

The Role of Inclusive Leadership in Enhancing the Strategic Flexibility

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Abstract: *The paper aims to explore the role of inclusive leadership in its dimensions (openness and communication, support and guidance, accessibility) in improving strategic flexibility with its dimensions (market flexibility, service flexibility provided, and competitive flexibility). The study uses a sample of (162) employees and professors at the University of Kufa. The study used the questionnaire as a main tool to collect data related to the study variables. The goal of the research is to test a number of main and secondary hypotheses related to the relationship of influence and influence between research variables by answering questions related to the study problem. In order to process the data, the study used many statistical methods to reach the results using the program (SMART PLS) and (v.20 SPSS). The results show that leadership practices at the university led to the development of strategies in an attempt to keep pace with changes in the educational environment. These results require strengthening leadership practices that focus on participation and take the views of the professor and employees. Consequently, flexible strategies can be developed that reflect positively on keeping pace with developments in the educational environment.*

Keywords: *inclusive leadership, Strategic flexibility,*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the light of the changes taking place in the external internal environments of the organization and its essential role in the work of the organization, it has become necessary for all types of organizations to develop specific skills for moving in a dynamic environment and to identify and respond to their needs. This requires the use of flexible strategies to cope with uncertain changes. Although there are many ways to gain competitive advantages, the strategic flexibility is the most important, which requires more studies and research in its contents and the ideas it includes (Glabiszewski, Grego-Planer, Liczmańska-Kopcewicz, & Zastempowski, 2018). It is therefore important to extend the scope of research with regard to strategic versatility to include service organizations in wider areas beyond the scope of business, as there is a distinct limitation of research in this field, on the one hand. On the other hand, employee engagement is a predictor of corporate growth and a turnaround of successful outcomes, which involves leadership that takes this strategy into account (Brozovic, 2018). According to Rodriguez (2018) only 32% of workers are actively involved in their companies, as shown by a survey of a variety of industries in the United States of America. He points out that there is a need for an open and adaptive style of leadership that reflects positively on working practices. Therefore, it will be interesting to study inclusive leadership by focusing more on employee needs of enhancing affiliation and appreciation.

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In this study, therefore, inclusive leadership was chosen as one of the variables of the study due to its significant role in supporting the organization as well as its employees. After reviewing the literature on the inclusive leadership variable, it became clear that this was the means to support the organization, given the capabilities that support the work environment. This is due to its dimensions of openness and communication, which represent a global leader's ability to communicate with his leader to deliver opinions and to invest ideas that are in the organization's interest. Likewise, support and guidance that represents the extent to which the inclusive leader can offer support operations to individuals working to achieve the expected goal. In addition, the ability of any individual within the organizational unit to reach a leader in order to support decisions or to participate in any idea that is in the organization's interest. At the same time, a strategic flexibility variable, which is an important tool to keep pace with changes in the organization, has been chosen. The University of Kufa has been chosen as a research field in order to achieve a set of objectives that have not been addressed in previous studies. It includes the use of an inclusive leadership style in an educational institution because of its important role, because at the same time, the educational institution is a productive and service institution.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Concept of Inclusive Leadership

The historical roots of inclusive leadership extend to the distant past, but it started in the sixth century BC, when the beginning of this concept started. Before discussing the concept of universal leadership, you must know exactly what the word "inclusive" means. Within the scope of development theory, the concept of inclusiveness expresses the need to proactively ensure the participation of the poor and disadvantaged in development processes. The dictionary tells us that inclusion means something "covering or including everything" or "not limited to specific people." While within the scope of the theory of leadership more specifically, "inclusive leadership" was used to emphasize the need for more diversity and better relationships between the leader and the working personnel (Wuffli, 2015). Amagoh (2009) shows that leadership is the ability to influence others to motivate and encourage them to achieve a set of goals for the organization. It can also be described as a set of activities that a leader performs in all areas that require the issuance and decision-making and thus the issuance of orders. Leadership is by influencing the working people in general, and conducting and directing their behavior in line with the organization's goals and interests. The leadership is working hard to coordinate its efforts, individuals wanting to present to them and thus achieving the desired goals. Leadership is a link between the perceptions of the organization and its employees and plays an important role in harnessing the efforts of individuals in the required direction in line with the desired goals. It was a major role in controlling the problems facing the workflow and in finding solutions for them.

The concept of inclusive leadership in management is proposed by Adapa and Sheridan (2017). Inclusive leadership means a win-win situation with a common goal and a vision of mutual relations. Moreover, Boitano, Dutra, and Schockman (2017) emphasize the important role of individuals in this relationship, and they paid attention to their perception of leadership. Bhandari, Bliemel, Harold, and Hassanein (2004) describe the inclusive leader as a valuable, person able to communicate with all individuals working at all levels of the organization and responsible for the results. Moreover, the inclusive leader is considered to play a major role at all levels of the organization. Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv (2010) explain that inclusive leadership means a more visionary leadership model capable of integrating teams more effectively into creative business contexts. Inclusive management practices can help individual employees reveal their self-understanding by providing them with knowledge of their positions. Such practices can also reveal how others cooperate with each other in their work and finally contribute to building models to develop the capabilities of individuals working on their routine while at work. It also affects employee welfare and an increase in creative behavior, thanks to the motivational effects of a inclusive leadership

style, increased employee satisfaction, commitment, and participation in tasks and assistance in building strong relationships between leaders and individuals working on the basis of mutual learning. Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) also indicate that inclusive leadership means the participation of working people, allowing them to contribute their unique capabilities and perspectives, and encouraging them to participate in organizational activities. The inclusive leadership also focuses on caring for the members' needs of openness and availability of the working group, as well as enabling leadership to participate in power, teaching and training.

2. Dimensions of Inclusive Leadership

According to the relevant literature, the inclusive driving scale includes three dimensions of inclusive leadership, namely openness, support, direction, and accessibility. Inclusive leadership with these dimensions can respond to the employee more positively and support the employee more effectively, then reduce employee negative behavior (Rodriguez, 2018).

1 - Openness and Communication: This dimension focuses on the leader being distinguished by being open to hearing new ideas from working individuals. As well as the leader's ability to communicate with working individuals and seeks to create new opportunities to improve the working methods of the organization. Also involving individuals in the process of discussing the desired goals and new ways to achieve them. When the leader shows more openness and communication, he listens to the new perspective of individuals and focuses on the way in which work efficiency can be enhanced through openness. A global leader can help individuals be eligible for the job and reduce the incidents facing the task assigned to them (Rodriguez, 2018).

2 - Support and guidance: This dimension supports the strengthening of how the leader deals with the working individuals by knowing the ideas that are going on in their minds and involving them in decision-making processes because they are more knowledgeable about the work they perform. This means that working individuals can consult a leader at any time, not only providing support and guidance, but also facilitating their participation in the job and career independence. Leaders tolerate the opinions and failures of individuals by listening to their opinions, tolerate their mistakes in a rational way, and provide encouragement and guidance to support individuals when they make the mistakes.

3 - Accessibility: This dimension addresses the extent of the individual's ability to reach his leader in the work, share his ideas and present the obstacles that he is exposed to while working and that are an incentive for him to build distinguished relations between the leader and the working individuals. In this process, the employee's need for belonging will be met. According to the theory of self-determination, the working individuals have three basic psychological needs: competence, independence, and relevance. Working individuals strive to meet these needs and tend to the environment that meets these needs and when the basic psychological need is met, people will show more positive results. On the contrary, the negative impact will result in the employee's inability to continue his work. When individuals are in a supportive environment that can support their needs for efficiency, independence and connectivity, their behavior in procrastination will clearly reduce this as an open and encouraging leadership style. From the foregoing, we see that accessibility in inclusive leadership provides an environment supportive of the individual worker need (Rodriguez, 2018).

3. Concept of Strategic Flexibility

Ansoff, 1965 is among the first researchers to mention strategic flexibility in his book "Organizational Strategy" from an emergency perspective who suggested that strategic flexibility could be achieved through a mix of product markets that is diverse enough to minimize the negative impact of disturbances that can be established (Miltenburg, 2003). Strategic flexibility can be defined as the degree to which an organization is prepared to change its strategy in response to opportunities, threats, and changes in the external environment. Strategic flexibility helps organizations feel critical changes in the

environment, prevents organizational rigidity and fosters creativity and innovation. Thus, strategic flexibility has an impact on the performance of the organization. However, relevant studies reflect mixed results with respect to these phenomena. Many evidences support the idea that strategic flexibility improves an organization's performance. Hilhorst, Smits, and Heck (2005) consider that the degree of flexibility that the organization needs according to the disturbances of the organization's environment, which is formed through its competitive strength. It can be measured in terms of dynamics, complexity and predictability. Moreover, the organization's flexibility is the degree to which it possesses a variety of actual and potential actions, and the speed with which it can increase the management's ability to control and improve the organization's ability to meet the challenges it faces. Liyanage and Weerasinghe (2018) show that strategic flexibility is an important source of competitive advantage in dynamic and challenging work environments. Also, Voola and Muthaly (2005) show that strategic flexibility allows organizations to adopt "sudden management" where organizations can manage unstable and rapidly changing markets. In the same context, De Toni and Tonchia (2005) show that flexibility is generally understood as the property of the interaction between a system and its external environment. In this case, elasticity acts as a filter as it temporarily protects the system from external disturbances. Consequently, flexibility acts as an absorbent of doubt and uncertainty. De Toni and Tonchia (2005) also explain that strategic flexibility can be illustrated by the speed at which competitive priorities within an organization that are directly related to operational flexibility can be identified and understood as the ability to change practices in a timely manner. In addition to this, capacity and positioning of strategic options in a specific situation within the organization because capacity is an indicator of the multiplicity of possible options. Whereas, positioning is an indication of its location to clarify the dimensions of strategic options.

4. Dimensions of Strategic Flexibility

The literature dealing with the concept of strategic flexibility indicates that there is a difference in how it is measured, due to the environment and the specificity of the product. Therefore, a Haraisa (2018) scale was used to measure the variable of strategic flexibility in line with the environment of the research sample. This measure includes three dimensions of strategic flexibility, namely, market flexibility, service flexibility, and competitive flexibility.

1. **Market Flexibility:** This dimension focuses on organizations' ability to adjust or fit marketing efforts in a changing environment in a long period of time. This can demonstrate market flexibility as the ability of organizations to evaluate and control their marketing efforts for a short period of time to meet and respond quickly to any situations in the changing environment. Market flexibility can be illustrated as the ability of an organization or organization to easily adapt to market changes without affecting the organization's business. On the other hand, market flexibility is defined as the ability of organizations to confront, respond to or influence market changes. Market flexibility includes many aspects such as entering a new market, market share and rapid response to customer requirements. Therefore, market flexibility indicates how organizations or organizations cope with the market by responding quickly to these changes and focusing on marketing efforts for growth and survival (Haraisa, 2018). Market flexibility indicates the organization's ability to enter and exit markets and place them in existing and new markets. By enhancing market flexibility, the organization is gaining a competitive advantage due to its ability to change and rapidly position itself within competitive markets (Shalender & Singh, 2015).

2. **Service Flexibility:** The second dimension of strategic flexibility is the flexibility of the service provided, which is the ability of organizations to produce and deliver goods and services to markets all over the world at preferential or competitive prices within a short period of time. To accomplish this requires many things such as operations, functions, materials, equipment, product production, knowledge of how the system responds, flexibility, and interactions with changes. Therefore,

the flexibility of the service provided can be defined as the force that gives organizations to be more flexible in providing goods and services and responding to changes and interactions with the environment (Haraisa, 2018).

Kumar and Singh (2019) indicate that the flexibility of the service provided means how well the organization is able to provide services and products of the required quality to the diverse markets that customers seek to obtain despite the presence of competing organizations. It is determined by seven types of service flexibility provided as follows:

- A. **Design flexibility:** it is the ability to provide new services.
- B. **Package flexibility:** means the ability to provide various services during a specific period.
- C. **Flexibility of delivery time:** It is the ability to expect service delivery.
- D. **Flexibility of the delivery site:** means the ability to provide service in different places.
- E. **Volume flexibility:** Means the ability to change product volume levels.
- F. **Flexibility of the system's durability:** It is the ability to continue to operate effectively despite changes affecting inputs and the process.
- G. **Flexibility of service recovery** means the ability to recover the service if something goes wrong.

3. **Competitive Flexibility:** The third dimension of strategic flexibility is called Competitive Flexibility, which means an organization's ability to respond to distinct customer requirements and changes and diagnose and adapt to environmental changes. Competitive flexibility is the ability of organizations to compete effectively in highly competitive markets and markets characterized by rapid technological changes and uncertain demand. On the other hand, competitive flexibility includes the following: prices, reducing production costs and diagnosing external environmental changes. Competitive flexibility can be defined as the ability of organizations to respond to all competitive factors and changes in the external environment (Haraisa, 2018). Celuch, Murphy, and Callaway (2007) show that competitive flexibility means the set of efforts and procedures that the organization follows, through which the organization is able to face the challenges of its corresponding organizations, and thus enables it to keep pace with changes in the labor market.

III. METHODOLOGY

The current study was conducted at the University of Kufa, and the study community included a number of individuals working at the University of Kufa (University Court) who number (275) affiliated for the purpose of coming out with an interest to clarify solutions to some of the problems facing the university. The study sample includes (200) employees out of (275) employees. The dependents who hold certificates (high school, diploma, bachelors, masters, doctorate) from the sample, the research sample, were retrieved. The retrieved forms are (168) forms and the valid forms are (162) forms. The model of the study clarifies the logical and relational relationship between the two study variables as well as clarifying the mutual bases for the relationships between the two variables. This study relies on two main variables that give rise to a number of sub-variables for each variable. The following measures have been adopted:

1- The independent variable is (global leadership). It guarantees three dimensions (openness and communication, support and direction, accessibility) based on the Rodriguez (2018).

2- The dependent variable is (strategic flexibility). It includes three dimensions: (shared vision, cooperation, and empowerment) based on the scale of Agha, Alrubaiee, and Jamhour (2012).

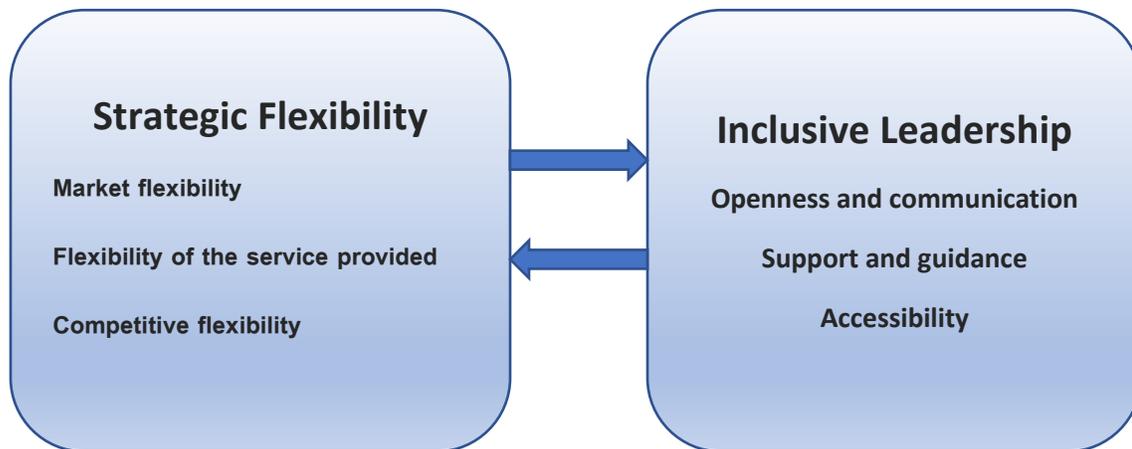


Figure 1. Research Framework

The study is based on a major hypothesis that: There is a positive relationship of significant effect for inclusive leadership in strategic flexibility. This hypothesis is divided into three sub-hypotheses:

1. There is a significant effect of openness and communication on strategic flexibility.
2. There is a significant effect relationship of support and guidance in strategic flexibility.
3. There is a significant effect of accessibility in strategic flexibility.

The questionnaire was relied upon to collect data mainly because it is a tool in collecting data and information. It was formulated in a way that aims at scientific research and not identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, the sample of the research. The questionnaire includes an introduction whose purpose is to be set, as well as information about each member of the sample. It includes (gender, age, academic achievement, years of service, and work location) as well as a definition of each study variable and also an explanation of each dimension of study. Table 1 explains the study variables and their dimensions, which were represented by (6) dimensions for each variable (3) three. The questionnaire form included (30) items distributed equally evenly, i.e. for each variable (10) items, i.e. for each dimension (5) items. It was prepared by relying on the relevant literature to define these dimensions, as well as benefiting from the opinions of experts in correcting the questionnaire items.

Table 1. Description of study variables

#	Main variables and scales	code	The dimension	Items No
1	Inclusive leadership (Rodriguez, 2018)	IL	Openness and communication	5
			Support and guidance	5
			Accessibility	5
2	Strategic flexibility (Haraisa, 2018)	SF	Market flexibility	5
			Flexibility of the service provided	5
			Competitive flexibility	5

We have relied on (Likert) scale which includes 5 options which are (agree strongly) weight (5) down to (do not agree strongly) weight (1) that is, the scale ranges between (5-1).

IV. RESULTS

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the study's main hypothesis and the subordinate hypotheses derived from it, as follows:

1- **The first main hypothesis:** This study assumes that there is an impact relationship of inclusive leadership with a positive moral significance in strategic flexibility. This means that strategic flexibility as a dependent variable is a real function of inclusive leadership, and that any change in the independent variable will result in a change in the dependent variable. The impact relationship will be tested using the SMART PLS program, which provides a simple regression method to test the relationship between two variables with a regression slope calculation (Beta). Its significance was also tested with calculated (t) and level of significance. The relationship that gets a level of significance less than (0.05) is accepted and vice versa is rejected. The simple regression method provides the determination coefficient that shows the variance in the dependent variable due to the change in the independent variable. The results of the effect appear as in Figure (2), and Table (2) is as follows:

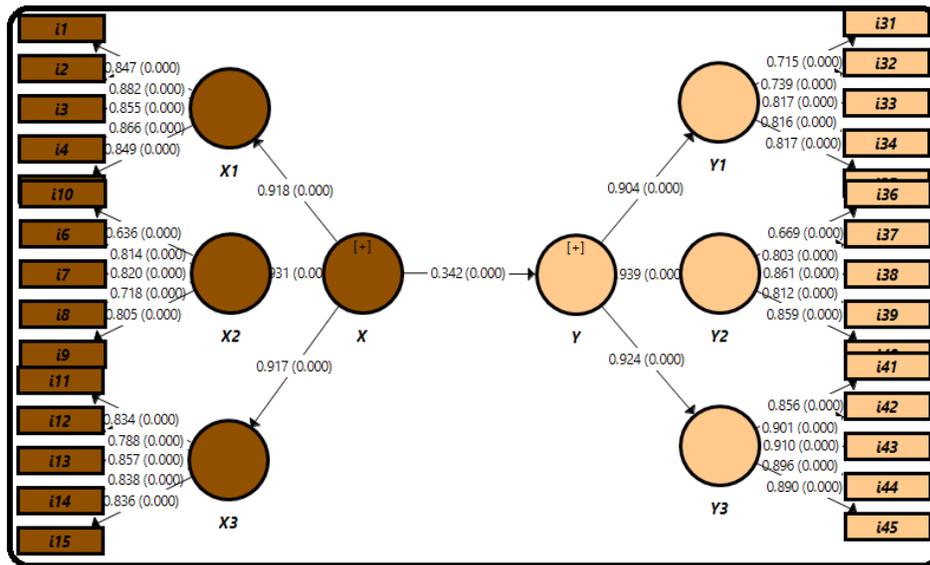


Figure 2. Regression coefficient results for the study variables

Table 2. Regression coefficient for inclusive leadership relationship with strategic flexibility

Independent variable	Dependent variable	β	T	$\sqrt{R^2}$	F	Sig
Inclusive leadership	Strategic flexibility	0.342	3.037	0.12	21.818	0.000

Figure (2) and Table (2) show that there is an effect relationship of significant and positive significance for the inclusive leadership in the strategic flexibility that amounted to (0.34). It is significant based on the achieved level of significance less than the level of significance assumed by the researcher of (0.05). This means that when one unit increases in inclusive leadership, it will lead to a (0.34) increase in strategic flexibility. The inclusive leadership also explains (0.12) of the variance in strategic flexibility. It is an acceptable ratio based on the calculated value (f) of (21.818) which is greater than its tabular value (4.00). On the basis of these results, this hypothesis is accepted at the level of this study.

2- **The Sub-hypotheses:** After testing the main hypothesis, the sub-hypotheses that stipulate an impact relationship of positive moral significance for inclusive leadership dimensions (openness and communication (X1), support and guidance (X2) and accessibility (X3)) will be tested in strategic flexibility. This means that strategic flexibility as a dependent variable is a real function of the inclusive driving dimensions. Any change in the dimensions of the independent variable will result in a change in the intermediate variable. The impact relationship will be tested using the SMART PLS program, which provides a multiple regression method to test the relationship between the dimensions of the independent variable and the dependent variable, by calculating the regression slope (Beta). Its significance is also tested with the calculated (t) and level of significance and the relationship that gets a level of significance less than (0.05) is accepted and vice versa is rejected. The test results are shown in Figure (3) and Table (3) as follows:

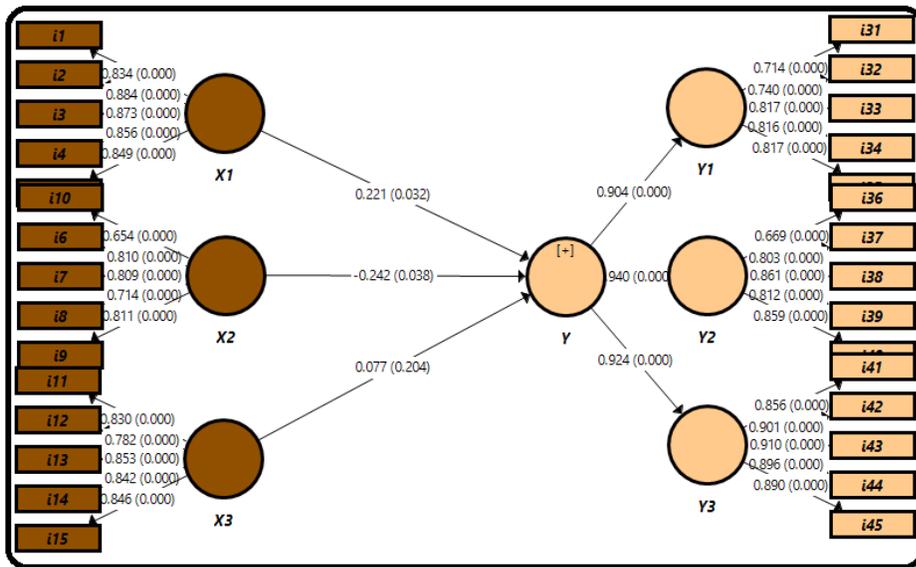


Figure 3. The regression coefficient results of the effect of inclusive leadership dimensions on strategic flexibility

Table 3. Regression coefficient statistics for the relationship of the effect of inclusive leadership dimensions on strategic flexibility

Independent variable	Dependent variable		T	R ²	F	Sig
Openness and communication	Strategic flexibility	0.221	4,667	0.17	10.78	0.032
Support and guidance		-0.242	6,942			0.038
Accessibility		0.079	1,225			0.204

Figure (3) and Table (3) show the results of the sub-hypothesis testing:

A- **The first sub-hypothesis:** This hypothesis stated that there is a significant influence relationship of openness and communication in strategic flexibility. The results show that there is a significant and positive effect relationship of openness and communication in the strategic flexibility, which amounted to (0.22). It is significant based on the achieved level of significance less than the level of significance assumed by the researcher of (0.05). This means that when one unit increases in openness and communication, it will lead to an increase (0.22) in strategic flexibility. On the basis of these results, this hypothesis is accepted at the level of this study.

B- **The second sub-hypothesis:** This hypothesis stated that there is a significant influence relationship of support and guidance in strategic flexibility. The results show that there is an effect relationship of significant but negative significance of support and guidance in the strategic flexibility that reached (0.24-). It is significant based on the achieved level of significance less than the level of significance assumed by the researcher of (0.05). This means that when one unit increases in support and direction it will lead to a decrease of (0.24) of strategic flexibility. On the basis of these results, this hypothesis is rejected at the level of this study because of the negative relationship.

C- **The third sub-hypothesis:** This hypothesis stated that there is a significant influence relationship of accessibility in the strategic flexibility. The results show that there is an effect relationship that is not significantly significant but positive for accessibility in the strategic flexibility, which amounted to (0.08). It is not significant based on the level of achieved significance greater than the level of significance assumed by the researcher, which was (0.05). This means that when one unit increases in accessibility it will lead to an increase of (0.08) in strategic flexibility. On the basis of these results, this hypothesis is rejected at the level of this study.

V. CONCLUSIONS

There is an agreement for the literature that dealt with the concept of inclusive leadership as one of the leadership methods required by the current environment and for its role in establishing the foundations of justice among workers and giving them a greater role by involving them in organizational processes. The leadership practices at the university, the sample of the research, led to the development of strategies in an attempt to keep pace with changes in the educational environment. The results show that listening to new opinions and ideas presented through university professors and employees has not all been taken as required. This is due to the nature of laws and regulations that the university is obligated to implement. In addition, there is a clear desire among the leaders at the university of the research sample to involve all organizational levels in decision-making processes but adopting them may contradict the current ministerial instructions. There are also limits or restrictions for communication between university leaders on the one hand and university professors and staff on the other hand, which negatively reflects on listening to problems or developing appropriate solutions at the appropriate time. The results of this study require strengthening leadership practices that focus on participation and taking the views of the professor and employees for the purpose of developing flexible strategies, which reflects positively on keeping pace with developments in the educational environment. In addition, it is necessary to open channels of communication between the university's higher management and the levels or cadres of all specializations, by moving away from the routine and looking at the problems away from the official atmosphere. It is important to use the powers granted to higher departments and not to abide by ministerial laws or instructions as much as possible for the purpose of increasing competition flexibility in line with the needs and desires of the market. Likewise, it is necessary to invest the knowledge capital that the university possesses and work to provide all means to support constructive ideas and opinions. Finally, it is important to promote the improvement of internal processes to be more inclusive by setting up workshops and courses and activating e-learning, because of its clear role in increasing the standards of the global classification. In addition, it is necessary to encourage international or international

partnerships to enhance the university's presence because of its clear role in increasing competitiveness and obtaining advanced ranks with advanced universities. This is done by providing material and moral support to the teacher continuously.

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