

Examination of the influence of forward-thinking leadership of middle-level managers on the strategic dedication of operational managers through the mediation of strategic agreement.

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## المخلص

تناولت الدراسة الحالية تحليل مدى تأثير القيادة الحكيمة (المفكرة) لمدراء في الادارات الوسطى على التزام المدراء التنفيذيين من خلال التوافق الاستراتيجي . حيث تعتبر الدراسة حالة عملية في اهدافها ،تم استخدام الاسلوب الوصفي المسحي للشركة قيد الدراسة ،تألفت المجموعة الاحصائية لهذه الدراسة من 150 مديرا لسلسلة التوريد في شركة اصفهان للصلب وتم جمع البيانات عن طريق الاستبيانات واستنادا الى صيغة كوكران كان الحد الادنى لحجم العينة هو 108 فردا تم اختبارهم عشوائيا من اصل 133 استبيانا تم توزيعها على المديرين وتم استرجاع 110 منها وتم اجراء جميع التحليلات بناءا على هذه الاجابات الكلمات المفتاحية: القيادة الحكيمة –الالتزام الاستراتيجي –التوافق الاستراتيجي

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**ABSTRACT**

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The current study has examined the influence of forward-thinking leadership of middle-level managers on the strategic dedication of operational managers, facilitated by strategic agreement. This research is practical in its objectives and is categorized as a descriptive-survey study. The statistical group for this study consisted of 150 supply chain managers from Isfahan Mobarake Steel, with data gathered via questionnaires. Based on Cochran's formula, the minimum sample size was 108 individuals who were chosen at random. Out of 133 questionnaires distributed to managers, 110 were returned, and all analyses were conducted based on these 110 responses.

**Keywords:** visionary leadership, strategic commitment, strategic consensus

## 1- Statement of the problem

Any plan, regardless of how well designed, is unproductive without individuals across the organization executing the plan. The inability to execute the plan is frequently due to the teams at the middle and lower tiers of the organization not being committed to the plan. To cultivate such a strategic dedication, the leadership of the team's top managers is crucial. In this context, the forward-thinking leadership of managers is pivotal by projecting a picture of the future to employees and persuading them to engage in the actualization of the vision (Ates et al., 2020).

Within the organization, middle managers hold a crucial role in the success or failure of executing organizational transformations (Urquhart et al., 2019). They serve as the coordinators of the daily operations of an organizational unit with the activities of associated groups. The significance of concentrating on middle managers is that they offer the potential to develop an understanding of internal organizational processes that form the foundation of strategy creation in organizational changes (Woodridge and Floyd, 2008). To cultivate their subordinates, they might employ a range of leadership styles, including forward-thinking leadership (Bai et al., 2016).

Forward-thinking leadership directly addresses the establishment of strategic dedication as it centers on the motivation to pursue a strategic vision (Carten et al., 2014). Both the leadership literature and the strategy process literature praise the virtues of forward-thinking leadership. In support of this positive view, research on forward-thinking leadership has so far only reported on organizational and contextual variables that enhance the positive effects of forward-thinking leadership. Despite the acknowledgment of the relevance of forward-thinking leadership for the strategy process, only a few studies on forward-thinking leadership strategy have been examined according to the mentioned materials, this research aims to analyze the impact of forward-thinking leadership of senior

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managers on the strategic dedication of operational managers with the mediation of strategic consensus.

## **2- Theoretical foundations and research background**

### **2-1- forward thinking leadership**

Forward-thinking leadership is the leader's capability to form and communicate the organization's vision by providing guidance and setting priorities to progress the organization and attain new heights of success. A forward-thinking leader must be insightful and understand how to implement strategy in the organization that propels the company towards growth and success (Atdirawong, 2021). Consequently, companies require leaders who can realize its vision and lead to sustain a competitive edge. Forward-thinking leadership demonstrates a leader's ability to share a vision to connect the organizational aspiration to the future objective, through empowering subordinates to participate in identifying the vision, which leads to organizational transformations (Berson et al., 2001).

### **2-2- Strategic dedication**

The strategic **dedication** of middle managers is connected to the extent of their comprehension and backing of the objectives of a strategy and the strategic course of the organization. In other words, strategic dedication is related to the degree of alignment of people's behavior with the strategic direction of the organization (Ford et al., 2003). This type of dedication is distinguishable from organizational commitment and is a better predictor of employees' behavioral support for the intended change. Dedication can foster a desire to collaborate more with others and make a double effort to achieve change goals in a person, and also enhance performance (Sango et al., 2019).

### **2-3- Strategic consensus**

"Consensus" is defined as "the agreement of all parties on a group decision. Consensus occurs only after discussion of the pros and cons of issues, and when all (not a majority) of managers agree." Gird (Dess and Orijer, 1987). In the field of corporate strategy, consensus is referred to as "the agreement between the

organization's strategy regarding the company's goals and the appropriate competitive methods to achieve them" (Gonzalez et al., 2012).

Studies on the factors affecting the **dedication** to change of middle managers have highlighted aspects such as the perceived support of the desired change by senior management, the type of employees' perception of organizational justice, and participation in decision-making (Barton and Ambrosini, 2013). Ford et al. (2003), conducted a study and concluded that the strategic dedication of middle managers is related to their understanding and support of the goals of a strategy and the strategic direction of the organization. In other words, strategic dedication is related to the degree of alignment of people's behavior with the strategic direction of the organization.

Cheema et al. in (2015), in their study titled Employee Participation and **Forward-thinking Leadership**: Impact on Customer and Employee Satisfaction, investigated the impact of employee participation and forward-thinking leadership (vision guidance, emotional commitment) on customer and employee satisfaction. The results indicated a significant relationship between forward-thinking leadership and emotional commitment on customer and employee satisfaction.

Ethirawong et al. (2021), conducted a study titled Identifying Factors Affecting **Forward-thinking Leadership**: Empirical Evidence from the Thai Manufacturing Industry. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the key factors affecting forward-thinking leadership in the context of the Thai manufacturing industry. The results showed that communication skills have the greatest impact on leadership.

## 5- Conceptual model and research hypotheses

According to the studies conducted and the investigation of the background of the research and the description of what was done in the first part, the hypotheses of the research are formulated and measured as follows:

1- The visionary leadership of middle managers has an effect on the strategic

consensus of operational managers.

2- The strategic consensus of middle managers affects the strategic commitment of operational managers.

3- The visionary leadership of middle managers has an effect on the strategic commitment of operational managers by mediating the strategic consensus of operational managers. The conceptual model of the research can be seen in Figure (1-2).

Figure (2-1) conceptual model of research

Forward thinking leadership	Strategic agreement	Strategic dedication
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### 3- Research approach

3-1- The current research is practical in terms of its purpose, because its findings can be put to practical use and its purpose is to develop practical knowledge in a specific field. Also, considering that a questionnaire tool was used to collect the data and it aims to describe the relationships between the variables using statistical tests, it is considered a descriptive-survey research. The statistical population of this research is 150 supply chain managers of Isfahan Mobarake steel, whose data was collected by questionnaire method. According to Cochran's formula, the minimum sample size was 108 people who were randomly selected, 133 questionnaires were returned to distribution managers and 110 questionnaires were returned, and all analyzes were based on 110 people.

Questionnaire questions were designed in two demographic sections and main questions and a 5-point Likert scale. Demographic questions included gender, age and education, and the main questions were 11 questions.

#### 3-2- Validity and consistency

In this research, due to the standard nature of the questionnaire, its validity was implicitly confirmed. But for more certainty, the face validity method has been used. For this purpose, the questionnaire was given to a number of professors, and they will be asked to comment on each question and regarding the evaluation of the related goal, and the questionnaire will be approved with partial amendments.

The convergent validity of the research was checked with the help of average variance expanded (AVE). Reliability is one of the technical characteristics of the measurement tool, which refers to the accuracy, reliability, stability or repeatability of the test results. In this research, two common standard measures of Cronbach's alpha and CR combined reliability were used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. Next, the definition of each variable used in this formula will come. Cronbach (1951) mentioned a high standard of 0.7 for Cronbach's alpha. Also, Frenell and Locker (1981) have expressed a high level of 0.5 for AVE and a high standard of 0.7 for CR.

$$r_{\alpha} = \frac{j}{j-1} \left( 1 - \frac{\sum S_j^2}{S^2} \right)$$

A: consistency coefficient of the whole test

J: number of test question subsets

Sj: j test variance

S: Variance of total scores of questions

Types of mediation effect

Three decades ago, Baron and Kenny (1986) presented an approach to mediation analysis that is still routinely used by many researchers. However, more recent research points to conceptual and methodological problems with Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach (e.g., Hayes, 2013)

In this regard, our description is based on Zhao et al.'s (2010) synthesis of previous research on mediation analysis and relevant directions for future research.

The authors identify two types of disintermediation:

- No mediation, only direct: the direct effect is significant, but the indirect effect is not.
- No mediation without effect: direct and indirect effects are not significant.

In addition, they identify three types of mediation:

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Complementary mediation: the indirect effect and the direct effect are both significant and in the same direction.

Competitive mediation: the indirect effect and the direct effect are both significant and in the opposite direction.

- Only indirect mediation: the indirect effect is significant, but the direct effect is not.

In this sense, Zhao et al.'s (2010) procedure is consistent with Baron and Kenny's (1986) concept of partial mediation and full mediation. In fact, if the direct effect is not significant, we are facing the situation of only indirect mediation, but if in addition to the indirect effect, the direct effect is significant, we can distinguish complementary and competitive mediation:

In complementary mediation, the direct effect and the indirect effect are in the same direction. In other words, the product of the direct effect and the indirect effect is positive.

In Greer's correlational mediation, the product of the direct effect and the indirect effect is negative. Competing mediation supports the hypothesized mediating effect, but also suggests that another mediator may be present whose sign of the indirect effect is the same as the direct effect. It is important to note that in competitive mediation, the mediating construct acts as a suppressor variable, which significantly reduces the total effect of the first variable on the third

The Examination process is as follows



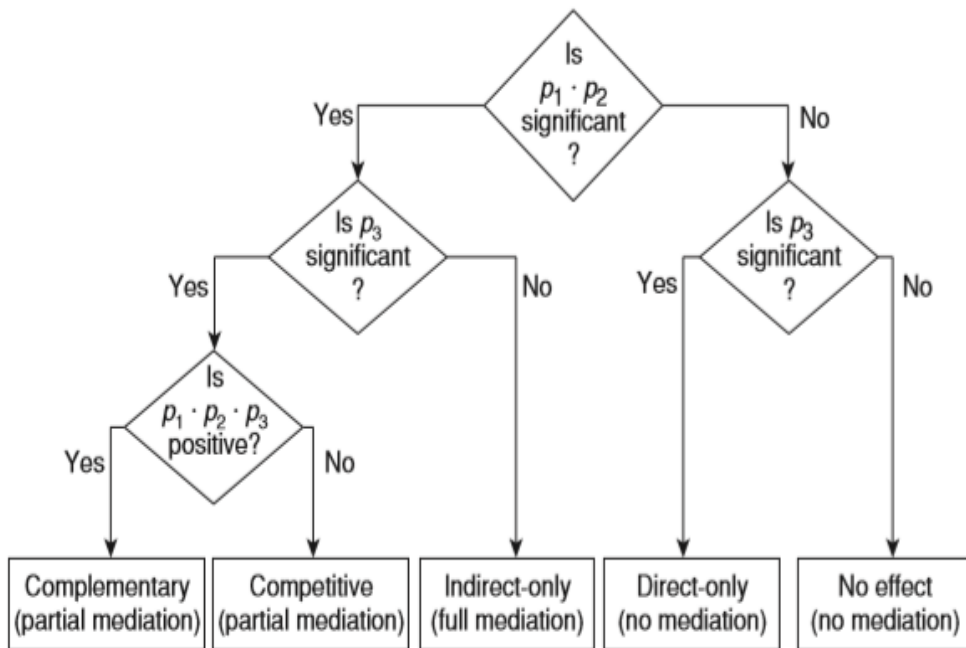


Figure (1-3) mediation analysis process (Hayes et al., 2021)

### 3-3- Data Examination method

SPSS software was used for data analysis and PLS software was used for factor analysis and modeling of structural equations. Modeling of structural equations by PLS method is evaluated and interpreted in two stages. These stages include measurement model test and structural model test, in each of these stages indicators are reported; In the following, each of these steps will be explained: 1) Measurement model test: The measurement model test includes the check of convergent validity (at the level of factors and at the level of reagents) as well as the check of auditory validity or diagnostic validity. at the level of agents and at the level of reagents).2) Evaluating the structural model to examine the relationship between the underlying variables: after the external model test, the internal model should be presented that shows the relationship between the

underlying variables of the research and the structural equation of the structural equation model. By using the internal model, research hypotheses can be examined

#### 4- Data Examination

examining the data to check the correctness of the Postulates is very important for any type of research. ; Data analysis is one of the main and most important parts of research. In this section, the data collected through the questionnaire is examining first. First, the frequencies related to the general questions of the questionnaire (including: gender, education, and age) are analyzed and investigated, and the research hypotheses are tested in the next section.

##### 4-1- Frequency distribution of gender variable

The results related to the frequency distribution of the gender variable are shown in Table (1-4)

Gender	Frequency of sex	PERCENT
MALE	101	91.8
FEMALE	9	8.2
TOTAL	110	100.0

Based on the data from the preceding table, **8.2%** of the surveyed population are **female**, while **91.8%** are **male**.

##### 2-4 Frequency Distribution of Educational Attainment

The frequency distribution of the educational attainment variable is presented in the subsequent table.

Table (4-2) Distribution frequency of the variable for education level

education	Abundance	PERCENT
Diploma	12	10.9
Bachelor's degree	46	41.8
Masters degree and higher	52	47.3
TOTAL	110	100.0

As per the data in the preceding table, within the sample, 12% possess a diploma or post-graduate diploma, 46% hold a bachelor's degree, and 52% have a post-graduate degree or above.

### 3-4- Distribution frequency of the variable for age level

Table (4-3) Distribution frequency of the age variable

AGE	Abundance	PERCENT
41-45	7	6.4
46-50	7	6.4
51-55	77	70.0
MORE THAN55	19	17.3
TOTA	110	100.0

Based on the data in the preceding table, within the sample, 7% were aged between 41 and 45 years. Another 7% were in the age group of 46 to 50 years, a significant 77% were between 51 and 55 years old, and 19% were above 55 years old.

1- Evaluation of the Measurement Model 1-1- Convergent Validity at the Indicator Level: To verify the validity of each observed variable or item, the factor load of each observed variable should exceed 0.4. The outcomes are displayed in table (2-4).

Table (4-4) results of factor loadings

Significance level	factor load	Structure	
0.000	0.86	V1-1	Visionary leadership
0.000	0.85	V1-2	
0.000	0.84	V1-3	
0.000	0.82	V1-4	
0.000	0.84	V2-1	Strategic consensus
0.000	0.85	V2-2	
0.000	0.86	V2-3	
0.000	0.88	V2-4	
0.000	0.89	V3-1	Strategic commitment
0.000	0.78	V3-2	
0.000	0.83	V3-3	
0.000	0.86	V3-4	

From the table above, it's evident that the outcomes of the confirmatory factor analysis show that the factor loadings of the questions pertaining to the variables exceed 0.4. This suggests that the items are effective in measuring the data.

1-2- Convergent Validity at the Factor Level Using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE): Fresnel and Locker (1981) advocate for AVE values of 0.5 or higher, implying that the intended structure accounts for 50% or more of the variance of its

items. Table (4-6) presents the results related to the average variance extracted for each of the structures.

Table (4-5) explores the convergent validity at the factor level using the extracted average variance.

Strategic commitment	Strategic consensus	Visionary leadership	
0.716	0.741	0.717	AVE

The convergent validity (at the factor level) for all variables exceeds 0.5, signifying the satisfactory validity of the measurement instrument.

Additionally, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability metrics are employed to evaluate the measurement models. The outcomes are displayed in the subsequent table:

Table (4-6) Outcomes pertaining to Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability.

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Visionary leadership	0.866	0.910
Strategic consensus	0.884	0.920
Strategic commitment	0.867	0.909

2- To check the validity of the auditor or diagnostic validity, Chin (1998) recommends two criteria:

2- 1- Assessor validity or diagnostic validity at the level of items: the items or indicators of a structure must have the highest factor load on their structure; It means to have the least sectional load on other According to Giffen and Ashtrab (2005), it's recommended that the factor load of each item on its associated construct should be a minimum of 0.1 greater than the factor load of the same item on other constructs. This ensures that each item is more closely related to its own construct than to others, enhancing the validity of the measurement model.

Table (4-7) auditor validity or diagnostic validity at the level of items

		Strategic commitment	Strategic consensus	Visionary leadership
Visionary	V1_1	0.423	0.452	0.861
	V1_2	0.366	0.468	0.858
	V1_3	0.448	0.466	0.842
	V1_4	0.324	0.542	0.826
Strategic	V2_1	0.843	0.448	0.346
	V2_2	0.854	0.458	0.437
	V2_3	0.863	0.432	0.399
	V2_4	0.884	0.467	0.403
Strategic	V3_1	0.572	0.896	0.521
	V3_2	0.323	0.783	0.431
	V3_3	0.431	0.838	0.441
	V3_4	0.416	0.862	0.526

In other references, it is mentioned that the items or indicators associated with each construct should have a factor load of at least 0.4 on their own construct and a maximum of 0.4 on other constructs. Given that the items or indicators associated with each construct have the highest factor load on their own construct (at least 0.4) and the least cross-load on other constructs (at most 0.4), it can be inferred that the assessor or diagnostic validity is established at the item level.

2-2- Assessor Validity or Diagnostic Validity at the Construct Level or Construct Divergence: The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of a construct must exceed the correlation of that construct with other constructs. This suggests that the correlation of that construct with its indicators is greater than its correlation with other constructs. Following this, the assessor's validity or diagnostic validity can be observed at the construct level or construct divergence:

Table (8-4) Assessor Validity or Diagnostic Validity at the Construct Level or Construct Divergence

	Strategic consensus	Strategic commitment	Visionary leadership
Strategic consensus	0.861		
Strategic commitment	0.525	0.846	
Visionary leadership	0.462	0.570	0.847

As per the Fornell and Larker method, the elements on the diagonal of the matrix should be larger than the values listed in the cells beneath them to establish the divergent validity at the construct level. From the above table, it's evident that in all cases, the diagonal elements are larger than the values listed below them, leading to the conclusion that the criterion validity is established at the construct level.

#### 4-5- Hypothesis Testing

In the form of a structural model, hypotheses were tested and the directionality of the structural model was evaluated. Each path corresponds to one of the model's assumptions, and the numbers on the arrows represent the path coefficient. Each hypothesis is tested by examining the sign, magnitude, and statistical significance of the path coefficient (beta) between each variable and the dependent variable. The path coefficient indicates the direct effect of one construct on another. The higher the path coefficient, the greater the predictive effect of the latent variable on the dependent variable. By studying the relationships between independent and dependent constructs using the relevant coefficient, it's possible to examine the significance of the effects between the research constructs. To investigate the significance of the path coefficient or beta, the significance of the t-value for each path coefficient should be considered (Taghvi Fard et al., 2018).

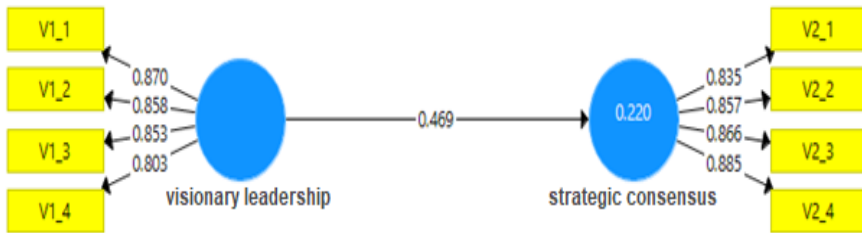


Figure (2) of the tested research model (Gration coefficient and R square) of the first hypothesis. (Visionary leadership and strategic consensus.)

Table (4-9) of the results of the first hypothesis test

The result of the hypothesis	Significance level	T statistics	Coefficient of explanation	Regression coefficient	Hypothesis		ROW
					dependent variable	independent variable	
proving a theory	0.000	4.02	0.22	0.46	Strategic consensus	Visionary leadership	1



the analysis indicates that visionary leadership plays a significant role in shaping strategic consensus. With a p-value of 0.000, the regression coefficient is confirmed to be non-zero in the sample and, by extension, in the statistical population. This validates the first hypothesis.

The beta coefficient value of 0.46 suggests that visionary leadership accounts for 46% of the changes in strategic consensus. In other words, nearly half of the variations in strategic consensus can be traced back to visionary leadership.

Moreover, the calculated t-value for this hypothesis surpasses 1.96, further affirming the substantial influence of visionary leadership on strategic consensus. This confirmation of the hypothesis highlights the crucial role of visionary leadership in fostering strategic consensus. It's a noteworthy finding that emphasizes the importance of visionary leadership in strategic management.

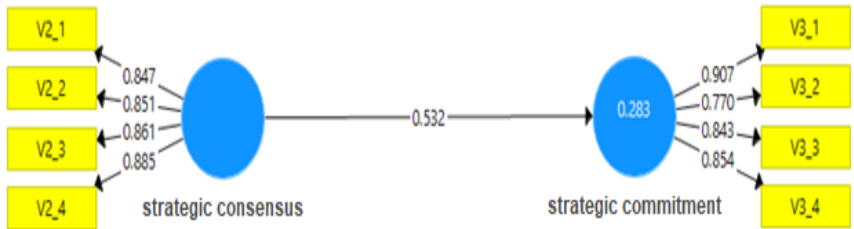


Figure (2) of the tested model of the research (Gration coefficient and R square) of the second hypothesis. (Strategic consensus and strategic commitment.)

Table (4-10) of the results of the second hypothesis test

The result of the hypothesis	Significance level	T statistics	Coefficient of explanation	Regression coefficient	Hypothesis		Row
					dependent variable	independent variable	
proving a theory	0.000	4.91	0.27	0.53	Strategic commitment	Strategic consensus	1

The analysis indicates that strategic consensus significantly influences strategic commitment. With a p-value of 0.000, the regression coefficient is confirmed to be non-zero in the sample and, by extension, in the statistical population. This validates the second hypothesis.

The beta coefficient value of 0.53 suggests that strategic consensus accounts for 53% of the changes in strategic commitment. In other words, over half of the variations in strategic commitment can be traced back to strategic consensus.

Furthermore, since the calculated t-value for this hypothesis exceeds 1.96, it can be concluded that strategic consensus significantly influences strategic commitment, thus confirming this hypothesis. This is a significant finding as it underscores the pivotal role of strategic consensus in shaping strategic commitment. It's a noteworthy finding that emphasizes the importance of strategic consensus in strategic management.

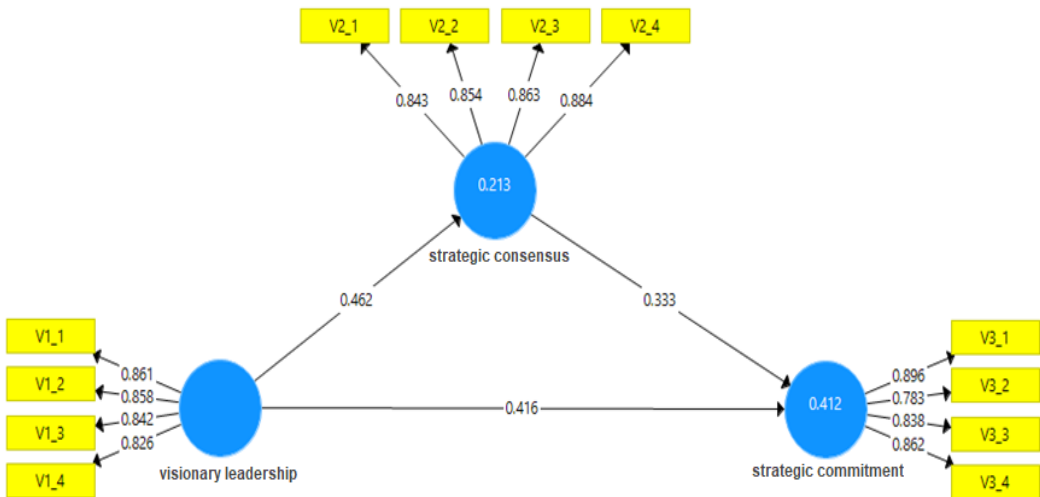


Figure (2) of the tested research model (Gratation coefficient and R square) of the third hypothesis

Table (4-12) of the results of the second hypothesis test

The result of the hypothesis meaningful	Effect indirect meaningful	direct impact meaningful	total effect	Hypothesis			Row			
				dependent variable	Mediator	independent variable				
proving a theory	0.00	0.354	0.053	0.416	0.000	0.570	Strategic commitment	Strategic consensus	Visionary leadership	1

The values estimated in the table above and the software output indicate the following:

a) The coefficient of determination for the strategic commitment variable was found to be 0.41 percent. According to the values related to the effect size of the coefficient of determination index, this value is capable of explaining the variance of the strategic commitment variable.

b) The direct effect of visionary leadership on strategic commitment was equal to 0.416 and was not statistically significant.

c) The indirect effect coefficient of visionary leadership was equal to 0.254, which is statistically significant at the ( $p < 0.05$ ) level.

d) The total effect was equal to 0.570, which was also statistically significant.

These findings provide valuable insights into the influence of visionary leadership on strategic commitment, both directly and indirectly. Despite the lack of a significant direct effect, the significant indirect effect and total effect underscore the importance of visionary leadership in shaping strategic commitment. This highlights the complex dynamics at play in strategic management and the pivotal role of visionary leadership.

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the research provides valuable insights into the role of visionary leadership and strategic consensus in shaping strategic commitment. The acceptance of the research hypothesis underscores the mediating role of strategic consensus between visionary leadership and strategic commitment. Despite the non-significant direct effects, the significant indirect effect highlights the importance of strategic consensus in this relationship.

Your study sheds light on how visionary leadership of middle managers can influence the strategic commitment of operational managers through strategic consensus. By leveraging Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for hypothesis testing, your study demonstrates the positive correlation between a team manager's visionary leadership and team consensus and strategic commitment. This finding can be instrumental for managers aiming to foster visionary leadership as a potent tool for enhancing consensus and strategic commitment, thereby improving organizational conditions.

The consistency of your study's results with previous research, such as Maladji et al., 2012, and Ford et al., 2020, further validates your findings. Your research emphasizes the need for a better understanding and management of visionary leadership for effective implementation of strategic commitment.

Your study also reveals that high-level managers, as change agents, may encounter situations that trigger reactions in strategic consensus, leading to strategic commitments. This insight can help in understanding why some strategies succeed while others fail. The study also uncovers potential clarity issues about corporate strategy at senior levels, necessitating continuous explanations to address potential consensus gaps within a company. Managers should also consider potential obstacles to creating strategic consensus, such as poor communication, and take necessary measures to improve it.

In conclusion, your research significantly contributes to the understanding of the interplay between visionary leadership, strategic consensus, and strategic commitment, offering valuable implications for strategic management.

If middle or operational managers are satisfied with their senior managers and have a good understanding of their manager, compared to those who do not have a good relationship with their manager, they are more inclined to accept the It can also be said that some managers and even manager's point of view. employees are inspired by their manager's personality and eventually adapt to the manager's vision. The emotional commitment of followers is necessary for the effective realization of the vision. When employees become more attached to their work, then with consensus and Strategic commitments are more willing to work towards the realization of the vision, so it is suggested to take steps in the path of consensus and then in the path of strategic commitment by considering the .factors affecting visionary leadership, including emotional commitments

the reflections on the research process and the new insights gained during the different stages of your study are insightful. It's common for research to generate more questions and uncertainties as it progresses, which indeed opens up new avenues for further investigation.

Your suggestions for future research are valuable. Expanding the focus beyond Iranian supply chain managers to include managers with different cultural and demographic characteristics could provide a more comprehensive understanding of visionary leadership and its impact on strategic consensus and commitment.

In addition, using other data collection methods such as interviews and observations could indeed help reduce subjectivity and provide more objective responses. Conducting similar studies in other types of organizations, both in the production-private sector and service sector, would allow for a comparison of results and potentially reveal industry-specific dynamics.

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Considering other mediating or intervening variables like organizational culture, size, environment, and trust could add more depth to the understanding of the relationships between visionary leadership, consensus, and strategic commitment. Repeating the current research from different perspectives and comparing the results would also contribute to the robustness of the findings.

In conclusion, your research has paved the way for further exploration in this field, and your suggestions provide a clear direction for future researchers. Your work is a significant contribution to the understanding of visionary leadership's role in shaping strategic consensus and commitment

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