

Strategy Evaluation and Organizational Performance: Investigating Transformational Leadership as A Mediator Using PLS-SEM

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Abstract

Effective strategic management and leadership are critical for improving organizational performance, particularly in public sector organizations. In the UAE, public institutions continue to face challenges in achieving desired performance outcomes. While prior research has examined leadership and strategy independently, there is a limited understanding of the mediating role of transformational leadership in the relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance. This study investigates the direct effect of strategy evaluation on organizational performance and determines whether transformational leadership mediates this relationship within the UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. A quantitative research design was adopted, with survey questionnaires administered to managers and administrative supervisors. A total of 351 valid responses were collected,

achieving a response rate of 99.4%. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that strategy evaluation alone does not have a significant direct effect on organizational performance. However, transformational leadership fully mediates the relationship, demonstrating that effective leadership is essential for translating strategic evaluation practices into improved organizational outcomes. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of the mediating role of transformational leadership in the UAE public sector. Practically, the findings offer guidance for policymakers and public sector managers on aligning leadership development with strategic evaluation processes to enhance performance. The results underscore the importance of fostering transformational leadership to achieve higher efficiency, accountability, and service delivery in public organizations.

Keywords: strategy evaluation, transformational leadership, organizational performance

1. Introduction

The strategy evaluation process identifies the level of strategy implementation (Elshamly, 2013). It highlights firms' effectiveness in reacting to new challenges that make them achieve their strategic aims (Osoro, 2022). Besides, the strategy evaluation process gives early signals about factors that might hinder the success of the strategy by prompting management to ask questions on the execution process or the leaders' reliability and competency (Adudu, 2022). Furthermore, organizations should review their capabilities and competencies for the successful implementation of their strategy (Popa et al., 2012). Therefore, the strategy evaluation process ensures that firms adapt their strategy to any risk of changes in the environment (Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019). Hence, strategy evaluation protects and prevents the organizations from collapse and taking wrong decisions as well as it can help organizations to anticipate problems if there is change in the internal and external environment (Dubihlela and Sandada, 2014). Strategy evaluation is an attempt to look beyond the obvious facts regarding the short-term health of a business and appraise instead of those more fundamental factors and trends that govern success in the chosen field of endeavor (Buhmann & Fraser, 2018).

The strategy evaluation has diverse effects on organizational performance (Bunnefeld et al., 2011; Waweru & Omwenga, 2015; Kanano & Wanjira, 2021). Nyariki (2016) reported that strategy evaluation led to the improvement in diverse aspects of organizational performance, that is, operations and employee performance. Similar to this, Kanano (2021); Alsmairat et al. (2023) found a positive and strong correlation between strategy evaluation and organizational performance. However, strategy evaluation has received limited attention in the strategic management literature (Dubihlela & Sandada, 2014; Abdul et al., 2016; Thorpe & Oliveira, 2019) especially in the public organizations. Literature shows that there are few studies on strategy evaluation focused on the public organizations' context (Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019; Khairi et al., 2024).

Leadership is among the most vital internal factors that determine the success of the organizations (Alanazi, 2021). In other words, it is the most important driving force to increase the employees and organizational performance (Lee, 2018). In addition, Almatrooshi et al. (2014) maintains that leadership is the effectiveness attained by means of accomplishing the organizational outputs and objectives, which are indicators of the quality of the leadership. Elqadri (2015) added that an effective leadership style can influence others to act to achieve the organization's goals (Amirul & Daud, 2012). Furthermore, leadership style can either encourage or discourage employees, and in turn can lead to increasing or decreasing performance levels (Belonio, 2012). Moreover, the organization's leadership needs to utilize appropriate leadership styles and behaviors to bring about the needed motivation and create the appropriate organizational culture values, which will, in turn, bring about effective overall performance in the organization (Hijazi et al., 2017; Al Dhanhani & Abdullah, 2021). Thus, performance is an extremely important concept that relates to an organization's outcome and success. It is measured by key constructs such as overall input and productivity on the task (Omar, 2021).

The UAE public sector faces a variety of challenges in public administration, including low productivity, inefficiency, and resistance to change, which hinder improvements in organizational performance (Khairi et al., 2024). Additionally, Khalifa et al. (2024) noted that UAE public organizations struggle to meet their expected goals due to a lack of alignment between strategy and operational management, as well as inadequate performance measurement systems. This highlights the need for the adoption of strategic management practices (Khalifa et al., 2022; Khalid et al., 2024). Despite this, there is a lack of studies examining the mediating role of transformational leadership between strategy evaluation and organizational performance within the UAE context, particularly among public organizations such as the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. This study addresses this research gap by exploring how transformational leadership mediates the relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance in UAE public organizations. Accordingly, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of transformational leadership in enhancing organizational performance as a mediating factor.

The paper is organized as follows: section one introduces the study; section two presents the literature review; section three details the research methodology; section four reports the results; and sections five and six provide the discussion and conclusions, respectively.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Relationship Between Strategy Evaluation and Organizational Performance

Strategy evaluation is an important strategic management practice that is reported to influence organizational performance (Muturi, 2015; Phina, 2020; Arabiat, 2021; Chukwuemeka et al., 2022; Khairi et al., 2024). For instance, Muturi (2015) examined the relationship between strategic management approaches and flower companies' performance in Kenya. The strategy evaluation step of the strategic planning process has a strong and favorable link with firm performance. Nyariki (2016) His qualitative results found that diverse aspects of organizational performance, including operations, satisfaction, and performance, are greatly facilitated by the strategy evaluation of the organization. Similar to this, Wanjiru (2016) investigated the influence of strategic management practices on the corporate performance of Serova Town Hotels. The findings demonstrated that strategy evaluation significantly affects effectiveness. Hieu and Nwachukwu (2018) examined the strategy evaluation process and strategic performance of mobile telecommunication firms operating in Nigeria. The findings showed that strategy evaluation has a significant and positive impact on strategic performance.

The study of Kanano (2021) indicated that strategy evaluation has a significant effect on organizational performance. Similar studies noted the influence of strategy evaluation on organizational performance. Likewise, Okwemba (2021) examined the effect of strategy evaluation on the performance of Chameli Sugar Company in Kenya. The study found that a strong positive relationship exists between strategy evaluation and performance. These outcomes are also supported by Adudu (2022), who examined the effect of strategy evaluation consistency, strategy evaluation suitability, strategy evaluation feasibility, and strategy evaluation acceptability on organizational performance. The study's results indicate

that strategy evaluation consistency, strategy evaluation suitability, strategy evaluation feasibility, and strategy evaluation acceptability have significant effect on the performance of the organization. Chukwuemeka et al. (2022) investigated the effect of strategic management practices on organizational performance. The research discovered that strategic objectives, strategy formulation, strategy implementations and strategic evaluation had a significant effect on organizational performance. Furthermore, Khairi et al. (2024) investigated the impacts of strategic management practices on organizational performance in Abu Dhabi, UAE public organizations, considering the mediating effects of teamwork and organizational commitment on these inter-relationships. The study found that strategic management practices of strategy formulation and strategy evaluation have a significant impact on organizational performance. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance.

2.2 The Relationship Between Transformational Leadership Style and Organizational Performance

Empirical work done by previous scholars confirms that there is a significant correlation between transformational leadership style and organizational performance. For instance, Alrowwad et al. (2020) found that transformational and transactional leadership relate positively to organizational performance. Also, Jiatong et al. (2022) Findings indicated that transformational leadership has a positive effect on affective organizational commitment and job performance. Similarly, Alsayyed et al. (2020) examine the impact of transformational leadership on organizational performance at the University of Jordan. Moreover, Lin et al. (2022) reported that transformational leadership has a positive and significant impact on organizational effectiveness through its components, which are inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

However, Agus et al. (2021) Effect of Management Innovation, Transformational Leadership, and Knowledge Sharing on Market Performance of Indonesian Consumer Goods Company. The results showed that transformational leadership has no significant positive effect on the market performance of consumer goods companies. Also, Purwanto (2020) found that transformational leadership and knowledge management do not significantly influence employee performance, both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction mediation. Previous studies have suggested that leadership has a significant positive impact on the performance of public organizations (Henderson, 2017; Kılıç & Uludağ, 2021; Alsayyed et al., 2020; Agus et al., 2021; Jiatong et al., 2022). The hypothesis that transformational leadership will positively influence organizational performance is, therefore, posited that:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance.

2.3 Mediating Role of Transformational Leadership on the Relationship Between Strategy Evaluation and Organizational Performance

Effective organizational performance increasingly depends not only on strategic planning but

also on the quality of leadership that translates strategy into action. Transformational leadership, with its emphasis on vision, inspiration, and employee development, has emerged as a critical mechanism through which organizations achieve their strategic objectives. Raman et al. (2020) findings revealed that academic leaders' emotional intelligence-subordinates' intention to perform relationship mediated via academic leaders' idealized influence. In addition, the mediation analysis revealed that academic leaders' idealized influence mediated the leaders' emotional intelligence-subordinates' intention to perform when it was modeled with academic leaders' gender as moderated in the structural model (Raman et al., 2020). Also, Zahari et al. (2022) found strong support for the mediating role of leadership capabilities to promote performance. Zhang et al. (2018) The results show that transformational and active-transactional leadership fully mediate the relationships between emotional intelligence of authorized leaders, and four collaboration satisfaction outcomes perceived by other participants in an integrated team: performance contribution satisfaction, efficiency satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and interests' satisfaction. Another work done by Belarmino (2019) indicates the significance of the mediating role of leadership style on organizational culture and TQM in tertiary institutions. Next, Lotfi et al. (2023) found that leadership style mediated the relationship between training and exercising, and personality types. Analysis done by Almandeel (2017) also showed that transformational leadership and transactional leadership mediated the relationship between personality types and turnover intention.

Moreover, there have been limited studies in transformational leadership as a mediation construct between strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and organizational performance, particularly from the UAE context. However, leadership style has been validated as mediation indicators in other countries with several factors as independent variables toward organizational performance (Almandeel, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018; Belarmino, 2019; Raman et al., 2020; Jade Riezl & Lyndon., 2022; Zahari et al., 2022; Lotfi et al., 2023). Therefore, this study filled the research gap by determining the mediating role of transformational leadership on the relationship between transformational leadership, strategy evaluation, and organizational performance among public organizations in the UAE. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: There is a mediating effect of transformational leadership on the relationship between strategy evaluation and control and organizational performance.

3. Research Framework

The conceptual framework provides a graphical representation of the relationships among the independent, dependent, and mediating variables. In this study, organizational performance is the dependent variable, strategy evaluation serves as the independent variable, and transformational leadership functions as the mediating variable. The framework clearly illustrates how strategy evaluation may influence organizational performance directly, as well as indirectly through transformational leadership.

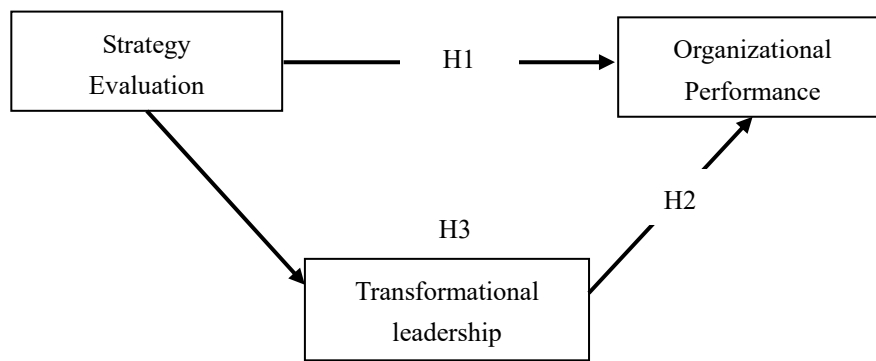


Figure 1. Research framework

This framework is grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory and the Upper Echelons Theory, which emphasize that an organization's internal resources and leadership capabilities are critical for achieving superior performance. These theories suggest that effective evaluation and execution of strategy, combined with transformational leadership, can provide a competitive advantage, thereby enhancing organizational performance (Agwu, 2018).

Despite the theoretical support, the mediating role of transformational leadership in the relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance has not been empirically tested, particularly in the context of UAE public organizations (Zeng et al., 2021; Deepalakshmi et al., 2024). Therefore, this study investigates how transformational leadership mediates the relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance in UAE public organizations.

4. Research Methodology

A quantitative research design was adopted for this study. Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire, which was distributed to employees of the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. Respondents were required to hold managerial positions and play leadership roles within various units and departments. Strategy evaluation is defined as the systematic analysis of a strategy to determine the effectiveness of its implementation and execution (Markus et al., 2021). In this study, strategy evaluation was measured using two dimensions, which are strategy evaluation consistency and strategy evaluation control. Ten items were adopted from Hieu and Nwachukwu (2018), Adudu (2022), and Al Humeisat (2022) to assess these dimensions.

Transformational leadership was measured based on items adopted from Alsayyed et al. (2020) and Al Dhanhani and Abdullah (2021), with each dimension of transformational leadership comprising five items. Organizational performance was measured using twelve items adopted from Isaac et al. (2016), Nusari (2020), and Durai and Viji (2022). These items reflect multiple aspects of organizational performance, including the organization's ability to achieve its public service delivery goals, employee engagement and capability, sustainability and environmental impact, and innovation and technology adoption. The data collected were

analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among strategy evaluation, transformational leadership, and organizational performance.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Measurement Model Assessment

Convergent validity is the extent to which the indicators of a specific construct converge or share a high proportion of the variance for that construct (Sarstedt et al., 2020). In other words, it refers to the level by which a measure relates positively with other measures within the same construct, i.e., the degree to which a latent construct explains the variance of its indicators. According to Hair et al. (2019) Convergent validity can be assessed using the factor loadings, composite reliability, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 1. Constructs reliability and validity

| Indicator | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability | AVE |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Individualized Consideration | 0.929 | 0.935 | 0.782 |
| Intellectual Stimulation | 0.781 | 0.854 | 0.566 |
| Organizational Performance | 0.960 | 0.964 | 0.697 |
| Strategy evaluation | 0.921 | 0.926 | 0.587 |
| Strategy evaluation consistency | 0.851 | 0.866 | 0.643 |
| Strategy evaluation control | 0.895 | 0.897 | 0.704 |
| Transformational Leadership | 0.890 | 0.936 | 0.558 |

To achieve convergent validity, each construct should have an AVE of ≥ 0.50 , and the factor loadings should preferably be greater than 0.7 or 0.6. However, Byrne (2013) suggests that factor loadings of 0.50 are acceptable if the summations of the loading result in high loading scores contributing to AVE scores of 0.50 or greater. Thus, it can be assessed that AVE for all the variables is greater than the cut-off point of 0.5, indicating that the explained variance is greater than the unexplained variance (Hair et al., 2014). Table 1 shows the results of composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and AVE.

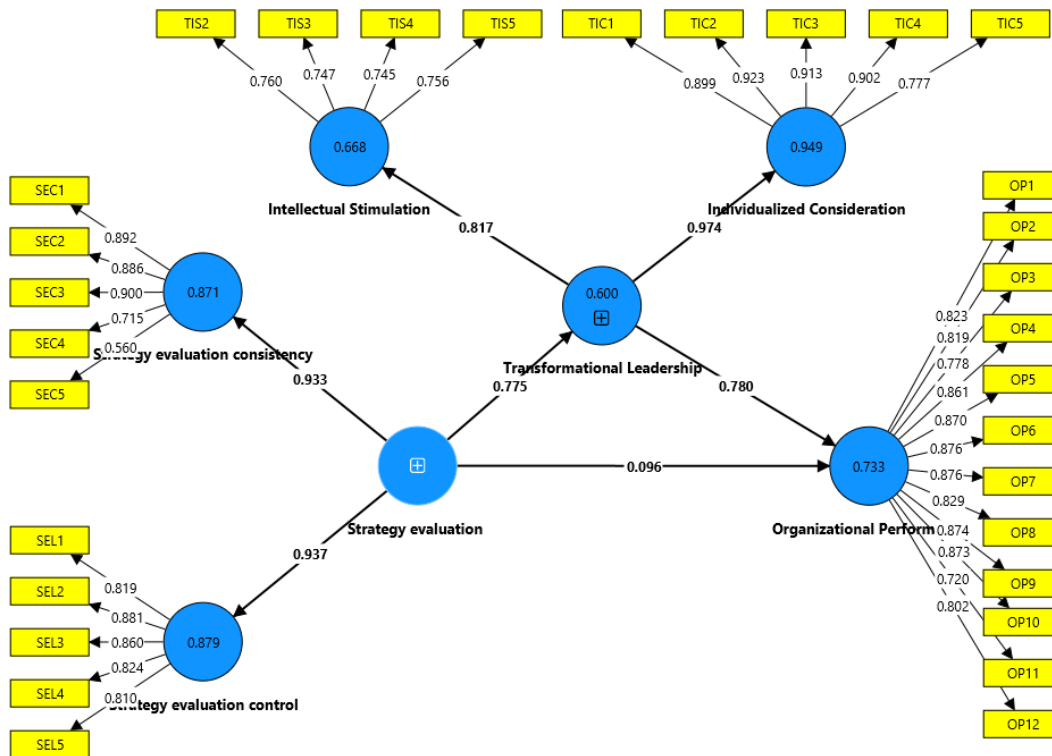


Figure 2. Measurement model

In line with the criteria, three items were removed from the measurement model because their factor loadings were significantly below the recommended threshold of 0.50. Including these items in the model led to Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values falling below the acceptable level of 0.50, indicating inadequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). Consequently, their deletion improved the overall reliability and validity of the constructs, ensuring that the measurement model met the recommended standards for structural equation modeling (Ramayah, 2016).

Table 2. Significance test for the structural model path coefficient, t-statistics, and p-values

| Direct hypotheses | Std β | Std Error | t-statistic | p-value | Finding |
|--|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------|--------------|
| Strategy evaluation → Organizational Performance | 0.093 | 0.051 | 1.877 | 0.061 | Not supports |
| Transformational Leadership → Organizational Performance | 0.783 | 0.044 | 17.542 | 0.000 | Supports |

The results of the path analysis indicate that strategy evaluation does not have a statistically significant effect on organizational performance in this study. The path coefficient ($\beta = 0.093$) is positive but very small, the t-statistic ($t = 1.877$) is below the critical value of 1.96, and the p-value ($p = 0.061$) exceeds the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that

strategy evaluation alone is not sufficient to enhance organizational performance in the sampled UAE public organizations.

In contrast, transformational leadership demonstrates a strong and statistically significant positive effect on organizational performance. The path coefficient ($\beta = 0.783$) is substantial, the t-statistic ($t = 17.542$) far exceeds the critical value of 1.96, and the p-value ($p < 0.001$) indicates a highly significant relationship. This finding highlights the critical role of transformational leadership in driving organizational performance, suggesting that leadership style may be a key mechanism through which strategy evaluation impacts outcomes.

Research hypothesis H1 was not supported. The PLS-SEM analysis indicated that strategy evaluation had an insignificant effect on organizational performance directly, indicating a negative relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance. This finding is contrary to previous studies, which have suggested that there is a significant and positive correlation between strategy evaluation and organizational performance. Hieu and Nwachukwu (2018) examined the strategy evaluation process and strategic performance. The findings showed that strategy evaluation has a significant and positive impact on strategic performance. Likewise, Kanano (2021) indicated that strategy evaluation has a significant effect on organizational performance.

Research hypothesis H2 was supported, implying that there is a direct, significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. This finding is consistent with that of Alhashedi et al. (2021) investigated the effect of transformational leadership behavior on organizational citizenship behavior on organizational performance. The study used a quantitative research approach with a questionnaire specifically designed to collect primary data from 250 managers in gold shops in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS. The results showed that transformational leadership behavior significantly influences organizational performance. Also, Alazeezi and Zainol (2022) investigated the effect of transformative leadership on organizational citizenship behavior in Abu Dhabi in the UAE. Data was gathered using questionnaires from a sample of 372 government entity employees. The study concludes that transformative leadership can improve organizational citizenship behavior in the corporate sector of Abu Dhabi.

Table 3. Mediating results of the transformational leadership

| Mediating hypotheses | Std β | Std Error | t-statistic | p-value | Finding |
|---|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|
| Strategy evaluation → Transformational Leadership → Organizational Performance | 0.607 | 0.040 | 15.128 | 0.000 | Mediated |

The specific indirect effects analysis indicates that transformational leadership significantly mediates the relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance ($t = 15.128$, $p < 0.001$). While the direct effect of strategy evaluation on organizational performance was not significant and was weak ($\beta = 0.093$, $p > 0.05$), the inclusion of transformational leadership as a mediating variable substantially strengthened this relationship ($\beta = 0.607$). This finding suggests that strategy evaluation alone may not directly improve organizational performance, but when combined with transformational leadership, it exerts a strong positive effect. In other words, transformational leadership acts as a critical mechanism through which strategy evaluation translates into enhanced organizational performance, highlighting the importance of leadership in ensuring effective strategic outcomes in UAE public organizations.

The third research hypothesis H3 was supported. This result is in line with the findings of previous studies. For instance, Almandeel (2017) determined the mediating effect of leadership styles on the relationship between employees' personality types and turnover intention in the banks of Saudi Arabia. The results showed that transformational leadership and transactional leadership mediated the relationship between personality types and turnover intention. In addition, Raman et al. (2020) Findings revealed that academic leaders' emotional intelligence mediates subordinates' intention to perform, mediated via academic leaders' idealized influence. In addition, the mediation analysis revealed that academic leaders' idealized influence mediated the leaders' emotional intelligence-subordinates' intention to perform when it was modeled with academic leaders' gender as moderated in the structural model (Raman et al., 2020). Also, Zahari et al. (2022) found strong support for the mediating role of leadership capabilities to promote performance. Moreover, Lotfi et al. (2023) leadership style mediated the relationship between training and exercising, and the personality types. Hence, Apriyani et al. (2023) analyzed the effect of transformational leadership, strategic planning, and organizational culture on organizational performance mediated by Organizational Commitment in Indonesia. The results showed that transformational leadership has a positive and significant influence on organizational commitment that is greater than strategic planning and organizational culture.

6. Implication

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study advances strategic management literature by highlighting the mediating role of transformational leadership in the relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance in UAE public organizations. Unlike prior studies Mohamed (2019); Aldhaheeri et al. (2020); Islam (2022), which examined only direct effects, this research demonstrates how leadership enhances the effectiveness of strategic management practices. The findings provide empirical support for both the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Upper Echelons Theory, showing that internal resources, specifically strategic management practices and transformational leadership, are critical drivers of organizational performance. The results also emphasize that managers' perceptions, decisions, and leadership style significantly influence strategic outcomes.

6.2 Practical Implications

For public sector organizations, including the UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, the study highlights that strategy evaluation alone may be insufficient to improve performance. Transformational leadership is essential to translate strategic initiatives into tangible results. Policymakers and organizational leaders should invest in leadership development programs that cultivate transformational behaviors, such as vision articulation, employee motivation, and innovation promotion. Integrating strategic management practices with leadership development can ensure that strategies are effectively implemented and evaluated, thereby optimizing organizational performance. Additionally, this research addresses a regional knowledge gap by providing insights from the UAE public sector and contributes to understanding how leadership can enhance strategic management outcomes in the Middle East. The findings suggest that public organizations can strengthen performance by strategically leveraging internal resources, particularly by combining effective strategy evaluation with transformational leadership competencies.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of strategy evaluation on organizational performance in the UAE public sector and to investigate the mediating role of transformational leadership in this relationship. The research focused on the UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, a key institution contributing to the country's development strategy. A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured survey questionnaire to collect data from managers, heads of departments, and administrative supervisors across Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicated that strategy evaluation alone did not have a significant direct effect on organizational performance. However, transformational leadership significantly mediated the relationship between strategy evaluation and organizational performance, highlighting its critical role in translating strategic evaluation practices into improved organizational outcomes. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the importance of transformational leadership as a mediating mechanism in the context of UAE public organizations. Practically, the findings emphasize that public sector institutions must invest in transformational leadership development to ensure that strategy evaluation effectively enhances organizational performance. The results are particularly relevant for the UAE's ongoing efforts to increase public sector productivity, optimize service delivery, and support the country's transition toward a knowledge-based economy.

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