

DEVELOPING THE STEWARD-INTEGRATOR LEADERSHIP (SIL): A NEW LEADERSHIP STYLE FOR THIRD-GENERATION THAI FAMILY BUSINESSES

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Abstract

Background/ Problem: Thai family businesses form a cornerstone of the national economy, yet many face succession challenges as third-generation leaders navigate the tension between preserving legacy and driving modernization. Existing leadership models, including transactional, transformational, and servant, address parts of this challenge but lack cultural integration with Thai kinship-based governance and high power-distance norms. Consequently, multi-generational conflicts and unclear leadership practices pose a threat to long-term sustainability.

Objective/ Purpose: This study examines the relationships among Stewardship (ST), Visionary Transformation (VT), Servant Orientation (SO), and Integrative Mediation (IM) on Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF) among multi-generational leaders in Thai family businesses.

Design and Methodology: Two hundred and forty respondents, representing Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z, participated in the survey. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to validate the proposed framework.

Results: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) demonstrated satisfactory construct reliability and validity (factor loadings = 0.68–0.79; CR = 0.82–0.88; AVE = 0.50–0.56). The model fit indices indicated an excellent fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.128$, GFI = 0.904, RMSEA = 0.023). The SEM results confirmed that all leadership dimensions significantly and positively influenced leadership effectiveness: IM ($\beta = 0.39$), VT ($\beta = 0.36$), SO ($\beta = 0.33$), and ST ($\beta = 0.30$). Among these predictors, Integrative Mediation emerged as the strongest determinant, emphasizing the importance of conflict resolution, relational harmony, and empathy in leadership performance. The findings suggest that effective leadership in Thai family enterprises is multidimensional, integrating transformational, servant, and stewardship qualities through mediation competence.

Conclusion and Implications: This study contributes to the development of the Visionary Habit Framework (VHF) and advances understanding of soft-power leadership as a culturally grounded approach for next-generation leaders in Thailand's family business context.

Keywords: leadership effectiveness, integrative mediation, stewardship, servant leadership, visionary transformation, family business, soft-power leadership

INTRODUCTION

Background

Leadership in family businesses has long been recognized as a crucial determinant of organizational sustainability, particularly in Asian contexts where generational succession shapes both strategic and cultural continuity. In Thailand, multi-generational family enterprises face complex challenges as leadership transitions from the founding to the successor generation. Differences in values, decision-making styles, and communication patterns among Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z often create tension that undermines organizational cohesion. These challenges require leadership approaches that not only drive transformation but also foster harmony across generations.

Traditional leadership theories, such as transformational, servant, and stewardship leadership, have contributed valuable insights into leadership effectiveness. However, these approaches often overlook the cultural dynamics of relational harmony and conflict mediation that are central to family business continuity in Asian societies. In Thai culture, leadership effectiveness extends beyond performance outcomes to include interpersonal balance, empathy, and the capacity to unify diverse generational mindsets. This study, therefore, introduces Integrative Mediation (IM) as a culturally embedded leadership dimension that bridges these generational and relational gaps.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to transformational and servant leadership, a limited understanding remains of how integrative mediation interacts with stewardship and vision-driven transformation to enhance leadership effectiveness within family enterprises. Addressing this gap, the present research proposes a multidimensional model that integrates four leadership constructs, Stewardship (ST), Visionary Transformation (VT), Servant Orientation (SO), and Integrative Mediation (IM) to predict Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF) among multi-generational Thai leaders.

By employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with data from 240 respondents across four generations, this study contributes to the conceptual and empirical advancement of soft-power leadership and the Visionary Habit Framework (VHF). The findings aim to expand leadership theory by highlighting the significance of mediation competence and relational integration as core mechanisms of effective leadership in Thai family business contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership in Multi-Generational Family Businesses

Leadership in family-owned enterprises presents distinct challenges due to the convoluted relationship between family and business systems. According to Sharma (2004), generational transitions in family firms often involve tensions arising from differing values, power structures, and communication styles. In Thailand, these challenges are magnified by cultural norms that emphasize hierarchy (*kreng-jai*) and interpersonal harmony (*nam-jai*), which influence leadership behavior and decision-making (Sombatsompop & Rojniruttikul, 2019).

Consequently, leadership effectiveness in multi-generational Thai family businesses requires not only strategic capability but also relational sensitivity, the ability to maintain unity while managing generational diversity.

Stewardship Leadership (ST)

Stewardship theory emphasizes leaders' moral responsibility to prioritize organizational and collective interests over personal gain (Hernandez, 2012). Within family businesses, stewardship is manifested through long-term orientation, loyalty, and the preservation of family legacy (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2009). Steward leaders foster trust and shared purpose, aligning successor and predecessor generations toward sustainable success.

However, stewardship alone may be insufficient in contexts where rapid generational shifts demand adaptability and innovation, necessitating integration with transformational and relational competencies.

Visionary Transformation (VT)

Transformational leadership, introduced by Bass and Avolio (1994), focuses on inspiring followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Visionary transformation extends this concept to include the leader's ability to translate long-term vision into practical change within traditional structures. In family enterprises, visionary leaders bridge generational divides by combining respect for heritage with forward-looking innovation (Chrisman et al., 2018).

In Thai family firms, where cultural continuity is valued, the ability to articulate a shared vision helps reduce resistance to change and aligns the goals of multiple generations.

Servant Orientation (SO)

Servant leadership, conceptualized by Greenleaf (1977), emphasizes service to others as the foundation of leadership. Servant-oriented leaders foster trust, empathy, and empowerment, which enhance team commitment and organizational cohesion (Eva et al., 2019).

In Asian collectivist cultures, servant leadership aligns closely with cultural values of humility, empathy, and social responsibility (Chan & Mak, 2014). In Thai contexts, servant-oriented leaders strengthen emotional bonds and foster familial trust, which are vital for long-term cooperation among family members and employees.

Integrative Mediation (IM)

Integrative Mediation (IM) is proposed in this study as a culturally grounded leadership dimension that captures a leader's ability to harmonize diverse perspectives, resolve conflicts constructively, and sustain relational balance. Building on Rahim's (2011) model of integrative conflict management, IM emphasizes collaboration and mutual understanding over authority-driven resolution.

In multi-generational family firms, IM plays a pivotal role in transforming potential generational conflict into working together by facilitating open dialogue, empathy, and negotiation. It enables leaders to integrate emotional intelligence with cultural norms of respect and consensus, leading to sustainable relational harmony (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Empirical evidence suggests that leaders who practice mediation-oriented behaviors enhance trust, communication flow, and collective decision-making, ultimately improving organizational performance (Zhang et al., 2019). Within the Thai cultural context, IM resonates with the concept of soft power leadership—the ability to influence through understanding and balance rather than authority.

Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF)

Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF) refers to the degree to which leaders achieve desired organizational outcomes through influence, motivation, and relational management (Yukl, 2013). Effective leaders in family enterprises must strike a balance between task performance and interpersonal cohesion, particularly across generations (Dyer, 2018). In this study, LEFF represents the holistic outcome of leadership that integrates the moral (ST), visionary (VT), and relational (SO, IM) components of leadership behavior.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on stewardship theory, transformational leadership, servant leadership, and conflict management theory, this research proposes a multidimensional model linking ST, VT, SO, and IM to LEFF. The framework suggests that while stewardship and vision provide direction and purpose, servant orientation and integrative mediation supply the relational and emotional mechanisms necessary to translate leadership vision into cohesive action.

This integration forms the foundation of the Visionary Habit Framework (VHF), a modernizing soft-power leadership as a culturally resonant approach for Thai family enterprises. It posits that leadership effectiveness is achieved not only through vision and ethics but also through the leader's capacity to mediate, integrate, and harmonize intergenerational relationships.

Thai Family Business: Governance, Culture, and Succession

Family-owned firms dominate Thailand's private-sector economy, providing stability and employment (Sribunrueng et al., 2022). They often operate within the Gong-Si system, where business and kinship are interwoven through authority, loyalty, and obligation. Such governance sustains continuity but embeds hierarchical decision-making that can constrain adaptation (Hofstede, 2001).

Stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005) describes this ethos as long-term, values-driven leadership oriented toward the preservation of socio-emotional wealth. While stewardship provides moral legitimacy, excessive adherence can hinder professionalization and innovation (Chrisman et al., 2012). Third-generation successors thus face a dual challenge, maintaining the legacy while introducing modern practices.

Research demonstrates that generational friction often stems from communication style, pace of innovation, and divergent expectations of authority (Phillipson, 2007; Qiu & Freel, 2019).

Jehn's (1995) typology task, process, and relational conflict remain useful here: when relational conflict dominates, trust declines (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

In Thai culture, avoidance is a common tactic used to preserve face and maintain harmony (Rahim, 2002); however, it can delay problem resolution and suppress innovation. Thus, generational integration demands leadership that mediates conflict while maintaining respect, which is a fundamental principle underpinning the SIL model.

Leadership Theories Relevant to Family Firms

Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Bass (1990, 1995) distinguishes between transactional leadership based on exchange, compliance, and reward and transformational leadership, which inspires commitment through vision and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leadership enhances innovation and engagement (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016), aligning with modernization goals of younger generations. However, in high power-distance cultures, such participatory styles require adaptation to traditional norms (Hofstede, 2001). This foundation informs H2, predicting that visionary transformation improves innovation outcomes.

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1977) conceptualized servant leadership as service-oriented influence rooted in empathy, listening, and follower development.

Later refinements (Liden et al., 2008) identified trust, humility, and community as central dimensions. Servant leadership aligns well with collectivist Thai values and the notion of leaders as caretakers, supporting H3, which links servant orientation to psychological safety and engagement.

Stewardship Leadership

Stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997) frames leaders as caretakers of organizational continuity, emphasizing trust and intrinsic motivation over control.

In family firms, stewardship manifests as commitment to the founder's legacy and long-term reputation (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005). While stabilizing, stewardship may resist modernization unless coupled with innovation. This dual nature forms the basis for H1, positing that stewardship enhances trust and continuity but must integrate with transformational change.

Participative, Autocratic, and Laissez-Faire Styles

Autocratic leadership ensures decisiveness but limits creativity (Tosunoglu, 2016). Democratic leadership fosters inclusion but slows decision-making (Gastill, 1994). Laissez-faire styles encourage autonomy, yet they also risk ambiguity (Woods, 2004). Thai family firms often combine these approaches across generations, suggesting that effective leadership requires contextual integration rather than rigid adherence to a single style.

Conflict Management and Psychological Safety

Effective conflict management transforms differences into collaboration. Rahim (2002) identifies integration and problem-solving as superior to avoidance or domination in sustaining long-term relationships. Edmondson (1999) defines psychological safety as a shared belief that interpersonal risk-taking is safe. In family firms, psychological safety enables younger members to contribute ideas without fear of offending seniors. Hence, H4 predicts that integrative mediation fosters collaboration and cross-generational trust, whereas avoidance diminishes performance.

Professionalization, Governance, and Organizational Size

Family firms are increasingly adopting professional governance structures to mitigate bias and improve strategic clarity (PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited, 2023). External CEOs or consultants introduce objective perspectives but must remain sensitive to family culture. Gersick et al. (1997) argue that firms balancing family control with professional oversight achieve higher sustainability. Thus, H5 anticipates stronger SIL outcomes in professionally governed and larger organizations.

Generational Differences in Leadership Preferences

Empirical studies confirm the presence of systematic generational variation in leadership preferences. Baby Boomers prioritize stewardship and stability; Generation X values mediation and pragmatism; Millennials and Gen Z favor transformational and servant approaches (Twenge, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). These preferences inform H6, expecting measurable differences in SIL dimension scores across cohorts. Integrating these preferences requires leadership capable of blending diverse expectations within a shared vision, precisely what the SIL framework proposes.

Toward the Steward-Integrator Leadership (SIL) Framework

Conceptual Integration. Synthesizing the reviewed literature reveals a recurring tension in Thai family enterprises:

- Stewardship preserves heritage but restricts innovation.
- Transformational vision encourages innovation but challenges hierarchy.
- Servant care nurtures trust but can blur authority.
- Mediation resolves conflict but requires deliberate leadership skill.

The Steward-Integrator Leadership framework integrates these dimensions into a holistic construct designed for Thailand's high power-distance, collectivist culture. SIL Dimension Theoretical Roots Core Function Expected Outcome. Stewardship Theory (Davis et al., 1997) emphasizes the preservation of legacy, responsibility, trust, and continuity (H1). Visionary Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1995) drives strategic change, innovation, and adaptability (H2). Servant Orientation Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) promotes empathy and relational trust, thereby fostering psychological safety (H3). Integrative Mediation Conflict & Psychological Safety (Rahim, 2002; Edmondson, 1999) manages generational conflict Collaboration & cohesion (H4)

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Summary

Based on the literature review and conceptual framework of the Visionary Habit Framework (VHF), this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the dimensions of Stewardship (ST), Visionary Transformation (VT), Servant Orientation (SO), and Integrative Mediation (IM) contribute to Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF) among multi-generational leaders in Thai family businesses?
2. Which leadership dimension exerts the greatest influence on leadership effectiveness?
3. Does Integrative Mediation (IM) serve as a key relational mechanism that enhances leadership harmony and performance across generations?
4. How well does the proposed Visionary Habit Framework (VHF) fit the empirical data of Thai family enterprises?

METHODOLOGY

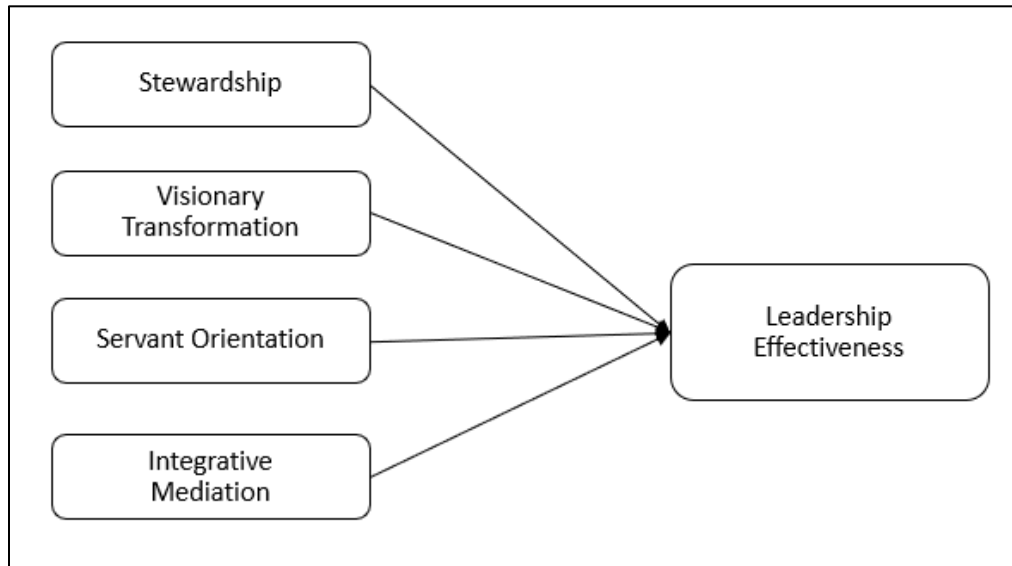
This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to observe the relationships among Stewardship (ST), Visionary Transformation (VT), Servant Orientation (SO), Integrative Mediation (IM), and Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF) within Thai family businesses using the Visionary Habit Framework (VHF). Structural Equation Modeling

(SEM) was employed to test the measurement and structural models, verifying theoretical relationships among the latent constructs.

The population comprised leaders and key members of Thai family enterprises representing at least two generations, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Using stratified purposive sampling, data were collected from 240 valid respondents, ensuring equal generational representation (25% per group). This sample exceeded the recommended minimum ratio of 10:1 for SEM parameter estimation (Kline, 2016).

Research Instrument

Figure 1 *Proposed Conceptual Framework*



Instruments

Both instruments were designed to assess leadership behavior, conflict management, and organizational climate in Thai family businesses, with special reference to the four dimensions of the Steward-Integrator Leadership (SIL) Index. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of six sections: demographic profile and five latent constructs (ST, VT, SO, IM, and LEFF). All items were adapted from established scales and measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire consisted of five parts (a total of 45 items), rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”).

Each section corresponded to theoretical dimensions validated in prior leadership and organizational research.

Part 1: Background Information

Collected demographic and organizational data: gender, age, generation (Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, Gen Z), position, firm size (SME/large), and ownership type (family-owned vs. non-family owned).

Part 2: Steward-Integrator Leadership (SIL) Dimensions

Table 1, this section measured four core leadership constructs:

Each dimension was operationalized with 8–10 items. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were later used to validate their construct validity.

Table 1 *Structure questionnaire*

Dimension	Definition	Sample Items	Sources
Stewardship (ST)	Leadership emphasizing long-term responsibility, family legacy, and socio-emotional wealth.	“Our leaders prioritize the company’s legacy over short-term gains.”	Davis et al. (1997); Miller & Le Breton-Miller (2005)
Visionary Transformation (VT)	Strategic foresight and innovation-driven leadership.	“Leaders inspire us to adapt to new technologies and markets.”	Bass (1995); Burns (1978)

Servant Orientation (SO)	Relational trust, empathy, and follower growth.	“My supervisor listens and cares about employee well-being.”	Greenleaf (1977); Liden et al. (2008)
Integrative Mediation (IM)	Constructive conflict management and generational bridging.	“Our leaders act as mediators during intergenerational disagreements.”	Jehn (1995); Rahim (2002); Edmondson (1999)

Part 3: Organizational Effectiveness (LEFF)

A six-item subscale measured perceived organizational performance, innovation, and employee satisfaction (Podsakoff et al., 1990).

Part 4: Conflict Climate and Psychological Safety

Measured perceived communication openness, collaboration, and conflict avoidance using items adapted from Rahim (2002) and Edmondson (1999).

Part 5: Open-Ended Items

Respondents could elaborate on intergenerational challenges, leadership preferences, and perceptions of succession.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected between January and March 2025 through both online and on-site distribution channels. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to minimize social desirability bias. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained in accordance with research ethics guidelines.

The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, professional networks, and family business associations. Completed responses were screened for completeness before statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 29 and AMOS 26. The analysis proceeded in three main stages:

1. Descriptive Statistics employed were frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to summarize demographic and construct-level data.
2. Measurement Model Validation using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Acceptable thresholds were factor loading > 0.60, CR > 0.70, and AVE > 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010).
3. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test hypothesized relationships among constructs. Model fit was evaluated using χ^2/df (< 3), GFI (> 0.90), and RMSEA (< 0.06).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 240 respondents participated in this study. As shown in Table 2, slightly more than half of the respondents were female (50.83%), while male respondents accounted for 49.17%. Participants were evenly distributed across four generations: Baby Boomers (25%), Gen X (25%), Millennials (25%), and Gen Z (25%), ensuring generational diversity in leadership representation.

Table 2 Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=240)

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	118	49.17
	Female	122	50.83
Generation	Boomer	60	25.00
	GenX	60	25.00
	Millennials	60	25.00
	Gen Z	60	25.00
Position	Owner	22	9.17
	Successor	64	26.67
	Manager	53	22.08
	Employee	101	42.08
Firm Size	SME	148	61.67
	Large	92	38.33

Age	Mean=40.31, S.D.=16.25
Experience	Mean=18.72, S.D.=15.71

In terms of organizational position, most respondents were employees (42.08%), followed by successors (26.67%), managers (22.08%), and owners (9.17%). Regarding firm size, 61.67% belonged to SMEs, while 38.33% were from large enterprises. The average age of respondents was 40.31 years (SD = 16.25), and the average lifetime employment was 18.72 years (SD = 15.71). These demographics suggest that the respondents represented a balanced mix of generations with substantial professional experience.

Descriptive Analysis of Constructs

Table 3 displays the mean and standard deviation of the five latent constructs. The results indicated that mean values ranged between 2.97 and 3.03, reflecting generally high and consistent perceptions among respondents.

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of all Constructed

Constructed	Items	M	SD	Ranking
Stewardship (ST)	ST	3.00	0.75	1
	ST1-ST6	2.98-3.02	0.92-0.97	
Visionary Transformation (VT)	VT	3.00	0.74	1
	VT1-VT6	2.98-3.03	0.91-0.94	
Servant Orientation (SO)	SO	2.99	0.71	5
	SO1-SO6	2.98-3.00	0.91-0.95	
Integrative Mediation (IM)	IM	3.00	0.72	1
	IM1-IM6	2.98-3.02	0.90-0.94	
Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF)	LEFF	3.00	0.76	1
	LEFF1-LEFF4	2.97-3.02	0.93-0.96	

Stewardship (ST), Visionary Transformation (VT), Integrative Mediation (IM), and Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF) all had the highest mean of 3.00. At the same time, Servant Orientation (SO) recorded a slightly lower mean of 2.99, though still positive. The small range among the constructs demonstrates that all leadership dimensions were perceived as equally important for effective leadership performance.

Measurement Model

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was first conducted to evaluate the factor loading and consistency between the empirical data and the model. The overall factor loading score was 0.68-0.79, Composite Reliability (CR) was 0.82-0.88, and Average Variance Extraction (AVE) was 0.50-0.56, indicating good discriminant validity.

The research results from Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis in Table 4 show the model goodness-of-fit criteria; Chi-square probability level was equal to 0.055, which was greater than the cut-off value of 0.05 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996). The relative chi-square (CMIN/DF) was equal to 1.128, which was less than the cut-off value of 3. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was equal to 0.904, which was more than the cut-off value of 0.90. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was equal to 0.023, which was less than the cut-off value of 0.06 (Kenny et al, 2015). Therefore, it can be concluded that the tests passed the criteria for a good fit, as shown in Table 4.

Reliability and Validity

Table 4 Model fit criteria and interpretation

Relevant Statistics	Cut-Off value	Result	Interpretation
Chi-square (χ^2)	P>0.05	0.055	Good fit
Relative Chi-square (χ^2/df)	<3	1.128	Good fit
GFI	>0.90	0.904	Good fit
RMSEA	<0.06	0.023	Good fit

To further ensure discriminant validity, Table 5 presents the Fornell–Larcker criteria that were applied. The square roots of AVE (diagonal values in bold) were greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, verifying that each latent construct is empirically distinct. The Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) and Maximum Reliability (MaxR(H)) also indicated satisfactory model performance.

Table 5 *Validity Analysis of Measurement Model*

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ST	VT	SO	IM	LEFF
ST	0.886	0.564	0.356	0.887	0.751				
VT	0.886	0.565	0.422	0.887	0.274***	0.752			
SO	0.857	0.500	0.502	0.861	0.268***	0.340***	0.707		
IM	0.868	0.524	0.503	0.870	0.275***	0.247**	0.446***	0.724	
LEFF	0.824	0.539	0.503	0.827	0.596***	0.649***	0.708***	0.709***	0.734

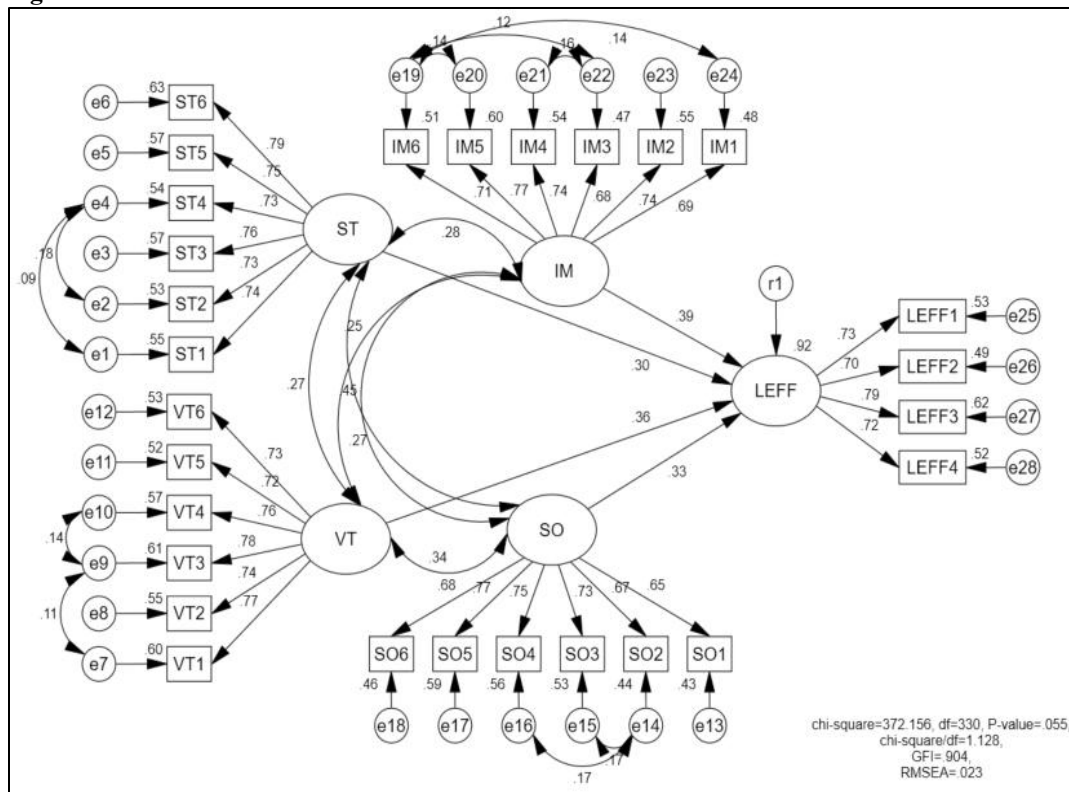
Note. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; MSV = Maximum Shared Variance; MaxR(H) = Maximum Reliability.

Diagonal values (bold) represent the square roots of AVE. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Structural Model (SEM Results)

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis in Figure 1 was conducted to test the hypothesized causal relationships among the five constructs: ST, VT, SO, IM, and LEFF. The results confirmed that all proposed hypotheses were supported, as every path coefficient was positive and significant at the 0.01 level.

Figure 2 *SEM model*



As shown in Table 6, Integrative Mediation (IM) exerted the strongest effect on Leadership Effectiveness ($\beta = 0.39$, $t = 6.42$, $p < 0.01$), followed by Visionary Transformation (VT) ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 6.70$, $p < 0.01$), Servant Orientation (SO) ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 5.36$, $p < 0.01$), and Stewardship (ST) ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 5.82$, $p < 0.01$).

These results indicate that all four leadership dimensions significantly influence leadership effectiveness among multi-generational Thai family business leaders. However, Integrative Mediation (IM) emerged as the most influential predictor, underscoring the critical role of relational harmony, conflict resolution, and negotiation in achieving effective leadership.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 *Summary of Model Effects*

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	ST $\rightarrow$ LEFF	0.30	5.82	0.000	Supported
H2	VT $\rightarrow$ LEFF	0.36	6.7	0.000	Supported
H3	SO $\rightarrow$ LEFF	0.33	5.36	0.000	Supported
H4	IM $\rightarrow$ LEFF	0.39	6.42	0.000	Supported

All four hypotheses were supported, confirming the theoretical proposition that leadership effectiveness is shaped by a synergistic combination of stewardship, vision, service, and mediation.

Model Fit Evaluation

The model demonstrated excellent overall fit:

χ^2 probability = 0.055 ($p > 0.05$), $\chi^2/df = 1.128 (< 3)$, GFI = 0.904 (> 0.90), and RMSEA = 0.023 (< 0.06).

These results confirm that the proposed Visionary Habit Framework (VHF) provides a statistically sound representation of leadership dynamics in family enterprises.

Summary of Findings

All hypotheses were supported. Leadership effectiveness in Thai family businesses is best explained by an integrative model that combines stewardship, vision, service, and mediation. Among these, Integrative Mediation (IM) emerged as the dominant predictor, validating the soft-power leadership concept as a key mechanism for intergenerational harmony and sustainable success.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study examined the causal relationships among Stewardship (ST), Visionary Transformation (VT), Servant Orientation (SO), and Integrative Mediation (IM) on Leadership Effectiveness (LEFF) among multi-generational leaders in Thai family businesses. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the analysis confirmed that all four dimensions had a significant and positive influence on leadership effectiveness. Notably, Integrative Mediation (IM) emerged as the most influential predictor, underscoring its role as the core mechanism of relational leadership within the Visionary Habit Framework (VHF).

The proposed VHF demonstrated excellent model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.128$, GFI = 0.904, RMSEA = 0.023), validating that leadership effectiveness in Thai family businesses is best explained through an integration of moral, visionary, and relational capacities.

Contribution of Leadership Dimensions to Effectiveness (RQ1)

The study found that all leadership dimensions, Stewardship, Visionary Transformation, Servant Orientation, and Integrative Mediation, positively contributed to leadership effectiveness ($p < 0.01$). This finding confirms that effective leadership is a multidimensional construct, combining ethical foundation, strategic vision, humility, and empathetic collaboration. In multi-generational Thai family enterprises, these dimensions interact to ensure both operational success and relational harmony.

Integrative Mediation as the Strongest Predictor (RQ2)

Integrative Mediation (IM) had the highest standardized effect ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$), confirming its central role as a soft-power leadership mechanism. This aligns with Rahim's (2011) theory of integrative conflict management, which highlights cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving as core leadership competencies.

In Thai cultural settings that emphasize *kreng-jai* (consideration), respect, and collective harmony, mediation represents not weakness but strength, enabling leaders to transform conflict into mutual understanding. IM therefore acts as a harmonizing force that balances the values of different generations, leading to sustainable leadership continuity.

Visionary Transformation and Adaptive Leadership (RQ3)

Visionary Transformation (VT) exerted a strong influence on leadership effectiveness ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$). This supports Bass and Avolio's (1994) transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and innovation as drivers of organizational growth.

For Thai family businesses, VT represents a leader's ability to modernize traditional systems while honoring the founder's philosophy, bridging the gap between heritage and innovation. This duality enables continuity and competitive advantage, making visionary adaptability a vital trait for next-generation leadership.

Servant Orientation and Cultural Resonance

Servant Orientation (SO) also demonstrated a significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), consistent with Greenleaf's (1977) and Eva et al.'s (2019) findings that servant leaders inspire trust and loyalty. Within Thailand's collectivist culture, servant-oriented leadership resonates with the values of *nam-jai* (kindness) and humility, fostering a family-like atmosphere in organizations.

Such leaders prioritize followers' needs, strengthen psychological safety, and create emotional bonds that transcend generational differences, reinforcing the cultural authenticity of the VHF model.

Stewardship and Ethical Continuity

Stewardship (ST) showed a significant yet comparatively diminished effect ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). This finding underscores stewardship's stabilizing role as the ethical foundation of leadership. Steward leaders act as moral guardians of the enterprise, prioritizing collective interests over self-gain (Hernandez, 2012).

In family businesses, stewardship manifests as continuity of values, trust, and relational capital that are inherited from founders. While stewardship alone may not guarantee innovation, it provides the moral compass that enables other leadership dimensions, especially vision and mediation, to thrive sustainably.

Model Validation and Cultural Context (RQ4)

The Visionary Habit Framework (VHF) achieved an excellent model fit, confirming both theoretical coherence and empirical robustness. The integration of transformational, servant, and stewardship leadership within an empathy-based mediation mechanism reflects Thailand's cultural orientation toward harmony, compassion, and balance.

This culturally grounded leadership model extends Western leadership theories by embedding relational sensitivity as a core construct, offering a localized yet globally relevant paradigm for soft-power leadership in family enterprises.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study advances leadership literature by establishing the VHF as a hybrid model that unites moral (stewardship), transformational (visionary), and relational (servant and mediation) leadership constructs.

It demonstrates that leadership effectiveness emerges not from authority or control, but from ethical intent, shared vision, and emotional intelligence, elements essential for sustaining multi-generational organizations.

The research further contributes to cross-cultural theory by framing "soft-power leadership" as a legitimate and measurable construct in non-Western contexts.

Practical Implications

Practically, the findings suggest that Thai family enterprises should: firstly, develop mediation competence to enhance empathy, listening, and conflict resolution skills across generations. Secondly, cultivate visionary adaptability through leadership programs that strike a balance between innovation and respect for heritage. Thirdly, promote servant-leader behavior by reinforcing humility, inclusion, and empowerment within the organizational culture. Finally, sustain stewardship values to ensure ethical continuity and stakeholder trust. Collectively, these practices strengthen relational harmony and ensure leadership succession aligned with both cultural and strategic continuity.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite robust results, this study's cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to capture the evolution of leadership behaviors over time.

Additionally, expanding the sample beyond Thai family businesses could improve external validity. Comparative studies across ASEAN contexts would illuminate how cultural values mediate leadership effectiveness.

Finally, exploring moderators such as organizational trust, psychological safety, and generational identity could deepen understanding of the mechanisms linking mediation to performance.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that leadership effectiveness in Thai family businesses is multidimensional and relational, rooted in ethics, vision, service, and empathy. Among these dimensions, Integrative Mediation (IM) is the most pivotal factor, enabling harmony and performance through understanding and dialogue.

The validated Visionary Habit Framework (VHF) thus offers a culturally resonant model for sustainable leadership in family enterprises, emphasizing soft power over authority, empathy over ego, and continuity over control. Such leadership not only sustains organizational performance but also preserves the moral and relational fabric that defines Thai family business success across generations.

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