

Does Thought Leadership Enhance Managerial Performance? Mediating Role of Social-skills and Moderating the Role of Gender

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of thought leadership in enhancing managerial performance with a specific focus on the mediating role of social-skills and the moderating role of gender. This study employs a cross-sectional quantitative approach deploying a questionnaire to collect data from 523 line managers of registered SMEs in Ghana. The findings signal a significant and positive linkage between thought leadership and managerial performance mediated by social-skills. However, gender has no significant moderating effect on this relationship. The study emphasises the need for owner-managers to invest in the acquisition of thought leadership and social-skills to improve the performance and sustainability of their organisations. These results have important implications for managerial training and development in SMEs and provide a basis for future research in this area.

Keywords: Thought leadership, social-skills, gender, managerial performance, SMEs, SmartPLS.

JEL Classification: I11, I21, M10

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1. Introduction

Effective leadership in organisations is crucial for success, and the notion of thought leadership has gained increasing consideration in recent years (Prahl et al., 2023; Barry & Girona, 2019; Herndon & Kor-Sins, 2019). Thought leadership, defined as influencing others through innovative ideas and strategic insights, has been proposed as a key driver of managerial performance (Kaufman & Boxshall, 2023; Getchell, 2022). However, the linkage between thought leadership and managerial performance is poorly understood, and the potential mediating and moderating factors that may influence this relationship require further investigation.

This study explores thought leadership's role in enhancing job performance within SMEs, focusing on the mediating effect of social-skills and the potential moderating role of gender. Unlike transformational or transactional leadership, thought leadership is characterised by an emphasis on innovation, adaptability, and strategic foresight, making it particularly relevant for SMEs operating in dynamic environments (Addy et al., 2024). Thought leadership addresses a unique leadership need within SMEs, where intellectual influence and adaptability are more critical for success than hierarchical control or follower-centric dynamics. By focusing on thought leadership, this paper fills a gap in the literature that primarily emphasises follower-centric models, contributing novel insights relevant to leadership within SME managers (Rohlfer et al., 2022).

The study hypothesises that thought leadership will be positively associated with managerial performance and that this relationship will be mediated by managers' social-skills. Additionally, the study proposes that the relationship between thought leadership and managerial performance will be moderated by gender, with a potential difference in the impact of thought leadership on the performance between male and female managers. Although existing research has demonstrated a positive association between various leadership styles, such as transformational and transactional leadership, and job performance (Lee et al., 2023; Hundie & Habtewold, 2024), limited studies have focused on thought leadership, particularly within the context of SMEs. This research addresses this gap by examining thought leadership as a distinct style that prioritises intellectual influence and foresight, which aligns closely with the agile, adaptive needs of SMEs.

Goleman's (1998) emotional intelligence model provides the theoretical foundation for exploring social-skills as a mediating variable, hypothesising that social-skills enhance the relationship between thought leadership and job performance. This study expands Goleman's model by applying it specifically within the thought leadership framework, extending its focus from traditional interpersonal dynamics to the intellectual influence that thought leadership necessitates in SMEs. This novel application of Goleman's model underscores the unique role of social-skills as a core competency within thought leadership, enhancing managerial performance through collaboration and strategic insight.

The growing interest in thought leadership reflects a broader trend in leadership research towards identifying new drivers of performance in dynamic environments. In particular, within rapidly evolving global business landscapes—especially in Africa and other developing economies, there is an increasing need for research that can inform strategies to mitigate adverse impacts on the performance of SME managers and their firms. This need is especially pronounced for SME managers, who are often regarded as critical drivers of economic growth in Ghana. Existing literature highlights a range of leadership styles commonly adopted within

SMEs, including transformational, laissez-faire, and thought leadership (Malik et al., 2020; Oyewole, 2023; Tay & Aigbogun, 2024; Kittikunchotiwut, 2020). However, there remains a notable lack of research examining how specific managerial qualities, such as social-skills, interact with thought leadership to affect job performance.

While prior studies, such as Oruh et al., (2021), suggest a positive link influence of compassionate leadership, on job insecurity and stress, and Kyei-Frimpong et al., (2022) highlight the mediating influence of knowledge sharing in leadership effectiveness, few studies address the unique influence of thought leadership on job performance or the role of social-skills and gender as mediating and moderating variables, respectively. This study thus aims to fill these gaps by focusing specifically on the mediating role of social-skills and the moderating role of gender.

By expanding on Goleman's model, this research contributes to both theory and practice by examining how thought leadership, through the mediating role of social-skills, can drive the managerial performance of SME managers. The subsequent sections of the paper include a literature review, methodology, results, discussion, implications, and avenues for future research. Through this investigation, the paper aims to inform leadership development programmes and provide actionable insights for owner-managers, practitioners, and policymakers to support effective leadership within SMEs.

2. Review of Literature and Development of Hypothesis

This research is based on Goleman's emotional intelligence framework, specifically focusing on social-skills, which are crucial elements of Goleman's theoretical model. Unlike managers, who typically use directive approaches, those with high social competence excel at utilising networking capabilities (Dimitriadis & Koning, 2022; Bari et al., 2021) within and beyond their organisational boundaries. These managers possess advanced communication and relationship-building skills that facilitate effective collaboration, idea exchange, and integration of diverse perspectives (Agyapong et al., 2022; Wiggill & Van der Walde, 2020; Teunissen et al., 2023). These competencies closely align with the core attributes of thought leadership, which are essential for optimising managerial performance.

Additionally, it is argued that a manager's gender significantly influences the effectiveness of thought leadership (Eibl et al., 2020). Female managers often exhibit a communication style characterised by enhanced listening capabilities and a more deliberate approach to speaking (Sueda, 2022; Turesky & Warner, 2020). This communication style nurtures a conducive milieu for motivating and aligning subordinates with organisational objectives, thereby illustrating the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between thought leadership and managerial performance. This interaction emphasises the critical role of gender in moderating the impact of thought leadership approach and highlights the need for an integrated consideration of social-skills and managerial gender in enhancing performance outcomes.

2.1 Thought Leadership and Managerial Performance

Thought leadership, characterised by the creation of original ideas and strategic guidance, embodies a visionary approach that motivates and mobilises individuals to enhance performance. Khuan et al. (2023) associate thought leadership with visionary leadership, stressing its foresight and inspirational power, while Meyer and Maluchnik (2023) define it as the ability to influence others through innovative ideas and strategic insight. In an era of rapid change and uncertainty, thought leadership has emerged as a vital paradigm, driving key

organisational outcomes such as innovation, decision-making, and continuous performance improvements (Kaufman & Boxshall, 2023; Welbeck et al., 2024). Scholars like Ghamri, & Zedan, (2024) argue that thought leaders not only drive innovation but also foster a culture that strengthens individual performance, organisational growth, and adaptability.

Further, Nguyen et al., (2021) highlight that managers embracing thought leadership excel at navigating uncertainties and effectively leading strategic initiatives, thus reinforcing organisational resilience. However, despite extensive discourse on thought leadership, there is a distinct lack of empirical research linking it directly to managerial performance. For instance, although Taylor et al., (2023) explore thought leadership as a tool for competitive advantage, they do not address its specific impact on individual managerial effectiveness. Similarly, Ahsan (2023) examines thought leadership within corporate social responsibility but neglects its potential implications for managerial performance.

This oversight limits a full understanding of how thought leadership contributes to managerial contexts. Investigating the direct impact of thought leadership on managerial performance could fill this gap, offering insights into how a thought leadership approach enhances managerial effectiveness and productivity. The current literature focuses primarily on organisational outcomes rather than on the individual performance of managers, especially in SMEs, where less-structured environments demand adaptable and resilient managerial strategies (Jin et al., 2024; Goni & Van Looy, 2022). Addressing this gap could thus provide essential empirical support to optimise managerial performance in diverse organisational settings. Premised on the above discourse, this paper hypothesises that:

H1: There is a positive and significant effect of thought leadership on managerial job performance

2.2 The Mediating Role of Social-skills on Thought Leadership and Managerial Performance

The conversion of thought leadership into measurable managerial performance may depend heavily on the social-skills of managers. Social-skills, which are a crucial aspect of emotional intelligence, include abilities such as active listening, effective verbal and nonverbal communication, and persuasive interactions (Ramadhan & Adriany, 2023; Riggio, 2024). These skills facilitate the development of meaningful relationships with organisational stakeholders and enhance managers' self-awareness and understanding of others, which is essential for effectively leveraging thought leadership.

A critical analysis of this text reveals an underlying gap in prevailing research on the influences of thought leadership approach on job performance, particularly from the perspective of social-skills as a mediating factor. While previous studies, such as Welbeck et al., (2024), demonstrate a positive effect of thought leadership on managers' job performance, they lack a deeper exploration into the mechanisms by which thought leadership exerts this influence. Kalra et al., (2024) provide insights into how ethical and self-leadership can drive performance by mediating through self-governing mechanisms, yet their study is limited to sales contexts, focusing primarily on ethical constructs rather than a broad application of thought leadership.

Similarly, while Supramaniam and Singaravelloo (2021) establish a significant link between emotional intelligence and organisational performance, they overlook the complex roles that specific social-skills might play in influencing managerial outcomes. In failing to examine the mediating impact of social-skills, these studies collectively leave an unaddressed gap regarding

how thought leadership might drive managerial performance through relational competencies, such as social-skills. This gap is central to the current paper, which aims to investigate this unexamined mediating role, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how social-skills function within the thought leadership-performance relationship.

Building on the identified research gap, it is evident that given the importance of social-skills and thought leadership in determining managerial effectiveness, examining how social-skills mediate the influence of thought leadership approach on managerial performance is essential. A comprehensive understanding of this relationship could reveal the mechanisms through which thought leadership leverages social competencies to enhance managerial outcomes, thereby providing actionable insights for developing more effective leadership interventions. This approach aims to bridge the gap in existing studies and fully harness the potential of these constructs to optimise managerial performance. Based on the aforementioned discussions, this paper hypothesises that:

H2: There is a positive and significant effect of thought leadership on managerial job performance

2.3 Social-skills and Job Performance

Social-skills are a crucial determinant of managerial job performance, encompassing competencies such as effective communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, which enable managers to cultivate robust interpersonal relationships, enhance team cohesion, and advance personal and organisational objectives. Dudzinski (2020) and Alhamami et al. (2020) empirically validated a positive correlation between social-skills and job performance, underscoring their pivotal role in augmenting managerial effectiveness.

Nevertheless, managerial job performance is a many-sided construct predisposed by an array of features, with individual competencies, motivation, organisational resources, and leadership (Ma'arof et al., 2024; Kumari et al., 2021), as articulated by the performance chain model. While the significance of social-skills in improving job performance is well documented (Tabassum et al., 2024; Sanwal & Sareen, 2023; Weidmann & Deming, 2021), the connexion between social-skills and the job performance of managers in SMEs is yet to be thoroughly examined within this broader contextual framework.

The existing literature often examines social-skills and other performance factors in isolation, overlooking the potential interactions between these elements and their combined impact on managerial performance, particularly in SMEs. Moreover, there is limited research on how social-skills contribute to job performance across different organisational contexts and industries, despite studies like Frogner et al., (2022) documenting the positive impact of social-skills on performance. Addressing this critical research gap would provide a more in-depth comprehension of how to up managerial performance across various organisational settings by integrating social-skills with other performance-related factors. This approach offers valuable insights into optimising managerial effectiveness in diverse environments. Premised on the above discourse, this paper hypothesises that:

H3: Social-skills positively and significantly affect managerial job performance

2.4 Gender, Thought Leadership and Managerial Performance

Gender's moderating influence in the connection between thought leadership and job performance is pivotal yet understudied. Research suggests that male and female leaders bring

distinct perspectives to their roles, shaping their effectiveness and influencing their leadership approaches (Dwiri & Okatan, 2021; Lee & Park, 2021). Male leaders may often prioritise achievement and validation, while female leaders frequently focus on demonstrating competence and achieving equitable recognition (Smith & Sinkford, 2022). These varied approaches can impact not only leadership styles but also how thought leadership principles are applied, ultimately affecting managerial performance (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

Gender dynamics, therefore, can significantly influence the perception, execution, and management of leadership initiatives within organisations. This underscores the potential for gender to play a substantial role in modulating the influence of thought leadership on job performance, with male and female managers potentially yielding different outcomes. Yet, despite its relevance, a comprehensive understanding of this moderating effect remains lacking. Addressing this gap could enable organisations to develop more inclusive leadership frameworks that adapt thought leadership strategies to enhance managerial performance in alignment with gender-specific needs, fostering a more diverse and effective leadership environment (Setiawan et al., 2021). Premised on the above discourse, this paper hypothesises that:

H4: There is a moderating role of gender on thought leadership and managerial job performance.

The conceptual framework of this study examines the influence of thought leadership on managerial performance, emphasising the mediating role of social-skills and the moderating role of gender. Thought leadership is recognised as a significant factor impacting job performance (Welbeck, et al., 2024), and this relationship is posited to be influenced by gender, which may shape how thought leadership is perceived and enacted in managerial contexts. Social-skills is highlighted as a crucial mechanism that facilitates the connection between thought leadership and performance outcomes, acting as a mediator that enhances interpersonal mechanism and communication within firms. By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how thought leadership, coupled with social-skills and gender considerations, can enhance managerial performance and effectiveness in various corporate settings.

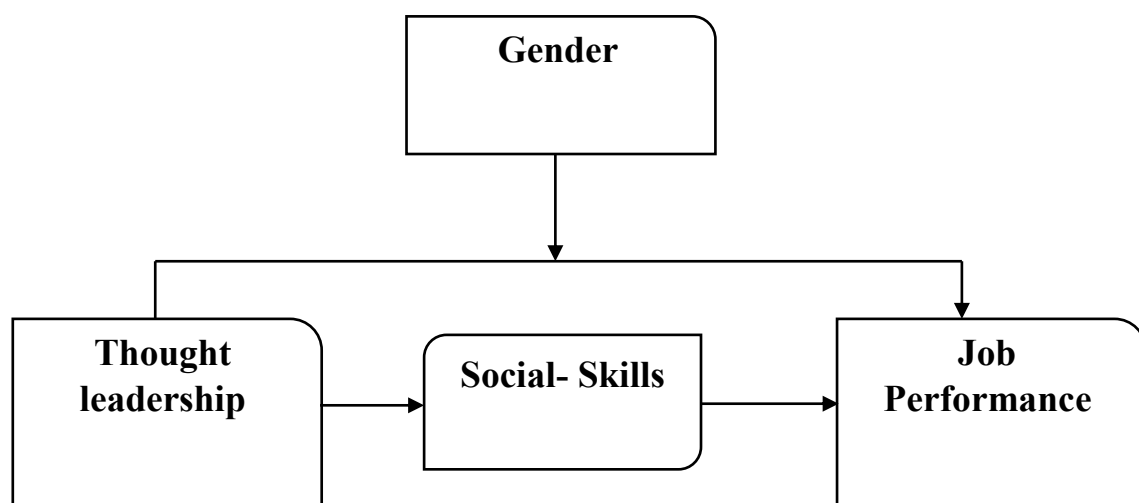


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors own creation

3. Methodology

The present study employed a quantitative, exploratory research design to assess hypotheses concerning the relationships among thought leadership, emotional intelligence, and job performance. Given the study's aim of exploring these constructs rather than testing an established model, a cross-sectional survey approach was chosen. This approach is suitable for capturing relationships at a specific time, particularly valuable in preliminary research where insights into new linkages are sought.

The research sample comprised 523 line managers from SMEs, identified through the Registrar-General's Department database in Ghana. These managers were selected due to their critical role in executing leadership within less-structured organisational settings, which aligns with the concentration of the study on thought leadership and managerial effectiveness. While a sample size of 523 was targeted to meet the requirements of Structural Equation Modeling's Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM), which often necessitates larger sample sizes for reliable path analysis, eligibility criteria such as managerial level and active role within SMEs were also applied to refine sample relevance.

A structured survey questionnaire was used, divided into two segments. Segment A gathered demographic data, while Segment B assessed the main study constructs, with responses captured on a Likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Questionnaires were distributed and collected in person, an approach intended to maximise response rate and data reliability. To minimise common-method bias, the study implemented several procedural measures, including ensuring the anonymity of responses and using diverse measurement scales. Additionally, Herman's single-factor test which helps to reduce biases was performed through a principal components analysis (Kock, 2020).

For data analysis, PLS-SEM was selected due to its robustness in exploratory contexts and its capacity to handle complex relationships within multifaceted constructs. This analytical method aligns with the study's predictive objectives and is particularly effective in studies like this, which aim to contribute to theory development rather than confirm established models. Furthermore, PLS-SEM is well-suited to smaller samples, making it a practical choice given the sample size constraints often encountered in SME-based research. Data analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27 for descriptive and correlational statistics and Smart-PLS version 3.0 for hypothesis testing through PLS-SEM.

In line with academic standards, the research methodology is reinforced by a wide-ranging review of prevailing works on thought leadership and emotional intelligence. This review provided a robust theoretical framework to inform the study's approach and underscore the relevance of examining these constructs in SME contexts.

4. Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Respondents

Table 4.1 offers an all-inclusive overview of the demographic features of this paper's respondents, including gender, age, and educational attainment. Concerning gender distribution, the sample comprised 276 males and 247 females, accounting for 52.8% and 47.2% of the total respondents, respectively. This finding suggests a relatively balanced gender distribution within the respondents' cohort.

In terms of age distribution, the most prevalent group of respondents was aged 20-30 years, comprising 249 respondents or 47.1% of the sample. The age group–30-40 years included 155 respondents, accounting for 29.6% of the sample. Respondents aged 40-50 years made up 18.3% of the sample, with 95 individuals in this category. Regarding educational background, the analysis revealed that 124 respondents (23.7%) had completed their secondary education. In contrast, 211 participants (40.3%) had a diploma. Additionally, 159 respondents (30.5%) had a bachelor's degree, while 29 (5.5%) had achieved a master's or doctoral degree.

Table 1 Descriptive Features of Respondents

Details	Measurement	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	276	52.8
	Female	247	47.2
Age	20-30	247	47.2
	30-40	155	29.6
	40-50	95	18.3
	50-59	24	4.9
Educational Level	Secondary	124	23.7
	Diploma	211	40.3
	University	159	30.5
	Masters and PhD	29	5.5

Source: Authors own creation

4.2 Measurement Model

The study's constructs and scales were evaluated for reliability and validity using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), as outlined by Baistaman et al., (2020). Internal consistency was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and construct-specific factor loading. The CFA results, presented in Table 2, indicate that the values for CA (α), CR, average variance extracted (AVE), and factor loadings all exceeded the recommended thresholds (Shrestha, 2021), demonstrating strong item convergence across all constructs.

Table 2 Construct reliability, validity and Multicollinearity

Construct and Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	VIF
TH1	0.725	0.91	0.927	0.614	2.071
TH2	0.781				2.394
TH3	0.789				2.566
TH4	0.787				2.342
TH5	0.800				2.304
TH6	0.785				2.252
TH7	0.795				2.216
TH8	0.806				2.306
SS1	0.827	0.905	0.927	0.678	2.375
SS2	0.839				2.584
SS3	0.847				2.576
SS4	0.784				2.096
SS5	0.835				2.370
SS6	0.808				2.080
JP1	0.793	0.895	0.919	0.656	2.088
JP2	0.815				2.435
JP3	0.840				2.565
JP4	0.835				2.309
JP5	0.772				2.084
JP6	0.800				2.145

Source: Authors own creation

Table 2 demonstrates the high reliability of the thought leadership style construct, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha, which exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. The items related to stress management and job performance also showed high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values surpassing 0.70, except for one item that had a loading below 0.70. The composite reliability measures were even higher, reflecting strong consistency. The average variance extracted (AVE) was moderate, with values above 0.50, indicating that the indicators collectively captured a moderate amount of variance in the construct.

It is crucial to confirm the discriminant validity to ensure that each construct is distinct from the others in this study. This can be achieved by comparing the correlations between the constructs using the square root of the AVE for each construct. As described by Ramayah et al., (2018), discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its highest correlation with any other construct. Table 3 provides the results of the discriminant validity analysis tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3 Discriminant validity Fornell-Larker criteria

	JP	SS	THL
JP			
SS	0.681		
THL	0.593	0.689	0.784

Source: Authors own creation

The results indicated that the discriminant validity analysis achieved a satisfactory level of performance, suggesting that the constructs utilised in the study were sufficiently distinct from one another, thereby validating their suitability for subsequent analyses. This means that each construct effectively captures a specific aspect of the data, ensuring that the measured variables are unique and pertinent. This validation is crucial as it ensures the dependability of the research variables in exploring relationships and effects in further statistical analyses, thus bolstering the integrity and resilience of the research framework.

The paper employed a heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) to measure the discriminant validity of the variables, which is essential for confirming their distinctiveness. The appropriate threshold for HTMT remains a subject of debate in extant literature, with Cheung et al. (2023) advocating for a threshold of 0.85 or below, and Ringle et al., (2023) suggesting a more lenient threshold of 0.90 or below. The HTMT ratio captured in Table 4 falls below the 0.90 brink, further reinforcing the discriminant validity of the constructs employed in this paper.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity (HTMT) Results

	JP	SS	THL
JP	0.812		
SMG	0.549	0.762	
THL	0.582	0.689	0.759

Source: Authors own creation

The next step involved evaluating the extent to which the independent variable contributed to explaining the alteration of the dependent construct. Ultimately, the measurement model in this study was designed to assess the notch to which the independent construct accounted for variance in the dependent construct.

Table 5: Model Fit

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
JP	0.426	0.424
SS	0.397	0.396

Source: Authors own creation

The R-square value of managerial job performance, as demonstrated in Table 5, is 0.426. This figure implies that THL and SS collectively account for 42.6% of the variability in MJP, signifying a substantial yet not comprehensive contribution. In other words, other factors may play a role in determining MJP. Furthermore, the R-square value for SS was 0.397, indicating that the variables assessed in the study explained 39.7% of the variability in SS. These results underscore the need to evaluate multiple factors to gain a thorough understanding of MJP and SS.

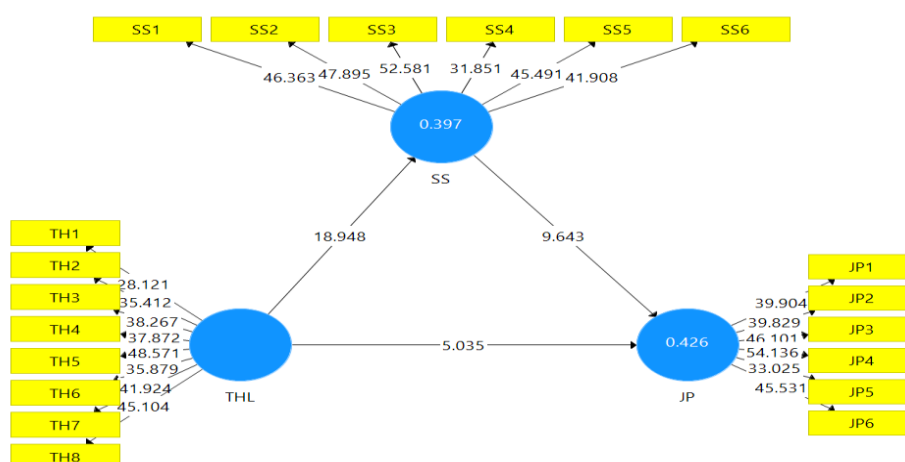


Fig. 2. Measurement Model Analysis

Source: Authors Own Creation

Table 6 Structure Model Result

	Beta Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
THL -> JP	0.264	0.054	4.879	0.000
THL -> SS	0.630	0.032	19.428	0.000
SS -> JP	0.457	0.051	8.911	0.000
Mod_THL_Gender_JP -> JP	-0.028	0.043	0.649	0.258

Source: Authors Own Creation

The outcomes of the analysis in Table 6 indicate that THL has a positive and significant effect on MJP ($\beta = 0.264$, $t = 4.879$, $p = 0.000$). This study concluded that there is a positive association between THL and MJP; therefore, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. Similarly, the outcomes of the analysis also demonstrated that THL had a positive and significant effect on SS ($\beta = 0.630$, $t = 19.428$, $p = 0.000$), confirming a positive association between THL and SS. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Moreover, the analysis indicated that SS significantly and positively affected MJP ($\beta = 0.457$, $t = 8.911$, $p = 0.000$), further supporting a positive relationship between SS and MJP. This finding supports hypothesis 3. However, the analysis regarding the moderating role of gender on thought leadership and job performance revealed that the moderating role of gender in the relationship between thought leadership and managerial job performance was not significant ($\beta = -0.028$, $t = 0.649$, $p = 0.258$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

4.4 Mediating Role of Social-Skills in the Connexion Between Thought Leadership and Managerial Job Performance

Bootstrapping was applied to assess the mediating influence of SS between THL and MJP. As shown in Table 8, the bootstrapping results revealed a positive indirect effect ($\beta = 0.267$) that was statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Additionally, the total effect results, as presented in Table 9, showed direct, positive, and statistically significant effects of THL on job performance, THL on SS, and SS on MJP. These findings indicate that SS partially mediate the connexion between THL and MJP, thereby supporting Hypothesis 4. This conclusion reveals a novel finding which would warrant further studies in this unexplored area.

Table 8: Bootstrapping Results of Mediation Analysis

Total Effects (THL-> JP)			Direct Effects (THL-> JP)			Hypothesis	Indirect Effects of SS on JP			BI [5.0%;95.0%]	
Coefficient	T-value	p-value	Coefficient	T-value	p-value		Coefficient	SD	T-value	p-value	
0.552	16.944	0.000	0.264	4.879	0.000	H4: THL -> SS -> JP	0.288	0.039	7.333	0.000	.238-.353

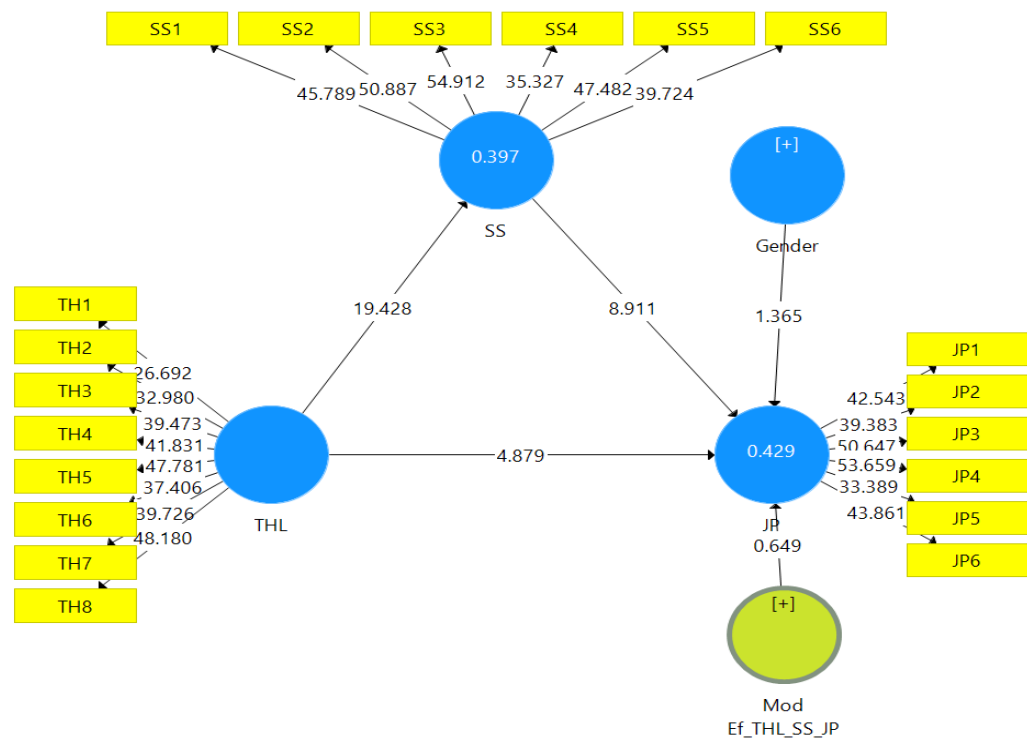


Fig. 3. Structure Assessment Model

Source: Authors Own Creation

5. Discussion of Results

This paper explored the mediating and moderating influence of social-skills(SS) and gender in the association between thought leadership and job performance among SME managers. To achieve this goal, respondents were asked to assess the impact of a thought leadership style on job performance among SME managers. The results indicate that thought leadership has a positive effect on job performance, supporting Hypothesis 1. The second hypothesis examined the effect of thought leadership on SME managers' job performance. The outcomes demonstrated that thought leadership significantly and positively affected stress management, thus verifying Hypothesis 2.

The third hypothesis tested the effect of social-skills on the job performance of line-managers of SMEs. The findings confirmed that social-skills had a positive and significant impact on job performance, thus validating Hypothesis 3. The fourth objective was to determine whether social-skills mediated the relationship between thought leadership and job performance. The results showed that social-skills partially mediated this relationship, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. The fifth hypothesis tested the moderating role of gender on the association between thought leadership and managerial job performance of line managers of SMEs. The outcomes indicated that gender played no moderating role in the relationship between thought leadership and the job performance of line managers of SMEs.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the relationships between thought leadership, social-skills, and managerial job performance, specifically focusing on the role of social-skills as a mediator and gender as a moderator in the context of SMEs. The findings confirm that thought leadership positively impacts managerial job performance, and social-skills significantly influence performance, supporting the idea that the effectiveness of thought leadership is enhanced by strong interpersonal competencies. Moreover, social-skills were found to partially mediate the relationship between thought leadership and job performance, suggesting that leadership is more effective when managers possess strong social abilities.

However, gender did not play a moderating role in the relationship between thought leadership and managerial performance, indicating that the benefits of thought leadership are consistent across both genders. This study provides valuable insights into how thought leadership and emotional intelligence can contribute to improving managerial performance in SMEs.

One limitation of this research is the cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to make causal inferences. Future studies should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to better explore the causal relationships among these variables. Additionally, while this study focused on the SME sector in Ghana, further research could expand to other regions or industries to increase the generalisability of the findings.

In conclusion, this research advances our understanding of thought leadership and its impact on managerial performance in SMEs, highlighting the significance of social-skills in amplifying the effects of leadership. These findings offer practical insights for enhancing leadership practices in SMEs, contributing to the broader field of organisational behaviour.

Implications for Research, Practice, and Society

Implications for Research

This study contributes to the literature on thought leadership, emotional intelligence, and managerial performance, particularly by revealing the mediating role of social-skills in the relationship between thought leadership and job performance. The finding that gender does not moderate this relationship opens new avenues for research. Future studies could explore other potential moderating variables, such as cultural, organisational, or contextual factors, that might influence the effectiveness of different leadership styles on managerial performance.

Furthermore, while this study focused on SMEs in Ghana, future research could expand this framework to other countries and sectors to explore whether the relationships observed are consistent across diverse contexts. Longitudinal or experimental studies would also offer more robust insights into the causal links between thought leadership, social-skills, and job performance.

Implications for Practice

In an increasingly complex business environment, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must adopt effective strategies to enhance the managerial performance of their line managers, boosting overall organisational performance. This paper highlights the pivotal role of thought leadership and social-skills in achieving this goal.

Our findings indicate that thought leadership significantly positively impacts managerial job performance, confirming its importance as a leadership style in SMEs. Additionally, thought leadership enhances social-skills among SME managers, indicating broader benefits beyond direct performance.

Social-skills emerged as a critical construct, positively impacting the managerial performance of line managers. Furthermore, social-skills partially mediate the relationship between thought leadership and managerial job performance, suggesting that effective thought leadership is amplified when managers possess strong social-skills.

Interestingly, our research found that gender does not moderate the association between thought leadership and managerial job performance among line managers in SMEs. This indicates that the benefits of thought leadership are consistent across genders, reinforcing the universal applicability of this leadership style.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for SMEs, particularly in enhancing the managerial performance of line managers. Given the positive influence of thought leadership and social-skills on job performance, organisations should prioritise the development of both leadership and interpersonal skills in their training programmes. Specifically, SMEs could benefit from leadership development initiatives that focus on cultivating emotional intelligence, communication, and other social-skills that are critical for managerial success.

Additionally, the study suggests that thought leadership can be an effective tool for improving managerial performance across genders, indicating that leadership development initiatives should be universally applicable and not tailored to specific gender groups. This is an important consideration for organisations aiming to promote inclusivity and equality in leadership roles.

Implications for Society

At a broader level, this research highlights the societal importance of developing leadership and social-skills, not just for organisational success, but also for enhancing overall workplace culture and employee well-being. When organisations invest in developing these competencies, they foster environments where managers are better equipped to lead diverse teams, manage stress, and improve employee satisfaction. This leads to a more engaged and productive workforce, which ultimately benefits society by contributing to economic prosperity and social well-being.

Moreover, policymakers can utilise these findings to advocate for public policies that encourage leadership development and emotional intelligence training in the workforce. Such policies could lead to improved workplace conditions, healthier organisational cultures, and greater employee retention, thus promoting long-term societal benefits.

In conclusion, the study's findings suggest that SMEs, policymakers, and educational institutions should work together to ensure that the next generation of leaders is equipped with the thought leadership and social-skills necessary to navigate complex organisational challenges and contribute positively to society.

6.4 Recommendations to Policymakers

The findings of this study highlight the importance of ongoing training to enhance the competencies of SME line managers, particularly in developing thought leadership and social-skills. Given that many respondents held diplomas, there is a clear need for increased training opportunities. Policymakers could advocate for targeted support, providing affordable, practical training regimes to strengthen leadership skills, which can significantly impact SME performance and the broader economy.

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