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The impact of paternalistic leadership on entrepreneurial success: The quality of the work environment as mediating variable a survey study of the opinions of a sample of academics in Iraqi universities

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Abstract

Paternalistic leadership is a type of leadership that relies on guidance, care, motivation, and protection from the leader towards their team or organization. Entrepreneurial success refers to the ability of individuals or companies to achieve their goals through innovation and sustainable growth. This research will examine the effect of Paternalistic leadership on business success in different work environments, particularly in the workplace of the organization under study. The current research aims to explore the association between Paternalistic leadership and entrepreneurial success, focusing on the quality of the work environment as an interactive variable affecting this relationship. The research was conducted in several Iraqi universities on a sample of (200) faculty members. A survey was used as the primary information gathering tool, consisting of two parts: the first part includes information about the surveyed sample, while the second part includes the study scale, which consists of three pillars represented by Paternalistic leadership, entrepreneurial success, and the quality of the work environment. The research relied on a primary hypothesis stating "there is a major impact between Paternalistic leadership and innovative success." The research concluded with several findings, the most important of which is that Paternalistic leadership influences the achievement of entrepreneurial success through the control of the superiority of the work environment.

Keywords: Paternalistic leadership, entrepreneurial success, quality of the work environment

Introduction

Leadership is counted one of the fundamental effects that influence the success of organizations, and its impact varies depending on the type of leadership practiced. The Paternalistic style stands out among the modern leadership styles that have been extensively studied as one of the methods that significantly affect the workflow within organizations, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship. Paternalistic leadership is characterized by providing an environment of support, care, and guidance for the organization and the team, where the leader acts as a "father" who cares about developing his team and helping them achieve success. It remains unclear how Paternalistic leadership can affect entrepreneurial success, especially in light of the changing factors within the work environment. As work environments diversify and their challenges multiply, the impact of Paternalistic leadership becomes contingent on the nature of that environment. Here, the urgent need arises to understand the effect of Paternalistic leadership on entrepreneurial success, considering the quality of the work environment as an interactive variable that influences this relationship. This research aims to explore the impact of Paternalistic leadership on achieving entrepreneurial success through the interactive effect of the quality of the work environment, represented through three sections:

The first section includes the scientific methodology of the research.

The second section presents a theoretical review of the literature related to the research variables: Paternalistic leadership, entrepreneurial success, and the quality of the work environment.

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Section One: Research Methodology

1. Research Problem

Although Paternalistic leadership is considered one of the effective ways to provide support for human resources and guidance, the question remains about the extent to which this leadership affects innovation and entrepreneurial growth, especially in diverse work environments such as traditional and modern work settings, where both organizational culture and structure, as well as available resources, may significantly impact the performance of entrepreneurs. Thus, the research problem can be embodied in the following main question:

How can Paternalistic leadership influence the achievement of entrepreneurial success in the organization under study, focusing on the quality of the work environment as an interactive variable? From this, the next research questions can be derived:

1. In what way can Paternalistic leadership affect entrepreneurial success in the organizations under study?
2. What role does the quality of the work environment play as an interactive variable in the relationship involving Paternalistic leadership and entrepreneurial success?
3. Can the effects of Paternalistic leadership on entrepreneurial success differ in traditional work environments compared to modern or innovative work environments?
4. How can leaders benefit from the Paternalistic leadership style to enhance innovation and entrepreneurship in the organization under study?

2. Importance of the Research

The importance of the research lies in the following points:

1. Uncovering how Paternalistic leadership contributes to achieving entrepreneurial success in various work environments, especially in light of the challenges posed by the continuous development in technology and modern work environments.
2. Reaching an understanding of the relationship involving Paternalistic leadership and the quality of the labour environment, which enables the provision of tools and strategies to improve its performance and enhance the level of innovation and success.

3. Research Objectives

1. Uncovering the relationship between Paternalistic leadership and entrepreneurial success.
2. Revealing the role of the quality of the work environment as an interactive variable affecting this relationship.
3. Diagnosing the effects of Paternalistic leadership on workers and their performance in unique work environments.
4. Reaching recommendations on how leaders can benefit from the Paternalistic leadership style to enhance entrepreneurial success in business organizations.

4. Research Hypotheses

This study is rooted in the following two key hypotheses:

- **First Hypothesis:** Paternalistic leadership has a notable effect on entrepreneurial success.
- **Second Hypothesis:** The quality of the work

environment as an interactive variable has a statistically significant effect on the relationship between Paternalistic leadership and entrepreneurial success.

5. Research Boundaries

1. **Spatial Boundaries:** The spatial boundaries of the research are represented by a number of Iraqi universities, which provide a fertile ground for conducting this type of study.
2. **Temporal Boundaries:** The period related to the preparation and distribution of the questionnaire to the research sample formed the temporal boundaries, which ended with the group and analysis of data, covering the period from 2/11/2024 to 30/1/2025.
3. **Human Boundaries:** The human boundaries were represented by a sample of educators from several Iraqi universities.
4. **Knowledge Boundaries:** The knowledge boundaries of the research were limited to the research variables represented by Paternalistic leadership, entrepreneurial success, and the value of the work environment.

6. Data Collection Methods

The questionnaire represented the main tool for collecting data related to the practical aspect, consisting of two axes: the first for personal information of the research sample, and the second for the study scale and its variables (Paternalistic leadership, quality of work environment, entrepreneurial success). The questionnaire included (12) questions for Paternalistic leadership, (16) for the quality work environment, and (12) for entrepreneurial success. In the theoretical aspect, the research relied on literature and previous studies related to the research variables through the international information network, journals, and scientific magazines.

7. Research Community and Sample

The research community consists of several Iraqi universities, with a sample size of (200) individuals from the teaching staff at these universities.

Section Two: The Theoretical Aspect

First: Paternalistic Leadership (PL)

1. Concept of Paternalistic Leadership

Numerous definitions of Paternalistic leadership have been presented in the literature reviewed. It was defined by (Wang, *et al.*, 2019) as the superior's commitment to control and supervision for their subordinates, to be a good role model, and in return, subordinates commit to respecting, being loyal to, and obeying the leader and adhering to their instructions.

Paternalistic leadership is characterized by providing continuous and appropriate guidance to employees while offering them emotional and psychological support. The Paternalistic leader is more than just a manager; they are a mentor who helps team members grow personally and professionally. Paternalistic leadership creates a collaborative atmosphere and a family-like environment in organizations because it is based on social relationships, principles of selflessness, and sacrifice, similar to benevolent leadership that fosters loyalty and the kindness of a father in dealing with his children and grandchildren.

According to (Cheng *et al.* 2004), Paternalistic leadership can be defined as a behaviour that involves discipline,

strong authority, and moral integrity. This definition includes three dimensions: benevolence, authoritarianism, and ethics. Paternalistic leadership blends discipline, authority, and power with Paternalistic love and care. Accordingly, Paternalistic leaders have two different faces: benevolent and authoritarian. Benevolent leadership refers to the leaders' concern for the personal, familial, and professional well-being of their followers. However, authoritarian leadership includes leader behaviours characterized by authority and control over followers, tasks, and activities. Previous studies on Paternalistic leadership have typically focused on the positive and negative influences of both benevolence and authoritarianism on various functions. However, it is surprising to what extent the perceptual agreement between leaders and their followers regarding these seemingly opposing dimensions of Paternalistic leadership enhances or harms dyadic communication and follower performance (Aygün *et al.*, 2020)^[11].

Through positive emotions and social support for specific leader behaviors or practices, such as expressing care and engaging in nurturing behaviours, paternalistic leadership can affect how well the followers perform. This is likely to engender positive feelings among their followers, who enjoy high levels of trust, emotional bonding, warm feelings, comfort, and identification with the leader to keep the positive cycle going.

According to the above information about Paternalistic leadership, it is a behavior based on leader's taking a guardian role over followers and a passive support to them, as well as demonstrating dominance and power.

2. Dimensions of Paternalistic Leadership

The researcher reviewed several previous studies to diagnose the dimensions of Paternalistic leadership and noted that most studies agree on the following dimensions:

- **Benevolent Leadership:** Benevolent leadership refers to leaders' concern for the personal, family, and professional well-being of their followers. The benevolent dimension is associated with leadership behaviour that shows respect for the interests of members or family welfare, as the behavioural dimension of the leader's benevolence is a form of investment in the leader's social relationships with organization members concerning their work or personal matters.
- **Authoritarian or autocratic leadership:** Autocratic leadership includes behaviours of the leader that are characterized by authority and control over followers, tasks, and activities. Previous studies have focused on continuous learning to understand the positive and negative effects of both benevolence and authoritarianism on various job outcomes. However, it is surprisingly noteworthy how much perceptual agreement exists between leaders and their followers regarding these seemingly opposing dimensions of Paternalistic leadership, which either enhances or harms dyadic communication and follower performance.
- **Ethical leadership:** According to the literature on organisational behaviour, ethical leaders are honest, trustworthy, fair, treat followers with respect and care; do not show favouritism, keep their promises, allow their followers to have a say and participate in decisions and clarify their expectations and

responsibilities.

Secondly: Quality of the Work Environment (QWE)

1. Concept of quality of the work environment

The work environment refers to the location in which someone works. Dynamic workplace connected with entities Networking is a social and professional technique in which employees have to interact with several individuals and its functioning by and by have to take place among it. Safe and healthy working conditions protect health, preserve lives, improve productivity, reduce poor labour management relationships and contribute to the continuity of services. A fit worker produces at a high level. If the work environment is good, employees will be happy and confident and can be a valuable resource to the organization. Safe physical and mental work conditions, humane hours, optimism, working conditions, time to care for yourself, incentive structure, information relevant to job roles, work style and pace. (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Sandhya 2018)^[17]

Without good performance of the employees, organizations do not function properly; performance of employees both individually and collectively is affected by various factors such as the work environment. Different researches proved that a good work environment plays a vital role in enhancing employee performance. The previous studies, however, does not focus on a few of the areas concerning the work environment that results the direct impact on the performance.

As reported in the study (Alharbi, *et al.* 2024)^[3], explains that to have good results, the nurse must work in healthy environment and be incentivized, so that this particular professional can provide high-quality care to the patient. In addition to this, by taking care of patients, nurses will enhance the health of their patients, which can be maximized in the presence of an encouraging, motivating, and safe environment.

In addition, an experimental research has established a connection between a healthy work environment and patient satisfaction, lower employee turnover, preference and satisfaction with jobs, and lower stress and burnout occurred at work. (Shin, Lee, 2024)^[21].

It's worth mentioning that improving the quality of the work environment has been a political priority in the last years, as one of the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 is "to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all" (Goal 8), and more specifically, "to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers". Indeed, in response to this development, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) tweaked its "Jobs Strategy" to address the importance of job quality, which recognizes the quality of the working environment one of the three dimensions of job quality, along with the quality of profits and the quality of the labour market. This means that labour market situation is not only evaluated by the OECD in terms of its volume but also in terms of quality, and whether jobs are the basis of a decent life for workers and their families (Murtin *et al.*, 2022)^[16].

A vast literature over the last decades has highlighted the critical role of work environment quality for worker well-being and health conditions. Nevertheless, three major models in this field have highlighted different drivers of worker well-being and psychosocial risk.

Introduction [edit] The demand-control model was developed by Robert Karasek and his colleagues in the 1980s and highlights the role of control over one's job in decreasing the risk of becoming ill as a result of high job demands.

- The model of effort-reward imbalance, first proposed by Johannes Siegrist, emphasizes the role of reciprocity and real fairness in balancing what is required of employees in terms of effort and what is returned to them in the form of reward, pay and recognition, as well as security.
- The job demands-resources model, a recently developed concept by Demerouti and colleagues, emphasizes that the opposite of a debilitating career is a satisfying job, where the demands of the job are balanced with sufficient resources for workers to meet those demands.

The first two models identified different clusters of potential risk factors, from which more nuanced hypotheses can be gleaned whereby they provide complementary accounts of how the work environment relates to worker mental and physical health; the third model, however, aims to integrate the mechanisms suggested by the preceding pair of models within a wider framework emphasizing a broader set of work environment determinants of worker health and well-being.

2. Dimensions of Work Environment Quality

Work environment quality refers to the set of factors that contribute to providing a healthy and motivating environment for productivity and employee well-being. The following are the key dimensions of work environment quality based on recent studies:

Work environment quality represents a set of factors that help provide a healthy and encouraging environment for productivity and well-being for workers. Below, we list several dimensions of work environment quality based on the studies reviewed: (Mba, 2021), (Hegazy *et al.*, 2021) [14, 10].

- **Physical Dimension:** This is represented by the design of workspaces, lighting, temperature, noise, and comfortable furniture.
- **Psychosocial Dimension:** The psychosocial work environment is often perceived as the interaction of organizational and social conditions and psychological factors shaped by structural conditions at the intermediate level.
- **Organizational Dimension:** This includes work policies, clarity of tasks, organizational justice, and effective management.
- **Health Dimension:** This includes occupational health and safety programs, and medical and psychological support for employees. A study showed the importance of applying mindfulness to enhance employee resilience and reduce emotional exhaustion.
- **Environmental Dimension:** This dimension focuses on a friendly work environment and environmental sustainability.
- **The Work-Life Balance Dimension:** It refers to the balance between personal and professional life to improve job satisfaction. Focused in a case study on the contribution of work-life balance to enhancing the

quality of the work environment and understanding how to promote social capital within the workplace by adopting practices that encourage work-life balance. As for the current research, it will be limited to addressing the dimensions agreed upon by most researchers, which are (the Physical dimension, the psychological and social dimension, the health dimension, and the work-life balance dimension).

Thirdly: Entrepreneurial Success (ES)

1. Concept of entrepreneurial success

In the competitive market situation, the role of leaders in market analysis is likely to expand, providing their organizations with more sophisticated tools to gain competitive advantage and drive innovation in their industries (Usman *et al.*, 2024) [25]. The entrepreneurial leadership trait is prominent in the education industry, and behaviors such as the ability to see opportunities and take advantage of advantages show that the entrepreneur embraces the critical factors for achieving entrepreneurial success. In this context, we see that the entrepreneur imposes creative thinking from the imagination stage to a systematic, logical and applicable stage.

Some metrics of success such as profitability, growth, company survival, contribution to society, personal satisfaction, fulfillment of social needs, and social recognition have been used to define entrepreneurial success. Some others have illustrated it as an At-will measure of an economic entities like company result and new job creation, and non-economic entities like community satisfaction and worker relation (Singh *et al.*, 2021) [24].

Finally, the notion of entrepreneurial success can be defined as: "Entrepreneurial success," defined as "the individual's understanding and assessment of the degree of achievement of criteria that are personally important to entrepreneurs" (Jenkins *et al.*, 2018) [4].

2. Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Success

It was found that the concept of entrepreneurial success includes two distinct dimensions: economic success and entrepreneurial satisfaction. Entrepreneurial success is often associated with the entrepreneur's personal traits, social networks, and prior knowledge. Entrepreneurial success is usually measured by sales growth, income growth, employment trends, and satisfaction (Shrestha & Campus, 2012) [23], while (Maza & Fedriani, 2022) [6] identified that the dimensions of entrepreneurial success were represented by the following dimensions:

- **Company survival:** The action and effect resulting from the survival of a company, depending on whether it is registered or not, with regard to the necessary legal and administrative procedures, after a certain period of time after its creation.
- **Satisfaction indicators:** Measure the degree of satisfaction of the different stakeholders associated with the company (employees, customers and the owner of the company; and for the latter, in terms of results, sales growth and workforce growth).
- **Competitive position of the company:** This is a multidimensional or vector indicator that compares the company's indicators with the average values of companies in its business sector with the same CNAE in relation to: economic profitability, financial profitability, asset turnover and debt.

Based on what the researchers have discussed in presenting their own views to express the dimensions of entrepreneurial success, the researcher sees the existence of three main dimensions to express entrepreneurial success, which are (financial dimension, innovative dimension, social dimension), and they will be briefly addressed:

1. Financial dimension: Financial performance, from an organizational perspective, can provide another type of indicator related to strategic direction (goals, vision and mission directed toward future results, building an effective team. (Costa& Carvalho 2022) ^[7]. The profits that the company achieves from revenues after deducting all expenses incurred during a specific period of time. (Alarussi & Alhaderi 2018) ^[2].

2. Innovative dimension: The psychosocial dimension in organizational behavior refers to the influence of psychological (such as motivation, stress, and mental well-being) and social (such as professional relationships, social

interaction, and organizational culture) factors on the performance of individuals within organizations. This dimension includes studying how the work environment affects workers' psychological health, their motivation, and their degree of belonging to the organization, which directly affects productivity and job commitment. (Torner *et al* 2025) ^[20].

3. Social dimension: It refers to the impact of social interactions and relationships between individuals within the work environment on overall performance and job harmony. This dimension includes examining aspects such as social support, social networks, work spirit, and social integration, and how these factors affect job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and collaboration between teams. (Dick *et al* 2024) ^[26].

**Section three: practical aspect
Research Conceptual Model**

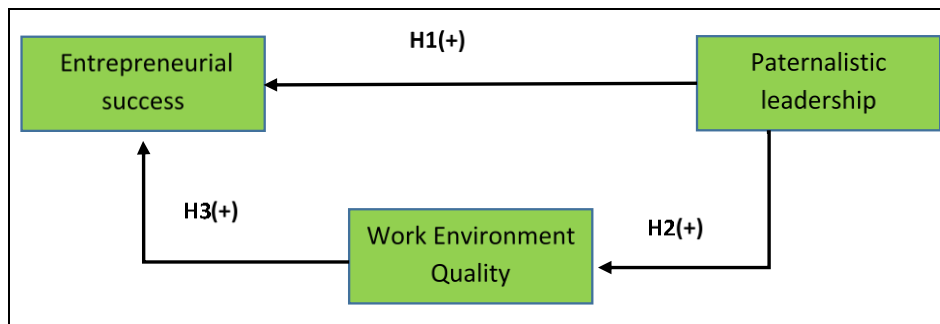


Fig 1: hypothetical research model

Results

To evaluate the measurement, the proposed model, and the direct effects of the offered hypotheses, a Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis with standard bootstrapping (5000 random samples) was performed using the Smart PLS program (Becker *et al.*, 2023) ^[5].

1. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model, also known as the outer model, is responsible for measuring latent variables in PLS-SEM route modeling. Every latent construct in the model is derived from many reflective observations. Figure 2 depicts the factor loadings for all constructs and items relevant the measurement model assessment.

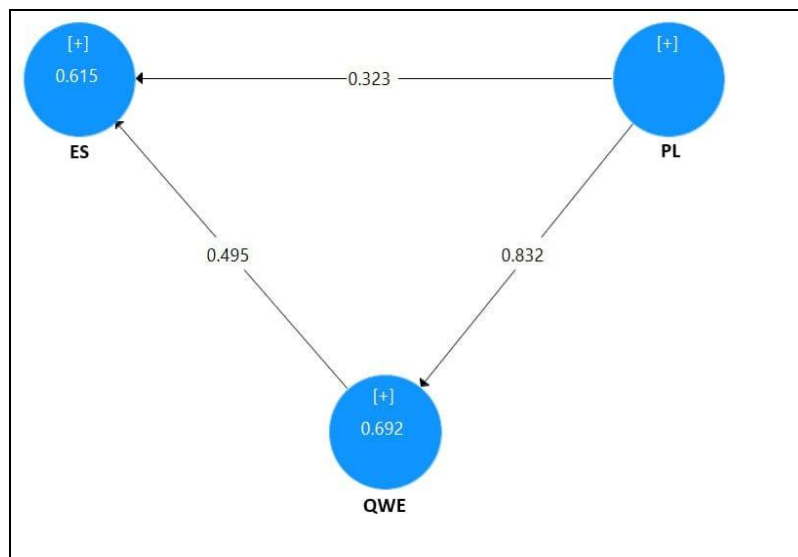


Fig 2: Measurement Model

Before moving on to the structural model review, the measurement model was tested to ensure that all quality

requirements were met. As a result, detailed assessments were undertaken, as shown below.

Table 1: Constructs validity and reliability

Constructs	CA	CR	AVE
Paternalistic leadership	0.836	0.877	0.508
Entrepreneurial success	0.916	0.933	0.665
Work Environment Quality	0.838	0.881	0.566

Cronbach's alpha is the usual technique for determining the dependability of variables or constructs. Cronbach's alpha value of ≥ 0.7 is considered excellent, but a value greater than 0.8 is sufficient to ensure the construct's dependability. In PLS-SEM, composite reliability is tested for the structures that ensure dependability. Each construct in this model has a composite reliability of > 0.8 , which is adequate for further investigation. This model has great composite reliability at 0.8. Furthermore, the Average

Variance Extracted (AVE) value assesses the constructs' convergent validity. Validating constructions requires an AVE value of ≥ 0.5 . As a result, the model meets every requirement listed above for further measures. While one model construct is not represented by another in the model, discriminant validity ensures that each model construct is different from each other. The PLS-SEM analytical approach was used in this study to examine discriminant validity in different ways.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Constructs	Paternalistic leadership	Entrepreneurial success	Work Environment Quality
Paternalistic leadership	0.750		
Entrepreneurial success	0.734	0.815	
Work Environment Quality	0.720	0.763	0.810

The Fornell-Larcker method is more widely accepted when evaluating the validity of reflective items. The diagonal values in Table 2 indicate that validity measures are more valuable than correlations with other constructs (Ab Hamid, 2017)^[1].

Table 3 shows the study constructs were assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT). According to this analysis, all study constructs have a value of less than 0.85, meaning that it met the discriminant validity requirement (Mohamad, 2024)^[15].

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	Paternalistic leadership	Entrepreneurial success	Work Environment Quality
Paternalistic leadership	0.750		
Entrepreneurial success	0.820		
Work Environment Quality	0.535	0.850	

2. Structural Model Assessment: The relationship among the latent variables in the PLS-SEM path model is described by the structural model. The T-value between the constructions and related indicators of the specific latent

variable is determined using the route model equation (Figure 3). As a result, the structural model indicates all the manifest variables and the construct level.

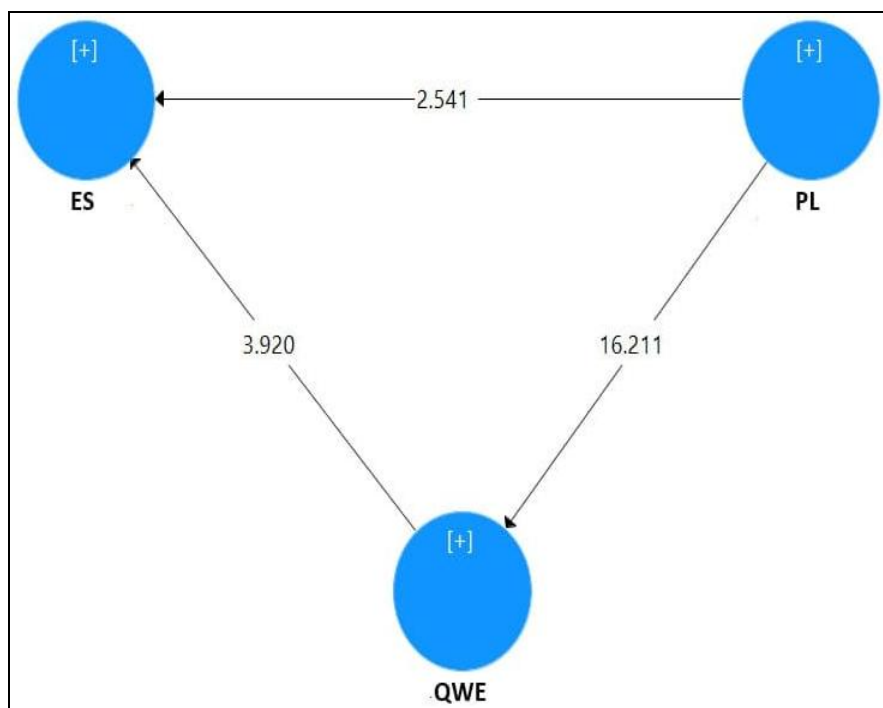


Fig 3: Structural Model

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4: Path Coefficient of Structural Model

Hypothesis (Direct)	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STD EV)	T-Value	P-Value
PL → ES	0.323	0.336	0.127	2.541	0.011
PL → QWE	0.832	0.829	0.051	16.211	0.000
QWE → ES	0.495	0.486	0.126	3.920	0.000
PL → QWE → ES (Indirect)	0.412	0.403	0.111	3.723	0.000

1. Measurement Model Assessment

Several tests, such as Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), were performed to confirm the quality of the measurement model.

- All values satisfied suggested criteria with Composite Reliability (CR) (all values reported > 0.8) providing evidence of excellent internal consistency.
- Also, all the AVE values were above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.5 which indicates that the latent variables adequately account for variability in the indicator variables.

2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT criterion, and the results showed that the values were within acceptable ranges (<0.85), indicating that the latent variables are distinct from one another and not overlapping.

3. Structural Model Assessment

PLS-SEM analysis indicates statistically significant relationships among the studied variables

The key findings from hypothesis testing are:

1. Parental Leadership → Entrepreneurial Success

• The path is positive and statistically significant ($\beta=0.323$, $T=2.541$, $P=0.011$), indicating that parental leadership has a positive effect on entrepreneurial success, albeit with a moderate strength.

2. Parental Leadership → Quality of Work Environment

• The relationship is very strong and positive ($\beta=0.832$, $T=16.211$, $P=0.000$), indicating that parental leadership has a significant impact on the quality of the work environment.

3. Quality of Work Environment → Entrepreneurial Success

• The relationship is positive and statistically significant ($\beta=0.495$, $T=3.920$, $P=0.000$), indicating that improving the quality of the work environment directly contributes to achieving entrepreneurial success.

4. Indirect influence: Authoritarian Leadership → Quality of Work Environment → Entrepreneurial Success

The indirect relationship was also positive and significant ($\beta=0.412$, $T=3.723$, $P=0.000$), indicating that the quality of the work environment plays a partial mediating role between authoritarian leadership and entrepreneurial success.

General Interpretation of Results

- The results confirm that authoritarian leadership has a direct impact on entrepreneurial success, but this impact is stronger when the quality of the work environment is

improved.

- The quality of the work environment is considered an important mediating factor, as it contributes to enhancing the impact of authoritarian leadership on entrepreneurial success.
- The strong relationship between authoritarian leadership and the quality of the work environment indicates the importance of leaders in creating a motivating and supportive work environment for employees, which positively reflects on institutional performance and entrepreneurial success.

Recommendations Based on Results

- Enhance authoritarian leadership by developing leaders' skills in building supportive and impactful relationships with employees.
- Improve the quality of the work environment by providing a motivating work environment that includes psychological support, adequate resources, and a positive organizational culture.
- Focus on the work environment as a key mediator in the relationship between authoritarian leadership and entrepreneurial success, indicating the need to adopt strategies that enhance employee satisfaction and optimal working conditions.

Conclusion

This study confirmed the robustness of the measurement and structural models through reliable statistical indicators. The findings revealed that parental leadership significantly enhances both the quality of the work environment and entrepreneurial success. Furthermore, the quality of the work environment not only directly influences entrepreneurial outcomes but also mediates the effect of authoritarian leadership. These results emphasize the vital role of leadership in shaping a productive and supportive work environment, which in turn drives entrepreneurial success. The study highlights the need for organizations to invest in leadership development and foster an enriching workplace culture. These strategic efforts can enhance employee engagement and contribute to sustained organizational performance and innovation.

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