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LKELMA and organizational performance: a cultural approach to relational governance in Morocco

Aida SOULAYMANI ^{1,2}, Khadija DERROUCH ², Fatima ASLAOU ¹, Ayoub ELASSALI ^{1,2}

1. Higher Institute of Nursing Professions and Health Techniques (ISPITS), Rabat; Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco, soulaymani@uit.ac.ma
2. Laboratory of Economics and Management of Organizations, Faculty of Economics and Management, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco, khadija.derrouich@uit.ac.ma, elassali.ayoub@uit.ac.ma

Abstract

Relational governance research widely addresses trust, commitment, and relational norms, but rarely operationalizes culturally embedded forms of word-based credibility. This study examines LKELMA, a Moroccan value associated with the given word or word of honor, as a relational-management construct and evaluates its association with organizational performance in the economic affairs services of Moroccan public universities. The empirical analysis includes 53 respondents. The LKELMA scale was assessed using principal component analysis, Bartlett's test, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index, and Cronbach's alpha, followed by simple linear regression. After purification, LKELMA was retained as a two-item construct (LKEL2 and LKEL3), with KMO = 0.500, explained variance = 84.807%, and standardized alpha = 0.821. LKELMA was positively associated with performance ($R = 0.450$; $R^2 = 0.202$; $\beta = 0.450$; $p < 0.001$), although its unique coefficient became non-significant in the broader six-determinant model ($\beta = 0.060$; $p = 0.461$). LKELMA therefore appears to be a culturally embedded relational resource that may complement formal governance, while its psychometric validation remains exploratory.

Keywords: LKELMA; word of honor; relational governance; trust; organizational performance; public universities; Morocco.

1. Introduction

Interorganizational performance does not depend solely on contracts, procedures, and formal control. Relational governance research shows that long-term exchanges are also shaped by trust, communication, commitment, relational norms, and shared expectations [1]-[4]. Contracts clarify obligations, whereas relational mechanisms facilitate adaptation, cooperation, and continuity. In Moroccan public organizations, governance is likewise linked to communication, transparency, trust, and institutional performance [5], [6].

Culture also influences the way relational expectations are expressed. Comparative studies on guanxi, renqing, wasta, and other culturally embedded relational systems show that social norms can structure trust, reciprocity, and business continuity without being equivalent across societies [7]-[10]. These comparisons are useful because they demonstrate that locally meaningful norms may become legitimate objects of management research.

In Morocco, LKELMA refers to the given word or word of honor. It is not synonymous with respect, trust, or commitment. Respect concerns consideration and courteous treatment; trust is a positive expectation about a partner's behavior; commitment reflects the willingness to maintain a relationship. LKELMA refers more specifically to the credibility attached to a verbal commitment and to the consistency between what is promised and what is subsequently done.

The scientific gap is therefore twofold: quantitative research on LKELMA is scarce, and culturally embedded relational norms have rarely been tested in Moroccan public-sector buyer-supplier relationships. The objective of this study is to assess the measurement quality of LKELMA and test its association with organizational performance in the economic affairs services of Moroccan public universities. The hypothesis is: H1 - A stronger perception of LKELMA in supplier relationships is positively associated with perceived organizational performance.

Figure 1 positions LKELMA as a culturally embedded relational resource operating alongside, rather than instead of, formal governance.

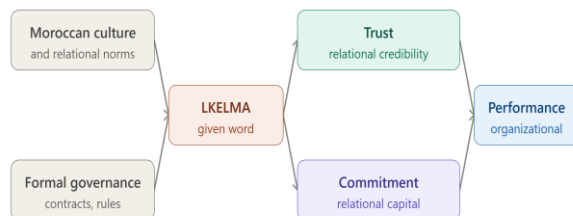


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual positioning of LKELMA within relational governance.

The model emphasizes a complementary logic: verbal credibility may foster trust and commitment, while contracts, procedures, and public procurement rules remain the formal governance framework.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. LKELMA as a relational construct

A culturally embedded norm becomes managerially relevant when it shapes expectations and behavior in recurring exchanges. In Morocco, prior work has linked the given word to interpersonal trust and informal coordination in business relationships [11]-[13]. LKELMA can therefore be

conceptualized as a norm of verbal reliability: the partner is expected to honor what has been promised, and this consistency can contribute to relational credibility.

2.2. Trust, relational governance and performance

Buyer-supplier research generally supports the complementarity of contractual and relational governance [1]-[4]. Trust and relational norms can reduce uncertainty, facilitate communication, and support performance, while formal arrangements remain necessary when accountability and legal compliance are central. This point is especially important in public universities, where relational quality cannot replace procurement rules, documentation, or traceability.

2.3. Cultural embeddedness and the Moroccan setting

The cultural dimension of LKELMA is important because relational norms derive part of their meaning from the social environment in which exchanges occur. Cross-cultural research shows that trust and relationship continuity may be supported by different locally embedded mechanisms [7]-[10]. The analytical value of these comparisons lies in identifying functional similarities—such as reputation, reciprocity, and verbal credibility—without assuming that the underlying cultural concepts are interchangeable.

In the Moroccan setting, LKELMA is particularly relevant to repeated exchanges in which actors value consistency between speech and action. Open-access Moroccan studies have discussed the role of the given word, *Niya*, and informal relational coordination in commercial networks [11]-[13]. The present study extends that line of work by providing exploratory quantitative evidence from public higher-education institutions.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Study design and participants

This article reports a focused analysis derived from a sequential qualitative-quantitative doctoral research design. The quantitative phase was cross-sectional and survey-based. The target population comprised managers involved in the economic affairs services of Moroccan public higher-education institutions, especially secretaries-general, heads of economic affairs services, and administrators. The final analytical sample included 53 respondents.

Men represented 67.9% of the sample and women 32.1%. Participants aged 45-60 years represented 47.2%, those aged 35-44 years 39.6%, and those aged 25-34 years 13.2%.

Secretaries-general accounted for 50.9% of respondents, heads of service 34.0%, and administrators 15.1%.

3.2. Measurement of LKELMA

The initial LKELMA scale contained three statements: LKEL1, 'A person must honor his or her word'; LKEL2, 'In business relationships, the given word is worth more than the contract'; and LKEL3, 'A person can trust someone who keeps his or her word'. Responses used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement.

Scale quality was examined using principal component analysis (PCA), the KMO index, Bartlett's test of sphericity, factor loadings, explained variance, and Cronbach's alpha. The dependent variable, organizational performance, was a global score combining financial and non-financial performance dimensions previously purified in the doctoral study.

Figure 2 summarizes the scale purification procedure used for LKELMA.

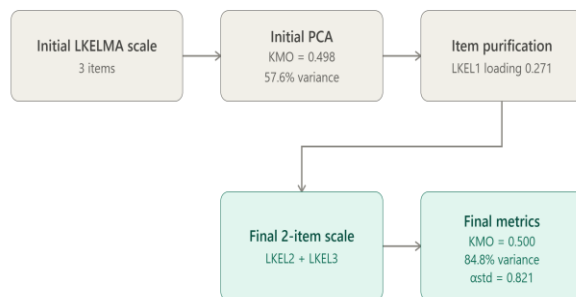


Figure 2. Construction and purification of the LKELMA measurement scale.

The procedure shows that the final scale retained the two items that most directly captured relational consequences of the given word: trustworthiness and the role of verbal commitment in business exchange.

3.3. Statistical analysis

A simple linear regression was used to test the association between LKELMA and organizational performance. R , R^2 , adjusted R^2 , the F statistic, the standardized coefficient β , the unstandardized coefficient B , and the 95% confidence interval were reported. Because the study is cross-sectional, results are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study and provided consent through completion of the questionnaire. The analysis used aggregated responses and did not report personally identifying information.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the distribution of responses to the three initial LKELMA items.

Table 1. Distribution of responses to the initial LKELMA items ($n = 53$).

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agreement (%)
LKEL1	34	17	2	0	96.2
LKEL2	30	22	1	0	98.1
LKEL3	26	25	1	1	96.2

Agreement was very high for all three statements, indicating strong normative endorsement of the given word. The almost unanimous agreement with LKEL1 also suggests limited discriminatory capacity.

Table 2 summarizes the psychometric results before and after item purification.

Table 2. Psychometric assessment of the LKELMA scale.

Stage	KMO	Bartlett p	Variance	Reliability
Initial 3 items	0.498	<0.001	57.613%	–
Final 2 items	0.500	<0.001	84.807%	$\alpha_{std} = 0.821$

LKEL1 had a low loading (0.271), whereas LKEL2 and LKEL3 loaded strongly (0.919 and 0.900). Removing LKEL1 markedly improved explained variance and internal consistency, although the final two-item scale remains exploratory.

Table 3 reports the simple regression model linking LKELMA to organizational performance.

Table 3. Simple linear regression: LKELMA and organizational performance.

R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F (1,51)	p
0.450	0.202	0.187	12.934	<0.001

The model explained 20.2% of the variance in organizational performance, indicating a moderate but statistically clear positive association.

Table 4 provides the estimated regression coefficients.

Table 4. Regression coefficients.

Term	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	3.040	0.409	–	7.431	<0.001
LKELMA	0.323	0.090	0.450	3.596	<0.001

The positive coefficient indicates that higher LKELMA scores were associated with higher perceived performance scores in the simple model.

5. Discussion

The results provide initial quantitative support for LKELMA as a culturally embedded relational construct. The positive association with performance is consistent with broader research showing that trust, relational norms, communication, and commitment can support interorganizational outcomes [1]-[4]. It is also consistent with Moroccan work emphasizing the role of communication, transparency, and trust in public-sector performance and governance [5], [6].

The most important theoretical point is that LKELMA should not be presented as a substitute for contracts. In public universities, verbal credibility may reduce behavioral uncertainty and facilitate cooperation, but formal procurement rules, written commitments, traceability, and legal accountability remain indispensable. The contribution of LKELMA is therefore relational and complementary.

The psychometric findings require caution. The final KMO value of 0.500 is only at the minimum conventional threshold, and the final scale contains two items. However, the purification itself is theoretically informative: the general moral statement that a person should honor his or her word showed little factor contribution, whereas the items linking the given word to trust and to the contract captured the relational dimension more clearly.

A second important result concerns the broader model from the doctoral study. LKELMA was significant when examined alone ($\beta = 0.450$; $p < 0.001$), but its unique coefficient was no longer significant when entered simultaneously with the other ethical dimensions ($\beta = 0.060$; $p = 0.461$). This does not invalidate LKELMA; rather, it suggests that its association with performance may overlap with trust, commitment, empathy, or other components of a broader relational system.

Future research should therefore develop a richer multidimensional LKELMA scale addressing promise-keeping, word-action consistency, relational reputation, reciprocity, and the relationship between verbal and contractual commitments. Larger samples and mediation or structural-equation models could test whether LKELMA influences performance indirectly through trust, commitment, or relational capital.

6. Managerial implications and limitations

Managers of public universities may benefit from strengthening consistency between verbal commitments and subsequent actions in supplier relationships. Clear communication, timely follow-up, and reliable fulfillment of commitments can enhance relational credibility without weakening formal procedures.

The study is limited by the small sample ($n = 53$), cross-sectional design, self-reported data, and exploratory two-item measurement of LKELMA. These limitations constrain generalization and prevent causal interpretation.

7. Conclusions

This study reframes LKELMA, the Moroccan value of the given word or word of honor, as an empirical construct of relational governance. LKELMA was positively associated with perceived organizational performance in the simple model, while its unique contribution diminished in the broader multivariable model. The findings suggest that LKELMA may operate as one component of a wider relational architecture linking trust, commitment, and performance. Its main contribution is therefore not only statistical but conceptual: it

opens a culturally grounded avenue for studying relational governance in Moroccan public organizations.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this study.

Author contributions

Aida Soulaymani: conceptualization, methodology, interpretation, and manuscript supervision; Khadija Derrouich: literature review, management perspective, critical revision, and manuscript validation; Ayoub Ellassali: data analysis, statistical interpretation, and critical revision. All authors approved the final manuscript.

Data availability

The aggregated results supporting the findings are reported in the manuscript. Additional non-identifying study materials may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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