

Factors Affecting Sound Implementation of Sustainable Leadership Development. The Case of the Sudanese Financial and Telecommunication Business Organizations.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

Sustainable leadership express the ability of business organization to adapt to environmental challenges and changes, while considering the future sustainability and continuity of the businesses Most empirical evidence is found in developed economies and fragmented in single sectors, emerging economies are under researched. This research aims to investigate sustainable leadership development in Sudanese financial and telecommunication sector, and highlight managerial awareness, orientation and perceived obstacles to tis implementation.

Methodology Approach

This is an exploratory qualitative research designed to shed lights on specific context, semi structured interviews were conducted with managers in financial and telecommunication organizations Non probability sampling was used to select respondents, namely purposive sampling. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key context specific practice factors influencing sustainable leadership development implementation.

Findings

The findings showed that a high level of understanding to the concept of sustainable leadership development among managers. A significant gap is perceived between awareness and practical implementation. The following obstacles: limited human capital capabilities, organizational culture, financial resources, digital infrastructure, governance practices and regulatory condition were highlighted.

Theoretical Implications

The research provides empirical evidence on Sustainable leadership development from an emerging economy. It highlights the contextual contingencies (crisis conditions) influencing sustainable leadership implementation in under-researched settings. The research advances theoretical integration between sustainable leadership and digital transformation in a combined sector financial service and telecommunication.

Practical implications

The research provides actionable insights for business organizations and policymakers to embed business the implementation of sustainable leadership development and impose regulatory factors and provide supportive governance measurements.

Value

The research highlights the contextual contingencies influencing sustainable leadership implementation in under-researched settings such as emerging economies. It also reveals how crisis conditions and absence of strategic intents shaped leadership development. The findings offer a framework for understanding sustainable leadership development in fragile environments.

Keywords: Sustainable leadership development; financial and telecommunications sectors; Emerging economies

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable business and sustainable leadership development are shaping the future of most business organizations worldwide and influencing their performance and competitiveness. This research seeks to investigate how sustainable leadership development and digital transformation affect the performance of the service sector in Sudan.

The study focuses on active organizations within the service industry in Sudan. The research has targeted private sector organizations, as they represent the most dynamic component of the service industry. Given the current political and economic situation in Sudan, the research has identified active companies through their official websites and the researcher's professional network. Due to the current war in Sudan most of these organizations has relocated their services and operations from Khartoum state to Port Sudan being a safe state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before delving into sustainable leadership as a concept and sustainable leadership development as a capacity building program it is important to identify the concepts that have contributed to the emergence and development of the concept, sustainable development and sustainable business are discussed in the coming part

Sustainable development

Sustainable development appeared due to the social environmental problems that appeared in the 1980s, how nations would offer clean water, education, and health care protect biodiversity, protect environment and ensure the development of industry to develop the country. Within this context, Mensah, (2019) has explained Sustainable development as sustainability in the course of development that can go on forever or for the specified amount of time that consider the environment preservation.

Thus, it is a concept and paradigm for development that advocates raising living standards without endangering the planet's ecosystems or creating environmental problems like deforestation and air and water pollution, which can lead to issues like climate change and species extinction. Fonseca, Domingues and Dima, (2020) defined Sustainable Development as the effort to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" which was the original definition of sustainable development.



Figure No.1

Source: Arenasolutions.com (2024).

The above figure demonstrates the definition of Sustainable Development and the interactions between the three dimensions.

In this concern the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals has tackled industry sustainability and good manufacturing practices aiming to preserve the environment and sustainable business practices. Different countries worldwide are introducing these Sustainable Development Goals in their national strategies; as well companies are adopting and incorporating these goals in their strategies. These strategies are geared towards the accomplishment of the 2030 UN adoption agenda.

Sustainability encompasses social, economic, and environmental dimensions it is a critical factor for organizational well-being and a unique resource for attaining sustainable competitive advantage. In today's technology-driven landscape, where resource accessibility is relatively equal among organizations, successful entities rely on their employees' competence and citizenship behaviors to anchor their competitive strategies.

The sustainability issues in regards to economic, social and environmental factors in a given country determine the directions towards which the business organizations have to adhere to these sustainable foundational issues. Business organizations have to align with the United nations 2030 strategy for sustainable development.

Sustainability in business enhances sustainable leadership development in the business organization as it lays the foundation and eligibility for sustainable leadership. The sustainable leader has to consider all the principles of sustainability and be knowledgeable about their impact on their business operations and how they align with business objectives.

The practices of sustainability in the service industry directly impact the negative waste management and reduce pollution levels. Tang (2021), Sustainable business is related to the ability of business models to adapt and integrate innovation to participate in the creation of sustainable businesses that is becoming associated with most business organizations in their different sectors.

Sustainable businesses must be accountable to their different stakeholders and in order to be profitable, they must maintain the well-being of their stakeholders. Sustainable businesses must leave stakeholders better off and reduce the negative impact of their operations; they must create a positive social and environmental

impact. Sustainable businesses must be transparent and advocate for change and innovative solutions. Sustainable businesses place sustainability as a core value. The natural environment and society are considered the main stakeholders in the business. Sustainable businesses must measure the impact of their business operations, seek business opportunities and also improve their operations in a continuous manner.

Sustainability in the Service Industry

While sustainability concepts originated in manufacturing, they have become equally vital for the service sector, which forms the backbone of many developing economies, including Sudan. The service industry—comprising finance, health, education, tourism, and information technology—plays a critical role in employment creation and GDP contribution. Its sustainable transformation is therefore crucial for achieving the UN SDGs, particularly Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) United Nations, (2023).

In the service context, sustainable practices include efficient resource use, customer-centric innovation, ethical governance, and digital integration. For instance, digital transformation can reduce waste, enhance transparency, and promote accessibility of services Broccardo et al (2023). Stobierski (2021) emphasized the importance of employee engagement and education in promoting sustainability, arguing that empowered employees are key drivers of change.

Sustainability in the service sector also demands responsible supply chain management. Even though services often rely less on physical production, they depend heavily on networks of suppliers, technology providers, and logistics partners. Hence, sustainable supply chain collaboration—focusing on transparency, ethical sourcing, and environmental responsibility—is essential for achieving corporate sustainability goals Atasu et al., (2019).

Sustainable leadership

Sustainable leadership as a concept started in the educational sector and many studies discussed this issue and its effect on the educational institution. Many studies looked at it from organizational perspectives and how it would affect the business organization

A comprehensive definition for Sustainable leadership was derived by Šimanskienė and Župerkienė (2014) as a type of leadership that is carried out with accountability to individuals, groups, and organizations by evaluating the ecological, social, and economic principles of sustainability within the framework of a community, organization, and group and by promoting successful learning and teaching based on these principles, as well as successful self-expression by individuals.

Muhammad Jehanzaib Chaudhry and Sadia Noureen (2023) explained that though sustainable leadership is a relatively "new approach" to leadership, it encompasses historical elements and practices that can result in significant progress and development for individuals and organizations. Sustainable leadership emphasizes the need for the development of culture and suggests that succession planning should be taken as an inevitable and essential practice. Coherent and cohesive values should be embedded to any organizations or individuals' work environment for their efficient functionality.

As mentioned by Elia et al., (2024) business organizations are part of nature and the foundation of sustainable leadership perspective. Social, physical, ethical, and commercial factors all support the idea that businesses should provide value that is knowledge-based, knowledge-creating, sustainable, and profitable Shrivastava (1995). Sustainability combines tactics to ensure that high corporate performance incorporates social and environmental concerns.

Hargreaves and Fink (2004) have defined and stated that Sustainable leadership is important, contagious, and enduring. It is a shared duty that takes care of and refrains from causing harm to the local community and educational system while not excessively depleting human or financial resources. An activist approach to sustainable leadership involves interacting with the forces that impact it and creates a diverse organizational

learning environment that encourages the exchange of beneficial concepts and effective methods in communities of collaborative development and learning.

Though the components listed below are based on the work of several authors, there is no one-size-fits-all curriculum for becoming a sustainable leader. Instead, things like traits, actions, and practices will vary depending on the leader's personality and temperament as well as the context in which they are operating.

Igbal, Ahmad and Halim (2021) based on their work on the Resource Based Value Furthermore, sustainable leadership increases organizational performance by reducing costs and increasing potential revenue. Sustainable leaders have proactive approach where they constantly scan the environment to monitor the external changes in the market Gerard et al., (2017 where they develop sustained relationship with internal and external stakeholders. Regarding internal activities, sustainable leaders develop a long-term vision, emphasize on the green initiatives, recognize sustainability issues, instill green management systems, and promote incremental and radical innovation Yet, out of the organization, sustainable leaders focus on accomplishing optimum performance for both society and environment Under sustainable leadership, organizations reap numerous benefits such as protecting the natural resources and efficient usage of resources.

In order to practice sustainable leadership, one must nurture a culture of inclusivity, diversity, and equal opportunity as well as good work environment and employee wellbeing. Fair labor practices, work-life balance, and the general well-being of employees are all facilitated by social sustainability. Organizations improve employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity—all of which contribute to improved performance—when they give equal weight to social sustainability and sustainable leadership. Fecap.br (2024)

Because it incorporates social considerations into sustainability strategies, engages stakeholders, improves employee well-being, establishes reputation, assures long-term viability, and generates good societal effect, the relationship between social sustainability and sustainable leadership is significant. Organizations may build a more just, egalitarian, and sustainable future by giving priority to both ideas. Fecap.br (2024) Different models tackled the issue of sustainable leadership starting from Honeybee

Individual traits is the starting point for sustainable leadership development as mentioned by Hu et al, (2024) they argued that different types and styles of leadership focused on the characteristics of the leaders and their internal impact on the organization and due to the global direction towards the inclusion of sustainability in business organizations. Sustainable leadership addresses this direction clearly. The sustainability issue is considered as one of the direct valuation for business organization and responsible business and as an attraction for investors and concern for society. Globalization has increased the need for innovative business solutions and manufacturing facilities that consider the environment and reducing fewer emissions that pollute the environment. Sustainable business thus entails the business operations

Sustainable leadership in organization is viewed as being a source for organizational learning competitive advantage and a value creating orientation, by linking sustainable practices to the business operations. The spread of the concept of sustainable leadership transcend to small and medium enterprise For example in India Small and medium enterprises also started to incorporate in their business operations sustainable issues and to reflect on the role of sustainable leadership as indicated by Luthra (2024), these enterprises have pivotal role in the economic growth of India and they are contributing by a large number labor employment. The study identified how sustainable leadership would affect the implementation of labor laws and human resource practices in these enterprises.

Sustainable leadership encompasses those activities and practices that produce long-term value for all stakeholders including the community, environment, and business organization employees. If effectively developed and managed sustainable leadership enhances the competitive advantage of the business organization through its different aspects, considering the strategy of the organization and the culture that needs to be nurtured to embrace the sustainability of the business in the context or form of innovative operations, procedures, envisioning the business to integrate business solutions that preserve the environment and encourage continuous improvements Woo and Kang (2020) mentioned that the impact of environment on business organization is important and how it needs to be incorporated in the businesses due to the fact that it

affects their operations. The effect of environmental sustainability on the business and the role of leadership to incorporate charismatic leadership style to address sustainability in the business.

One might argue if Sustainable leadership would have a role during crisis. The activities which were implemented during the Pandemic could clearly highlights the impact leaders have on business sustainability. Leadership allows business organization to be more creative in developing their products and services if we consider the turbulent environment since COVID19, businesses became more resilient. Innovative business solutions which some business developed to overcome the pandemic business disruptions, for instance directing some of the business operations to be electronic, digitalizing some business operations to reduce human interactions. In this regard the global supply chain was hardly hit. Accordingly business organizations turned towards digital transformation and more use of business analytics and internet of things to sustain their businesses.

Several studies argued whether Sustainable leadership could be the effective management approach to address issues of sustainability in business Sebastian & Hühn (2024) questioned the impact or role sustainable leadership or behaviors have on organizational performance.

In this context Lewandowska et al. (2023) indicated that employees have long been seen as the organization's most valuable resource, employee satisfaction can be a critical indicator of organizational sustainability, and the majority of sustainable leadership approaches have a direct impact on employees Sustainable leadership practices are encompassed by multiple management systems, processes and values that can create a long-run organizational performance. In short, sustainable leadership practices can enhance employee satisfaction with the job and organization and also contribute to high organizational performance

Environmental degradation and preservation is among the top priorities of different national and international organization concerned with providing more greener and healthy lifestyle to their communities. Constructing a business strategy to fulfill these concerns is being highly appreciated by environmental protection agencies whether locally, regional or globally is becoming challenging for business organization especially for those engaged in manufacturing industries, and many community based organizations evaluate the business responsibility to how effectively they develop their business operations that cater for environmental issues. Hu et al, (2024) mentioned that business organizational leadership orientation towards sustainability impact their directions in leading their executive teams to embark sustainable leadership.

Different leadership styles evolved during the last period, each fostering specific business stance in regards to the directives it undertake for the business. For example the transformation leadership, ethical, concentrate on some issues for instance profit generation in the organization, as well as the traditional leadership style stemming from leadership theory, autocratic, democratic, participatory leadership styles which consider changing certain aspects in the organization. On the contrary Sustainable leadership could be looked at as a broader concept in addressing business problems as well as trying to preserve the environment and contribute to community development.

Innovation is fundamental components of sustainability Sustainable leaders promote an innovative culture that supports responsible product creation, resource efficiency, and sustainable business models. For instance Sustainable Leadership would have the potential to prioritize sustainability issues within the organization and possess the skill of recognizing and reducing risks related to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) aspects. They are aware that neglecting these risks may negatively impact one's reputation in addition to one's financial performance. Khoiruddin et al., (2023)

Bencsik and Berke (2023) Human resource development, organizational strategy, and organizational culture are the three fundamental foundations of sustainable leadership at the organizational level. In addition to reinforcing the practices of sustainable leadership, sustainable leadership addresses the formation of organizational culture from the perspectives of creativity, trust, and sustainability Avery and Bergsteiner (2011). Amara and Chen (2020). The relationships between people, corporate communities, the environment, and consumer demand are the main areas of attention for the strategic orientation. Strategic choices also take

into account the preservation of the environment and societal well-being in order to accomplish this Burawat (2019).

People-centered leadership is implied by human resource development. Workers act as a devoted team and are stakeholders in the company Avery and Bergsteiner (2011). Because of the cross-level, sustainable leadership may more effectively incorporate sustainability concepts into the growth of the organization by comprehending emerging trends and bridging the gap between individual and organizational viewpoints. They assist in the organization's transition into a sustainable business by doing this.

Sustainable leadership development underpins the success of individual employees who work in a team to guarantee the long term continuity of the business. Many construct has tackled the issue of sustainable leadership, such as Honeybee, locusts, they tried to reflect that the work of these natural species illustrate the concept of sustainable leadership in the following dimensions the work division and the persistency to work. The locust nature is that they are characterized by strong powers and are self-centered. The metaphoric in the since that the honeybee hive benefits all the community internal and external through the production of Honey. In contrast locust is self-contained and just benefits the internal Avery & Bergsteiner (2011).

Sustainable leaders work is built on sharing of information and delegation of authority to empower their subordinates and motivate them to be more creative and develop novel business practices and innovate in the way they perform their duties and responsibilities which positively affect business performance. Nazir, et,al (2022).Sustainable leadership requires the commitments of all organizational levels to ensure it is being practiced

Sustainable leadership it is taking from different leadership styles and theories such as trait leadership, transformational leadership, stakeholder theory. When considering its definition. Sustainable means maintainable which simply connote to durability and leadership determines the direction of the organization and achieve the vision of the organization. The leader directs the activities of the team to achieve the business activities. Leadership has the ability to influence and motivate group members for implementing business objectives.

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to provide or develop measurements to be used by the service industry companies to adopt sustainable leadership development programs to improve their current business performance to enhance the industry competitiveness and elevate these business organizations performance to aspire for regional and global markets, with the following specific objectives:

1. Understand the concept of sustainable leadership development and its impact on organizational performance.
2. Examine how Sustainable leadership practice would impact business performance in the Service Industry.
3. Identify the challenges to implement sustainable leadership development in the Sudanese financial services and telecommunication sectors.
4. Develop a business measurement to enhance sustainable leadership development in business organization in the financial service and telecommunication sectors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is necessary to characterize and evaluate methods, shed light on the resources and limitations, interpret the assumptions and outcomes, and connect the potential to the "frontiers of knowledge" as mentioned by Patel and Patel, (2019).

As stated by Albudaiwi (2018) research rigor when conducting a quantitative study, researchers aim to choose a sample that will optimize the study's generalizability. In qualitative research, researchers would look for the most intriguing cases and increase the likelihood of finding the entire spectrum of phenomena of interest. In addition to identifying representative respondents, the researchers would also have to decide on various sampling choices in addition to identifying representative respondents, such as the following: When should the study be carried out? What time of day or season is it? At what locations? For how long?.

Research Design

The researcher has followed the qualitative approach in this study and was applied with the aim of retrieving in-depth insights regarding the perceptions of the participants for the concept of Sustainable leadership development and its impact on business performance in Sudanese service industry.

Population and Sampling

The researcher has followed non probability sampling, in choosing the organizations that constitute the population of the study which are working in the service sector in Sudan.

Purposive or Judgmental Sampling.

In this method, the researcher uses their judgment and experience to select sample members they believe are best suited to achieving the study's objectives. These individuals are chosen because they possess specific characteristics, in-depth knowledge, or unique experiences relevant to the research topic, the researcher might purposively select a sample of entrepreneurs who have successfully established their companies and others who have experienced failure. This method is very useful in qualitative research that seeks depth rather than breadth, but its results depend heavily on the researcher's judgment and may be subjective.

Inclusion criteria

- Employed in a service-sector organization (e.g., hospitality, banking, healthcare, retail, logistics) operating in Sudan.
- Role: manager or team leader from different departments
- As indicated by Simkus, J.(2022), sample members are not chosen randomly, but rather based on the researcher's personal judgment, accessibility, or to achieve specific study objectives. In this case, the probability of selecting every individual in the population is unknown and may be zero for some. The researcher anticipated that this type of sampling serves the purpose of the research and is suitable for the exploratory studies, qualitative research that focuses on understanding a phenomenon in depth rather than generalizing it or in situations where it is impossible to establish a sampling framework. The quality of the sample is the foundation for the quality of the results.

Limitations: Because this method is non-probability, results might not be statistically applicable to the whole Sudanese service industry. Selection bias may be introduced by the sample's overrepresentation of companies and people who are more approachable, cooperative, or involved with technology. Therefore, rather than being conclusive, results should be considered as suggestive and hypothesis-generating.

Data Collection.

A semi structured interview was conducted with 45 managers and senior employees from the selected business organizations in both the financial service and telecommunication to gather data the questions covered leadership development practices, organizational readiness.

The interview questions were built on the research questions and were divided into the following main sections:

- Demographic information
- Awareness to the concept and familiarity with the constructs of sustainable leadership
- Strategies and procedures of sustainable leadership.
- Effects of sustainable leadership development on organizational performance in regards to financial, processes.
- Actual obstacles and expected hindrances for the implementation of sustainable leadership development.
- Recommendation and the way forward.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis method was used as a technique of data analysis from qualitative responses, and it involved the steps that include data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and refinement.

The analysis of the qualitative data which was designed to evaluate the organizations orientation towards developing sustainable leadership capability of the employees. This is very important because it determines whether the company has hands on sustainable leadership development, and has well established training programs to educate its employees and leaders about the trilogy of business, society and the environment, and whether these programs focus on some of the principles of sustainable leadership such as systems thinking, long-term planning, stakeholder engagement, communication, and change management.

Data Analysis and Results.

The results of the analysis of the data obtained through the semi-structured interviews indicate that, from the participants' perspective, the concept of sustainability extends beyond the economic dimension to encompass organizational continuity, quality, long-term growth, environmental protection, social responsibility, and strategic leadership underpinned by innovation. This reflects a comprehensive understanding consistent with the current literature on sustainable leadership and sustainable development in business and service sectors.

The analysis revealed a high level of awareness among both managers and employees regarding sustainable leadership development and digital transformation, as well as their impact on the performance of business operations. Stobierski (2021) recognized the role of employee engagement and education in promoting sustainability, highlighting that employees represent a key driving force in sustainability initiatives. Similarly, Iqbal and Sulej (2022) indicated that environmental turbulence moderates the effect of sustainable leadership on employees' well-being in small enterprises. This suggests that external environmental conditions can significantly influence the implementation of sustainability practices and may interrupt business operations.

Furthermore, Northouse (2021) explained that the vision of a business organization is translated into reality through effective leadership. Leaders must possess the necessary abilities to motivate followers and encourage them to embrace change. These abilities function as internal mechanisms for inspiring employees, directing organizational processes, and supporting the achievement of shared objectives. Accordingly, although the findings indicate a high level of awareness of sustainable leadership among respondents, awareness alone is not sufficient to champion sustainable leadership practices within organizations.

Sustainability in the service sector also requires responsible supply chain management practices. Although the production requirements in the service sector are lower compared with manufacturing industries, the sector still depends on supply chains through information technology solutions, service providers, and logistics partners. Therefore, sustainable supply chain collaboration—focusing on transparency, ethical sourcing, and environmental responsibility—is essential for achieving corporate sustainability goals (Atasu et al., 2019). Respondents indicated that the implementation of some sustainable business practices has already influenced their operational processes and improved supply chain management effectiveness.

In addition, the respondents emphasized business continuity, organizational excellence, and long-term development while considering environmental and societal responsibilities. This perspective aligns with the argument of Iqbal, Ahmad, and Halim (2021), who demonstrated through the Resource-Based View that sustainable leadership can enhance organizational performance by reducing costs and increasing potential revenue streams. Gerard et al. (2017) further emphasized that sustainable leaders adopt a proactive approach by continuously scanning the external environment to monitor market changes and develop long-term relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

The respondents also viewed sustainability, innovation, and community engagement as interconnected aspects of organizational development rather than independent concepts. Such an understanding appears pragmatic and shaped by the nature of organizational activities, available resources, and the national context. Innovation was often perceived as a survival mechanism, community engagement as a source of institutional legitimacy, and sustainability as a long-term strategic framework. Most managers agreed that their organizations could integrate sustainable leadership development into their strategic plans within the next five years.

This perception is consistent with the work of Muhammad Jehanzaib Chaudhry and Sadia Noureen (2023), who argued that sustainable leadership, although considered a relatively recent leadership approach, incorporates historical leadership practices capable of generating significant organizational progress. Their study emphasized the importance of organizational culture development and succession planning as key elements for achieving sustainability objectives.

Sustainable Leadership Development in the Service Industry

Although most respondents demonstrated awareness of sustainable leadership as a concept, a clear disparity emerged between conceptual understanding and practical implementation. Managers and senior employees expressed uncertainty regarding the existence of structured leadership training programs focused on sustainability or leadership capability development.

The majority of respondents believed that such programs might exist, while others indicated that there was little clarity or a lack of systematic training initiatives, particularly in light of the current national challenges. This ambiguity suggests the absence of a clearly articulated strategic direction and highlights the gap between organizational intentions and actual implementation.

This interpretation is supported by the respondents' perceptions of the level of support provided by organizational vision and culture for sustainable leadership. Some participants indicated weak institutional support, whereas others reported gradual shifts toward sustainability through training initiatives, innovation, and the integration of organizational values.

These findings suggest that sustainable leadership development within these organizations remains at an early or formative stage and requires structured strategic intervention to ensure its effectiveness. The current war conditions in Sudan further complicate this process, as many organizations in the service sector are focusing primarily on resilience strategies to maintain operational continuity.

The results also reveal a clear disparity in participants' perceptions of supportive policies or organizational practices, with opinions ranging from acceptance to rejection to lack of knowledge. This disparity highlights a cognitive and organizational gap between strategic-level intentions and operational-level awareness among employees.

Despite these limitations, awareness of sustainable leadership as a concept remains very high. Respondents consistently referred to the triple balance between organizational performance, societal responsibility, and environmental protection, which corresponds closely with the core principles of sustainable leadership described in the literature.

However, the implementation of sustainable leadership practices remains relatively weak and requires greater organizational commitment, particularly through targeted training programs in sustainable business practices.

Based on the data obtained from managers and department heads, the researcher concludes that sustainable leadership development is still in its infancy in Sudan. Several contextual factors contribute to this situation, most notably the ongoing war, which has interrupted many organizational training initiatives and operational activities.

External Environment and Institutional Context

The findings indicate that participants perceive the external environment—particularly digital infrastructure and the regulatory framework—as critical enabling factors for sustainable leadership and digital transformation. Competition and quality standards were also identified as motivating factors for adopting sustainability practices.

These findings underscore that the success of sustainable leadership depends not only on internal organizational capabilities but also on the readiness of the broader institutional, economic, and regulatory environment.

Respondents emphasized the importance of strengthening internal capabilities through the appointment of qualified employees, enhancing organizational flexibility, and developing a clear strategic vision for sustainable leadership implementation.

Key Challenges and Enabling Factors

Respondents identified several challenges that may hinder the implementation of sustainable leadership development and digital transformation. These challenges can be grouped into internal and external factors.

Internally, organizations need to strengthen employees' capabilities in digital transformation and invest in technological infrastructure. Capacity building and skills development were repeatedly emphasized as essential for successful implementation.

Organizations should therefore focus on strategies aimed at:

- Changing organizational mindsets and resource allocation
- Improving overall organizational performance
- Training employees in modern technologies to address the skills gap and reduce resistance to change
- Building a supportive culture for sustainable leadership development
- Enhancing cybersecurity and data protection systems

Leveraging Employees' Leadership Capabilities

The findings indicate that structured leadership development programs focusing on sustainability competencies are largely absent. Participants emphasized the importance of continuous leadership training and capacity building as critical enablers of sustainable leadership implementation.

Douglas et al. (2022) suggested that when organizations integrate individual leadership development initiatives with strategic organizational development activities—such as strategic planning and change management—this can significantly enhance human capital and improve organizational performance. Similarly, Kjellström, Stålné, and Törnblom (2020) emphasized the need to develop leadership competencies across three domains: leading the organization, leading others, and leading oneself.

From a theoretical perspective, Douglas et al. (2022) highlighted the relevance of the Resource-Based Theory, which suggests that intangible resources such as human capital, knowledge, skills, and social networks contribute to the development of sustainable competitive advantage and organizational effectiveness.

Financial Resources and Infrastructure

Respondents also recommended benchmarking sustainable leadership practices with international organizations. However, the researcher inferred that such benchmarking initiatives could place additional pressure on financial resources, particularly when combined with the investments required for digital transformation.

Megheirkouni and Mejheirkouni (2020) identified several challenges faced by organizations operating in turbulent business environments, including limited financing for training, individualized leadership approaches, corruption, lack of leadership skills, and broader financial and economic difficulties.

Organizational Culture and Resistance to Change

Sustainable leadership development represents a deliberate organizational change that requires a supportive organizational culture. Without cultural readiness, resistance to change may hinder implementation.

Several respondents identified resistance to change and limited awareness of sustainability concepts as potential barriers. Joon, Nugroho, and Ramachandaran (2025) argued that a strong organizational culture aligned with sustainability values can foster active employee engagement and enhance organizational performance. Consequently, organizational culture may act as a mediating factor influencing the successful implementation of sustainable leadership development.

Governance and Regulatory Environment

Government support and a strong regulatory environment can play a critical role in enabling sustainable leadership development. Effective governance frameworks can support sustainability initiatives through regulatory directives, sector benchmarking, and policies that encourage sustainability integration into business strategies.

Therefore, sustainable leadership in Sudan should be understood as a systemic transformation process rather than a standalone managerial initiative. Although the literature often highlights a strong relationship between sustainable leadership and organizational performance, the findings of this research indicate that external environmental factors—including war, governance challenges, and economic instability—may significantly influence or interrupt the implementation process.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has examined the factors influencing the implementation of sustainable leadership development (SLD) the case of Sudan's financial and telecommunication. The study was carried in critical period for both political and economic conditions in Sudan. A qualitative approach was utilized, based on semi-structured interviews which was them analyzed using thematic analysis; the study investigated the managerial awareness, organizational readiness, and contextual constraints affecting sustainable leadership development.

The findings reveal to a great extent a high level of awareness of sustainability and sustainable leadership among respondents. However, there is a significant gap in the implementation of sustainable leadership development due to lack of strategic orientations on the organizational level specially spotted by the respondents on having the qualified and well trained staff leadership orientations in addition to regulatory constraints, which work as enablers, and on top of that is the ongoing war and institutional fragility. Sustainable leadership development and digital transformation in the Sudanese Financial and Telecommunication sector remains at an infancy stage, requiring structured policy intervention, strategic alignment, digital infrastructure development, and human capital investment.

Recommendations for:

Business organizations

- Developing training programs on Sustainable business, sustainable leadership
- Raise the awareness of the their employees to incorporate ESG awareness, and encourage innovative business solutions that foster sustainable issues
- Integrate sustainability KPIs into leadership performance evaluation.
- Invest in Human Capital
- Continuous professional development.
- Embed Sustainability into Organizational Culture
- Incorporate sustainability into mission and vision statements.

Policy makers

- Government should consider the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 strategy to formulate a national strategy for sustainable business practices, and accordingly business organizations will be compelled to consider sustainability and sustainable leadership practices and develop their organizations accordingly to the policy regulations. This will work as an amplifier for implementations.
- Establish a dedicated body to serve as an organizer and sponsor for the implementation of sustainable development Goals.
- Develop sector specific benchmark standards.
- Organize a yearly conference to share different sectors experiences in sustainable leadership development.

Future research

- Conduct similar research studies to include other sectors to form a nationwide study on sustainable leadership development in Sudan, to establish the national sustainable leadership development roadmap for Sudan.
- Future research could expand beyond financial and telecommunication sectors to include for example, manufacturing, public sector institutions, small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
- Further investigate how regulatory and governance reforms influence sustainable leadership adoption.

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