating understanding of how quotations contain multiple codes, which subsequently lead to the formation of categories in the analysis.

between any entity within the university and other external parties. The following quotation was extracted from an official report of the institution:

> *The King Abdullah Institute for Research and Consulting Studies at King Saud University serves as the contractual interface and business center, providing paid consulting and training services to all community institutions.* (DOC8)

This new form of financial regulation enables the institution to have full control over its monetary resources. Previously, as a government institution, the university was not allowed to handle financial transactions and manage its own resources. This was clearly stated by one participant:

> *This new financial regulation governs university affairs, and the article was amended because universities were not authorized to receive money. No government sectors, including universities, had such authorization; only the Ministry of Finance held that authority. This regulation now allows the university to have control over its financial resources.* (KSU12)

One member of the university council emphasized that these financial regulations aim to ensure one party can control all economic aspects within the institution. This facilitates the institution in achieving financial independence:

> *Now, the goal is to establish a party that functions as the financial bank for the university, promoting financial independence. Consequently, the King Abdullah Institute requests that any external work proposal be reviewed by the institution before acceptance.* (KSU1)

The KAI is recognized as an institutional investment agency with exclusive governance regulations. These regulations empower the KAI to establish partnership relationships between institutional entities and external organizations. The authority spans the stages of negotiation, approval, and management of agreements on behalf of the university council. This underscores

the significant role of the KAI, indicating that strategic partnerships between the university and external entities are solely facilitated through the KAI. This insight was explained well by a member of the university council:

> *We have the King Abdullah Institute, which is one of the university's investment arms ... all matters related to resources, partnerships, or payments involving external parties are carried out through the King Abdullah Institute. Because it is the only authorized body that has the governance process or the ability to negotiate and enter into contracts with external parties under the service contract or resource development.* (KSU20)

In this respect, the KAI undertakes the review and approval process of all proposals with financial implications involving external organizations. One participant elaborated on how this decision was developed by the university council within the framework of governing the financial aspects of the institution:

> *We have the King Abdullah Institute, which is pioneering financial governance at the university. The university council has issued a decision that all financial matters and agreements are to be handled by the King Abdullah Institute. In our colleges, our focus is only on providing services, while financial and other matters outside the university are handled by the King Abdullah Institute.* (KSU14)

In addition, another member of the university council noted that these recent regulations of the university council allow the KAI to supervise and track the approach to implementing these agreements:

> *The King Abdullah Institute is designated as the entity responsible for the supervision and follow-up process, as outlined in the updated financial regulations of the university system. All activities within this framework, in accordance with the financial regulation text, are executed through the King Abdullah Institute.* (KSU4)

This ensures better organization of work and protection of the university's rights. For instance, one participant underlined that the KAI oversees all financial agreements, including consultations conducted by colleges or faculty members:

> *Financial matters fall exclusively within the purview of the King Abdullah Institute, which oversees consultations provided by the university, colleges, and faculty members. The King Abdullah Institute conducts financial reviews, contributing to the organization of work and the preservation of the university's rights.* (KSU25)

The institutional dean underscored the benefits of adopting these new regulations. This includes enabling all relevant parties to engage in agreements related to other institutional entities, making efficient use of university resources, and improving university performance while avoiding past incorrect decisions:

> *I must look at all proposals to determine if it is feasible to connect them with other entities and resources or if they might deplete the university's resources. It is crucial to avoid repeating previous unsuccessful agreements, correct errors from the past, and develop performance.* (KSU13)

The university council also governs new regulations that are associated with spending efficiency. These regulations have major implications for the council's approach to reviewing strategic proposals and making decisions on them. One participant discussed how the university council has adopted a project management model to deliver the organization's strategy. This takes place by shifting from the traditional model of a public organization to a business management approach:

> *Our policies and procedures were previously built on the premise that the university operates under a public administration model, managing a budget that it consumes on its terms and returns the rest. Now, our model has shifted to a business administration*

*or management model. So, we must work on efficiency to achieve the goals of the organization and generate revenue.* (KSU4)

This marks the introduction of a new operational mechanism, necessitating council members to establish specific conditions for each decision. Additionally, it implies the withdrawal and rejection of proposals that fail to meet these standards. A member of the university council explicitly emphasized this point:

*In the council, we do not settle for any decision without a review of spending efficiency, which means we have to prevent and impose things.* (KSU1)

The purpose of the spending efficiency regulations is to help the institution utilize its resources economically. One participant underlined that adopting this spending efficiency approach has contributed significantly to saving the university's financial resources:

*We routinely incorporate spending efficiency into our decision-making process, which becomes evident when we review figures from the previous year. We are surprised to see that we have saved such a significant amount.* (KSU5)

Therefore, the spending efficiency approach stands as a central element in scrutinizing the details of the institution's strategic projects and mitigating its liabilities. Another council member emphasized that embracing this approach facilitates a precise examination of the costs associated with strategic proposals:

*When constructing a new building, the initial cost of a hundred million is not the primary concern. The real challenge arises from the need to allocate 30 million annually for its operation. This raises the question: How will this cost be managed? Currently, no investments are approved without meticulous consideration of their capacity and importance.* (KSU6)

The regulations of spending efficiency entail that all decisions must have implications for improving institutional performance. When introducing strategic topics, such as projects and

construction, to the council, additional priorities come into play. In such cases, a council member should provide a strong rationale to align the proposal with the university's strategic plan. This involves not only emphasizing its necessity but also highlighting the advantages it brings. One of the university's vice presidents further elaborated on this.

> *Among these objectives, for example, it assesses any decision made by the council on whether it serves to improve the university level or not. When it comes to costs, there are several criteria that must be verified at the university level … now, when I ask for a project, it must have not just an economic return in the traditional sense, but a utilitarian return such as financial, social, or improving people's lives. Let's say I want to build a college; the question is why do I need this? I need to find strong justifications for why this project is needed.* (KSU2)

The university council also regulates the investment matters of the university. In this respect, one member of the council indicated that the topic of investment in organizations within the public sector is still in its infancy. This is due to the fact that there are no previous regulations governing the mechanism of investment practices in public institutions:

> *As I said, the idea of investing in universities is still an emerging idea that takes years to develop to the point where it becomes practical … but my point is that we do not have anything in the system that lays down the rules for doing so.* (KSU5)

For this reason, another participant noted that, due to the education system lacking defined investment rules for universities, the university council has formalized new regulations to organize the institution's investments with external partnerships:

> *Some structures within the university, such as investments or internal audits, do not have a designated agency. So, we have developed regulations to establish internal review and investment mechanisms.* (KSU4)

In particular, one participant reported that the university council had established the Investment Committee to supervise this purpose. Consequently, the committee is charged with formulating all investment regulations that impact the institution:

> *When it comes to investments, the university has a specialized committee dedicated to governing all investment regulations; it functions as a distinct entity.* (KSU20)

The Chairman of the Investment Committee elaborated on the composition of the committee and its functioning with the aim of improving the institution's performance. Another point highlighted is the committee's importance in efficiently utilizing the university resources, considering it as one of the institutional strategic objectives.

> *So, the Investment Committee comprises both internal and external members of the university. It is directed by a member of the university council, and I serve as the chairman of the committee ... in this capacity, I review topics such as intellectual property, material utilization, and how the university can make effective use of them.* (KSU13)

## 4.9.2 Compliance

The second category that emerged in this theme is compliance, shedding light on how the university council implements the new performance guidelines. This category also involves determining the responsibilities of council members in formulating new rules to guarantee adherence to the required standards. Specifically, it focuses on performance compliance standards within the institution, spanning areas like human resources, legal matters, and reporting. This entails a detailed exploration of the specific procedures that must be followed in this regard.

For instance, the institution undertook a strategic initiative to overhaul the payroll system. The Dean of Human Resources conveyed that the Ministry of Finance introduced the new payroll system. The participant elaborated on the initial challenges faced in implementing the system

within the institution. Furthermore, the functioning of the new payroll system and the strategic implications for the institution were discussed. Subsequently, the participant highlighted the benefits of the system, emphasizing its role in improving accuracy and eliminating errors in the workflow:

> *When the Ministry of Finance proposed a system that applies salaries to the new exchange system, everyone neglected it, and no one wanted to change ... in this process, salaries are directed to the Ministry of Finance platform, which then transfers them to the Central Bank. Subsequently, the Central Bank forwards the salaries to the payroll department. This means that the role of the banks is over, so the university can work with any party ... we have observed the benefits of utilizing the new system, we can now track all transactions and identify any errors in allocations or benefits.* (KSU1)

The university council establishes precise procedures for the appointment of new staff and faculty members. Proposals for appointments undergo thorough scrutiny by various councils and committees before receiving final approval from the university council. This thorough review involves key processes that are clearly outlined by one participant:

> *If you want to appoint a faculty member, the process involves going through academic councils. Next, it goes to committees associated with the Deanship of Human Resources. And then it is submitted to the university council for approval.* (KSU7)

Similarly, another participant noted that hiring and dismissing an employee follows several procedures. In that case, the decision can be taken by the dean of the college or deanship. However, the implementation of this decision must be verified by the Dean of Human Resources:

> *It is within my authority to appoint or dismiss employees in accordance with the regulations. But I am required to submit the decision to the Deanship of Human*

*Resources. The Dean of Human Resources is the one who signs the appointments on*

*behalf of the university president and holds responsibility for the process.* (KSU15)

These procedures are designed to align seamlessly with the operations of the institution. In this

context, workplace compliance aims to adhere to appropriate and transparent procedures within

the institution through the engagement of councils. This ensures that the university council can

make well-informed decisions, avoiding conflicts and contradictory judgments. A participant

further illustrated this through a detailed example:

*To avoid conflicts in decisions and ensure uniformity in procedures, the university*

*emphasizes the importance of consistency. For example, the aim is to avoid situations*

*where one college receives only 7,000, while another receives 70,000. Similarly,*

*discrepancies in the compensation of colleagues teaching at different colleges, such as*

*one receiving 2,000 and another 20,000. The university is always viewed as a*

*substantial entity, so its councils are always councils of expertise.* (KSU12)

Therefore, all entities within the institution, such as colleges, are required to comply with the

procedures set by the authorized body. One dean of a college stated:

*The college should follow up with the competent authority, such as the Deanship of*

*Human Resources, on the proposals concerned.* (KSU23)

The university council also lays down the procedures for finalizing agreements between

institutional entities and external organizations. One participant reported that presenting any

agreement concerning a particular entity to the university council is mandatory.

*Now, all agreements must be submitted to the university council for review by its*

*members.* (KSU13)

The reason for submitting these agreements to the university council is to select the most

suitable option by coordinating with other relevant entities involved in the agreement, thus

avoiding unnecessary duplication. In this respect, another participant compared the functioning

of the university council before and after following these procedures and the resulting advantages.

> *In the old system, there was no requirement to present these agreements to the council. However, the new university system requires the presentation of all agreements and memoranda. These agreements have multiple levels, and each one must undergo council scrutiny. During council discussions, it became evident that certain aspects could be utilized by more than one party, while others might be redundant.* (KSU4)

For this purpose, the university council assigns the legal department an important role in the review, management, and approval of these agreements. In the case of strategic agreements, one participant outlined how institutional entities enter into agreements with international businesses. These agreements are initially submitted to the legal department before being referred to the university council:

> *When entering into agreements with international companies, our standard procedure involves submitting them to the legal department for initial review. Once approved, the agreements are then presented to the university council … the idea is that the council does not make decisions that contradict each other.* (KSU6)

The university council operates in accordance with formal procedures and regulations, where any proposal must undergo a comprehensive review by the legal department before presentation to the council. Thus, obtaining approval from the legal department is an essential prerequisite for proposals being considered by the university council. The following quotations from participant accounts offer additional insights into this procedural aspect:

> *The legal department reviews the proposal from a legal perspective and so on, and then it goes to the university council.* (KSU24)

*The topic is uploaded with the approval of a list that has already been studied by the legal department prior to its submission to the council.* (KSU10)

In view of the above, preliminary procedures precede the submission of proposals to the university council. This includes notes from the legal department detailing the specific aspects of the proposals. These notes aid the university council in making informed decisions, ensuring the university's responsibility and rights are preserved. Furthermore, agreements with external parties must be scrutinized to ensure that the university does not adversely affect their implementation. This was captured by one participant account:

*At the university, we have a legal department that meticulously considers all these details. Every proposal is accompanied by notes from the legal department, securing the preservation of both the university's and colleges' rights ... the legal department ensures that all external matters presented to the university relieve it of any responsibility.* (KSU16)

The draft agreements are drawn up by the legal department, encompassing specific details such as length and terms that clarify arrangements for conclusion, termination, and implementation. A member of the university council explicitly expressed this by stating:

*The meticulous examination of agreements by the legal department precedes their presentation to the university council, ensuring the inclusion of crucial details. Approval by the legal department guarantees clarity of materials and addresses clauses related to force majeure. Furthermore, the implementation plan outlines procedures for abandonment or termination, for example, by providing one- or three-month notices to the other party. This comprehensive approach underscores that the legal department provides all necessary details. Their extensive experience enables them to adeptly draft agreements, covering initiation, execution, and conclusion.* (KSU19)

More importantly, certain types of agreements may reach an advanced stage of strategic cooperation or long-term contracts between institutional entities and external organizations. One participant noted that it is more crucial to have legal legislation to review those agreements.

> *Some agreements may eventually evolve into a cooperative or contractual system that entails certain legal responsibilities. Therefore, approval by the legal department is a key prerequisite before the matter is referred to the university council.* (KSU21)

Specifically, another participant emphasized that adhering to these procedures is intended to safeguard the university from any financial obligations to external bodies:

> *Agreements that take place between the involved parties are presented to the legal department and reviewed in a rational way to preserve the rights of the university. If there are no financial obligations, they are then submitted to the university council.* (KSU17)

In addition, the university council requires that all entities comply with mandatory reports. The findings of this study demonstrate that various reports must be submitted to the university council, with the most important one being the annual report prepared by every college and deanship of the university. This requirement was indicated by one member of the university council:

> *Annual reports from all colleges and deanships are also submitted to the Vice Rectorate for Planning and Development. Coordination on this matter involves the vice rectorate and other relevant parties, and the vice president subsequently presents a comprehensive report to the council.* (KSU26)

The primary aim of these annual reports is to evaluate the performance of each entity at the institutional level, aligning with the strategic plan. This involves delivering a comprehensive account of how each entity operates throughout the year. The benefits of these annual reports

extend to closely monitoring the performance of each entity. One participant explicitly stated the purpose that underlies these annual reports

*Additionally, at the end of each year, every college is obligated to conduct a follow-up, and a comprehensive report detailing all its activities throughout the year must be submitted.* (KSU16)

Taking this into account, the university's Vice Rectorate for Development and Planning assumes a significant role in the assessment of annual reports from all colleges and deanships. This ensures a consistent alignment with the institutional strategic plan. Additionally, it is committed to furnishing the university council with regular and comprehensive reports. The next quotations capture the pivotal role of the Vice Rectorate for Development and Planning in relation to the annual reports.

*This vice rectorate follows up the strategic plan of the university, evaluates the performance, and provides the university council with periodic reports.* (KSU21)

*The annual reports are submitted to the Vice Rectorate for Development and Planning. I must emphasize that the vice rectorate carefully reviews these reports to ensure the full realization of the strategic plan's objectives.* (KSU17)

One of the university's vice presidents underscored that the Vice Rectorate for Development and Planning consistently compiles a comprehensive report derived from the annual reports of colleges and deanships. This report outlines the objectives achieved in the strategic plan and is thoroughly reviewed and discussed by the members of the university council:

*There is a comprehensive annual report detailing all achievements of the university, which is presented and reviewed by the university council.* (KSU20)

In this regard, one dean of a college explained the process by which the college produces its annual report. It initiates with the departments of the college, followed by an internal review

and discussion. subsequently, it undergoes evaluation at the university level. The annual report serves as a tool to assess whether the college's performance aligns with the standards already established in the institution's strategic plan:

> *Of course, each college develops an annual report at its own level. Departments submit their reports to the college, where they are discussed in the college council, then the college council also raises the report at the university level. In fact, it evaluates the performance, whether it goes as planned or not.* (KSU25)

Given the above, an example of the annual report was collected by the researcher from one of the university's colleges (DOC9). It provides full details on the preformation of the college throughout the year. The annual report demonstrates the college's structure, achievements, departments, programs, faculty members, published scientific research, scientific conferences, student statistics, and a summary of student clubs.

In this context, one dean of a deanship commented on the content of the annual reports. This involves presenting an overview of the entity's performance, including both completed and unsuccessful projects. Additionally, it refers to all legal matters concerning the university. This allows council members to effectively discuss and address crucial aspects of each division of the university:

> *The annual report delineates the progress of the work. We mention outcomes generally, and certainly, it includes things like completed or installed projects. It also addresses legal matters, including cases that may be won by the institute or ruled against the university. In this way, the causes and consequences are examined.* (KSU13)

In addition to the annual report, the university council requires several other reports customized to specific types of work. One example is the renewal of agreements for any entity within the organization. This requires a detailed report from the dean of the involved college or deanship,

explaining the execution of such agreements. The secretary of the university council underlined that this task is mandatory:

> *The council must review such reports. For instance, if you are the dean of the college and wish to renew an agreement, you are required to submit a renewal report.* (KSU3)

Similarly, a college dean emphasized the compulsory requirement to submit a report to the university council when seeking the renewal of a specific agreement. This ensures that agreements function as intended, allowing only fruitful agreements to be approved by the university council:

> *It is necessary to report to the council on the renewal of agreements, including a second report on the work and achievements. The renewal of any contract is contingent on its success within a specified period.* (KSU8)

There are different external stakeholders involved in monitoring the university's performance concerning the achievement of its strategic plan. These stakeholders include official agencies and ministries. Therefore, in addition to being accountable to the university council, the university's vice rectorates are obligated to submit reports to these diverse external entities. An example of such entities was provided by one vice president of the university:

> *We submit reports to the university council and sometimes to external entities such as the Ministry of Education, the Royal Court, the Royal Commission of Riyadh, and the Ministry of Planning.* (KSU2)

## 4.10 Chapter summary

This chapter delves into an analysis of the study's findings. It begins by clarifying the scope of the analysis, which includes interview transcripts and collected documents simultaneously. The chapter continues by stating that thematic analysis was employed in this study and then presents the key themes that emerged from the findings. The next sections comprehensively analyze each theme, elucidating the emerging process through categories and codes. This contains the

presentation of evidence through quotations from participants and collected documents. The first theme which is role-based contribution and accountability for institutional strategy that emerged from the categories of roles–vice presidents of vice rectorates, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges. The second theme considers technology as a driver to foster effective contribution amongst board directors, which includes categories such as leading to effective participation, organizing council meetings, and archiving council documents. Then, the chapter provides an analysis of the third theme of engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making, which emerged from categories such as college council/equivalent and university council levels. An in-depth analysis was performed on how advanced presidential leadership facilitates the realization of institutional strategy, taking into account both internal and external categories relevant to the university council and the Higher Coordinating Committee. Lastly, the chapter proceeds by analyzing the fifth theme which concentrates on the efforts of board directors in developing regulations and enforcing performance compliance. This theme was identified through categories of regulations and compliance.

This chapter provides a comprehensive thematic analysis that emerged from the findings of this study. **Chapter 5** will further discuss the study's findings in relation to relevant and current literature.

# Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

## 5.1 Introduction

In continuation of the preceding chapter, this chapter discusses the research findings in the context of addressing the research questions of this study. These questions are fundamentally developed to explore the contribution of KSU council members to their institutional strategy. To provide a clear understanding, the research questions are listed below:

***How Do Council Members of King Saud University Contribute to their Institutional Strategy?***

- How do council members of King Saud University exercise their responsibilities in relation to institutional strategy?

- How do council members of King Saud University engage in strategic decision-making of their institution?

- How do council members of King Saud University utilize their organization's resources to execute strategies?

- How do council members of King Saud University ensure that strategies are implemented efficiently in their institution?

This chapter aims to present a comprehensive discussion of the significant themes that emerged from the research findings in relation to the relevant existing literature. Hence, the discussion is enriched by a wide range of disciplines and theories. Each theme is also discussed based specifically on the insights derived from the research findings of this study. Thus, these themes will shape the central aspect of this chapter:

**Theme I.** Role-based contribution /accountability for the institutional strategy

**Theme II.** Technology as a driver to foster effective contribution

**Theme III.** Engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making

**Theme IV.** Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization

**Theme V.** Developing/enforcing regulations and compliance

Moreover, the chapter concludes by proposing a model that outlines the contribution of the board of directors to their institutional strategy in the context of the higher education sector. The proposed model has been developed based on analyzing and discussing the findings of this research.

## 5.2 Theme I. Role-based contribution /accountability for the institutional strategy

Based on the findings of this research, it has become evident that the extent to which the board directors impact the institutional strategy is contingent upon the particular roles they hold within the institution. The majority of the board directors have distinct responsibilities that are related to their formal position within the institution, such as being a president, vice president, dean of supporting deanships, or dean of colleges. As a result, the board members have specific commitments and accountability towards the institutional strategy.

Even though more than three decades have passed since Zahra & Pearce (1989) noted that "*there is controversy over the nature of directors' strategic role*" (p. 328), it is still an ongoing debate about the role of the board of directors in corporate governance literature. This has prompted scholars to offer diverse viewpoints on the involvement of board members in the strategic process of their organizations (Bezemer et al., 2023).

Prior studies have advocated for the role of board directors in overseeing the organization's strategy, emphasizing their fiduciary obligations. This goes back to agency theorists who emphasize that the board of directors must monitor the performance of the organization in order to ensure it aligns with the interests of the shareholders (Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Hendry & Kiel, 2004; Huse, 2007). Furthermore, Hillman & Dalziel (2003) insisted that the board of directors' involvement in carrying out the organizational strategy can

be determined by evaluating and controlling the organization and management performance. In light of this, the board of directors has the authority to assess the management's performance in achieving the organizational strategy through rewards and sanctions (Hendry & Kiel, 2004; Stiles & Taylor, 2001).

The assumption in other research is that board members are less accountable and play a passive role in relation to their institutional strategy (Golden & Zajac 2001; Herman, 1981). From this perspective, the board of directors is viewed as a passive tool that is used to advance management's interests. The argument is that the CEOs have the ability to prevent the board of directors from influencing the strategy choices. However, this depends particularly on whether the board decides to evaluate and/or modify the organization's strategy (Golden & Zajac, 2001; Jensen, 2019). In contrast, other studies explain that the low level of involvement of the board directors in the organizational strategy is due to many reasons. For instance, the complexity and critical nature of information may hinder board members from effectively taking an active role in the strategic processes of their organization (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001; Lorsch & MacIver, 1989). In other studies, it has been proven that the board's composition as well as the knowledge and expertise of individual board members are factors should be considered when seeking its effectiveness (e.g., McDonald et al., 2008; Nahum & Carmeli, 2020; Pfeffer, 1972).

The findings of this study manifest that board members play a crucial role in shaping and delivering their institutional strategy. This is because the KSU's council members work on behalf of the shareholders, which is the higher education ministry in this case. Therefore, the board members are held accountable for monitoring and executing their organizational strategy in front of the shareholders. Additionally, each board member serves as the head of a division within the organization, such as vice rectorates, colleges, or deanships. Board members have to discuss organizational strategic topics on the board because board decisions can affect their

entities. This is the case in addition to being accountable for controlling and implementing the strategic plan of the organization within their entities. The study's findings are consistent with previous research that suggests board members must participate in strategy to fulfil their fiduciary obligations.

The involvement of the board of directors in strategy has been observed in various aspects of corporate governance literature. Some previous studies have argued that the directors of boards engage in strategy because they have a high degree of expertise in the industry of their institution (Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990; Tricker, 2015). This trend emphasizes the importance of board directors possessing specialized functional skills, such as understanding financial and market forces, to provide insights on their institutional strategy. Likewise, other studies have shown that the contribution of board directors to a strategy is largely influenced by their knowledge (Bordean et al., 2012; David, 2011; Olavarrieta & Ellinger, 1997), despite the fact that other studies indicate that the director's experience is the primary factor in their participation in a strategic process (Haleblian & Finkelstein, 1999; Kroll et al., 2008).

It has been established by previous researchers that board directors possess a crucial network and relationships that enable their institution to establish beneficial strategic alliances and collaborations with external entities (Campling & Michelson, 1998; Pugliese et al., 2014). The approach is viewed by the resource dependency theorists who assert that board members have valuable resources that can be utilized by their institution (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In this respect, some studies indicate that the reputation and prestige of board members impact their participation in strategic agendas (Zald, 1969).

Other scholars have argued that the involvement of directors in strategy is driven by a role factor, as they are required to perform definite functions when they become members of the board (Huse, 2005; Johnson et al., 1996). This tendency has drawn attention to the fact that the board of directors' duties are handled individually by their members (Cadbury, 1992; Petrovic,

2008). In light of the above, directors as board members have different responsibilities and are assigned specific tasks as part of delivering the institutional strategy (FRC, 2018). As discussed in the literature review chapter, roles of the board of directors include chairpersons, CEOs, executive directors, and NEDs. Thus, the specific position of each board member can determine their levels of involvement in the institutional strategic process, reflecting the expectations of the role they occupy (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 2015; Solomon et al., 1985).

This study reveals that roles of board members affect how each board member participates in the strategic process of their institution. It is evident from the findings that each board member is accountable for their institutional strategy differently. This depends on their position as a president, vice president, dean of supporting deanship, or dean of college. At the highest level of the board, the president of the university is in charge of the overall formation and delivery of the insinuation's strategy. His role in the strategic process is crucial and he serves as both chairman and CEO. Executive roles are held by most of the other board members due to their specific position within the organization. As the vice presidents are primarily responsible in monitoring the work of other entities within the institution, such as colleges or deanships, and ensuring that the institutional strategic objective is met. While the deans of supporting deanships and colleges are accountable for delivering the institutional strategy within their entities. Besides, a few of the board members are NEDs as representatives from other government agencies, such as the education ministry. Their role with respect to the institutional strategy is to inform the board of relevant information from government officials and agencies. Based on the above, the contribution of board members to strategy is mainly based on their roles in the institution.

In previous studies, it has been found that inside directors are effective in engaging in strategic organizational activities (Baysinger et al., 1991; Zahra & Pearce, 1990). The board directors are expected to have a deep knowledge of the organization, its strategy, and the successful

implementation of the strategy (Hillman et al., 2000). Therefore, having access to essential information about the organizational operations enables the inside members of the board to be closely involved in the strategic process (Adams & Ferreira, 2007; Baysinger & Hoskisson, 1990). Thus, it has been demonstrated that the inside directors play a significant role in the board's functioning by improving the quality of board decision-making (Fama & Jensen, 1983), increasing the monitoring of board work (Raheja, 2005), and enhancing the performance of both the board and the organization (Masulis & Mobbs, 2011).

In contrast, other researchers have found that independent directors, external to the board, are crucial in controlling the performance of the organization in relation to strategic objectives the organizational strategy (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003; Rindova, 1999). This perspective emphasizes that independent directors are entrusted with overseeing strategic decisions and ensuring that the organizational strategy is in line with the interests of the shareholders. (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001). Thus, the outside directors can provide independent and unbiased evaluations of the organizational strategy (Zahra & Pearce, 1989). Furthermore, it has been observed that the outside directors can provide the organization with resources that can be advantageous in determining and delivering the organizational strategy (Hillman et al., 2009; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

The findings of this research suggest that inside directors tend to contribute actively to the execution of the institutional strategy. The inside members of the council have been found to be heavily engaged in the strategic process, given their ability to access day-to-day data on organizational performance. For instance, the vice presidents have obligations in terms of monitoring the performance of affiliated entities, such as supporting deanships and colleges. This includes evaluating the work towards achieving the organizational objectives. Additionally, other members of the council, such as deans of supporting deanships, are tasked with implementing the institutional strategy objective in their deanships. This involves

conducting activities such as updating the deanship strategy to align with the institutional strategy and assessing performance in this regard. Similarly, the internal members of the council, such as the deans of colleges, are obligated to take necessary actions that make their colleges operate as part of the organizational strategy. It can be concluded from this that internal directors are more likely to contribute to the strategic process by obtaining the authority that allows them to provide insights on organizational strategy. Thus, this study confirms previous research which indicated the positive impact of the inside directors on their institution's strategy (Zahra & Pearce, 1990).

## 5.2.1 Summary of Theme I

The findings of this study indicate that the contribution of board directors to the organizational strategy is a reflection of their responsibility as occupants of their positions within the institution. The KSU council members have a duty to formulate, implement, and evaluate their institutional strategy in accordance with official requirements. The council members work to ensure the objectives of the institution are met with the interests of the stakeholders. The findings also indicate that the council members engage in board discussions as part of formulating the organizational strategy. Furthermore, they are responsible for the execution part of the council's strategic decisions in their entities, such as deanships or colleges. The council members are obligated to evaluate the performance of their entities and provide the relevant university's rectorate with necessary reports. In this regard, certain members are responsible for monitoring performance against the strategy realization and reporting progress to the council as part of their job duties. The Vice Rectorate of Planning and Development and the Deanship of Development are both included. This study reveals that the primary factor that enables the board members to contribute to their organizational strategy is their official positions in the organization. Another factor is the importance of each member's extensive experience working at the institution or other government agencies, in addition to their high

level of education and background, including a professor's title. The key factor facilitating their contribution to the institutional strategy lies in the expectations associated with their respective roles. Notably, the university president shoulders significant accountability across diverse aspects of the institutional strategy. As leaders of the university rectorates, vice presidents share the responsibility of overseeing the operational aspects of relevant deanships and colleges. Furthermore, assuming the role of a dean in a supporting deanship involves delivering specific services to external entities and ensuring internal alignment with the deanship's strategic objectives. Alongside the deans of colleges, the dean holds distinct obligations, including formulating the college strategy and exercising authority to enact the council's strategic decisions. This study supports previous studies that emphasize the importance of the role as a crucial factor in determining the work of the board of directors. It also suggests that board members are actively involved in the strategic agenda of their organization once they are inside directors. The findings indicate that council members participate closely in strategic topics as they have executive roles in formulating decisions during council meetings and committees. Simultaneously, they possess the authority to execute those decisions in their respective entities within the organization. In addition, council members have a duty to inform the relevant rectorate of the university about the evaluation of the performance standards of their entities against the organizational strategic objectives. Therefore, this study confirms with past studies that internal board directors are more active in participating in the strategic process. The individual director of the board has the responsibility and authority to take actions and decisions that are intended to accomplish the organization's strategy in this manner.

## 5.3 Theme II. Technology as a driver to foster effective contribution

Given the effective involvement of the board of directors in their organization's strategic agendas, this study shows that technology is a fundamental factor that leads to the board's in-depth engagement in the strategic process. The research findings illustrate how technology facilitates the contribution of the board directors to their organizational strategy in various ways. This can be identified by the effective participation of board members, the organization of board meetings, and the archiving of board documents. Thus, the board's work and activities are greatly influenced by the use of technology, which ultimately determines how directors contribute to the organizational strategy.

In recent years, the integration of portals into organizational operations has emerged as a new concept in information technology (Dias, 2001). One stream of literature has emphasized that there are advantages of utilizing technology to boost the board's activities. It was proven that board portals can enhance the communications between board members and the distribution of information (Sodi, 2007). Thus, board portals facilitate the sharing of documents between the directors as well as restoring the board materials in an effective and high-quality manner (Abraham, 2012). According to Donnelly (2019), board portals can be utilized to enhance board meetings by providing flexible schedules and agendas. Additionally, other studies have revealed that board portals offer a significant advantage in reducing the use of paperwork. By providing necessary information electronically to the directors, this cost-efficient and paperless method shifts board work, allowing for optimal use of time during board meetings (Howell, 2014; Wagley, 2007).

In contrast, other previous research has stressed some obstacles that boards may encounter when adopting technology. One of the challenges is to protect the organization's data from potential cyber-attacks, which makes it necessary for boards to control how information

technology is shared and restored (Trautman & Altenbaumer-Price, 2010). The large and complex information that board members receive is another concern in adopting portals on the boards. This could lead the board to be reliant on subcommittees or management to perform its functions (Merendino et al., 2018; Srinivas et al., 2019).

This study identified that a board portal delivers many benefits that help board members engage in productive ways. The KSU's *Majales* empowers board members to engage in preliminary participation ahead of official board meetings. This proactive approach enables members to thoroughly prepare and review the upcoming meeting topics in-depth. Thus, council members can use the online platform to write their notes, enquiries, or discuss the proposal. In interviews, it was emphasized that this portal provides benefits such as the capability to review specific proposals or take necessary actions before the actual council meeting. Furthermore, board members experience a high level of satisfaction when performing their jobs effectively due to this flexibility. The study demonstrates the advancements of a board portal in board communications, document sharing, and flexibility, which is consistent with prior research (Abraham, 2012; Donnelly, 2019; Sodi, 2007).

This study revealed that the board portal is a useful tool for organizing agenda presentations during board meetings. The KSU's system of councils is used in managing interactions between members during board meetings by allowing them to request interference through the portal. Furthermore, the system is advantageous during the confidential vote phase of board decisions on the portal. The board portal is advantageous in terms of decreasing the amount of paperwork and even making it paperless, which can help save funds and time. In line with previous studies, this research emphasizes that the use of a board portal can significantly enhance the effectiveness of board meetings (Donnelly, 2019; Howell, 2014; Wagley, 2007).

In order to overcome the obstacles of using the board portal, the Deanship of Electronic Transactions and Communications is responsible for operating the KSU's *Majales*. As per the

dean's interview, the deanship prioritizes the proper and effective implementation of the portal. The portal requires two-factor authentication for board members' access and provides dedicated support from a team of deanship members to address any technical issues during board meetings. Additionally, the deanship ensures that the organizational data is restored in a secure manner.

Considering concerns about the large and complex information that may disrupt the work of the board through the portal, however, this study found that these issues can be addressed through certain procedures implemented before a proposal, particularly academic proposals, is referred to the board. For example, the proposal of introducing new executive programs is initiated by the department councils, which is followed by the college councils. After that, the Vice Rectorate Graduate Studies and Scientific Research must review and approve it, before sending it to the university council. Furthermore, the council's secretary must coordinate with members to ensure that all proposals meet the full requirements before being presented to the council. The findings of this case study indicate that a board portal is essential for board members to contribute effectively to their organizational strategy.

This study's participants have expressed that using the board portal in their organization has resulted in a significant change in the way the board functions. The council members have expressed a substantial improvement in the way the KSU's council operates through the portal. It is noted that the board portal offers multiple methods for members to engage effectively, be fully informed about essential information, and have easy access to the board agenda. This case study found that using the board portal was beneficial in tracking proposals, following up on performance, correcting previous errors, preventing duplicate requests, and avoiding conflict decisions.

### 5.3.1 Summary of Theme II

This theme focuses on the significance of board portals in enhancing the contribution of board members to organizational strategy. The findings of this study demonstrate that board portals are very efficient in optimizing the work of the board through various aspects. First, the board portal has given board members numerous options to conduct their duties, making them highly satisfied. The board portal also can be accessed by the board members regardless of time or location, giving them the chance to thoroughly review the proposals. In advance of board meetings, they have the option to communicate with each other on the portal to address any issues or concerns that may be raised. The board portal has been highly recommended by participants in this study for effectively engaging in board discussions and agendas. Second, the board portal is a crucial component of the board's operations, which involve managing meetings, documents, and communication. The portal categorizes the board's proposals based on their types, making it effortless to follow them. Furthermore, members have the option to leave comments and requests before and during board meetings, making it possible for one member to intervene with a specific subject. It is vital to utilize the time of board meetings efficiently and make them more productive. The board portal, as mentioned by the participants, is an advanced tool that allows board members to address the required proposal within a sufficient amount of time. Third, all of the board documents are uploaded and restored on the portal allowing members to find and review any documents. Furthermore, members have the ability to access the history of their actions on the board since they joined. Members are able to track the board's previous decisions through the board portal. This feature of the board portal helps board members avoid making decisions mistakenly. The board portal also provides a clear decision-making mechanism to prevent different treatment of similar proposals. In this case study, adopting the Board portal has been proven to be a useful tool for archiving board documents, which has resulted in optimal decisions. Besides, the board portal was utilized to

keep track of how the board's decisions are executed. Finally, the board portal is employed to effectively monitor the execution of the board's decisions, avoiding potential neglect that may occur if the portal is not utilized.

## 5.4 Theme III. Engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making

This theme highlights the contribution of board directors to their institutional strategy through their engagement at various levels of decision-making within the organization. This study demonstrates the vital role of board members in shaping organizational strategy through active participation in board discussions. Moreover, it establishes that directors exert a significant influence on strategic decisions even at levels below the board. In this case study, it was found that board members, due to their top positions in various organizational bodies, are obligated to make decisions before reaching the board level. The university's president and vice presidents are accountable for monitoring the organization's overall performance and communicating with external organizations and agencies. The majority of board members are responsible for decision making because they are leaders of their entities, such as deans of deanships or colleges. A few board members are responsible for representing the stakeholders and ensuring that the board receives essential information and monitors its activities. Thus, the contributions of board members to the organizational strategy can be identified by their involvement in the board's strategic agendas and discussions. In addition, they have the responsibility of making strategic decisions for their entities by serving as the chair of subordinate councils.

The corporate governance literature confirms that the board of directors makes contributions to their organizational strategy (Andrews, 1980; Zahra, 1990; Lembinen, 2018). This is fundamentally based on a legal perspective, which emphasizes that the board of directors is

obligated to carry out their organizational strategy on behalf the shareholders (ABA, 2007; Andrews, 1981; Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Cadbury, 1992; Harrison, 1987; Pugliese et al., 2009; Tricker, 2012; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). However, the involvement of board directors in strategy has been a topic of debate for a long time (Hendry & Kiel, 2004).

While empirical findings in the corporate governance literature consistently affirm the influence of the board of directors on strategic decision-making (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001), the variation in defining the strategic role of the board stems from multiple factors, including the diversity of definitions of strategy (Hendry & Kiel, 2004). As Zahra & Pearce (1990) suggest, the board's involvement in strategy extends to various tasks and stages of strategic management. Furthermore, previous studies intensively relied on agency theory to define the contribution of the board of directors to strategy and this limits the use of other perspectives and theories (Bordean et al., 2011). Additional research suggests that board members participate in strategic decisions primarily when they possess expertise in the relevant topic, as proposed by McDonald et al. (2008), or that the board's internal environment can influence board members' engagement in strategic decisions (Nahum & Carmeli, 2020)

In light of empirical findings in the corporate governance literature, other prior studies have claimed that the effective involvement of board directors in strategic decisions is not likely to take place unless they are engaged in the work with management or stakeholders (Boulton, 1978; Hendry & Kiel, 2004). In this respect, Zahra & Pearce (1990) confirm that internal board directors can lead to effective involvement in strategic decisions due to access to relative information. Similarly, the board members' lack of involvement in their organization's daily activities is due to their lack of involvement in strategic decisions, as indicated by Pugliese et al. (2009). Accordingly, Rindova (1999) suggests that board directors are likely to be effective in formulating strategies for their organizations if they are engaged in the early stages of the strategic decision-making process.

However, other studies have indicated that the role of the board of directors in strategic decisions has not yet been fully defined (Ravasi & Zattoni 2006; Trickier, 2012). In particular, the extent to which the board directors are involved in the strategy formulation and implementation process is still unclear (Pugliese et al., 2009; Farrell, 2005). The topic of board directors' involvement in strategic decisions is still not fully understood due to the limitations of access to the board of directors (Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Zald, 1969). Therefore, this case study aims to fill this gap by providing additional insights regarding the contributions of board directors to their institutional strategic decisions in various ways.

Firstly, this study supports previous research that emphasizes the legal responsibilities of board directors to make strategic decisions by carrying out three organizational strategies on behalf of shareholders (Andrews, 1981; Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Harrison, 1987; Pugliese et al., 2009; Tricker, 2012; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). It is evident from this study that the KSU council members are accountable for involving strategic decision making as part of formulating the institutional strategic plan, which must be approved by the council. The KSU's strategic plan was initially established by the council members in 2010. During the council meetings, council members dedicated time to reviewing and updating the institution's strategic plan in 2020. This took place because the Ministry of Education requires the council members of KSU to participate in the formulation of their organizational strategy.

Secondly, this study uncovered that board directors possess a profound understanding of the strategic decision-making process within their organization, attributed to their roles as inside directors on the board. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Zahra & Pearce (1990), which indicate that insider directors can result in optimal involvement of board members in strategy. The study found that internal board directors are effective in taking part in the strategic decision-making process, as they are responsible for developing strategic plans and proposals for their entities such as colleges and deanships. Thus, board members have to

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collaborate with the university administration to make strategic decisions ahead of time before these subjects are brought to the board level. Then, these strategic proposals can be discussed further during the board meetings. The findings are in line with previous research that suggests that effective engagement of board directors in organizational strategy can be achieved if they are involved in the early stages of strategic decisions (Rindova, 1999).

Thirdly, the findings of this study demonstrate that board members contribute insights at various levels of the strategic decision-making process within the organization. This includes the board members of the institution's president, vice presidents, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges. The significant role the university president with respect to the organizational strategy will be discussed separately later in **4.5 Theme IV. Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization**.

Among the council members, vice presidents have been particularly active in shaping strategic decisions, aligning with the specific responsibilities of their rectorates. For example, the Vice President of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research is tasked with reviewing strategic proposals related to Graduate Studies and Scientific Research and taking necessary actions before submitting them to the university council level. Thus, strategic decisions like introducing graduate programs or reaching scientific research agreements with external insulation must be examined and approved by the vice president prior to referring to the university council to make the final decisions. Another example is the role of the Vice President for Planning and Development in formulating the institution's strategic plan and ensuring that it is aligned with every unit in the institution, including deanships and colleges. In light of this, the Vice President for Planning and Development is accountable for reviewing, requesting revisions, or accepting all strategic proposals before they can be considered at the board level. The examples are applicable to other vice presidents when discussing their involvement as

board members in the early stages of the board's strategic decisions as each vice president is assigned according to the nature of the work of one's rectorate.

In addition, the deans of supporting deanships are in charge of making strategic decisions in their deanships. The study's findings indicate that deans of supporting deanships are involved in-depth in formulating strategic proposals for their deanships. The strategic decisions of the deanships are subject to intensive discussions and adjustments. This takes place through the deanships' councils or committees before these proposals can be sent to the institution's board. For instance, the Dean of Scientific Research Deanship has the authority to make significant decisions about the deanship's strategic plan through the council and committees of the deanship. Along with any strategic cooperation with external organizations and institutions, it must be reviewed and decided by the dean within the deanship level. The role of the Deanship of Development and Quality is another example. The duty of this role is to ensure alignment between the deanship's strategic plan and KSU's strategic plan. As the head of the deanship, the dean is responsible for monitoring the performance of the deanship through the deanship's council meetings. Additionally, due to the nature of the deanship's function, the strategic plan of every unit within the organization is reviewed, revised, and updated by the Dean of Deanship of Development and Quality in coordination with the Vice President for Planning and Development.

Furthermore, the deans of colleges are also accountable for making strategic decisions for their colleges as they serve as chair of the college councils. According to this study, deans of colleges are fully engaged in the strategic decision process through various means. The task involves creating strategic plans for their colleges, introducing new programs, monitoring the performance of the colleges, and collaborating with relevant supporting deanships to fulfill academic accreditation requirements. Therefore, the college councils serve as the designated place for in-depth discussions on strategic decisions before their submission to the respective

rectorates or the university council. For example, the Dean of the College of Education is tasked to oversee the performance of the college and ensure that the college and university plans are aligned. Moreover, deans are required to conduct extensive reviews of the strategic proposals for their college as they will present them to the university council level. Consequently, individuals should be prepared to address any inquiries that may arise during council meetings and defend their college council's decisions at the university council level.

**Figure 5 Levels of KSU's strategic decision-making**
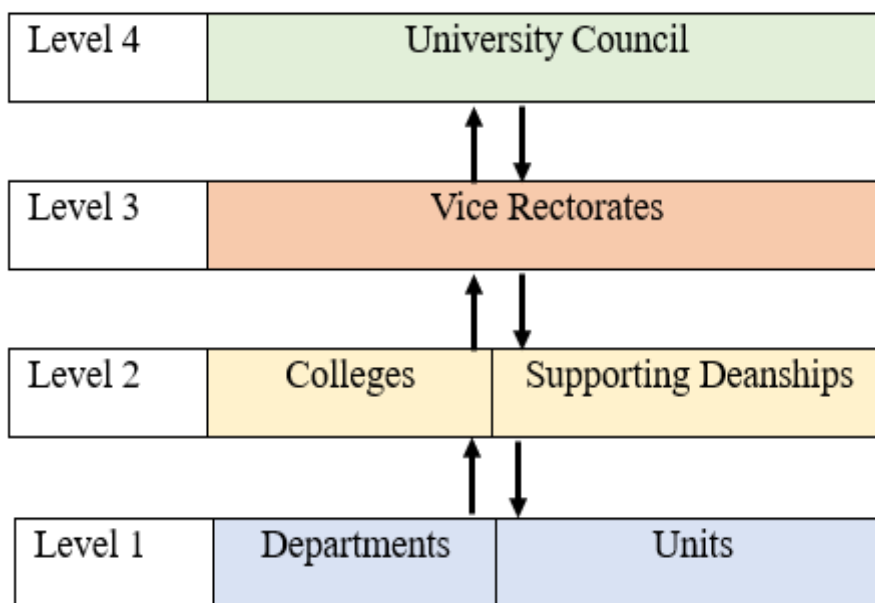


**Source:** Developed by the author.

**Figure 5** displays that board directors in this case study were involved in four main levels to contribute to the strategic decisions of their organization.

The first level of strategic decision-making within the university is at the department level. There are two distinct divisions at this level: academic departments operating within colleges and units for non-academic matters managed by supporting deanships. The department councils' decisions must be approved by deans of the colleges or the college councils before

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being considered at the next level. Likewise, deans of supporting deanship must either directly approve proposals from the units or approve them through deanship councils.

The second level of the organizational strategic decision process considers in depth the engagement of the governing body members through councils in their supporting deanships and colleges. By leading councils of supporting deanships and colleges, the deans have the responsibility of developing strategic plans, programs, or other strategic proposals.

The strategic decision-making process within the organization is carried out by the vice rectorates at the third level. The vice presidents are in charge of evaluating the strategic proposals and deciding whether they can be proceeded to the next level or if they do not meet the requirements. Hence, coordination between the vice presidents and the deans of the colleges or supporting deanships is necessary for resolving any issues with the proposals or, in some cases, providing additional documents. For example, introducing an executive program for the College of Business Administration takes place initially in the department council, and then the chair of the department discusses it thoroughly in the college council. Hence, it must be accepted by the college council before it can be sent outside the college. The college dean is also required to communicate with the Vice President of Educational and Academic Affairs to ensure the successful approval and consideration of the proposal at the highest level.

At the fourth level of the organizational strategic decision process lies the university council level, where all council members engage in discussions to formulate the final strategic decisions.

### 5.4.1 Summary of Theme III

This theme highlights the contribution of board directors to their organizational strategy through engagement at multiple levels of the strategic decision process. This study reveals that board directors play a central role in making crucial strategic decisions for their organization. Their substantial contribution to both the development and revision of KSU's strategic plan is

underscored as significant. Board directors are accountable for conducting these tasks on behalf of the shareholders, which is the Ministry of Education in this case study. Additionally, they are in charge of and have the authority to make strategic objectives of their entities within the institution. The findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of the board of directors in executing their organization's strategy (Andrews, 1981; Brauer & Schmidt, 2008; Harrison, 1987; Pugliese et al., 2009; Tricker, 2012; Zahra & Pearce, 1989). Also, the findings of this study indicate that board directors are heavily involved in making strategic decisions for their organization when they serve as internal board directors. By working closely with management, board directors can gain a better understanding of the nature of strategic proposals and how they are implemented. The board members were found to be more active and have the necessary knowledge and authority to make strategic decisions due to their roles as inside board directors. This study's findings support previous research that highlights the importance of internal board directors in effective participation in strategic decisions of the organization. (Rindova, 1999; Zahra & Pearce, 1990). Most importantly, this study extends understanding of the contribution of board directors to the organizational strategy through effective engagements at multiple levels of strategic decision-making. In this case study, board directors are involved in four key levels to make organizational strategic decisions. It is the responsibility of council members, who are deans of colleges, to oversee the work of the departments in their colleges. First, the department's strategic proposals are evaluated and approved by the dean's office. Second, the deans of colleges and supporting deanships act as the chair of the councils within these entities. Thus, they are closely engaged in discussing and evaluating strategic matters in the councils at the supporting deanship or college level. Third, the role of the vice president involves coordination with deans of subordinate colleges or supporting deanships. The vice presidents are authorized to take necessary actions and decisions regarding the organizational strategy. Fourth, the university council level is the

highest level of the strategic decision process within the organization. At this level, all council members effectively engage in deliberations to address strategic proposals during the council meetings. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that board directors contribute to their organizational strategy by actively participating in the strategic decision process, both internally and externally to the board. This takes place at four levels of the decision-making process, including departments, colleges, vice rectorates, and the university.

## 5.5 Theme IV. Advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization

This theme emphasizes the significance of the institution's president in implementing the organizational strategy. The impact of the institution's head on the strategic matters of the organization can be identified in various ways. As revealed by this study, the university president bears a crucial responsibility for implementing the institution's strategy, highlighting various effective methods in carrying out his role. Firstly, the leadership role of the university president adds insights to strategic decisions during board meetings by serving as the chair of the board. He is obligated to manage strategic decisions during the board's activities and meetings, as the CEO of the board. Secondly, the university's president positively contributes to facilitating the institution's performance in achieving the organizational strategy through activities beyond board responsibilities. Additionally, the establishment of the Higher Coordinating Committee, where the president and vice presidents actively participate, is essential for effective strategic decision-making alongside the board. Thus, this study found that the university president plays a pivotal role in guiding the institution's performance towards its strategic objectives, serving as a key enabler.

The role of board chairpersons in formulating and implementing the organization's strategy has been emphasized by the literature on corporate governance (Banerjee et al., 2020; Cadbury, 1992; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2007). By prioritizing strategic agenda and directing board

discussions, chairpersons can improve the board's effectiveness and ensure that the organization's performance is aligned with its strategy (Nadler, 2004). Thus, the role of board chairpersons is to create an active environment that encourages board members to discuss and debate strategic decisions effectively (Huse, 2005). In addition, the chairpersons are in charge of monitoring the performance of the organization in relation to meeting the strategic objectives of the organization (Adams & Ferreira, 2007). Furthermore, the board chairperson is accountable for communicating with external actors and ensuring that shareholders receive transparent and necessary information. (Higgs, 2003; FRC, 2018). Therefore, the accomplishment of the organizational strategy's objectives requires the board chairpersons to play a crucial role.

The findings of this study show that the president of the university, who serves as chair of the board, has a significant impact on the organizational strategy. The role of the board chair was found to be a key factor in the formulation and implementation of the strategy of the institution. The university president fulfils his responsibilities in relation to the institution's strategy in various forms, both within and beyond board meetings.

Firstly, it is necessary for the university president to approve some strategic proposals before they can be presented to the university council. The president of the university has the power to determine whether a proposal can be referred to the university council or not. The secretary and other council members forward strategic proposals from their entities to the university president before they are submitted to the board. In addition, the Higher Coordinating Committee reviews and discusses certain strategic matters before presenting them to the board. By doing this, the president can acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the council agenda topics and give priority to strategic topics to be the main focus of the council discussions. This is supported by earlier studies that emphasize the importance of the board

chair in leading board discussions and functions that address organizational strategy (Nadler, 2004).

Secondly, the board members in this case study have highlighted the leadership competence and skills of the board chair in managing and directing board discussions. The university president's effective leadership style involves attempting to bring together the opinions of board members and make the board decisions in a uniform manner. The university president goes through the specific details during the board discussions to ensure that the board makes the best decisions. Furthermore, the president of the university manages board meetings in a fruitful manner by encouraging all members to participate in the board discussions and to clarify their viewpoints. The manner in which the board is managed under the direction of the university president received high commendation from participants in this study. Also, it was evident that the university president refrains from expressing his views at the outset, allowing all members of the board to freely discuss the topic. The president then concludes at the end. By using this approach, biases or influences in the board's decision-making process are eliminated. In light of the above, this study supports the suggestion that the key role of the board chair is to create a positive environment that encourages board members to actively participate in board meetings (Huse, 2005).

Thirdly, the university president is the most accountable individual in monitoring the institution's performance against its strategic objectives. This involves making strategic decisions through board meetings that enable entities to perform in accordance with the institutional strategy. Meanwhile, certain decisions undergo review and approval by the Higher Coordinating Committee, with the specific goal of realizing the institutional strategy. In addition, there are other decisions which cannot be effective unless they are approved by the university president such as operational proposals. This study shows that the execution of the strategic decisions of the institution has different forms to be effective, starting from the

colleges and supporting deanships where the deans are authorized to take necessary actions to implement these decisions. If they are not authorized, the vice presidents are responsible for completing the work. If they do not have the authority to do so, the president holds the power to make necessary decisions, whether within the board, the Higher Coordinating Committee, or by direct command. Considering the above, this study confirms the essential role of the board chairs in overseeing the organization's performance in achieving strategic objectives (Adams & Ferreira, 2007).

Fourthly, the university's president is held accountable to provide up-to-date information regarding the institution's performance to stakeholders, including the ministry of education and other government agencies. In addition, the board chair is responsible for conveying the orders from the ministry or other government agencies to the board. In certain circumstances, the university president has the authority to contact other ministries such as the Ministry of Finance in order to resolve the funding requirements for implementing the strategic objectives of the institution. In the event of agreements with international institutions, the university president is obligated to notify the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In view of the above, this study confirms previous studies that the board chair plays a crucial role in maintaining stable communication with the major shareholders of the institution. (FRC, 2018; Higgs, 2003)

CEOs are highly obligated to make crucial decisions in formulating their organizational strategies, which is why their roles are primarily linked to strategy (Ansoff, 1991); and because these roles have the potential to impact the work of the board, employees, and the entire organization (Glick, 2011). Additionally, the strategic decision-making within the board is influenced by the power of CEOs, as they are considered to have the highest power in the executive team (Pollock et al., 2002; Tang et al., 2011). The CEOs work in the organization can be categorized as interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles (Mintzberg, 1971, 1973, 1975). First, the interpersonal roles consist of leadership liaison, and figurehead

functions that the CEOs perform. Second, the informational roles include the way that CEOs possess, exchange, and deliver essential information that impact the performance of the organization. Third, the decisional roles involve making optimal decisions by evaluating opportunities and threats, taking necessary actions to resolve the performance of the organization, and managing and utilizing the resources of the organization (Mintzberg, 1971, 1973, 1975). In light of the above, it is evident that the CEOs have a direct effect on the board's strategic decisions and the way implementation is performed.

This study revealed that CEOs play a vital role in making strategic decisions for their organization and in how they are implemented, as proposed by Ansoff (1991). Taking into account Mintzberg's three roles of CEOs, which encompass interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles (Mintzberg, 1971, 1973,1975).

The university presidents serve the CEOs with the greatest authority as the highest executive position in the institution (Pollock et al., 2002; Tang et al., 2011). In this case study, the council members described the university president as a mature, democratic, and wise leader. Moreover, the communication between the university president and ministries and government agencies, including the classified information that the university president delivers to the board, reflects the liaison role of the CEO. Furthermore, the university president is a figurehead who represents the institution, opens ceremonies and conferences, and signs agreements with external organizations. According to the information presented, the university president, acting as the CEO, effectively carried out his interpersonal roles in this case study.

The informational roles of the CEO involve handling essential and classified information from both internal and external entities. Therefore, it is necessary for the CEO to have knowledge of when, where, and who can access this information. For instance, the board decisions are classified, and no individual is allowed to access the board documents except the board members and the shareholders. Moreover, the university president may receive information

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from external agencies and must respond without necessarily referring to the board. Thus, it is a vital role that the president of the university, as the CEO, has to handle carefully.

The CEO decisional roles are considered in this case study as the obligations of university president to overall assess how the institution works toward the strategic objectives within and outside the board. Also, he is authorized to take necessary decisions and actions during the execution stage of the board strategic decisions. In addition, improving spending efficiency is one of the objectives of the institutional strategic plan strategic objectives, which held the CEO and the board accountable for managing how the institution's resources are utilized in order to achieve this goal. Also, the university council has recently approved a new regulation of the spending efficiency policies as it aims for optimal usage of the institution's resources.

In light of the above, this case study discusses the CEO's interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles in relation to the university president serving as the CEO. Thus, it is clear that the CEO's role has a significant impact on the functioning of the board and the entire institution, as demonstrated by Glick (2011).

The dual role, in which one individual holds both the CEO and board chair positions, has been a subject of considerable debate, leading to contradictory conclusions in the corporate governance literature. A growing stream of literature has demonstrated that the combination of the CEO and chair roles has a positive impact on board performance and prevents any possible conflicts if these roles are conducted by two individuals (Davis et al., 1997; Donaldson & Davis, 1991). Moreover, the dual role of the CEO can improve the board's decision-making by clarifying accountability and the way the board responds to external events (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2015). Besides, the joint leadership of the board can offer a clear direction, a faster response to the external environment, and the CEO-chair will gain a better understanding of the organization's performance and its industry (Boyd, 1995). In summary, Daily & Dalton (1997) propose four advantages of the CEOs' dual roles, including strong leadership, internal

efficiency, and the elimination of conflicts and confusion caused by having two leaders on the board.

In contrast, the combination of the CEO and the board chair by one person may affect the balance of power between the board members, and thus it is not recommended by the *Cadbury Report* (Cadbury, 1992). Furthermore, the separation of roles between the CEO and the board chair is advocated by agency theory (Daily & Dalton, 1997), and in this way, the responsibilities of both positions are clearly defined (Dalton et al., 1998). Moreover, other studies found that the joint leadership of the board has a negative impact on the organizational performance (Goyal & Park, 2022; Ong & Wan, 2001). Additionally, the lack of board performance monitoring is a primary disadvantage of CEO role duality (Lorsch & MacIver, 1989; Daily & Dalton, 1993). However, it was evident that the duality of the CEO role can be affected by many factors, both external and internal (Boyd, 1995). Other studies found that there is no financial impact on the firm performance resulting from the board leadership structure (Daily & Dalton, 1997). Likewise, Wan & Ong (2005) found that the board leadership structure has no influence on either process or performance of the board.

This study uncovered that board leadership with role duality positively influences both the board and the institution's performance across several aspects. As both the CEO and chair of the board, the university president has been credited with seamlessly managing board activities, meetings, and communications, while also successfully preventing potential conflicts. The duality of roles is valuable in determining the board's responsibility for strategic decisions, with reference to the term *Authority Holder* commonly used within the institution's decision-making process. This implies that decisions cannot be made without reference to the individual holding the authority to decide. In simpler terms, the university president possesses full authority and delegates it to vice presidents, deans of supporting deanships, and college deans. Thus, in the capacity of the chair and CEO of the board, the university president bears the utmost

responsibility for determining the institution's strategic decisions and overseeing their implementation. This study supports the point that joint leadership of the board improves its functioning and enhances accountability in decision-making (Davis et al., 1997; Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2015).

In this case study, the dual role of the CEO has been noted to contribute to a consistently clear strategic direction and prompt responses to external events, facilitated by a meticulous review process for the institution's strategic proposals before they are presented to the board. The university's president is responsible for reviewing the proposals and determining if they should be referred to the board or if a committee should discuss them. In certain circumstances, the university's president has the authority to make necessary decisions, particularly when addressing operational concerns. The university president, as the CEO-chair of the board, has an in-depth and detailed understanding of how the institution operates and can assess the situation accurately (Boyd, 1995). In addition, the role duality has led to quicker decisions of the board during the COVID-19 pandemic. This encompasses crucial swift decisions made by the board that have far-reaching effects on the entire institution, including faculty members, employees, and students. The university's council has made necessary adjustments to the academic year's rules, which include schedules, attendance, and examination. Based on the above, this study is in agreement with previous studies, indicating that joint board leadership can be the key to the board's clear direction and quick responses to external circumstances, as suggested by Boyd (1995).

This study also revealed that role duality was a driver for having a strong leader of the board as the president of the university. This also resulted in an improvement in the board's work in terms of meeting management, board decisions, and quick responses to unexpected events. As the sole figurehead of the institution, the president of the university helps maintain the university's uniformity and avoid conflicts when communicating with external agencies,

representing the institution, and delivering a public speech. Thus, this study confirms the benefits from having the joint leadership of the board as indicated by Daily & Dalton (1997). This study contradicts previous studies that indicate that role duality can result in negative organizational performance (Goyal & Park, 2022; Ong & Wan, 2001) and its findings illustrate that the board's strong leadership has, in fact, contributed to the enhancements of board and institutional operations. As discussed earlier, the highest level of leadership of the university president significantly impacted the manner in which board meetings are managed. This involves creating an active environment that allows all members to freely participate in board discussions. Moreover, the board joint leadership enables the university president to have in-depth knowledge of the board agenda and thus shed light on the important topics. Also, the CEO duality enables the university president to tackle various issues outside of the board's responsibilities.

The university president engages heavily in assessing the institutional performance through a range of forms. This can be accomplished directly by contacting deans of supporting deanships and colleges or through the Higher Coordinating Committee with vice presidents. In some cases, the university president has the authority to make the required decision. Also, the study's findings contradict the literature's emphasis on role duality as a reason for the lack of monitoring board performance (Daily & Dalton, 1993; Lorsch & MacIver, 1989). This is because the board decisions are taken after the topics are discussed by all members during board meetings. In the event that the board cannot reach a conclusion, a vote will be conducted through the board portal with complete confidentiality. Furthermore, this study found that the board's work, including memorandums, undergoes review and evaluation overseen by the Ministry of Education, acting as stakeholders in this case. Therefore, it is crucial to note that the power of the university president must not interfere with the regulations set by the Ministry of Education, or the decisions made by the university council. In light of the above, the joint

leadership of the board cannot be attributed to a reduction in oversight or a weakening of organizational performance. Instead, this study observed that it improves the performance of both the board and the institution, positively contributing to the achievement of the institutional strategic plan

## 5.5.1 Summary of Theme IV

This theme sheds light on the leadership role of the university president as a facilitator in accomplishing the strategic objectives of the institution by exercising his role in relation to the university strategic plan in range of forms within the board and externally. Within the board, the university president acts as the chair of the board as he directs the board meetings effectively. This involves highlighting strategic proposals to be focused on and encouraging the board members to engage in board discussions. Furthermore, the chair of the board is responsible for ensuring performance in accordance with the strategic plan. Additionally, the university president has established the Higher Coordinating Committee to oversee the institution's performance and manage the preparation of strategic proposals before submission to the board. Another leadership role of the university president is serving as the CEO of the board. In this capacity, the university president is actively involved in making strategic decisions for the institution through board meetings, the Higher Coordinating Committee, or by personal directive. This is because the university president holds full authority to make the necessary decisions to execute the board decisions concerning the strategic objectives. In interpersonal CEO roles, the university president has shown to be a strong leader and figurehead, as well as maintaining active relationships with stakeholders. In the CEO's informational roles, the university president is responsible for securing classified information, including board documents and other materials from official agencies. In contrast, the decisional CEO roles which the university president is obligated to undertake range from making strategic decisions within the board and determining how to handle their

implementation, whether internally or externally to the board. This study observed that the president of the university serves as the CEO and the chair of the board. The positive impact of this dual role was duly recognized on the performance of both the board and the institution. As a result, a strong leadership presence was established on the board, improving the board's operations, and mitigating potential conflicts or confusion that could arise from having two leaders within the organization. Furthermore, concurrently holding both roles enables the university president to deeply delve into the organization's operations, ultimately proving beneficial in shaping strategic decisions for the board. To summarize, the university president is a crucial player in achieving the institutional strategy by working within and beyond the board.

## 5.6 Theme V. Developing/enforcing regulations and compliance

This theme focuses primarily on the board's decisions to manage the organization's operations by enacting guidelines and mandating adherence. The KSU council has established new rules and enforces compliance with them to ensure that the institution's work is carried out in accordance with its strategic plan. Under the board's new regulations, the King Abdullah Institute for Research and Consulting Studies (KAI) is tasked with handling all proposals that have financial aspects or involve contracts with external organizations. In addition, the board has approved new rules that pertain to the university's spending efficiency and the proper utilization of its resources. Moreover, the university council has entrusted the investment committee with overseeing all investment matters and regulations between the university and external partners. Based on the above, the board's new regulations are intended to improve the organization's performance in line with the KSU's strategic plan. Three of the core objectives of the KSU's strategic plan include achieving self-revenue, increasing diversified investment, and improving the institution's spending efficiency standards.

Compliance policies and frameworks that affect the institution's performance have been enforced by the board, including changing the payroll system, appointing faculty members, and hiring new employees. Furthermore, compliance procedures are essential because the legal department must review the board's proposals before they can be added to the board agenda. This is to ensure that the board's decisions do not violate the law and do not conflict with previous decisions. Moreover, Annual reports are required by the board from all entities within the institution, including supporting deanships, colleges, and evaluate rectors. By doing this, the board members can accurately assess how the institution operates in accordance with the strategic plan. Considering the above, the board members' involvement in establishing new regulations and enforcing compliance in the implementation was crucial to determining their contribution to their institution's strategy.

The role of the board of directors in forming regulations and ensuring that they are enforced to fulfil the organizational objectives is widely discussed in corporate governance literature. For instance, the *Cadbury Report* (1992) stipulates that "*Boards of directors are responsible for the governance of their companies*" (p.15). As the top governing body, the board of directors has direct access to the internal mechanisms that govern their organizations (Aguilera, 2005). Thus, the board of directors bears the responsibility for maintaining the effectiveness of the organization's performance through the direction of the board's power (Zald, 1969). Importantly, the board of directors' effective use of controls will result in a successful assessment of the strategic matters of the organization (Molz, 1985).

The findings of this study illustrate that the board of directors has actively played a role in controlling the performance of the organization to be in line with the organizational strategy objectives. The KSU council governs the financial aspects and proposals to be made through one division of the institution. This practice has been proven to offer several advantages. First, this helps the board follow a clear decision-making process regarding strategic partnerships

with external organizations. Second, it prevents the board from making duplicate decisions, allowing all relevant parties to be involved in the agreements that were originally proposed by one entity. For example, when the board reviews an agreement of scientific research collaboration with external institutions for the medical college, other similar colleges such as the colleges of dentistry or nursing can be involved in the agreement. Thus, it increases the efficiency of the institution's performance by effectively utilizing resources. Third, unifying the financial aspects of the university through KAI was intended to ensure that the university is not obligated to any unexpected liabilities. This approach enables the board to obtain detailed information about financial proposals from the KAI before they are officially approved.

The board also governs the investment aspects of the university through a special committee chaired by one of its members. The Investment Committee is composed of members of the university and external partners. It is tasked with reviewing and evaluating investment proposals from enterprise investors. This approach ensures that the committee thoroughly studies the board's decisions regarding ongoing investments, providing the board with a clearer assessment to make informed decisions. Additionally, the board's decisions are made only after fulfilling the spending efficiency regulation. The findings of this study are consistent with the *Cadbury Report*, highlighting the crucial role that the board of directors plays in governing their organizations (Cadbury, 1992). Also, this study supports the importance of board directors in governing their organization due to their direct access to internal mechanisms (Aguilera, 2005), increasing the effectiveness of the organization performance (Zald, 1969), and controlling the strategic plan of the organization (Molz, 1985).

From a strategic management perspective, the board of directors plays a crucial role in establishing the standards that must be adhered to during the organizational strategy process (Helmer, 1996; Ingley & Van der Walt, 2001). The task involves setting performance criteria and setting clear strategic objectives (Kaplan & Norton, 2001, 2016). Therefore, the board of

directors is mandated to provide clear direction to the management of the organization and ensure that the performance of the organization adheres to the rules (Miller, 2014). As such, the organization's operations will be strengthened by developing and promoting values and principles like quality and efficiency (Higgins, 2005).

This study revealed that the enforcement of compliance with the implementation of organizational strategic objectives is significantly influenced by the role played by the board directors. The board decisions provide clear guidance on how to implement them and specify who is responsible for follow-up among the board members, depending on the type of subject. The results of this study additionally indicate that the board of directors bears the responsibility of providing explicit guidance and establishing compliance rules for implementation, consistent with the insights of Miller (2014). The KSU's council delegates its authority to the head of the relevant entity within the institution to complete the necessary tasks in accordance with the council's decisions. For example, the university council has made a recent regulation in relation to the payroll system. In this matter, the Dean of the Human Resources Deanship is delegated to implement the decision with assistance from the university's Vice President and provide the council with updates in this regard. The new system has been proven to be efficient in providing precise information, tracking the payment process, and preventing any human errors. Additionally, the council's decisions are finalized once the spending efficiency criteria are satisfied. This contributes to the enhancement of the institution's quality culture and operational efficiency, pivotal elements for the successful implementation of strategies (Higgins, 2005).

Furthermore, the KSU council enforces the point that any proposal intended for submission to the board must undergo review and approval by the legal department. The purpose of this was to meet the board's standards for making accurate decisions. Enforcing this procedure can prevent the board from making decisions that contradict previous or unlawful ones. Therefore,

the main purpose of this is to promote board decisions with high standards. Moreover, the board's spending efficiency approach has proven to be beneficial and save the institution's annual budget. Another role of the KSU's council in terms of enforcing compliance performance standards is to make it mandatary for each entity within the institution to submit an annual report. The annual reports outline the performance of the entity during the year. Thus, the annual reports are primary controls through the Vice the Rectorate for Planning and Development and are submitted to the council. Thus, the board is able to assess the overall performance of the institution in relation to its strategic plan. The findings of this study agree with those of previous studies on the importance of the board of directors in setting standards for the implementation strategy (Helmer, 1996; Ingley & Van der Walt, 2001; Kaplan & Norton, 2001, 2016).

Based on the above, the involvement of board directors in governing their organization by setting regulations and enforcing compliance in implementing them reflects their contribution to the organization's strategy in this case study.

## 5.6.1 Summary of Theme V

The theme provides an explanation of how board directors exercise their responsibility by establishing regulations and enforcing compliance to realize the organization's strategy. The KSU council members were involved in introducing new regulations that aim to govern the work of both the council and the institution. The council delegates responsibility for monitoring and controlling the financial affairs of the institution to the KAI, including the board proposals that contain financial aspects. In this way, the KAI is required to review and approve the proposals before they can be sent to the university council. Furthermore, the board has increasingly prioritized the application of spending efficiency regulations to every decision it makes. The institution's financial resources were effectively managed and saved due to this. The board also regulates the investments of the institution through a special committee. This

approach allows the board members to gain detailed information on the proposals before making decisions. This study also found that the role of board directors in setting compliance rules to meet the required standards is significant. In this regard, the board delegates its authority to the related body within the institution to process the execution according to the board decisions. Another compliance procedure was enforced by the board, which mandates that proposals be reviewed and approved by the legal department in advance of board decisions. The aim is to establish high standards in the board decision process. Further, each entity within the institution including supporting deanships, college, or vice rectorate must comply with submitting their annual report to the board. As a result, the board members are able to conduct a precise evaluation of the implementation's performance in relation to its strategic objectives. The board of directors' contribution to their organization's strategy was credited to their role in establishing rules and ensuring performance compliance.

## 5.7 Emergent model of the contribution of board directors to institutional strategy

The findings of this case study have facilitated the formulation of a model that aims to elucidate how board directors contribute to their institution's strategy. The foundation of the model is constructed upon the principles of the Resource-Based View (RBV) in strategic management, emphasizing the organization's internal resources as integral elements in shaping its strategy (Grant, 1991). In accordance with the RBV perspective, effectively utilizing the resources of the organization will enable it to maintain its competitive advantage (Reed & DeFillippi, 1990). In this context, David (2011) outlines that organizational resources can be categorized into three main groups. Firstly, there are physical resources, including plants, equipment, and technology. Secondly, human resources encompass employees, their skills, and abilities.

Lastly, organizational resources consist of the structure, planning processes, and culture of the organization (David, 2011). The model is depicted in **Figure 6** below.

**Figure 6 Emergent model of board directors' contribution to institutional strategy**
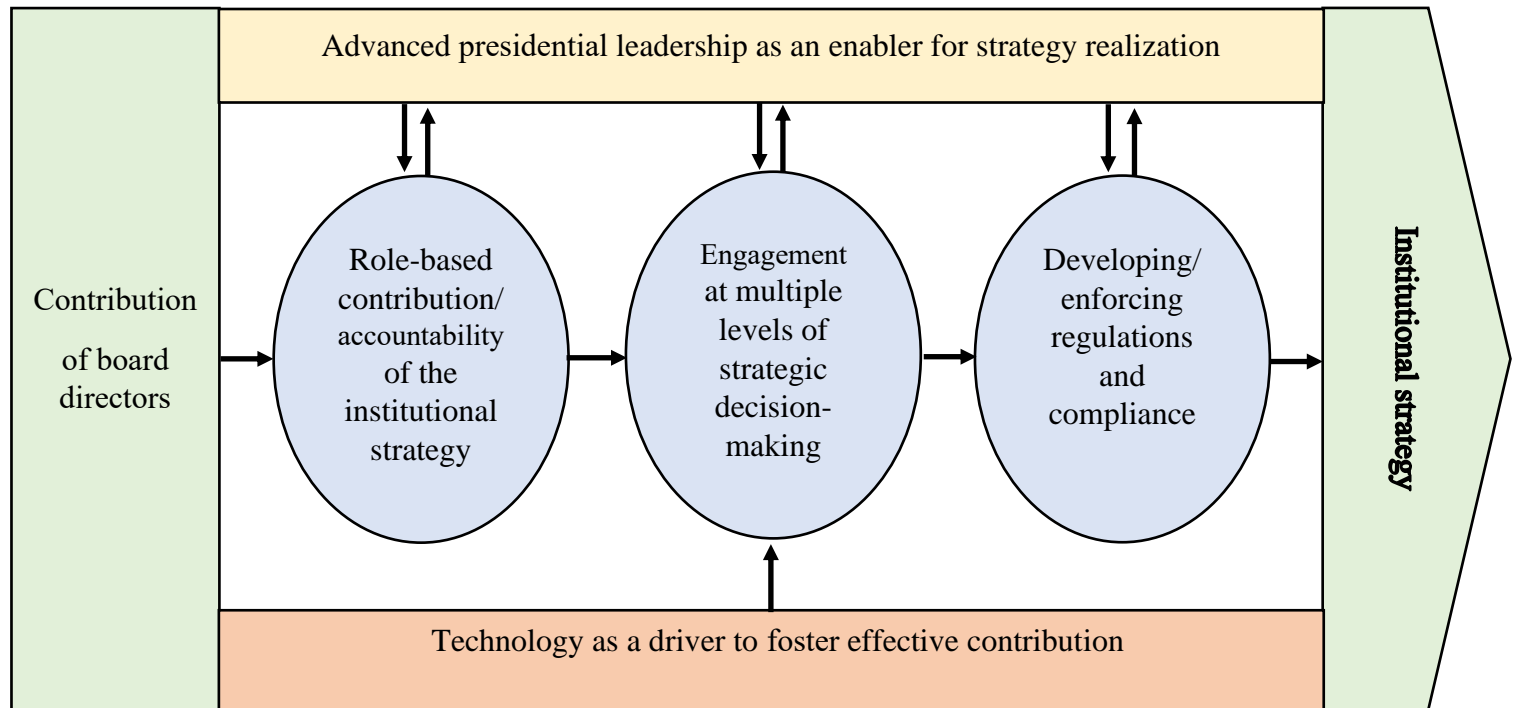
In this model, five main elements have been identified that reflect the responsibility of the board directors towards the strategy of their institution. The following will cover each one of these elements. Firstly, the board of directors in this case study was predominantly comprised of representatives from various entities within the institution. They held positions such as the head of their entities, vice presidents of vice rectorates, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges. Each one of them was tasked with a variety of duties that relate to the institution's strategy, depending on the nature of their entities. They were obligated to add insights to the institutional strategy by occupying their official positions in the university. The involvement of the board of directors can be a part of any stage in the strategic management process, including formulation, implementation, or evaluation. The vice presidents of vice rectorates are responsible to oversee the work of the subordinate bodies, thus they are

responsible to ensure that the performance of these bodies is in line with the institution's strategy. The deans of supporting deanships have responsibilities for their respective deanship's strategy, an integral part of the institutional strategy. This accountability extends to the deans of colleges, who are responsible for implementing the board's strategic decisions within their colleges. In light of the above, this approach determines how board directors contribute to strategy through a role-based approach.

Secondly, board directors have been involved in several levels of decision-making concerning strategic matters of the institution. At the first level, oversight is provided by the deans of supporting deanship and college on the performance of departments and units. This involves tasks such as approving strategic proposals or advancing to the next level, and monitoring the implementation of strategic decisions that originate from higher levels. The second level takes into account the engagement of deans as they actively participate in the councils of supporting deanships and colleges. In this capacity, the deans not only contribute to discussions but also hold the significant responsibility of chairing these councils. Their involvement at this level plays a pivotal role in shaping strategic decisions and fostering collaboration within the supporting deanships and colleges. At the third level are the university's vice rectorates, where the vice presidents take on the responsibility of reviewing the strategic proposals from supporting deanships and colleges. Additionally, they oversee the implementation of the board's strategic decisions within the deanships and colleges as part of their duties. Thus, cooperation between vice presidents and deans is significant at this step. The fourth level is the board level where all members engage in a detailed discussion to determine the final stage of the strategic decisions of their organization. Therefore, the commitment of board directors in these phases, as part of making strategic decisions of their institution, is critical.

Thirdly, the board directors' contribution to the institutional strategy is reflected in the development of regulations and enforcement of implementation compliance. The board of

directors has recently decided that one division of the institution will handle all financial matters of the institution. This was found to be beneficial in terms of enhancing the efficacy of the work of both the board and the institution, which is a strategic objective of the institution. Also, the board has promoted a culture that aims to consider spending efficiency when making decisions within the board level or below. Now, the board of directors has started to carefully consider the financial impacts of their decisions and explore ways to use the institution's resources efficiently. Moreover, the board has established rules to govern investments of the institution, specifying that they should be managed through a committee chaired by a member of the board in collaboration with external partners. Accordingly, these strategic investments undergo in-depth analysis before being presented to the board. Furthermore, the board granted directors the authority to comply with and implement its strategic decisions within their respective entities. Therefore, board directors are held accountable for ensuring that their entities operate in line with the board's strategic decision. The board of directors also stipulates that the legal department must review and approve any proposal before it is presented to the board. This measure is intended to increase the quality of the board's decisions. In addition, the board mandates annual reports from all institutional entities. This allows the board of directors to accurately evaluate the institution's overall performance against the objectives of its strategic plan. Taking the above into consideration, the involvement of board directors in developing regulations and complying with them in their entities explains how they contribute to their institutional strategy.

Fourthly, the role of the institution's president is considered crucial because it has been found to interfere with three previous elements. The formal communication between the university president and vice presidents of vice rectorates, deans of supporting deanships, or deans of colleges had a positive impact on the institution's performance in relation to its strategy. The president of the institution has also led the strategic decision-making process by serving as the

chair of the board, reviewing strategic matters with the vice president through the Higher Coordinating Committee, and approving memorandums from the councils of supporting deanships and colleges. In addition to acting as the chair of the board, the university president served as the CEO. The university president has demonstrated outstanding leadership by directing board meetings, acting as the official representative to external organizations, inaugurating conferences and official meetings, and regularly engaging with shareholders. Taking into account the above, the institution has been able to perform in accordance with its strategic objectives due to the high-level of presidential leadership.

Fifthly, the utilization of technology has been recognized as a vital factor in the effective contribution of board directors. The board portal was primarily employed to effectively implement board operations through the system of councils *Majales*, resulting in increased directors' involvement and a highly practical and convenient approach The board agenda is uploaded to the portal in advance of board meetings, enabling board directors to thoroughly review proposals and express their views or make inquiries. The board meetings are effectively utilized to prioritize important proposals. Through the KSU council portal, these meetings are managed to facilitate discussions where members can address any comments or inquiries. Thus, adopting the portal in the boardroom has proven to result in savings of time, effort, and funds. Furthermore, the board portal has demonstrated its reliability as a source for restoring board documents, given that all supporting documents for each proposal and decision by the board are uploaded in the *Majales* system of councils, facilitating easy access for the directors. Given the above discussion, it becomes evident that the incorporation of technology within the board of directors serves as a key driver, allowing directors to actively contribute to the board agenda, especially in strategic subjects.

In summary, the emergent model sheds light on five key elements that collectively determine the contribution of board directors to the strategy of their institution. First, it emphasizes the

significance of board directors' role-based contribution and accountability in shaping the institutional strategy. Second, it stresses the importance of the active engagement of board directors at various organizational levels in strategic decision-making processes. Third, the model recognizes the crucial role of board directors in developing regulations and ensuring compliance implementation that promotes institutional success. Fourth, it underscores the pivotal role of the institutional president in achieving institutional strategic goals, emphasizing individual leadership and strategic influence. Fifth, the model recognizes the positive influence of adopting technology within the board, particularly through a board portal, deeming it a significant factor in fostering the contribution of board directors to institutional strategy.

## 5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter is dedicated to fully discussing the findings of this case study. It contains a comprehensive discussion of every theme in relation to current and pertinent literature. The chapter begins by considering how board directors contribute and are accountable to the institutional strategy through the rule-based approach. Then, it considers the use of technology to manage the work of the board as it was found to be a key driver of increasing the contribution of board members in this study. It is followed by providing a full discussion of the board directors' involvement in strategic decisions for their institution at different levels within the institution. Next, it sheds light on the leadership role of the president of the institution in relation to its strategy within and beyond the work of the board. Afterwards, the board members' duties to the institution's strategy are further discussed as part of the development of regulations and compliance requirements approved by the board. Finally, a model which emerged from the findings is proposed to summarize the manner in which board directors contribute to the strategy of their organization within the context of the KSU.

Subsequently, the conclusion of this thesis will be presented in **Chapter 6**.

# Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the thesis. It begins by summarizing the study's findings, which were extensively discussed in the previous chapter. This is followed by presenting an evaluation of the study's quality and a discussion about how the aims and objectives have been accomplished. Next, the chapter continues by describing the implications that can be taken from this study. Afterwards, the study's limitations are acknowledged and clarified. The chapter proceeds to offer suggestions for future research opportunities. The subsequent section contains a personal reflection about the PhD journey. The end of the chapter provides a summary of what has been covered.

## 6.2 Summary of the study's findings

In the previous two chapters, the analysis of the findings through thematic development was presented in **Chapter 4**, while these findings were discussed along with relevant literature in **Chapter 5**. This section will briefly discuss the five main themes that emerged from the findings.

The first theme focuses on the contribution of board directors to their organization's strategy through their official roles within the institution. It highlights the authority and obligation of board members to perform specific strategic tasks as part of their job. These tasks vary depending on the board members' official positions and the specific roles, such as the vice president of rectorates, and dean of colleges, or dean of supporting deanships. Thus, this theme indicates that the contribution of KSU's council members to the institutional strategy is greatly influenced by their official positions. They are held accountable for carrying out strategic

decisions and/or implementing them on behalf the board as part of the authority of occupying organizational positions.

The second theme presents the significance of technology as a factor that enables board members to participate effectively in the strategic agendas of the board. It was observed that the KSU council uses the system of councils *Majales*, which is a board portal, to manage board operations and activities. Adopting the KSU's *Majales* was found to be the key to increasing board members' involvement on the agendas, by allowing them to access board topics in advance of board meetings. Board members' contributions are enhanced by being able to carefully review all board proposals in a comfortable and easy manner. In addition, *Majales* was identified as a useful tool for organizing council meetings by prioritizing essential proposals and managing board discussions. Lastly, *Majales* was utilized to restore the database of board documents, which is extremely useful for reviewing past documents and preventing any conflicts of decision.

The third theme considers the board members' engagement at different levels of decision-making in the institution's strategy as an explanation of how they contribute to their situational strategy. Most of the council members of KSU are the heads of their entities within the institution, which includes vice rectorates, supporting deanships, and colleges. Thus, they are responsible for engaging in making strategic decisions for their entities through sub-boards within their entities. In addition, they are obligated to implement the institutional strategic decisions of the university council in their bodies. As the head of the vice rectorate, supporting the deanship, or college, one bears the responsibility of ensuring that the strategy of their entity aligns harmoniously with the broader institutional strategy. This is in addition to their efforts involved in establishing the strategic direction at the board level of the university council. In summary, this theme underscores the significance of the KSU council members' engagement

at various levels in strategic decision-making as a determinant of their contribution to the institutional strategy.

The fourth theme places emphasis on the advanced leadership of the university president as a factor in achieving the institutional strategy. The university president has taken on the role of chair and CEO of the board. The university president has demonstrated exceptional abilities in leading university council meetings by encouraging all members to participate in the board's strategic agenda. Hence, the board's strategic proposals are thoroughly discussed in a positive environment under the control of the university president. In addition, some strategic decisions can be decided by the university president without consulting the board. These may include operational or strategic proposals from entities within the institution that require external communication with government ministries or agencies. In such cases, the university president has the authority to make decisions and inform the relevant bodies to implement them. Additionally, the president of the university has established a subcommittee aligned with the university council that is referred to as the Higher Coordinating Committee. As members of this committee, the president and vice presidents focus on considering strategic and significant topics, conducting thorough discussions and reviews prior to submitting proposals to the university council. This has been found to be effective in preventing time waste during board meetings and ensuring that the board's strategic agendas are properly introduced to the board. Therefore, the university president's advanced leadership is considered an essential key to enabling the institution's strategy to be achieved.

The fifth theme focuses on the efforts made by board directors to develop regulations and enforce implementation compliance as a way of contributing to the institution's strategy. The council members have approved the board's new regulations that aim to accomplish the university's strategic plan by governing the institution's finances, spending efficiency, and investments with external bodies. The result of this was a significant improvement in the work

of both the board and the institution by uniformizing the process of work, particularly in making strategic decisions on the board. Furthermore, the board members have put forth effort to ensure that the strategic decisions of the board are implemented on their respective entities and that the board receives updates regarding the progress. The KSU council has established mandatory procedures for reviewing and approving board proposals by the legal department before these can be submitted to the board. This is intended to ensure that the board' decisions do not violate any rules by making mistakes in approving incomplete proposals, specifically, when it comes to strategic proposals with external bodies that may incur additional liabilities for the university. Moreover, it is the duty of the KSU council members, who are the leaders of their entities, to submit annual reports to the board. An annual report covering overall performance against the institutional strategy is required by each entity within the institution. Thus, the contribution of KSU council members to the institutional strategy can be determined through their efforts in developing regulations and enforcing the implementation to fulfil the objectives of the university strategic plan.

The application of a case study method enabled the researcher to acquire in-depth data concerning the contribution of governing body members to the strategy of their institution. As a result, the study made a significant contribution by developing a model that sheds light on the processes by which board members contribute to strategy through their respective roles within the institution (please **refer to 5.7**). It delineates three core elements: board directors' role-based contribution and accountability, engagement at multiple strategic decision levels, and developing regulations and ensuring compliance. These approaches determine the way that board directors influence their institution's strategy. Supporting these elements, the institution's president plays a pivotal role as an enabler in achieving the institutional strategy within and beyond the board. In addition, technology is another factor that positively influences board

members' engagement. By utilizing *Majales*, board members can effectively exercise their roles in relation to the realization of the institutional strategy.

In summary, the five elements of the model present a detailed explanation of the process by which board directors contribute to strategy of their institution.

## 6.3 Assessment of the study's quality

The author has followed specific procedures in this doctoral study to ensure that essential research quality requirements are fulfilled. The objective is to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative research. Scholars on qualitative research have defined the term trustworthiness into four concepts: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba,1981; Lincoln & Guba,1985; Rolfe, 2006; Stahl & King, 2020).

To address the credibility concerns of this study, the first stage was to create a clear and coherent research design. The research question, philosophical position, and the inquiry logic of the study are consistent with the research design in identifying evidence that explains the reality of phenomena being studied such as how council members contribute to their institutional strategy. The author developed the research design thoroughly, covering all aspects of research methodology, research method, research context, level of analysis, unit of analysis, unit of observation, methods of data collection, sample selection, time horizon, and method for data analysis (see **Figure 4, Chapter 3**). In addition, this case study has used triangulation of sources, including elite in-depth interviews and documentary sources. Thematic analysis was involved in the process of developing theme codes and categorizations that emerged from the themes. It was undertaken simultaneously by analyzing interview transcripts and collected official documents. This leads to greater confidence in the interpretation process and increases the credibility of the findings. Additionally, the researcher has undertaken a scientific journey to gather data for the study. The researcher has carried out the primary interviews and gathered relevant documents for the main study. Also, the

researcher conducted interviews for the pilot study at the same institution. It was very useful to become familiar with organizational operations and reflect the views of the sub-council members, which increased the credibility of the findings of the main study. Moreover, the credibility of the study has been boosted by engaging in consultation and discussion with highly experienced supervisors in governance and qualitative research. Therefore, supervisory meetings have been held on a regular basis to discuss the analysis and interpretation of the study's results, ensuring high levels of credibility in this research project.

The methodology chapter tackled the study's transferability concerns by giving a description of the participants involved in the study (see **Table 9, Chapter 2**). Additionally, during the analysis stage, details about participants' work are extracted to address the research question. The participants were highly suitable for providing information that was relevant to the research question. Furthermore, the general and specific details of the research context are completely described in this thesis.

This study provides detailed information on how the research was conducted to address the dependability concerns. The foundation of the study relies on the philosophical positions of social constructivism and interpretivism. This is consistent with all of the research question, the guiding theory, the logical inquiry, data collection, analysis procedures, and the findings of the research. In addition, the data collected in this case study was collected using two different methods to increase its dependability and stability.

To address confirmability concerns in this research, as mentioned earlier, triangulation was conducted in this study to collect data consisting of in-depth interviews and documentary methods. Also, the author employed reflexive analysis throughout the thesis to prevent personal bias from compromising the quality of the research. Furthermore, this thesis consists of a coherent structure and detailed quotations from participants' interviews and collected

documents. This is organized to provide full transparency of the process of theme development through codes, categories, and themes.

## 6.4 Accomplishment of the study's aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the study that were established at the outset of this thesis have been largely fulfilled. An overview of these accomplishments will be detailed in the subsequent paragraphs.

<u>Research aim:</u> The aim of this research is *to explore the nature in which council members of King Saud University exercise their responsibility in relation to their institution's strategy.* This case study offers a comprehensive analysis of how council members, with their varied roles and responsibilities, contribute to KSU's strategic plan. This analysis brought about the identification of processes and approaches where KSU council members fulfill their responsibilities within the institutional strategy. It encompasses board directors' role-based contribution and accountability for the institutional strategy through various positions such as vice presidents of vice rectorates, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges. Additionally, the advanced leadership of the university president greatly impacts the institutional strategy both internally and externally to the board. Furthermore, the involvement of board members at multiple levels of strategic decision-making has proven valuable in advancing decision-making processes within the governance system. Also, board members contribute to the formulation of regulations and enforcement of compliance with performance standards, aiming to realize the institutional strategy. Moreover, the utilization of technology was found to be significantly effective in driving board members to actively engage in decision-making and planning processes. In light of the above, the aim of this study has been accomplished.

<u>Research objective 1:</u> The first objective of this research is *to explore the manner in which board directors exercise the duties that are associated with their roles as part of the*

*institution's strategy.* Based on the analysis of the findings, it can be concluded that the council members of KSU have played different roles in relation to their institution's strategy. It was found that the board delegated authority to directors through their roles within the institution. These roles that are included are those of the university president, vice president of vice rectorates, dean of supporting deanships, and deans of colleges. Also, board directors are obligated to take strategic actions and decisions as they are the leaders in their respective divisions. This study identified that board directors take on their duties with respect to institutional strategy by fundamentally occupying specific positions within the institution. This research objective has been accomplished based on the information provided above.

Research objective 2: The second objective of this research is *to determine the extent to which board directors are involved in making institutional strategic decisions.* It was found in this study that board directors take a significant part in the decision-making process of institutional strategic decisions. The analysis of the findings showed that the council members of KSU have been involved in various stages of institutional strategic matters. This mainly includes the college council or equivalent level and the university council level. It was determined by the leading role of board directors in making strategic decisions for their institution as they chair college councils or equivalent. It was evident that board directors are responsible and actively engaged in making strategic decisions within their entities on behalf of the KSU's council. Furthermore, the study revealed that board directors are greatly involved in the process of making decisions about the institutional strategy at board level. This entails scrutinizing strategic proposals ahead of board meetings and actively participating with other members in board discussions. In some instances, board directors contribute to subcommittees of the board to make the most effective strategic decisions. In consideration of the above details, this research objective has been met.

Research objective 3: The third objective of this research is *to explore the approach in which board directors utilize the organization's resources to implement the institutional strategy*. The analysis of the collected data from this study shows that board directors utilize organizational resources in different forms. The use of technology to handle board operations through a board portal has been found to be highly effective in organizing the work of the board towards the institutional strategy. This was identified to add value to the way the board functions by enhancing the quality of work and making it easier to access and manage board agendas. In addition, board directors have contributed to the approval of board regulations that aim to use institutional resources efficiently. The new spending efficiency policies in these regulations aim to thoroughly review the financial aspects of any contracts with external private companies, such as consultations and training plans. Moreover, board directors have actively participated in establishing a new governance mechanism for their institutional investments with external partnerships. The approval of these new regulations was intended to make efficient use of organizational resources in realizing the strategic plan of the institution. Given the aforementioned points, this research objective has been achieved.

Research objective 4: The fourth objective of this research is *to identify the extent to which board directors ensure that implementation is performed in accordance with the organizational strategic objectives*. This thesis proves that board directors in this case study have established performance standards that must be adhered to. This can be found by developing new regulations that aim to govern the work associated with board operations. It includes procedures that board proposals must follow prior to their submission to the board level. For example, it is necessary for the KAI to review financial proposals before referring them to the university council. This was complied with to ensure the implementation of the financial aspects of the institutional strategy was managed and evaluated by one entity of the institution. Similarly, all board proposals must be reviewed and approved by the legal

department before being submitted to the board. The purpose of this was to prevent the board from making any illegal decisions. In addition, members of the board are obligated to set compliance performance standards for their entities. They are also in charge of overseeing the progress of the performance of their entities against strategic objectives as part of the university's strategic plan. This is because every entity within the university, including colleges, supporting deanships, and vice rectorates, is required to submit an annual report. The board must receive the annual reports on institutional performance after being evaluated by the Vice Rectorate for Planning and Development and the Deanship of Development and Quality. Based on the above points, this research objective has been accomplished.

Research objective 5: The fifth objective of the research is *to propose a model that outlines the contribution of board directors to their institutional strategy.* This study extends the understanding by introducing an emerging model that intensely explains the processes through which board members contribute to institutional strategy. The model offers valuable insights into the relationship among these processes and how they interact with each other. It identifies three main correlated elements: 1. role-based contribution and accountability to institutional strategy, 2. engagement at multiple levels of strategic decision-making, and 3. development and enforcement of regulations and compliance. These approaches are influenced by element 4. advanced presidential leadership as an enabler for strategy realization. Additionally, element 5. technology as a driver fostering effective contribution positively affects element 2. Overall, the model highlights the importance of these five factors in illustrating the mechanisms in which board directors impact the institutional strategy. In consideration of the above details, this research objective has been achieved.

The accomplishment of the set aims and objectives of this research signifies that the primary question introduced at the start of the study has been successfully addressed. In summary, this

thesis reveals the manner in which council members of KSU contribute to their institutional strategy.

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of how the research's aims and objectives were achieved. The implications of this study are discussed in the following section.

## 6.5 Implications of the study

The thesis provides important implications for understanding the contribution of board directors to their institutional strategy within the context of the higher education sector. The findings of this research provide insight into how the members of the governing body of a university affect institutional strategy.

This study reveals specific approaches undertaken by KSU council members, explaining how they exercise their responsibilities in relation to the institutional strategy. These encompass diverse roles and obligations held by board members, including vice presidents of vice rectorates, deans of supporting deanships, and deans of college. Additionally, the study highlights the exceptional leadership of the KSU president in facilitating the successful implementation of the strategy, both within and beyond board meetings. Furthermore, the findings of this study demonstrate the value of the board members' engagement at various stages of decision-making processes within their institutional entities and at the board level. Moreover, the study sheds light on the significant role played by council members in establishing new regulations that align with the institutional strategic plan and enforcing implementation compliance within their entities. It also recognizes the impact of technology, specifically the board portal *Majales*, as a tool to promote active participation of board members. Through this research, valuable insights into the governance mechanisms of KSU have been provided, contributing to the existing knowledge base and filling gaps in the literature on governance processes and practices within the context of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia

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The study findings have led to the formation of an emergent model that considerably contributes to understanding the impact of board directors on the strategy of a higher education institution. Thus, five specific areas are highlighted in the model that reflect the contribution of board directors to their institutional strategy. The model offers in-depth analysis of its components and their connections, as well as the interference among them. It enlightens the efforts of board directors in carrying out the strategic duties of their institution. It also stresses the importance of institutional resources, such as adopting technology, in strengthening the effectiveness of board directors as they fulfill their duties within the institution's strategy. The model is considered to be the first to draw attention to the processes that outline the contribution of university council members to strategic matters of their university within the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia.

Feedback regarding the results of this study will be given to KSU, where this study was conducted. This study is the first to focus on the work of board directors in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. Hence, this case study is structured to provide insights into the manner in which KSU council members contribute to the university's strategic plan. This thesis includes an in-depth analysis of the work of KSU's council members that affects the institutional strategy. The findings of this study highlight areas where council members have put in effort to achieve the objectives of the university's strategic plan. Thus, the KSU can concentrate on the factors that enhance the involvement of council members in the planning and implementation of the strategic objectives of the university. In addition, the results of this study demonstrate important factors that greatly impact the involvement of KSU council members in the council operations and activities, especially those that are part of the strategic plan. The institution could achieve significant improvements by optimizing operations of its

board and enhancing methods through which board directors add value to the strategic plan, as recommended in this study.

This case study has several important implications for practices in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia. Firstly, this study extensively explores the mechanisms of the governing body of higher education institution in Saudi Arabia. As a result, it offers suggestions for best practices that higher education institutions can implement to achieve a high level of board directors' involvement in their institutional strategy.

Secondly, the study's findings identify valuable practices for board directors to apply in carrying out their responsibilities related to the institutional strategy. This includes advocating how board members engage in various decision-making processes across diverse levels within the governance system. Such engagement offers optimal and broader perspectives, allowing governing body members to meaningfully influence strategic matters that shape their institution. KSU and other higher education institutions can benefit from adopting these recommended approaches for an effective contribution of board members.

Thirdly, the importance of technology in the board's internal functioning is increasingly recommended by the study's findings. As discussed earlier, the use of technology has been a key factor in fostering the contribution of directors to board agendas. This study gives a comprehensive explanation of how technology can enhance the board directors' ability to perform their strategic duties of the institution effectively. Therefore, the use of technology in the governance body within the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia can be considered as one of the implications of this study for best practices.

Lastly, the study's findings draw attention to the crucial role of the board leadership in terms of achieving the institutional strategy. This was evidenced by effective management of board meetings and taking responsibility for making vital decisions to ensure continuous operations in accordance with the institution's strategic plan. Therefore, this study provides important

implications for practices that leaders of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia can employ to optimize the strategic performance of their institutions.

In summary, this study has significant implications that assist in understanding the governance process of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. It provides additional insights into the roles of KSU's council members with respect to the institutional strategy. This study's findings have significant implications for studies on higher education governance, including literature, theory, and practices.

## 6.6 Limitations of the study

This thesis, similar to other works in the social science field, has its limitations. The primary limitations in this study include methodological constraints, challenges in generalization, ethical concerns, and issues of subjectivity.

Certain methodological limitations should be taken into account when considering the findings of this research. This research employed an intensive case study method, and the findings can only be considered valid within the context of KSU. The sample size was restricted to members of the KSU council as the aim of this research was to focus on the contribution of individual members of the KSU to their institutional strategy.

The results of this study may not be applicable to other organizations or sectors. This is because differences in the organizational structure (e.g., board's composition and leadership) or the external environment of the organization where it operates (e.g., private or public sectors) may produce various outcomes when studying the inputs of board directors to organizational strategy. Thus, the fundamental limitation of this study can be attributed to the generalization of the findings. However, there may be an expectation of further studies on similar institutions within the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia.

Conducting this case study has been limited due to ethical issues. The context of the research, which focuses on the KSU council, has been observed to contain sensitive information and

classified documents. The documents and work of the KSU council are only accessible to council members. Therefore, the participants' information and views have not been disclosed in this thesis, except for those in the context of the research. In addition, the research information and content forms were signed by all participants before engaging in the interviews.

In spite of efforts to mitigate bias, as detailed in **Section 6.3**, the researcher acknowledges that personal values, past experiences, and interactions with those participating in the study have played a role in shaping the research process. Although there were procedures to minimize the impact of the researcher's biases, absolute objectivity was not claimed. By following Lincoln & Guba's (1985) guidelines for trustworthiness in qualitative research, the researcher has been committed to being transparent and maintaining the integrity of both the research and its participants. Moreover, the research design of this study is intended to ensure that the findings and conclusions are reliable and respected in both academic and professional circles.

In summary, the limitations of the study are briefly discussed in this section. Suggestions for further research will be provided in the next section.

## 6.7 Suggestions for further research

This case study has explored a new area of scientific research by examining the contribution of board directors to their institution's strategy in the context of the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia. Taking into consideration that this thesis is the first to provide an in-depth analysis of the efforts of university governing body members in relation to the institutional strategy, this section offers some suggestions for further study.

Firstly, this study concludes with an emergent model that outlines the contribution of board directors to their institutional strategy. This provides an opportunity for further research to test and refine the emerging model from this study in other institutions within the context of higher education to expand the applicability of the model.

Secondly, this thesis offers an opportunity for further research through comparative case studies of different institutions within the context of this study. Comparative case studies of other universities or institutions within the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia would allow us to gain additional understanding of the strategic role of members of the governing body in the sector. It would also enable comparison of the findings of this study with other universities or institutions, which could lead to consistent or contrasted outcomes. This could shed light on how different governance structures or organizational cultures may affect the role of board directors in relation to their institution's strategy. Thus, this study offers an excellent opportunity for future research by carrying out comparative case studies of other higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia.

Thirdly, the cross-sectional approach was used in this case study due to the time constraints for completing the doctoral degree. Moreover, the purpose of this research is to explore the contribution of KSU council members with respect to their institutional strategy. Therefore, an opportunity for further research could be taken through a longitudinal approach. This would allow for the examination of phenomena studied over time and track potential changes. A longitudinal study could be applicable when it is intended to focus on examining the successful achievement of the institutional strategy. Thus, longitudinal studies would be suitable for future research.

Fourthly, expanding the scope of this study would be another opportunity for further research considering the level of analysis of this study is the KSU's council. Hence, future research would extend the scope of study to include other segments within the institution such as managers, employees, faculty members, and students. This would be appropriate for studying how institutional strategies are formulated, implemented, and perceived.

Finally, expanding the scope of this study beyond the context of Saudi Arabia presents a potential opportunity for further research to investigate how governance practices observed at

KSU can be adapted to diverse international contexts with analogous governance structures, professional standards, cultural backgrounds, leadership competencies, and regulatory systems. By focusing on regions sharing these similarities, conducting a comparative study is suggested as a means to advance the understanding of effective governance practices in higher education institutions globally.

Some future research avenues from this thesis are presented in this section. The next section will offer a personal reflection about the doctoral journey.

## 6.8 Personal reflection

I have been on a remarkable journey towards my PhD in the past four or so years. From a personal point of view, these years provided significant opportunities for advancement. Completing my doctoral studies has enhanced my self-skills and abilities, allowing me to become more aware of my capabilities, ambitions, and limitations. I have found that the process of pursuing my doctoral degree to be challenging through different stages. Thus, I would like to draw attention to the challenges that are common amongst PhD students.

Firstly, I studied my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the USA, where the first step was to agree on the degree plan with academic advisors. These programs are designed with particular courses that students must pass in order to obtain the required credit hours for completing the degree. The course's syllabus contains a set of assessments for each course so students will have a clear understanding and expectation of what tasks they are required to work on, such as taking exams or conducting sample projects. While pursuing this doctoral degree in the UK, I have recognized that the process is not quite similar. Although, the doctoral program does include a number of mandatory models as well as various graduate courses and training that is designed by the Doctoral and Researcher College. I have experienced that pursuing my PhD involves an ongoing learning process that does not finish even after the official completion of the degree.

Secondly, the learning process of pursuing a PhD encompasses several stages. The first stage begins by searching for a research topic through existing literature. This includes in-depth reviews of academic articles and books that are relevant to the research subject. It is followed by critically identifying the gaps of knowledge that this research could fill. The process continues by developing a theoretical framework that addresses the research questions. The second stage involves determining and justifying the research methodology of the study. This includes establishing an accepted manner to justify the philosophical position, inquiry logic, methodology choices, and research design of the study. The next stage involves collecting data for the study, where the researcher's tasks include arranging interviews and collecting documentation from the institution. Then, the data must be carefully analyzed which requires the researcher to immerse himself in the data through the process of theme development. The next step is to write a discussion of the study's findings against the current and relevant literature. This is followed by finalizing the study findings by providing conclusions of the study. The final stage involves editing the entire thesis by combining all chapters and improving the quality of the work. This paragraph presents a summary of the outcomes of obtaining knowledge through a doctoral degree.

Thirdly, the PhD journey involves challenging tasks that require the researcher to self-manage the progress of the work. This requires the researcher to spend a significant amount of time alone in order to complete a specific task, such as reading references, preparing for meetings, or writing drafts of the thesis chapters. Thus, I have realized that successful completion of the doctoral degree actually takes place through self-motivation and continuous work on a daily basis. In the end, the researcher will benefit from acquiring knowledge on how to conduct scientific research that is acceptable in academia through this PhD journey.

## 6.9 Chapter summary

This chapter marks the conclusion of the thesis. A brief summary of the study findings is given at the beginning. Following that, there is a discussion designed to evaluate the study's quality. The chapter continues by providing an explanation of how this study has accomplished its aims and objectives. The subsequent sections provide discussions on the study's implications and limitations. This is followed by providing suggestions for further research. Afterward, a personal reflection about the doctoral journey is included. Finally, this section is intended to summarize the chapter.

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# Appendix 1

Dear Saqer Alnajran,

The approval process for your Ethics ApplicationSREC-HBS-20210428-SAAL9955 has now been completed.

Regards,
The Ethics Team

# Appendix 2

Ref No: KSU-HE-21-357

**The Researcher / Saqer Alnajran**

Peace, mercy and blessings of God

With reference to the recommendation of the Standing Committee for Scientific Research Ethics to authorize the heads of the Scientific Research Ethics Subcommittees to give approvals.

We inform you the approval of the Sub-Committee on the Ethics of Human and Social Research at its session number (34) of 2020 on 24/05/2021, to conduct the research shown in the following table:

| No. | Name | Research Title | Tool | Status |
|-----|------|----------------|------|--------|
| 1 | **Saqer Alnajran** | The Role and Contribution of Board of Directors to Strategy Implementation of the Higher Education Sector in Saudi Arabia: A Case of King Saud University (KSU) | **Interview** | **Approved** |

Therefore, we hope that the concerned authorities at the university will facilitate the researcher's task.

Yours sincerely.

Sub-Committee Chair

Human and Social Research Ethics

Dr. Abdul Salam bin Wail Al-Suleiman

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# Appendix 3

**20 September, 2021**

Name : SAQER ABDULLAH O ALNAJRAN
Nationality : Saudi.
Position :  Teacher Assistant
College of : Business Administration

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

    The Human Resources Development Dept of King Saud University (KSU) certifies that the above named has the KSU approval to have a scientific journey at Kingdom of Saudia Arabia for (90) Days starting from 1/9/2021.

    He has been given this certificate at his request to submit to whom it may concern.

الاسم   :  صقر بن عبدالله النجران
الجنسية :  سعودي
الوظيفة :  معيد
بكلية   :  إدارة  الأعمال

## الى من يهمه الامر

تفيد إدارة تنمية الموارد البشرية بجامعة الملك سعود بأن الموضــح اسمه وبياناته أعلاه قد تمت الموافقة على قيامه برحلة علمية إلى المملكة العربية الســـعودية لمدة (٩٠) يوم ابتدأ من ١٤٤٣/١/٢٤هـ الموافق ٢٠٢١/٩/١م.

وقد أعطي هذه الإفادة بناء على طلبه لتقديمها إلى  من يهمه الأمر .

مدير ٢

اجابة تنمية الماوارد الـ..ـرة

فيصل بن سعود احربي
ALHARBI FAISAL SAUD B.
DIRECTOR OF  HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT  DEPT.

ملف رقم (١١٦١١٦)

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# Appendix 4

## To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that Mr. Saqer Alnajran has completed 31 interviews with KSU staff members as part of his PhD research project titled: *The Role and Contribution of Directors to Strategy Implementation of the Higher Education Sector in Saudi Arabia: A Case of King Saud University (KSU).*

If you have any questions or enquiries, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

**Rayed Alotaibi**
Chairman of Managment Department
ralotaibi2@KSU.EDU.SA
0114693424

# Appendix 5



## Interview Protocol

**Section 1. Information about the participant and warmup:**

- Tell me about your education background and work experiences?
- What's your position(s) in the organization?

**Section 2. Information about their views and activities on the council:**

- In general, how do you see the work of the council?
- How do you participate in the council meetings?

**Section 3. Information about their work within the board:**

- Tell me about your work as a council member.
- How do you engage in the council agenda?
- How do you participate in the council decision-making?

**Section 4. Information about their views regarding the national strategy:**

- Tell me about the difference in your work with respect to the 2030 Vision for Saudi Arabia.
- Have you been asked to perform other tasks/obligations?
- Have you seen any new policies or procedures with respect to council operations?

**Section 5. Information about their contribution to strategy:**

- How do you participate in developing and executing strategic plans and programs?
- How do you formulate new policies and regulations?
- How does the council manage strategic challenges?
- How do you ensure effective execution of strategies?

**Section 6. End of the interview and participant reflection:**

- Do you have any final thoughts about the research topic that you would like to add?
- Thank you for your participation.

# Appendix 6

## An example of the interview transcripts:

**Interviewee:** (Membership: KSU Council)

(Role: University Vice President)

(Code: KSUX)

**Researcher: Doctor, thank you so much for taking part in this interview. We start with a question about your educational and work experience.**

Guest: My name is [participant name] and I am the Vice President for [X]⁷ at King Saud University. I received my Bachelor's degree from [K] University in 1984. I then worked as an assistant teacher for a year. Subsequently, I completed my Master's in [CE] at the University of [C] in 1988, majoring in [CEM]. I moved to the University of [T] in 1992 to pursue my PhD. Afterward, I returned to the Kingdom, where I was appointed as an assistant professor and later promoted to associate professor, and eventually, to the position of professor. I served as the Head of the [CE] Department for about four years. Following that, I moved to the practical aspect of the university, specifically the Vice Rectorate for [X]. In this role, I supervised the general [X] administration at the university for approximately three years. I then moved to the Ministry of Higher Education, where I managed [X] for emerging universities. Currently, I have been serving as the university Vice President for [X] at King Saud University for the past 10 years.

**Researcher: Regarding the university council, how do you see the work of the council?**

Guest: The university council is an organized council at the university level. The process is arranged as we use the system of councils [*Majales*]. The idea of the system is to become paperless. The system of councils works in the sense that the topics are specified, and each subject has all the supporting documents. These supporting documents can be reviewed on the basis that the decision is taken, and all topics are listed. Then these proposals are settled based on a kind of classification, with topics grouped, for example college councils, scientific committees, student issues, bachelor students, master students, and doctoral students, faculty affairs, aspects of finance, and the Deanship of Student Affairs. These are categorized into their

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⁷ Note: Letters have been used to replace identifying information in this transcript to protect the participant's identity. Anonymization log of all replacements is kept separately.

respective categories until a new topic comes up with the appropriate category for it. Usually, in order for the council meeting to be effective, all members of the university council are informed of the topics in advance, and then they review the supporting documents before the council meeting. So, each member knows exactly this topic, its implications and concerns, allowing them to form an opinion before attending the council meeting. A member can make an inquiry about the points and whether he agrees or rejects the topic, and then one can write his comments in the council system. Comments are received on a specific topic, which advises on this topic, and whoever proposes its presentation in the council is responsible for answering all questions from council members on these topics. The point is, sometimes the inquiries still need more clarification in the university council meeting. Of course, all topics are now discussed in the council. When the university council meeting commences, the effective agenda ensures a standard meeting. Members review the topics, and proposals without comments indicating that all council members have reviewed the supporting documents. For example, does the decision originate from colleges, scientific committees, the Deanship of Graduate Studies, the Deanship of Scientific Research, or the Deanship of Human Resources? Are these decisions made by them? The recommendation from other councils which are proposed to the university council for approval, for example, approval or rejection. So, the topics where members of the council do not write a comment on them, so the council decides that these do not need to be discussed during the meeting; it only discusses topics with comments. As for the topics with comments, they are given an opportunity. Sometimes, if the inquiry is not clear or needs some details, they ask the person who wrote the inquiry to give details of his inquiry, and then the requester is the one who responds to the inquiries from those present. All members of the council can submit inquiries, each with specific questions or comments. The requester, typically someone who is responsible for the matter under consideration, responds to and clarifies the points raised by the council members, and then they see the issue as convincing or not; sometimes there are differences in points of view. At this point, the consideration is that the president of the council his excellency the president of the university begins to conclude that we have not reached a decision by a majority in general.

**Researcher: In this case, what happens?**

Guest: We now come to the issue of voting, which determines what the elements of voting are. Voting is requested as an alternative, and a decision is made based on the results.

**Researcher: Does the president decide? Or is it by vote?**

Guest: No, the decision is determined by a vote. Voting on existing alternatives, as the members vote on these alternatives, and the option with the highest votes is the one which is taken, and the same process is applied to all of the topics that are reviewed.

**Researcher: Is there a difference between strategic topics and other topics?**

Guest: It depends on the source of the proposal. Usually, when any topic is presented, the first check is on the clarity of supporting documents.

**Researcher: Is the implementation of [Y] or [X] discussed in the university council?**

Guest: Of course, these [X] are listed in Chapter Four of the regulations. These [X] are frequently not included in the university council. These are usually reviewed between the university vice rectorate, the procurement department, and the financial department.

**Researcher: Are these topics presented to the university council?**

Guest: No, these topics are not included in the university council.

**Researcher: Are these [X] determined by the university council?**

Guest: The university council generally approves it. But for example, if I want a [X] for 20 [Z], like [PG] or, for example, a [NB], these take actions between the procurement department, the proposal examination committee, and the university vice president for [X]. Of course, the approval of his excellency the president in the financial aspects in the first place, as well as the cooperation of the university Vice Rectorate for [X] and the [MF], of course. Now the [SE] representatives, all of them are now intervening in this [X] and asking for details about it, so there must be convincing reasons for the [MF] regarding [SE], as well as the [CAPX].

**Researcher: Is it this approach decided by the university council?**

Guest: No, these [CX] often only need the approval of the university president.

**Researcher: What about the university's strategic plan?**

Guest: We have plans that come from the university Vice Rectorate of Education and Academic Affairs, the development and renewal work, and in addition to the colleges. There is a planning committee in which all colleges have representatives who discuss the plans, such as from the College of Engineering or the College of Business Administration. After they approve them, a recommendation is submitted to the university council for approval. Actions that are divided by a particular plan.

**Researcher: When are the council meetings held?**

Guest: We have a meeting each month.

**Researcher: Do the council meetings have a full quorum?**

Guest: Yes, for us, the meeting date is adhered to. We strictly adhere to the schedule. You find that those who are absent, for example, are either sick or have something urgent.

**Researcher: In terms of the agenda of the council, who determines the work of the council?**

Guest: There is the secretary of the council, and there is his excellency the president of the university, and now any member of the council has the right to raise a direct proposal to his excellency the president of the university or the Secretary of the Council if this topic must be presented. Here, when a proposal is referred to him, the secretary of the council determines if the proposal is supposed to pass through a lower council or not before it can be presented to the university council.

**Researcher: To the college council, right?**

Guest: Yes, the college council and to other deanships, as the proposal must follow the procedures before it can be presented to the university council. Whoever determines the filter is the secretary of the council, before he forwards it to the council. For example, if we send a proposal while he checks it and goes through the procedures so that it reaches the stage of presenting it to the council, as he gives the approval to be present to the council.

**Researcher: Regarding decision-making in the council, when does the voting take place?**

Guest: Vote can be chosen when there is a conflict.

**Researcher: What about if the document is not clear?**

Guest: If the document is not clear, it will be returned. The council is clear on this point. If there is any confusion or a missing recommendation, it will be returned, withdrawn from the meeting, and the person or the responsible party will be asked to re-present it with the required information and documents. No decision is taken unless everything is obvious.

**Researcher: When will there be a vote for a decision?**

Guest: Voting, in general, takes place when there is a difference of opinion on a particular thing. For example, because the topic has not been commented on, it means that there is a consensus on it. Of course, whether it is a rejection or acceptance. For other topics, it will be discussed in the meeting. If the applicant is able to convince those present that there is no problem, it will be accepted. When there is a difference of opinion, people say this, and others say that, it becomes apparent that we acknowledge the lack of clarity. Then, his excellency the president of the council sees the general trend among members, is there a majority or not? If there is no majority, the decision is taken based on the vote.

**Researcher: Are there many decisions that need votes?**

Guest: No, not many decisions reach this stage. All proposals have been passed through several councils and studied thoroughly. However, there are some issues that may require a vote, either because the decision is not clear or there is an equal division among the members.

**Researcher: Regarding strategic decisions, are they discussed in the council?**

Guest: In regard to the council's strategic decisions, we have an equivalent body at the university known as the Higher Coordinating Committee for his excellency the university president and the university vice presidents. These topics are presented to them as an advisory council for his excellency the university president.

**Researcher: Does the committee include the president and vice presidents only?**

Guest: The president and the vice presidents, for new and daily matters. With regard to the university committee, decisions on certain matters are delegated to this committee, which functions in an advisory capacity. There is no predefined agenda, and I will illustrate with an example. When topics are brought to the committee, some are deliberated by the Higher Coordination Committee. Once an agreement on the strategic aspects is reached, these matters are then presented to the university council. Thus, proposals, whether introduced by the originating party or external proposals reviewed by the university committee, are then submitted to the university council for a final decision.

**Researcher: What about agreements or cooperatives?**

Guest: All of them must be presented to the council, along with the agreements.

**Researcher: You mentioned the [CX] that are not covered by the council.**

Guest: Yes, only [CX].

**Researcher: As for the strategic issues and their external agreements with outside institutions, are they presented to the council?**

Guest: Yes, they must be presented to the council in sufficient ways, and the agreement itself can be amended. It is possible that nothing can happen unless all members of the council are convinced of it. This is the function of the council secretary, to present these agreements to the legal department before. Then, he takes the deanship's recommendations, after taking necessary amendments if required, then he presents them to the council, meaning the council secretary ensures that these proposals follow the administrative procedures before they are presented to the university council.

**Researcher: How does the council review the strategic decisions?**

Guest: The strategic decisions are reviewed by the Higher Coordinating Committee. Addressing specific problems, such as dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and how we dealt with such situations in the university's working policies and regarding the arrangements for that scenario.

**Researcher: What happens if the subject is presented to the committee and then to the university council?**

Guest: The decision is approved, and if a proposal comes, let's say from his excellency the minister, if his excellency the president of the university is informed directly, we ask, "What do you think about, for example, a specific problem or something?" or "What is the appropriate opinion?" Sometimes the Higher Coordinating Committee calls people if it is related to graduate studies, and the Dean of Graduate Studies. If it is associated with the medical city or a health subject, for example, the Medical Director. So, this is a senior advisory committee to the president of the university. For example, if I have a topic on which I seek their consultation, I do so before submitting it to the university council.

**Researcher: Before you present it to the university?**

Guest: When the council interferes with it. They may leave the topic until the agreement is appropriate, and their decision is more like a recommendation. Like this topic is not something that should be submitted in these days, like when the topic is best to be discussed, or this is an alternate proper arrangement you take. I mean, we have the [MPX] which we are working on at the university. We have been working on it for about four or five months, with a company and with the [RCR] and [DGDA]. But we have not reached the end because we must discuss the alternatives they offered us, and we will reach the final alternative by presenting it to the Higher Coordinating Committee, stating that this is the [MPX] and asking the members for any comments or suggestions regarding our completion of it.

**Researcher: In the decision-making process, are there parties that have an impact on the council's decisions?**

Guest: There are no partisanships or political blocs.

**Researcher: Are there members who influence the decisions taken by the council?**

Guest: No, what is it like? All members of the council are equal, and each one has the right to voice his opinions. For example, if there has been a discussion between two people. Everyone now hears this opinion and that opinion. We are all part of public policy. Let's assume I am a college dean, and in the council discussions, my standpoint is not personal but that of representing the college. If the discussion pertains to a general topic, particularly when my college has not intervened, I approach it from the perspective of a council member. Is this opinion more appropriate than the other?

**Researcher: If a large group agrees on something, does it become difficult for a member of the council to oppose?**

Guest: No, the council does not have this. Everyone has an opinion to share. Of course, once I express my viewpoint, I need to justify it. Not only do I say it, but I say it and justify it.

Sometimes one changes the public's opinion as a whole. He has a certain point that they do not pay attention to.

**Researcher: With regard to the Vision 2030, Have you noticed new approaches that the council has adopted, or have you been asked as a member to undertake additional tasks?**

Guest: Of course, the decision-making process involved normal administrative decisions in the past, but when the vision was launched, I tell you frankly, the university determines the right goal, stating that by 2030, it must reach the high level. Among these objectives, for example, it assesses any decision made by the council on whether it serves to improve the university level or not. When it comes to costs, there are several criteria that must be verified at the university level. At the university level now, the Deanship of Graduate Studies, the Deanship of Scientific Research, the published research, all these now have a different direction. Before, it was only a personal motive, as you said. If there is a personal motive, I do this, but we did have a goal that we must achieve from a financial point of view. Now, the [MF] actually evaluates these [CX] to determine if they truly serve the goals of 2030. This is what concerns the university. Now, when I ask for a [X], it must have not just an [ER] in the traditional sense, but a [UR] such as [F], [S], or improving [PL]. Let's say I want to [BC]; the question is why do I need this? I need to find strong justifications for why this [X] is needed. The approval process has shifted from the old times when a [X] could be requested without justifications. Now, it requires strong and convincing reasons, becoming subject to scrutiny, initially by the [MF] alone. If you can persuade them to agree, there will be [SE] representatives; now you want this [B], the [SE] will be first asked: why do you want it? And why do you want it that big? They go into more detail. We are here talking about the [SE]. Let's go back to the [MF]. Of course, the [MF] has [CAPE]. Now there are several filters before the approval of the [X] attained. From an educational point of view, the goal is for the university to become one of the approximately best 50 universities. This implies a focus on research rather than solely on teaching. The acceptance rate for graduate students and the faculty are crucial factors. With a defined goal in mind to increase postgraduate student enrolment aligned with the budget evaluations based on scientific research, which constitutes the largest percentage, scientific research comes to qualify the faculty members. The university, frankly, benefits from sending faculty members to other universities. There is no problem with it in terms of scientific and academic qualifications. The question now is: Who wants to work with students? The aim is to increase their number and quality as researchers and international students. Bringing in foreign students is not only about obtaining a Master's degree but also developing certain skills, such as research skills. The difference between before Vision 2030 and now, every administration

has a goal—what should you do?

**Researcher: Has the decision-making process in the council changed regarding this matter?**

Guest: Yes, there has been a change. Initially, decisions were made based on certain criteria. Now, decisions are made with a focus on financial terms, as the university aims to become a non-profit institution. Currently, the decision-making involves considerations of financial implications. For instance, with postgraduate students, there was no pressure on the department head and the college dean to attract additional students. We know that postgraduate programs contribute to the generation of revenue, regardless of whether we accept 10, 50, or 100 graduate students, without consideration of the difference. Now, there is marketing for postgraduate programs, promoting the college's existing services, and motivating faculty members to contribute to exams and laboratories, resulting in more pressure on the dean.

**Researcher: As for the policies, have there been any changes within the council?**

Guest: Now the policies are aligned with the Ministry of Education's policies.

**Researcher: What are the new regulations in the council?**

Guest: The council has its own regulations, but we are still aligned with the Ministry of Education.

**Researcher: Regarding the implementation of decisions, how does the council follow up on the work?**

Guest: If, for example, we have a specific agreement at the university, the King Abdullah Institute for Consulting Studies is the one that signs the agreement in the new arrangement. This agreement is for the Vice Rectorate for [X]. We begin working with the third party and the King Abdullah Institute. We are working with the consultant [RCR] and [DGDA] on the subject of the [MPX], but the agreement is signed with the King Abdullah Institute.

**Researcher: Is it required for the council to approve the agreement and then forward it to the relevant entity within the institution?**

Guest: The council must approve the agreement's terms and conditions. If agreed upon, we move to the executive aspects. The execution goes to the King Abdullah Institute to sign it. Several agreements are signed by the King Abdullah Institute directly for the concerned colleges, for example, with certain restaurants. It is the one who signs the agreement and becomes responsible for its implementation.

**Researcher: Do you submit that to the council?**

Guest: You mean an update? No.

**Researcher: For the agreement' assessments?**

Guest: No, the council only determines approval, renewal, and rejection.

**Researcher: And how do you follow up on this?**

Guest: There is a specific deanship that approves the agreements, and there is a certain deanship that works on that.

**Researcher: Is the issue more administrative that does not require the approval of the council?**

Guest: Yes, this is an administrative matter. The council's role shall be in approving or renewing them. Often, if there is a specific problem, such as with the research chairs, which is an administration responsibility. For example, some of the research chairs did not work as required, so they were referred to the council to cancel these chairs, and they were subsequently stopped. Now there is a deanship responsible for the research chairs, their achievements, and what they do. Proper management and monitoring are essential.

**Researcher: Is there a member responsible for follow-up?**

Guest: Of course, monitoring goes through the deanship or the vice rectorate.

**Researcher: Is this reported to the council?**

Guest: It is reported to the council if there is a problem, for example, with research chairs, scientific groups, and other issues.

**Researcher: What is the procedure if there is a problem in the implementation for a long time?**

Guest: If an issue arises, it will be brought to attention, and a decision will be made to either continue or cease the activity. The same thing happened with scientific societies that were registered with us, and they have not shown any achievements. So, the council is the one who can approve or cancel it or make a decision about it. Regarding the progress of the work, the relevant vice president may raise an update to the council.

**Researcher: How are decisions made regarding the implementation of the strategic plan?**

Guest: For the strategic plan, the Vice Rectorate for Planning and Development is responsible for it, and its directions are distributed to the entire university. We have this in the Vice Rectorate regarding [X], studies, and [D]. We are responsible for implementing them. The directions come from the vice rectorate to the entire university. We discuss these matters in the council periodically.

**Researcher: Does the vice rectorate follow up on the implementation with the agencies, departments, deanships, etc.?**

Guest: Yes, the Vice Rectorate for Planning and Development is the one that is involved with these entities. We submit reports to the university council and sometimes to external entities

such as the [ME], the [RC], the [RCR], and the [MP]. As well as periodic reports on the university's activity. Now, for strategic plans, the university Vice Rectorate for Planning and Development is requesting feedback and updates from all university entities.

**Researcher: Can you talk about your involvement in strategic decisions like the [MPX]?**

Guest: Regarding the [MPX], we are currently at about 60% or 70% completion, and once the plan for implementation is finalized, we present it to the Higher Coordinating Committee for approval. If approved, we proceed with the work. Some aspects require approval from the university council, while others do not. For instance, if I want to update his excellency the president and the university vice presidents on a specific topic, especially if it concerns the university, there are points that requires specialization. In the case of the [MPX], I sought expertise from the faculty of [AP], involving them in the committee to criticize, evaluate, and consult on the [MPX].

**Researcher: Is this consultation initiated through a committee?**

Guest: Yes, for briefing and information. I could complete the work without the committee, but because it is something significant for the university.

**Researcher: Is this approved by the university council?**

Guest: No, it does not involve the university council. However, as it concerns the university, we discuss it with the Higher Coordination Committee to understand the [X]'s status.

**Researcher: Do some members of the university council work on a committee to study a particular subject?**

Guest: Yes, sometimes the issue becomes difficult, and we cannot reach a solution. Furthermore, instead of presenting the topic a second time to the university council, if we reach a discussion in which the topic is not clear, we form a committee. This committee studies the topic and gives its recommendations in the next meeting. So, the topic is studied by specialized people and becomes clear.

**Researcher: Is there a committee that can issue decisions on behalf of the university council?**

Guest: No, it is not possible. The matter must reach the university president, who gives his directions.

**Researcher: What if the topic comes from outside the university?**

Guest: If it comes from outside the university, it is directed to the responsible party. It may come directly to me, to a dean, or to the university president. The party determines the next steps, whether it requires forming a committee or referral to a specific entity at the university.

The decision depends on the subject, and there is no permanent committee but is formed based on the matter at hand.

**Researcher: Thank you, doctor. Is there anything you would like to add?**

Guest: God bless you. These are indeed good questions. Thank you for the interview.

**Researcher: God bless you and thank you for your participation.**