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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN COMMERCIAL BANKS: SOUTH SUDAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to establish the influence of strategic leadership on strategy implementation in commercial banks with specific reference to South Sudan. The subsequent hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation. The research was anchored on the Upper Echelon theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory. The study applied positivism philosophy and cross-sectional research design. The population of the study was all the thirty (30) commercial banks in South Sudan and therefore census survey was utilized. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Data was analyzed using inferential statistics specifically regression analysis to test the hypothesis. The findings of the study showed that strategic leadership significantly influences strategy implementation. The study recommends that shareholders of the commercial banks need to unlock the value of their investment through effective strategic leadership by improving the management and development of strategic areas of capacity building and management policies that would be geared towards enhancing strategy implementation and also develop a framework for adoption by commercial banks, designed to address strategy implementation challenges that continue to hinder realization of key objectives.

Key Words: Strategic leadership, strategy implementation, commercial banks, South Sudan perspective.

Introduction

Strategy implementation is a very important part of the process of strategic management since all the formulated strategies must be implemented for an organization to meet the intended objectives (Elbanna & Pollanen, 2016). For a long period of time now, strategic leadership has been recognized as a major driver of effective and efficient strategy implementation. Leadership is about exercising authority either formal or informal in line with rules, policies and the established laws for the parties' responsibilities in an organization in pursuit of the set vision, mission and objectives (Ohlsson & Larsson, 2017).

According to Pearce and Robinson (2007) strategic leadership is about coping with change; and more changes always demand more leadership. Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson (2012) define strategic leadership as the ability to envision, anticipate and maintain flexibility by the leader, in ensuring empowerment to others so as to create the necessary strategic changes; it involves managing through others. Capon (2008) defines strategic leadership as the ability to positively influence a people or group of people towards goals achievement. Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble (2010) are emphatic that the role of leadership is important since its agenda for action and conclusion on how to push for change will influence the implementation process and move it forward.

Literature on strategic leadership posits that leaders placed at the top of work units or organizations have overall responsibility for the organization's strategy implementation. The central objective of an effective strategic leadership is to expand and enhance organization's adaptive and absorptive

capacity (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). It is argued that good leadership has strategic vision and is persuasive at implementing strategy to achieve tangible results. Lynch (2009) is of the view that strategic leadership typically involves communicating with and listening to those inside the organization with the aim of spreading knowledge, creating and innovating new areas and solutions to problems. Thompson et al. (2010) emphasizes that there is no doubt that effective organizational leadership and the existence of a strong organizational culture are two central elements in allowing fruitful implementation of a firm's strategies and objectives. Weak leadership can wreck the soundest strategy; forceful execution of even a poor plan can often bring victory.

A strategic leader gets all the options available and strategically applies the best combination of optimal strategies to position the firm on the growth path. Strategic leaders define key and crucial organizational strategic change moments, create appropriate strategies and translate such strategies to actions in operational terms for the change direction required (Daft, 2014). Therefore, strategic leadership is required to harness and deploy requisite organizational capabilities that allow entities to ensure successful strategy implementation (Özer & Tınaztepe, 2014).

In this study, strategic leadership has been operationalized according to Adetunji and Ogbonna (2013) as transformational and transactional leadership. Transformational leadership concerns with stimulating and inspiring followers to extra perform for better results including aspects like idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bower, 2010) whereas transactional leadership involves the use of reward and punishment to enable followers perform. This is through aspects like

management-by-exception and contingent reward (Ljungholm, 2014; Warrilow, 2012).

Implementation is the process of analyzing key success areas of organizational objectives and initiation of necessary framework to achieve desired results (Elbanna, Andrews & Pollanen, 2016). Once the strategic path has been projected, the top management's priorities swing to converting the chosen strategic plan into actions and desirable results (Thompson et al., 2010). A very critical stage of the process of strategic management is ensuring that the strategies are put into effect and getting the organization to move in the strategy accomplishment direction. Zeps and Ribickis (2015), define strategy implementation as the process of converting plans and strategies into action with the view of reaching a certain goal.

Strategy implementation has been operationalized using the McKinsey 7s structure which was developed in 1978 by Peters and Waterman (1982) focusing on how a firm achieves the suitable balance between the firm's chosen strategy and the vital resources required to implement that strategy. The initial framework was investigating the success of the Japanese industry (Banahene, Ahudey & Mensah, 2016). The model has been widely used as a tool that analyses how to increase firm performance and establish the best way of implementing the strategies proposed (Singh, 2013). The style, strategy and staff variables are clustered into the category of human capital resources. The skills, systems, structure and shared values variables are grouped as organizational capital resources (Mitchell et al., 2015).

The context of the study is the commercial banks in South Sudan. Commercial banks in South Sudan which composed both local and foreign owned as incorporated during the CPA (2005) and after independence (2011)

and generally lack long operating experience in terms of strategic leadership yet the literature affirms that strategic leadership is the basis of a firm's strategy implementation success. Commercial banks play crucial role of mobilizing deposits and advancing credit to productive investments for the benefit of stakeholders; existing and potential investors, government and customers - both retail and corporate in order to achieve the goal of financial intermediation.

To achieve this crucial role, commercial banks come up with strategic plans which their implementation becomes a milestone focus that depends on several factors including strategic leadership.

Problem of Research

Strategy implementation is central to strategic management philosophy representing the ultimate purpose of firm existence, the actualization of set objectives (Mišanková & Kočíšová, 2014). Strategic leadership studies reveal the existence of the relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation. Hutzschenreuter, Kleindienst and Greger (2012) argue that strategic leadership leads to successful strategy implementation through understanding the firm and putting appropriate measures to steer strategies towards future demands.

However, Judge (2012) argues that strategic leadership does not significantly lead to improved strategy implementation. Still, other studies (Jooste & Fourie, 2009; Abdow, 2015) found no direct relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation. This therefore creates a gap for further study to determine why there is an inconclusive finding in the previous studies.

The contextual focus of this study were the commercial banks in South Sudan driven by the fact that these banks operate in a diverse setup characterized by different strategic

options and leadership capability leading to strategy implementation challenges. Commercial banks in South Sudan lack long operating experience in terms of strategic leadership since foreign banks operate as subsidiaries with leadership framework from their parent banks. This therefore calls for strategic leadership to deal with these unique challenges in addition to the execution issues.

Interrogation of literature found several studies (Jooste & Fourie, 2009; Abdow, 2015) that have been carried out to determine the extent of the association existing between strategic leadership and strategy implementation. Some studies carried out in South Sudan found leadership and strategy implementation relating significantly. For instance, Akuei et al (2016) studying how implementation of strategies is effectively influenced by organizational culture in South Sudan commercial banks in a descriptive survey found a positive influence of leadership on effective strategy implementation. The study relied on organizational culture which had a single element of leadership among other factors in a model and thus the need for strategic leadership role in totality is necessary for generalization of the findings.

Ammar and Ahmed (2016) studying the factors deemed necessary in Sudanese microfinance to adopt mobile banking through collection of primary data by use of a questionnaire found a significant influence of leadership and implementation of technology among micro finance institutions in South Sudan. Microfinance sector was key in the study with other factors like organizational structure not considered thus the focus on commercial banks in South Sudan will give a different level of leadership influence especially if the structure under operation is also considered in the model.

Despite a number of empirical studies that link each individual study variables to strategy implementation, there is mixed and inconclusive results due to different theoretical perspectives applied and measurements of variables thus requiring a holistic approach to extensively study the relationship. Most of these studies were carried out in different contextual setups ranging from SMEs, microfinance to manufacturing however, this study extends to commercial banks in South Sudan. The use of different measures of research designs by previous studies presents a methodological gap for further interrogation. A study on descriptive research design using primary data as well as regression analysis to test the direct effect at the significance levels along the stated hypotheses is required for further comparisons. Therefore, the study sought to answer the question; how does strategic leadership influence strategy implementation among commercial banks in South Sudan?

Literature Review and Research Focus

The development of theoretical framework helps to clarify relevant theories in a clearly defined manner. In this section the theories are outlined and discussed based on their assumptions and critiques in line with the study variables. These include Upper Echelon theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Tece, Pisano & Shuen 1997). The anchor theory for the current study was the Upper Echelon Theory (UET). The Upper Echelon Theory (UET) was originated and developed by Hambrick and Mason (1984). It views strategic organizational processes and outcomes as product of managerial qualities of strategic leaders. The central tenet of the upper echelon theory is that, organizations are a reflection of the skills, expertise and values of the senior leaders as they work at strategic level (Guo, Pang & Li, 2018). According to the theory it is through strategic

leadership that proper strategies and decisions are formulated that are in tandem with how strategic implementation process should be carried out (Chen & Liu, 2018).

The propositions by the upper echelon theory have brought forth significant literature in research of the role of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. It is argued that organizations with great leaders (with proper mindset) will transform ideas and plans in to actions and therefore the achievement of the objectives and goals. The theory is chosen for this study because its assertion is similar to the study's main objective which supposes that strategic leadership can influence the strategy implementation in organizations. This theory provides assumptions that the role of strategic leaders in influencing organizational outcomes can be interpreted, the key postulation being that organizational outcomes and strategic decisions are partially predicted by strategic leaders (Qian, Cao & Takeuchi, 2013).

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) was advanced by Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997). The theory explains that activities such as development of strategies and implementation of strategic plan may be driven by management fads such as culture change, business process engineering, empowerment, quality, dramatic changes within the environment, declining organizational performance, or even both (Teece, 2014). In essence to clearly define, formulate and implement a strategy requires sharp and experienced minds through strategic leadership and the shared knowledge along the functional units.

The study applies this theory as it contends that strategy implementation is as a result of capabilities and firm capacity as well as abilities to deploy resources, usually in combination using firm's processes and procedures. The key assumption of this

theory is that management role in strategy is integration and adapting and also reconfiguring of skills of the firm especially internal including competencies and more so skills to match the environment (Di Stefano, Peteraf & Verona, 2014). The capabilities according to the theory coupled with resources enable organizations achieve the objectives set through strategic plan and implementation process.

Studies had been undertaken linking strategic leadership and strategy implementation aspects. For instance, Mubarak and Yusoff (2019) studying the impact of strategic leadership on strategy implementation through previous literature review found that organizations seem to have difficulty in executing their strategies and leadership is claimed as one of the most significant barriers and that leadership is found as an important driver in successful strategy execution suggesting that the role of leadership should be undertaken meticulously while articulating and implementing the strategic decisions.

The study however was based on literature review to come up with conclusions as opposed to the current study which adopts cross-sectional research design with specific reference to commercial banks in South Sudan

The study by Adoli and Kilika (2020) in a review of literature on conceptualizing the role of leadership strategy in the context of strategic management process and specifically focusing on on the nature of strategic management process and its contribution to answer fundamental question of how firms achieve desired strategic implementation through use of suitable leadership found that organizational leaders formulating strategies through approaches that are systematic, rational as well as logical to strategic choices at corporate, business and

functional levels are able to achieve desired goals in strategic plan. This therefore calls for an appropriate leadership strategy aimed at eliminating the gap in human capital that exists in various levels of strategic management process in an organization between the current and desired state of leadership in the future that will address the organization deficiencies by considering the right number of leaders required by the firm for the next at least 5 years with required leadership qualities, skills, behavior, team capabilities and appropriate culture. This study however only focused on a comprehensive review of conceptual and theoretical literature that brings out the role of leadership strategy in the context of strategic management process as opposed to the current study which focuses on specific leadership styles of transactional and transformational and how they affect strategy implementation through use of primary data.

Rahman, Dey and Al-Amin (2019) studying the relationship between organizational strategy and leadership style in performance efficiency in an extensive studies conducted on different peer reviewed journals which is based on leadership and organizational strategy with performance. The findings of different authors are taken into consideration to show the cause effect relationship between organizational strategy and leadership strategy. This study establishes different proposition and validated those proposition with the analysis of different findings of different authors among them the importance of leadership in organizational strategy with the view that proper leadership results to organizational strategy that is in tandem with the organizational goals.

The study however focused on performance efficiency which differs from the current study which emphasizes of strategy implementation as an end result of strategic

leadership with specific reference to commercial banks in South Sudan context.

A review literature study by Zainol, Kowang, Hee, Fei and Kadir (2021) on managing organizational change through effective leadership argued that a well-planned change management by strategic leadership is crucial to ensure that change can be made to the entire organization and effectively implemented. Organizational change to foster implementation of strategies must be driven by a good leadership so that it is effectively and efficiently administered. The overall view from the past studies show that a good manager has the ability to drive the employees to accept change initiatives in the organization towards implementing a certain strategy of interest. This paper aimed to evaluate how prior researches had been dealing with change management in recent years taking in account of leadership styles of the managers. The current study deals with specific leadership styles and how strategy implementation can be achieved without necessarily managing change in the organization.

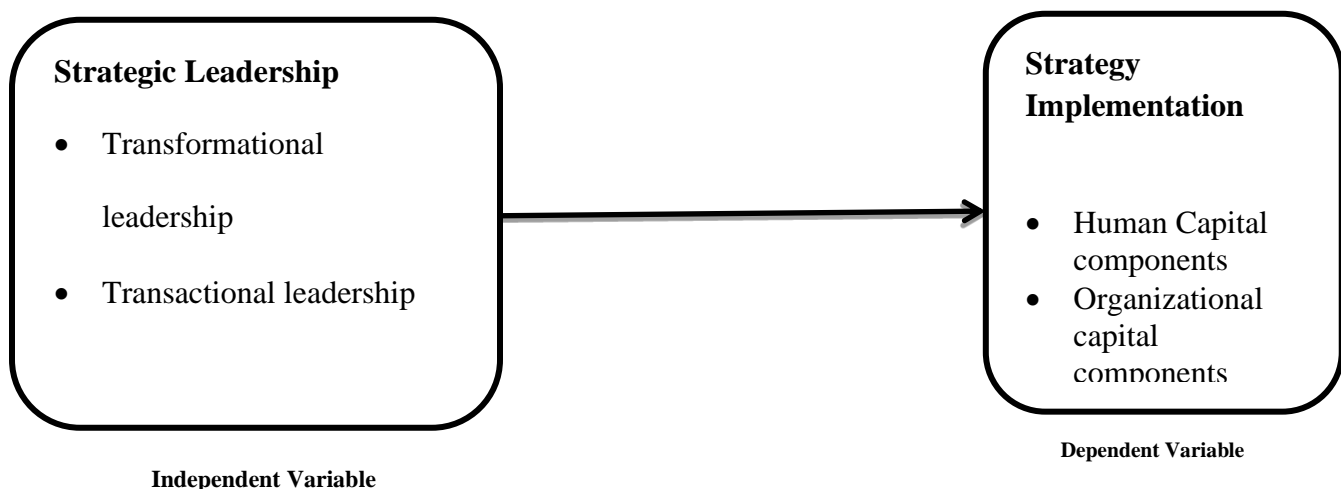
A study by Kabeyi (2019) on organizational strategic planning, implementation and evaluation with analysis of challenges and benefits argued that for an effective strategy to be implemented, strategic leadership should start with a SWOT analysis which will enable the organization to build on its strengths and utilize opportunities while controlling or managing threats and weaknesses and that strategy implementation should be linked by an evaluation strategy by strategic leadership to realize strategy success otherwise the strategies remain useless paperwork. The study argued that a good strategic plan will give significant benefits to organizations like increased profitability and better corporate governance. It should however be noted that having a strategic plan does not guarantee

success, but a well-crafted, innovative and creative plan that is well implemented will guarantee success which is the focus of this study in the context of South Sudan commercial banks.

The conceptual framework for this study has been developed based on the literature and empirical reviews. The scholar, avers, conceptual framework as a hypothesized

model that identifies concepts or variables considered in a study bringing out the relationships. This conceptual study paper seeks to understand the relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation constructs. The relationships among variables are outlined in Figure 1

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



General Background of Research Methodology

The research methodology discusses the procedures involved to come up with research findings. It starts by establishing the research philosophy, research design employed and the population of the study. Furthermore, the instruments employed and the technique involved including reliability tests, validity tests and regression analysis was established. Finally, the technique of data analysis both descriptive and inferential analysis for testing hypothesis is discussed in this section.

Sample of Research

The study covered all commercial banks in South Sudan. According to Bank of South Sudan (2020) there were 30 licensed commercial banks in the country. The study used a census survey as it covered all commercial banks in South Sudan since a rule of thumb for regression analysis to be performed is a minimum sample of 30. The commercial banks were selected because they are subject to the Bank of South Sudan (BSS) guidelines and regulations. The variables under the study fit well in the discussion within the context of these banks.

Given that the population is relatively tiny, this approach was thought to be reasonable. In order to collect data, survey questionnaires were self-administered to these commercial banks by drop-and-pick-up technique. Table

1 provides a summary of the categorization of commercial banks.

Table 1: Categorization of Commercial Banks in South Sudan

Category	Number of commercial banks
National commercial banks	12
Joint Venture commercial banks	11
Foreign commercial banks	7
Total	30

Source: Bank of South Sudan (2020)

Instrument and Procedures

This research used primary data that was gathered using a questionnaire. Before issuing the questionnaire, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity concerning their contributions. The management questionnaires were self-administered by use of drop and pick up later approach so as to allow the participants enough time to respond to the questions, thereby enhance accuracy in responses and improve response rate. The researcher equipped himself on various aspects including making rapport with the participants, and observation of ethical issues in data collection. In order to increase response rate, appointments with the participants were made, upon which the researcher met the participants for data collection. Furthermore, an introduction letter from university of Nairobi faculty of business indicating the aim of the study was obtained and given to the respondents. Additionally, participants were assured of voluntary participation and utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Analysis

Prior to data collection, pilot test was carried out where reliability was computed using Cronbach's Alpha and reliability using factor analysis. Data diagnostics were conducted to ensure that the data meets the threshold for further tests. The study used simple linear regression analysis to test the hypothesis.

The general model for predicting strategy implementation was represented by the following model: $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon_1$ where Y is the strategy implementation which is a linear function of X_1 (Strategic leadership).

Results of Research

The objective was to determine the effect of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. A simple regression analysis was utilized where strategic leadership was regressed against strategy implementation. The hypothesis formulated was that;

H₁: There is no significant relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation in commercial banks in South Sudan.

The derived statistical results from a simple regression analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Regression Results for the Effect of Strategic Leadership on Strategy Implementation

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.847 ^a	.717	.707	.40924	.717	70.972	1	28	.000	1.416
a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic leadership										
b. Dependent Variable: Strategy implementation										
ANOVA ^a										
Model		Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.			
1	Regression	11.886		1	11.886	70.972	.000 ^b			
	Residual	4.689		28	.167					
	Total	16.576		29						
a. Dependent Variable: Strategy implementation										
b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic leadership										
Coefficients ^a										
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.				
		B	Std. Error	Beta						
1	(Constant)	.384	.419		.918	.367				
	Strategic leadership	.905	.107	.847	8.424	.000				
a. Dependent Variable: Strategy implementation										

Source: Research data (2022)

The study found a strong positive relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation (R= .847). Coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .717$) indicates that strategic leadership explain 71.7% of variation in strategy implementation.

The overall model was statistically significant ($F=70.972$, $p<0.05$). The

significant relationship is further manifested by the t-value in the coefficient table ($\beta=.905$, $t=8.424$, $p<0.05$). This therefore depicts that strategic leadership is key in determining strategy implementation of commercial banks in South Sudan and thus the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation is rejected.

Discussion

The objective of the study was to establish the effect of strategic leadership on strategy implementation in the commercial banks in South Sudan. And the corresponding hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation in commercial banks in South Sudan however, it was found that strategic leadership has a statistically significant influence on strategy implementation. The findings support previous studies for instance by Abashe (2016) who studied the influence of strategic leadership in strategy implementation focusing on 106 managers of KCB Group based in Nairobi. The study established that setting long term direction by strategic leaders affects strategy implementation. The study found that leaders set objectives of the company and that in the long-term process, the human resource planning needs are addressed thus more customer-focused due to effective goals setting.

According to a study by Kahiga, (2017) on the influence of Strategic Leadership Practices on Competitive Advantage of National Bank of Kenya concluded that banking leaders require the right leadership style like strategic leadership to be able to guide their organization sustainable competitive advantage, above average profitability and financial performance. This is necessary due to the new daily challenges faced by banks and especially with the most recent global financial crisis. Strategic leadership plays a crucial role in the provision of superior business performance. Competition among banks increased with the creation of incentives by the government in support of domestic and foreign investors to run businesses. Mubarak and Yusoff (2019) studying the impact of strategic leadership on strategy implementation through previous literature review found that organizations

seem to have difficulty in executing their strategies and leadership is claimed as one of the most significant barriers and that leadership is found as an important driver in successful strategy execution suggesting that the role of leadership should be undertaken meticulously while articulating and implementing the strategic decisions.

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strategy and leadership style in performance efficiency in an extensive studies conducted on different peer reviewed journals which is based on leadership and organizational strategy with performance. The findings of different authors are taken into consideration to show the cause effect relationship between organizational strategy and leadership strategy. This study establishes different proposition and validated those proposition with the analysis of different findings of different authors among them the importance of leadership in organizational strategy with the view that proper leadership results to organizational strategy that is in tandem with the organizational goals.

Kirimi and Minja (2011) stress that strategic leaders influence others through actions and ensure the employees understand and observe the corporate governance and ethical codes. Therefore, the direction that a firm takes in its performance would be an indication of the kind of leadership exhibited by the leadership. Carter and Greer (2013) argue that strategic leaders will always strive to meet the bottom line of the organization, which translates into better financial performance, product market performance and shareholder returns. Strategic leaders would thus endeavour to foster strategic direction and share it with other stakeholders for collective efforts to achieve set goals.

However, Oladele and Akeke (2016) opine that strategic leadership does not necessary lead to performance and only some aspects e.g. inspiration exhibited significant positive relationship with leadership. It can therefore be implied that strategic leaders need to possess and are willing to learn in a bid to improve their capacity to steer organisations for better performance in the eye of the all stakeholders be it shareholders, customers and even regulators as is the case of MFIs. The study suggests that commercial banks should provide trainings on transformational

leadership to supervisors in order to create awareness about the positive impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement which ultimately makes a difference on employees' job performance (Yeshitila & Beyene, 2019). In addition, commercial banks should encourage supervisors to exhibit all dimensions of transformational leadership to make employees love their work and organization rather than performing with fear.

Palladan, Abdulkadir and Chong (2016) studied the effect of strategic leadership, organization innovativeness; information technology capability on effective strategy implementation in a survey of cross-sectional nature conducted in tertiary institutions located in Kaduna State in Nigeria's educational sector. The results showed that contextual performance in the form of strategic leadership behaviors, organizational innovation attitude (innovativeness) and IT capability promotes the effectiveness of the institutions and that having strategic leaders in place couple with innovation attitude and IT capability of the institutions increases the efficiency of the overall institutions due to proper implementation of good and reputable strategies. Further Palladan (2017) studies the effects of strategic leadership, organizational innovativeness and information technology capability on effective strategy implementation and suggested that strategic leadership, organizational innovativeness and information technology capability are found to be significant and positively affect organizational effective strategy implementation suggesting that the variables are important in facilitating strategy implementation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study determined the effect of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. The study found a strong relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation. Coefficient of determination indicated that strategic leadership explained 71.7 % of variation in strategy implementation. Further the overall model was significant as depicted by F-value. The significant relationship was further manifested by the significant t-value in the coefficient table.

This therefore depicts that strategic leadership is key in determining strategy implementation within commercial banks in South Sudan and thus the hypothesis that there is no significant influence of strategic leadership on strategy implementation is rejected.

The study recommends that shareholders of the commercial banks need to unlock the value of their investment through effective strategic leadership by improving the management and development of strategic areas of capacity building and management policies that would be geared towards enhancing strategy implementation and also develop a framework for adoption by commercial banks, designed to address strategy implementation challenges that continue to hinder realization of key objectives. Further the study suggests that commercial banks should provide trainings on transformational leadership to supervisors in order to create awareness about the positive impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement which ultimately makes a difference on employees' job performance. In addition, commercial banks should encourage supervisors to exhibit all dimensions of transformational leadership to make employees love their work and

organization rather than performing with fear.

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