

The Impact of Visionary Leadership on the UAE SMEs Performance: The Mediation Role of Organizational Alignment and Organizational Innovation

Anwar Saleh Alnimr, School of International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.
Email: aalnimir@yahoo.com

Fakhrorazi Ahmad, School of International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.
Email: fakhrorazi@uum.edu.my

Oussama Saoula, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.
Email: osaoula@uum.edu.my

Corresponding author: Oussama Saoula, Email: osaoula@uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study examines how visionary leadership influences the organisational performance of SMEs in the United Arab Emirates, with particular attention to the mediating roles of organisational alignment and organisational innovation. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were obtained from 313 manufacturing SMEs. The relationships among the study variables, including both direct and indirect effects, were assessed using PLS-SEM. The findings reveal that visionary leadership exerts a significant direct influence on organisational performance and also contributes indirectly through organisational alignment. Although visionary leadership and strategic vision demonstrate positive associations with organisational performance, the linkage is fully mediated by organisational innovation. The evidence further suggests that while transformational leaders are effective in fostering internal coherence and strategic direction, superior organisational outcomes are achieved primarily through innovation rather than leadership vision alone. The study underscores the importance of developing innovation-driven capabilities within SMEs to fully realise the performance benefits associated with visionary leadership. It also advances leadership–performance frameworks by explaining how leadership vision operates through internal organisational mechanisms within developing-country contexts. In practical terms, the findings offer valuable guidance for entrepreneurs and policymakers seeking to strengthen the competitiveness, resilience, and long-term sustainability of SMEs in the rapidly evolving business environment of the UAE.

Keywords: Visionary Leadership, Organizational Alignment, Organizational Innovation, Organizational Performance, UAE SMEs

INTRODUCTION

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where SMEs play a pivotal role in economic diversification, employment generation, and innovation, organisational performance has emerged as a key national strategic priority. In alignment with UAE Vision 2030, which seeks

to transform the economy into a knowledge-based and innovation-led system, SMEs are expected to demonstrate high levels of agility, competitiveness, and operational excellence. Nevertheless, many SMEs in the UAE continue to face challenges arising from rapid technological change, intensifying global competition, and limited internal capabilities, all of which constrain organisational performance.

Over recent decades, leadership has increasingly been recognised as a critical determinant that enables organisations to manage such complexity and achieve sustainable success within dynamic and competitive environments (Hermawan et al., 2024). Within this context, visionary leadership has gained prominence as a leadership style characterised by future orientation, strategic clarity, and the ability to mobilise organisational members towards shared objectives. Visionary leadership refers to a leader's capacity to articulate a compelling future direction, inspire employees to work towards that vision, and align organisational resources with long-term strategic objectives. In contemporary organisations, visionary leaders extend beyond routine operational management by introducing new strategic pathways and reshaping organisational structures. Empirical evidence suggests that this leadership style plays a vital role in facilitating organisational transformation and the successful execution of strategic initiatives, particularly in uncertain and technologically volatile environments (Kadhun et al., 2023).

Within SMEs, where structures are generally less formalised and leadership influence is more immediate, the impact of visionary leadership on organisational behaviour, innovation, and performance may be even more pronounced. Although scholarly attention to visionary leadership has expanded considerably, prior research has largely concentrated on large corporations and public institutions, with relatively limited focus on SMEs, particularly within developing economies. This omission is important because SMEs differ substantially from large organisations in terms of resource limitations, decision-making processes, and structural flexibility. Leaders with a strong strategic vision can shape organisational priorities, strengthen employee motivation, and direct innovation efforts, thereby enhancing performance outcomes (Lamu, 2023). In the UAE context specifically, SMEs operate within an intensely competitive and rapidly evolving business landscape shaped by digital transformation, sustainability agendas, and government-led development initiatives, all of which require leadership grounded in foresight to ensure survival and growth (Tantry et al., 2025).

The principal dependent variable in this study is organisational performance, which reflects the extent to which an organisation achieves its strategic, operational, and financial objectives. In SMEs, however, performance is closely linked with internal resources, including leadership quality, innovation capability, and strategic coherence. Research grounded in the resource-based view indicates that intangible assets, such as leadership competencies and organisational knowledge, can generate sustainable competitive advantage when effectively leveraged (Collins, 2022). Within this framework, visionary leadership is conceptualised as a strategic organisational resource that enables firms to cultivate such capabilities and translate them into superior performance outcomes. Nevertheless, the effect of leadership on performance does not occur in isolation. Rather, its influence is channelled through internal organisational processes that convert leadership intent into practical action. Two critical mechanisms in this regard are organisational alignment and organisational innovation. Organisational alignment refers to the integration and coordination of various organisational components to ensure unified direction and coherent strategic execution. High levels of alignment allow organisations to utilise resources more efficiently and reduce internal conflict, both of which positively

influence performance, particularly when strategic and IT alignment support التنفيذ (Pashutan et al., 2022).

In contrast, organisational innovation represents the organisation's ability to continuously generate new ideas, products, processes, and methods of working. Within SMEs, innovation is widely recognised as a major driver of performance because it enables differentiation, improves efficiency, and enhances responsiveness to customer needs (Soomro et al., 2020). Visionary leaders are often viewed as catalysts of innovation through their encouragement of experimentation, organisational learning, and the cultivation of a future-oriented culture. As noted by Wang et al. (2024), leadership styles that emphasise vision and strategic direction are strongly associated with higher levels of innovative behaviour and improved organisational outcomes. Although prior studies have examined the relationships among leadership, alignment, innovation, and performance, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how these variables interact within a single integrated model, particularly in the context of UAE SMEs. Specifically, the mediating roles of organisational alignment and organisational innovation in the relationship between visionary leadership and organisational performance remain insufficiently explored. Some studies suggest that alignment functions as a crucial mediating mechanism through which strategic vision is translated into operational execution and systems integration (Slim et al., 2021).

Another stream of literature argues that innovation constitutes the primary mechanism through which leadership contributes to performance enhancement, particularly by enabling value creation in rapidly changing markets (Mai et al., 2022). Despite this, very few empirical studies have jointly examined these interrelationships within SMEs operating in emerging market contexts. It is within this research gap that the present study seeks to contribute by investigating the chain of influence through which visionary leadership affects organisational performance in UAE SMEs, with specific emphasis on the roles of organisational alignment and organisational innovation. By integrating leadership theory with the resource-based view and innovation perspectives, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how visionary leadership contributes to SME success. The findings are expected to make both theoretical and practical contributions by clarifying the underlying mechanisms through which leadership shapes organisational performance and by offering evidence-based recommendations for SME leaders and policymakers seeking to strengthen the competitiveness of the UAE SME sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Discussion

Visionary leadership reflects a behavioural orientation centred on articulating a compelling and desirable future, supported by clearly defined long-term goals and objectives, while actively engaging organisational members in the pursuit of shared aims. In modern organisational contexts, visionary leaders extend beyond conventional managerial functions by shaping strategic direction, promoting forward-looking thinking, and driving organisational transformation. This leadership style is particularly significant within SMEs, where leaders often exert direct influence over strategy formulation, organisational culture, and day-to-day operations. Empirical evidence indicates that visionary leadership plays a crucial role in enabling organisations to manage change effectively and attain sustainable success by aligning employee efforts with long-term objectives, consistent with broader strategic leadership

evidence on transformation (Singh et al., 2023). In rapidly developing economies such as the UAE, where firms must respond to accelerated shifts in markets, technology, and policy frameworks, visionary leadership becomes especially critical for enhancing organisational effectiveness.

The RBV offers an important theoretical foundation for explaining how visionary leadership contributes to organisational effectiveness. According to RBV, firms achieve SCA through the possession and effective deployment of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. Within this perspective, managerial vision and leadership capabilities are regarded as strategic intangible resources that shape how organisations utilise and develop their broader resource base (Collins, 2022). Visionary leadership can therefore be understood as a higher-order organisational capability that guides strategic decision-making, facilitates learning, and strengthens internal competencies. From this standpoint, leadership does not necessarily influence performance directly; rather, it shapes the internal organisational conditions through which higher levels of performance can be realised (Kadhum et al., 2023).

One of the most important internal capabilities influenced by visionary leadership is organisational alignment. Organisational alignment refers to the extent to which strategy, structure, processes, and employee behaviours are coherently directed towards common objectives. When alignment is strong, employees clearly understand organisational priorities, and their actions remain consistent with strategic goals, thereby improving coordination and operational efficiency. Empirical studies demonstrate that strategic and organisational alignment significantly enhances performance by strengthening the connection between strategic planning and implementation (Gede & Huluka, 2023). The role of leadership in creating and sustaining such alignment is particularly important in SMEs, where formalised systems of control and coordination are often limited. Visionary leaders provide a clear sense of direction and purpose, linking individual roles and activities to the organisation's broader mission.

Another critical internal capability closely associated with both visionary leadership and organisational performance is organisational innovation. This refers to the firm's capacity to generate and implement new ideas, products, services, and operational practices in response to competitive pressures and external environmental changes. For SMEs, innovation is essential for achieving differentiation, improving productive capacity, and responding rapidly to changing customer demands. Baumanė-Vītoliņa et al. (2022) found that organisational innovation is significantly and positively associated with the performance of SMEs in technology-oriented industries. The continuous advancement of knowledge and technology further intensifies the importance of innovation within organisations (Zhang et al., 2025). Visionary leaders often stimulate innovation by encouraging idea sharing, experimentation, and a culture that values learning from failure and continuous improvement, thereby embedding future-oriented thinking within the organisational environment (Wang et al., 2024).

Dynamic capabilities theory further strengthens this theoretical perspective by emphasising the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to environmental change. Within this framework, visionary leadership may itself be viewed as a dynamic capability because it enables firms to identify emerging opportunities, respond strategically, and restructure internal systems to sustain competitiveness. Similarly, organisational alignment and organisational innovation can be interpreted as manifestations of

dynamic capabilities, as both enable firms to adapt strategies and routines in response to changing conditions (Drago et al., 2022). In the context of UAE SMEs, where firms operate within an environment characterised by digital transformation, sustainability initiatives, and government-led economic diversification, the combination of visionary leadership, strong alignment, and robust innovation capability is particularly essential for achieving high organisational performance.

From this integrated theoretical standpoint, visionary leadership functions not only as a strategic antecedent of internal organisational capabilities but also as a central mechanism through which leadership effects are transmitted into superior firm performance. SMEs led by visionary leaders are more likely to demonstrate clear strategic direction, stronger innovative behaviour, and greater adaptive capability, enabling them to navigate environmental challenges more effectively. These arguments provide a strong conceptual basis for investigating how visionary leadership influences organisational performance in UAE SMEs through the mediating roles of organisational alignment and organisational innovation.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Visionary Leadership and Organizational Performance

Visionary leadership fundamentally refers to the ability of leaders to formulate and communicate a clear, compelling future direction while inspiring organisational members to move collectively towards that vision through strategic coherence and emotional engagement. Within SMEs, where organisational structures are generally less hierarchical and managerial influence is more concentrated, visionary leadership becomes particularly critical in shaping both strategic agendas and operational priorities. Leaders who communicate a well-defined and persuasive vision enable employees to understand not only what the organisation seeks to accomplish but also why those objectives are significant, thereby strengthening intrinsic motivation and organisational commitment.

This shared understanding promotes stronger commitment, improved coordination, and greater collective investment in the achievement of common goals, all of which are essential for enhanced organisational performance. Recent evidence suggests that transformational and visionary leadership styles play a significant role in ensuring the effectiveness of organisational change and long-term performance, particularly by enabling firms to respond effectively to environmental shifts and competitive pressures within SME contexts (Woo, 2025). In the case of UAE SMEs, which operate in highly dynamic and competitive markets shaped by digitalisation and economic diversification, visionary leaders are especially important for directing strategic initiatives and channelling resources towards performance-enhancing activities. Through mechanisms such as providing strategic focus, reducing uncertainty, and fostering employee commitment, visionary leadership is therefore expected to contribute directly to organisational effectiveness.

H1: Visionary leadership has a significant and positive effect on organizational performance.

Visionary Leadership and Organizational Alignment

A second important construct is organisational alignment, which refers to the extent to which employees, organisational processes, and strategic objectives are closely integrated and

directed towards common goals. Visionary leadership serves as a key antecedent of alignment because it provides a unifying direction that enables organisational members to recognise how their individual contributions support the firm's long-term vision. Leaders who consistently communicate strategy and reinforce strategic priorities create greater clarity among employees, thereby strengthening alignment around organisational objectives.

This is particularly important for SMEs, where formalised systems, procedures, and coordination mechanisms may be less developed. In such settings, leadership must fulfil a strong communicative and integrative role to ensure that organisational efforts remain strategically coherent. Empirical evidence indicates that leadership-driven alignment enhances organisational consistency and strengthens the connection between strategy formulation and execution, thereby improving operational effectiveness, including clearer IT–business alignment mechanisms within SMEs (Pashutan et al., 2022). Visionary leaders also help resolve competing priorities by directing attention towards overarching organisational goals that unify diverse functions and activities. For UAE SMEs operating within a rapidly changing environment shaped by global competition and government-led transformation initiatives, strong organisational alignment enables firms to respond more effectively to strategic challenges. Accordingly, it is widely recognised that visionary leadership exerts a positive influence on organisational alignment.

H2: Visionary leadership has a significant and positive effect on organizational alignment.

Visionary Leadership and Organizational Innovation

Organisational innovation refers to a firm's capacity to generate, develop, and implement new products, ideas, processes, or procedures that enhance its competitiveness and adaptability. Visionary leadership plays a central role in fostering innovation because it promotes a future-oriented perspective and encourages employees to move beyond conventional practices. Leaders who communicate a clear and compelling vision inspire organisational members to explore new approaches, experiment with alternative solutions, and engage in creative problem-solving.

Within SMEs, innovation initiatives are often driven more directly by leadership than by formalised R&D structures. In such contexts, visionary leadership is particularly important in creating an environment that tolerates calculated risk and values continuous learning, both of which are essential conditions for the emergence of innovation. Empirical evidence indicates that visionary leadership makes a substantial contribution to innovative performance in SMEs, especially within technologically dynamic environments where continuous innovation is necessary. This is particularly evident when leaders encourage employee voice and experimentation, which subsequently translate into stronger innovation outcomes (Yang et al., 2025). Rather than allowing creativity to develop in an unstructured manner, visionary leaders channel creative efforts by linking them to long-term strategic objectives, ensuring that innovation activities contribute to value creation rather than isolated experimentation. In the context of UAE SMEs, where firms are increasingly encouraged to innovate in alignment with national economic diversification strategies, visionary leadership is expected to play a critical role in strengthening organisational innovation (Cai et al., 2023).

H3: Visionary leadership has a significant and positive effect on organizational innovation.

Organizational Alignment and Organizational Performance

Organisational alignment is widely recognised as a major determinant of organisational outcomes because it creates synergy among all organisational components and directs them towards the achievement of strategic objectives. When employees clearly understand what is most important to the organisation and can directly relate their individual roles to broader organisational goals, coordination becomes more efficient and resource wastage is significantly reduced. Alignment also strengthens decision-making by ensuring that both strategic and operational choices are grounded in clearly defined priorities.

Beyond improving efficiency and effectiveness, organisational alignment ensures that programmes and initiatives are guided by relevant information and data rather than conflicting interests or fragmented agendas. Empirical evidence supports the view that high levels of strategic and organisational alignment enhance performance by narrowing the gap between planning and execution (Slim et al., 2021). In SMEs, particularly those facing resource limitations and dispersed managerial attention, alignment becomes even more critical for maximising the effectiveness of strategic initiatives. Misalignment in such organisations often results in inefficient workflows, duplication of effort, and strategic drift, all of which undermine performance. Within the UAE SME context, where firms operate in a highly competitive environment characterised by rapid environmental shifts, aligned organisations are better positioned to respond quickly and effectively to emerging opportunities and challenges. Therefore, organisational alignment is expected to exert a positive influence on organisational performance.

H4: Organizational alignment has a significant and positive effect on organizational performance.

Organizational Innovation and Organizational Performance

Organisational innovation is a critical determinant of performance because it enables firms to create value, improve operational effectiveness, and respond more rapidly to evolving market demands. For SMEs, a strong innovation strategy is particularly important as it allows them to compete more effectively with larger organisations through the introduction of new products, services, and systems. Innovation supports improvements in quality, cost reduction, and customer satisfaction, all of which contribute directly to enhanced organisational performance.

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that innovation capability is positively associated with organisational performance in SMEs and manufacturing firms (Jalil et al., 2021). Moreover, innovation contributes to long-term sustainability by enabling businesses to adapt to technological advancements and changing customer preferences. In the UAE context, where innovation and knowledge-based growth are central to national economic development strategies, SMEs that actively invest in innovation are expected to achieve stronger organisational performance. Innovative organisations are better positioned to secure competitive advantage through the development and implementation of new ideas and improved practices. Accordingly, organisational innovation is expected to exert a positive effect on organisational performance.

H5: Organizational innovation has a significant and positive effect on organizational performance.

The Mediating Role of Organizational Alignment

Organisational alignment is likely to mediate the relationship between visionary leadership and organisational performance because it represents the mechanism through which leadership vision is translated into coordinated organisational behaviour. While visionary leaders may formulate compelling goals and a clear strategic direction, these intentions contribute to performance only when they are effectively converted into organisation-wide action. Alignment ensures that people, processes, and organisational structures are synchronised with leadership objectives so that all activities move in a unified and strategically focused direction.

Empirical evidence indicates that alignment serves as a critical mechanism linking leadership with organisational outcomes by bridging the gap between strategic intent and operational execution (Mumcu, 2021). In SMEs, where leadership influence is typically strong and formalised systems are comparatively limited, alignment becomes particularly important in converting leadership vision into measurable performance outcomes. When alignment is high, employee and departmental behaviours reinforce one another, thereby amplifying the positive effects of visionary leadership on organisational performance. Accordingly, organisational alignment is expected to function as a mediating variable in the relationship between visionary leadership and organisational performance.

H6: Organizational alignment mediates the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational performance.

The Mediating Role of Organizational Innovation

Organisational innovation is also expected to mediate the relationship between visionary leadership and organisational performance because it represents the mechanism through which a leader's vision is transformed into novel solutions that generate value for the organisation. Visionary leaders stimulate employees to explore new ideas and challenge existing practices, thereby enhancing the organisation's capacity for innovation. This capability enables firms to develop new products, optimise processes, and respond effectively to environmental changes, all of which contribute to improved performance. Empirical evidence indicates that innovation serves as a key channel through which leadership influences performance outcomes, particularly within SMEs and dynamic industries (Yildiz & Aykanat, 2021). In the context of UAE SMEs, where firms are encouraged to adopt advanced technologies and innovative business models, organisational performance is likely to be strongly shaped by visionary leadership through its impact on innovation. By fostering a culture of creativity and experimentation, visionary leaders establish conditions that allow firms to generate competitive advantages, ultimately leading to superior performance. Consequently, organisational innovation is hypothesised to mediate the relationship between visionary leadership and organisational performance.

H7: Organizational innovation mediates the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational performance.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative research approach was employed to examine the impact of visionary leadership on organisational performance in UAE SMEs, with organisational alignment and organisational innovation included as mediating variables. A quantitative

methodology is appropriate as it enables systematic testing of hypothesised relationships among constructs and facilitates generalisation of findings across a large number of firms. The study draws on leadership, resource-based, and innovation theories, which require empirical validation through statistical modelling. Quantitative methods are widely used in leadership and innovation research due to their ability to provide robust evidence of causal relationships between organisational variables, and this aligns with contemporary guidance for management research using PLS-SEM (Becker et al., 2022). This design allows for rigorous testing of the conceptual framework, including both direct and indirect effects (Ringle et al., 2023).

The study population comprised small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises in the UAE. Manufacturing SMEs were selected because they represent a critical component of the UAE's economic diversification strategy and rely heavily on leadership, alignment, and innovation to maintain competitiveness. Data were collected from owners, senior managers, and department heads, who are typically assumed to have comprehensive knowledge of leadership practices, strategic fit, innovation activities, and organisational performance. In SMEs, managerial influence is pronounced, as strategic and operational decisions are largely centralised, making managerial perceptions a key determinant of organisational outcomes (Tantry et al., 2025). Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire, yielding 313 valid responses, which is sufficient for PLS-SEM and mediation analysis.

All constructs were operationalised using multi-item scales adapted to the UAE SME context. Visionary leadership was measured by items assessing leaders' ability to articulate a clear future vision, communicate it to employees, and guide organisational direction. Organisational alignment was assessed through items indicating the extent to which organisational goals, strategies, and employee actions were mutually supportive and coherent. Organisational innovation was measured via proxies reflecting the frequency and degree of development and implementation of novel ideas, products, or practices. Organisational performance was operationalised in terms of efficiency, competitiveness, and achievement of strategic goals. The use of previously validated instruments ensures reliability and validity and facilitates comparability with prior research on leadership and innovation, consistent with PLS-SEM measurement standards (Becker et al., 2022).

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyse the data. This method is suitable for models with multiple mediators and does not require normally distributed data, making it particularly appropriate for SMEs, where normality assumptions are often violated and sample sizes are moderate. PLS-SEM allows for simultaneous testing of the measurement and structural models, enabling detailed assessment of construct validity and hypothesised relationships. Reliability and validity of the measurement model were evaluated using composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. The structural model was assessed using path coefficients, R^2 values, and bootstrapping to estimate direct and indirect effects (Awwad, 2025).

The mediating roles of organisational alignment and organisational innovation were tested through bootstrapping, which provides more accurate estimates of indirect effects and confidence intervals than alternative methods and is recommended for mediation analysis in complex models. This approach allows for interpretation of both direct and indirect relationships between visionary leadership and organisational outcomes while accounting for system-level predictors. Overall, this analytical procedure aligns with contemporary research

on leadership and innovation, which emphasises the investigation of mediating mechanisms to understand how leadership influences organisational performance (Ringle et al., 2023).

FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical findings of the study on visionary leadership, organisational alignment, organisational innovation, and organisational performance among UAE SMEs. The results are structured sequentially, beginning with descriptive statistics and data screening, followed by measurement model assessment, structural model evaluation, and finally mediation analysis. Collectively, these findings offer a comprehensive assessment of the proposed research framework and the study hypotheses. Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics for the key constructs, based on 313 valid responses from manufacturing SMEs in the UAE. The mean score for visionary leadership was 2.90 with a standard deviation of 1.314, indicating a moderate presence of visionary leadership traits among the surveyed firms. While many SME leaders demonstrate future-oriented and inspirational qualities, these characteristics are not uniformly emphasised across all organisations.

For organisational alignment, the mean and standard deviation were 2.84 and 1.194, respectively, suggesting only a limited alignment between organisational goals, processes, and employee actions. This indicates that while some degree of strategic and operational coherence exists within UAE SMEs, it is not pervasive, highlighting the role of leadership in fostering integration across organisational activities. Organisational innovation showed a mean of 3.17 and a standard deviation of 1.013, reflecting moderate to high levels of innovative activity among UAE SMEs. This finding indicates that a substantial number of firms actively engage in generating new ideas, improving processes, and responding to market changes, consistent with the UAE's emphasis on innovation-driven growth. The highest mean was observed for organisational performance, at 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.878, indicating that overall SME performance is perceived as relatively strong. The slightly higher performance scores suggest that UAE SMEs display resilience and adaptability in navigating a dynamic business environment, despite variability in leadership and alignment metrics.

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Analysis

Construct	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
VL	313	2.900	1.314
OA	313	2.838	1.194
OI	313	3.165	1.013
OP	313	3.405	0.878

VL: Visionary Leadership; OA: Organizational Alignment; OI: Organizational Innovation; OP: Organizational Performance.

The normality assessment of the data is summarised in Table 2. The distributions of the primary constructs indicate that the dataset is suitable for multivariate analysis. For visionary leadership, skewness and kurtosis values were 0.119 and -1.338 , respectively, suggesting an approximately symmetrical distribution with slightly flatter tails than a normal distribution. This indicates that while responses varied, they did not significantly deviate from normality for visionary leadership measures. Organisational alignment exhibited slight positive skewness (0.271) and mild leptokurtosis (-1.143), reflecting an overall symmetrical distribution with relatively light tails. This suggests that agreement levels on alignment were dispersed around

the mean, without clustering at the extremes, indicating variability in SME alignment, yet remaining statistically suitable for further analysis.

Table 2: Normality Test

Construct	N	Skewness	Kurtosis
VL	313	0.119	-1.338
OA	313	0.271	-1.143
OI	313	-0.009	-0.926
OP	313	0.293	-0.720

The distribution of organisational innovation was nearly symmetrical, with skewness of -0.009 and kurtosis of -0.926 . This shows that responses on innovation activities were evenly distributed, with no pronounced tendency towards higher or lower values, and the lighter tails further indicate stability in innovation scores. Organisational performance demonstrated slight positive skewness (0.293) and kurtosis of -0.720 , indicating an approximately normal distribution. While some SMEs reported above-average performance across all dimensions, overall responses were evenly spread, with no significant departure from normality. As shown in Table 2, all skewness and kurtosis values fall within acceptable ranges, confirming that the data distributions are appropriate for structural equation modelling and mediation analysis.

The results of the normality tests are summarised in Table 3. Both the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests indicate that all study variables significantly deviate from a perfect normal distribution. Organisational performance showed a Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic of 0.128 and a Shapiro–Wilk statistic of 0.956 , with $p < 0.05$, indicating a non-normal distribution. Visionary leadership had a Kolmogorov–Smirnov value of 0.121 ($p < 0.05$) and a Shapiro–Wilk value of 0.925 ($p < 0.05$), reflecting substantial variation in leadership perceptions among UAE SMEs, which is typical for leadership and organisational behaviour data. Organisational alignment was also non-normal, with a Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic of 0.105 and a Shapiro–Wilk value of 0.941 ($p < 0.01$), indicating heterogeneity in how SMEs align strategy, structure, and employee behaviour. Organisational innovation showed a Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic of 0.095 and a Shapiro–Wilk value of 0.969 , similarly demonstrating deviation from normality. As Table 3 illustrates, all constructs significantly diverge from normality, confirming the appropriateness of using PLS-SEM, which does not require normally distributed data, particularly for mediation analysis in SME research contexts.

Table 3: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
OP	0.128	313	0.000	0.956	313	0.000
VL	0.121	313	0.000	0.925	313	0.000
OA	0.105	313	0.000	0.941	313	0.000
OI	0.095	313	0.000	0.969	313	0.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The preliminary evaluation of the measurement model is illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts the relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators. The model includes four reflective latent constructs: visionary leadership, organisational alignment, organisational

innovation, and organisational performance. Each construct is measured by multiple observed items, with these indicators serving as reflective manifestations of the underlying latent variables. The model assumes that the observed measures accurately represent the true latent constructs. Standardised factor loadings, shown in Figure 1, indicate the strength of association between each indicator and its respective latent construct. Higher loadings signify that an indicator effectively captures the construct, whereas lower loadings suggest a weaker representation. This specification provides a diagnostic overview of each item's contribution before any modifications are made. Figure 1 presents a flow diagram of the measurement framework, confirming that each indicator is conceptualised singularly, enhancing conceptual clarity and minimising the risk of measurement overlap. This initial specification establishes a foundation for subsequent reliability and validity assessments, allowing the measurement model to be refined prior to testing hypothesised relationships among the reflective constructs.

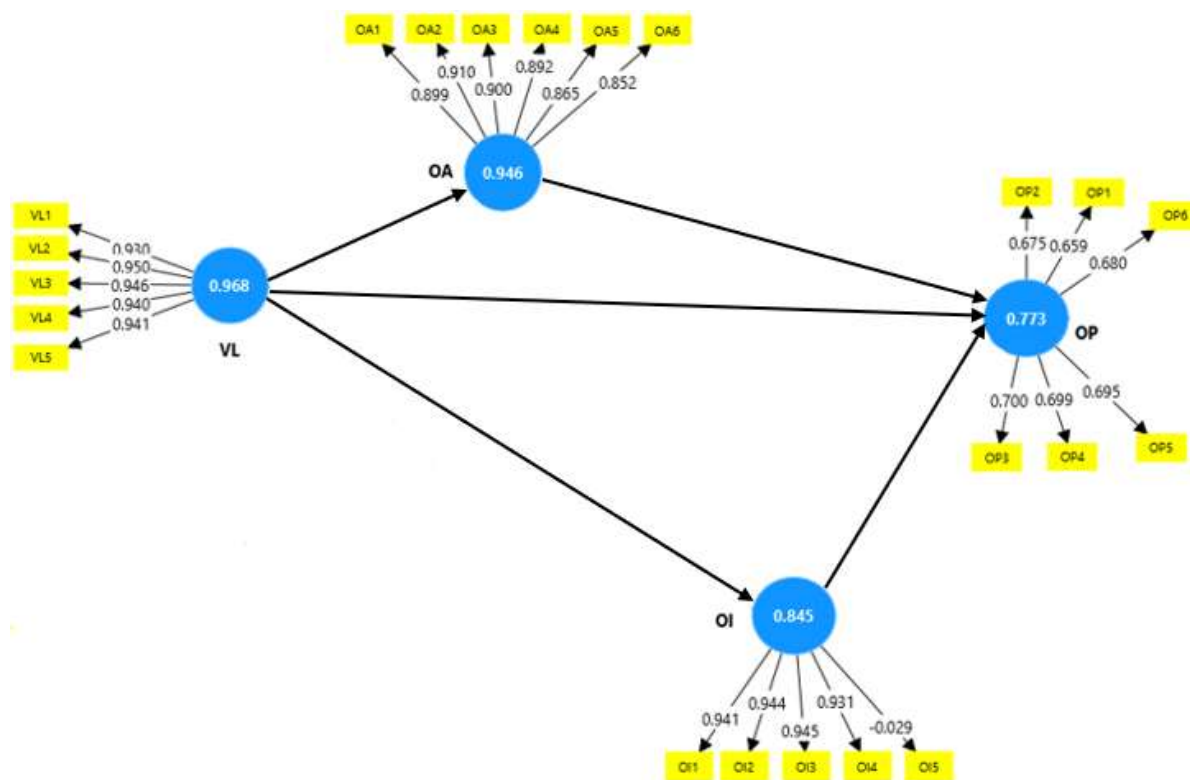


Figure 1: Evaluation of Measurement Model-Initial Model

The reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model are summarised in Table 4. Organisational alignment demonstrates strong indicator reliability, with factor loadings ranging from 0.852 to 0.910. Internal consistency is high, as reflected by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.946 and a composite reliability of 0.951. The AVE of 0.786 indicates that a substantial portion of the variance in the indicators is captured by the construct, confirming robust convergent validity. Organisational innovation exhibits similarly strong measurement properties, with most indicator loadings between 0.931 and 0.945. Internal consistency is satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.845 and composite reliability of 0.948. The AVE of 0.708 exceeds the recommended threshold, confirming convergent validity. However, one item displayed a very low and negative loading, suggesting it does not adequately represent organisational innovation and may warrant exclusion in model refinement.

Organisational performance shows moderate measurement quality, typical in such studies. Indicator loadings range from 0.659 to 0.700, indicating relatively weaker associations with the latent construct. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are 0.773 and 0.774, respectively, both above recommended reliability thresholds. The AVE of 0.469 falls slightly below the recommended 0.50 minimum, implying that the construct accounts for less than half of the variance in its indicators and may require strengthening. Visionary leadership displays excellent reliability and convergent validity. All item loadings range from 0.930 to 0.950, reflecting strong relationships between observed indicators and the latent construct. Internal consistency is very high, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability both at 0.968. The AVE of 0.886 indicates that the majority of the variance in the indicators is explained by the construct, confirming strong convergent validity.

Table 4: Construct Reliability and Validity-Initial Model

	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
OA1	0.899	0.946	0.951	0.786
OA2	0.910			
OA3	0.900			
OA4	0.892			
OA5	0.865			
OA6	0.852			
OI1	0.941	0.845	0.948	0.708
OI2	0.944			
OI3	0.945			
OI4	0.931			
OI5	-0.029			
OP1	0.659	0.773	0.774	0.469
OP2	0.675			
OP3	0.700			
OP4	0.699			
OP5	0.695			
OP6	0.680			
VL1	0.930	0.968	0.968	0.886
VL2	0.950			
VL3	0.946			
VL4	0.940			
VL5	0.941			

The final refined model is illustrated in [Figure 2](#). It comprises four latent constructs: visionary leadership, organizational alignment, organizational innovation, and organizational performance, each measured by multiple observed indicators that satisfy established reliability and validity criteria. Compared to the original conceptualization, this refined model excludes lower-performing indicators, resulting in a more streamlined and efficient measurement system. Only indicators with very high factor loadings were retained, ensuring stronger and more consistent relationships between each latent construct and its measures, which enhances operational accuracy.

This refinement improves the model's explanatory power and reduces measurement error. Assessment of the measurement model confirmed the absence of cross-loadings among constructs, establishing a distinct yet cohesive set of indicators for each construct. This supports theoretical distinctiveness and discriminant validity among visionary leadership, organizational alignment, organizational innovation, and organizational performance. Overall, the refined model provides a robust foundation for testing the hypothesized structural relationships, ensuring that path estimates reflect genuine theoretical linkages rather than measurement artefacts.

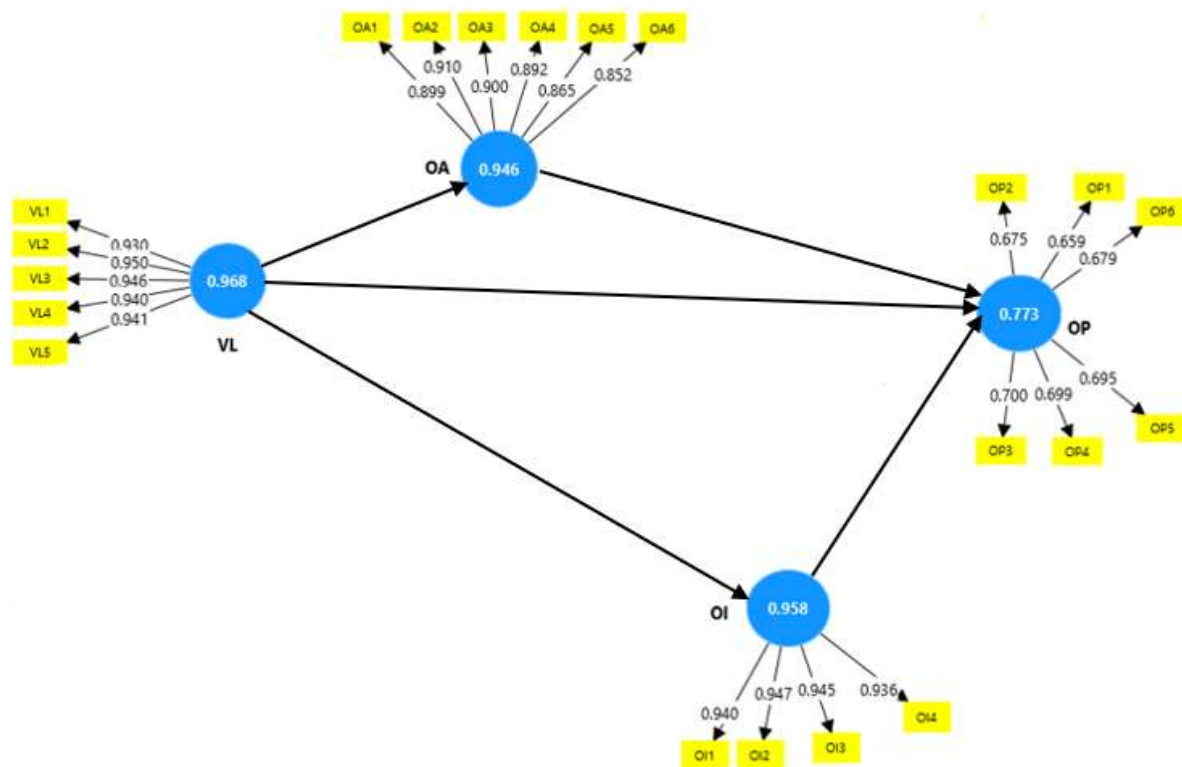


Figure 2: Evaluation of Measurement Model Final

The reliability and convergent validity of the final measurement model are summarised in Table 5. Organizational alignment exhibits strong indicator reliability, with factor loadings ranging from 0.852 to 0.910. The construct demonstrates excellent internal consistency, indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.946 and a composite reliability of 0.957. Its AVE value of 0.786 shows that a substantial proportion of indicator variance is explained by the construct, confirming robust convergent validity. Organizational innovation shows excellent measurement quality, with indicator loadings between 0.936 and 0.947. The construct displays very strong internal consistency, reflected in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.958 and composite reliability of 0.969. The AVE value of 0.887 exceeds the recommended threshold, indicating that the construct explains most of the variance in its indicators and confirming convergent validity.

Organizational performance demonstrates acceptable reliability, with factor loadings from 0.659 to 0.700. The Cronbach's alpha of 0.773 and composite reliability of 0.841 exceed recommended guidelines, indicating adequate internal consistency. The AVE of 0.469 is slightly below the desired 0.50 threshold, suggesting the construct explains less than half of its

indicators' variance; however, overall fit indices indicate it remains suitable for inclusion in the structural model. Visionary leadership exhibits outstanding reliability and validity, with all indicator loadings ranging from 0.930 to 0.950. The construct shows excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.968 and composite reliability of 0.975. Its AVE of 0.886 confirms that a large portion of variance in its indicators is explained by the construct, providing strong evidence for convergent validity.

Table 5: Final Model Construct Reliability and Validity

	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
OA1	0.899	0.946	0.957	0.786
OA2	0.910			
OA3	0.900			
OA4	0.892			
OA5	0.865			
OA6	0.852			
OI1	0.940	0.958	0.969	0.887
OI2	0.947			
OI3	0.945			
OI4	0.936			
OP1	0.659	0.773	0.841	0.469
OP2	0.675			
OP3	0.700			
OP4	0.699			
OP5	0.695			
OP6	0.679			
VL1	0.930	0.968	0.975	0.886
VL2	0.950			
VL3	0.946			
VL4	0.940			
VL5	0.941			

Discriminant validity among the constructs was assessed using the HTMT ratio of correlations, as shown in [Table 6](#). Discriminant validity indicates the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs ([Aman-Ullah et al., 2022](#)). The HTMT value between organizational alignment and organizational innovation is 0.710, suggesting that while these constructs are related, they remain empirically distinguishable. The HTMT values between organizational alignment and organizational performance (0.417) and between organizational innovation and organizational performance (0.314) are well below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.85, confirming strong discriminant validity for the mediators and performance.

Table 6: The Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

	OA	OI	OP	VL
OA				
OI	0.710			
OP	0.417	0.314		
VL	0.744	0.666	0.417	

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) further supports these findings. The HTMT value between visionary leadership and organizational alignment is 0.744, indicating a strong but not excessive relationship, consistent with the theoretical expectation that visionary leadership promotes alignment. The HTMT between visionary leadership and organizational innovation is 0.666, reflecting a substantial association while maintaining construct distinctiveness. Finally, the HTMT value between visionary leadership and organizational performance is 0.417, providing additional evidence that leadership and performance are empirically distinct constructs, despite being conceptually related.

Discriminant validity among the constructs was further assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as shown in Table 7. This criterion requires that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlation with any other construct. For organizational alignment, the diagonal AVE value is 0.887, which is higher than its correlations with organizational innovation (0.675), organizational performance (−0.359), and visionary leadership (0.610), indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. Organizational innovation has a diagonal AVE of 0.942, exceeding its correlations with organizational alignment (0.675), organizational performance (−0.271), and visionary leadership (0.643), confirming that it is empirically distinct from the other constructs. Organizational performance shows a diagonal value of 0.985, higher than its correlations with organizational alignment (−0.359), organizational innovation (−0.271), and visionary leadership (−0.361), demonstrating strong discriminant validity. Visionary leadership has a diagonal AVE of 0.941, surpassing its correlations with organizational alignment (0.610), organizational innovation (0.643), and organizational performance (−0.361), suggesting that it is clearly distinct from the other constructs while remaining theoretically related.

Table 7: Latent Variable Correlations (Fornell-Larcker Criteria)

	OA	OI	OP	VL
OA	0.887			
OI	0.675	0.942		
OP	-0.359	-0.271	0.985	
VL	0.610	0.643	-0.361	0.941

The structural model's goodness of fit is summarised in Table 8 using the coefficients of determination (R^2). Organizational alignment exhibits an R^2 of 0.861 with an adjusted R^2 of 0.860, indicating that a substantial proportion of the variance in alignment within UAE SMEs is explained by visionary leadership. This suggests that leadership vision is a primary driver shaping how organizational goals, structures, and employee activities are aligned. Organizational innovation shows an R^2 of 0.426 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.422, reflecting the combined influence of visionary leadership and organizational alignment in explaining variation in innovative activity. This underscores the central role of leadership-driven strategic direction and internal alignment in fostering dynamic capabilities within SMEs. The variance explained in organizational performance is 0.149, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.133, suggesting that visionary leadership, organizational alignment, and organizational innovation account for a modest but meaningful portion of performance variance. These findings indicate that while internal organizational factors are influential, additional external or contextual variables likely also shape SME performance outcomes in the UAE.

Table 8: Coefficient of Determination (R²)

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
OA	0.861	0.860
OI	0.426	0.422
OP	0.149	0.133

Table 9 presents the direct effects among the study variables. Organizational alignment exerts a positive and highly significant effect on organizational performance, with a path coefficient of 0.438 ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that SMEs with better alignment between goals, processes, and employee activities are more effective in translating strategic intent into operational results, highlighting alignment as a key performance-enhancing mechanism. Organizational innovation also demonstrates a positive and significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.423$, $p = 0.001$), confirming that SMEs engaging in new ideas, process improvements, or novel products/services achieve higher performance outcomes, which is particularly relevant for UAE SMEs operating in competitive and dynamic markets.

Table 9: Direct Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Beta	Sample Mean (M)	SD	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
OA -> OP	0.438	-0.046	0.180	0.213	0.000	Accepted
OI -> OP	0.423	-0.315	0.179	1.810	0.001	Accepted
VL -> OP	0.349	-0.059	0.174	0.283	0.002	Accepted
VL -> OA	0.318	0.313	0.082	3.874	0.000	Accepted
VL -> OI	0.275	0.271	0.143	1.925	0.054	Rejected

Visionary leadership has a strong direct positive effect on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.349$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that leaders who articulate a clear future and inspire employees contribute directly to improved firm outcomes, reinforcing the role of visionary leadership in fostering motivation, strategic focus, and commitment. Visionary leadership also significantly enhances organizational alignment ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$), underlining its importance in harmonizing personnel, structures, and procedures toward shared strategic goals. However, the direct relationship between visionary leadership and organizational innovation is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.275$, $p = 0.054$), indicating that while leadership vision may encourage alignment, its influence on innovation alone is less direct in this context.

The structural path model results are illustrated in Figure 3, providing a visual depiction of both direct and indirect relationships among visionary leadership, organizational alignment, organizational innovation, and organizational performance. The model highlights the mediating roles of organizational alignment and innovation in transmitting the effects of visionary leadership to performance outcomes. Arrows indicate hypothesized causal paths, with numerical values representing standardized path coefficients derived from PLS-SEM analysis. The model demonstrates a strong positive effect of visionary leadership on organizational alignment, suggesting that leaders who clearly communicate strategic goals and future vision can effectively align personnel, structures, and procedures toward common objectives. Organizational alignment is positively associated with performance, indicating that focused and coordinated SMEs are better at translating strategic intent into operational success. Organizational innovation also emerges as a significant predictor of performance, implying

that SMEs actively generating new ideas, refining processes, and implementing novel solutions achieve superior outcomes.

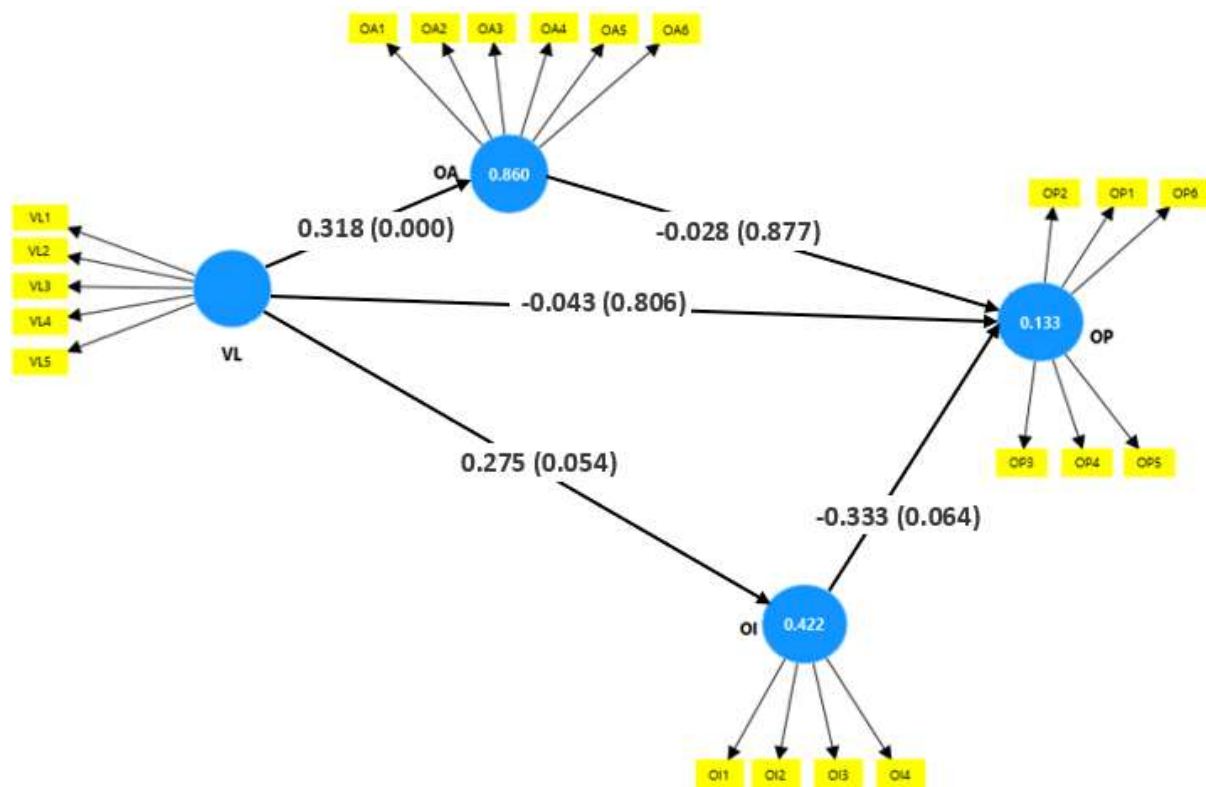


Figure 3: Path Model Results of Mediation

While the direct path from visionary leadership to organizational innovation is weaker, the model indicates that vision alone is insufficient to drive innovation without an enabling organizational environment. Both organizational alignment and innovation serve as mechanisms through which visionary leadership indirectly enhances performance. This supports the theoretical premise that the impact of leadership on organizational performance is mediated by internal cohesion and innovation, reinforcing the importance of strong internal systems and a supportive climate for translating visionary intent into tangible performance gains.

Table 10 presents the mediating effects of organizational alignment and organizational innovation. The results indicate that organizational innovation significantly mediates the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational performance. The standardized indirect effect is 0.196 with $p = 0.000$, confirming a positive and significant mediation. This demonstrates that visionary leaders enhance organizational performance primarily by fostering innovative activities, such as developing new products, improving processes, and encouraging creative problem-solving, which translate strategic vision into tangible performance outcomes. This finding supports the notion that organizational innovation is a key mechanism through which leadership vision is operationalized.

In contrast, the mediating effect of organizational alignment between visionary leadership and performance is not statistically significant. The indirect effect of the path from visionary leadership to organizational alignment to organizational performance is -0.009 , $p = 0.886$,

indicating no support for this mediation. While organizational alignment remains an important driver of performance, it does not significantly account for how visionary leadership influences performance in UAE SMEs. This suggests that, although alignment promotes internal cohesion and coordination, it is not the primary mechanism through which visionary leadership translates into improved organizational outcomes.

Table 10: Indirect Hypothesis Mediator

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
VL -> OI -> OP	0.196	-0.092	0.073	1.312	0.000	Accepted
VL -> OA -> OP	-0.009	-0.011	0.060	0.144	0.886	Rejected

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of visionary leadership on organizational performance in UAE SMEs, with organizational alignment and organizational innovation as mediating variables. The findings provide valuable insights into how leadership vision translates into tangible organizational outcomes. Consistent with leadership and innovation theories, the results indicate that visionary leadership represents a critical strategic resource for SMEs operating in competitive and dynamic environments. The significant positive effect of visionary leadership on organizational performance demonstrates that leaders who communicate a clear vision and motivate employees foster higher commitment, provide clearer strategic direction, and enhance organizational efficacy, which collectively improve performance (Hermawan et al., 2024).

The strong association between visionary leadership and organizational alignment highlights the importance of leadership in promoting internal coherence. Vision-oriented leaders provide direction, reduce ambiguity, and align employee actions with organizational strategic goals, confirming that leadership is pivotal in driving strategic and operational alignment, particularly in SMEs lacking formal governance systems (Gede & Huluka, 2023). By articulating a vision, employees better understand how their work contributes to organizational success, which improves coordination and reduces inefficiencies (Woo, 2025). The results indicate that organizational alignment does not significantly mediate the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational performance. This suggests that while alignment enhances internal coherence, it does not automatically convert leadership vision into performance outcomes in UAE SMEs. One possible explanation is that alignment may promote stability and continuity but does not inherently support the competitive and adaptive capabilities needed in turbulent markets. In such contexts, coherence enhances operational efficiency but does not directly drive growth or differentiation. This aligns with prior studies suggesting that alignment must be complemented by innovation and learning to generate substantial performance gains (Soomro et al., 2020).

Conversely, organizational innovation was found to be a significant mediator in the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational performance. This indicates that the performance benefits of visionary leadership are primarily realised through enhanced innovation, rather than through internal alignment alone. Visionary leaders stimulate employees to generate new ideas, question existing practices, and pursue novel opportunities,

thereby strengthening organizational innovative capabilities (Baumane-Vītoliņa et al., 2022). Innovation enables SMEs to improve products, optimise processes, and adapt to market changes, which contributes to higher organizational performance (Jalil et al., 2021). In the dynamic context of the UAE economy, innovation emerges as a key mechanism through which leadership vision drives competitive advantage (Cai et al., 2023).

The absence of a significant direct effect of visionary leadership on organizational innovation suggests that supportive internal organizational systems are essential. Leadership vision alone is insufficient to foster innovation without complementary structures, processes, and capabilities. While inspirational leaders can motivate employees, sustainable innovation requires organizational architectures that enable experimentation, knowledge sharing, and the application of new ideas. These findings are consistent with dynamic capability theory, which posits that leadership behaviours must be embedded in organizational routines to produce lasting creative outcomes (Drago et al., 2022). Finally, the positive effects of organizational alignment and innovation on performance underscore the importance of internal capabilities for SME success. Alignment ensures efficient resource utilisation across the organization, while innovation provides agility and responsiveness in turbulent markets. Together, these capabilities form a foundation for operational efficiency and adaptability, which are crucial for SME sustainability (Mai et al., 2022). The study highlights that visionary leadership, when coupled with supportive organizational processes that foster innovation and connect strategic priorities to daily operations, is essential for UAE SMEs to achieve superior performance.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational performance in UAE SMEs, with particular attention to the mediating roles of organizational alignment and organizational innovation. The findings highlight the critical role of visionary leadership in driving successful outcomes within competitive and dynamic business environments. Leaders who articulate a clear future direction and inspire employee engagement foster stronger strategic focus, higher commitment, and more efficient organizational behaviour, which collectively enhance performance. The results indicate that organizational innovation is a key mechanism through which visionary leadership translates into tangible organizational outcomes. While visionary leadership provides direction and motivation, innovation operationalizes this vision through the development of new products, optimisation of processes, and the establishment of adaptable organisational routines. In contrast, organizational alignment—though influenced by visionary leadership—does not significantly account for the pathway through which leadership improves performance, underscoring the primacy of innovation-based capabilities as the main channel of leadership impact in SMEs. The study further suggests that evaluating the effectiveness of leadership in UAE SMEs should extend beyond vision articulation to include the extent to which leaders institutionalize innovation within their organizations. SMEs that combine strategic foresight with strong innovation capabilities are better equipped to respond to environmental changes, maintain competitive advantage, and achieve superior performance. These findings offer practical implications for SME directors, managers, government policymakers, and industry practitioners aiming to enhance the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of small- and medium-sized enterprises in the UAE.

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