

The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust in the Relationship Between Effective Leadership and Organizational Reputation: Evidence from Telecom Companies in Sulaimani City

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the research model that examines the mediating role of organizational trust in the relationship between effective leadership and organizational reputation based on empirical data collected from telecom organizations in Sulaimani City. The researchers employed the survey method as an empirical data-gathering instrument. The data were analyzed via PLS, basically to test and confirm the research hypotheses. The results validated hypotheses that effective leadership components namely leading oneself, people, and an organization positively impact organizational reputation. The results also depicted that there exists a strong and positive relationship between organizational trust and effective leadership factors. Moreover, there existed a strong and positive relationship between organizational trust and organizational reputation. The results also pointed out the indirect effects of effective leadership components on organizational reputation via partial mediation of organizational trust. Organizational trust is a partial mediator in increasing the effect of effective leadership on organizational reputation, as per the results. This current research contributes to the body of work by broadening theories related to effective leadership through the identification of organizational trust as a significant mediating variable and highlights the significance of trust in enhancing perceived organizational reputation based on sound leadership practices.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Effective Leadership, Organizational Trust, Organizational Reputation, Telecom Companies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of an organizational reputation is the major objective of every business organization, and this is also applicable to companies in the telecom industry, which is considered crucial for success in a competitive market. Reputation is an intangible asset that has gained considerable attention in recent years (Kumari et al., 2021).

A favorable reputation is developed, which helps build a unique corporate identity (Rawat, 2023), and effective leadership and organizational trust are the factors affecting it (Sharma et al., 2024). Effective leadership creates a culture for trusting and enhancing organizational reputation. As noted by Pourakbar (2018), leaders shape work conditions, organization policy, recognition, and career growth to earn trust and activate teams. Inspirational leadership, coaching, feedback, and rewards are markers for effective leadership to build up a psychologically safe culture (Joo, Yoon & Galbraith, 2022). Trust in leadership and colleagues strengthens organizational reputation (Rusu, 2021). Organizational trust is critical to improving performance, production, and service quality in telecom companies. Leaders have to create a work atmosphere that is genuine and supportive to instill trust, which, in turn, will enhance

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communication and strengthen organizational reputation (Vito et al., 2020). In competitive economies, retaining and attracting customers is crucial for sustaining growth and reputation (Rusu, 2021). In this respect, the present study explores how organizational trust acts as a mediator between organizational reputation and effective leadership in Sulaimani City telecom companies. This paper has an introduction, literature review, research methodology, data analysis, discussions, findings, and recommendations for future studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Effective Leadership

Effective leadership is a key subject popularly researched and studied by many because it is paramount at every level of any entity. According to Koochang et al. (2017), and Hofmeyer et al. (2015) the notion of leadership relationship between leaders establishes an influence or inspiration to accomplish goals through motivation and recognition. As mentioned by Gill et al. (2006) from many characteristics, the dominant traits of leaders are dominance, extraversion, self-confidence, resilience, and energy drive. Kavitha & Jayshree (2014) the success of a leader can be considered by his/ her ability to inspire and support the followers, build organizational performance, and reputation, and gain trust (Rahul, 2023; Hoa, 2015). Effective leadership, which is strategic, charismatic, inspirational, and relationship-building, is essential in establishing a great company reputation and encouraging positive behaviors and word-of-mouth (Men & Stacks, 2012). Effective leaders are confident, mature, honest, and self-disciplined (Pranitasari, 2020). They ask for ideas, communicate honestly, and embrace a variety of difficulties (Joo et al., 2023). Key ingredients that define effective leadership are honesty, integrity, confidence, passion, accountability, creativity, empathy, resilience, emotional intelligence, humility, transparency, teamwork, and vision. These qualities encourage collaboration, gain trust, and lead to a good company reputation (Radhika, 2020).

2.2 Organizational Reputation

These are two standpoints from which the reputation of an organization can be analyzed: that of stakeholders and that of the organization itself. According to Elmegeed, Mohamed, & Azab (2023), a good reputation is the intangible property of an organization that distinguishes it from competitors in the market, hence helping an organization satisfy the expectations of its stakeholders. Reputation has been one of the most important factors within the modern-day context of digitalization to which public opinion and media are playing a great role. As

Barney (2000) mentioned, a good reputation is an imperfectly replicable resource that is hard for rivals to imitate. Being so directly influential on public opinion and, as a result, over income, such stakeholder views are critical to the formation of an organization's reputation, particularly in consumer interactions with goods, services, and staff (Santhosh & Baral, 2018). The customer experiences shared are thus also critical to determining what other stakeholders will think regarding the reputation of the company. Both image and identity belong to reputation, and culture and company context produce identity (Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011). It is stakeholders' perceptions, feelings, and knowledge that have been gained through direct or indirect contact with the company. The overall perception among internal and external stakeholders towards an organization's past, present, and future is its corporate reputation (Mahon & Mitnik, 2010; Kumari et al., 2021).

2.3 Organizational Trust

Organizational trust is the faith and belief an employee has in their employer and the actions of the employer (Koochang, Paliszkiewicz, & Goluchowski, 2017). It involves assurance by employees in the leadership, realization of goals, and perception that actions taken by the organization are for the benefit of employees. Trust is improved performance, profitability, and working conditions of the organization (Paliszkiewicz et al., 2015; Dalati et al., 2017). Organizational trust leads to cooperation, frank openness in communication, and respect for one another. It is an indispensable ingredient of employee confidence, engagement, and innovation. As Schulke, Reimann & Cook (2021) establish, trust enhances efficiency and strengthens leadership and organizational change efforts by reducing complexity and ambiguity in interactions. Leaders who build trust can more effectively overcome challenges and drive change through increased staff engagement and buy-in (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Establishing and maintaining trust requires an adherence to moral principles, transparency in communication, and predictability in behavior. For an organization to sustain trust as part of its culture and ensure stability and long-term performance, it needs to resolve breaches of trust quickly and make the building of trust part of everyday practice (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

2.4 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual research model, consisting of the independent variables, mediation mechanism, and dependent variable. In this case, effective leadership components are independent variables, which were measured using three pivotal parts, namely Leading the Organization (LO), Leading People (LP), and Leading Self (LS). Organizational trust was

considered the mediation variable in the present research, determined by using ten items or questions measuring several aspects, including effective communications, competence, benevolence, and congruency. In addition to stability, reliability, integrity, transparency, accountability, and trustworthiness. The dependent variable is organizational reputation, also measured with three major elements innovative capabilities, high quality of products and services, and corporate social responsibility. Accordingly, the model was a basis for the following hypotheses.

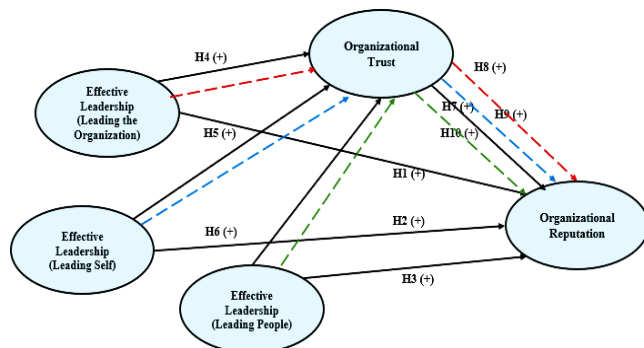


Fig. 1 Conceptual research model

2.4.1 Effective Leadership and Positive Organizational Reputation

Researchers who looked at how effective leadership correlated with reputation suggested that effective leadership practices remain instrumental to building and sustaining positive organizational reputation (Lange et al., 2011; Koohang et al., 2017; Kumari et al., 2021). Leading by example, building up a good culture, and prioritizing stakeholder relationships are some ways effective leaders drive considerable response in the way outside world perception views their company (Hoa, 2015). Positive organizational reputation and effective leadership go hand in hand. Great leaders ensure a clear vision and strategy, which subsequently develops confidence and builds trust with stakeholders. It's only when the direction is clear and goals seem achievable that an organization can improve its reputation (Koohang et al., 2017). Blass, & Ferris, (2007) in their study on leader reputation, noted that respect for stakeholders, coworkers, and employees builds trust. A leader's status is elevated when that particular leader shows empathy, listens actively, and is thankful for the efforts of other people. As indicated by Ensari et al. (2011), a positive organizational reputation for fairness and dependability is enhanced by effective leaders who uphold these values as standards for the whole organization. This reputation appeals to investors, staff, and consumers alike. Delighted employees are more productive and frequently become brand ambassadors for the company, improving its reputation. Effective leaders empower and assist their staff to create a great work environment. Based on the

above theory and empirical findings these hypotheses are proposed.

H1: LO is positively and significantly related to building a positive organizational reputation.

H2: LS is positively and significantly related to building a positive organizational reputation.

H3: LP is positively and significantly related to building a positive organizational reputation.

2.4.2 Effective Leadership and Organizational Trust

Some scholars have taken into consideration the linear correlation between leadership and trust. In their study, Mastrangelo et al. (2014) depicted the impact of effective leadership on trust, good environment, job satisfaction, and adequate knowledge management. Pourakbar (2018) depicted that work motivation has a positive impact directly on organizational commitment and that effective leadership has a positive impact directly on organizational trust. Effective leadership's effect on trust was also researched by Koohang, Paliszkievicz, & Goluchowski (2017). Researchers employed a questionnaire comprising factors such as trust, organizational performance, leadership, and knowledge management, which was developed and dispensed to participants at every managerial level working in nine different US locations. Partial least squares path modeling was exercised to evaluate the gathered data. The results reported a positive and significant linear relationship between effective leadership and organizational trust. Paliszkievicz et al. (2015), examined trust and effective leadership, and the results demonstrated a positive connection between both variables. They explained that for organizational trust to be built in firms, effective leadership is required. Based on that, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: LO is positively and significantly related to organizational trust.

H5: LS is positively and significantly related to organizational trust.

H6: LP is positively and significantly related to organizational trust.

2.4.3 Organizational Trust and Organizational Positive Reputation

Relationships are the core of business including telecom companies, and organizational trust is the cornerstone of a productive working relationship. Positive attitudes are developed when the workforce develops some sense of trust in their management levels. Managers, therefore, can play a vast role in fostering employee's trust in the workplace to build a positive reputation (Abbas et al., 2021). In this regard, the central element that can allow individuals to work with others in a way that depending on others will not only be

acceptable but also it will be natural, is the trust that leads to an organizational positive reputation, according to Rahayuningsih (2019). To illustrate, completing tasks requires the ability to trust others in doing their job with care. This ability to rely, however, is based on the simple, yet essential belief that one can trust peers (Koochang et al., 2017). Organizational trust leads to a team that is more comfortable and stable, as there is a free flow of ideas and resources. Because of this security, there is more participation and cooperation among the team members. Apart from facilitating workflow, it creates excitement that spreads across the whole workforce, and good energy at every level of the company enhances the organizational positive reputation (Yan et al., 2022). As a result, individuals start working out and are motivated to put in their best effort, thereby enhancing performance and team success. Hence, organizational trust acts like the invisible glue that holds a team together, creating a robust and harmonious work environment when people remember to establish shared goals and build positive reputations (Reina & Reina, 2005). Thus, the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Organizational trust is positively contributing to enhancing organizational positive reputation.

2.4.4 The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust

Effective leadership contributes to the development of the organization's reputation and improves organizational trust in both the public and private sectors (Koochang et al., 2017). As indicated by Viktoria, (2023) according to several studies effective leadership also raises employee engagement and fosters organizational trust in the organization, which encourages improved performance, so together, these elements strengthen the organization's positive reputation (Blass & Ferris, 2007; Reina, & Reina, 2005). Organizational trust acts as a mediator for organizational reputation and effective leadership: It is the real linking pin in reinforcing the positive impacts of leadership on reputation. In turn, employee trust increases due to effective leaders characterized by openness, honesty, and coherence in their way of communicating. They gain the trust of colleagues through their expressed empathy and fairness (Rahayuningsih, 2019).

When employees have trust in their leaders, then the commitment will be higher and much more aligned with the beliefs and objectives of the organization. No doubt, such a notion will ensure an overwhelmingly favorable work atmosphere that, as a result, enhances morale and productivity (Yan et al., 2022). From the outside, an organization with a culture of organizational trust is perceived as reliable and steady. These organizations have a higher reputation because stakeholders, clients, and partners appreciate them more favorably. Because

organizational trust acts as a moderating factor, competent leadership can have an even greater potential impact (Koochang et al., 2017). Organizational trust ensures that any effort in maximizing the reputation will always be worthwhile and increases the chances of plans and intentions of leadership being supported and effectively implemented. Organizational trust, according to Horwitz (2023), indeed makes leadership successful as it ensures good deeds are felt within the corporation and, in general, improves the organization's reputation (Ensari et al., 2011). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H8: Organizational trust is mediating the impact of LO on organizational positive reputation.

H9: Organizational trust mediates the impact of LS on organizational positive reputation.

H10: Organizational trust is mediating the impact of LP on organizational positive reputation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The survey instrument was conducted online through a professional Google Form to about 1,200 participants who held managerial, technical, IT, and telecommunication positions in various telecom companies in Sulemani City of the Kurdistan Region. Additionally, the sample size was determined through a simple random sampling technique. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2016), for any research to be effective, the sample size is typically in the range of 30 and 500 respondents, or ten times the number of variables being researched: independent, dependent, mediating, and control variables that will help analyze good and credible data. 56 subjects took part in a pilot test to determine the quality and clarity of the questionnaire before conducting a full-scale survey. From the results of the pilot test, there were no problems concerning face validity, and the appropriateness of the questionnaire for this research was verified. In fact, for data collection, 350 questionnaires were given to participants from the various telecom companies in Sulemani City. The first responses to these questionnaires totaled 196 and were returned within about two weeks. As a follow-up to the phone calls made, 100 more questionnaires were distributed to obtain a total of 296 complete responses, an excellent response rate of 84.5%. After collecting the data, it first entered SPSS software. Advanced testing was done using SmartPLS 3 software to verify the hypotheses and evaluate the main relationships within the model.

3.2. Measures

A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely

disagree) to 7 (completely agree), was used to measure all research variables to enable respondents' perceptions to be measured in a nuanced manner. Measurement items were carefully selected from validated research instruments to ensure reliability and relevance. In particular, leadership effectiveness was measured through three prevalent sub-dimensions: leading the organization (LO), leading people (LP), and leading oneself (LS). These indicators collectively represent the multidimensional nature of effective leadership, providing an integrated perspective. The measurement employed 15 items adapted from Koohang et al. (2017) that have been empirically tested and validated in previous studies to ensure maximum robustness in measuring leadership effectiveness. Similarly, organizational trust was measured using 10 items, similarly adapted from Koohang et al. (2017), to reflect how many employees have faith in the integrity, dependability, and ethical standing of their company. These items help measure the level at which trust between employees and their company is present, which is a highly critical factor that influences organizational performance and employee involvement. Finally, organizational reputation was operationalized based on three essential dimensions: innovation (INNO), service quality (SQ), and social responsibility (SR). To effectively depict this construct, 16 items were adopted from Jalal (2024) and Balan & Burlea-Achiopoiu (2017). A multi-dimensional scale gives a strong and well-balanced measure of organizational reputation and reflects how external and internal stakeholders perceive an organization as possessing the capacity to be innovative, possess service excellence, and be socially responsible. By employing validated scales of measurement and the measurement of multiple dimensions on key constructs, this study offers a robust and comprehensive evaluation of leadership effectiveness, organizational trust, and organizational reputation, which increases the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

3.3. Participants Features

The demographic features of the respondents who willingly filled out the questionnaires and participated in the survey are shown below. According to the breakdown shown in Table 1, out of all the participants from the Sulaimani City telecommunications companies, 72.6% (n=215) were male and 27.4% (n=81) were female. The distribution indicates that there is a big difference in the number of genders among respondents. Results showed that the highest age group among the respondents was between 30 and 40 years, which accounted for 53.4%, (n=158), of the entire sample. Further, 26%, (n=77), were between 41 and 50 years. Those below 30 years accounted for 16.2%, (n=48), while 4.4%, (n=13), were between 51 and 60 years.

Table 1
Profile of the Survey Participants.

Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Gender	Male	215	72.6	296
	Female	81	27.4	
Age Groups	Less Than 30 Years	48	16.2	296
	30-40 Years	158	53.4	
	41-50 Years	77	26.0	
	51- 60 Years	13	4.4	
Education Level	High School	8	2.7	296
	Bachelor Degree	223	75.3	
	Master Degree	62	20.9	
	PhD	3	1.0	
Overall Experience	Less than 5 Years	69	23.3	296
	5-10 Years	146	49.3	
	11-15 Years	63	21.3	
	16-20 Years	15	5.1	
	21 Years and above	3	1.0	
Job Position	Managers	19	6.4	296
	Technicians	108	36.5	
	IT Experts	53	17.9	
	Telecom	91	30.7	
	Specialists			
	Other	25	8.4	

From the results on participants' educational backgrounds, the most dominant qualification among the survey sample was a bachelor's degree held by 75.3%, (n=223) of respondents. In addition, 2.7% (n=8) of the participants had a high school diploma, while 20.9% (n=62) had a master's degree. Only 1% (n=3) of the total were holders of a Ph.D., the greatest degree of academic performance. These results indicate a very educated working force as most of the respondents seem to have acquired higher education. The results on the participants' general work experience, as illustrated in Table 1, reveal that the largest group of the respondents, 49.3% (n=146), had between five to ten years of working experience in the telecom company. Furthermore, 21.3% of respondents (n=63) had 11 to 15 years of experience, and 23.3% (n=69) reported having fewer than five years. Additionally, of the participants, 5.1% (n=15) had 16–20 years of experience, while just 1% (n=3) had 21 years or more. These results show that the majority of respondents from Sulaimani City's telecom companies are comparatively young professionals, mostly in their early to mid-career phases. The results also indicated that technicians in telecom companies who were willing to participate in the survey represented 36.5% (n=108) of the sample and were thus the largest group of respondents, as illustrated in Table 1. The next group was telecom experts, who comprised 30.7% (n=91) of the respondents. Furthermore, of those who participated, 8.4% (n=25) reported holding other jobs, while 17.9% (n=53) were IT experts. Sixty-four percent of the respondents identified themselves as managers (n=19). These findings demonstrate the range of positions the telecom workers

under study hold.

3.4. Data Analysis

This research employed PLS path modeling, which is one of the variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) methods, primarily to analyze the data and test the study hypotheses. Ringle et al. (2005) hypothesize that before the hypotheses are tested, PLS path modeling performs three key checks: convergent validity check, discriminant validity check, and structural model check to make the results reliable and consistent. In this respect, convergent validity requires that three basic requirements are satisfied: first that each construct's indicator loadings are large and greater than (0.70), which indicates high individual item reliability; second that each construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than (0.50), which indicates that the construct captures more than half of the variance in its indicators; and finally that the composite reliability (CR) is greater than (0.80), which indicates internal consistency. Further, all root AVEs of each latent variable have to be greater than all correlations with other variables to demonstrate discriminant validity and show that all of them are distinct and measure a distinct construct (Hair et al., 2014). The structural model is tested for R² statistics of the outcome variables after obtaining convergent and discriminant validities. The explanatory power of the research model is captured by the R² values, which also capture the percentage of variance explained by the independent variables in the dependent variables. Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, (2009) state that R² values of 10% and above are needed for the model to be valid and to be interpreted meaningfully. These capture whether or not the hypotheses are accepted. As described by Chin (2003) the standardized path coefficients indicate the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The t-values and p-values are also used to check for the significance of the different relationships, verifying the acceptance or rejection of each hypothesis.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Establishing Reliability and Validity

Table 2 reports Cronbach's α , composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) test statistics that all establish the convergent validity of the model constructs. Convergent validity was established to be satisfactory since each of the latent variables had an AVE measure higher than the (0.50) criterion. Specifically, the AVE values of organizational trust (OT) were significantly higher at (0.686), but the AVE values of the dimensions of effective leadership, i.e., leading the

organization (LO), leading people (LP), and leading self (LS), ranged from (0.532 to 0.628).

Table 2

Reliability and Validity.

Constructs	Items Code	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
Leading the Organization	LO	0.614	0.824	0.793
Leading People	LP	0.532	0.819	0.747
Leading Oneself	LS	0.628	0.867	0.822
Organizational Trust	OT	0.686	0.934	0.899
Organizational Reputation	INNO	0.678	0.921	0.871
	SQ	0.698	0.846	0.804
	SR	0.537	0.811	0.749

For the organizational reputation constructs, including innovation (INNO), service quality (SQ), and social responsibility (SR), the AVE values were (0.537 to 0.698), further establishing the validity and reliability of the constructs. In this respect, the CR values for all the constructs in the model reflected values ranging above 0.80; for effective leadership, the values ranged from (0.819 to 0.867). For organizational trust, the values rose to 0.934, and for organizational reputation, the values ranged from (0.811 to 0.921). These all signify good internal consistency. These results ensure the robustness of the model as a value of (0.80) and higher is acceptable. In the estimation of the internal reliability of the model constructs, Cronbach's α was used. Organizational trust has a Cronbach's α of (0.899), reflecting high reliability, because, in Table 2, Cronbach's α values for organizational reputation construct varied from (0.749 to 0.899), whereas α values for effective leadership varied from (0.747 to 0.793). These scores reflect adequate reliability because they exceed the usually accepted cut-off of (0.70). These findings indicate that there is significant intercorrelation and high internal consistency between the indicators of the model components.

4.2 Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker criterion is among the most widely used methods to check discriminant validity to ensure that every study construct is empirically distinct from others. The method relies on comparing the square root of the AVE of each construct with its correlations with other latent variables by analyzing correlations between study variables. To demonstrate discriminant validity, the square root of AVE for a construct must be greater than its highest correlation with another construct (Chin et al., 2003). By doing this, it is guaranteed that the construct is explaining more variance with its indicators than with other constructs in the model, thereby supporting evidence of its uniqueness. Hair et al. (2014) also note that a well-structured correlation matrix must reveal the square roots of AVE to be greater than the

corresponding inter-construct correlations. As evident in Table 3, the results of the discriminant validity analysis indicate that the square root of the AVE of every construct is larger than its correlation with any other latent variable in the model. This confirms that not only are the constructs conceptually distinct but also that they meet the statistical criteria for discriminant validity, confirming the adequacy of the measurement model.

Table 3
Results of Discriminant Validity Test.

Fornell-Larcker Criterion							
	LO	LP	LS	OT	INNO	SQ	SR
LO	0.871						
LP	0.820	0.829					
LS	0.793	0.766	0.817				
OT	0.709	0.712	0.791	0.795			
INNO	0.764	0.779	0.772	0.766	0.786		
SQ	0.698	0.705	0.805	0.731	0.645	0.813	
SR	0.675	0.687	0.707	0.771	0.697	0.707	0.904

Note: LO= Leading the organization, LP= Leading people, LS= Leading self, OT= Organizational trust, INNO = Innovation, SQ =Services quality, and SR = Social Responsibilities.

4.3 Establishing the Model Fit

The researchers must check the model fit to examine how the proposed model and sample data correspond to each other, and as such, it needs to reflect the underlying theoretical framework adequately. Therefore, another critical step, preceding hypothesis testing, necessarily involves proving the suitability of the model (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013). Several indices are used to examine the fitness of the research model, i.e.: Standardized Root-Mean-Square Residual and Chi-square Index that quantify covariance fit; variance inflation factor; and Normed Fit Index. As seen in Table 4, the Chi-square was 2.051, which was less than 3, and this is an acceptable fitness. Moreover, the SRMR index value of 0.077 was lower than the cut-off points of less than 0.08. Additionally, the normed fit index value was 1.000, which, as before, was also higher than the requirement of 0.90 or more, again in support of the model's fitness. Additionally, VIF ranges from a minimum of 1.000 to a maximum of 3.651, all well below the threshold value of 5, which confirms no multicollinearity effects. In conclusion, these findings establish that the study model fits the data well.

Table 4

Results of Model Fit Tests.

Fitness Test Method	Estimated Model	Decision Criteria	Overall Decision
X2	2.051	≤ 3.0	Fit
SRMR	0.077	< 0.08	Fit
NFI	1.000	≥ 0.90	Fit
VIF	Ranged from 1.000 to 3.651	<5	Fit

Note: χ^2 = chi-square, SRMR = Standardized Root-Mean-Square Residual, NFI = Normed Fit Index, and VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

This section applies statistical tests to the research hypotheses, which were developed in light of relevant theories and empirical findings from previous research. The R^2 value was checked before the interpretation of the results of the path analysis using PLS-SEM. This critical step determines the accuracy of the prediction of the research model and tests the various hypotheses that have been advanced by analyzing the variation explained in the dependent variables (Henseler, Hubona & Ray, 2016).

Table 5
Path Analysis Coefficient, T-Value, and P-Value for the SEM.

Hypotheses	Interaction	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	LO-->OR	$\beta = 0.749$	19.406	0.000	Supported
H2	LP-->OR	$\beta = 0.818$	24.394	0.000	Supported
H3	LS-->OR	$\beta = 0.633$	14.017	0.000	Supported
H4	LO-->OT	$\beta = 0.684$	16.078	0.000	Supported
H5	LP -->OT	$\beta = 0.685$	16.119	0.000	Supported
H6	LS -->OT	$\beta = 0.452$	10.138	0.000	Supported
H7	OT-->OR	$\beta = 0.947$	50.587	0.000	Supported

Dependent variables: Organizational Reputation, and Organizational Trust
R: 0.884 and 0.816 R2 Values OR= 0.779, OT= 0.663 df (3, 292), F: 347.279, and 194.229
Note: LO= Leading the organization, LP= Leading people, LS= Leading oneself, OT= Organizational trust, and OT = Organizational Reputation.

Although considered a low level of predictive power, many researchers consider that R^2 should at least be 0.10 to be acceptable. Generally speaking, the higher the R^2 , the better the predictive accuracy, hence the reliability of the model. More specifically, an R^2 value of 0.60 is considered significant, 0.33 is a medium level of predictive power, and 0.19, even though low, is acceptable. Figure 3 and Table 5 depict the results, from which it can be seen that the R^2 of organizational reputation and organizational trust is 0.779 and 0.663, respectively. It can thus be found that the model has considerable predictive power in explaining most of the variance in empirical research data.

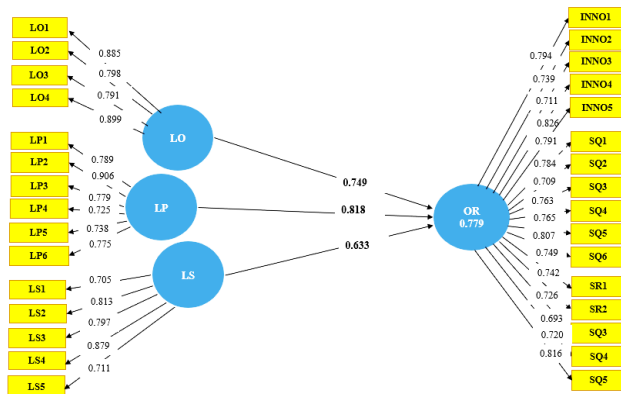


Fig.1: Path analysis result of the structural model.

Direct Impacts

Results in Table 5 showed that effectively leading the organization significantly influences the organizational reputation with a large effect size, ($\beta = 0.749$) and p-value of (0.000). Therefore, hypothesis **H1**, which states leading the organization is positively and significantly related to building a positive organizational reputation, is supported. One percent improvement in leading the organization results in an increase of up to (0.749) in organizational reputation. The results depicted that effective leaders also have a direct influence on organizational reputation with an effect size ($\beta = 0.818$) and p-value (0.000) and thus **H2** is accepted. Additionally, effective self-leading also has a direct significant influence on organizational reputation with an effect size ($\beta = 0.633$) and a p-value of (0.000). In conclusion, therefore, the third hypothesis, **H3**, is accepted. The result of Table 5 was that structuring organization and trust in the organization is significantly and positively related, according to effect coefficient ($\beta = 0.684$) and p-value (0.000), less than (0.05), thus accepting **H4**, the result also shows that managing people is also significantly and positively related to trust in the organization according to the effect coefficient ($\beta = 0.685$) and p-value (0.000), which leads to the acceptance of **H5**. The results pointed out that organizational trust is influenced by self-leadership, with an effect size of ($\beta = 0.452$) and a p-value of 0.000, so **H6** is supported. Direct influence is exerted by the organizational trust on organizational reputation, whose effect coefficient reaches ($\beta = 0.947$), and a p-value of (0.000); the seventh hypothesis **H7** is therefore supported.

Mediation Analysis

The predictor variables for the present study model are Leading the Organization (LO), Leading People (LP), and Leading Oneself (LS as indicated in Table 6 and Fig. 2). Organizational Trust (OT) serves as the mediator variable, and Organizational Reputation (OR) is the dependent variable. Results in Table 5 confirmed direct relations between effective leadership factors (LO, LP, L) and organizational trust. In addition, organizational trust

was strongly correlated with organizational reputation as well. Results in Table 6 further indicate the indirect effects of good leadership (LO, LP, and LS) on organizational reputation with coefficients of (0.647, 0.649, and 0.428), respectively, and significance levels of ($p = 0.000$) for all. These results suggest that organizational trust partially mediates the influence of effective leadership on organizational reputation. Thus, all hypotheses, **H8**, **H9**, and **H10**, are hereby accepted.

Table 6

Inferences for Mediation.

Hypothesis	Interaction	Direct Beta w/o Med	Indirect Beta	Mediation Type Observed
H8	LO --> OT- ->OR	$\beta = 0.749$, $P = 0.00$	$\beta = 0.647$, $P = 0.000$	Partial mediation
H9	LP --> OT- ->OR	$\beta = 0.818$, $P = 0.00$	$\beta = 0.649$, $P = 0.000$	Partial mediation
H10	LS --> OT- ->OR	$\beta = 0.633$, $P = 0.00$	$\beta = 0.428$, $P = 0.000$	Partial mediation

Dependent Variable: Organizational Reputation

Mediator Variable: Organizational Trust

Note: LO= Leading the organization, LP= Leading people, LS= Leading oneself, OT= Organizational trust, and OR = Organizational Reputation.

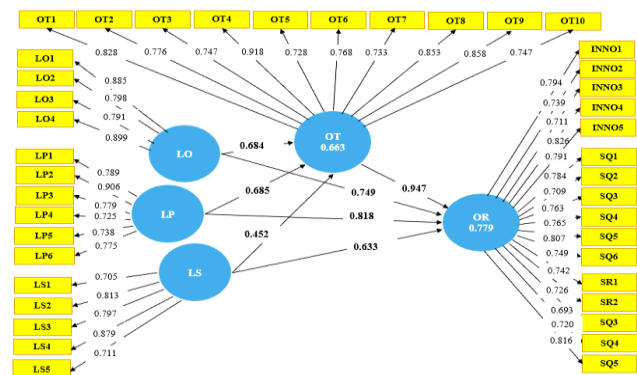


Figure 2: Path diagram for structural equation modeling results

5. CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussions of the Findings

The primary aim of the present research was to test the mediating function of organizational trust between effective leadership and organizational reputation. In this study, the proposed model is empirically confirmed based on data received from the respondents of telecom companies working in Sulaimani City, Iraq. The conclusion of the study shows strong evidence that organizational trust bridges effective leadership and organizational reputation interface. According to research evidence, organizational trust is greatly supported by effective leadership, the finding here

corroborates Hoa (2015) and Kumari et al. (2021). Trust becomes established in the business setting since the leaders are transparent, honest, and practice inclusive (Pourakbar, 2018). This relation makes it imperative that appropriate leadership behaviors be demonstrated in the context of addressing problems specific to the local business, such as resource limitations and customer satisfaction demands when considering telecom companies in Sulaimani City. Reputation is positively related to organizational trust. Trust leads to stakeholder confidence, consumer delight, and employee loyalty critical building blocks in the creation of reputation (Paliszkievicz et al., 2015). In the telecom industry, which faces customer perception often hinged on the quality and responsiveness of service, trust gives a platform for building a high brand image and public trust. These findings put organizational trust in the role of being an intervening variable between reputation and leadership. Good leadership builds trust and only then does a good reputation ensue. This mediating role means that whatever it is that leaders do by themselves cannot lead to an improved reputation for the company before establishing trust in their midst. Telecom operators must therefore give special focus to the trust element in their leadership programs.

5.2 Conclusions

The research findings indicate that the components of effective leadership, i.e., leading the organization (LO), leading people (LP), and leading oneself (LS), have positive and significant influences on organizational reputation. This points to the critical role of leadership effectiveness in deciding how an organization is perceived from the outside. Besides, the study reveals a strong and positive relationship between organizational trust and the factors of effective leadership. This shows that management practices that encourage transparency, integrity, and employee confidence have a major contribution towards building trust in the organization.

Also, the analysis confirms a positive and significant relationship between organizational reputation and organizational trust that substantiates that trust is a key driver of an organization's reputation. Organizations that instill trust within employees and stakeholders are likely to be viewed favorably in terms of credibility, ethical reputation, and general reputation. The study also establishes the partial mediating role of organizational trust between effective leadership (LO, LP, LS) and organizational reputation. This implies that while leadership has a positive contribution to the reputation of an organization directly, part of this effect arises indirectly through trust. Moreover, the findings show that organizational trust is a positive mediator that strengthens the influence of effective leadership on organizational reputation. These results highlight the

significance of trust in bridging the gap between a leader's behavior and an organization's reputation, reflecting on the significance of leaders actively contributing to a trustful culture to build their organization's reputation.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the results obtained in this research, managers within telecom companies should ensure that communications with employees and stakeholders are open and effective; they should share information on decisions, changes, and challenges that arise, using accountability and integrity. Managers should empower teams by delegating responsibilities and providing support, so leaders who show trust in their teams obtain the due amount of trust in return. On the other hand, it increases trust internally but also with customers, suppliers, and the greater community through reliable and ethical dealing. The managers should make available an environment where the employees can share ideas, air their views, and take calculated risks without any threat of retribution. To this end, opportunities should be provided for employees to give feedback regarding leadership and organizational practices. Similarly, words have to be translated into action for any credibility to be instituted. Workers are bound to have confidence in those leaders who regularly act on organizational values and promises.

The research thus recommends that the training programs need to focus on ethical decision-making, emotional intelligence, and communication skills to enhance the ability of the leader to build trust. Leaders can also act as role models to garner trust from the workforce by demonstrating moral conduct, showing empathy, and being committed to company goals. The researchers' findings indicate that telecom companies in Sulaimani City should adopt structured programs, such as seminars, team-building activities, and recognition systems, to enhance the processes of establishing trust. Managers and staff who uphold the culture of trust consistently and morally should be recognized and rewarded.

5.4 Practical and Theoretical Contributions

The findings demonstrate that leaders of telecom companies need to strategize in building trust. Rising levels of organizational trust and organizational reputation may involve open communication, ethical behavior, and fair decision-making. Telecom companies can use the information to promote their image by creating a trust culture, which is important in a competitive market like Sulaimani City. The findings could also be useful to the organizations by designing and implementing trust-enhancing initiatives that improve the stakeholder and employee perceptions of the telecom

companies. The result may provide insight into integrating leadership development and trust-building initiatives into organizational plans by policymaking in telecom companies. The research offers practical solutions for resolving trust and reputation concerns that are particular to the region, considering the particular difficulties experienced by telecom companies in Iraq.

The current research also has a significant contribution to the body of knowledge since it enriches the theories on leadership, also underlining the role of organizational trust as the mediation mechanism. It also emphasizes how trust increases the strength of the link between the practices of effective leadership and perceived organizational reputation. Focusing on the context of telecom companies in Sulaimani City, this research develops an understanding of how organizational trust works in specific cultural contexts. It provides evidence that organizational trust plays an important role in fostering positive organizational outcomes. In addition, current research integrates effective leadership and organizational trust with organizational reputation by explaining the dynamic interactions between them. This further develops a conceptual understanding of how the elements interact with each other to influence organizational success. The research gives a local perspective to the organizational studies and provides worthwhile insights into the under-researched context of telecom companies in developing nations like Iraq.

5.5 Limitations, and Recommendations for Further Studies

To address common method bias (CMB) and endogeneity problems as much as possible and for accurate statistical inferences, the authors applied the latest methodologies to the best of their capabilities because CMB is a difficult problem for survey-based research. However, the longitudinal dataset can test the hypothesis and utilize empirical evidence drawn from various manufacturing and service firms in future studies to establish improved ways of handling the problem of CMB to enhance the credibility of their results. Increasing sample sizes and enhancing the representativeness of samples enable the findings to be transferred to a wider context. Moreover, since leadership theories are the foundations of leadership research, the researchers based their theoretical approach on them. In addition, they used organizational theory to supplement and enhance their research. Such a combination of theoretical approaches strengthens the framework of this study and furthers our understanding of the topics it discusses. Further studies may seek to investigate whether these relations hold in other parts of the country or sectors within Iraq and hence provide wider ramifications on leadership and organizational studies. It is also possible to research how

some external factors, such as changes in technology and regulations, impact these variables. In an environment of changing conditions, this may also spur interest in the specific effects that different leadership philosophies have on the reputation and trust of the organization.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors hereby declare that the research, authorship, and publishing of this work are free from conflicts of interest. Furthermore, the research findings and conclusions have been kept impartial and honest.

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