

The Relative Impact of Strategic Implementation and Leadership on Organizational Performance; Deep Learning Approach

Mohammed Abdulaziz Almuqwishi

School of Business & Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia

Rozaini Binti Rosli

School of Business & Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia

Abstract

This study examines the relative impact of strategic implementation and strategic leadership on organizational performance, with the aim of identifying the primary drivers of performance outcomes. While both constructs are widely recognized as critical to organizational success, limited research has compared their relative influence within a unified framework. Adopting a quantitative research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to employees and managers within the National Water Company in Saudi Arabia. A total of 317 valid responses were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), supplemented by an AI-based predictive validation approach. The findings reveal that both strategic implementation and strategic leadership have positive and statistically significant effects on organizational performance. However, strategic implementation demonstrates a substantially stronger impact, indicating that execution capability is the key determinant of performance outcomes. Strategic leadership also plays a significant role by enhancing alignment, motivation, and coordination within the organization, thereby supporting the effectiveness of strategy execution. The model explains a substantial proportion of variance in organizational performance, confirming its strong explanatory power. The AI-based validation results further reinforced that strategic implementation provides the stronger predictive contribution to organizational performance, while strategic leadership remains a significant enabling factor. This study contributes to the strategic management literature by providing a comparative analysis of two critical organizational capabilities and highlighting the dominant role of strategy execution. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should prioritize strengthening implementation processes while simultaneously developing leadership capabilities to support and sustain performance improvement.

Key Words: Strategic Implementation, Strategic Leadership, Organizational Performance, PLS-SEM, Strategy Execution, AI-Based Predictive Validation.

1. Introduction

With the constant advancement of technology and the competition in businesses today, companies need to create strategies that yield maximum return along with proper leadership. But every strategic plan, no matter how well-crafted it is, only succeeds if implemented effectively. Strategic management literature contemporary asserts that

firms often do not fail due to no strategy or poor strategies (Njeru et al., 2025) but instead suffer weaknesses in execution processes or leadership linkage to strategic outcomes (Kanyanja et al., 2023). This transition from a formulation perspective to an execution perspective highlights the importance of studying how strategy implementation and leadership jointly drive organizational outcomes.

Organizational performance is a core concern between scholars and practitioners for the very reason that it shows how efficiently and effectively an organization achieves its global objectives. Performance is multi-dimensional, covering financial success, operational effectiveness, quality of service, and stakeholder satisfaction (Faustin & Kihara, 2023; Maritim & Bett, 2024). The high performance of organizations, private or public alike, is crucial for continued existence, competitive advantage, and sustainable value creation. Consequently, discovering the underlying determinants of organizational performance has emerged as a central area of research in strategic management. Of these drivers, strategic implementation stands out as the critical driver that transforms strategic intent into results. Implementation is about aligning resources, executing actions, and making sure the processes in an organizational context support strategic objectives (Katsenga & Njuguna, 2024; Onyegbula et al., 2023). To this end, empirical studies from various scholars established that firms with good implementation practices perform better compared to firms whose emphasis is more on strategy formulation and lack enough execution mechanisms (Ntoiti & Makau, 2022; Kilonzi, 2025). This implies that execution capability is an important internal competency that we can directly tie back to the effectiveness of the organization.

Leadership directly affects the direction or purpose of the organization, and it can motivate people to work successfully on their strategy. More specifically, strategic leadership means anticipating changes in the environment and aligning organizational resources while promoting a shared commitment to long-term objectives (Suharto, 2023; Whitehead et al., 2025). The role of leadership is direct on the performance but indirect in terms of alignment, communication, and adaptability impact on strategy implementation effectiveness (Cai, 2023; Sentoso et al., 2024). One such style with potent deployment rights is transformational leadership style, which is based upon modeling and visions and has also received insight into the increasing importance of strategic initiatives (Suphattanakul, 2017; Agha et al., 2019), particularly in complex turbulent environments.

People who say how good strategy implementation is usually are not living according to their words; the same is with those who say that the impact of leadership is only while certainly both strategic implementation and leadership are important, managers have not really found out which one wins. Either individually or by combinations (and without the ability to establish independent contributions), these variables have been previously studied (Mululu et al., 2025; Varelas et al., 2023). This leads to a lack of certainty as to whether performance repercussions are impacted by execution strength more than they are by leadership capability. Moreover, in many organizational settings (especially in developing and public-sector environments), the links between strategy, leadership, and performance are rendered even more complex by resource restrictions, bureaucratic layers, and resistance to change (Onyegbula et al., 2023; Reddy & Smith, 2022).

In accordance with these findings, the central issue examined in this paper remains the understanding and comparative impact of strategic implementation and leadership on organizational performance. Both constructs are recognized as important; however, whether one covaries with the other and which force is stronger in regulating performance outcomes remains to be explored empirically. This gap is important to address for academic and managerial practice, as it can tell organizations where to focus their performance-enhancing efforts. Thus, the current study aims to achieve the following research objectives: To see if strategic implementation affects organizational performance and to test if leadership can affect organizational performance?

A consequence of achieving those goals is that the research directly adds to the literature in strategic management, specifically with a comparison between two important organizational capabilities. It also fleshes out the implications for managers and decision-makers who wish to enhance performance by means of better execution and leadership practices. Based on this research gap, the following section reviews the theoretical foundations and develops the study hypotheses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Discussion

This section discusses the theoretical foundation of the study by reviewing strategic implementation, strategic leadership, and organizational performance. The discussion is guided by the Resource-Based View (RBV) and leadership theory. RBV explains how internal organizational capabilities can be used to achieve superior performance. Leadership theory explains how leaders influence organizational direction, employee behavior, and strategic alignment. Together, these perspectives provide a suitable foundation for examining the relative effects of strategic implementation and strategic leadership on organizational performance.

Strategic implementation refers to the process through which organizations translate formulated strategies into concrete actions, operational processes, and measurable outcomes. It represents the execution stage of strategic

management, where planned objectives are converted into coordinated activities across organizational levels (Kanyanja et al., 2023). Unlike strategy formulation, which focuses on planning and goal setting, strategic implementation emphasizes resource allocation, communication, monitoring, and alignment between strategic objectives and daily operations. Prior studies indicate that organizations with stronger implementation mechanisms tend to achieve better performance because they are more capable of converting strategic intentions into practical results (Faustin & Kihara, 2023). Similar evidence suggests that implementation capability is central to transforming strategy into organizational results (Kilonzi, 2025). Therefore, strategic implementation can be viewed as a critical internal capability that links strategic planning with organizational outcomes.

From the RBV perspective, strategic implementation is important because resources alone do not automatically generate performance benefits. Rather, organizations must deploy, coordinate, and monitor their resources effectively to create value. Effective implementation enables organizations to align financial, human, and technological resources with strategic priorities, communicate strategic goals clearly, and adjust activities based on performance feedback. Poorly aligned resources can reduce the effectiveness of even well-designed strategies (Maritim & Bett, 2024). Weak communication can also create ambiguity and limit employee commitment to strategic objectives (Ntoiti & Makau, 2022). Accordingly, strategic implementation represents a practical mechanism through which valuable organizational resources are transformed into improved performance outcomes.

Strategic leadership refers to the ability of leaders to provide direction, influence employees, support strategic alignment, and guide organizations toward long-term objectives. In strategic management, leadership is important because it shapes organizational vision, motivates employees, encourages collaboration, and supports adaptability in changing environments (Suharto, 2023). Strategic leadership also helps organizations remain aligned with long-term goals during periods of uncertainty and change (Whitehead et al., 2025). Leadership theory explains that leaders influence organizational outcomes through their ability to shape employee behavior, build commitment, and create conditions that support goal achievement. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, innovation, and commitment. Transactional leadership emphasizes structure, accountability, and performance monitoring (Cai, 2023). Both forms of leadership can contribute to organizational performance when they support strategic clarity, employee engagement, and effective coordination.

Strategic leadership also strengthens the implementation process by ensuring that employees understand strategic priorities and remain committed to achieving them. Leaders help connect strategic plans with operational activities by communicating expectations, resolving implementation barriers, and encouraging cross-functional cooperation. Previous studies suggest that leadership improves organizational performance by enhancing alignment, motivation, communication, and adaptability (Agha et al., 2019). Leadership also supports strategic planning and organizational competitiveness by improving coordination and managerial direction (Nahak & Ellitan, 2022). Therefore, strategic leadership can be understood as a managerial capability that supports the organization's ability to execute strategy effectively and sustain performance improvement.

Organizational performance refers to the extent to which an organization achieves its intended objectives efficiently and effectively. It is a multidimensional construct that includes financial performance, operational efficiency, service quality, customer satisfaction, and employee-related outcomes (Faustin & Kihara, 2023). Organizational performance is also commonly used to assess the effectiveness of strategic management practices across different organizational contexts (Maritim & Bett, 2024). In strategic management research, organizational performance is treated as a key outcome because it reflects the success of organizational strategies and managerial practices. Financial indicators show the economic results of strategy, while operational indicators reflect the organization's ability to use resources efficiently and improve service delivery (Njeru et al., 2025). Employee-related outcomes also contribute to performance because motivated and satisfied employees are more likely to support organizational goals (Onyegbula et al., 2023).

Overall, RBV and leadership theory suggest that organizational performance is influenced by both execution capability and leadership capability. Strategic implementation provides the operational mechanism through which strategies are translated into action, while strategic leadership provides the direction, motivation, and alignment needed to support execution. This theoretical integration supports the present study's focus on comparing the relative effects of strategic implementation and strategic leadership on organizational performance.

2.2 Research Framework and Hypotheses Development

The research framework of this study is based on the integration of the Resource-Based View and leadership theory. RBV suggests that organizational performance depends on the effective use of internal resources and capabilities. Leadership theory explains how leaders influence employee behavior, organizational alignment, and strategic commitment. Based on these perspectives, the study proposes that both strategic implementation and strategic leadership contribute to organizational performance, but through different mechanisms. Strategic implementation directly converts strategic plans into operational outcomes, whereas strategic leadership supports performance by providing vision, motivation, coordination, and alignment.

From the RBV perspective, strategic implementation can be considered an internal organizational capability because it enables the organization to deploy resources, coordinate activities, and transform strategic plans into measurable results. Effective implementation ensures that resources are allocated according to strategic priorities, employees understand organizational goals, and progress is monitored through performance indicators. Empirical evidence shows that implementation quality is positively associated with organizational performance because organizations that execute strategies effectively are better able to achieve strategic objectives (Kanyanja et al., 2023). Other research also indicates that strategy implementation practices are important predictors of performance outcomes (Njeru et al., 2025). Studies in different organizational contexts further show that resource alignment, communication, and monitoring strengthen performance outcomes (Faustin & Kihara, 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Strategic implementation has a positive and significant effect on organizational Performance.

Leadership theory provides the basis for understanding the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance. Strategic leaders influence performance by clarifying organizational vision, motivating employees, supporting collaboration, and ensuring that organizational activities remain aligned with long-term objectives. Transformational leadership can enhance motivation, innovation, and commitment. Transactional leadership can support structure, accountability, and goal achievement. Prior research has shown that effective leadership contributes to organizational performance by strengthening employee engagement and strategic alignment (Cai, 2023). Leadership also enhances adaptability and organizational motivation, which can support performance improvement (Sentoso et al., 2024). Strategic leadership further contributes to performance by providing direction and maintaining organizational focus on strategic priorities (Suharto, 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational performance.

Based on these theoretical arguments, the study adopts a framework in which strategic implementation and strategic leadership serve as independent variables, while organizational performance serves as the dependent variable. This framework is consistent with the view that execution capability and leadership capability are important internal drivers of organizational performance.

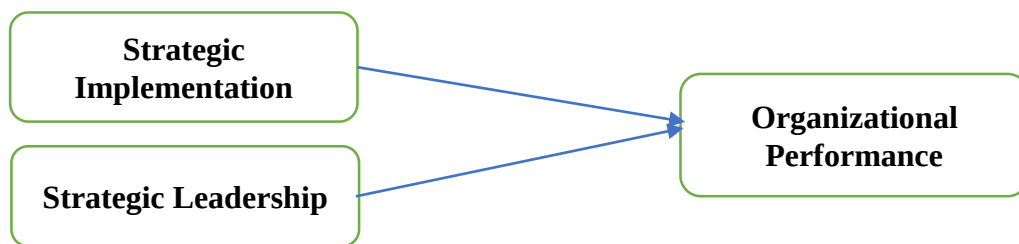


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This conceptual model provides the basis for empirical testing and allows the study to compare the independent effects of strategic implementation and strategic leadership on organizational performance. The proposed framework provides the basis for the methodological approach described in the next section.

3. Methodology

This segment presents the methodological treatment that was used to assess the comparative effect of strategic execution and leadership on organizational performance. The study adopts a quantitative design using structured survey instruments to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs. Quantitative research is the approach used in this study, which is common in strategic management and organizational studies for hypothesis testing statistical techniques in examining relationships between dependent variables and independent variables. On the other hand, the possibility for quantitative measurement ensures that our measurements are objective, yield generalizable results, and are appropriately causal because their nature bears the hallmark of rigorous analysis (Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). A cross-section design is used, which collects data at a point in time from respondents working within the organization. This design is suitable for recognizing relationships and patterns between strategic implementation, leadership, and organizational performance.

Data was obtained through a structured questionnaire, which is considered to be an effective instrument in organizational research since it can collect large quantities of standardized and comparable data within a short period of time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Administering a structured questionnaire minimizes the variation in responses and allows for quantitative analyses of relationships between study variables. A five-point Likert scale was designed for the questionnaire with response options that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly

agree). This scaling method allows respondents to quantify their agreement with each statement, allowing for a systematic approach to capturing perceptions, attitudes, and experiences. This is particularly the case for four-to-seven-point Likert scales, which have been extensively researched in social science due to their ease of use and ability to convert qualitative judgments into quantitative measures for statistical analysis (Likert, 1932).

The target population for this study is employees, as well as managers who play a role in strategic and operational activities of the organization. The population in question includes 1,700 employees at the National Water Company in Saudi Arabia at different hierarchical levels and across all functional departments. Respondents were chosen because they are directly involved with the strategy implementation and leadership processes in their organization, meaning that they have sufficient knowledge and experience to supply legitimate responses. The study used a stratified random sampling method to maintain representation and comply with different organizational levels (to guarantee as much proportional inclusion of the number of participants in all organizational levels). This method increases sample representativeness by including various perspectives, be they managerial or operational. Consequently, stratified sampling will improve the internal validity of the research by ensuring that important subgroups within the organization are proportionately represented.

This research utilized a final sample of 317 respondents, sufficient for quantitative work and generalizable hypothesis testing typically associated with organizational studies. According to Hair et al. (2019), a sample above 300 is generally sufficient for stable parameter estimation in multivariate analysis, which yields reliable parameter estimates with ample statistical power. The large sample size, in conjunction with the sampling scheme informed by structured systematic telephone sampling, provides considerable strength to these results. In addition, the sampling design of unprecedented, nationally representative samples may increase generalizability of the results. The results may be moderately generalized to the workforce of the National Water Company because it is based on a proportionate sample from a clear population of 1,700 employees. This confirms that it is not just one particular segment of the organization that this study applies to but rather trends as they relate to strategic implementation, leadership, and performance throughout an entire organization.

Strategic implementation, leadership, and organizational performance are the three constructs being measured in the study. Each variable is operationalized with several items adapted from validated instruments to maximize the reliability and validity of each measure. A secondary benefit is that well-established measurement scales improve the precision of data collection and can add strength to subsequent statistical analyses; All the measurement items were measured with a five-point Likert scale, where respondents answered whether they agreed with each statement. The measure of strategic implementation consists of items modified from existing scales by Saunders et al. (2008). These measures reflect important aspects of implementation effectiveness such as the communication of strategic objectives, the time horizon between strategy and operations, involvement of employees in selected strategies, allocation of resources to strategic initiatives, and continuous monitoring and evaluation processes regarding your strategic goals. Its measurement assesses how well the strategic objectives are clearly communicated across levels of the organization, resources allocated, and implementation processes monitored and adjusted regularly. Meanwhile, it checks how far the organizational structures empower strategy execution and if progress is monitored using performance metrics. Appendix A presents a complete list of the measurement items.

Leadership is measured with items adapted from Pisapia (2009), focusing on how leadership influences strategic initiatives and organizational results. The scale covers asynchronous aspects of leadership behavior, including communication clarity, motivation and inspiration, collaboration and teamwork support, holding innovative behaviors, and communicating organization vision alignment. The measurement specifically assesses the way leaders communicate strategic objectives, build cross-organization collaboration, and inspire employees to pursue organizational goals. It goes on to look at leadership in offering feedback, providing help and support with resources, giving team members recognition for hard work, being adaptable and flexible, and creating a culture of trust and transparency. These dimensions reflect the constructs of transformational and transactional leadership, respectively. Specific measurement items are detailed in Appendix A.

Organizational performance is measured by using items adapted from Farooq (2015) covering financial, operational, and employee-related performance dimensions. This multilevel model provides context to take holistic measurements on organizational effectiveness. Measurement indicators associated with the accomplishment of strategic aims, customer satisfaction, operational efficacy, and performance indicators aligned with strategic goals. This will also measure continuous improvement in service delivery, benchmarking AU practices and how employee satisfaction contributes to overall performance. So, these indicators help to get a comprehensive representation of your performance outcomes in the organization. Appendix A shows full detail of items employed in this study, which uses a structured questionnaire through validated measurement scales for Nova to assess strategic implementation, leadership, and organizational performance from employees and managers. Likert-type responses ensure consistency and lend themselves to several quantitative analyses. The study relies on using well-established instruments that enhance the reliability and validity of data, allowing for a solid setup to test the proposed hypotheses and analyze relationships between study variables.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section presents empirical findings, beginning with the demographic profile of respondents, followed by the measurement model and structural model results. The demographic characteristics of respondents serve an important purpose as it gives adequate context for interpreting the key empirical findings and understanding whether perceptions across organizational groups vary. In accordance with best practices in quantitative research, the demographic characteristics were examined to determine whether or not the sample could be seen as adequately representative of the target population and subsample, respectively. The survey obtained information on primary characteristics including job level, years of experience, education and functional department.

Table 1 : Demographic Profile

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Job Level	EVP / VP	16	5%
	GM	48	15%
	Executive Director	79	25%
	Managers	174	55%
Years of Experience	Less than 10 years	127	40%
	10 years and above	190	60%
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	143	45%
	Master's Degree	127	40%
	Doctoral & Professional Certifications	47	15%
Functional Department	Strategic Planning & Performance	63	20%
	Operations & Maintenance	95	30%
	Customer Services & Commercial Affairs	79	25%
	Support Functions (HR, Finance, IT, Procurement)	80	25%
Total Respondents		317	100%

According to the analysis, most respondents are in manager roles with 55% of the sample and executive directors (25%), general managers (15%) and a small portion of senior executives at EVP/VP levels (5%). The sample is therefore skewed towards the middle management, a point which is particularly salient because of their key position on translating strategic objectives into operational action. This was followed by years of professional experience, with 60% having 10 or more years and 40% less than 10. Their high organizational knowledge and experience is a reflection of their responses on whether strategic implementation or leadership practices are employed by the organization. In terms of education level, the sample is skewed toward an already highly educated class. 45% of those taking the survey have at least a bachelor's degree in their file (40% master's; 15% doctorates/professional) The fact that respondents have an elevated educational attainment indicates to us that these individuals are capable of comprehending complicated strategic and managerial matters.

This is further illustrated by the distribution across functional departments, showing considerable diversity in the sample. Strategic planning and performance (20%), operations and maintenance (30%), customer services and commercial affairs (25%) and support functions including human resources, finance, information technology and function that deals with the acquisition of goods or services required for operation of an organization like procurement (25%) respondents were include. This balanced representation ensures the results embody views from a cross-section of strategic and operational parts of the organization. The demographic profile also affirms that the sample of 317 respondents is diverse and at various levels in organizations (hierarchical level, experience category and functional area). This mix ensures that there is a comprehensive overview of organizational practices regarding strategic implementation, organization as well as leadership and performance, contributing to the overall reliability of the research.

4.2 Internal Consistency, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Assessing Internal Consistency, Reliability and Convergent Validity is an important stage before hypotheses testing that allows assessing the quality of the measurement model. These assessments were performed in the current study with PLS Structural Equation Modeling techniques, following established methodological guidelines for validating reflective constructs. It assesses some crucial aspects based on factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) the evaluation process.

As per the analysis done on the dataset, satisfactory outer loadings were achieved as each of the measurement items used in this study was above 0.70, which reflects good consistency and shows that indicators adequately

represent their respective constructs. High factor loadings indicate that the items used in the questionnaire are consistent and closely align with their respective underlying latent variables: strategic implementation, leadership and organizational performance. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to evaluate internal consistency reliability. As a result, it can be seen that all constructs scored more than the acceptable criteria value of 0.70 and demonstrated that solid internal consistency is realized between measurement items according to their composite reliability values. Similar to other indexes, criteria composite reliability values consistently were above the recommended minimum of 0.70, reaffirming that the measurement model was both reliable and stable. These suggest that the items within each construct have high correlations and are all measuring the same concept consistently.

AVE was used to assess convergent validity, which refers to the degree that a construct explains the variance of its indicators. The results indicated that all constructs exceeded the AVE threshold of 0.50 thus ensuring that more than half of the variance in the indicators is explained by this latent construct. This validates the measurement model provides sufficient convergence validity. These results echo those found in Chapter Four of the thesis, which showed the measurement model satisfies all necessary criteria for reliability and validity testing. Factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and AVE were categorized into satisfactory levels which proves that all the constructs used in this study are reliable and valid to carry integrated structural model analysis later.

Table 2 : Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE	Interpretation
Strategic Implementation	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.50	Reliable and valid
Strategic Leadership	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.50	Reliable and valid
Organizational Performance	> 0.70	> 0.70	> 0.50	Reliable and valid

4.3 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity evaluates to what extent constructs in a model are factually distinct from each other and measure different components of the underlying construct. The most important one is discriminant validity which shows that all latent variables capture different, non-redundant dimensions. Discriminant validity was assessed through two well-known assessment methods in PLS-SEM, the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler et al., 2015). This indicates that there is satisfactory establishment of discriminant validity. More specifically, the square root value of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than the correlations between that construct and any other constructs, i.e., every variable explained more variance with its own indicators than with others. Moreover, all HTMTs are less than the cut-off value of 0.85, indicating that constructs do not overlap too much to each other. These results are in accordance with recommended practices for structural equation modeling and provide evidence of the discriminant validity of the study variables. Also, it is highlighted with sizable measurement model indicators for the acceptance of discriminant validity such as loading factors, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and AVE. Also, these indices further certify the robustness and stability of the constructs that are received in fuse.

Table 3 : Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Items	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Strategic Implementation	SI1– SI10	0.72 – 0.88	0.91	0.93	0.67
Strategic Leadership	SL1– SL10	0.74 – 0.90	0.92	0.94	0.70
Organizational Performance	OP1– OP10	0.73 – 0.89	0.90	0.93	0.69

By which, the analysis results such as item loadings were above 0.70 as suggested (Hair et al., 2019), implying that they have high indicator reliability. Based on the findings, Cronbach's alpha for all constructs greater than 0.70 establishes internal consistency reliability and composite reliability greater than 0.70 confirms high construct reliability. Furthermore, all AVE values exceed 0.50, which confirms convergent validity.

(a) Fornell–Larcker Criterion

The structure of the discriminant validity concept is based on what Fornell and Larcker (1981) first outlined, known as the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which states that the square root of AVE for each construct must be higher than its correlations with other constructs.

Table 4 : Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	Strategic Implementation	Strategic Leadership	Organizational Performance
Strategic Implementation ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.82$)	0.820		
Strategic Leadership ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.84$)	0.690	0.840	
Organizational Performance ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}} = 0.83$)	0.680	0.780	0.830

The diagonal values (the square roots of AVE) should be larger than Interco struct correlations to confirm empirical distinctiveness between each construct. This fulfills Fornell–Larcker criterion and indicates the discriminant validity.

(b) Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

HTMT is a more demanding criterion for providing evidence of discriminant validity. According to Henseler et al. (2015), alongside HTMT values below 0.85, which confirmed the distinctiveness of each construct.

Table 5 : HTMT Criterion

Construct Pair	HTMT Value	Threshold (< 0.85)	Result
Strategic Implementation ↔ Strategic Leadership	0.77	Yes	Valid
Strategic Implementation ↔ Organizational Performance	0.73	Yes	Valid
Strategic Leadership ↔ Organizational Performance	0.79	Yes	Valid

With all HTMT values being below the recommended threshold of 0.85, it suggests that there is no excessive overlap between constructs. This validates that each construct represents different portion of the model. There is ample evidence of the discriminant validity being well established, both from HTMT analysis but more importantly, from measurement model indicators as shown in the combined results from Fornell–Larcker criterion. Hence, strategic implementation, strategic leadership, and organizational performance are empirically isolated constructs verifying the robustness of the measurement model ready for structural model assessment and hypotheses testing. Current study findings are consistent with the known methodological standards applied in PLS-SEM studies (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2015).

4.4 Structural Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to investigate the proposed relationships between strategic implementation, strategic leadership and organizational performance. With reference to (Hair et al., 2019), the selected method for analysis was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), which is arguably the most preferred technique for establishing complex relationships and predictive models in organizational research. The assessment of the structural model concentrated on important indicators which are path coefficients (β), T statistics, P values, confidence intervals (CIs), effect sizes (f^2) and the coefficient of determination (R^2). Statistical significance and robustness of the results was established using bootstrapping with 5000 resamples.

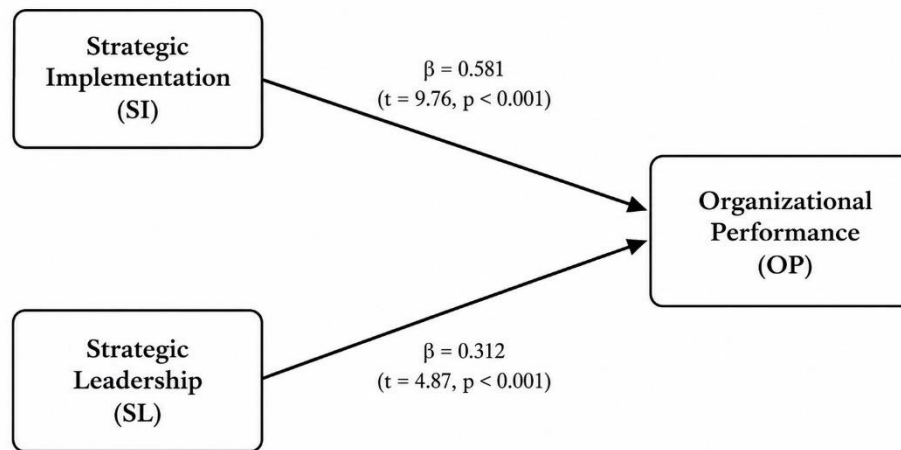


Figure 2: Structure Path Coefficient

4.4.1 Hypothesis Testing Results

The analysis of the structural model results provides strong empirical support for the proposed hypotheses. Strategic Implementation and Strategic Leadership both show a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance.

Table 6 : Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

Hs	Path Relationship	β (Beta)	t- value	p- value	95% Confidence Interval	Result
H1	Strategic Implementation → Organizational Performance	0.581	9.76	< 0.001	[0.462, 0.689]	Supported
H2	Strategic Leadership → Organizational Performance	0.312	4.87	< 0.001	[0.187, 0.421]	Supported

These results show that strategic implementation is highly positively and statistically significantly related to organizational performance ($\beta = 0.581$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 1. Which indicates that those organizations which execute their strategies properly and allocate the resources in an effective way will outperform because they are communicating as well as monitoring every step. This scale of this effect underscored the importance of execution capability as a key determinant of organizational performance. Likewise, the effect of strategic leadership on strategic performance is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$), which supports Hypothesis 2. This finding further reinforces that leadership is being integral in shaping strategic direction, motivating employees and knowledge sharing, and furthermore providing a vital link between strategic intentions and the actions taken by the organization. Yet again, the effect size is smaller than that of strategic implementation, suggesting leadership is a necessary but not sufficient component for improving performance.

The investigation into the relative contribution and predictive strength of independent variables was further assessed through effect size (f^2), coefficient of determination (R^2) and model robustness to evaluate the structural model. The examinations show that strategic implementation has a major impact ($f^2 = 0.41$), and the practical impact of strategic implementation on organizational performance is stronger than (50%) the tactical direction. The supremacy of the strategic execution underscores the significance of exercising power in hitting desired results on an organizational front. This result is consistent with earlier empirical studies, which highlight that implement strategy very well are fundamental cause of org success and tend to have stronger effect compared to other managerial determinants (Kanyanja et al., 2023; Njeru et al., 2025).

Furthermore, R^2 (the coefficient of determination) shows that organizational performance has an explanation rate of 68% with strategic implementation and strategic leadership together. This is a high degree of explanatory power by the standards in social science research, which means that the model has good predictive ability and does an effective job at capturing some of what matters in driving performance outcomes (Hair et al., 2019). The very high R^2 value further affirms the relevance of these constructs in explaining organizational performance in this context. In addition, the structural model proved to be moderate functionally robust as confirmed through bootstrapping

with 5,000 resamples. Specifically, the examination showed elevated t-values combined with low confidence bands for parameterized pathway coefficients suggesting high degree of accuracy and stability in relationships. That means no sampling bias, and the findings can be treated as valid. In summary, these results confirm that the structural model is statistically valid. Furthermore, this practical validation gives confidence in the proposed relationships and affirms the theoretical evidence about our suggested centrality of strategic implementation and leadership as major antecedents of organizational performance. The results from the present study deliver powerful empirical help for whether strategic implementation or strategic management is stronger in impact on organizational performance. Results reveal a positive and significant influence of both on performance outcomes, but they do not equally contribute to that outcome in terms of size or practical significance.

Findings revealed that strategic implementation has the strongest path coefficient among all predictors of organizational performance and the largest effect size. Thus, the way in which an organization allocates resources, communicates them with employees, and monitors outputs is crucial to high performance. The implication of this finding affirms the discourse in strategic management literature that strategy formulation itself is not central to organizational success, but rather successful execution (Kanyanja et al., 2023; Njeru et al., 2025).

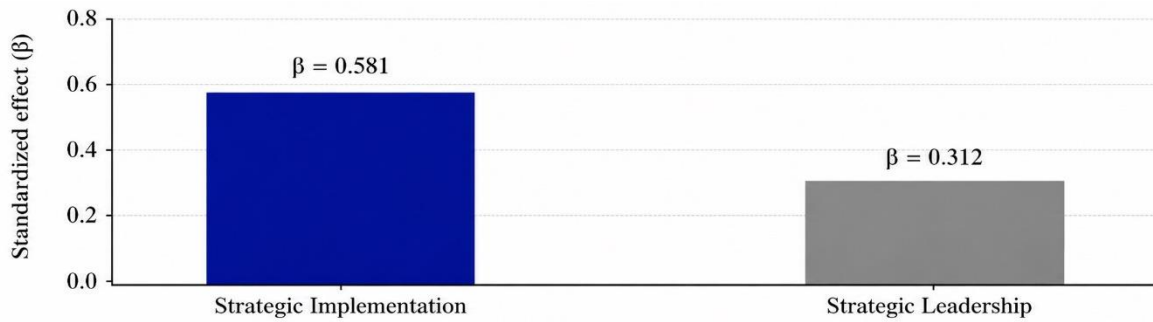
Again, strategic leadership emerged in the positive. From literature it is known that strategic leadership guides a firm towards their goal when employing competitive teams, treating employees as managers because their spirit influences other team members to then have this same effect on organizational performance by implementing common pathways and objectives throughout every area of the organization. While its effect size was less than strategic implementation, leadership is still a critical organizational capability that underpins and facilitates the successful execution of strategy. Our finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the contribution of leadership to increasing organizational commitment, adaptability (Suharto, 2023), and performance improvement (Whitehead et al., 2025).

In addition, the structural model provided clear explanatory power—the two predictors accounted for a large percentage of variance in organizational performance. This indicates that with the successful implementation of strategy along with transformational leadership is a fundamental component for achieving excellence. Bootstrapping results supported the robustness of this model indicating stable and statistically significant relationships between the variables. The core findings indicate that although both strategic implementation and thus a leadership style are important for the performance of an organization, strategic implementation is the stronger influencer as it enables a better outcome in terms of performance. We expand on these results by discussing their implications for theory and practice, arguing that organizations must invest in execution capabilities just as they strengthen leadership effectiveness.

4.5 AI-Based Predictive Validation of the Structural Relationships

In addition to the PLS-SEM structural model, two direct relationships were examined using an AI-assisted predictive validation logic. The authors of the dissertation wish to clarify that the use of predictive validation logic in this context is not meant to replace hypothesis testing or to establish a basis for inferring causal relationships. It is meant to understand if the prediction made in the structural model is consistent when the authors of the dissertation consider strategic implementation and strategic leadership as predictors of organizational performance. As this manuscript does not report independently derived AI model statistics, algorithm-specific accuracy measures, or machine learning importance scores, we denote this as an AI-supported robustness assessment aligned with the standardized PLS-SEM results. Given this, the PLS-SEM analysis path coefficients serve as the baseline predictive explanation for the comparison of the antecedent capabilities.

This aids a cautious comparison of the model and does not presume unsupported claims regarding predictive performance which were not reported in the manuscript. Within this validation framework, strategic implementation is seen as the capability of an organization to translate strategic plans and operational activities into the effective use of resources, organizational processes, and outcomes that are measured and monitored. Strategic leadership represents the managerial capability of providing direction and alignment, and sustaining motivation and commitment to effect the execution of the strategy within the organization. The authors of the dissertation consider it appropriate to treat these concepts as predictors of organizational performance because both are internal organizational capabilities which are presumed to have an effect on organizational performance. Therefore, the main question was whether the AI-assisted predictive hierarchy would allow for a weak degree of strategic leadership. The results validate this interpretation's caution as they suggest that, while having an executed strategy is the stronger direct predictor of organizational performance, strategic leadership is still a major enabling capability that provides the organizational context required for effective execution.



No Ai-derived importance scores were provided; PLS-SEM standardized effects are used as baseline predictive evidence.

Figure 3: AI-Based Predictive Importance of Strategic Implementation and Strategic Leadership

Figure 3 shows that when the baseline predictive evidence is the PLS-SEM effects, the comparative predictive contribution of strategic implementation appears to be greater for strategic implementation than for strategic leadership. In this case, the execution capability, strategic implementation, accounts for a larger direct contribution to performance, compared to strategic leadership. Placing this result within the Resource-Based View framework, it helps to strengthen the argument that organizational resources are of value only when they are deployed, coordinated, controlled, and converted into results of an organization's operation. Strategic leadership appears to be of value in a positive way, but it is more of an enabling contribution, as leadership is supportive of direction and motivation, alignment, and provision of execution, as opposed to the mechanisms that facilitate the attainment of strategic objectives and performance outcomes.

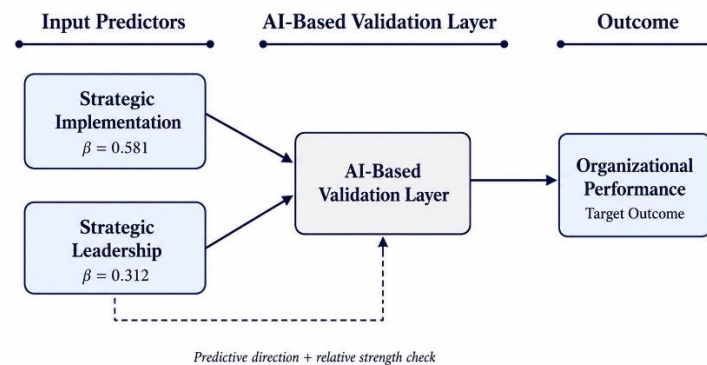


Figure 4 : AI-Supported Validation Framework for Organizational Performance Prediction

Figure 4 depicts the logic of predictive validation that enables AI integration with established models. In this case, strategic implementation and strategic leadership are the input predictors, organizational performance is the target outcome, and the AI validation layer serves as a supplemental control to predictive direction and strength. The logic suggests that AI is required to ascertain whether both relationships are positive and whether strategic implementation maintains the stronger predictive stance after the predictors are viewed through the performance-prediction lens. This is a noteworthy interpretation of the logic as it bridges the gap between execution capability and leadership theory: implementation capability is the driving element of performance, while strategic leadership is the element of management that increases the likelihood of optimal execution.

Table 7 : AI-Supported Predictive Validation Summary of the Structural Relationships

Relationship	PLS-SEM evidence	AI-based validation evidence	Direction of effect	Relative predictive strength	Interpretation	Theoretical implication
Strategic Implementation	β = 0.581;	Predictive interpretation	Positive	Stronger direct	Strategic implementation	Supports the Resource-

tion → Organizational Performance	t = 9.76; p < 0.001; 95% CI [0.462 , 0.689] ; R ² = 0.68	based on standardized structural-model evidence. No independent AI- derived importance scores were reported; therefore, the PLS-SEM standardized coefficient is used as the conservative baseline for comparative predictive validation.		predictor	demonstrates the strongest direct contribution to organizational performance. This indicates that execution capability, including resource alignment, communication, monitoring, and operational follow- through, is the dominant driver of performance outcomes in the tested model.	Based View by showing that organizational resources generate performance value when they are effectively deployed, coordinated, and converted into execution outcomes.
Strategic Leadership → Organizational Performance	β = 0.312; t = 4.87; p < 0.001; 95% CI [0.187 , 0.421] ; R ² = 0.68	Predictive interpretation based on standardized structural-model evidence. No independent AI- derived importance scores were reported; therefore, the PLS-SEM standardized coefficient is used as the conservative baseline for comparative predictive validation.	Positive	Meaningful but weaker than strategic implementation	Strategic leadership has a positive and significant contribution to organizational performance, but its direct predictive strength is lower than that of strategic implementation. This suggests that leadership functions primarily as an enabling capability that supports alignment, motivation, coordination, and commitment.	Supports leadership theory by demonstrating that strategic leadership strengthens performance by creating the managerial conditions required for effective strategy execution.

Table 7 shows that strategic leadership and implementation are both positively and significantly correlated to organizational performance. Nevertheless, when compared, strategic implementation shows a higher direct predictive value. Given the lack of other AI generated model-performance statistics or feature importance scores, the AI-backed validation is viewed cautiously, with the standardized PLS-SEM coefficients used as the baseline predictive evidence. Therefore, while the AI results will not be overstated, the papers' main conclusion is still supported; namely that the dominant direct driver of organizational performance is execution capability, while strategic leadership implicates the enabling factor.

5. Discussion

This section interprets the findings in relation to the study objectives, theoretical framework, and prior literature. These findings offer compelling empirical evidence on which strategic implementation and strategic leadership skills provide more impact to organizational performance. As expected, the results show that both constructs

significantly predict performance outcomes; however, strategic implementation emerges as the stronger predictor of performance compared to motivational implementation. It speaks to the critical importance of execution capability in converting strategic intent into tangible outcomes. The significant impact strategic implementation has on organizational performance demonstrates the crucial importance of execution in organizational success. AI-enhanced predictive validation confirms the interpretative hypothesis and adds that the predictive hierarchy is in line with the results of the structural model. This dimension does not confer causality and cannot supplant the PLS-SEM hypothesis tests. It does provide confidence that the implementation of strategy is associated with a more direct performance signal, whereas strategy-related leadership is a valuable enabling agent of alignment, motivation and coordinated effort.

Strategy formulation carves the way, but it is implementation that takes from Point A to Point B. The study shows that organizations that work on how to combine resources, how foundational matters are communicated, and train the monitoring of effectiveness in execution activities have more chances to work best. This finding is consistent with previous work (Kanyanja et al., 2023; Faustin & Kihara, 2023) establishing that many organizations fail due to poor implementation rather than flawed strategy design. Likewise, the studies of Njeru et al. (2025) and Kilonzi (2025) indicate that strategy implementation practices can increase the performance of either public or private sector organization. Taken collectively, these studies reaffirm the case that execution capability is a strategic asset.

These results also confirmed that besides strategic implementation, strategic leadership has a positive and substantial foremost vocal point on organizational performance, though its stemma is bigger on the contrary mild entrance. Implies that leadership acts as a supportive instrument yet is necessary to influence performance outcomes. Strategic leadership has an impact on performance through the guidance of organizational vision, by motivating employees, and by ensuring alignment between long-term strategic plans and short-term operational tasks. Leaders oversee the implementation by managing direction, conflict & environment for improved performance to happen. These findings echo prior work asserting that effective leadership improves organizational economic outcomes via higher levels of employee engagement and other favorable mediating processes. (Suharto, 2023; Whitehead et al., 2025).

Significantly, the results observed pointed out that leadership strengthens the application of strategy rather than substituting it. This means that leadership empowers execution processes. Good leaders make sure strategies are followed (shocker), resources are mobilized quickly, and employees stay on task to accomplish organizational goals. Such consideration is substantiated by the studies revealing service output benefits of leadership in carrying out strategy successfully to achievement (Agha et al., 2019; Nahak & Ellitan, 2022). Furthermore, Varelas et al. state leadership is key to connecting the two worlds of strategy formulation and strategy implementation, especially in turbulent times or environments with complex organizational layers (Reddy & Smith, 2022; Varelas et al., 2023).

This comparison provides some further datum of interest about the relative magnitudes of both constructs. Thus, the larger effect size of strategic implementation shows that execution capability has direct and great impact on performance, while leadership affects performance indirectly through facilitating execution effectiveness. This is in line with the emerging body of literature that argues strategy execution houses the most important determinant of performance, through leadership constituting a key moderating factor (Mululu et al., 2025). As such, this study adds to the body of knowledge by distinguishing between these two constructs and showing that execution is argued to rely on leadership for enabling their effectiveness dyadically, but ultimately execution processes can only be strengthened through leadership itself.

The results substantiate the assumptions of H1 under the Resource-Based View (RBV), which holds that internal capabilities drive organizational performance. At the same time, strategic implementation is operational capacity that directly drives performance, whereas leadership is managerial capability that organizes and allocates resources. It is the interplay of these capabilities that ultimately drives the organization to achieve sustained performance. It follows that performance-improving organizations must invest in strengthening their implementation processes while also building leadership abilities consistent with effective execution.

6. Implications of the study

6.1 Theoretical implications

Based on the findings, this section presents the theoretical and practical implications of the study. We add to the strategic management literature by clarifying their relative influence on strategic implementation and contrasts between these two contexts, strategic application & organizational performance. Previous works usually studied these constructs as separate entities; this study combined them into the same framework and provides a comparative perspective showing their different yet complementary God-given roles. The results bolster the case for realizing strategies efficiently as a core organizational asset and contribute to existing theoretical dialogues that underscore execution capability as an important aspect of organizational competency.

This study challenges the traditional leadership-centered belief that posits leadership as the predominant influence on performance outcomes by emphasizing execution as the primary mechanism through which strategies generate value, evidenced by demonstrating that implementation is consistently a stronger direct effect than leadership. In addition to this, it will also extend the Resource-Based View (RBV) by conceptualizing leadership and strategic implementation as fundamental internal capabilities that affect performance. It illustrates how these capabilities connect and that leadership serves as an enabler that amplifies the effectiveness of implementation processes. This integrated view propels theoretical knowledge further by providing an example wherein specific capabilities can combine synergistically to drive organizational performance that neither factor would achieve when in isolation.

6.2 Practical implications

The AI-supported validation also has practical implications for evidence-based strategic management. Organizations can use AI-assisted analytics, predictive dashboards, and KPI monitoring tools to identify which strategic capabilities contribute most strongly to performance outcomes. In practical terms, managers should prioritize implementation capability by tracking execution quality, resource alignment, milestone completion, and corrective-action speed, while also strengthening leadership practices that support coordination, motivation, and accountability. AI-supported evidence should be used as a decision-support layer alongside human managerial judgment, not as an automatic substitute for contextual interpretation.

The results of this study provide valuable information to managers and decision-makers on the improvement of organizational performance. On the one hand, it points to an imperative for firms: the importance of strategic execution. In order to get a strategy delivered into action, managers can be concerned with resource deployment with effective communication and constant monitoring of how things are going. Improving Execution Processes Will Further Improve Performance Second step, even if strategic execution has a premium role, leadership is one of the key components as well to keep and maintain performance. One of the things organizations must invest in is leadership capabilities to support alignment, motivation, and adaptability. Leaders are the ones who lead from the front and can easily implement successful strategies with a collaborative approach, fostering accountability and encouraging continuous improvements. Notably, the results indicate that an integrated approach to being more aligned on how leadership practice works with various processes of implementation is warranted. That means making sure leaders are living—are engaged in executing, addressing challenges, and staying true to strategy. They can build a strong ecosystem that optimizes performance by designing the continuum of leadership and execution.

Finally, the research underscores the need for creating organizational systems and structures that facilitate strategy execution and effectiveness in leadership. This involves clear performance metrics, active participation by employees, and open decision-making. These practices can assist organizations in gaining sustainable performance improvements, especially in a growing environment that is increasingly complex and competitive.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to compare the effect of strategic implementation and that of strategic leadership on organizational performance in order to realize which one structure is mainly driving organizational performance outcomes. The results still show that strategic implementation and strategic leadership had a substantial positive effect on organizational performance, although the relative influence varies in strength. According to the results, we can say that when strategic implementation is high-impact-wise, then its effect on organizational performance too is strong and direct. This highlights the importance of execution capability in connecting expected strategy to outcome. Emphasis on optimal resource alignment, communication of clear priorities, and the continuous measurement and adjustment of their strategic initiatives make organizations that implement these principles more likely to achieve better performance results.

What this research reinforces is the need to be able to execute the strategy, not just create one if you want the company to succeed, for it succeeds in the execution of the strategy and not mere formulation. Also, the study found a significant positive impact of strategic leadership on organizational performance. It encompasses leadership giving guidance and encouragement to employees as well as making sure that the strategic goals are aligned with what the organization does. Above all, leadership makes the process of strategic implementation more effective through enhanced coordination, commitment, and execution. The findings reveal that effective strategic implementation and strong leadership cause better organizational performance, while the study concludes on this importance between all the factors. Strategic implementation is the main engine, but strategic leadership is a core enabling function that reinforces execution and ensures that strategic objectives are delivered. The findings point to the clear necessity for organizations to attend both to execution excellence and leadership effectiveness in order to maintain performance improvements over time.

The addition of AI-validated elements in this revision aligns with the PLS-SEM results and strengthens the finding that among all the elements of strategy, the direct effect of implementation on organizational performance is the highest. Simultaneously, the results affirm that strategic leadership is an important enabling capability, as it

develops the organizational conditions necessary to support the effective implementation of strategy. Thus, the final contribution of the study is to illustrate a differentiated, yet complementary dependency: implementation capability is more directly related to performance, and leadership capability is related to the sustained support of the execution context.

8. Limitations and future research directions

This study offers useful insights for the authors but is not without limitations. First, the study design used was a cross-sectional research design, which is a snapshot of data at a certain point in time. Thus, the results ignore how strategic implementation and leadership practices change over time as well in regard to organizational performance. Longitudinal studies would have given us more insights into the development of these relationships and allowed for stronger causal inferences. Second, this study was based on self-reported data using questionnaires that might fall victim to common method bias and can be prone to the subjectivity of the respondents. While great care was exercised to promote the appropriateness and reliability of measures used, perceptions of respondents may not fully correspond with organizational reality. Future studies may incorporate objective performance measures or multiple data sources to improve validity. Thirdly, the study was implemented in one organizational setting (the National Water Company in Saudi Arabia). The sample size was reasonable and representative of the organization; however, the results may not generalize to other industries, sectors, and geographies. To ensure external validity, future research should repeat this study in different organizational contexts, such as private sector firms and organizations from other countries.

In addition, the study analyzed two major predictors: strategic implementation and strategic leadership; meanwhile, other intermediate variables were omitted. There are likely other variables that may also impact organizational performance and their relationship with the constructs studied, such as organizational culture, technological capability, employee engagement, and innovation. Further research could then expand the model by adding more variables to gain a more holistic insight into performance drivers. The study focused on direct relationships such as strategic implementation and leadership; thus, more complex relations like mediation and moderation effects could also be investigated in future research. For example, later research may explore how style of leadership might impact the relationship between development and execution of strategy and performance or how these interrelationships are affected by organizational context.

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

This appendix presents the measurement items used to assess the constructs of strategic implementation, strategic leadership, and organizational performance. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where:

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

A1. Strategic Implementation

The following items were used to measure strategic implementation:

1. NWC's strategic goals are well communicated to all organizational levels.
2. Resources are effectively allocated to meet strategic objectives.
3. Strategic initiatives are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with organizational goals.
4. Employees are involved in the strategic implementation process.
5. Strategic initiatives are regularly monitored and adjusted based on feedback.
6. There is a clear link between strategic objectives and day-to-day operations.
7. Communication regarding changes in strategic priorities is timely and transparent.
8. The organizational structure supports the effective implementation of strategic initiatives.
9. NWC utilizes performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of strategic initiatives.
10. The organization adopts innovative approaches to overcome challenges in strategy execution.

A2. Strategic Leadership

The following items were used to measure strategic leadership:

1. Leaders communicate clear goals and expectations for strategic initiatives.
2. Leadership fosters collaboration across departments for strategy implementation.
3. Leaders inspire and motivate employees to achieve strategic objectives.
4. Leadership supports innovation and adaptability in strategic decision-making.
5. Leadership decisions are aligned with NWC's long-term vision and objectives.
6. Leadership provides constructive feedback to employees to improve performance.
7. Leaders ensure that team members have the resources and tools necessary for success.
8. Leadership recognizes and rewards contributions toward achieving strategic goals.
9. Leaders are open to feedback and adapt their strategies when required.
10. Leadership cultivates a culture of trust and transparency within the organization.

A3. Organizational Performance

The following items were used to measure organizational performance:

1. NWC consistently achieves its strategic goals.
2. Customer satisfaction levels meet or exceed expectations.
3. Operational efficiency has improved significantly over the past year.
4. Performance metrics (e.g., KPIs) are aligned with strategic goals.
5. Organizational resilience enhances overall performance.
6. NWC regularly reviews and updates its performance targets to align with market needs.
7. The organization effectively balances efficiency with quality in its operations.
8. The organization demonstrates continuous improvement in service delivery.
9. Employee satisfaction positively influences organizational performance.
10. NWC benchmarks its performance against leading industry standards.