

THE EFFECT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON SMALL AND
MEDIUM ENTERPRISES PERFORMANCE OF UAE: THE MEDIATION ROLES
OF EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY AND ORGANIZATION INNOVATION

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A thesis submitted in
fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the
Doctor of Philosophy in Technology Management.

Faculty of Technology Management and Business
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OCTOBER 2022

DEDICATION

For my beloved family.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Praise Allah, Lord of the Worlds, who enabled me to complete this study successfully.

I want to express my utmost gratitude and appreciation to the individuals that helped me to complete this work. First and foremost, to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Wan Fauziah Binti Wan Yusoff for her consistent encouragement advice, and guidance throughout the period of this research.

Additional thanks go to my family members and friends (Fatima Al Muhairi, Ali Al Nuaimi, Zayed Al Humairi and Ahmed Al sheryani), for their constant support to accomplish this work.

Finally, I also want to thank those who have contributed directly or indirectly towards the success of this research.



PERPUSTAKAAN TUNKU TUNJALAMINAH

ABSTRACT

Today, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) become a vital asset for almost all countries in the world and represent a dynamic sector of the global economy. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), SMEs is the pillar of economic growth in the last decades. While leadership has been proven to raise the profitability and growth among SMEs, the scenario in the UAE is not encouraging, lots of SMEs are struggling to maintain business on the long term, and they are unable to benefit from innovation or hire creative workforce. The reality shows that SMEs in UAE are weak against crises and tough competition. Unsuccessful leadership style was the main cause for continuous losses and failure which forced them to shut down the business or downsize their activities and workforce. Despite the wealth of studies on this topic, there is lack of empirical studies that report the solutions to these problems in the UAE. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine the significance of relationships between transformational leadership, organization innovation, employee creativity, and SME business performance, as well as the mediation roles of organization innovation, employee creativity. Quantitative methods have been deployed to examine these relationships. The population equal 11023 of SMEs working in in Abu Dhabi, the respondents are the executive managers. SMEs worked in information and communication, manufacturing, education, financial and insurance, professional scientific and technical are included in the survey procedure. Simple random sampling technique was used to distribute the questionnaires during the survey phase. A sample of 441 SMEs was specified for survey and collecting the data for the analysis. The results revealed that all direct and indirect relationships are significant, whereas organization innovation, employee creativity partially mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and SME business performance. This study makes several theoretical contributions to the topic of transformational leadership and organizational performance. Whereas the creativity of employees seems to be a key source of innovation particularly in SME, it become vital resources to achieve economic growth in the market and sustainable profitability. Accordingly, SMEs should focus on leaders who have certain traits, such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to raise profitability and business growth in UAE market. The findings of this study will benefit the SME Council of UAE to empower small and medium-sized projects and businesses including representatives from government bodies, and developing strategic plans and policies for small firms, setting the necessary rules and regulations to enhance the coordination between the UAE's National Program for SMEs and following-up the program's performance indicators.

ABSTRAK

Hari ini, perusahaan kecil dan sederhana (PKS) menjadi aset penting bagi hampir semua negara di dunia dan mewakili sektor ekonomi global yang dinamik. Di Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE), PKS merupakan tonggak pertumbuhan ekonomi dalam beberapa dekad yang lalu. Walaupun kepimpinan telah terbukti meningkatkan keuntungan dan pertumbuhan dalam kalangan PKS, senario di UAE tidak menggalakkan, banyak PKS bergelut untuk mengekalkan perniagaan dalam jangka panjang, dan mereka tidak dapat memanfaatkan inovasi atau mengupah tenaga kerja kreatif. Realiti menunjukkan bahawa PKS di UAE lemah terhadap krisis dan persaingan yang sengit. Gaya kepimpinan yang tidak berjaya adalah punca utama kerugian dan kegagalan berterusan yang memaksa mereka menutup perniagaan atau mengecilkan aktiviti dan tenaga kerja mereka. Walaupun banyak kajian mengenai topik ini, terdapat kekurangan kajian empirikal yang melaporkan penyelesaian kepada masalah ini di UAE. Oleh itu, matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kepentingan hubungan antara kepimpinan transformasi, inovasi organisasi, kreativiti pekerja, dan prestasi perniagaan PKS, serta peranan pengantaraan inovasi organisasi, kreativiti pekerja. Kaedah kuantitatif telah digunakan untuk mengkaji hubungan ini. Populasi bersamaan dengan 11023 PKS yang bekerja di Abu Dhabi, responden adalah pengurus eksekutif. PKS yang bekerja dalam maklumat dan komunikasi, pembuatan, pendidikan, kewangan dan insurans, saintifik dan teknikal profesional termasuk dalam prosedur tinjauan. Teknik persampelan rawak mudah telah digunakan untuk mengedarkan soal selidik semasa fasa tinjauan. Satu sampel 441 PKS telah ditetapkan untuk tinjauan dan pengumpulan data untuk analisis. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa semua hubungan langsung dan tidak langsung adalah penting, manakala inovasi organisasi, kreativiti pekerja sebahagiannya menjadi pengantara hubungan antara kepimpinan transformasi dan prestasi perniagaan PKS. Kajian ini memberikan beberapa sumbangan teori kepada topik kepimpinan transformasi dan prestasi organisasi. Walaupun kreativiti pekerja nampaknya menjadi sumber utama inovasi khususnya dalam PKS, ia menjadi sumber penting untuk mencapai pertumbuhan ekonomi dalam pasaran dan keuntungan yang mampan. Sehubungan itu, PKS harus memberi tumpuan kepada pemimpin yang mempunyai ciri tertentu, seperti pengaruh ideal, motivasi inspirasi, rangsangan intelektual, dan pertimbangan individu untuk meningkatkan keuntungan dan pertumbuhan perniagaan dalam pasaran UAE. Penemuan kajian ini akan memberi manfaat kepada Majlis PKS UAE untuk memperkasakan projek dan perniagaan kecil dan sederhana termasuk wakil daripada badan kerajaan, dan membangunkan pelan strategik dan dasar untuk firma kecil, menetapkan peraturan dan peraturan yang diperlukan untuk meningkatkan penyelarasan antara Program Kebangsaan UAE untuk PKS dan susulan penunjuk prestasi program.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

In the business world, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the source of economic development and the sources of sustainable business growth in developing countries (Abdul-Mohsin, 2020). SMEs become vital assets for large number of countries and represent a dynamic sector of the world economy (Ali et al., 2021). This state is due to the globalization and tough competition in domestic markets.

Nowadays, SMEs must be capable to make a significant difference by adopting innovating methods in business model and rely on employees' creativity to foster business performance. It is imperative that the leaders of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) focus on creativity and innovation in order to develop their businesses while increasing productivity (Qalati et al., 2020). To address the requirements of its residents, the UAE is devoting a lot of effort and money into increasing its innovation capacity within its many entities (Abdulqader & Al Marri, 2020). As a result, SMEs must be innovative in all aspects of their operations in order to meet the expectations of customers who are increasingly sophisticated in their selection of products and services (Fitriati et al., 2020; Gherghina et al., 2020).

Moreover, in today's competitive market, SMEs should focus on the success factors that attract customers. The success or failure in SME domain could be related to something beyond financial and managerial structure, e.g. lack of innovation in the business plan, shortage of creative workforce, and inefficient leadership style. The current digitization era and digital transformation in all industries becomes a strategic necessity on the leadership agenda, especially for organizations rely on innovation in term of process, marketing, and products, those organizations seek a leadership style

that promote innovation and creativity to boost the organizational performance, e.g., raising the profitability and growth in the market. However, adopting transformational leadership become the right answer for almost all SMEs searching for an effective leadership style that adapt with the rapid change in the business world and market crises (Singh & Hess, 2017). Without a transformational leader who has the personal characteristics to encourage innovation among employees, as well as motivate them to be creativity, high level of performance could be a difficult aim to achieve (Lopes et al., 2017). Consequently, to bargain with the customers' demand, an SME must deal with creative issues and inventive solutions for the complex challenges that every company may face (Liao and Tsai, 2019). In such situation, an SME adopt transformational leadership rely on creativity originates from employees who are intellectual assets of every company (Mishra et al., 2018).

Globally, SMEs constitute over 90% of businesses; this percentage represents a major portion of gross domestic product (GDP) of many developing countries (Ogundana et al., 2017). Whereas UAE among the fast-developing countries, the government in this country must focus on the competitive advantages coming from SMEs and enables them to access larger markets and allows for their growth and sustainability (Dutot et al., 2014) and improve globalization of SMEs and support several types of mechanisms, such as knowledge sharing, collaboration, innovation (Costa et al., 2020). SME could be in a better position in the market by relying on innovation practices and effective leadership styles (Cao & Yu, 2019). Hence, it is important to explore the variables that foster SME performance, such as leadership, innovation, and creativity (Halim et al., 2019).

This chapter introduces the research topic briefly for the reader and explains the problem statement. The study's backdrop provides context for the investigation, establishing a knowledge base on which the research will be built. For a study to be successful, it must answer the research questions and objectives. The study's significance and scope reflect the impact of leadership, creativity, and innovation on the performance of SMEs. To conclude, the operational definition offers a concise explanation of the most important concepts that were introduced during the research.

In the UAE, SMEs is the fundamental pillar of the economy, whereas innovation and creativity positively affects the performance of SMEs and the economic growth (Hamdan, 2019). The trading segment contributes 47% of the total

value-add generated by SME sector (Dubai SME, 2015). For example, in Dubai province, the contribution of SME to the economy is approximately 50% of Dubai's GDP, while SMEs contribute 52% of the total workforce according to a recent report in 2019 by Dubai SME department. This also means that the SMEs in Dubai make up 99.2% of all enterprises in the United Arab Emirates, which is an impressive statistic. Thereby, researching in the main factors that affect the performance of SMEs in UAE has been increased in recent years (AbdulQuddus, 2019).

Trading, manufacturing, and utilities are the three categories in which SMEs in the UAE operate. Different requirements should be completed for a company to be categorized as a SME. Industrial companies have higher yearly sales and staff numbers than the ordinary trade or Service Company. As indicated in Figure 1.1, the categorization of SMEs in the UAE is determined by the amount of turnover and the number of employees. Companies with a turnover of less than AED 50 million and a workforce of 6 to 50 employees. If a small production firm has the same turnover as a large corporation, but employs more people (10-100 employees), then a small service company with six to fifty employees will have lesser turnover (20 million AED).

The medium-sized manufacturing industry employs up to 250 employees and generates revenue of up to AED250 million. Companies with 51-200 workers and an annual revenue of up to AED200 million qualify as medium-sized service firms; medium-sized trade firms also meet these standards. Businesses with less than 10 employees or the owner as their sole employee fall into this category, known as micro enterprises.

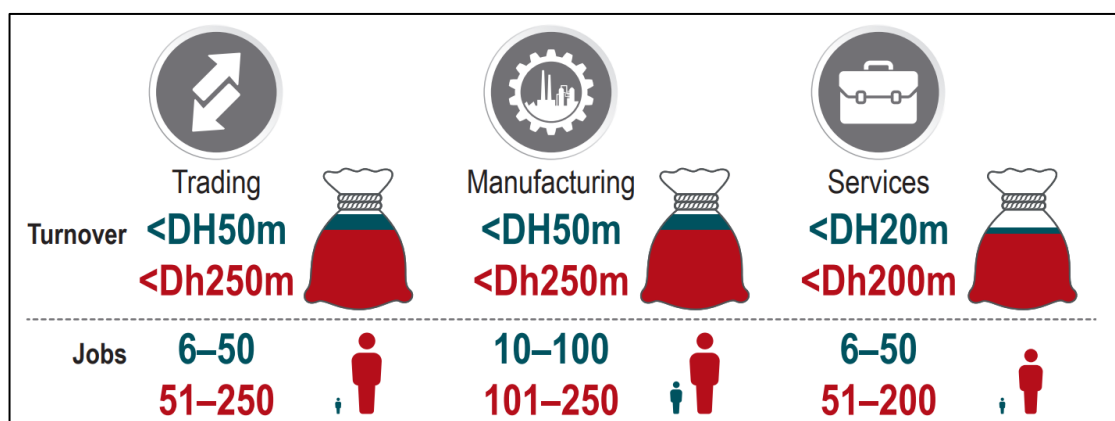


Figure 1.1: Definition of SMES in Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Chamber, 2019).

The United Arab Emirates' National Program for SMEs launched a strategy to help and stimulate small and medium businesses and entrepreneurship. Because of its role in developing the country's economy and growing its diversity, sustainability, and competitiveness, as well as fostering creativity and expertise in economic activities and the business sector, the UAE Ministry of Economy established special programs for entrepreneurs and creative people to engage in the SME sector. These specialized programs will be completing a connection with the European Business Network, hosting a SME Forum, and engaging in SMEs and innovation exhibitions and competitions. Hence, the UAE Ministry of Economy pointed out that the plan for 2020 included activities to empower entrepreneurs and creative citizens, while encourage and enable SME owners to learn best practices and trends in entrepreneurship and innovation development.

In 2014, the National SME Program was established under the umbrella of Ministry of Economy. This program is supervised by the UAE SME Council to Empower Small and Medium-Sized National Entrepreneurs. The council coordinates with federal and local government bodies and the private sector to market the products in coordination with the relevant entities. In addition to that, this program provides training, seminars and workshops to empower and educate SME owners. The aim of the ministry of economy is to promote sustainable economic development in the UAE through this program (Government of UAE, 2021).

A small percentage of Emiratis are actively involved in the management of established enterprises despite numerous UAE efforts aimed at cultivating Emiratis' entrepreneurial potential. For example, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Chabrak et al., 2017; Chabrak et al., 2018; El-Sokari et al., 2013) specifies the percentage of recognized business ownership, which is the proportion of enterprises that have been in operation for at least three and a half years.

Table 1.1 summarized some of the information that provides comparison between 2008 and 2017 measures. The count of SMEs increased by 109% to reach 151872 firms in 2017. However this increment happened in the small firms as it increased by 100%. However, micro firms decreased by 16% and medium firms decreased by 60%. While the numbers show a healthy growth, the decrement in medium firms is questionable and could be a sign for some difficulties that encountered by those firms.

Table 1.1: SMEs Growth 2008 and 2017 (SME Council of UAE)

	2008	2017	Change
SMEs Count	72,695	151,875	109%
Size - Micro %	72%	61%	-15%
Size - Small %	18%	36%	100%
Size - Medium %	5%	2%	-60%
Size - Large %	5%	1%	-80%
GDP - Micro %	60%	49%	-18%
GDP - Small %	17%	28%	65%
GDP - Medium %	15%	13%	-13%
GDP - Large %	8%	10%	25%
Manufacturing %	13%	10%	-23%
Trading %	46%	43%	-7%
Service %	41%	47%	15%

SMEs in the UAE have proven to be the strategic drivers of industries across the country and are expected to play a much stronger role in the years to come. According to Ministry of Economy, the SMEs sector represents more than 94 per cent of the total number of companies operating in the country and provides jobs for more than 86 per cent of the private sector's workforce. Based on Dubai government reports (2017); micro, small, and medium enterprises are 95% of registered firms, its contribution to gross value add is 40%, employing 42% of the workforce. The ministry is targeting 60% contribution of SMEs by 2021 (The UAE government portal, 2020). Therefore, this study is an exploration to improve SMEs performance, which will contribute to employment and reach the target of UAE national strategy.

For Abu Dhabi and the UAE, the development of the SME sector is a top priority. According to the UAE Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, the SME segment contributed for 53% of the UAE GDP in 2019, up from 49% in 2018. The federal government plans to expand that proportion to 60% by 2021, as indicated in Figure 1.2. It appears to be a reasonable goal for the UAE. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can still achieve their 60 percent market share target in 2021, even though it may sound ambitious. To achieve that aim, policies must be designed to support a thriving business sector towards transformational leaderships that is open to both success and failure. Entrepreneurs must be willing to take chances and learn from their mistakes, whereas transformational leaders have the personal traits to foster inspiration and motivation among individuals working in SMEs.

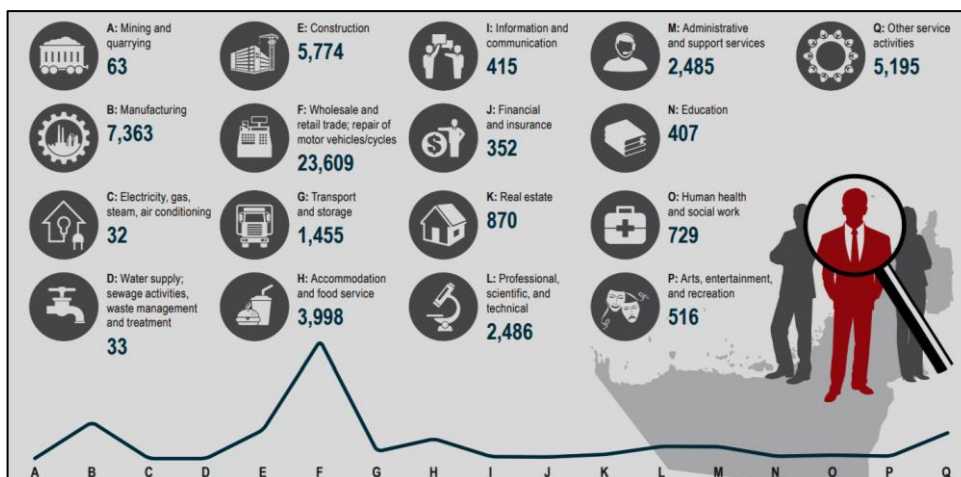


Figure 1.2: Number of SME establishments in Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Chamber, 2019).

Several categories determine the success of SMEs by sector, including the number of workers, contribution to production by sector, or productivity by sector for SMEs. Retail trading is a market in which SMEs clearly dominate, and this is almost the same all over the world, including Abu Dhabi.

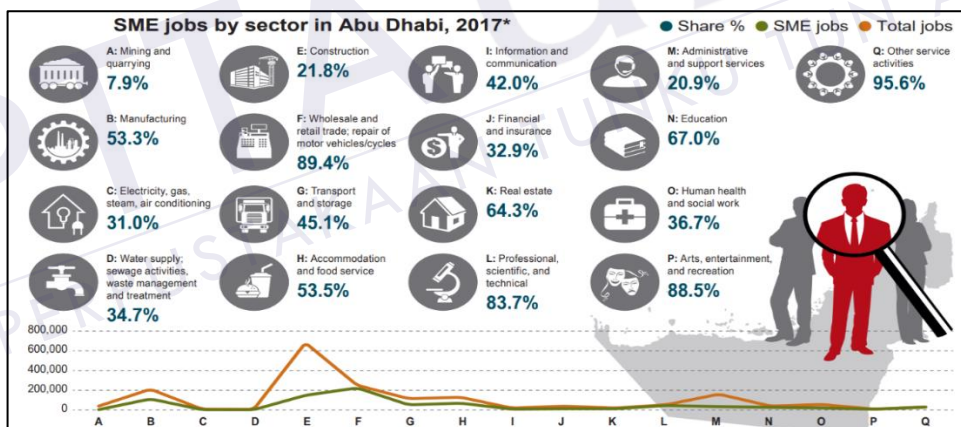


Figure 1.3: SME share in total jobs (Abu Dhabi Chamber, 2019).

There were 223,000 workers in that market, which accounted for more than a quarter of all jobs provided by SMEs, which represents approximately 90% of all retail workers (see Figure 1.3). SME participation is also high in two other service-oriented industries. These are "Professional, Scientific, and Technical services," which includes law firms and consultancies, as well as the vast real estate market. Both had contribution rates from SMEs of around 85% and 70%, respectively, and their output outperformed that of large corporations by around 15%

It is well understood that transformation leadership plays a critical role in accomplishing SMEs' long-term objectives. The highly competitive business environment, and the rapid changes in the market shows the importance of this kind of leadership style in improving organizational performance (Nungky et al., 2020). As a result, effective leadership is one of the most important variables that contribute to organizational success in situations when small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) encounter several challenges and difficulties in order to remain competitive in the marketplace (Matzler et al., 2008; Vasconcelos & Oliveria, 2018; Manzoor et al, 2019). It has become necessary for organizations in UAE to study the factors that have an impact on innovation effectiveness (Ruchi & Babeet, 2021). Some scholars confirmed that firm innovative performance could be influenced by transformational leadership (Ting et al., 2021). According to Al-Busaeedi (2020), transformational leadership has a substantial impact on the development of organizations and the industrial sector in UAE, although organizational innovation's function in transformational leadership has yet to be explored. However, a few researchers have concluded that transformational leadership is an important factor in the success of UAE university personnel when it comes to innovation (Almaskari et al., 2021). But few studies have looked into how transformational leadership styles foster innovation and creativity among individuals in UAE organization. Hence this study expands on the topic by concentrating on sub-dimensions of transformational leadership that foster innovation through idea generation and execution at the SMEs of UAE. Therefore, transformational leadership, organization innovation, and employee creativity assumed to be the success factors of SMEs now. Consequently, studying the relationships between these variables will provide empirical evidences on the strength of influence of each variable for policy makers in the country, as well as enhance the body of knowledge on SME's business.

As mentioned earlier, when SMEs rely on innovation and creativity, they will add values to their business with bigger company who dominate the market (Maritz & Donovan, 2015). This assumption applies on the domestic market in United Arab Emirates (UAE). Innovation and creativity, however, comes not only from large companies, but also from dynamic SMEs that can make strong contributions to the national economy (Schiliro, 2015). While, many SMEs are planning to transfer

business from traditional methods to creative and innovated business model, there are many challenges hinder such plans (Kremer et al., 2019).

It is critical to comprehend the complexities of SMEs, their operations, and the obstacles that executives face on a daily basis. SMEs also collaborate with larger-scale competitors rather than competing with them. In fact, there are numerous examples of how smaller businesses can assist larger businesses in achieving significant cost savings and revenue which otherwise would not be possible. Moreover, it is necessary to investigate the challenges of SMEs in UAE business environment, especially those associated with innovation and leadership, SMEs, on the other hand, are not doing so well in terms of effective leadership that encourages the use of creativity and innovation in the organization. For the sake of performance improvement and economic growth in the UAE, SMEs should employ organizational innovation, such as process innovation, product innovation, and marketing innovation in many aspects and technology dimensions. Based on the previous arguments, it is evident researching on SME business performance need empirical evidences to highlight the importance of transformational leadership, employee creativity, and organization innovation in an emerging economy like UAE.

1.2 Problem statement

Although, the topic of transformational leadership has been widely studied on large organizations, but the impact of transformational leaders on SMEs performance received limited interest by scholars in the past. In this regard, some scholars claimed that SMEs faces challenges linked to leadership styles and they argued that the majority of SMEs around the world do not rely on changing leadership style, but they focus on other factors deemed to increase the sales and boost business growth (Nazarian et al., 2017; Mendy & Harrison, 2021; Habicher et al., 2022). It is evident that the challenges of management in the digital economy affecting the performance of SMEs (Mamadjonov et al., 2021). In cases where the organization is confronted with several new difficulties and challenges, effective leadership can aid in improving organizational performance (Shekar et al., 2021). However, many developing countries have witnessed large number of businesses shut down due to ineffective leadership (Choudhary, 2019). The reality shows that unsuccessful leadership

approaches was the main cause for continue losses among SMEs which forced them to end business or downsize their activities (Bertello et al., 2021). Another issue is that the majority of SMEs are unable to distinguish between effective and ineffective leaders (Nungky et al., 2020). SMEs will continue to face new problems and inability to survive in the market that require leaders who are capable to take the right decisions at the time of crises (Fachrunnisa et al., 2020).

Some studies in the past examined the contribution of transformational to UAE market, e.g., Madi et al. (2020) found that transformational leadership is positively associated with both adaptive culture and firm's resilience and significantly impacts service companies in Dubai. While Tariq et al. (2021) discovered that transformational leadership influences employee innovation. Likewise, Ruchi and Babeet (2021) claimed that leadership styles in general have an impact on all departments and individuals inside the organization. However, little academic works have been reported on this topic in the context of UAE-based SMEs. The survey on the literature reveals a dearth study on how transformational leaders promote employee creativity and organization innovation towards profitability and business growth. Despite various researchers in the past had studied leadership in SME domain, most concerns arise on the absence of a framework combine the role of innovation and creativity in a business model (Miah & Hafit, 2020).

Arguably, Nations around the world have developed national innovation strategies and frameworks by recognizing innovation as a foundation stone for economic and social development. In realizing innovation as a foundation for economic and social development, nations around the world are interested in innovative strategies and frameworks (UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2015). The innovation strategy is associated with aspiration of individuals, private institutions and governments to achieve development by generating creative ideas and introducing new products, services and operations that improve the overall quality of life (UAE National Innovation Strategy, 2015, p. 5). The UAE uniquely exercises its ability of attracting and retaining the best talent through becoming a prime destination for creative people, besides being ranked first worldwide in drawing talent from the globe. In last ten years, efforts of UAE have ended in giving it 46th rank in the world according to Bloomberg index as shown in Table 1.2. This report reveals some issues facing the country and firms who conduct business inside UAE. The situation has not been

improved in terms of innovation on the global scale despite the advancement in Middle East region. This report arises a big concern about the reality of innovation and creativity among SMEs of UAE whereas the ability of these firms remains ambiguous and unclear. Yet, the performance of these firms with respect to the diffusion of innovation in recent years has not been discussed with empirical evidences.

Table 1.2: The world's most innovation countries in 2019 (Bloomberg innovation index, 2019)

2019 Rank	2018 Rank	YOY Change	Economy	Total Score	2019 Rank	2018 Rank	YOY Change	Economy	Total Score
1	1	0	S. Korea	87.38	31	NR	-	Slovenia	64.11
2	4	+2	Germany	87.30	32	27	-5	Hungary	63.05
3	7	+4	Finland	85.57	33	33	-	Turkey	62.89
4	5	+1	Switzerland	85.49	34	30	-	Portugal	62.79
5	10	+5	Israel	84.78	35	31	-	Greece	62.05
6	3	+3	Singapore	84.49	36	36	0	Estonia	61.79
7	2	-5	Sweden	84.15	37	34	-3	Lithuania	59.73
8	11	+3	U.S.	83.21	38	37	-	Hong Kong	58.90
9	6	-3	Japan	81.96	39	38	-1	Slovakia	58.03
10	9	-	France	81.67	40	45	+5	Thailand	57.77
11	8	-	Denmark	81.66	41	41	0	Bulgaria	56.36
12	12	0	Austria	80.98	42	40	-2	Latvia	55.46
13	14	+1	Belgium	80.43	43	39	+4	Malta	55.43
14	13	-1	Ireland	80.08	44	42	-2	Croatia	54.98
15	16	+1	Netherlands	79.54	45	NR	-	Brazil	53.62
16	19	+3	China	78.35	46	NR	.	U.A.E.	52.93
17	15	-2	Norway	77.79	47	49	+2	Iran	52.81
18	17	-	U.K.	75.87	48	47	-1	Cyprus	52.05
19	18	-	Australia	75.38	49	44	-5	Serbia	51.35
20	22	+2	Canada	73.65	50	NR	-	Argentina	51.31
21	20	-1	Italy	72.85	51	48	-	S. Africa	51.03
22	21	-	Poland	69.10	52	43	-9	Tunisia	48.92
23	24	+1	Iceland	68.41	53	46	-7	Ukraine	48.05
24	23	-	New Zealand	68.12	54	NR	-	India	47.93
25	28	+3	Czech Rep.	68.09	55	NR	-	Kuwait	47.27
26	26	0	Malaysia	67.61	56	NR	-	Saudi Arabia	47.18
27	25	-2	Russia	66.81	57	NR	-	Qatar	46.58
28	32	+4	Luxembourg	66.37	58	NR	-	Chile	46.40
29	35	+6	Romania	64.78	59	NR	-	Mexico	46.00
30	29	-1	Spain	64.52	60	NR	-	Vietnam	45.92

Although innovation is considered an important determinant for economic growth, it is still difficult for SMEs in developing nations like the UAE to incorporate innovation into their business strategy (Moore, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2018; D'Souza & Taghian, 2018; Jayakar et al., 2018). In short, the key impediment to successful technology adoption of the SMEs in UAE needs to be addressed from the perspective of diffusion of innovation (Oni & Papazafeiropoulou, 2014; Stawicka, 2021; Pandey, 2022). A successful technology diffusion among SMEs requires advanced technical skills, as well as transformational leaders who understand how innovation contribute to business (Chummee, 2022). It is evident that SMEs in UAE increasingly face a lot of challenges and competition not only from their peers but also from large firms in the international and domestic market (ALAmeri & Musa, 2021). The majority of SMEs rely on traditional management styles, while it is still unclear to what extent transformational innovation and creativity enhance SME performance in the UAE market. Many complementary factors would be dominant, and a SME's ability to obtain technology may be hindered by the unwillingness of other SMEs to adopt innovation practices and hire transformational leaders. Yet, it was not reported how transformational leadership contribute to the profitability and business growth of SMEs based on this scenario.

1.3 Research questions

This aim of this study is to examine the variables that influence SME business performance in UAE, such as employee creativity, transformational leadership, and organization innovation. Thus, to achieve this aim, the following questions will be answered.

- i) Do transformational leadership have significant effect on SME performance?
- ii) What is the effect of transformational leadership on organization innovation?
- iii) What is the effect of transformational leadership on employee creativity?
- iv) Does organization innovation affect SME performance?
- v) Does employee creativity affect SME performance?
- vi) Does organization innovation mediate the effect of transformational leadership on SME performance?

- vii) Does employee creativity mediate the effect of transformational leadership on SME performance?

1.4 Research objectives

- i) To identify the effect of transformational leadership on SME performance.
- ii) To identify the effect of transformational leadership on organization innovation.
- iii) To identify the effect of transformational leadership on employee creativity.
- iv) To examine the effect of organizational innovation on SME performance.
- v) To examine the effect of employee creativity on the SME performance.
- vi) To investigate the mediation role of organization innovation on the relationship between transformational leadership on SME performance.
- vii) To investigate the mediation role of employee creativity on the relationship between transformational leadership on SME performance.

1.5 Scope of study

This study topic is exploration of SMEs performance in UAE by surveying employees from different levels. The conceptual framework landscape is limited to transformational leadership, individual and team creativity, innovation management, and business performance. These variables are significant drivers of the competitiveness and market success of SMEs worldwide, especially in the UAE. Population consists the executive managers of SME in Abu Dhabi state of UAE. The response is one individual for each SME. Estimate count of SMEs in Abu Dhabi is 11023; and the sample size is 441. The study is using quantitative approach to answer the research questions.

1.6 Significance of study

i) Knowledge

For management and practical side, the study specifically beneficial to SMEs in UAE, as it highlights on the role of creativity and leadership in the success rather than the traditional management and economic antecedents. At the same time, it could

have widespread implications to other sectors in the different areas, practitioners, owners, decision makers, researchers, and academics. Moreover, the significance of this research project is to highlights the transformational leadership and the combined mediation role of innovation practice and employee creativity to strengthen performance of SME. Thereby, the findings of this study will contribute to the corpus of knowledge on this subject, as well as fostering innovation and creativity culture among SMEs and promote the development of innovative SMEs in UAE market.

ii) Policy of UAE

For policy makers and governance level, the study is also beneficial to decision makers in funded programs in UAE or worldwide, because the study can reveal that the success and fail could be related to something beyond financial and managerial structure. Investigating variables related to individuals and group qualities, could be valuable add on to the information available for decision makers to improve the future police and requirement for the funds and grants offers? UAE government target Innovation Strategies in the country for the short and long-term, insights from this study will help to reduce the barriers to innovation for policy and decision makers in UAE authorities and government institutions. Which will ease doing business by SMEs in the future.

iii) Practical

In practice, the outcome of this research project will be reflected on the economic development of small and medium projects in UAE. The economy of UAE is built on SME, whereas the findings of studies like the current one will benefit the authorities to reshape the role of SEMs based on new perspectives such as leadership. In addition to more support provided to these firms so that enable them to use innovation tools and make these tools as a priority for every firm want to conduct business in UAE.

1.7 Definitions of terms

Organization innovation. It is a set of activities that help an organization to progress in the work by endorsing new ideas and inventing new products or services. Organization innovation is measured through a set of practices, i.e., process innovation, product innovation, technology innovation, and marketing innovation.

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