The Moderation of Vision 2030 in the Relationship between EFQM Model Implementation and Corporate Excellence in Saudi SMEs

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Abstract:

This study investigates the relationship between EFQM model implementation and corporate excellence in Saudi small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with a specific focus on the moderating role of Vision 2030. Drawing on organizational excellence and quality management perspectives, the study explores how internal excellence enablers and national transformation agendas interact to influence organizational outcomes in a rapidly changing economic environment. Data were collected from Saudi SMEs and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model was carefully evaluated and refined to ensure acceptable reliability and validity before testing the structural relationships. The results demonstrate that all EFQM enabler dimensions process, people, policy and strategy, and partnerships and resources have significant positive effects on corporate excellence, confirming the effectiveness of the EFQM framework in driving excellence outcomes. The moderation analysis reveals that Vision 2030 does not exert a uniform moderating effect across all EFQM enablers; rather, it significantly strengthens only the relationship between partnerships and resources and corporate excellence. This finding highlights the selective and context-dependent role of national strategic orientation, particularly in enhancing externally oriented organizational capabilities. The structural model exhibits strong explanatory power, indicating that a substantial proportion of variance in corporate excellence is explained by the combined influence of EFQM enablers and Vision 2030 alignment. Overall, the study provides empirical evidence that corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs is primarily driven by robust internal management practices, while Vision 2030 functions as a contextual amplifier for specific excellence dimensions.

Keywords: *EFQM Model; Corporate Excellence; Vision 2030; Saudi SMEs.*

1. Introduction

Achieving organizational excellence has become a strategic imperative for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Saudi Arabia, particularly in light of the profound economic and institutional transformations associated with Saudi Vision 2030. As competitive pressures intensify and business environments become increasingly dynamic, organizations are required to adopt structured excellence frameworks that enhance strategic alignment, operational capability, and long-term performance sustainability. Within this context, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model has emerged as one of the most widely recognized frameworks for guiding organizations toward excellence by integrating systematic management practices and continuous improvement principles (Ranjbarian, 2022). The EFQM model emphasizes a set of core enablers processes, people, policy and strategy, and partnerships and resources that collectively shape organizational outcomes and performance excellence (Haerizadeh & M.V.S., 2022).

The EFQM framework has been extensively applied across sectors to strengthen organizational learning, foster innovation, and improve operational sustainability. Its enabler-based structure supports the development of coherent management systems that link internal capabilities with performance results (Keshtegar et al., 2021). In developing and transitioning economies, EFQM provides a particularly valuable roadmap for enhancing organizational maturity and addressing performance gaps, especially among SMEs that often face constraints related to resources, managerial expertise, and formalized systems (Ndalamba & Tomé, 2021). Recent studies further demonstrate that EFQM implementation contributes to improved competitiveness and quality outcomes by embedding continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making into organizational practices (Zhang et al., 2021). As such, EFQM represents a robust internal mechanism for driving corporate excellence within resource-constrained organizational settings.

In the Saudi Arabian context, the pursuit of organizational excellence is closely intertwined with Saudi Vision 2030, the national transformation agenda aimed at economic diversification, private-sector development, and institutional effectiveness. Vision 2030 actively promotes the adoption of international best practices, stronger governance structures, and enhanced performance management systems across organizations (Aldhobaib, 2025). The agenda places particular emphasis on empowering SMEs as key drivers of economic growth, innovation, and employment creation (Kayani & Alzaid, 2025). Empirical evidence suggests that

alignment with Vision 2030 initiatives enhances organizational learning, innovation capacity, and competitive positioning, especially for SMEs operating within a rapidly evolving, knowledge-driven economy (Larabi, 2025). Through regulatory reforms, performance-based incentives, and institutional support mechanisms, Vision 2030 reshapes the strategic environment in which SMEs operate.

Because Vision 2030 introduces new institutional pressures, regulatory expectations, and performance-oriented reforms, it has the potential to influence how internal quality management frameworks such as EFQM translate into corporate excellence outcomes. National transformation agendas can shape organizational behavior by redefining strategic priorities, stakeholder expectations, and governance standards (Khan & Iqbal, 2020). Recent research highlights that performance management systems aligned with Vision 2030 objectives are more likely to generate sustainable organizational outcomes, particularly when integrated with quality and excellence frameworks (Awad et al., 2023). However, the extent to which Vision 2030 strengthens or conditions the effectiveness of EFQM implementation remains insufficiently explored.

Despite the growing body of research on organizational excellence, empirical studies examining the interaction between EFQM implementation and national transformation policies are still limited. Existing research has largely focused on the direct effects of EFQM on organizational learning, innovation, human resource practices, and competitive advantage (Para-González et al., 2022). Other studies have examined excellence outcomes within public and educational institutions without explicitly considering the role of national strategic agendas (Shehadeh, 2024). More recent reviews emphasize the need to contextualize EFQM within broader institutional and strategic environments to fully understand its performance implications (Mutlu, 2025). Consequently, the moderating role of national development initiatives such as Vision 2030 remains an underexplored yet theoretically significant area of inquiry.

Given that Vision 2030 shapes strategic orientation, institutional standards, and stakeholder expectations, examining its moderating influence on the relationship between EFQM implementation and corporate excellence offers both theoretical and practical value. Governance-oriented excellence models highlight the importance of contextual alignment between internal management systems and external institutional frameworks (Salman & Laouisset, 2020). Moreover, competitiveness studies grounded in the Vision 2030 framework suggest

that national strategic alignment may selectively amplify organizational capabilities rather than uniformly affecting all management practices (Balola, 2025). Building on these perspectives, this study investigates the moderating role of Vision 2030 in the relationship between EFQM model implementation and corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

By integrating quality management theory, institutional transformation perspectives, and the EFQM framework, this study contributes to the organizational excellence literature by clarifying how internal excellence enablers interact with national transformation agendas. The findings provide empirical insights into how Saudi SMEs can enhance strategic readiness, strengthen operational performance, and sustain corporate excellence in alignment with Vision 2030 objectives. In addition, the study offers policy-relevant implications for supporting SME excellence initiatives within the broader national development landscape.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Discussion

The pursuit of organizational excellence has been widely examined through multiple theoretical lenses, including quality management theory, institutional theory, and performance excellence frameworks. A central model used to understand excellence in contemporary organizations is the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model, which conceptualizes excellence as the outcome of structured enablers process, people, policy and strategy, and partnership and resources working in synergy to enhance organizational outcomes (Ranjbarian, 2022; Haerizadeh & M.V.S., 2022). As a holistic framework, EFQM aligns with continuous improvement theory, suggesting that organizational systems must evolve through feedback-driven learning, stakeholder engagement, and data-informed decision-making (Sarmadi et al., 2025). This model has been widely validated across sectors for its ability to establish a culture of excellence and strengthen innovation, leadership, and operational capability (Keshtegar et al., 2021; Para-González et al., 2022).

From a theoretical standpoint, the EFQM model is grounded in quality management theory, which emphasizes systematic processes, human-capital development, and strategic alignment as key drivers of excellence. Scholars note that EFQM provides a structured mechanism for linking organizational enablers with performance outcomes, ensuring that goals, resources, and practices are aligned to produce superior results (Mutlu, 2025; Zhang et al., 2021). The model also reflects principles from the resource-based view (RBV), as it stresses the importance of developing

human resources, partnerships, and organizational capabilities to achieve sustainable advantage (Kayani & Alzaid, 2025). By reinforcing internal strengths and reducing inefficiencies, EFQM contributes to improved competitiveness, agility, and stakeholder satisfaction. In Saudi Arabia, theories of organizational excellence increasingly intersect with institutional transformation perspectives, particularly those emerging from Saudi Vision 2030. Vision 2030 introduces institutional pressures that encourage SMEs to adopt advanced governance mechanisms, enhance quality systems, and align with global standards (Aldhobaib, 2025; Al-Towaijri, 2020). According to institutional theory, national policies and regulatory frameworks shape organizational behavior by providing normative expectations, performance benchmarks, and strategic orientations (Larabi, 2025; Awad et al., 2023). Vision 2030 functions as an institutional force that directs SMEs toward performance excellence, innovation, and competitiveness by emphasizing accountability, transparency, and operational modernization (Khan & Iqbal, 2020).

The integration of EFQM within the Vision 2030 context can also be examined through the lens of strategic alignment theory, which posits that optimal organizational performance occurs when internal capabilities align with external strategic demands (Balola, 2025; Shehadeh, 2024). Vision 2030's emphasis on private-sector empowerment, digitalization, and quality enhancement creates an environment where the effectiveness of EFQM implementation is likely to depend on an organization's alignment with national transformation objectives (Salman & Laouisset, 2020). Therefore, Vision 2030 may not only influence organizational performance directly but also shape the extent to which EFQM enablers translate into excellence outcomes. Overall, the theoretical foundations suggest that EFQM serves as a powerful internal mechanism for fostering excellence, while Vision 2030 functions as an external institutional driver that may strengthen or modify the impact of EFQM implementation. Understanding the interaction between these two forces provides a meaningful theoretical basis for examining moderated relationships within Saudi SMEs, particularly in a rapidly changing policy environment. This theoretical lens supports the need for empirical investigation into how EFQM enablers and Vision 2030 objectives jointly influence corporate excellence.

2.2 Hypotheses Development

The EFQM model has long been recognized as a comprehensive framework that links organizational enablers such as process management, people development, policy and strategy, and partnerships and resources to

superior performance outcomes (Ranjbarian, 2022; Haerizadeh & M.V.S., 2022). Its enabler-based logic aligns with quality management theory, which proposes that excellence arises from structured processes, empowered employees, strategic clarity, and effective resource utilization (Keshtegar et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). Within the context of Saudi SMEs, the adoption of EFQM is increasingly viewed as a mechanism for enhancing competitiveness, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability (Sarmadi et al., 2025). Given the growing national emphasis on excellence and transformation under Vision 2030, examining the relationships between EFQM enablers and corporate excellence is both theoretically grounded and practically relevant (Aldhobaib, 2025).

Process and Corporate Excellence

Process management is a foundational dimension of EFQM, emphasizing the design, control, and improvement of organizational processes to ensure consistency, efficiency, and value creation. Prior studies demonstrate that well-structured processes enhance operational performance, reduce variability, and strengthen customer satisfaction all core elements of excellence (Para-González et al., 2022; Mutlu, 2025). In SMEs, process maturity is often a critical determinant of performance because these firms frequently operate with limited resources and unstandardized procedures (Shehadeh, 2024). Research in developing economies shows that process improvement initiatives significantly improve organizational agility, innovation, and excellence outcomes (Rahmati & Jalilvand, 2024). Given this evidence, a strong positive relationship between EFQM process management and corporate excellence is expected.

H1: Process significantly influences corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

People and Corporate Excellence

The EFQM's "people" criterion emphasizes the development, engagement, and empowerment of employees as strategic assets that drive organizational success. Drawing on the resource-based view (RBV), employees represent a unique and valuable resource capable of generating superior performance when effectively managed (Kayani & Alzaid, 2025). Empirical studies confirm that training, motivation, participation, and continuous development contribute to higher levels of quality, innovation, and organizational excellence (Ndalamba & Tomé, 2021; Sarmadi et al., 2025). In Saudi SMEs, workforce capability is especially critical, as many enterprises face skill shortages, talent competition, and constraints in human-capital development (Awad et al., 2023). When employee skills and

engagement are aligned with organizational goals, excellence outcomes become more attainable.

H2: People significantly influence corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

Policy and Strategy and Corporate Excellence

Policy and strategy provide the directional foundation for organizational excellence by shaping long-term priorities, goals, and performance expectations. EFQM emphasizes alignment between strategy, stakeholder needs, and operational practices, arguing that such alignment enhances performance coherence and excellence (Ranjbarian, 2022). Empirical research supports the notion that clear and adaptive strategies improve decision-making, resource allocation, and innovation, ultimately contributing to higher levels of excellence (Zhang et al., 2021; Balola, 2025). In the Saudi context, SMEs are increasingly required to articulate strategic plans that align with Vision 2030 objectives, market dynamics, and competitive pressures (Aldhobaib, 2025). Strategic clarity and adaptability allow organizations to navigate institutional changes while sustaining performance outcomes.

H3: Policy and strategy significantly influence corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

Partnerships and Resources and Corporate Excellence

Partnerships and resources represent another critical EFQM enabler that reflects an organization's ability to manage its internal and external resources, including suppliers, technology, finances, and collaborations. According to quality management theory and RBV, effective resource management enhances organizational capability and performance potential (Kayani & Alzaid, 2025). Research highlights that SMEs with strong partnerships and optimized resource utilization achieve higher efficiency, improved innovation, and better customer outcomes (Para-González et al., 2022; Mutlu, 2025). In Saudi Arabia, partnerships particularly with government institutions, private-sector actors, and support agencies play a prominent role under the Vision 2030 framework, which seeks to build an interconnected ecosystem for SME empowerment (Larabi, 2025). Accordingly, the ability to manage resources and partnerships is expected to contribute significantly to excellence outcomes.

H4: Partnerships and resources significantly influence corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

Moderating Role of Vision 2030

Saudi Vision 2030 introduces a national institutional framework designed to accelerate economic diversification, improve service quality, and

enhance organizational performance across sectors. Institutional theory suggests that broad national agendas can shape organizational behaviors by creating normative pressures, performance expectations, and strategic incentives (Khan & Iqbal, 2020; Awad et al., 2023). Vision 2030 emphasizes excellence, innovation, accountability, and private-sector development, setting the direction for SMEs to adopt international quality frameworks such as EFQM (Aldhobaib, 2025; Al-Towaijri, 2020). Emerging research indicates that organizations aligned with Vision 2030 exhibit stronger performance improvements, better governance practices, and enhanced strategic clarity (Larabi, 2025; Balola, 2025). From a theoretical perspective, Vision 2030 may function as a strategic catalyst that strengthens the relationship between EFQM implementation and excellence outcomes. When SMEs internalize Vision 2030 principles such as transparency, digital readiness, innovation, and customer-centricity their ability to extract value from EFQM enablers increases. Strategic alignment theory supports the idea that the effectiveness of internal systems (EFQM) is enhanced when they correspond with external institutional expectations (Rahmati & Jalilvand, 2024). Therefore, Vision 2030 may amplify the positive influence of EFQM practices on excellence by providing a conducive environment, policy support, and performance-driven incentives.

H5: Vision 2030 significantly moderates the relationship between EFQM model implementation and corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine how the implementation of the EFQM model influences corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs and to assess whether Vision 2030 moderates this relationship. Quantitative approaches are widely recommended in organizational excellence and quality-management research because they allow for structured measurement of complex constructs, objective analysis of variable relationships, and generalizable insights across diverse organizational settings (Haerizadeh & M.V.S., 2022; Mutlu, 2025). Survey-based designs, in particular, have been consistently used in studies that evaluate EFQM enablers, performance outcomes, and strategic alignment processes (Ranjbarian, 2022; Rahmati & Jalilvand, 2024). In line with this methodological tradition, the present study collected data using a structured questionnaire designed to capture perceptions related to EFQM dimensions, organizational excellence indicators, and Vision 2030 alignment. The study targeted Saudi small

and medium-sized enterprises, which play a central role in national economic diversification and are directly impacted by the transformative objectives of Vision 2030 (Kayani & Alzaid, 2025; Al-Towaijri, 2020). SMEs were considered an appropriate population because they are currently undergoing significant modernization in management systems, operational structures, and strategic capabilities changes that make them an ideal setting for examining how EFQM practices contribute to excellence outcomes (Buhulaiga, 2021; Larabi, 2025).

Participants included managers, department heads, quality coordinators, and individuals with direct knowledge of organizational processes and performance systems. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure inclusion of respondents with relevant expertise, which is consistent with sampling techniques used in previous EFQM and quality management studies in emerging markets (Zhang et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2020). Data collection was conducted online through professional SME networks, business support institutions, and digital communication platforms, a strategy that aligns well with the growing adoption of e-business and digital communication among Saudi SMEs (Selaković et al., 2023; Kayani & Alzaid, 2025). The questionnaire contained measurement items adapted from established EFQM and organizational excellence instruments, ensuring consistency with validated frameworks and previous empirical studies (Para-González et al., 2022; Mutlu, 2025). EFQM enablers were operationalized through items representing process management, people development, policy and strategy alignment, and partnership and resource management core components of the EFQM excellence framework. Corporate excellence was measured through indicators related to innovation capability, operational performance, stakeholder satisfaction, and competitiveness (Raoof et al., 2021; Kaczmarczyk, 2024). Vision 2030 alignment was assessed using items that reflect strategic fit with national transformation goals, institutional expectations, and performance-oriented modernization efforts (Aldhobaib, 2025; Balola, 2025). All items used a five-point Likert scale to capture the degree of agreement and to allow for consistent quantitative analysis. Prior to deployment, the instrument was reviewed to ensure clarity, content relevance, and cultural alignment with the Saudi business environment, following established practices in excellence research (Shehadeh, 2024; Awad et al., 2023).

Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM), which is widely recognized as a robust technique for evaluating complex relationships among latent constructs in organizational excellence studies

(Haerizadeh & M.V.S., 2022; Rahmati & Jalilvand, 2024). The analysis involved several procedures, including data screening, reliability assessment, and validity testing through composite reliability and average variance extracted. To examine the moderating role of Vision 2030, interaction terms and bootstrapping procedures were applied, reflecting approaches used in studies investigating moderation within excellence and quality management contexts (Yanya & Mahamat, 2020; Kwarteng et al., 2022). Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples provided robust significance estimates and improved the accuracy of the moderation analysis. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the confidentiality of their responses and the academic purpose of the research. No identifying information was collected, ensuring anonymity and compliance with ethical standards commonly applied in organizational research (Mukhtar & Nawang, 2025). Overall, the adopted methodology provides a rigorous and reliable foundation for examining the relationship between EFQM implementation and corporate excellence under the moderating effect of Vision 2030 within Saudi SMEs.

4. Findings

This section presents the key empirical results of the study, beginning with data screening and descriptive statistics, followed by an evaluation of the measurement model and structural relationships. The analyses assess the reliability and validity of the constructs, the predictive power of the model, and the significance of the hypothesized paths, including the moderating effect of Vision 2030 on the relationship between EFQM implementation and corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs.

Normality of the study variables was assessed using skewness and kurtosis statistics, as presented in Table 1. The results indicate that all constructs Process (Pro), People (Pe), Policy and Strategy (PS), Partners and Resources (PR), Corporate Excellence (CE), and Vision 2030 (V) exhibit skewness values ranging between −1.095 and 0.585, which fall well within the commonly accepted threshold of ±2 for social science research. Similarly, kurtosis values for all variables range between −1.171 and 1.512, remaining within the acceptable limits of ±7 suggested for multivariate analyses. These findings suggest that the data do not deviate substantially from normality. Although partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) does not require strict normal data distribution, assessing skewness and kurtosis remains important to ensure data quality and to rule out extreme distributional abnormalities.

Therefore, the normality assessment confirms that the dataset is suitable for subsequent PLS-SEM analyses without the need for data transformation.

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
V	347	-1.064	1.512

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

As presented in Table 2, the descriptive statistics for all study constructs, including Process (Pro), People (Pe), Policy and Strategy (PS), Partners and Resources (PR), Corporate Excellence (CE), and Vision 2030 (V) based on responses from 347 participants. The results indicate that the EFQM enabler dimensions Pro, Pe, PS, and PR recorded moderate mean values ranging from 2.727 to 2.789, with relatively similar standard deviations (between 1.084 and 1.124). These findings suggest that respondents perceived the implementation of EFQM enablers within their organizations to be at a moderate level, reflecting partial adoption rather than full institutionalization of excellence practices. In contrast, Corporate Excellence (CE) reported a high mean score of 4.372 (SD = 0.688), indicating that respondents generally perceived their organizations as achieving a high level of overall excellence outcomes. Similarly, Vision 2030 (V) recorded a high mean value of 4.306 (SD = 0.799), suggesting strong awareness and perceived alignment with national strategic objectives among the surveyed organizations. The observed disparity between the moderate EFQM enabler scores and the high levels of perceived corporate excellence and Vision 2030 alignment may reflect the influence of external policy drivers and strategic aspirations, which can elevate outcome perceptions even when internal process maturity remains evolving. Overall, the descriptive results provide an initial indication of variation across constructs and justify further structural analysis to examine the relationships among EFQM enablers, Vision 2030, and corporate excellence.

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
V	347	4.306	0.799

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

As illustrated in Figure 1, the initial measurement model results prior to construct refinement. The initial assessment revealed that while most EFQM enabler constructs Process, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partners and Resources demonstrated acceptable indicator loadings, the Vision 2030 construct exhibited substantial measurement deficiencies. Several Vision 2030 indicators displayed very low and negative factor loadings, indicating weak item–construct relationships and potential conceptual misalignment. Such loading patterns fall below the recommended threshold for reflective measurement models and suggest that the construct did not adequately capture a unidimensional latent variable in its initial specification. Retaining indicators with negative or weak loadings can distort construct validity, inflate measurement error, and compromise the reliability of subsequent structural estimates. Accordingly, the initial model was deemed unsuitable for hypothesis testing without further refinement. These findings necessitated a measurement purification process, leading to the removal of problematic indicators and the re-estimation of the model to achieve acceptable reliability and convergent validity prior to structural model evaluation.

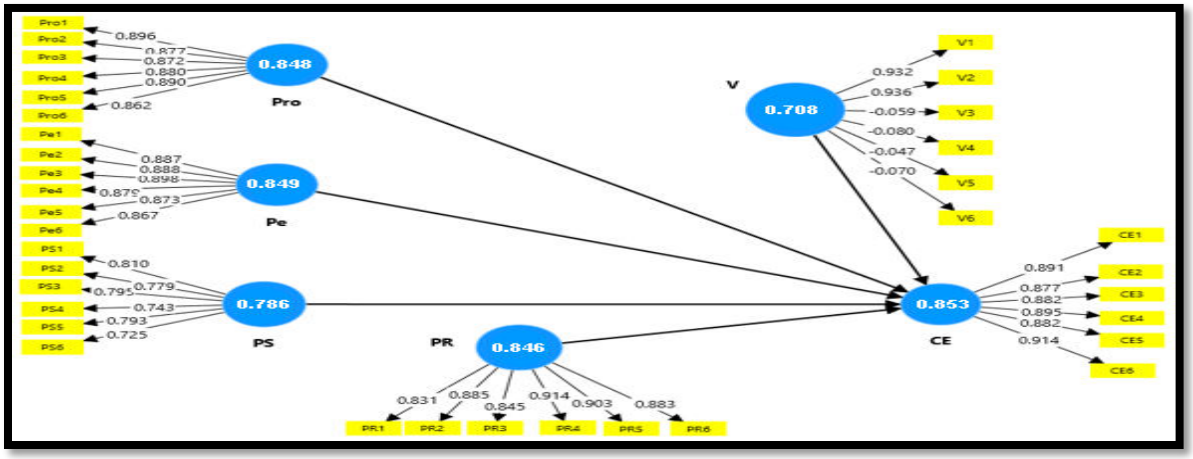

Figure 1: Initial Model measurements

As reported in Table 3, the results of the initial measurement model assessment include indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity for all constructs. Overall, the EFQM enabler constructs Process (Pro), People (Pe), Policy and Strategy (PS), and Partners and Resources (PR) as well as Corporate Excellence (CE), demonstrate satisfactory measurement quality in the initial model. All indicators associated with these constructs exhibit strong factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, with loading values ranging from 0.725 to 0.914. In addition, Cronbach's alpha values (0.786–0.853) and composite reliability values (0.810–0.862) indicate adequate internal consistency reliability, while average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 confirm acceptable convergent validity. These results suggest that the EFQM enabler dimensions and Corporate Excellence are measured reliably and consistently, supporting their suitability for inclusion in the structural model. In contrast, the Vision 2030 construct exhibits significant measurement deficiencies in the initial model. Although indicators V1 and V2 show high positive loadings (0.932 and 0.936), the remaining indicators (V3–V6) display very low and negative loadings ranging from −0.047 to −0.080. This pattern indicates weak indicator–construct relationships and a lack of unidimensionality within the construct. Consequently, the Vision 2030 construct records a low composite reliability value of 0.342 and an AVE of 0.264, both of which fall well below acceptable thresholds for convergent validity. Retaining indicators with negative loadings may introduce measurement error and distort subsequent structural path estimates. Therefore, the initial measurement model highlights the need for construct purification through the removal of problematic Vision 2030 indicators and re-estimation of the model to ensure reliable and valid measurement prior to hypothesis testing.

Table 3: Initial Model measurements

Items	**Loading**	**Cronbach's alpha**	**Composite reliability**	**Average variance extracted (AVE)**
CE1	0.891	0.853	0.862	0.714
CE2	0.877			
CE3	0.882			

CE4	0.895			
CE5	0.882			
CE6	0.914			
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	0.887	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			
V1	0.932	0.708	0.342	0.264
V2	0.936			
V3	-0.059			
V4	-0.080			
V5	-0.047			
V6	-0.070			

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

As illustrated in Figure 2, the final measurement model demonstrates substantial improvement following construct refinement, with all retained indicators exhibiting strong and positive factor loadings above the

recommended threshold of 0.70. After removing problematic Vision 2030 indicators identified in the initial model, the remaining constructs Process, People, Policy and Strategy, Partners and Resources, Corporate Excellence, and Vision 2030 exhibit satisfactory measurement quality. The refined model achieves adequate internal consistency reliability, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding accepted cut-off levels, while convergent validity is confirmed through average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 for all constructs. These results indicate that each construct explains a substantial proportion of variance in its indicators and that the measurement items consistently represent their respective latent variables. The improvement observed in the final measurement model confirms the effectiveness of the construct purification process and supports the unidimensionality and reliability of the retained indicators. By addressing the measurement deficiencies identified in the initial model, the refined model minimizes measurement error and enhances the robustness of subsequent structural path estimates. Consequently, the final measurement model satisfies the recommended criteria for reliability and validity in PLS-SEM, providing a sound basis for testing the hypothesized relationships in the structural model.

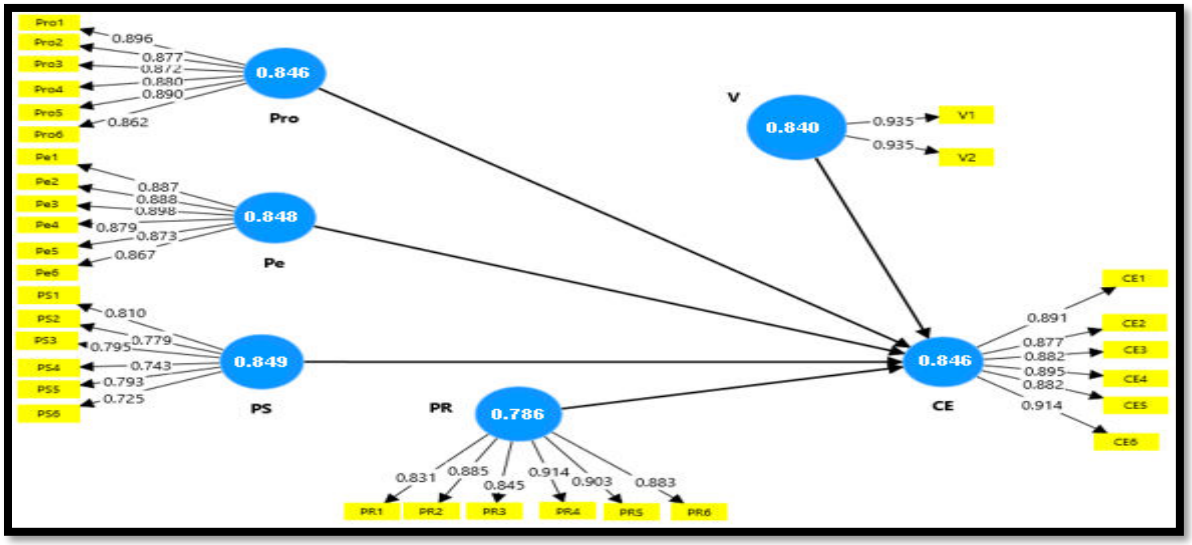

Figure 2: Final Model measurements

As reported in Table 4, the final measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and convergent validity for all study constructs following the refinement of the initial model. All retained indicators exhibit strong and positive factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, with values ranging from 0.725 to 0.935. Corporate Excellence (CE) shows high indicator loadings (0.877–0.914), accompanied by

acceptable internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.846; composite reliability = 0.857) and convergent validity (AVE = 0.693). Similarly, the EFQM enabler constructs Process (Pro), People (Pe), Policy and Strategy (PS), and Partners and Resources (PR) demonstrate adequate reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.786 to 0.849 and composite reliability values between 0.810 and 0.860. The AVE values for these constructs range from 0.540 to 0.700, confirming that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. Notably, the Vision 2030 construct shows substantial improvement in the final measurement model following the removal of problematic indicators. The remaining indicators (V1 and V2) exhibit very high loadings of 0.935, resulting in strong internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.840; composite reliability = 0.787) and a high AVE value of 0.756. This indicates a well-defined and unidimensional construct that meets all recommended measurement criteria. Overall, the results of the final measurement model confirm that all constructs are measured reliably and validly, providing a robust foundation for subsequent structural model and hypothesis testing.

Table 4: Final Model measurements

Items	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CE1	0.891	0.846	0.857	0.693
CE2	0.877			
CE3	0.882			
CE4	0.895			
CE5	0.882			
CE6	0.914			
PR1	0.831	0.786	0.810	0.540
PR2	0.885			
PR3	0.845			
PR4	0.914			
PR5	0.903			
PR6	0.883			
PS1	0.810	0.849	0.860	0.700
PS2	0.779			
PS3	0.795			

PS4	0.743			
PS5	0.793			
PS6	0.725			
Pe1	0.887	0.848	0.858	0.697
Pe2	0.888			
Pe3	0.898			
Pe4	0.879			
Pe5	0.873			
Pe6	0.867			
Pro1	0.896	0.846	0.857	0.693
Pro2	0.877			
Pro3	0.872			
Pro4	0.880			
Pro5	0.890			
Pro6	0.862			
V1	0.935	0.840	0.787	0.756
V2	0.935			

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

As shown in Table 5, the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) confirms that discriminant validity is fully achieved among all constructs in the model. For constructs to demonstrate acceptable discriminant validity, HTMT values should typically fall below the accepted thresholds of 0.85 (strict criterion) or 0.90 (more lenient criterion). The results in Table 5 show that all HTMT values fall within these accepted ranges, with inter-construct ratios ranging from 0.321 to 0.827, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. For example, Corporate Excellence shows moderate HTMT correlations with Partners and Resources (0.503) and Policy and Strategy (0.420), while the People and Process constructs display similarly acceptable ratios. Notably, Vision 2030 demonstrates discriminant validity as well, with HTMT values such as 0.754 with Corporate Excellence and 0.516 with Partners and Resources, all remaining below the maximum acceptable threshold. These results verify that no construct overlaps excessively with another, and each captures a unique dimension of the EFQM–Vision 2030 framework. Therefore, the HTMT analysis presented in Table 5 provides strong evidence that the measurement model satisfies the accepted discriminant validity requirements and supports the robustness of the structural model.

Table 5: The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

	CE	PR	PS	Pe	Pro	V
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		
V	0.754	0.516	0.448	0.337	0.358	

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

As shown in Table 6, the Fornell–Larcker criterion further confirms that discriminant validity is satisfactorily established across all constructs in the measurement model. According to the accepted standard, the square root of each construct's AVE displayed on the diagonal should be greater than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that a construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with external constructs. The results in Table 6 clearly satisfy this requirement. For instance, Corporate Excellence shows a diagonal value of 0.890, which is higher than its correlations with Partners and Resources (0.485), Policy and Strategy (0.421), People (0.306), Process (0.325), and Vision 2030 (0.604). The same pattern appears across all EFQM constructs, with Partners and Resources (0.877), Policy and Strategy (0.975), People (0.882), and Process (0.880) each demonstrating diagonal values that exceed their inter-construct correlations. Notably, Vision 2030 also shows strong discriminant validity, with a diagonal value of 0.935, higher than its correlations with Corporate Excellence (0.604), Partners and Resources (0.471), Policy and Strategy (0.426), People (0.305), and Process (0.329). Since all diagonal values exceed the corresponding off-diagonal correlations, the Fornell–Larcker criterion confirms that each construct is empirically distinct and that the final measurement model meets the accepted discriminant validity standards.

Table 6: Discriminant validity fornell-larcker criterion

	CE	PR	PS	Pe	Pro	V
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	
V	0.604	0.471	0.426	0.305	0.329	0.935

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

As reported in Table 7, the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that the structural model explains a substantial proportion of variance in Corporate Excellence (CE). Specifically, the R^2 value for CE is 0.904, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.902, suggesting that approximately 90.4% of the variance in corporate excellence is jointly explained by the EFQM enabler constructs and Vision 2030 included in the model. According to established PLS-SEM guidelines, R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 can be described as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. Therefore, the reported R^2 value reflects a very strong explanatory power of the proposed model.

The high R^2 value indicates that the selected predictors capture the key organizational drivers of corporate excellence within the study context. This finding suggests a strong alignment between EFQM enablers and national strategic orientation (Vision 2030) in explaining excellence outcomes. At the same time, the adjusted R^2 value being very close to the original R^2 indicates that the model is not over-fitted and that the explanatory power is stable after accounting for model complexity. Overall, the results confirm the robustness of the structural model and provide strong empirical support for proceeding with hypothesis testing and interpretation of path relationships.

Table 7: R Square (R^2)

	R-square	**R-square adjusted**
CE	0.904	0.902

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

As illustrated in Figure 3, the reflective structural (inner) model presents the hypothesized relationships between the EFQM enabler constructs Process, People, Policy and Strategy, and Partners and Resources and Corporate Excellence, as well as the moderating role of Vision 2030. The model shows positive direct paths from all EFQM enablers to Corporate Excellence, indicating that improvements in internal processes, human resources, strategic orientation, and partnership and resource management contribute to higher levels of organizational excellence. The magnitude of the standardized path coefficients suggests that the effects of Policy and Strategy and Partners and Resources are comparatively stronger, highlighting their central role in driving excellence outcomes within the study context. In addition, Figure 3 illustrates the interaction

effects between Vision 2030 and each EFQM enabler construct. The moderation paths indicate that Vision 2030 strengthens the relationship between Partners and Resources and Corporate Excellence, while its interaction with Process, People, and Policy and Strategy appears comparatively weaker. This pattern suggests that alignment with Vision 2030 particularly enhances the effectiveness of external-oriented capabilities, such as partnerships and resource utilization, in achieving corporate excellence. Overall, the structural model visualization supports the proposed conceptual framework and demonstrates how national strategic orientation operates as a contextual factor shaping the strength of EFQM–excellence relationships.

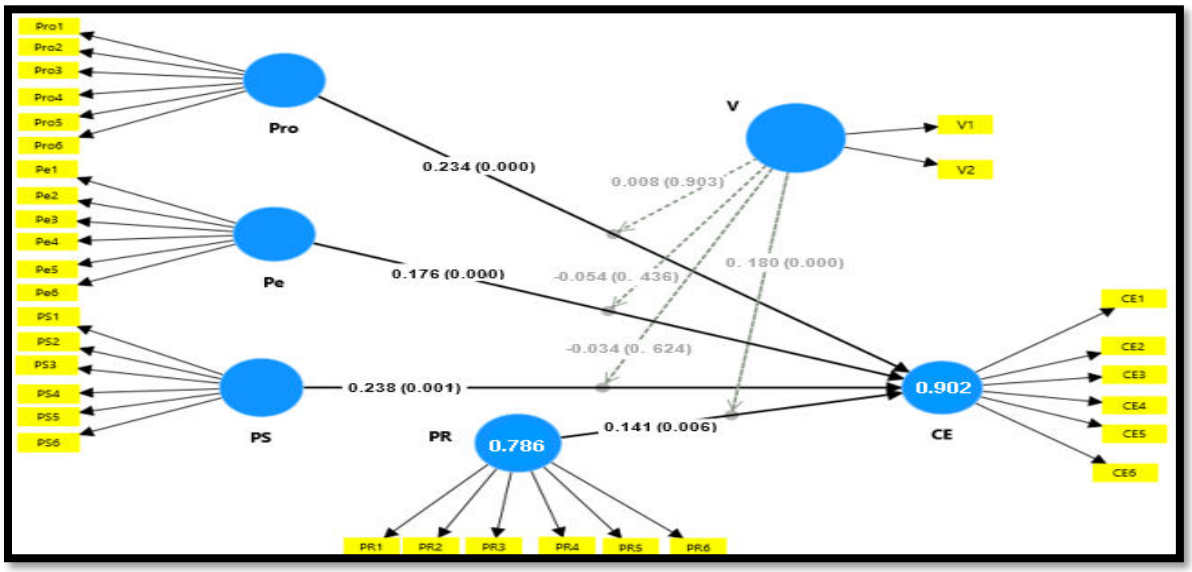

Figure3: Reflective structural (inner) model with Moderation PLS-SEM

As reported in Table 8, the hypothesis testing results reveal that all direct relationships between the EFQM enabler constructs and Corporate Excellence (CE) are positive and statistically significant. Specifically, Partners and Resources (PR) exhibit a significant positive effect on CE (β = 0.141, t = 3.022, p = 0.006), indicating that effective management of partnerships and organizational resources contributes meaningfully to excellence outcomes. Similarly, Policy and Strategy (PS) demonstrate a strong positive relationship with CE (β = 0.238, t = 3.052, p = 0.001), highlighting the importance of strategic alignment and policy clarity in achieving corporate excellence. The effects of People (Pe) (β = 0.176, t = 2.276, p < 0.001) and Process (Pro) (β = 0.234, t = 3.151, p < 0.001) are also significant, suggesting that human capital development and process efficiency play critical roles in enhancing organizational excellence.

Regarding the moderation analysis, the results indicate a selective moderating effect of Vision 2030. The interaction between Vision 2030 and Partners and Resources (V × PR → CE) is positive and statistically significant (β = 0.180, t = 5.029, p < 0.001), demonstrating that alignment with Vision 2030 strengthens the impact of partnerships and resource management on corporate excellence. In contrast, the interaction effects between Vision 2030 and Process (β = 0.008, p = 0.903), People (β = −0.054, p = 0.436), and Policy and Strategy (β = −0.034, p = 0.624) are not statistically significant. These findings suggest that Vision 2030 does not uniformly moderate all EFQM enabler–excellence relationships but instead exerts a targeted moderating influence, particularly on externally oriented and resource-dependent dimensions. Overall, the results provide partial support for the moderation hypothesis and confirm the robustness of the proposed structural model.

Table 8: Hypothesis Test results

Hypotheses	Beta	Sample Mean (M)	SD	T statistics	P values
PR -> CE	0.141	0.139	0.046	3.022	0.006
PS -> CE	0.238	0.235	0.077	3.052	0.001
Pe -> CE	0.176	0.173	0.076	2.276	0.000
Pro -> CE	0.234	0.23	0.073	3.151	0.000
V x Pro -> CE	0.008	0.007	0.06	0.117	0.903
V x Pe -> CE	-0.054	-0.052	0.063	-0.825	0.436
V x PS -> CE	-0.034	-0.032	0.063	-0.508	0.624
V x PR -> CE	0.180	0.176	0.035	5.029	0.000

Pro: Process; Pe: People; PS: Policy and strategy; PR: Partner and resources; CE: Corporate excellence; V: Vision 2030

5. Discussion

This study examined the moderating role of Saudi Vision 2030 in the relationship between EFQM model implementation and corporate excellence in Saudi SMEs. The findings provide strong empirical evidence that EFQM enablers remain critical drivers of corporate excellence, while Vision 2030 plays a selective and context-specific moderating role rather than a universal one. Overall, the results contribute to the organizational excellence and quality management literature by clarifying how internal excellence frameworks and national transformation agendas interact within an emerging-economy SME context. The results show that all

EFQM enabler dimensions process, people, policy and strategy, and partnerships and resources have statistically significant and positive effects on corporate excellence. This finding reinforces the core logic of the EFQM model, which conceptualizes excellence as an outcome of integrated organizational enablers operating in a mutually reinforcing manner (Ranjbarian, 2022; Haerizadeh & M.V.S., 2022). In line with prior research, effective process management enhances consistency, efficiency, and operational control, which are essential for achieving sustainable excellence, particularly in SMEs where resource limitations often magnify inefficiencies (Para-González et al., 2022; Mutlu, 2025). Similarly, the significant effect of people on corporate excellence underscores the importance of employee capability, engagement, and continuous development as strategic assets, consistent with the resource-based view and EFQM's emphasis on human capital as a source of competitive advantage (Ndalamba & Tomé, 2021; Kayani & Alzaid, 2025).

The significant influence of policy and strategy on corporate excellence highlights the importance of strategic clarity and alignment in achieving superior organizational outcomes. EFQM emphasizes that excellence cannot be sustained without coherent strategies that align organizational objectives, stakeholder expectations, and operational practices (Zhang et al., 2021; Balola, 2025). In the Saudi SME context, this finding is particularly relevant, as organizations are increasingly required to align their strategies with Vision 2030 priorities such as innovation, digitalization, and private-sector competitiveness (Aldhobaib, 2025; Al-Towaijri, 2020). Strategic alignment enables SMEs to navigate institutional change more effectively, thereby translating quality initiatives into measurable excellence outcomes. Among the EFQM enablers, partnerships and resources also demonstrate a significant positive effect on corporate excellence, reflecting the importance of external collaboration and effective resource utilization. This result is consistent with studies emphasizing that SMEs rely heavily on partnerships with suppliers, government agencies, and support institutions to compensate for internal resource constraints (Larabi, 2025; Kayani & Alzaid, 2025). Within the Vision 2030 ecosystem, partnerships are particularly salient, as national transformation policies actively promote collaboration, public–private partnerships, and ecosystem-based development to enhance SME performance (Awad et al., 2023; Khan & Iqbal, 2020).

A key contribution of this study lies in its examination of Vision 2030 as a moderating variable. The results reveal that Vision 2030 significantly moderates only the relationship between partnerships and resources and

corporate excellence, while its moderating effects on process, people, and policy and strategy are not statistically significant. This finding indicates partial moderation, suggesting that Vision 2030 does not uniformly amplify all EFQM enablers but instead strengthens specific dimensions that are more externally oriented and institutionally embedded. From an institutional theory perspective, Vision 2030 functions as a macro-level framework that reshapes organizational environments through policy incentives, regulatory reforms, and performance expectations (Khan & Iqbal, 2020; Elango & Dhandapani, 2020). These institutional pressures appear to be particularly relevant for partnership formation, access to resources, and inter-organizational collaboration, which are directly influenced by national programs, funding mechanisms, and development initiatives under Vision 2030 (Larabi, 2025; Balola, 2025).

The absence of significant moderation effects for process, people, and policy and strategy suggests that these EFQM enablers operate largely as internal organizational capabilities whose effectiveness depends more on managerial practices and organizational maturity than on external policy alignment. This finding aligns with strategic alignment theory, which posits that while external strategies shape organizational direction, internal systems such as processes and human resource practices must first reach a certain level of maturity before external pressures can meaningfully enhance their impact (Shehadeh, 2024; Rahmati & Jalilvand, 2024). In other words, Vision 2030 may create a favorable environment for excellence, but it does not automatically strengthen all internal EFQM mechanisms unless SMEs possess the internal readiness to absorb and operationalize national strategic objectives.

The high explanatory power of the model, as reflected by the substantial R^2 value for corporate excellence, further underscores the strong alignment between EFQM enablers and excellence outcomes in the Saudi SME context. This finding suggests that EFQM provides a comprehensive and contextually appropriate framework for capturing the key drivers of excellence within organizations operating under national transformation agendas (Sarmadi et al., 2025; Rahmati & Jalilvand, 2024). At the same time, the selective moderation results caution against assuming that national visions function as blanket performance enhancers. Instead, their influence appears to be contingent on the nature of the organizational capability being examined.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the role of EFQM model implementation in driving corporate excellence among Saudi SMEs and assessed the moderating influence of Saudi Vision 2030. The findings demonstrate that all EFQM enabler dimensions process, people, policy and strategy, and partnerships and resources play a significant role in enhancing corporate excellence. These results reinforce the robustness of the EFQM model as a comprehensive and effective framework for guiding organizational excellence, particularly within dynamic and transformation-oriented environments such as those shaped by national reform agendas. A central contribution of this study lies in clarifying the nature of Vision 2030's influence. Rather than acting as a universal moderator, Vision 2030 operates as a selective contextual enhancer. The results show that Vision 2030 significantly strengthens the relationship between partnerships and resources and corporate excellence, while its moderating effects on internally focused EFQM enablers are not statistically significant. This finding suggests that national transformation agendas primarily amplify externally oriented organizational capabilities such as collaboration, resource access, and ecosystem integration rather than uniformly reinforcing all internal management practices.

The strong explanatory power of the structural model highlights the combined importance of robust internal excellence enablers and strategic alignment with national priorities in shaping organizational outcomes. For Saudi SMEs, achieving sustained corporate excellence requires more than the adoption of structured quality management frameworks; it also demands the strategic integration of national development objectives into outward-facing activities, particularly those involving partnerships, resource mobilization, and engagement with the broader institutional environment. Overall, this study provides empirical evidence that corporate excellence in the Saudi SME context emerges from the interaction between strong internal management systems and selective alignment with Vision 2030 initiatives. By distinguishing between internal and externally oriented excellence mechanisms, the study advances understanding of how national transformation programs influence organizational performance. Future research may build on these findings by adopting longitudinal designs or examining sector-specific contexts to further illuminate how excellence evolves under sustained national transformation efforts.

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