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Examining the Impact of Strategic Leadership and Organizational Culture on Organizational Performance Considering the Mediating Role of Organizational Innovation (Case Study: Iran Khodro Company)

Siavash. Borhan Ashkevari[1*]

[1] Master of Business Administration, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: Siavashborhan@yahoo.com

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aims to investigate the effects of strategic leadership and organizational culture on organizational performance, with a focus on the mediating role of organizational innovation.

Methodology: A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) based on partial least squares (PLS). Data were collected from 190 managers and experts at Iran Khodro Company using standardized questionnaires. The validity and reliability of the instruments were confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE).

Findings: The results showed that both strategic leadership and organizational culture have significant positive effects on organizational performance and organizational innovation. Organizational innovation also positively impacts performance and mediates the relationships between strategic leadership and performance, as well as between culture and performance.

Conclusion: Strategic leadership and organizational culture are critical drivers of organizational performance, and their effects are significantly enhanced through organizational innovation. These findings underscore the importance of fostering innovation as a mediating mechanism to improve performance outcomes in dynamic business environments.

Keywords: *Strategic Leadership, Organizational Performance, Organizational Culture, Organizational Learning.*

1 Introduction

In today's dynamic and ever-changing world, continuous evaluation of organizational performance holds significant importance. Conceptually, organizational performance can be assessed based on the extent to which organizational goals are achieved. A key point emphasized by previous researchers is the measurability of these goals. In other words, the degree to which an organization's predefined goals are measurable is crucial. Organizations can control their performance by comparing their goals with actual outcomes. Achieving this requires high precision and the identification of a set of indicators during performance evaluations (Abubakar et al., 2019; Farooq, 2024).

A review of previous studies highlights the examination of various factors influencing organizational performance. Among these, variables such as leadership styles, including strategic leadership, and internal factors such as organizational culture and innovation, have garnered significant attention from scholars. Improvements in strategic leadership as a holistic approach, enhancing organizational culture and shared subcultures, and fostering innovation throughout the organization can lead to growth in organizational performance, particularly in non-financial domains (Chalmers, 2024; Ghaffarian et al., 2024; Ginting, 2023).

Strategic leadership is defined as the ability of leaders to influence their followers toward specific decisions to ensure the organization's long-term survival and garner public support. Another definition describes strategic leadership as "the ability to understand the entire organization and its operating environment and to use this understanding to create strategic change across the organization, ensuring its short-term and long-term sustainability" (Ellinger & Ellinger, 2021; Muzee et al., 2016).

In the realm of strategic leadership, organizational culture and innovation occupy a pivotal role. Innovation refers to identifying new ideas and employing creative methods to offer or develop new goods and services. Rapid environmental changes, dynamism, and competition compel organizations to innovate in business development and promote learning behavior. Innovation is thus defined as the successful implementation of a creative idea within an organization. It represents a fundamental inclination to abandon outdated technologies and methods in favor of new, improved alternatives. It is argued that innovation is essential for improving organizational performance processes (Dickel & de Moura, 2016; El-Kassar & Singh, 2019; Endres et al., 2022).

Strategic leadership plays a vital role in facilitating creativity, promoting employees' innovative capabilities, fostering their valuable ideas, and managing organizational processes and systems. Additionally, it involves evaluating and controlling organizational resources and ensuring their appropriate use and accountability (Alameri et al., 2019).

On the other hand, organizational culture emphasizes how employees accomplish their tasks within the organization. By fostering a shared value system, organizational culture significantly influences employee cohesion and the enhancement of organizational performance. Therefore, developing an organizational culture that stimulates innovation and creativity is essential. Organizational culture can motivate employees to engage in work processes and facilitate creativity and innovation within the organization. Consequently, strategic leaders must focus on cultivating a strong and positive organizational culture (Shahzad et al., 2017).

Organizations with a positive and strong culture can foster motivated and committed employees, whereas a negative and weak culture may demotivate even the most outstanding employees, leading to no significant achievements. Engagement arises when employees perceive that their organization respects their work, their efforts contribute to organizational goals, and, importantly, their personal aspirations for growth are met (Samanta, 2021).

In Iran, the automotive industry is one of the key sectors contributing to national economic growth and development. However, in recent years, performance evaluations of managers at Iran Khodro Company have revealed suboptimal organizational performance across various departments. Due to its production-oriented nature, Iran Khodro is at the heart of the supply chain. However, based on preliminary interviews with managers and performance assessments, it has been acknowledged that non-financial performance processes in the company are not at a desirable level. Improving organizational performance is a challenge that has imposed significant costs on the company. This study aims to evaluate the influence of antecedents such as strategic leadership, organizational culture, and organizational innovation in predicting organizational performance at Iran Khodro. Using a positivist paradigm approach, the study seeks to address the issue through empirical research. Accordingly, the primary research question is framed as follows: "To what extent do strategic leadership and organizational culture affect organizational

IJIMOB
E-ISSN: 3041-8992

performance, considering the mediating role of organizational innovation?" The main objective of the study is to determine the impact of strategic leadership and organizational culture on organizational performance, with a focus on the mediating role of organizational innovation at Iran Khodro Company.

2 Methods and Materials

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of strategic leadership and organizational culture on organizational performance, considering the mediating role of organizational innovation among managers and experts at Iran Khodro Company and its subsidiaries in Tehran. Accordingly, this study is classified as applied research due to its focus on examining the effect of strategic leadership and organizational culture on organizational innovation and organizational performance.

Another criterion for classifying research methods is based on the method of data collection. Using this criterion, the current study is categorized as descriptive-correlational research, specifically utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population included all managers and experts of Iran Khodro Company and its subsidiaries in Tehran, estimated at approximately 370 individuals. Based on Cochran's formula, the sample size was determined to be 190, and the sampling method was simple random sampling.

The data collection tool consisted of four standardized questionnaires whose validity and reliability had been confirmed in prior studies. To measure strategic leadership, the Strategic Leadership Questionnaire developed by Hitt et al. (1995) was used, which comprised 25 items. To measure organizational culture, the Organizational Culture Questionnaire by Denison (2000), containing 18 items, was employed. Organizational performance was assessed using the "Achieve" Organizational Performance Questionnaire by Hersey and Goldsmith (2002), which included 42 items. Lastly, to evaluate organizational innovation, a combination of questionnaires from Jiménez et al. (2008), Penêda (2006), and Prajogo and Sohal (2006) (as cited in Choupani, 2011), with 17 items, was utilized.

Initially, the validity and reliability of these questionnaires were examined. Face validity and qualitative validity methods were employed to assess validity. After obtaining validation from experts, the reliability of the questionnaires was tested. For this purpose, 30 initial questionnaires were distributed among the statistical population, and Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each variable and its indicators. The results indicated that the Cronbach's alpha values for all four research variables, along with their indicators, exceeded the critical value of 0.70.

After confirming validity and reliability, the process of distributing and collecting data continued. The questionnaires were distributed over approximately two months among managers and experts, resulting in 190 completed questionnaires, which were then used for the research process. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 and SmartPLS software.

Initially, questionnaire data were converted into numerical codes and entered into SPSS version 22 for analysis. The data analysis was conducted in three sections. In the first section, demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, education, and marital status, were analyzed, categorized, and described. The second section focused on descriptive statistics, where measures such as mean, count, standard deviation, variance, skewness, kurtosis, minimum, and maximum values were examined. Finally, in the inferential statistics section, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the assumption of normality for the research variables.

3 Findings and Results

Approximately 75% of the respondents to the survey were male, while about 25% were female. Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents were male.

The age distribution of the respondents was divided into four categories. Approximately 3% of respondents were under the age of 30, 36% were aged between 30 and 40, 52% were aged between 41 and 50, and 9% were aged 51 and above.

The educational level of respondents was categorized into four groups. Approximately 14% of the respondents held an associate degree, 46% held a bachelor's degree, 31% held a master's degree, and 9% held a doctoral degree. Based on these results, most respondents had a bachelor's degree.

Descriptive statistics comprise methods used to organize, summarize, tabulate, chart, describe, relate, and interpret the collected data. Descriptive statistical methods help researchers easily identify and explain the data or information collected on a specific topic. Descriptive statistics summarize and compile data for better presentation to readers, and they summarize the patterns of responses in a sample. Descriptive statistics for all variables in this study, including strategic leadership (25 indicators, SL1–SL25),

IJIMOB
E-ISSN: 3041-8992

organizational culture (18 indicators, OC1–OC18), organizational performance (42 indicators, OP1–OP42), and organizational innovation (17 indicators, OI1–OI17), are presented in Table 4. Indicators include mean, standard deviation, minimum, median, and maximum values. The observed mean values are close to their medians. Additionally, skewness and kurtosis values are less than the standard error, indicating an approximately normal distribution of the observed variables.

In this study, the observed variables for all four main latent variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

After describing the variables and responses from the statistical population, this section examines the hypotheses and statistical tests used in the research. In other words, this section analyzes the findings to statistically verify the validity and reliability of the hypotheses.

Before employing statistical techniques, it is essential to determine whether the collected data are normally distributed. If the data distribution is normal, parametric tests can be used for hypothesis testing. Otherwise, non-parametric tests must be applied.

Table 1

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results

Research Variable	Test Statistic (K-S)	Significance Level	$\alpha = 0.05$	Test Result	Distribution Status
Strategic Leadership	0.085	0.002	0.05	Reject H_0	Non-normal
Organizational Innovation	0.106	0.000	0.05	Reject H_0	Non-normal
Organizational Culture	0.067	0.039	0.05	Reject H_0	Non-normal
Organizational Performance	0.110	0.000	0.05	Reject H_0	Non-normal

Based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results presented in Table 1, since the significance levels for all four variables are smaller than the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is not accepted at the 0.05 level of significance. It can therefore be concluded that the distribution of the variables in this study is not normal.

Given the non-normality of the data distribution, partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling was employed for data analysis. Additionally, due to the multilevel nature of the model, the presence of multiple independent variables, multicollinearity among variables, and the inability of software such as LISREL, AMOS, and EQS to validate the model effectively, SmartPLS software was used to apply the PLS method.

The PLS estimation method determines coefficients to maximize the interpretive and explanatory power of the model. This ensures that the model can predict the dependent variables with the highest accuracy. PLS, a multivariate statistical method, allows for simultaneous modeling of one or more dependent variables and multiple explanatory variables, even with limitations such as unknown variable distributions, small sample sizes, or high collinearity among explanatory variables.

The assessment of endogenous measurement models involves examining factor loadings, calculated by measuring the correlation between a construct and its indicators. If the value equals or exceeds 0.40, it indicates that the variance shared between the construct and its indicators is greater than the measurement error variance, confirming the reliability of the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha is used as a reliability criterion, with values above 0.70 indicating acceptable reliability. Another key metric is composite reliability (CR); values above 0.70 indicate good internal consistency, while values below 0.60 suggest a lack of reliability. Table 2 summarizes these metrics.

Table 2

Reliability Metrics from PLS Output

Variables	Dimensions	Beta	t-value	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Shared Variance
Strategic Leadership	Strategic Path Determination	0.75	18.01	0.77	0.84	0.57
	Discovery and Preservation of Core Competencies	0.72	14.86			
	Human Capital Development	0.73	14.36			
	Emphasis on Ethical Practices	0.55	8.94			

IJIMOB
E-ISSN: 3041-8992

	Maintaining Effective Collaboration Culture	0.72	15.81			
	Establishing Strategic Controls	0.63	10.40			
Organizational Culture	Rational Culture	0.88	37.09	0.90	0.93	0.77
	Ideological Culture	0.91	51.05			
	Participatory Culture	0.82	17.64			
	Hierarchical Culture	0.91	61.63			
Organizational Innovation	Product Innovation	0.91	52.39	0.91	0.94	0.85
	Process Innovation	0.94	89.20			
	Administrative Innovation	0.91	57.70			
Organizational Performance	Ability	0.86	42.50	0.93	0.94	0.72
	Clarity	0.86	37.78			
	Support	0.87	28.06			
	Incentive	0.83	33.42			
	Evaluation	0.87	58.78			
	Credibility	0.87	44.25			
	Environment	0.75	19.68			

According to Table 2, the factor loadings for all dimensions of the variables exceed the critical value of 0.40. Additionally, all t-values for the dimensions are above the critical value of 1.96, confirming the reliability of the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha values for all four main variables exceed 0.70, and composite reliability values indicate desirable internal consistency. Furthermore, shared variance values exceed the critical value of 0.50.

Convergent validity, the second metric for assessing measurement models in partial least squares (PLS), was examined using the average variance extracted (AVE). This metric indicates the mean variance shared between a construct and its indicators. Higher values signify greater model fit. An AVE value above 0.50 demonstrates acceptable convergent validity.

Table 3

Convergent Validity of the Research Model

Variables	AVE
Strategic Leadership	0.57
Organizational Innovation	0.85
Organizational Culture	0.77
Organizational Performance	0.71

As shown in Table 3, AVE values for all four constructs exceed the critical threshold of 0.50, indicating acceptable convergent validity for the model.

Table 4

Divergent Validity Using Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	OC	OI	OP	SL
Organizational Culture	0.88			
Organizational Innovation	0.72	0.92		
Organizational Performance	0.71	0.78	0.84	
Strategic Leadership	0.64	0.54	0.62	0.75

According to Table 4, derived from the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE for the latent variables (diagonal values) exceeds the correlation values in the off-diagonal cells. This confirms that constructs (latent variables) in the research model interact more strongly with their own indicators than with other constructs, indicating acceptable divergent validity.

IJIMOB
E-ISSN: 3041-8992

Table 5

Summary of Research Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis	β Value	t-Value	Significance (sig)	Conclusion
H1	0.20	2.53	0.000	Hypothesis Confirmed
H2	0.13	1.97	0.041	Hypothesis Confirmed
H3	0.63	9.81	0.000	Hypothesis Confirmed
H4	0.21	2.40	0.002	Hypothesis Confirmed
H5	0.52	6.88	0.000	Hypothesis Confirmed
H6	0.25	3.22	0.000	Hypothesis Confirmed
H7	0.60	5.71	0.000	Hypothesis Confirmed

The results in Table 5 indicate that all seven hypotheses have been statistically confirmed based on their β values, t-values (all exceeding the critical value of 1.96), and significance levels (all below the threshold of 0.05).

Hypothesis 1: The results indicate that strategic leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.20$, $t = 2.53$, $p < 0.001$). This finding supports the hypothesis that effective strategic leadership enhances organizational performance, emphasizing its role in achieving organizational goals and improving overall efficiency.

Hypothesis 2: The analysis confirms that strategic leadership positively influences organizational innovation ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 1.97$, $p < 0.041$). This result highlights the importance of strategic leadership in fostering innovation within organizations, enabling them to adapt and thrive in dynamic environments.

Hypothesis 3: The findings show a significant positive effect of organizational culture on organizational innovation ($\beta = 0.63$, $t = 9.81$, $p < 0.001$). This outcome underlines the critical role of a supportive organizational culture in promoting creativity and innovative practices within the organization.

Hypothesis 4: The results demonstrate that organizational culture significantly impacts organizational performance ($\beta = 0.21$, $t = 2.40$, $p < 0.002$). This finding validates the hypothesis that a strong and positive organizational culture contributes to improved organizational performance by fostering employee engagement and alignment with organizational objectives.

Hypothesis 5: The analysis establishes a significant positive relationship between organizational innovation and organizational performance ($\beta = 0.52$, $t = 6.88$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that organizations with higher levels of innovation are better equipped to achieve superior performance outcomes.

Hypothesis 6: The results confirm the mediating role of organizational innovation in the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 3.22$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that strategic leadership indirectly enhances organizational performance by fostering innovation as a mediating factor.

Hypothesis 7: The findings reveal that organizational innovation mediates the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance ($\beta = 0.60$, $t = 5.71$, $p < 0.001$). This highlights that the positive influence of organizational culture on performance is partially realized through its impact on innovation.

The mediation role of organizational innovation in the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance was evaluated using the Preacher and Hayes (2008) approach. The Variance Accounted For (VAF) was calculated as 25% (0.25), exceeding the 10% threshold, indicating that organizational innovation acts as a partial mediator between strategic leadership and organizational performance. Additionally, the Sobel test yielded a t-value of 3.22, which is statistically significant, further confirming the mediation effect.

Similarly, the mediation role of organizational innovation in the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance was analyzed. The VAF was 60% (0.60), surpassing the 10% threshold, suggesting that organizational innovation serves as a complete mediator in this relationship. The Sobel test provided a significant t-value of 5.71, supporting the presence of full mediation.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study provide compelling evidence regarding the relationships between strategic leadership, organizational culture, organizational innovation, and organizational performance. These findings are significant

IJIMOB
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in understanding the mechanisms through which leadership and culture influence innovation and performance.

The study confirmed a significant positive relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance. This aligns with findings by Najmi, Kadir, and Kadir (2018), who emphasized the importance of strategic leadership in enhancing organizational accountability and achieving performance targets. Strategic leaders shape organizational vision, allocate resources effectively, and build adaptable structures, which are critical for improving performance (Hitt et al., 1996). Furthermore, the findings corroborate the performance prism framework proposed by Neely, Adams, and Kennerley (2002), which highlights the role of leadership in aligning stakeholder expectations with organizational objectives.

The results also demonstrated a positive effect of strategic leadership on organizational innovation. This finding is consistent with the study by Alameri et al. (2019), which showed that empowering leadership enhances innovation by fostering creativity and complex problem-solving among employees. Effective strategic leaders create an environment that encourages experimentation and learning, enabling organizations to innovate processes and products (Ilyas et al., 2017). This dynamic capability, as highlighted by Najmi, Kadir, and Kadir (2018), bridges knowledge management and strategic leadership to improve innovation outcomes (Najmi et al., 2018).

A strong and positive organizational culture was found to have a significant influence on organizational innovation. This supports the findings of Shahzad, Xiu, and Shahbaz (2017), who emphasized the role of a collaborative culture in enhancing innovation within the software industry (Shahzad et al., 2017). Organizational culture acts as a foundation for shared values and norms, which stimulate creativity and the adoption of innovative practices (Samanta, 2021). The results align with Abubakar et al. (2019), who identified the interplay between culture and decision-making styles as a driver of innovation performance (Abubakar et al., 2019).

The positive relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance reinforces the theoretical propositions in the literature. As Abubakar et al. (2019) indicated, a supportive culture fosters better decision-making and resource utilization, which are pivotal for achieving performance objectives (Abubakar et al., 2019). Samanta (2021) also highlighted the connection between a value-driven culture and employee engagement, which in turn enhances overall organizational performance (Samanta, 2021).

The study's findings reveal a strong positive effect of organizational innovation on performance, which is consistent with prior studies (Ilyas et al., 2017; Shahzad et al., 2017). Innovation enables organizations to improve operational efficiency, address customer needs more effectively, and maintain a competitive edge in dynamic markets. This is aligned with the resource-based view, where innovation is considered a strategic asset for sustaining competitive advantage (Hitt et al., 1996).

The mediating role of organizational innovation in the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance, as well as between organizational culture and organizational performance, highlights its pivotal position in the organizational ecosystem. These findings are consistent with the study by Najmi, Kadir, and Kadir (2018), which emphasized that innovation acts as a bridge linking leadership and culture to enhanced performance outcomes (Najmi et al., 2018). Alameri et al. (2019) also noted that innovation serves as a critical intermediary that amplifies the effects of leadership and cultural practices on organizational success (Alameri et al., 2019).

Despite its significant contributions, this study has some limitations. First, the data collection was confined to a single industry (automotive) and one geographical location (Tehran), which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relied on self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce common method bias. Third, while the study utilized structural equation modeling to test relationships, it does not provide causal inferences due to its cross-sectional design.

Future research should aim to replicate this study in different industries and regions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into causal relationships among the variables. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as interviews and case studies can complement the quantitative data and provide richer insights into the dynamics of leadership, culture, innovation, and performance. Future studies should also explore other potential mediators and moderators, such as employee engagement or digital transformation, to extend the theoretical framework.

Organizations should prioritize strategic leadership development through training programs focused on adaptive leadership, creativity, and innovation management. Cultivating a strong organizational culture that promotes collaboration, trust, and shared values is essential for

IJIMOB
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fostering innovation and improving performance. Leaders should actively encourage innovative practices by providing resources and a safe environment for experimentation. Lastly, organizations must regularly evaluate and align their cultural practices and leadership strategies to maintain a competitive edge in evolving markets.

- Conduct behavioral analysis of investors according to demographic characteristics, including education level, gender, specialization, etc.
- Guide and manage investors based on their risk tolerance approaches.
- Investment companies should consider both positive and negative external drivers.
- Consider investors' perceptions and awareness when facing environmental risks.
- Promote discourse and culture on investment approaches aligned with environmental risks.
- Define behavioral characteristics of investors in the capital market.
- Identify and analyze investors' behavioral outputs in the capital market.

Suggestions for future research include:

- Examining how investors confront environmental risks in the investment field.
- Identifying and prioritizing factors that mitigate investment losses in the Tehran Stock Exchange from a behavioral perspective.
- Diagnosing emotional investor behaviors in response to environmental risks.
- Providing preventive strategies for investment companies to manage environmental risks.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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