

The Mediating Roles of Leadership Styles Between Artificial Intelligence Capability and Organizational Performance in the UAE

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Abstract

The increasing adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed organizational operations, positioning AI capability as a strategic resource for enhancing organizational performance. However, evidence from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Education suggests that investments in AI have not consistently translated into improved organizational outcomes, highlighting the importance of complementary organizational capabilities. This study examines the effect of AI capability on organizational performance and investigates the mediating roles of transformational and transactional leadership. A quantitative research design was employed using survey data collected from 281 managers, heads of departments, and supervisors within the UAE Ministry of Education. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results

indicate that AI capability has a significant negative direct effect on organizational performance. However, both transformational and transactional leadership significantly mediate this relationship, with transformational leadership exhibiting the stronger mediating effect. These findings suggest that the organizational value of AI capability is realized through effective leadership rather than technological capability alone. The study extends Resource-Based Theory by demonstrating that complementary leadership capabilities are essential for translating AI resources into organizational value. Furthermore, it contributes empirical evidence from the UAE public education sector, where research on AI capability and leadership remains limited. The findings provide practical insights for policymakers and educational leaders by emphasizing the importance of integrating AI investments with leadership development, employee digital readiness, and changing management to achieve sustainable organizational performance.

Keywords: artificial intelligence capability, organizational performance, leadership styles

1. Introduction

Organizational performance remains a central concern for both public and private institutions, as it reflects their ability to achieve strategic objectives, deliver quality services, and sustain competitiveness in a rapidly evolving environment (Shweta & Panicker, 2025). In the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), improving organizational performance has become increasingly vital, particularly within the public sector, where efficiency, innovation, and service excellence are national priorities. Recent advances in digital transformation have highlighted Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a powerful enabler of enhanced organizational performance. AI offers capabilities that strengthen decision-making, optimize operations, and improve employee productivity (Hermans, 2022). However, the successful adoption and effective utilization of AI extend beyond technological implementation; they are profoundly shaped by leadership styles that determine how such capabilities are embraced and applied within organizations (Rorink et al., 2024).

Public sector organizations are tasked with providing goods and services that are essential for individuals and institutions to achieve their goals and objectives at both domestic and international levels (Nyamka, 2022). In the education sector, public institutions play a particularly dynamic role by developing strategies that promote sustainable growth, innovation, and a competitive culture that enhances institutional capacity, academic quality, and resource utilization (Sajid, 2017; Azeem et al., 2021). The success of educational organizations depends largely on the effectiveness of their governance structures, management practices, and ability to align institutional operations with broader national development goals (Kashan et al., 2017). Therefore, organizational performance in the education sector is a critical factor in achieving institutional missions and visions, ensuring accountability, and delivering quality education that meets societal and economic demands (Amha & Brhane, 2020). Organizational performance is typically assessed by the degree to which educational institutions achieve their objectives in terms of academic excellence, efficiency, innovation, and sustainability (Haron & Khadijah, 2023).

Sustained organizational performance in the education sector refers to an institution's ability to maintain high levels of effectiveness and quality over time (AlShehhi et al., 2021). This involves consistently meeting educational goals, achieving academic excellence, responding to stakeholder expectations, and remaining competitive in an evolving global environment (Mesiya, 2019). Sustaining performance is crucial for educational institutions to deliver quality outcomes, support societal development, and contribute to economic growth (Mahade et al., 2025). Several factors influence sustained performance in education (Aisyah et al., 2023). Leadership decision-making is one critical factor, as effective leaders set clear institutional goals, communicate strategic visions, and motivate staff toward continuous improvement (Ali, 2025). Another important factor is technological innovation, particularly the adoption of AI and digital tools. These innovations enhance teaching and learning, improve administrative efficiency, and enable data-driven strategies that support long-term institutional success (Khadragy, 2024).

Leadership plays a crucial role in guiding organizations through technological change.

Transformational and transactional leadership styles, in particular, influence how AI-driven initiatives are implemented, how employees adapt, and ultimately, how organizational outcomes are enhanced (Neiroukh et al., 2024). Effective leaders foster innovation, adaptability, and collaboration conditions necessary for AI to deliver its full potential in driving organizational success (Birhan, 2024). Transformational leadership as a style of leadership that transforms associates to rise above their self-interest by altering their ideals, morale, values, and interests, motivating employees to perform better than initially expected (Al-Obthani & Ameen, 2019). Moreover, transformational leaders are proactive, they seek to optimize individual, group and organizational development and innovation, not just achieve performance (Agarwal, 2020). In contrast, transactional leadership defines expectations and promotes performance to achieve these levels (Hassan & Abdulla, 2021). Transactional leadership referring to a leader who display behaviors associated with constructive and corrective transactions (i.e., clarifying what the employee should do to be rewarded as well as monitoring performance and taking action when problems occur) contingent reward, management by exception (Guhr et al., 2018; Kanat-maymon et al., 2020). The third style is laissez-faire leadership, it tends to react only after problems have become a serious to take corrective action and may avoid making any decisions at all (Donkor et al., 2021).

Despite the substantial investments in AI and digital transformation across UAE public organizations, evidence suggests that improvements in organizational performance have not consistently matched strategic expectations, particularly within the education sector (Alblooshi et al., 2023; Alshehhi et al., 2024). Although AI has the potential to enhance decision-making, operational efficiency, and service delivery, its successful implementation depends not only on technological capability but also on leadership that can effectively guide organizational change (Aisyah et al., 2023; Mahade et al., 2025). Existing evidence indicates that many public educational institutions continue to face challenges related to leadership readiness, employee adaptation to AI-enabled work practices, and the strategic alignment of AI initiatives with organizational objectives, thereby limiting the realization of AI-driven performance gains (Dahabreh, 2023; Alaa et al., 2024). These challenges highlight the importance of understanding how leadership can facilitate the translation of AI capability into improved organizational performance.

Although previous studies have established a positive relationship between AI capability and organizational performance (Malik & Tripathi, 2021; Cramarenco & Dabija, 2023), the mechanisms underlying this relationship remain insufficiently understood. In particular, limited empirical attention has been given to the mediating roles of transformational and transactional leadership, especially in public-sector organizations and within the UAE context (Kindarto et al., 2020; Aisyah et al., 2023). Most UAE studies have examined leadership as an independent, mediating, or moderating construct in different organizational settings without explaining how leadership facilitates the conversion of AI capability into organizational performance (Almheiri et al., 2022; Abdullah, 2022). Given the strategic importance of AI in the UAE education sector and the scarcity of empirical evidence from the UAE Ministry of Education, this study aims to investigate the effect of AI capability on organizational performance and to examine the mediating roles of transformational leadership and

transactional leadership in this relationship.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence Capability and Organizational Performance

Artificial intelligence capability has emerged as a strategic organizational resource that enables organizations to improve decision-making, automate processes, optimize resource utilization, and enhance service quality, thereby contributing to superior organizational performance (Arslan et al., 2021). Empirical evidence consistently supports a positive relationship between AI capability and organizational performance. For example, Vidal et al. (2017) and Almarzooqi (2019) argued that leaders' understanding of AI technologies is essential for translating AI investments into organizational value, as effective leadership enables the successful implementation and strategic utilization of AI initiatives. Moreover, Wijayati and Rahman (2021) found that AI adoption significantly improves employee performance by enhancing work engagement and facilitating organizational adaptation to change. This results also supported by Mikalef et al. (2023) who investigated the relationship between AI capability and organizational performance in European public organizations and found that AI capability significantly enhances organizational performance through improved process automation and cognitive insight generation, although cognitive engagement was found to have a negative effect on organizational performance. Therefore, these studies suggest that organizations with stronger AI capability are more likely to achieve improved operational efficiency, innovation, and overall organizational performance. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that AI capability will positively influence organizational performance within the UAE Ministry of Education.

H1: AI capability has a significant positive effect on organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education.

2.2 The Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Performance

Transformational leadership is characterized by leaders' ability to inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate employees to achieve performance beyond expected levels while fostering innovation, commitment, and organizational change (Buil et al., 2019). Extensive empirical research has demonstrated that transformational leadership positively influences organizational performance by enhancing employee motivation, job performance, organizational commitment, innovation, and overall organizational effectiveness (Han et al., 2019; Patiar & Wang, 2020; Jiatong et al., 2022). In public-sector organizations, transformational leaders facilitate organizational adaptability, encourage knowledge sharing, and promote continuous improvement, all of which contribute to superior organizational performance (Pawirosumarto et al., 2017; Alsayyed et al., 2020). However, a few studies have reported insignificant relationships between transformational leadership and performance under specific organizational contexts (Novitasari et al., 2020; Pranowo et al., 2021; Setyawan et al., 2021), suggesting that contextual factors may influence the effectiveness of this leadership style. Therefore, the preponderance of empirical evidence supports a positive association between transformational leadership and organizational

performance. Therefore, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education.

2.3 The Relationship Between Transactional Leadership and Organizational Performance

Transactional leadership is based on a system of contingent rewards and corrective actions, whereby leaders motivate employees by clarifying performance expectations, monitoring task completion, and rewarding the achievement of established objectives (Northouse, 2016). This leadership style is particularly effective in organizations that emphasize operational efficiency, accountability, and goal attainment. Empirical studies generally indicate that transactional leadership positively influences organizational performance by improving employee productivity, task accomplishment, and organizational effectiveness (Khan et al., 2019; Ali & Fuad, 2020; Agarwal & Gupta, 2021; Breznik, 2023; Ashok Kumar, 2023). Similarly, previous research has shown that transactional leadership enhances follower performance, organizational efficiency, and work outcomes through structured supervision and performance-based incentives (Vithanage & Shyaman, 2020; Okhawere, 2025). Nevertheless, some studies have reported insignificant relationships between transactional leadership and employee performance, suggesting that the effectiveness of this leadership style may vary across organizational settings and depend on contextual factors such as organizational culture and employee characteristics (Nurlina, 2022b; Agarwal & Gupta, 2021; Breznik, 2023). Despite these mixed findings, the majority of empirical evidence supports a positive association between transactional leadership and organizational performance. Accordingly, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Transactional leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education.

2.4 Mediating Role of Transformational and Transactional Styles in the Relationship Between AI Capability and Organizational Performance

Although Artificial Intelligence capability has been widely recognized as a strategic resource for improving organizational performance, evidence suggests that its benefits are not realized automatically but depend on an organization's ability to effectively integrate AI into its strategic and operational activities (Mikalef et al., 2023; Cramarenco & Dabija, 2023). Rather, organizations require effective leadership to translate AI capabilities into improved organizational outcomes by facilitating technological change, aligning AI initiatives with organizational objectives, developing employees' digital competencies, and fostering innovation (Almarzooqi, 2019; Aisyah et al., 2023). In this regard, transformational leaders inspire employees to embrace AI-driven change and encourage innovation, whereas transactional leaders reinforce AI implementation through clear performance expectations, structured monitoring, and contingent rewards, thereby supporting the effective utilization of AI capabilities (Wijayati & Rahman, 2021). Therefore, both transformational and transactional leadership represent important mechanisms through which AI capability can enhance organizational performance (Mikalef et al., 2023; Mahade et al., 2025).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the mediating role of transformational and transactional leadership between various organizational antecedents and performance-related outcomes. For example, Zhang et al. (2018) found that transformational and active transactional leadership fully mediated the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and collaboration outcomes. Similarly, Belarmino (2019); Zahari et al. (2022) and Lotfi et al. (2023) reported that leadership styles significantly mediated the relationships between organizational resources, employee characteristics, and organizational performance. However, empirical evidence examining transformational and transactional leadership as mediators between AI capability and organizational performance remains scarce, particularly in public-sector organizations and within the UAE context. Given the UAE government's strategic emphasis on AI adoption in public education, understanding the leadership mechanisms through which AI capability enhances organizational performance represents an important theoretical and practical research gap. Therefore, this study proposes that transformational and transactional leadership mediate the relationship between AI capability and organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education.

H4: Transformational leadership significantly mediates the relationship between AI capability and organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education.

H5: Transactional leadership significantly mediates the relationship between AI capability and organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education.

2.5 Research Framework

The proposed research framework is grounded in the Resource-Based Theory (RBT), which posits that organizations achieve superior performance and sustained competitive advantage by effectively acquiring, developing, and utilizing valuable strategic resources and capabilities (Moses & Theresa, 2021; Joel, 2016). In this study, AI capability, comprising AI infrastructure and AI technical skills, is conceptualized as a strategic organizational resource, while transformational and transactional leadership represent complementary organizational capabilities that facilitate the effective utilization of AI. Based on the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence presented in the preceding sections, this study proposes that AI capability influences organizational performance both directly and indirectly through transformational and transactional leadership. The framework addresses the identified research gap by explaining the mechanism through which AI capability enhances organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education. The proposed conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

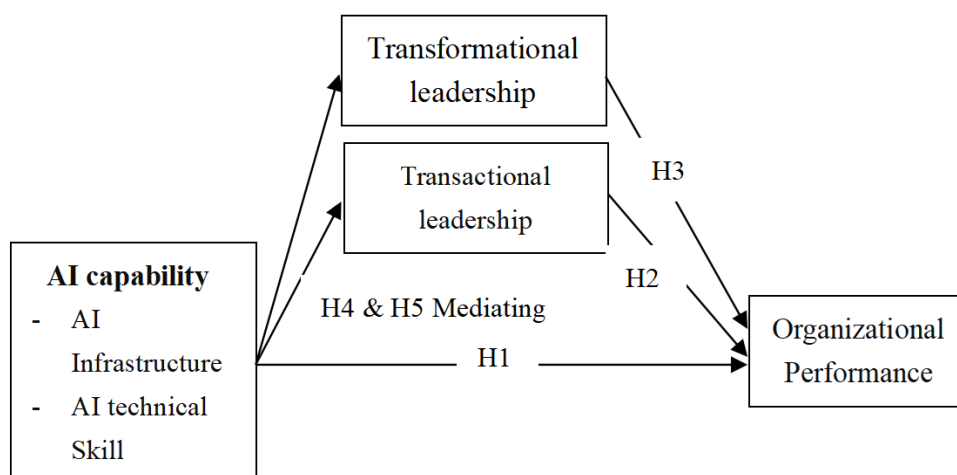


Figure 1. Research framework

This conceptualization aligns with the growing recognition that the successful implementation of AI depends not only on technological readiness but also on leadership capable of facilitating organizational change, fostering employee adaptation, and aligning AI initiatives with strategic objectives (Perez, 2017; Almarzooqi, 2019; Mikalef et al., 2023; Aisyah et al., 2023). Accordingly, the proposed framework integrates technological and behavioral perspectives to explain how AI capability influences organizational performance through the mediating roles of transformational and transactional leadership within the UAE public education sector.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey research design to examine the relationships among AI capability, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education. A survey approach is appropriate for collecting standardized data to examine relationships among variables and test research hypotheses (Creswell, 2014). The study population comprised 1,847 employees of the Ministry of Education. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, a minimum sample of 317 respondents was determined. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of employees from the Ministry's departments in Dubai and Sharjah (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019).

The measurement scales were adapted from established and validated instruments. AI capability was operationalized using two dimensions: AI infrastructure with 10 items adapted from Tong (2021); Mikalef and Gupta (2021) and Nam (2022); and AI technical skills with 10 items adapted from Tong (2021), Nam (2022). Transformational leadership was measured using 20 items representing four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration adapted from Wen et al. (2019) and Al Dhanhani and Abdullah (2021). Transactional leadership was measured using 12 items covering contingent reward, management-by-exception (active), and

management-by-exception (passive), adapted from Al-Araimi (2012) and Wen et al. (2019). Organizational performance was measured using 10 items adapted from Aisyah et al. (2023) and Alaa et al. (2024). All measurement items were modified where necessary to reflect the context of the UAE public education sector. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Following the recommended two-stage analytical procedure, the measurement model was first assessed to establish the reliability and validity of the constructs. Subsequently, the structural model was evaluated to test the proposed research hypotheses (Shmueli et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated by assessing internal consistency reliability and convergent validity using Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and indicator loadings (Hair et al., 2019). As shown in Table 1, all constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70.

Table 1. Constructs reliability and validity

Indicator	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Organizational Performance	0.909	0.930	0.543
AI capability	0.947	0.949	0.506
AI Infrastructure	0.931	0.932	0.621
AI technical Skill	0.896	0.903	0.519
Transformational leadership	0.919	0.936	0.537
Idealize Influence	0.944	0.988	0.815
Intellectual stimulation	0.738	0.743	0.562
Inspirational Motivation	0.861	0.864	0.642
Individualized Consideration	0.865	0.885	0.721
Transactional leadership	0.956	0.958	0.698
Contingent Reward	0.910	0.912	0.787
Management-By-Exception (Active)	0.909	0.910	0.786
Management-By-Exception (Passive)	0.849	0.864	0.768

Furthermore, all AVE values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). During the measurement model assessment, three indicators (MBP4, IC5, and IS3) were removed because their factor loadings were below the recommended threshold. The remaining indicators exhibited acceptable loadings, confirming the adequacy of the measurement model for subsequent structural model analysis (Purwanto & Sudargini, 2021; Hair et al., 2022). The final measurement model is presented in Figure 2.

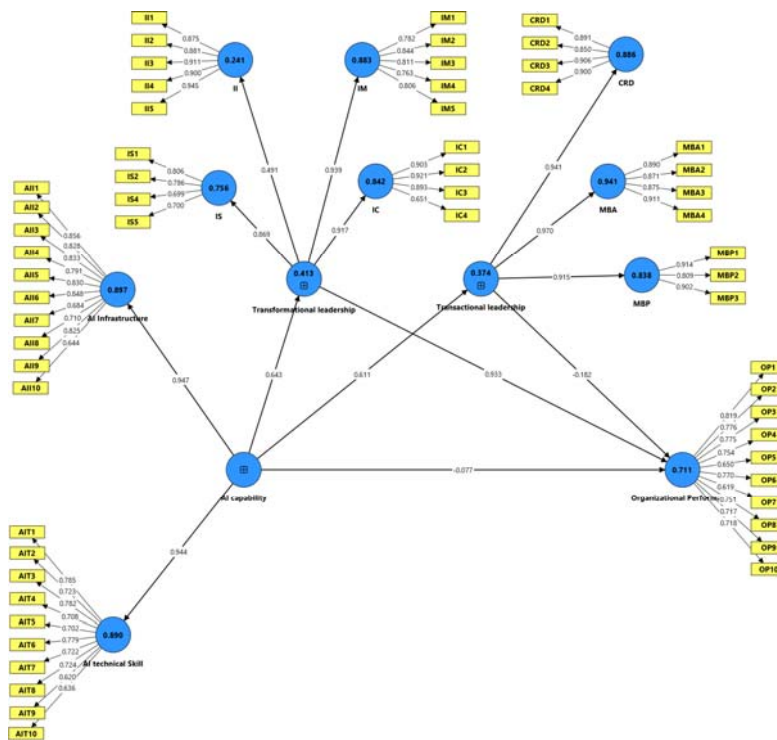


Figure 2. Measurement model

4.2 Structural Model Assessment

Following the establishment of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated by examining the path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and the significance of the hypothesized relationships using the bootstrapping procedure (Hair et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2024). The structural model results are presented in Table 2.

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

Direct Research Hypotheses		Std β	Std Error	t-statistic	P values	Results
AI capability -> Organizational Performance	H1	-0.104	0.042	2.509	0.012	Significant negative
Transformational leadership -> Organizational Performance	H2	0.930	0.029	31.655	0.000	Significant positive
Transactional leadership -> Organizational Performance	H3	-0.179	0.036	5.028	0.000	Significant negative

Table 2 presents the results of the structural model assessment. Contrary to the proposed hypothesis, AI capability exhibited a significant negative effect on organizational performance

($\beta = -0.104$, $p = 0.012$); therefore, H1 was not supported. This finding contrasts with previous studies reporting a positive relationship between AI capability and organizational performance (Tripathi, 2021; Cramarenco & Dabija, 2023; Mikalef et al., 2023). A possible explanation is that AI capability alone may not immediately translate into improved organizational performance unless it is effectively integrated into organizational processes and supported by appropriate leadership, employee readiness, and change management, particularly within public-sector organizations undergoing digital transformation.

Consistent with the proposed hypothesis, transformational leadership had a significant positive effect on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.930$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that transformational leadership enhances organizational performance by fostering innovation, employee commitment, and organizational effectiveness (Sheehan et al., 2020; Alrowwad et al., 2020; Jiatong et al., 2022). In contrast, transactional leadership exhibited a significant negative effect on organizational performance ($\beta = -0.179$, $p < 0.001$); therefore, H3 was not supported. This finding contradicts previous studies reporting a positive relationship between transactional leadership and organizational performance (Al Mansouri et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2019; Ali & Fuad, 2020; Salem et al., 2021), but is consistent with evidence suggesting that transactional leadership may be less effective in dynamic and innovation-oriented environments that require adaptability and creativity (Young et al., 2020; Nurlina, 2022).

4.3 Mediation Analysis

The mediating effects of transformational leadership and transactional leadership were examined using the bootstrapping procedure in PLS-SEM. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Mediating results of transformational leadership and transactional leadership

Mediating Research Hypotheses		Std β	Std Error	<i>t</i> -statistic	P values	Results
AI capability -> Transformational leadership -> Organizational Performance	H4	0.598	0.053	11.276	0.000	Mediated
AI capability -> Transactional leadership -> Organizational Performance	H5	0.109	0.025	4.399	0.000	Mediated

The findings indicate that transformational leadership significantly mediated the relationship between AI capability and organizational performance ($\beta = 0.598$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. This finding suggests that AI capability enhances organizational performance by strengthening transformational leadership, which is consistent with previous studies highlighting the mediating role of transformational leadership in improving organizational outcomes (Zhang et al., 2018; Raman et al., 2020; Zahari et al., 2022). Similarly,

transactional leadership significantly mediated the relationship between AI capability and organizational performance ($\beta = 0.109$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5. Although the indirect effect was weaker than that of transformational leadership, the finding confirms that transactional leadership also serves as a mechanism through which AI capability influences organizational performance. Thus, the stronger indirect effect of transformational leadership suggests that it is the more effective leadership style for translating AI capability into improved organizational performance within the UAE Ministry of Education.

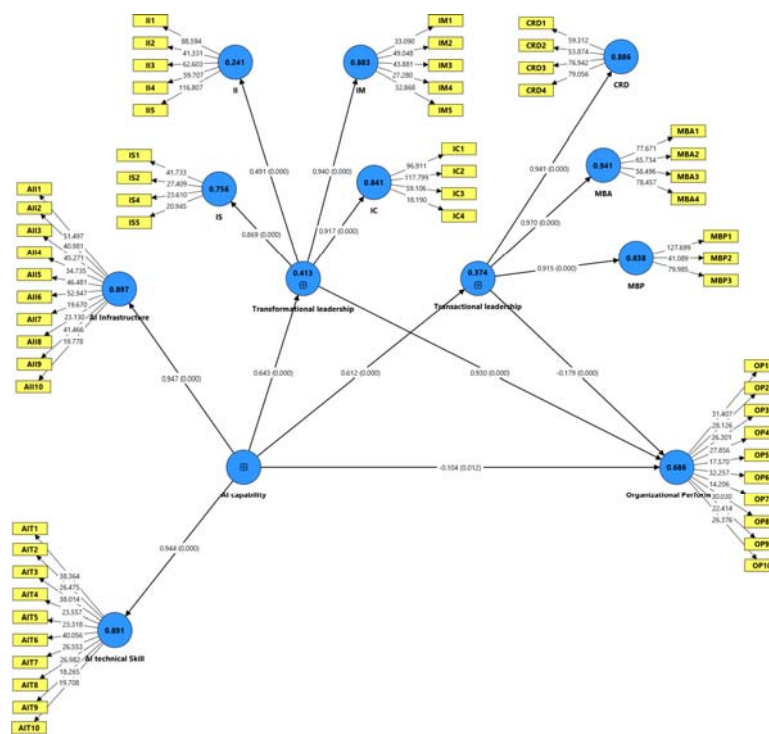


Figure 3. Structural model

Figure 3 illustrates the final PLS-SEM structural model, including the standardized path coefficients and bootstrapped t -statistics for the hypothesized relationships. As shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Coefficient of determination (R²)

	Indicator	R-square	R-square adjusted
Exogenous variable	Organizational Performance	0.711	0.709
Mediator	Transactional leadership	0.374	0.372
	Transformational leadership	0.413	0.412

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated the effect of AI capability on organizational performance in the UAE Ministry of Education, with transformational and transactional leadership examined as mediating mechanisms. The results indicate that AI capability alone does not directly enhance organizational performance, as evidenced by its significant negative direct effect. However, both transformational and transactional leadership significantly mediated this relationship, with transformational leadership demonstrating the stronger indirect effect. These results suggest that the organizational value of AI capability is realized not solely through technological investment but through effective leadership that facilitates AI adoption, organizational change, and employee engagement. This study contributes to Resource-Based Theory (RBT) by demonstrating that AI capability, although a valuable strategic resource, is insufficient on its own to generate superior organizational performance. Instead, the findings highlight the importance of complementary leadership capabilities in transforming AI resources into organizational value. By identifying transformational and transactional leadership as key mediating mechanisms, the study extends the application of RBT to AI-enabled organizational transformation within the public education sector and provides empirical evidence from the UAE, a context that has received limited scholarly attention. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that the UAE Ministry of Education should complement investments in AI infrastructure and technical capabilities with leadership development, employee digital readiness, and structured change management initiatives. In particular, strengthening transformational leadership competencies can facilitate AI adoption, foster innovation, and align AI initiatives with strategic organizational objectives. More broadly, the findings offer practical insights for public-sector organizations seeking to maximize the organizational benefits of AI through the effective integration of technological capability, leadership, and organizational readiness.

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