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THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, LEADERSHIP, AND TECHNOLOGY IN IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN THE GCC

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ABSTRACT

Improving employee performance in the GCC states is a complex and recurring issue in the management of public service organizations. In this paper, the impact of leadership, technology and the organizational structure on employee performance is investigated. A survey instrument consisting of two parts: 5 items for gathering demographic data and 20 items to measure the constructs. The analysis was performed with the partial least squares technique of the structural equations modeling approach using the Smart PLS software. All three factors exhibited significant direct impact on employee performance with varying magnitudes. Additionally, the analysis unveiled significant moderating effects of leadership and technology. This is the first study that investigates the effect of these factors on government employees' performance in Oman and the GCC. The findings have significant value for researchers and managers of public administrations. The results have important ramifications on employee performance management at government administrations and service organizations in Oman, the GCC states, and MENA region in general. This includes decisions regarding the hiring, developing, and evaluating of employees, as well as general policy changes for the recruitment and promotion processes of government employees.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Organizational Structure, Technology, Employee Performance, Government Employment, PLS-SEM, GCC, LMX Theory, Expectancy Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION AND MODEL CONCEPTUALIZATION

Even though improving employee performance has been a central management issue in most public organizations in developed countries, it has only recently gained attention in Oman and the GCC region [1]. Since the mid-1970s, the GCC countries have enjoyed a steady income from oil revenues that amassed significant wealth. As part of a social and political informal understanding, governments have used public offices and administrations' jobs as a means to distribute the oil-generated wealth to national job seekers [2]. The ensuing perceived environmental support has been shown to impact employees' engagement and performance [3]. Consequently, performance of government employees was not typically evaluated objectively and the need to improve such performance has been generally inexistent [4]. However, several factors have perturbed this comfortable equilibrium. The GCC countries have young populations with about 40% of the population between the ages of 15 and 45. Additionally, these states have had one of the highest birth rates in the world signifying a rapid growth in populations [5]. This meant that an increasing number of young national job seekers are joining the job market each year. The majority of these prefer government jobs due to their reputation of being less demanding, mostly clerical with little requirements in terms of skill, while offering strong job security when compared to private sector employment. Additionally, the number of government jobs available became smaller and smaller relative to the applicants due to the tremendous advances in information technology which increased the productivity of incumbent employees (Scharfenort, 2020). Furthermore, public sector organization have been consistently scrutinized for falling short of required service levels or performance targets [6]. In recent years, this pressure on the government employment systems has been magnified by the declining oil revenues. Oil prices have plunged in the last 5 years to historical lows pushing many GCC countries to incur unprecedented budgetary deficits [7]. On top of all these challenges, Oman and the GCC countries have endured the global Covid-19 pandemic that paralyzed entire sectors and brought entire economies to the fringe of collapse [8], and forced the adoption of the "work from home" mode of employment [9]. This is of utmost importance since performance and productivity are intricately tied to employees' physical and psychological health and well-being [10].

Considering all these challenges, it became apparent that Oman can no longer turn a blind eye to the performance of its government employees. The increasingly scarce resources should be invested in the most effective manner. Government employees must, therefore, perform better with the least possible investment. One plausible alternative is to determine what really motivates government employees and positively affects their performance. This will help channel the scarce resources to the most impactful factors. The study aims to investigate the effect of leadership, technology, and organizational structure on employee performance. The joint effect of leadership, organizational structure, and organizational culture has been investigated [11]; however, and to the best of the authors' knowledge, no other study has considered the three factors in a single study.

1.1. Model Conceptualization

The objective of this study is to investigate some of the factors that affect government employees' performance with an emphasis on the GCC states and Oman. Several theories have been introduced in the literature to explain and predict employee performance. Some of the most commonly referenced are Hertzberg (1959) Two Factor Theory, Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, and Aldefer's (1972) ERG model [12]. Hertzberg classified factors motivating employees into satisfiers (intrinsic) and dissatisfiers (extrinsic). The latter refer to factors which minimize or eliminate dissatisfaction such as remuneration, working conditions, relationship with colleagues, and cultural adaptability [13]. Vroom, on the other hand, argued that motivation for better performance is contingent upon the expectation that efforts will improve performance which will generate reward and recognition [14]. Relatedly, Aldefer explained performance by organizing needs into three categories: Existence, Relatedness, and Growth needs. There are several factors that can influence the employee performance ranging from organizational structure to socialization and knowledge management commitment [15]. In this study, the focus is on determining the extent to which leadership, technology, and the organizational structure affect employee performance. Leadership and organizational structure qualify as extrinsic in the context of Hertzberg's two-factor theory, and as Existence factors on the context of Aldefer's ERG model.

Additionally, Vroom's expectancy theory provides a rationale for the technology factor since technology raises expectations that efforts will lead to better performance.

1.2. Hypotheses Development

In a highly connected and technology-driven world economy, employee performance can be significantly affected by the technology used in manufacturing as well as service sectors [16]. The use of information technology (IT) has become essential in most jobs [17]. In fact, [18] and [19] found that performance was the most impacted factor by technology among several other factors such as satisfaction, health, and safety. Notably, and even when technology's impact on indicators of material and service intensity is insignificant, it significantly impacts employee performance [20]. In a recent review paper spanning many articles, [21] inferred that technology use is driven more by motivators rather than inhibitors. From a broader perspective, a strong positive relationship has been established between knowledge management and organizational performance [22]. The influence occurs both directly and through mediating variables such as human capital [23]. Consequently, the first hypothesis of the study is formulated as follows:

H1: Technology is positively related to employee performance.

The Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) theory relates employees' outcomes such as performance and satisfaction to leaders' effects [24]. In a variable, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, agile leadership can significantly shape the employees' performance [25]. Applying the social learning and social exchange theories, [26] found that leadership had a significant positive impact on employee service performance. In the public sector, [27]arrived at the same conclusion in a study involving public health employees. The effect of leadership on employee performance is so strongly established that most research surpassed the question to investigate which leadership style is more effective. Emergent leadership has been shown to yield positive effect on organizational performance [28]. Empowering leadership, on the other hand, has been shown to influence employees' proactive work behaviour thus positively affecting organizational operations [29]. Similarly, transformational leadership has been found to positively impact work engagement [30], and to be a core motivator of employee psychological empowerment [31]. Integrative leadership has been shown to positively influence employees' innovation performance through the impact it has on psychological empowerment and resource flexibility [32]. In public sector organizations, authentic leadership has been shown to have a significant impact on employee engagement [33]. In the Middle Eastern public context, research into Jordanian public service revealed a clear effect of servant leadership on performance [34]. Within the GCC context, which is predominantly Muslim, an Islamic leadership model was developed and confirmed to positively influence job performance [35]. Notwithstanding the fact that different leadership styles may affect performance in different ways [36], the hypothesis is constructed as follows:

H2: Leadership is positively related to employee performance.

A typical organizational structure defines the authority and communication channels in an organization. With clear paths of duties and reporting, the overall performance of the organization improves reflecting an improvement in the performance of its employees [37] and [38]. The organizational structure facilitates working relationships among various units and positively affects the behaviour and performance of employees [39]. Well established communication channels keep employees better informed and leads to better performance [40]. On the other hand, mechanistic structures hinder performance and organizations would require restructuring to affect change [41]. In the GCC context, recent research indicated a significant positive effect of the job description, which is a manifestation of the organizational structure, on employee performance [42]. Relatedly, a recent study showed that organizational support contributed significantly to increased "organizational citizenship behaviour" (OCB) in Faculty of an Omani University [43]. OCB is a key factor in promoting organizational development based on different triggers of employees' psychology and work status [44]. Furthermore, the organizational structure affects performance through the significant effect it has on employee work motivation [45]. Together with authentic leadership, a flexible organizational structure has been shown to enhance employees' attitudes and behaviours, and consequently their performance [46].Therefore, optimal organizational structures have a direct positive impact on an organization's productivity and performance [47]. Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Clarity of organizational structure is positively related to employee performance.

Chief executive officers (CEOs) typically make the strategic technology decisions for their organizations; whereas chief information officers (CIOs) lead technology efforts [48]. However, the literature is quite scarce in studying the direct relationship between leadership and technology.

Nonetheless, the decision to adopt technology can be driven by superiors' technology leadership [49]. Similarly, leaders play an indispensable role in sustaining good practices of technology implementation. As such, the potential impact of leaders can be substantial and sustained. In the GCC context, research has shown that managers with adaptive personalities who quickly integrated technology into their business operations emerged as effective leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic [50]. Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Leadership is positively related to technology.

The organizational structure defines the lines of communication within an organization. Thus, it would seem trivial to expect that the structure has a significant impact on technology use and integration. However, the literature focused on the effect of technology on the organizational structure as in [51]. Among the few studies identified, Wahba (2015) [52] studied the impact of the organizational structure on technology within the knowledge management context. Furthermore, [53] identified a relation between organizational structure and technology within the innovation context. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5: Clarity of organizational structure is positively related to technology.

As stated earlier, the organizational structure defines the authority and communication channels in the organization. Thus, it would seem trivial to expect that leadership effectiveness is affected by the organizational structure. However, there is little evidence in the literature shedding light on this relationship despite the significant research on the leadership style appropriate for different structures. For instance, [54] provided evidence that the complexity of the organizational structure has a negative effect on transformational leadership. Positive leadership and the leader's actions, on the other hand, foster positive change within the organization and bridge employees' virtues to the organization's counterparts [55]. In team-based organizational structures, shared leadership has been shown to positively impact employee and team performance [56]. In the GCC context, ethical leadership has been found to play an important role in building trust in the organization's structure albeit not having the same impact on the organizational openness to change [57]. The final hypothesis can therefore be stated as follows:

H6: Clarity of organizational structure is positively related to leadership.

2. METHODOLOGY

A survey instrument consisting of two parts: 5 items for gathering demographic data and 20 items was used to measure the constructs. Demographic data consisted of gender, education, and work experience (profile of respondents provided in Table 1).

Table 1: Profile Of Respondents.

		MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
WORK EXPERIENCE	less than 5 years	13	17	12	17	25	17
	between 5 and 10 years	19	24	34	48	53	35
	more than 10 years	46	59	25	35	71	48
CURRENT POSITION	Public	68	87	46	65	114	77
	Private	10	13	25	35	35	23
TOTAL		78	52	71	48	149	

The items were adapted from previous studies to ensure content validity. The items in the second part were all measured using a 5-point Likert scale and are summarized in Table 2.

The study was approved by the IRB committee at the Gulf University for Science and Technology (IRB-25/2024-25). Although no private data was collected and used, the respondents received a clear explanation of the purpose of the study and were requested to provide their explicit consent (see Appendix A for details). The respondents were randomly selected from the employees including all managerial and clerical levels in Oman and Kuwait.

The structural equation modelling (SEM) of partial least squares (PLS) was selected for analysing the model. This technique is quite suitable for complicated models, especially in cases where the sample sizes are relatively small [58]. [59]state that PLS-SEM accomplishes significantly high levels of statistical power with relatively small sample sizes since it uses a component-based approach that does not drastically limit the distributional assumptions of Data. Our study's sample size of 149 meets the minimum requirements established by the "10 times

rule" proposed by [60] which contends that the minimum sample size should be at least 10 times the largest number of structural paths directed at any construct in the structural model. A two-pronged approach is used to analyse the data, whereby the measurement model is analysed first and subsequently the structural model is investigated. This approach ensures reliability and validity of the measurements before investigating the relationships among the structural model.

3. RESULTS ANALYSIS

A random sample of 149 employees was polled. The sample consisted of 52% male and 48% female employees. Most of the respondents (48%) have work experience exceeding 10 years. This percentage was higher in the male group (59%) as opposed to the female group (35%). In terms of the sector, 77% of the respondents are employed in the public sector; whereas 23% are in the private sector. Notable, the percentage of female respondents in the private sector is higher than the male, 35% versus 13%, respectively.

3.1. The Measurement Model Assessment

CONSTRUCT	ITEMS	FACTOR LOADINGS	CR	AVE
PERFORMANCE	I meet all the performance requirements of my job.	0.805	0.831	0.500
	I am able to perform my job well with minimal time and effort.	0.803		
	I took on challenging tasks, when asked of me or when available.	0.689		
	I came up with creative solutions to new problems in my job.	0.699		
LEADERSHIP	My manager always sets challenging goals for the organization based on current objectives.	0.656	0.898	0.639
	My manager provides precise instructions to me about the work to be done.	0.827		
	I am encouraged to work out my jobs or tasks creatively.	0.786		
	I am motivated by my manager to accomplish my work in solving work-related problems.	0.849		
	My manager always provides supportive guidance and assistance to increase my work performance.	0.863		
TECHNOLOGY	Technology helps me perform my duties.	0.731	0.877	0.589
	Technological practices provide suitable opportunities for learning and developing.	0.799		
	Technology contributes to the accomplishment of my job tasks with flexibility.	0.856		
	I adopt new technology quickly and easily to do my job.	0.759		
	My work environment contains advanced technology that contributes to the effective development of my tasks.	0.675		
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	The necessary adjustments and updates are made in line with the mission and vision of the organization periodically.	0.656	0.858	0.604
	The organizational structure clearly defines my roles and responsibilities.	0.798		
	The organizational structure clearly defines the authority structure and the communication channels in my organization.	0.846		
	The organizational structure clearly identifies my superiors and my subordinates.	0.797		

Table 2: Loading Factors, CR And AVE.

The internal reliability of the measurement model is assessed using Composite Reliability (CR). The CR values for all the constructs exceeded 0.7 and thus satisfying the rule proposed by [61]. The convergent reliability, on the other hand, was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As proposed by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), AVE values exceeding 0.5 suggest acceptable levels of convergent validity, which is the case for all the constructs as exhibited in Table 2.

Furthermore, and in accordance with the (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) criterion, the square root of AVE for each construct is higher than the inter-correlations among the constructs in the model (bold face values on diagonal in Table 3), thus confirming the discriminant validity of the

constructs.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

	LEADERSHIP	PERFORMANCE	STRUCTURE	TECHNOLOGY
LEADERSHIP	**0.800**			
PERFORMANCE	0.407	**0.751**		
STRUCTURE	0.583	0.405	**0.777**	
TECHNOLOGY	0.370	0.356	0.345	**0.767**

The measurement model is deemed sufficiently valid and reliable to warrant proceeding to the assessment of the structural model.

3.2. The Structural Model Assessment

To assess the structural model, and by considering the coefficient of determination R^2, the model explains 34% in the variation of the leadership construct, 24.4% in the variation of the performance construct and 16.2% for the technology construct. These values are acceptable since they exceed 30% for the first construct. For the technology construct, it is an observable construct and even smaller values are deemed acceptable. Furthermore, this is a PLS-SEM model, and other more relevant measures of fit are typically used. For instance, according to Leguina (2015), a Standardized Root Mean squared Residual (SRMR) value less than 0.08 and a Normed Fit Index (NFI) greater than 0.5 [62], are indicators of acceptable fit. In the current model, the SRMR is equal to 0.076 and the NFI equals 0.746. Additionally, to assess the predictive relevance of the model, the Stone–Geisser Q^2 (cross validated redundancy) was computed. The Q^2 values for performance, leadership and technology were 0.065, 0.19 and 0.055, respectively. According to [63], Q^2 values greater than zero implies that the model has predictive relevance. Consequently, all the criteria employed indicate that the model has acceptable fit and predictive relevance.

To assess the significance of the various paths, a nonparametric bootstrapping was carried out with 5000 subsamples. The path coefficients and corresponding p-values are shown on Figure 1. Performance is jointly determined by technology (H1: β= 0.205, p=0.045), leadership (H2: β= 0.207, p=0.026) and organizational structure (H3: β= -0.213, p=0.029). Notably, structure has the highest coefficient, whereas technology has the lowest coefficient. Technology, on the other hand, is only significantly influenced by leadership (H4: β=0.255, p=0.004). Finally, leadership is strongly and positively associated with the organizational structure (H5: β=0.583, p=0.000).

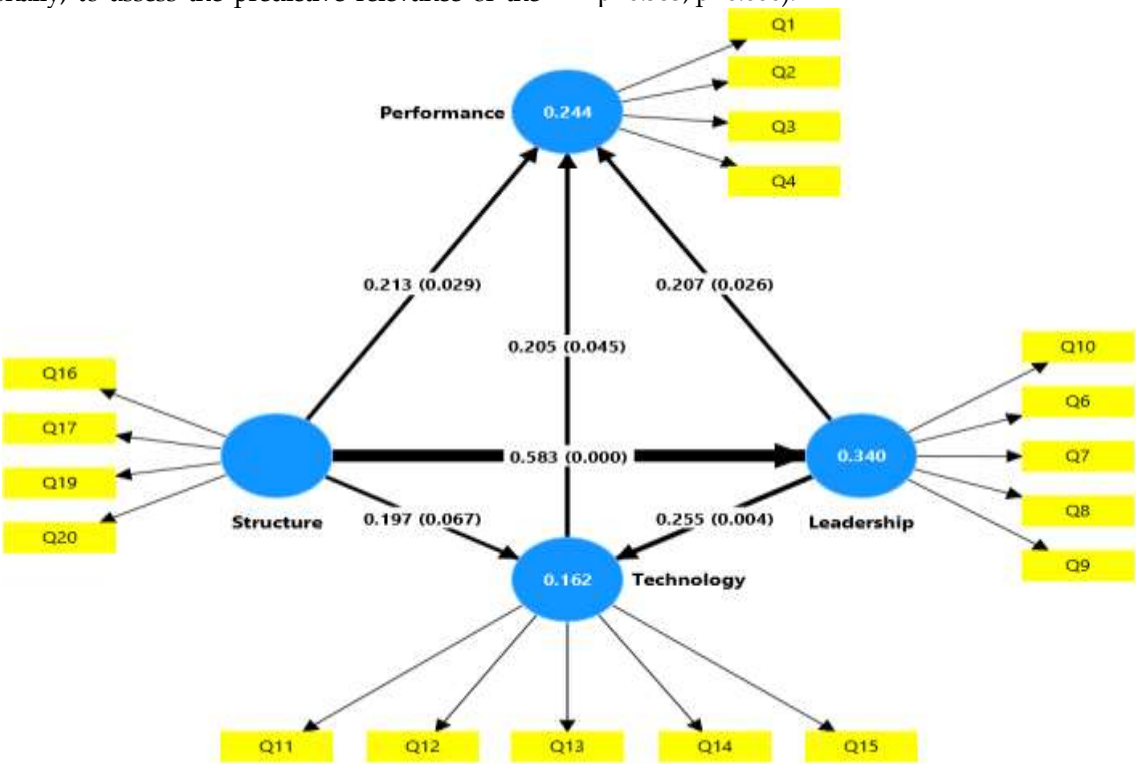

Figure 1: Estimated Path Coefficients and Significance (Bootstrapping Results).

As evident from Table 4, there is evidence to support five of the six hypotheses (0.05 level of

significance).

Table 4: Hypothesis Tests.

	HYPOTHESIS	DECISION
H1	Technology is positively related to employee performance	Accept
H2	Leadership is positively related to employee performance	Accept
H3	Clarity of organizational structure is positively related to employee performance	Accept
H4	Leadership is positively related to technology	Accept
H5	Clarity of organizational structure is positively related to technology	Reject
H6	Clarity of organizational structure is positively related to leadership	Accept

4. DISCUSSION

The results shed light on how GCC government employees' performance is affected by leadership, technology, and the organizational structure. The evidence indicates that employee performance is related to all three factors. The positive relationship with technology is in line with Vroom's expectancy theory and is confirmed by many studies [64]. Similarly, the positive relationship with the organizational structure is consistent with Hertzberg's two-factor theory, in particular as it relates to the "dissatisfiers" and reported by several studies [65]. A "toxic" organizational structure has been reported to cause negative behaviour and performance for both employees and managers [66]. The relation between leadership and performance is in line with the LMX theory [67] and other recently reported findings [68]. Furthermore, the organizational structure is significantly positively related to leadership and leadership is positively related to technology. As evident from Figure 1, the paths with the highest factor loadings are structure leadership, leadership technology and structure performance.

The strong positive relationship between the organizational structure and leadership implies that the leadership role draws its validity from the authority vested in it by the structure. Nonetheless, there are recurring barriers, such as ineffective communication and rigid bureaucratic structures, that managers must overcome to manifest leadership characteristics [66].

The leadership role is primarily limited to the managerial, supervisory, role, which is the norm in highly bureaucratic systems such as the public sector in the. As prior research has unambiguously shown, employee performance depends on the leadership style [36]. Therefore, a negative relationship between leadership and performance can only mean that the leadership style employed at government offices is not conducive to high performance.

The positive relationship between leadership and technology, on the other hand, has been sporadically reported in the literature. Technological choices and decisions are driven by leadership considering the overall organization's strategic objectives. Relatedly, technology has transformed job duties in most sectors and contributed to a surge in effectiveness and productivity. This is particularly true in the mostly clerical government jobs. However, this also manifests a tendency to associate leadership with the facilitator role whereby leaders are evaluated based on their contribution to resources availability [45].

The positive effect of technology on performance is both intuitive and supported by significant findings in the literature. Information technology has played a pivotal role in streamlining many of the office processes and rendered clerical jobs more effective and efficient. By minimizing the likelihood of errors and providing automatic reminders, office employees have become more effective. Additionally, information technology has reduced the time it takes to perform repetitive and/or communication tasks since it enhances sharing knowledge both formally and informally [69].

The organizational structure has the most significant positive effect on performance. The clear paths of authority and communication displayed by the structure have a direct impact on performance. Essentially, clear communication channels imply that targets and requirements are clearly propagated and received. Furthermore, clear and distinct authority lines reap the benefits of unity of command and eliminate the "dual bosses" problem.

There are several relevant implications of the findings of this study. At the academic level, the results confirm prior research findings and stipulate that the GCC region and despite its unique characteristics exhibits similar patterns to the rest of the World when it comes to employee performance. There is evidence that certain leadership styles are more appropriate for certain organizational structures.

Additionally, the most significant path in the network is (structure leadership technology) represents a new model relating the organizational structure to performance with leadership and technology as mediating variables. This clearly

shows that the root driver for performance is the organizational structure in this population of employees.

The managerial implications can be classified into medium- and long-term ones. For the medium term, to improve performance it is advisable to invest in technology since it has a significant direct impact on performance. Changing leadership, on the other hand, may not have any immediate impact on performance since it is perceived as a mild influencer of performance. However, clarifying the authority and communication channels of the existing organizational structure may lead to more significant improvements.

The long-term managerial implications would need to focus on a restructuring of the public service organization. In an established government bureaucracy, this may represent a significant challenge; however, given the tremendous pressure on government spending and the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness, this could represent the best viable option forward. Many GCC states have already embarked on ambitious restructuring efforts with varying degrees of success. A prime example of a successful endeavour is Dubai and the UAE in general, where the government has introduced some revolutionary paradigm changes in the management of government offices.

The transformation can be enhanced by adopting award models that relate the results to the right enablers [70]. The second managerial implication in this context is to address the leadership issue. Identifying the reason behind the perceived negative impact of leadership on performance is paramount. There is a need to determine if the problem arises from a mismatch between the organizational structure and the leadership style; or whether the perception stands regardless.

For GCC policy makers, this study reveals the importance of adopting competence-based criteria for the appointment of leaders at various levels of the hierarchy of public administration. Balancing the need for an efficient bureaucracy, needed to manage public offices, and the aspirations of the new generation of job seekers, requires a systematic and integrative approach that matches the job level to the technology requirements and the role of the leaders. For instance, highly technical jobs requiring extensive use of technology would benefit from expert leaders who can leverage their technical expertise to solve problems and maintain the efficiency of operations.

On the other hand, for leadership positions with a strong political framework to succeed, leaders should be given additional training in team management and performance evaluation.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The objective of this study is to determine the effect of leadership, technology and organizational structure on government employees' performance in the GCC states of the Sultanate of Oman and Kuwait. The analysis showed that technology and the organizational structure positively affect performance, whereas leadership negatively affects performance. Additionally, the results indicated a significant positive relationship between structure and leadership on one hand, and leadership and technology on the other. An important theoretical contribution is the identification of a significant path between structure and performance having leadership and technology as mediating variables.

The study has some important limitations that must be considered before generalizing the findings. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small and homogeneous to be fully representative of the Oman and GCC populations. Larger, and possibly stratified, samples would need to be studied to validate and generalize the results. Secondly, the findings correspond to a cross-sectional study that considers the perception of employees at one point in time, which could have biased the responses. Therefore, a longitudinal study may help uncover the long-term changes in perceptions as new paradigms of management are being implemented in government offices. These research venues, and others, will constitute paths for future research to help in understanding this important issue at this crucial junction of Oman and the GCC development.

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APPENDIX A SURVEY COVER PAGE

Dear Participant:

Invitation To Participate and Description of the Project

You are being asked to participate in my study of antecedents to employee performance. I am investigating this topic in order to further my understanding of the effect of organizational structure, leadership and technology on perceived performance.

Your participation in the research study is voluntary. Before agreeing to be part of this study, please read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask questions if you do not understand something.

Description Of the Procedure (What Is Involved)

If you participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions about how you perceive your performance in the context of technology use, leadership, and organizational structure within your organization.

Financial Or Other Incentives

You will not gain any material benefit (financial or otherwise) by participating in this research.

Risks Or Discomforts

There is a -possibility that some of the questions in the interviews may make you feel uncomfortable. I will be asking you about personal things, and you may feel embarrassed at times when talking about things. This rarely happens, but if you do feel uncomfortable, you can do any of the following: you can choose not to answer certain questions; you can take a break and continue later, you can choose to stop the survey. If you wish, you can call someone else of your choosing to talk about your feelings.

Potential Benefits

By helping us complete this project, you will contribute to a better understanding of the antecedents of perceived employee performance, which may lead to improving employment conditions.

Confidentiality

The study data are completely anonymous. Your name will not be used in the paper that will be written; neither will any other information which may be used to identify you. Access to the information is limited to the research team only. We will not share your name, IP address, or any information that may identify you.

Participant Rights

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without any penalty. Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your consent.

Questions About the Study

if you have questions about this study, please contact Dr. Saadouli named above, at the following phone number: +965-2530-7306 or email: Saadouli.n@gust.edu.kw

Authorization

I have read the above information and I have decided that I will participate in the project described above. The researcher has explained the study to me and answered my questions. I know what will be asked of me. I understand what the purpose of the study is. If I don't participate, there will be no penalty or loss of rights. I can stop participating at any time, even after I have started.