The Impact of EFQM Model Implementation on Corporate Excellence in Saudi SMEs

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Abstract:

Organizational excellence has become a strategic imperative for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in highly competitive and rapidly evolving environments, particularly in Saudi Arabia where SMEs play a pivotal role in economic diversification and sustainable growth. This study examines the impact of key enabler dimensions of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model on Corporate Excellence within Saudi SMEs. Specifically, the study investigates the effects of Processes, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resources on excellence outcomes. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected from managers and employees working in Saudi SMEs using a structured questionnaire. The proposed research model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate both the measurement and structural models. The findings reveal that all four EFQM enabler dimensions exert positive and statistically significant effects on Corporate Excellence, confirming the relevance of the EFQM framework in the SME context. Partnerships and Resources emerged as the strongest predictor of excellence, followed by People, Policy and Strategy, and Processes, highlighting the importance of strategic collaboration, effective resource utilization, and human capital development in achieving superior organizational performance. The structural model demonstrates a moderate level of explanatory power, indicating that EFQM enablers collectively play a meaningful role in shaping excellence outcomes while acknowledging the influence of additional contextual factors. Overall, the study provides empirical support for the applicability of the EFQM model in Saudi SMEs and offers practical insights for managers and policymakers seeking to enhance organizational excellence and long-term sustainability.

Keywords: *EFQM Model; Corporate Excellence; Saudi SMEs.*

1. Introduction

Organizational excellence has emerged as a central strategic priority for organizations operating in increasingly competitive, knowledge-intensive, and rapidly evolving environments. Firms are no longer evaluated solely on short-term financial performance but are increasingly assessed based on their ability to deliver sustained value to multiple stakeholders through efficient processes, capable human resources, strategic clarity, and effective partnerships. In the Gulf region, and particularly in Saudi Arabia, the pursuit of organizational excellence has gained heightened importance as organizations align their internal capabilities with the national transformation agenda articulated in Saudi Vision 2030. This agenda emphasizes productivity, quality, innovation, and sustainability as foundational pillars for long-term economic diversification and competitiveness. Within this strategic context, structured quality and excellence frameworks have attracted growing attention as tools for guiding organizational transformation and performance improvement.

Among these frameworks, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model is widely recognized as one of the most comprehensive and integrative approaches to organizational excellence. The EFQM model provides a systematic blueprint for aligning leadership, people, strategy, partnerships, resources, and processes to achieve sustainable performance outcomes. Fonseca (2022) emphasizes that the EFQM 2020 model extends beyond traditional quality management by embedding strategic direction, stakeholder value creation, and organizational learning into a unified excellence architecture. Similarly, Bukvič (2023) highlights the model's applicability across diverse organizational contexts, noting its capacity to support continuous improvement and long-term value creation. As Saudi Arabia accelerates efforts to strengthen the SME sector as a driver of economic growth, understanding how EFQM implementation influences corporate excellence becomes both timely and practically significant.

The theoretical foundation of the EFQM model is grounded in its well-established "enablers and results" logic. This logic posits that superior organizational results are achieved through the effective deployment and integration of internal enablers, including people management, policy and strategy, partnerships and resources, and process management. Mitsiou and Zafiropoulos (2024) explain that the strength of the EFQM model lies in its emphasis on the causal relationship between

organizational practices and performance outcomes. Pungeršek et al. (2020) further argue that this integrative logic enables organizations to diagnose performance gaps and systematically improve operational and strategic alignment. Empirical research has shown that EFQM adoption supports structured self-assessment, enhances coordination across organizational functions, and fosters innovation through continuous learning mechanisms. Haerizadeh and M (2022) demonstrate that EFQM-based initiatives contribute to closing performance gaps by reinforcing coherence between strategy and execution. Oliveira and Gomes (2025) further confirm that EFQM enablers unlock the full potential of total quality management practices when implemented holistically.

Evidence from different national and sectoral contexts reinforces the value of the EFQM model in promoting organizational excellence. In Oman, Al Hasni and Elgeddawy (2025) show that EFQM implementation supports sustainable organizational excellence and business development within industrial settings. In healthcare contexts, Guglielmetti Mugion et al. (2020) illustrate how excellence-oriented practices enhance service quality and stakeholder satisfaction. Bukvič (2023) also documents the model's effectiveness in high-performance and service-intensive industries. Despite this growing international evidence base, empirical studies that examine EFQM implementation within Saudi SMEs remain limited. This gap is noteworthy given that SMEs account for more than 90% of business establishments in Saudi Arabia and play a critical role in employment generation, innovation, and economic diversification.

Corporate excellence, typically reflected in high levels of customer satisfaction, employee engagement, innovation capability, and sustained operational performance, has been closely associated with EFQM enabler dimensions. Demirel (2022) conceptualizes corporate excellence as the outcome of integrated managerial systems that balance operational efficiency with strategic adaptability. Research on process management consistently highlights its role in standardization, efficiency improvement, and error reduction, thereby strengthening organizational reliability and performance. Ndalamba and Tomé (2021) emphasize that process management is a fundamental requirement for excellence in contemporary organizations. Casebolt et al. (2020) further demonstrate that systematic process improvement enhances coordination and value

delivery. The people dimension has also been identified as a critical driver of excellence, as employee empowerment, capability development, and engagement directly influence innovation and service quality. Apio (2022) provides evidence that empowered employees contribute significantly to performance outcomes. Banyhamdan et al. (2020) similarly underline the strategic importance of human capital in achieving quality and excellence.

Strategic alignment through effective policy and strategy formulation represents another key EFQM enabler. Zapletalová (2023) argues that excellence models are most effective when organizational strategies are clearly articulated and aligned with operational practices. Hameed and Jamal (2022) further show that strategic alignment enhances organizational ingenuity and performance outcomes. In addition, partnerships and resources play a pivotal role in supporting excellence, particularly in environments characterized by technological change and competitive pressure. Ambekar et al. (2021) demonstrate that strong supplier relationships and effective use of information technology positively influence firm performance. Panda (2025) highlights the growing importance of technological and resource capabilities in enabling workforce agility and organizational responsiveness.

Although these relationships have been widely examined in international contexts, limited empirical evidence exists on how EFQM enablers influence corporate excellence specifically within Saudi SMEs. This context is characterized by varying levels of organizational maturity, constrained resources, and evolving strategic orientations shaped by national transformation initiatives. Ali et al. (2020) note that Saudi SMEs face unique challenges in adopting formal quality and excellence frameworks. Larabi (2025) further emphasizes the dynamic capabilities required for sustainable performance in Saudi SMEs. Mostafa et al. (2024) highlight the growing relevance of organizational excellence in supporting institutional performance within Saudi Arabia. Addressing this gap is critical because, despite adoption challenges, SMEs stand to benefit substantially from structured excellence frameworks that enhance competitiveness, resilience, and long-term sustainability.

Accordingly, this study investigates the impact of four EFQM enabler dimensionsProcesses, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resourceson corporate excellence within Saudi SMEs. By focusing on

this specific organizational and national context, the study contributes empirically to the EFQM and organizational excellence literature and offers context-sensitive insights into how excellence frameworks support SME performance under the evolving demands of Saudi Vision 2030. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical enrichment and practical guidance for SME leaders, policymakers, and quality professionals seeking to strengthen excellence-driven transformation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Discussion

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model remains one of the most widely adopted excellence frameworks globally, offering an integrated approach to assessing organizational capabilities and performance outcomes. At its core, the EFQM model is built on the premise that organizational excellence results from the systematic alignment and interaction of “enablers” and “results” (Fonseca, 2022). Enablers refer to what an organization does and how it operatesincluding leadership, strategy, people, partnerships, resources, and processeswhile results capture what the organization achieves in terms of customer satisfaction, employee outcomes, societal contributions, and business performance (Oliveira & Gomes, 2025). The interdependence between these two dimensions reflects the EFQM philosophy that robust internal systems foster sustained performance and continuous improvement (Bukvič, 2023; Mitsiou & Zafiropoulos, 2024).

The EFQM model has evolved from earlier Total Quality Management (TQM) foundations, extending beyond quality control toward a holistic framework that emphasizes strategic direction, stakeholder value, innovation, and sustainability. Scholars argue that EFQM provides a stronger structural interpretation of excellence than traditional TQM approaches, as it integrates leadership, operational capabilities, and result-oriented metrics into a single coherence model (Haerizadeh& M, 2022; GuglielmettiMugion et al., 2020). This makes EFQM particularly suitable for organizations operating in environments characterized by rapid change, digitalization, and heightened stakeholder expectations, including SMEs seeking to enhance competitiveness and align with modern governance standards (Demirel, 2022; Ali et al., 2020). Within the EFQM framework, process managementis recognized as a foundational enabler of excellence. Strong process management enhances organizational efficiency, reduces variability, and ensures

consistent service delivery, thereby strengthening customer satisfaction and business results (Ndalamba& Tomé, 2021; Casebolt et al., 2020). The role of process standardization and continuous improvement becomes even more critical in dynamic environments where firms must adapt rapidly while preserving operational reliability (Szelagowski & Berniak-Woźny, 2020; Moura et al., 2021).

Similarly, the people dimension underscores the importance of human capital as a determinant of organizational excellence. Studies grounded in quality and excellence models consistently show that organizations investing in employee development, empowerment, and engagement achieve higher levels of performance, innovation, and customer orientation (Para-González et al., 2021; Apio, 2022; Banyhamdan et al., 2020). Effective people management practices foster organizational commitment and support the internal culture needed to implement excellence frameworks successfully (Yousif Ali &Hasaballah, 2020; Halid et al., 2020). The policy and strategy component of the EFQM model highlights the need for clear strategic direction aligned with stakeholder expectations and environmental realities. Strategic alignment enables organizations to transform vision into actionable plans and ensures consistency between long-term objectives and day-to-day operations (Zapletalová, 2023; Hameed & Jamal, 2022). In SMEs, effective strategy deployment is particularly crucial because resource limitations require focused and well-coordinated initiatives to achieve meaningful performance outcomes (Mugo, 2025; Babalola & Nwanzu, 2020).

The final enabler relevant to this studypartnerships and resourcescaptures the role of external relationships and internal assets in supporting excellence. Partnerships with suppliers, customers, and strategic allies improve knowledge sharing, operational integration, and service quality (Ambekar et al., 2021). Resources such as technology, financial capabilities, and infrastructure further contribute to performance improvement by enabling organizations to innovate, scale operations, and respond to market dynamics (Panda, 2025; Rahmati &Harfat, 2024). Research across various industries confirms that effective management of partnerships and resources strengthens organizational resilience and enhances business outcomes (Ubaid & Dweiri, 2023; Gavieiro Besteiro, 2022). Overall, the theoretical foundations of the EFQM model suggest that excellence is achieved

through the structured interaction of internal enablers that guide behavior, shape organizational culture, and support strategic decision-making. These enablers collectively influence corporate excellence by improving processes, strengthening workforce capabilities, aligning strategic priorities, and optimizing resource utilization. This theoretical grounding provides the basis for examining how EFQM enablersspecifically Processes, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resourcesaffect corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

2.2 Hypotheses Development

The EFQM model emphasizes the relationship between organizational enablers and excellence outcomes, suggesting that improvements in internal capabilities directly influence business performance, stakeholder satisfaction, and long-term sustainability (Fonseca, 2022; Oliveira & Gomes, 2025). In line with this theoretical foundation, the present study explores how four EFQM enabler dimensionsProcesses, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resourcesshape corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs. The following subsections develop hypotheses based on existing empirical findings, theoretical arguments, and contextual considerations.

Processes and Corporate Excellence

Process management is widely recognized as a cornerstone of organizational excellence within the EFQM framework. Effective process management enables organizations to standardize operations, minimize waste, optimize resource utilization, and enhance reliability in both products and services (Ndalamba& Tomé, 2021; Casebolt et al., 2020). Scholars argue that organizations with mature process management systems achieve superior performance results because consistent and well-designed processes support continuous improvement and innovation (Szelagowski & Berniak-Woźny, 2020; Moura et al., 2021). In addition, empirical studies demonstrate that process improvement initiatives are strongly associated with enhanced customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and organizational responsivenesskey components of corporate excellence (Guglielmetti Mugion et al., 2020; Bukvič, 2023). Within the context of SMEs, where limited resources and informal management structures may exacerbate operational challenges, establishing robust processes becomes even more critical for achieving excellence outcomes (Ali et al., 2020; Rahmati & Jalilvand, 2024). Based

on this theoretical and empirical evidence, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Processes have a positive and significant effect on corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

People and Corporate Excellence

The EFQM model positions people as a fundamental enabler of organizational success, emphasizing the importance of employee development, engagement, empowerment, and alignment with organizational values (Para-González et al., 2021; Pungeršek et al., 2020). The literature consistently highlights that human capital capabilities directly influence innovation, service quality, productivity, and organizational learningfactors strongly associated with excellence (Banyhamdan et al., 2020; Apio, 2022). Studies show that employees who receive adequate training and have opportunities to participate in decision-making are more committed to organizational goals and demonstrate higher performance levels (Yousif Ali &Hasaballah, 2020; Halid et al., 2020). Furthermore, research on quality management frameworks indicates that people-focused practices create supportive work environments that enhance execution of excellence strategies and contribute to sustained competitive advantage (Babalola & Nwanzu, 2020; Mostafa et al., 2024). In Saudi SMEs, where workforce motivation and capability development are critical to navigating rapid economic changes, people-related practices are likely to play an influential role in shaping excellence. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: People practices have a positive and significant effect on corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

Policy and Strategy and Corporate Excellence

Policy and strategy represent the mechanisms through which organizations translate vision and mission into actionable plans. According to the EFQM framework, strategic alignment ensures that organizational resources, processes, and capabilities are directed toward achieving long-term objectives and stakeholder value (Mitsiou & Zafiropoulos, 2024; Haerizadeh& M, 2022). Research shows that organizations with clear, coherent, and well-communicated strategies are better positioned to implement excellence initiatives and achieve strong performance results (Zapletalová, 2023; Hameed & Jamal, 2022). In

SMEs, strategic clarity is particularly important because it compensates for limited resources by enabling leaders to prioritize initiatives that have the highest impact on organizational outcomes (Mugo, 2025; Panda, 2025). Furthermore, studies in diverse sectorsincluding education, public administration, and healthcaredemonstrate that strategic planning enhances quality improvement, innovation, and responsiveness, all of which are essential dimensions of corporate excellence (Bukvič, 2023; Guglielmetti Mugion et al., 2020). Given this evidence, it is reasonable to expect that effective policy and strategy formulation will positively influence excellence in Saudi SMEs. Accordingly, the study advances the following hypothesis:

H3: Policy and strategy have a positive and significant effect on corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

Partnerships and Resources and Corporate Excellence

The Partnerships and Resources dimension of the EFQM model highlights the role of external relationships and internal assets in supporting excellence achievement. Prior research indicates that strong partnerships with suppliers, customers, and strategic allies facilitate knowledge exchange, operational integration, and service quality improvement (Ambekar et al., 2021; Ubaid &Dweiri, 2023). Resource managementincluding the availability and effective use of financial, technological, human, and infrastructural resourcesis also essential for building organizational resilience and enhancing performance outcomes (Panda, 2025; Rahmati &Harfat, 2024). Studies further emphasize that organizations leveraging technology, digital tools, and strategic partnerships are more capable of delivering consistent value, innovating, and achieving excellence (Ali et al., 2020; GavieiroBesteiro, 2022). In the context of SMEs, where resource constraints are common, the ability to develop effective partnerships and manage resources strategically may significantly influence excellence outcomes. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Partnerships and resources have a positive and significant effect on corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate how EFQM enabler dimensions Processes, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resources shape corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs. Quantitative approaches are widely used in organizational excellence and EFQM-based research because they allow researchers to test theory-driven relationships, measure latent constructs, and generalize findings across organizational settings (Magno, Cassia &Ringle, 2024; Shaaban& Hassan, 2021). Prior studies on excellence frameworks also highlight the importance of structured measurement tools and statistical modeling for evaluating EFQM enabler-result relationships (Oliveira & Gomes, 2025;Mitsiou&Zafiropoulos, 2024). The target population comprised small and medium enterprises operating in Saudi Arabia across manufacturing, service, and commercial sectors. SMEs are central to the national transformation efforts under Vision 2030, making them an important context for examining excellence adoption (Ali, Hilman & Gorondutse, 2020; Mostafa et al., 2024). Due to the absence of an accessible sampling frame, a non-probability convenience sampling strategy was adopted, consistent with EFQM research conducted in organizational and public-sector environments where random sampling is challenging (GuglielmettiMugion et al., 2020; Vartiak, 2021). Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed to managers and employees with direct knowledge of their organization's operational and quality practices.

The measurement instrument was developed using validated EFQM-based scales to ensure theoretical alignment and content relevance. Items measuring the four EFQM enablers were adapted from established quality and excellence models (Shaaban& Hassan, 2021; Ubaid &Dweiri, 2023). Corporate Excellence was measured using indicators reflecting key performance outcomes emphasized in the EFQM results dimension, including operational performance, stakeholder satisfaction, and continuous improvement orientation (Bukvič, 2023; Demirel, 2022). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale to capture respondents' perceptions consistently.

Reliability and validity assessments were conducted following standard guidelines for structural equation modeling (SEM). Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable (Haji-Othman &Yusuff, 2022).

Convergent validity was evaluated through factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), ensuring that constructs adequately explained the variance of their indicators. Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT), methods widely recommended in contemporary quality management studies (Magno et al., 2024; Pungeršek et al., 2020). The structural model was assessed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a technique well-suited for complex models, predictive analyses, and studies with multiple interrelated constructs such as EFQM frameworks (Oliveira & Gomes, 2025; Haerizadeh& M, 2022). PLS-SEM has been widely applied in excellence and quality management research because of its ability to handle non-normal data, small to moderate sample sizes, and multidimensional constructs. The model's explanatory power was evaluated using the R-square statistic for the dependent variable. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study, ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality of all respondents.

4. Findings

This section presents the empirical results of the study based on the data collected from Saudi SMEs. The findings include an assessment of data normality, descriptive statistics of the key variables, evaluation of the measurement model, and examination of the structural model. These analyses collectively demonstrate the reliability and validity of the study constructs and provide evidence regarding the extent to which EFQM enabler dimensions explain corporate excellence in the sampled organizations.

As shown in Table 1, the results of the normality assessment indicate that the data for all study constructs Processes, People, Policy and Strategy, Partnerships and Resources, and Corporate Excellence exhibit acceptable distributional properties. The skewness values range from −1.095 to 0.585, while kurtosis values range from −1.171 to 1.502, all of which fall within the commonly accepted threshold of ±2. These results suggest the absence of severe deviations from normality. Although Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) does not require strict normality assumptions, the observed distribution characteristics further confirm the suitability of the dataset for subsequent measurement and structural model analysis, thereby enhancing the robustness and credibility of the study's empirical findings.

Table 1: Normality test

	N	Skewness	Kurtosis
Pro	347	0.223	-1.041
Pe	347	0.037	-1.171
PS	347	0.585	-0.406
PR	347	0.205	-0.859
CE	347	-1.095	1.502

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence.

As presented in Table 2, the descriptive statistics provide an overview of respondents' perceptions of the EFQM enabler dimensions and corporate excellence across the sampled Saudi SMEs. The mean values for the EFQM enablersProcesses (M = 2.727), People (M = 2.767), Policy and Strategy (M = 2.789), and Partnerships and Resources (M = 2.750)indicate moderate levels of implementation within the surveyed organizations. These findings suggest that while Saudi SMEs have begun adopting structured excellence practices aligned with the EFQM model, the overall maturity of enabler implementation remains at a developing stage. This pattern is consistent with prior research highlighting that SMEs often face resource constraints and managerial limitations that affect the depth and consistency of quality framework adoption (Ali et al., 2020; Fonseca, 2022; Oliveira & Gomes, 2025).In contrast, Corporate Excellence records a comparatively high mean score (M = 4.372, SD = 0.688), indicating that respondents perceive their organizations as performing strongly in terms of overall excellence outcomes. This discrepancy between moderate enabler implementation and high perceived excellence suggests that Saudi SMEs may be achieving performance outcomes through selective or informal excellence practices rather than through fully institutionalized EFQM systems. Similar patterns have been observed in prior EFQM and quality management studies, which report that excellence outcomes may precede formal framework maturity, particularly in emerging and transitional organizational contexts (Bukvič, 2023; Al Hasni&Elgeddawy, 2025). The relatively moderate standard deviations across all constructs further indicate acceptable response consistency, supporting the reliability of the descriptive results and providing a sound basis for subsequent measurement and structural model analyses.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pro	347	2.727	1.124
Pe	347	2.767	1.084
PS	347	2.789	1.105
PR	347	2.750	1.118
CE	347	4.372	0.688

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence.

As illustrated in Figure 1 and reported in Table 3, the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and validity across all study constructs. All indicator loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement items are well aligned with their respective latent constructs. Internal consistency reliability is confirmed, as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for all constructs surpass the acceptable benchmark of 0.70, reflecting a high level of consistency among the measurement items. Convergent validity is further supported by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50 for all constructs, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators.These results confirm that the measurement model is both reliable and valid, providing a robust foundation for subsequent structural model analysis. The strong psychometric properties observed across the EFQM enabler dimensionsProcesses, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resourcesas well as Corporate Excellence, are consistent with prior EFQM-based empirical studies and validate the suitability of the adopted measurement scales for examining organizational excellence within the context of Saudi SMEs. Overall, the adequacy of the measurement model enhances confidence in the interpretation of the structural relationships tested in the study.

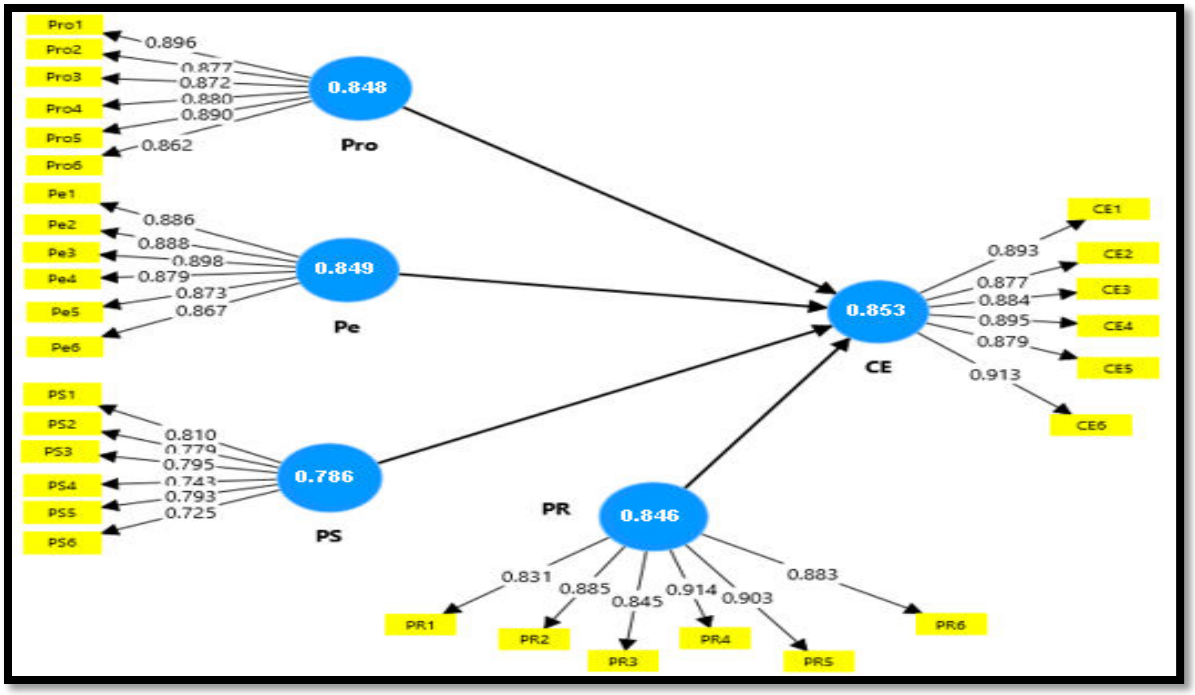

Figure 1: measurement model

As presented in Table 3, the results of the measurement model evaluation confirm satisfactory levels of indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity for all study constructs. All measurement items demonstrate strong standardized loadings, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that each indicator reliably represents its corresponding latent construct. The Corporate Excellence construct shows particularly high loadings, ranging from 0.877 to 0.913, reflecting the robustness of the indicators used to capture excellence outcomes.Internal consistency reliability is further supported by Cronbach's alpha values, which range from 0.786 to 0.853 across the constructs, all surpassing the minimum acceptable level of 0.70. Similarly, composite reliability values range between 0.810 and 0.862, confirming a high degree of consistency among the measurement items. Convergent validity is established, as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.540 to 0.714. These results indicate that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its observed indicators.

Table 3: Initial and final Model measurements

Items	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CE1	0.893	0.853	0.862	0.714
CE2	0.877			
CE3	0.884			
CE4	0.895			
CE5	0.879			
CE6	0.913			
PR1	0.831	0.846	0.857	0.693
PR2	0.885			
PR3	0.845			
PR4	0.914			
PR5	0.903			
PR6	0.883			
PS1	0.810	0.786	0.810	0.540
PS2	0.779			
PS3	0.795			
PS4	0.743			
PS5	0.793			
PS6	0.725			
Pe1	0.886	0.849	0.860	0.700
Pe2	0.888			
Pe3	0.898			
Pe4	0.879			
Pe5	0.873			
Pe6	0.867			
Pro1	0.896	0.848	0.858	0.697
Pro2	0.877			
Pro3	0.872			
Pro4	0.880			
Pro5	0.890			
Pro6	0.862			

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence.

The HTMT results presented in Table 4 indicate that all constructs meet the required threshold for discriminant validity. HTMT values below 0.85 (strict criterion) or 0.90 (more lenient criterion) demonstrate that constructs are empirically distinct. In this model, all HTMT values fall within acceptable limits, ranging from 0.321 to 0.827. The relationship between Corporate Excellence (CE) and the four EFQM enablers displays moderate HTMT ratios: CE–PR (0.503), CE–PS (0.420), CE–Pe (0.321), and CE–Pro (0.337). These values show that CE is related to, but clearly differentiated from, each enabler. Among the enablers themselves, the highest HTMT value is between PR and PS (0.827), which remains within acceptable limits and suggests these constructs share some conceptual alignment but still maintain distinctiveness. Other enabler relationships show moderate ratios, such as PR–Pe (0.540), PR–Pro (0.552), PS–Pe (0.774), and PS–Pro (0.769). The smallest ratio appears between Pe and CE (0.321), reflecting a clear conceptual distinction. Overall, the HTMT results confirm that the constructs do not exhibit excessive overlap, supporting the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Table 4: The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

	CE	**PR**	**PS**	**Pe**	**Pro**
CE					
PR	0.503				
PS	0.420	0.827			
Pe	0.321	0.540	0.774		
Pro	0.337	0.552	0.769	0.756	

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence.

The Fornell–Larcker results in Table 5 confirm that discriminant validity is well established across all constructs. According to this criterion, the square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than its correlations with other constructs. This condition is clearly satisfied in the model. Corporate Excellence (CE) has a square root of AVE of 0.890, which is higher than its correlations with PR (0.485), PS (0.421), Pe (0.306), and Pro (0.325). This indicates that CE is empirically distinct from the EFQM enablers. Similarly, Partnerships and Resources (PR) shows a square root of AVE of 0.877, exceeding its correlations with CE (0.485), PS (0.617), Pe (0.513), and Pro (0.523). Policy and Strategy (PS)

reports the highest AVE square root value at 0.975, far surpassing its correlations with CE (0.421), PR (0.617), Pe (0.730), and Pro (0.733). Although the correlations between PS and the other enablers are moderately highparticularly with Pe (0.730) and Pro (0.733)they still remain below the square root of the construct's AVE, supporting adequate discriminant validity. Likewise, People (Pe) presents a square root of AVE of 0.882, higher than all associated correlations, and Process (Pro) shows 0.880, also exceeding its inter-construct correlations. Overall, the Fornell–Larcker results confirm that each construct explains more variance within its own indicators than with any other construct, validating the distinctiveness of all EFQM dimensions and Corporate Excellence within the model.

Table 5: Discriminant validity fornell-larcker criterion

	CE	**PR**	**PS**	**Pe**	**Pro**
CE	0.890				
PR	0.485	0.877			
PS	0.421	0.617	0.975		
Pe	0.306	0.513	0.730	0.882	
Pro	0.325	0.523	0.733	0.743	0.880

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence.

As shown in Table 6, the structural model explains a meaningful proportion of variance in Corporate Excellence. The R^2 value of 0.270, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.260, indicates that the four EFQM enabler dimensionsProcesses, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resourcescollectively explain approximately 27% of the variance in corporate excellence among Saudi SMEs. In the context of organizational and management research, particularly within SME settings, this level of explanatory power is considered moderate and acceptable, reflecting the multifaceted nature of excellence outcomes.These findings suggest that while EFQM enablers play a significant role in shaping corporate excellence, additional organizational, environmental, and contextual factors not captured in the current model may also contribute to excellence performance. This result is consistent with prior EFQM and quality management studies, which emphasize that organizational excellence is influenced by a combination of internal capabilities and external conditions. Overall, the R^2 results confirm the adequacy of the

structural model and support its suitability for examining the determinants of corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

Table 6: R Square (R^2)

	R-square	**R-square adjusted**
CE	0.270	0.260

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the reflective structural model depicts the hypothesized relationships between the EFQM enabler dimensions and Corporate Excellence in Saudi SMEs. The model demonstrates that all four enablersProcesses, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resourcesexert positive direct effects on Corporate Excellence. The direction and magnitude of the path coefficients indicate that the EFQM framework provides a coherent explanatory structure for understanding how internal organizational practices translate into excellence outcomes.The structural relationships shown in Figure 2 further confirm that Corporate Excellence is influenced by a combination of operational, human, strategic, and relational capabilities rather than by a single dominant factor. The visual representation highlights the central role of Corporate Excellence as the endogenous construct, while the four EFQM enablers function as complementary drivers contributing to organizational performance. Overall, the structural model supports the theoretical assumptions of the EFQM framework, emphasizing that excellence emerges from the integrated and simultaneous implementation of multiple enabler dimensions within organizational systems.

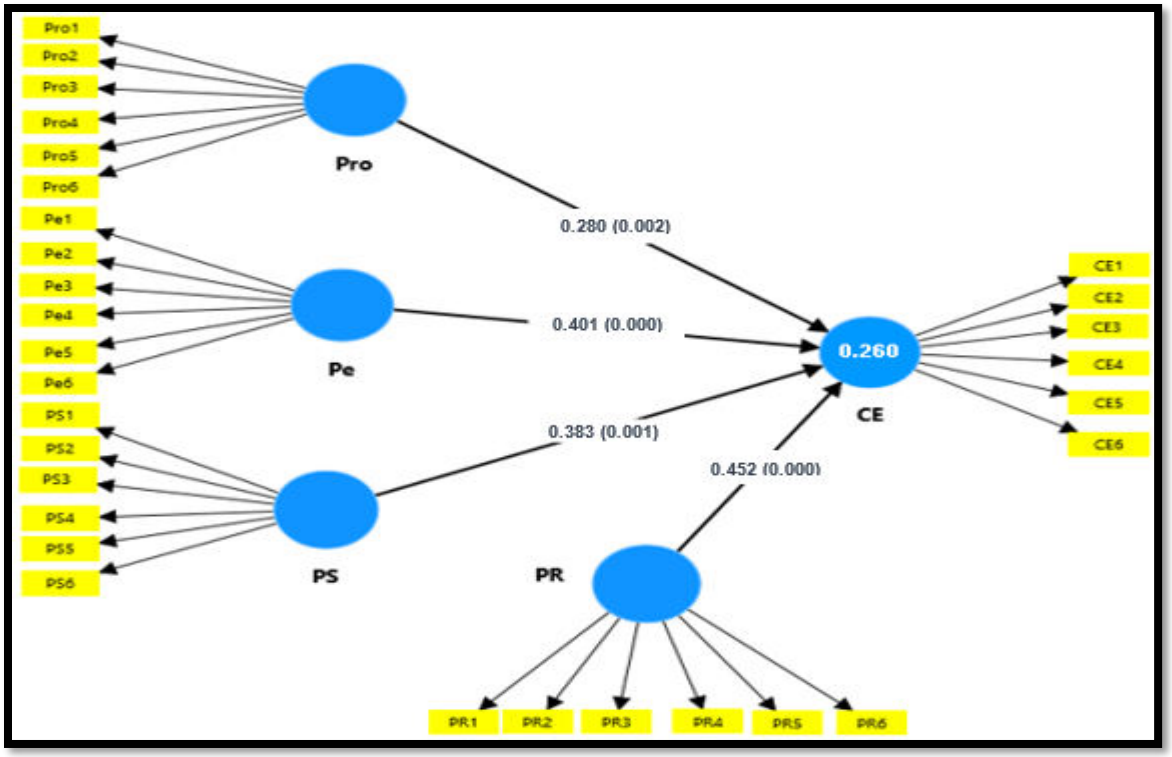

Figure2: Reflective Structural (Inner) Model

As reported in Table 7, the direct path analysis results indicate that all four EFQM enabler dimensions exert positive and statistically significant effects on Corporate Excellence, thereby providing full empirical support for the proposed hypotheses. Partnerships and Resources exhibit the strongest influence on Corporate Excellence ($\beta = 0.452$, $t = 3.837$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that effective management of external relationships, technological assets, and organizational resources plays a critical role in enhancing excellence outcomes among Saudi SMEs. This finding highlights the importance of strategic collaborations and resource optimization in environments characterized by competitive pressure and resource constraints.Policy and Strategy also demonstrate a strong and significant effect on Corporate Excellence ($\beta = 0.383$, $t = 7.469$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that clear strategic direction and alignment with organizational objectives substantially contribute to excellence performance.

This result underscores the role of well-articulated strategies in guiding SME operations and ensuring consistency between long-term goals and daily practices. Similarly, People practices show a positive and significant relationship with Corporate Excellence ($\beta = 0.401$, $t = 2.561$, $p < 0.001$), emphasizing the contribution of employee development, engagement, and

empowerment in driving organizational success. These results reinforce the view that human capital remains a central pillar of excellence within EFQM-oriented organizations.Processes also have a positive and significant effect on Corporate Excellence ($\beta = 0.280$, $t = 4.558$, $p < 0.01$), although the magnitude of this relationship is comparatively lower than that of the other enablers. This suggests that while process standardization and operational efficiency are important contributors to excellence, their impact may be amplified when combined with strong strategic, human, and relational capabilities. Overall, the path analysis confirms that Corporate Excellence in Saudi SMEs is driven by the integrated influence of multiple EFQM enablers, supporting the theoretical premise that excellence emerges from the holistic implementation of quality management practices rather than isolated initiatives.

Table 7: Direct model path analysis

Hypotheses	Beta	Sample Mean (M)	SD	T statistics	P values
PR -> CE	0.452	0.399	0.104	3.837	0.000
PS -> CE	0.383	0.121	0.016	7.469	0.001
Pe -> CE	0.401	0.042	0.016	2.561	0.000
Pro -> CE	0.280	0.206	0.045	4.558	0.002

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of key EFQM enabler dimensions Processes, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resources on Corporate Excellence within Saudi small and medium enterprises. The findings provide strong empirical support for the EFQM model's central premise that organizational excellence emerges from the integrated implementation of multiple internal enablers rather than isolated managerial practices. All hypothesized relationships were found to be positive and statistically significant, confirming the relevance and applicability of the EFQM framework in the Saudi SME context.Among the four EFQM enablers, Partnerships and Resources emerged as the strongest predictor of Corporate Excellence. This finding highlights the critical role of external collaboration, effective resource utilization, and technological capability in driving excellence outcomes in

SMEs. In resource-constrained environments such as Saudi SMEs, strategic partnerships with suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders enable access to complementary capabilities, knowledge sharing, and operational flexibility, which collectively enhance performance and resilience (Ambekar et al., 2021; Ubaid &Dweiri, 2023). Moreover, effective management of financial, technological, and infrastructural resources supports innovation and scalability, which are essential for sustaining excellence in dynamic markets (Panda, 2025; GavieiroBesteiro, 2022). This result is consistent with prior EFQM studies emphasizing that partnerships and resources act as critical enablers that translate strategic intent into tangible organizational outcomes (Oliveira & Gomes, 2025; Al Hasni&Elgeddawy, 2025).

Policy and Strategy also demonstrated a strong and significant influence on Corporate Excellence, underscoring the importance of strategic alignment within the EFQM framework. This finding suggests that SMEs with clearly articulated strategies and well-aligned policies are better positioned to deploy resources effectively, coordinate internal processes, and respond to environmental challenges. Strategic clarity enables SME leaders to prioritize high-impact initiatives and align operational activities with long-term objectives, thereby enhancing excellence performance (Zapletalová, 2023; Hameed & Jamal, 2022). This result aligns with EFQM theory, which positions strategy as a central mechanism for integrating stakeholder expectations, organizational capabilities, and performance outcomes (Fonseca, 2022; Mitsiou & Zafiropoulos, 2024). In the Saudi context, strategic alignment is particularly relevant as SMEs navigate economic diversification and digital transformation initiatives under Vision 2030.

The People dimension was also found to have a significant positive effect on Corporate Excellence, reinforcing the view that human capital remains a cornerstone of organizational performance within excellence models. Employee empowerment, capability development, and engagement contribute directly to service quality, innovation, and continuous improvement, all of which are key dimensions of corporate excellence (Para-González et al., 2021; Banyhamdan et al., 2020). This finding supports prior research indicating that people-centered practices strengthen organizational culture and enhance the successful implementation of quality and excellence initiatives (Apio, 2022; Yousif Ali &Hasaballah, 2020). For Saudi SMEs, investing in workforce development and engagement is especially important, given the rapid

pace of economic change and the growing demand for skilled and adaptable employees (Ali et al., 2020; Mostafa et al., 2024).

Processes, while exhibiting the smallest path coefficient among the enablers, nonetheless showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with Corporate Excellence. This result confirms that effective process management through standardization, efficiency, and continuous improvement contributes meaningfully to excellence outcomes. Well-designed processes reduce operational variability, improve reliability, and support consistent value delivery, which are essential components of organizational excellence (Ndalamba& Tomé, 2021; Casebolt et al., 2020). However, the comparatively weaker effect suggests that process improvements alone may be insufficient to achieve high levels of excellence unless they are supported by strategic direction, skilled people, and strong partnerships. This finding aligns with EFQM literature emphasizing that process excellence must be embedded within a broader organizational system to generate sustained performance gains (Szelagowski & Berniak-Woźny, 2020; Bukvič, 2023).

The structural model explains a moderate proportion of variance in Corporate Excellence, indicating that EFQM enablers collectively play a substantial role in shaping excellence outcomes while acknowledging the influence of additional contextual and environmental factors. This level of explanatory power is consistent with prior EFQM and quality management studies conducted in SME and public-sector contexts, where excellence is influenced by both internal capabilities and external conditions (Haerizadeh& M, 2022; Rahmati &Jalilvand, 2024). Overall, the findings validate the EFQM model as a robust and contextually relevant framework for understanding how Saudi SMEs can enhance corporate excellence through integrated managerial practices.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the EFQM literature by providing empirical evidence from Saudi SMEs, a context that has received limited attention despite its strategic importance. The results reinforce the enabler–results logic of the EFQM model and demonstrate its applicability beyond large organizations and public institutions. Practically, the findings suggest that SME leaders should adopt a holistic approach to excellence by simultaneously strengthening strategic alignment, people management, process optimization, and partnership development. Such an integrated approach is likely to enhance organizational competitiveness and support sustainable performance in line with Saudi Vision 2030 objectives.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact of key EFQM enabler dimensions Processes, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partnerships and Resources on Corporate Excellence within Saudi small and medium enterprises. The findings provide strong empirical evidence that the EFQM model constitutes a relevant and effective framework for understanding and advancing organizational excellence in the SME context. All four enablers were found to exert positive and statistically significant effects on Corporate Excellence, underscoring that excellence is not the outcome of isolated managerial initiatives but rather the result of an integrated and balanced configuration of organizational capabilities.

Among the examined dimensions, Partnerships and Resources emerged as the most influential driver of Corporate Excellence. This finding highlights the critical importance of effective resource utilization, technological capability, and strategic collaboration for SMEs operating in competitive and resource-constrained environments. The strong effect of Policy and Strategy further emphasizes the role of strategic clarity and alignment in translating organizational vision into tangible performance outcomes. In addition, the significant contributions of People practices and Processes reaffirm that human capital development and process efficiency remain fundamental pillars of sustainable organizational performance. Collectively, these results reinforce the EFQM principle that excellence is achieved through the coordinated interaction of strategic, human, operational, and relational enablers.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that Saudi SMEs aiming to enhance corporate excellence should adopt a holistic and balanced approach to EFQM implementation. Rather than concentrating efforts on a single enabler, SME leaders are encouraged to simultaneously strengthen strategic planning, invest in workforce capability development, optimize operational processes, and cultivate strong partnerships that support innovation and resilience. Such an integrated approach is particularly pertinent in the context of Saudi Arabia's ongoing economic transformation, where SMEs are expected to play a central role in driving competitiveness, diversification, and sustainable growth.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions, and the reliance on self-reported survey data

may introduce perceptual bias. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, incorporating objective performance measures, or examining additional organizational and environmental factors that may shape excellence outcomes. Nevertheless, the present study makes a meaningful contribution by providing empirical support for the applicability of the EFQM model in Saudi SMEs and by demonstrating its value as a strategic tool for fostering corporate excellence. The insights generated offer both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers committed to excellence-driven organizational transformation.

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