

Proceeding Paper

Rapid Digitalization in Pandemic Times: Investigation of the Leadership Role in Managing Information and Communication Overload in Higher Education Institutions in Kuwait [†]

Mirna Safi *, Oualid Abidi, Hamsa Sarhan and Rupali Bhagat

College of Business, Australian University, Mubarak Al-Abdullah P.O. Box 1411, Kuwait

* Correspondence: m.safi@au.edu.kw

[†] Presented at the Digital Transformation in Business: Challenges and New Opportunities, West Mishref, Kuwait, 17 November 2022.

Abstract: The advancement of technology paved the way for significant improvements in higher education institutions (HEIs) as much as it was associated with sizable pressures for individuals, implied by the challenging task of managing enormous volume of information from digital communication channels. This research is addressing two main objectives. First, explore the extent of Information and Communication Overload (ICO) that accompanied the digital transformation in Kuwaiti HEIs and accelerated amidst the Covid19 pandemic. Second, assess the conditions that are/could be used in those organizations to mitigate ICO and any of its adverse effects.

Keywords: digital transformation; information overload; communication overload; leadership; higher education institutions

1. Objectives

This research aims to explore the extent of information and communication overload (ICO) that accompanied the rapid digital transformation in Kuwaiti higher education institutions (HEIs) during the pandemic and to assess whether leadership could help mitigate its adverse effects. Evidence shows that several Middle Eastern HEIs are increasingly engaged in digital transformation [1] and entrepreneurial modernization and diversification [2].

2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach based on in-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews with three academic managers working in three different Kuwaiti HEIs. This approach is recommended for exploratory studies tackling evolving phenomena [3]. The researchers conducted the interviews for a period of 45 minutes with each participant. Notes were taken during the meetings, and interviews were recorded for the data analysis, completed using the coding process.

3. Results

The collected evidence highlights the central role of leadership in mitigating the magnitude of ICO in higher education settings. Leaders should streamline the amount of information and the number of communications flowing within their units. Courtesy, employee empowerment, and proactive planning also seem to be determinant leadership features that limit ICO. The latter involves a careful selection of change initiatives based on the efficient use of available resources.

4. Implications

This study emphasizes the increasing exposure of academics to the phenomenon of ICO, as explained by the amount of disruptive information that they receive. This implies



Citation: Safi, M.; Abidi, O.; Sarhan, H.; Bhagat, R. Rapid Digitalization in Pandemic Times: Investigation of the Leadership Role in Managing Information and Communication Overload in Higher Education Institutions in Kuwait. *Proceedings* **2023**, *85*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2023085020>

Academic Editor: Farid Abdallah

Published: 16 March 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

that HEIs' leadership should play a significant role in managing the enormous volume of information from digital communication channels. A second implication derives from the exploratory nature of this study, which raises a number of opportunities for future research, such as the impact of servant leadership on ICO.

5. Originality Value

HEIs experienced significant difficulties in digital transformation during the pandemic, such as insufficient funding for substantive digitalization, staff unpreparedness, and resistance to change [4–8]. Therefore, HEIs represent an appropriate field of research to explore the aspects of ICO in the digital era, and analyze the organizational responses brought to them. To date, almost no studies have focused on the academic leadership role in limiting the effects of ICO.

6. Contribution

This research would contribute to the enhancement of the knowledge background in the area of ICO by addressing the nature of leadership support in the higher education sector, which has been overlooked in previous studies. The outcomes would represent useful guidance for HEIs in the Middle East and worldwide about dealing with ICO using a multilevel approach. Indeed, several researchers have acknowledged ICO as the source of various forms of strain for workers, including stress and job dissatisfaction [9–11].

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.S. and O.A.; methodology, O.A.; software, O.A.; formal analysis, O.A.; investigation, M.S., H.S. and R.B.; writing—original draft preparation, M.S.; writing—review and editing, M.S. and O.A.; supervision, M.S.; project administration, M.S.; funding acquisition, M.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the Australian University grant number IRC-2021/2022-SOB-MANAGEMENT-PR15.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Our institution does not systematically apply an ethical approval procedure for the research conducted by staff members. Ethical approval is only mandatory when the research samples involves respondents from particular groups with whom particular precautions have to be considered (e.g., children, disabled people, etc.).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study through a cover letter attached with the questionnaire. All respondents had to view and agree prior to answering the survey questions.

Data Availability Statement: Data are available on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank the fund received from the Australian University (Research Project Number: IRC-2021/2022-SOB-MANAGEMENT-PR15).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Abdulrahim, H.; Mabrouk, F. COVID-19 and the Digital Transformation of Saudi Higher Education. *Asian J. Distance Educ.* **2020**, *15*, 291–306.
2. Abidi, O.; Dzenopoljac, V.; Dzenopoljac, A. Discussing the role of entrepreneurial universities in the COVID-19 era in the Middle East. *Manag. J. Sustain. Bus. Manag. Solut. Emerg. Econ.* **2021**, *26*, 55–66. [[CrossRef](#)]
3. Creswell, J.W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd ed.; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2003.
4. Bogdandy, B.; Tamas, J.; Toth, Z. Digital transformation in education during COVID-19: A case study. In Proceedings of the 2020 11th IEEE International Conference on Cognitive Infocommunications (CogInfoCom), Mariehamn, Finland, 23–25 September 2020; pp. 000173–000178. [[CrossRef](#)]
5. García-Morales, V.J.; Garrido-Moreno, A.; Martín-Rojas, R. The Transformation of Higher Education After the COVID Disruption: Emerging Challenges in an Online Learning Scenario. *Front. Psychol.* **2021**, *12*, 616059. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
6. Mikheev, A.; Serkina, Y.; Vasyaev, A. Current trends in the digital transformation of higher education institutions in Russia. *Educ. Inf. Technol.* **2021**, *26*, 4537–4551. [[CrossRef](#)]

7. Mohammed, A.O.; Khidhir, B.A.; Nazeer, A. Emergency remote teaching during Coronavirus pandemic: The current trend and future directive at Middle East College Oman. *Innov. Infrastruct. Solut.* **2020**, *5*, 1–11. [[CrossRef](#)]
8. Pazos, A.J.B.; Ruiz, B.C.; Pérez, B.M. Digital transformation of university teaching in communication during the COVID-19 emergency in Spain: An approach from students' perspective. *Rev. Lat. Comun. Soc.* **2020**, *78*, 265–287. [[CrossRef](#)]
9. Ayyagari, R.; Grover, V.; Purvis, R. Technostress: Technological antecedents and implications. *MIS Q.* **2011**, *35*, 831–858. [[CrossRef](#)]
10. Högberg, K. Technostress Among Hotel Employees—A Longitudinal Study of Social Media as Digital Service Encounters. In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2021*; Wörndl, W., Koo, C., Stienmetz, J.L., Eds.; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2021. [[CrossRef](#)]
11. Korunovska, J.; Spiekermann, S. *The Effects of Digitalization on Human Energy and Fatigue: A Review*; Vienna University of Economics and Business: Vienna, Austria, 2019.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.