



Organizational Immunity and its Role in Institutional Excellence: An Exploratory Study from Employees' Perspectives at the Oil Products Distribution Company / Ministry of Oil

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Abstract:

This research study investigates the impact of organizational immunity on the attainment of institutional excellence at the Oil Products Distribution Company of the Iraqi Ministry of Oil. The components that encapsulate organizational immunity include but are not limited to organizational learning, organizational memory, and organizational DNA, which together empower the organization for adaptive response in the face of challenges and the resilience to bounce back. From here, an institution is expected to demonstrate excellence in leadership, in human resources, in service quality, and in organizational culture.

The study further states that there is a positive significant relationship between the tenets of organizational immunity and institutional excellence. Thus, enhanced institutional immunity creates institutional resilience, which enables taking care of stability, adaptability to the environment, and sustainable competitive advantage. Results show that organization learning and memory contribute significantly to institutional excellence in building the retention and adaptability of knowledge in the pro-active response to challenges.

The study, therefore, emphasizes the need for improving organizational learning through continuous development programs and using organizational memory to ensure consistency within decision-making and operational success. It also underscores the importance of culture-building on resilience and adaptability toward creating institutional excellence sustainable over time and positioning the organization for competitive advantage and growth.

Keywords: Organizational Immunity, Institutional Excellence, Organizational Learning, Organizational Memory, Ministry of Oil.

1. Introduction:

We must first understand the term "immunity," which refers to the ability of a living organism to defend and protect itself against external factors that may cause harm or disease. Immunity is an innate response to internal and external pressures and the ability to resist diseases (Al-Badayneh, 2021). Hence, the concept of "Organizational Immunity" emerged and was articulated by various researchers and writers. This concept is derived from the human immune system, likening an organization to the human body. It reflects how the body detects viruses and other threats, recognizes and senses them, and then defends and resists them to protect and heal itself. Similarly, organizational immunity represents an organization's capacity to sense, respond to, and counteract internal and external challenges to maintain resilience and stability (Al-Bakdali & Al-Samman, 2023). It is defined as the ability to identify and eliminate intruders inside and outside the organization, enabling it to maintain health in a highly hazardous environment. Identifying intruders is one of the primary objectives of the organization's immune function, categorized into three types: external intruders, internal intruders, and factors related to internal decay, represented by "organizational aging (Nehme, 2024). It is also defined as a product of evolution that embodies organizations' attempts to adapt to surrounding changes. This is achieved through developing a set of internal mechanisms that enable them to address internal weaknesses and confront external threats (Majeed & Lafta, 2022).

According to (Ali et al., 2023), organizational immunity, or resilience, is defined as an organization's ability to maintain stability and effectiveness during change, uncertainty, or stress and resist external pressures and internal changes. Organizational immunity is also defined as a barrier that protects and shields the organization from crises and external attacks through its policies, procedures, and processes, implemented by specialized experts (Barham, 2022).

The importance of organizational immunity lies in helping the organization remain stable, effective, and competitive in a rapidly changing business environment (Abazeed, 2022). Organizational immunity is a modern concept that plays a vital role in institutional excellence, reflecting an organization's ability to adapt to environmental changes and internal and external challenges. This topic is highly relevant today, as it represents a self-sustaining system that strengthens itself without needing independent, costly entities in terms of effort and money. The immunity system is pervasive in all facets and departments of organizations and significantly impacts employee performance (Alkhafaji et al., 2023). Several dimensions have been identified and widely agreed upon by many researchers (Mahdy, 2022); (Ali & Ali, 2022); and (Sherwani, 2021) agree on three main dimensions: organizational learning, organizational memory, and organizational DNA or genetic structure. Organizational learning has become essential in rapidly changing environmental conditions impacting organizational operations. It enables organizations to find new methods to cope with this rapid pace, ultimately helping them achieve their goals (Abunaser et al., 2023). Tasks, functions, processes, and management areas can classify organizational memory. It includes technical, organizational memory, cultural, organizational memory, marketing organizational memory, and administrative organizational memory (Ameen & Mhaibes, 2024).

Organizational DNA is defined as the organizational traits that distinguish it from competing organizations, woven from its social and cultural fabric (Alkhafaji et al., 2023). Some also view it as a set of unique attributes that characterize the organization, setting it apart from other organizations and enabling it to face threats and sustain its existence (Asaad & Hameed, 2023).

Institutional excellence and its standards have become essential for administrative development to improve performance levels. Many studies have focused on developing and forming clear visions and strategic plans to achieve this (Mukhlif, 2023). (Hashem, 2022) In addition, institutional excellence reflects the combination of management elements and the organization's construction in superior ways to address external changes and conditions effectively. It signifies an integrated approach to organizational performance. (Basheer & Hassan,

2024) defined institutional excellence as the process of leveraging all available resources of the organization and aligning organizational behaviors towards efficiently implementing strategies to achieve superiority in all organizational domains. Institutional excellence is a trait, a set of characteristics, or a distinctive element of an institution that makes it unique and enables it to sustain this advantage for a long time due to its complexity (El-Ebiary, 2021). Achieving institutional excellence in all its standards and indicators relies on strategic planning to build a solid foundation for all its components, including policy planning, systems, structure development, process planning, resource investment, and human resource development (Karam & Kitana, 2020). (Felićio et al., 2022) indicate that institutions striving for excellence should communicate the vision to employees, empower them, link excellence to activities and processes, evaluate excellence, enhance technology-related skills, and encourage learning. Institutional excellence is critical in today's organizations, as pursuing excellence, progress, and understanding global excellence standards is necessary (Hasannajad et al., 2023).

Achieving institutional excellence can be accomplished through various means, and each organization may have a unique perspective on excellence different from other organizations (Ubaid et al., 2020). The research problem lies in assessing the company's ability and commitment to the principles of organizational immunity and its role in institutional excellence, especially amid the rapid changes in economic environments.

Consequently, the research problem was defined by raising questions about the current state of organizational immunity in the studied company, the feasibility of its application to the research sample, and the role of organizational immunity in achieving institutional excellence within the company. The significance of this research stems from two main aspects. First, it contributes by conducting a field study on organizational immunity's impact on the company's institutional excellence. The second aspect focuses on two essential areas for the company: organizational immunity and institutional excellence, which are objectives the company strives to achieve, enhance, and reach.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development:

In a study conducted (Alshawabkeh, 2021) on the relationship between governance and institutional excellence, the findings indicated that organizational immunity and governance levels were high in the Greater Madaba Municipality, as perceived by the sample participants. The study also revealed a statistically significant effect (at $\alpha \leq 5\%$) of governance dimensions—organizational justice, accountability, sustainability, and transparency—on organizational immunity within the organization studied.

The study conducted by (Barham, 2022) aimed to verify the existence of an impact of organizational immunity on strategic leadership in secondary schools in the governorates of southern Palestine. The study concluded a statistically significant relationship between organizational immunity and achieving strategic leadership in secondary schools in the governorates of southern Palestine.

A study by (Hashem, 2023) aimed to assess the impact of sharing marketing knowledge on attaining organizational immunity in Jordanian industrial corporations using a quantitative methodology; the following outcomes have been obtained: The sharing of marketing knowledge influences building organizational immunity in Jordanian industrial corporations. The study conducted by (Haasan & Haddadi, 2024) addressed the impact of organizational immune systems by focusing on three dimensions (organizational learning, organizational memory, and organizational DNA) on the ability of tourism companies in the Middle East to confront uncertainty and ambiguity in the tourism work environment. The discussions demonstrated the importance and impact of the dimensions of organizational immunity and their impact on enhancing the ability of tourism companies to confront uncertainty, challenges, and rapid changes they face. In a study conducted by (Zakaria Ali et al., 2024), the direction, strength, and importance of the influential relationship between organizational immune systems and crisis

management strategies were tested based on a sample of (246) university leaders and their assistants in public universities, and (117) university leaders and their assistants in private universities. The results showed that organizational immune systems significantly positively impact crisis management strategies in both samples. In addition, a test of comparative models was conducted, and it was concluded that there are no differences in the relationships between the two societies. In a study that addressed the relationship between organizational immunity and strategic success, which aimed to find an answer to whether organizational immunity has an impact on the strategic success of banks, the results indicated that organizational immunity has a positive role in enhancing strategic success in the government and private banks in the study sample (Hmood & sagban Hasan, 2022). The study conducted by (Alsuwaidi, 2023) showed that employee motivation, internal knowledge sharing, and a culture of cooperation are important precursors to e-service quality. However, e-service quality needs to predict institutional excellence significantly. Also, implementing a quality policy in the company does not mitigate the impact of e-service quality on excellence. In a study by (Augustine Mhaibes, 2024), they sought to benefit from the government excellence model in Iraq to evaluate institutional performance. The research sample included 32 leading figures from the Iraqi presidency. The UAE quality management model was used to evaluate institutional excellence. The results indicate that government institutional excellence constitutes a crucial foundation for public institutions to achieve sustainable success and gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive environment. The study's results (Alzuod et al., 2024) showed that administrative creativity and institutional excellence were average in the private hospital in Zarqa Governorate. The study recommended that policymakers in private hospitals in Jordan pay great attention to developing administrative creativity in its dimensions (modernity, adaptability, and predictability) to achieve institutional excellence. The research hypotheses can be elucidated as follows, based on the aforementioned:

H1: There is a correlation between the dimensions of organizational immunity and institutional excellence.

H2: There is a statistically significant impact relationship between the dimensions of organizational immunity and institutional excellence.

3. Methodology:

A. Data Collection:

This study uses a slightly modified version of the original questionnaire developed by (Ameen & Mhaibes, 2024) for organizational immunity and (Basheer & Hassan, 2024) for institutional excellence. (50) items were included in the questionnaire, of which (30) refer to organizational immunity and (20) to institutional excellence. A five-point Likert scale was used, where the respondent was asked to indicate how much he agreed/disagreed with the items. A descriptive and analytical approach was adopted for the current research. The research sample was represented by several employees working in the Engineering Authority. (150) questionnaires were distributed to the number of employees, and (120) items were obtained and distributed according to gender, educational level, and years of service.

B. Measurement of variables or definition of variables

This study uses a slightly modified version of the original questionnaire developed by (Ameen & Mhaibes, 2024) for organizational immunity and (Basheer & Hassan, 2024) for institutional excellence. (50) items were included in the questionnaire, of which (30) refer to organizational immunity and (20) to institutional excellence.

Figure (1) shows the relationship between the two research variables:

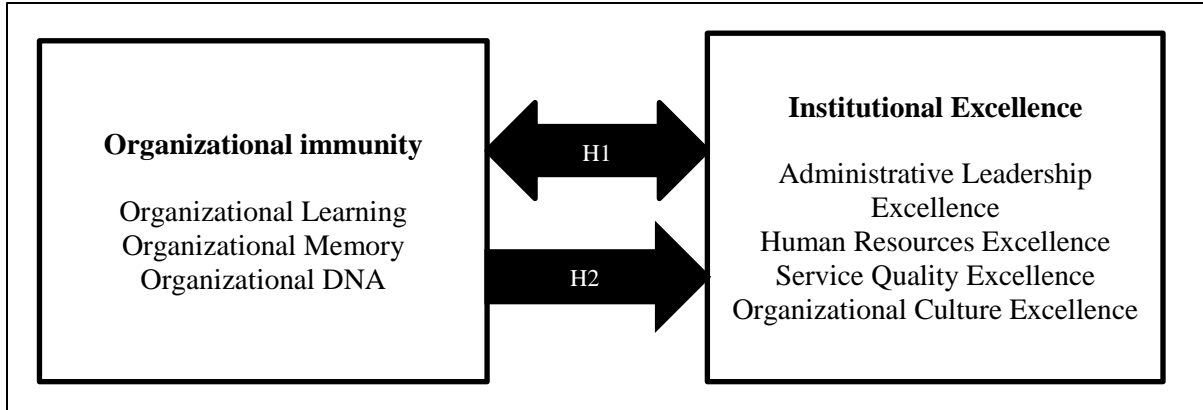


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Prepared by the researcher

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to measure reliability, as this coefficient aims to determine the stability and consistency of results across different items within a measurement tool or questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha is one of the most common methods for assessing the internal consistency of questions intended to measure the same attribute. The value of Cronbach's Alpha ranges between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 indicating a higher level of reliability. Generally, achieving a value above 0.7 is considered a good reliability indicator. This test was applied to a set of questions measuring the same attribute to ensure the stability of the measurement tool. A high resulting value reflects the reliability of the tool used in the measurement.

Table 1: Stability

Variables	Paragraphs	Cronbach's alpha values
Organizational Immunity	1-30	0.872
Organizational Excellence	31-50	0.821
Measure	1-50	0.947

Source: Prepared by the researcher

Table (1) displays the reliability test results using Cronbach's Alpha for the study variables. For the organizational immunity variable, which includes items 1 to 30, the Cronbach's Alpha value reached 0.872, indicating high reliability and consistency among the items measuring this variable. As for institutional excellence, which includes items 31 to 50, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.821, a good value indicating satisfactory reliability and consistency among the items related to measuring institutional excellence. For the overall scale, which includes all items from 1 to 50, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.947, a very high value demonstrating excellent reliability and consistency for the measurement tool as a whole. These values suggest that the measurement tool used has a good to excellent level of reliability, ensuring the dependability of the results obtained.

The statistical methods used depend on the nature of the data distribution. If the data follows a normal distribution, specific statistical methods are applied; alternative methods are used if the data is not normally distributed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used to test whether the data conforms to a normal distribution; Table (2) and Figures (2) and (3) show that the variables of job maturity and decision-making follow a normal distribution, as the significance level of the test for each variable was higher than the statistical significance level (0.05), indicating that the data is normally distributed.

Table 2: Test of normal distribution of variables

Variables	Test Statistics	Paragraphs	Test Significance
Organizational Immunity	0.089	120	0.77
Organizational Excellence	0.96	120	0.68

Source: Prepared by the researcher

The following figures clearly show that the data distribution for organizational immunity and institutional excellence follows a normal distribution based on the test results.

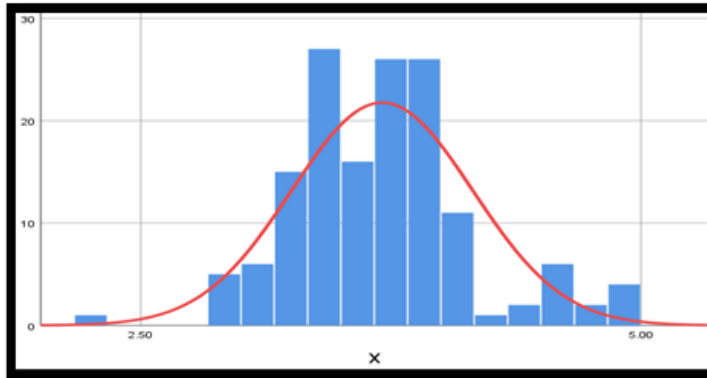


Figure 2: Gradation of data for the regulatory immunity variable

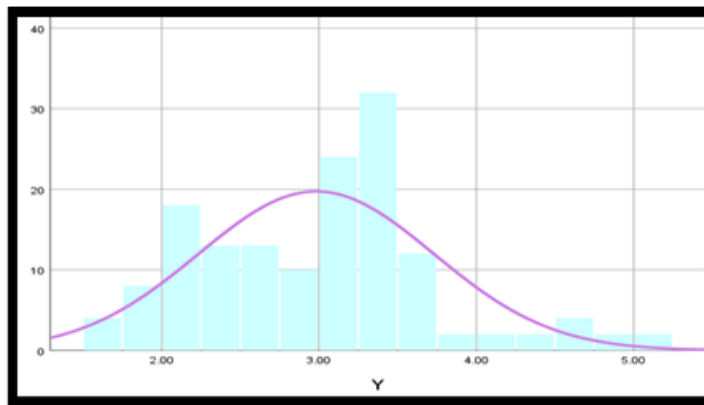


Figure 3: Gradation of data for the institutional excellence variable

Descriptive statistical tools, such as the mean and standard deviation, were utilized to analyze the research dimensions and variables. These tools are essential in research and statistical analysis, as they help understand data distribution and measure the variation of different variables. The descriptive analysis of the variables (organizational immunity and institutional excellence) shown in Table (3) aims to highlight the main characteristics of these variables. This analysis reveals central tendencies, such as the mean, and the dispersion of values, such as the standard deviation, helping the researcher understand data distribution and measure differences among various elements.

4. Results:

Table (3) presents the descriptive analysis of the research variables and dimensions, with each variable and its dimensions explained below:

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of research variables and dimensions

Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of difference	Arrangement
Organizational learning	3.479	0.615	17.68%	3
Organizational memory	3.713	0.472	12.71%	1
Organizational DNA	3.536	0.561	15.87%	2
Organizational immunity variable	3.576	0.405	11.33%	first
Administrative leadership differentiation	3.411	0.608	17.82%	3
Human resource differentiation	3.372	0.714	21.17%	4
Service quality differentiation	3.449	0.557	16.15%	2
Organizational culture differentiation	3.517	0.609	17.32%	1
Institutional excellence variable	3.437	0.463	13.47%	second

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

4.1 Organizational immunity variable:

4.1.1 Organizational Learning

The mean reached 3.479, indicating a high level of organizational learning. The standard deviation was 0.615, reflecting a moderate dispersion in the opinions of the sample. The coefficient of variation was 17.68%, suggesting a reasonable variance among the sample's opinions. This dimension ranks third among the dimensions of organizational immunity.

4.1.2 Organizational memory:

The mean was 3.713, the highest among the dimensions, indicating a high level of organizational memory. The standard deviation was 0.472, reflecting low dispersion in the opinions of the sample. The coefficient of variation was 12.71%, the lowest among the dimensions, indicating a high degree of consistency in the sample's opinions. This dimension ranks first among the dimensions of organizational immunity.

4.1.3 Organizational DNA:

The mean was 3.536, indicating a high level of organizational DNA. The standard deviation was 0.561, which is moderate. The coefficient of variation was 15.87%, reflecting a moderate variance in the opinions of the sample. This dimension ranks second among the dimensions of organizational immunity.

The overall analysis of the organizational immunity variable showed a mean of 3.576, indicating a high organizational immunity overall. The standard deviation was 0.405, reflecting low dispersion in the sample's opinions. The coefficient of variation was 11.33%, the lowest, indicating a high degree of consistency in the sample's responses. This variable ranked first among the research variables.

4.2 Institutional excellence variable:

4.2.1 Administrative Leadership Differentiation:

The mean was 3.411, indicating a high level of distinction in managerial leadership. The standard deviation was 0.608, reflecting moderate dispersion in the sample's opinions. The coefficient of variation was 17.82%, indicating an apparent variance among the sample's opinions. This dimension ranks third among the dimensions of institutional excellence.

4.2.2 Human Resource Differentiation:

The mean was 3.372, lower than the other dimensions, indicating a moderate level of distinction in human resources. The standard deviation was 0.714, representing the highest dispersion among the dimensions. The coefficient of variation was 21.17%, reflecting significant variability in the sample's opinions. This dimension ranks fourth.

4.2.3 Service Quality Differentiation:

The mean was 3.449, indicating a high level of distinction in service quality. The standard deviation was 0.557, reflecting moderate dispersion. The coefficient of variation was 16.15%, indicating reasonable variability in the sample's opinions. This dimension ranks second among the dimensions of institutional excellence.

4.2.4 Organizational Culture Differentiation:

The mean was 3.517, the highest among the dimensions, indicating a high level of distinction in organizational culture. The standard deviation was 0.609, reflecting moderate dispersion. The coefficient of variation was 17.32%, indicating moderate variability in the sample's opinions. This dimension ranks first.

General Analysis of the Institutional Excellence Variable: The mean was 3.437, indicating a high level of overall institutional excellence. The standard deviation was 0.463, reflecting moderate dispersion. The coefficient of variation was 13.47%, indicating low variability in the sample's opinions. This variable ranked second among the study's variables.

4.3: First Main Hypothesis:

There is a correlation between the dimensions of organizational immunity and institutional excellence. According to Table (4), the Pearson correlation coefficient reached 0.582, indicating a strong positive relationship between organizational learning and institutional excellence, with a significance level of 0.000, supporting the validity of the results.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.521, demonstrating a strong positive relationship between organizational memory and institutional excellence. Similarly, it was 0.569, indicating a strong positive relationship between organizational DNA and institutional excellence.

As for the overall variable of organizational immunity, the Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.670, reflecting a strong positive relationship with a significant level of correlation.

Table 4: Correlational relationships between dimensions of organizational immunity and institutional excellence

Dimensions and variables	Institutional Excellence Variable	
	Pearson's correlation value	Significance of correlation
Organizational learning	0.582	0.000
Organizational memory	0.521	0.000
Organizational DNA	0.569	0.000
Organizational immune variable	0.670	0.000

Source: Prepared by the researcher

All relationships between the dimensions of the organizational immunity variable and institutional excellence are positive, indicating that an increase in the positive aspects of organizational immunity leads to an increase in institutional excellence. All values are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, enhancing the reliability of the results. Therefore, the hypothesis can be accepted.

4.4 Second Main Hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant impact of the dimensions of organizational immunity on institutional excellence.

4.4.1 Organizational learning: α (constant term): 1.023 refers to the value that expresses the level of institutional excellence when all other variables are zero. β (marginal slope): 0.562 reflects the effect of organizational learning on institutional excellence, indicating that a one-unit increase in organizational learning leads to a 0.562 increase in institutional excellence. $R^2= 0.339$ means that 33.9% of the variance in institutional excellence can be explained by organizational learning. $F= 45.721$ reflects the model's strength with statistical significance (Sig. = 0.000), indicating that the model meets the statistical criteria.

4.4.2 Organizational Memory: $\alpha=1.212$ represents the baseline value of institutional excellence. $B= 0.439$ indicates the effect of organizational memory on institutional excellence, where a one-unit increase in memory leads to a 0.439 increase in institutional excellence. $R^2= 0.271$ means that 27.1% of the variance in institutional excellence can be explained by organizational memory. $F= 48.916$ indicates the model's strength with statistical significance (Sig. = 0.000).

4.4.3 Organizational DNA: $\alpha= 1.429$ represents the baseline value of institutional excellence. $B= 0.687$ reflects the effect of organizational DNA, where a one-unit increase in DNA leads to a 0.687 increase in institutional excellence. $R^2= 0.324$ means that organizational DNA can explain 32.4% of the variance in institutional excellence. $F= 51.807$ indicates the model's strength with statistical significance (Sig. = 0.000).

Organizational Immunity Variable: $\alpha=1.395$ represents the base value of the level of institutional excellence. $B= 0.541$ reflects the effect of organizational immunity, indicating that a one-unit increase in immunity leads to a 0.541 increase in institutional excellence. $R^2= 0.449$ means that 44.9% of the variance in institutional excellence can be explained by organizational immunity. $F = 63.875$ indicates the model's strength with statistical significance (Sig. = 0.000).

Table 5: The impact of organizational immunity dimensions on institutional excellence

Variables	Organizational Excellence						
	α	β	t(β)	Sig.	R^2	F	Sig.
Organizational learning	1.023	0.562	7.561	0.000	0.339	45.721	0.000
Organizational memory	1.212	0.439	6.093	0.000	0.271	48.916	0.000
Organizational DNA	1.429	0.687	7.480	0.000	0.324	51.807	0.000
Organizational immunity variable	1.395	0.541	8.127	0.000	0.449	63.875	0.000

Source: Prepared by the researcher

The results show that each dimension of organizational immunity has a positive and strong statistically significant effect on institutional excellence, reflecting the importance of these dimensions in enhancing institutional excellence. Therefore, the hypothesis can be accepted.

5. Conclusion:

The research concluded that organizational learning ranked last among the sub-variables, indicating the need to improve performance and efficiency within the company by enhancing employees' knowledge and skills and training and developing their capabilities. Implementing continuous training, development, awareness, and cultural programs helps the researched company to develop its workforce, thereby achieving its objectives.

On the other hand, the organizational memory variable ranked first, as it represents one of the company's strengths due to its ability to store and retrieve information, making it a source of strength and success. Organizational memory allows the company to benefit from past experiences as a tool for excellence and success.

It can be enhanced by establishing modern and continuously updated digital databases and consistently creating training programs encouraging knowledge and experience transfer, urging employees to learn from past challenges and successes.

The variable of human resource excellence ranked last. This finding aligns with the sub-variable of organizational immunity, specifically organizational learning, which indicates that the company needs to pay more attention to its human resources, as they are among its most valuable assets and are fundamental to its success and distinction.

In contrast, organizational culture ranked first, consistent with the organizational immunity variable, organizational memory, which also held the top rank. This indicates that the company emphasizes its principles and philosophy, preserves them, and supports them with an organizational memory, making it distinct from other companies. This uniqueness stems from having a specific, unified direction that guides all employees' behaviors.

It is crucial to support the company's culture, continuously promote it, and keep pace with renewal and development as it operates in a constantly changing and evolving environment. This requires the involvement of senior management and all financial, material, and human resources.

The research concluded that there is a positive correlation (a direct relationship) between organizational immunity and institutional excellence. This means that enhancing the positive dimensions of organizational immunity leads to increased institutional excellence, suggesting that the organization's ability to uphold its organizational culture is essential.

A strong organizational memory allows the company to refer back to all its information to address any obstacles, respond to changes, and build a barrier that shields it from crises and threats, contributing to its distinction, sustainability, and success.

There is an impact relationship between the dimensions of organizational immunity and institutional excellence. These dimensions—organizational learning, organizational memory, and organizational DNA—can reflect positively on the company's institutional excellence. Increased focus on organizational learning, enhancing memory, and reinforcing organizational DNA can contribute to its institutional distinction.

Authors Declaration:

Conflicts of Interest: None

-We Hereby Confirm That All The Figures and Tables In The Manuscript Are Mine and Ours. Besides, The Figures and Images, which are Not Mine, Have Been Permitted Republication and Attached to The Manuscript.

- Ethical Clearance: The Research Was Approved by The Local Ethical Committee in The University.

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