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FROM PARTICIPATION TO PERFORMANCE: RESULTS-BASED LEADERSHIP AS THE MISSING LINK IN PETROLEUM PROJECT GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH SUDAN'S OIL INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation is widely recognized as a governance tool capable of improving project performance, yet a persistent question remains about the pathway through which participatory information translate into operational results. This research article answers this contemporary question by conceptualizing Results-Based Leadership as the mediating mechanism that translates input from Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation processes into measurable project outcomes in petroleum industry. A positivist, correlational explanatory research design was employed. Data were collected from a target population of senior management in the joint operating companies and the Ministry of Petroleum. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze results-based leadership's mediating influence on the relationship between Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation and project performance in South Sudan's petroleum industry. Results-based leadership positively mediates the relationship between Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation and the Performance of Petroleum Industry by increasing the explanatory power by more than 6%. The findings underscore the need for petroleum industry reforms that institutionalize results-oriented leadership practices alongside participatory governance models. Petroleum policymakers, practitioners and operators should strengthen accountability systems, leadership capacity and evidence-driven decision-making processes to improve project delivery within politically volatile and institutionally fragile environments. Theoretically, the article enriches project management literature by repositioning results-based leadership as the missing organizational link through which participatory governance become project performance outcomes within institutionally fragile petroleum environments. It advances stakeholder theory, theory of change and institutional theory by integrating leadership into the nexus between participation and project performance within a fragile extractive-sector environment that remains insufficiently explored in project management scholarship.

Keywords: Participatory monitoring and evaluation, results-based leadership, petroleum industry, petroleum projects.

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Introduction

Project management literature has traditionally assumed that internal management systems, such as Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E), invariably strengthens accountability and legitimacy, ultimately improving project outcomes. The claim is that such systems impose external compliance standards, provide legal authority for enforcement and establish the institutional credibility that makes stakeholder participation meaningful rather than performative (Turner, 2007; Kumar & Markesets, 2007; Scott, 2014). Yet, this assumption, while largely true in mature stable institutional contexts (Pham, 2018), is overly simplistic, especially in fragile institutional settings where PM&E may continue to function at the organizational level but its effectiveness may still be conditioned by broader regulatory and other external factors. PM&E is broadly understood in project management literature as a structured, all-inclusive process that enables project-affected stakeholders to track, assess project outcomes and provide feedback for corrective action (Chambers, 1997; World Bank, 2013). Rather than treating project beneficiaries as passive receipts of information, participatory governance places high premium on shared control transparency and accountability in project decision-making (Chambers, 1997). In past empirical studies, PM&E is often operationalized using indicators, such as institutional quality, stakeholder engagement and feedback integration (Estrella and Gaventa, 1998; Kansheba and Marobhe, 2022), collaborative planning and training (Too, Kidombo and Gakuu, 2021; Heim, Kalyuzhnova & Ghobadian, 2023). This study thus measures it using institutional quality, stakeholder engagement, training and development and collaborative planning, supported by their well-established role in influencing project performance (Chandurkar et al., 2017) and use in previous studies such as (Coleman, Schultz, Parker, Manyindo & Mukuru, 2023). However, despite its normative appeal, participatory governance alone may be insufficient to guarantee greater project improvements especially in complex extractive industries characterized by competitive interests, asymmetric power relations and high risks (Tutdel, 2021). PM&E practices generate information, but that information does not automatically translate into action. Something must happen between the time participatory governance generates monitoring data and the time the said data improves a project outcome. Someone must first interpret the data, prioritize it against competing operational demands and then coordinate responses across project stakeholders before enforcing accountability for results. This "*someone*" is leadership. The assumption that PM&E always leads to better project results, while widely accepted (Mbelwa, 2018; Alzoubi et al., 2023), fails to consider that its effectiveness in achieving desirable project outcomes is largely dependent on the quality of leadership capabilities. This brings into context the role of leadership as the mechanism that translates PM&E insights into operational results.

Results-Based Leadership (R-BL) is often touted in project management literature as the leadership paradigm that provides the management and strategic capacity through which participatory inputs are converted into measurable project outcomes. Unlike traditional leadership paradigms that often prioritize traits or behaviors of leaders, R-BL is distinctly defined by its focus on transparency and accountability, coordination, adaptive decision-making and strategic alignment with performance objectives (Ulrich, Zenger & Smallwood, 1999; Orey, 2011; Bawany, 2023). This focus on measurable outcomes arguably ensures that PM&E insights are not only collected, but also systematically integrated into decision-making and project execution. Different

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researchers, academics and practitioners have used different measures to operationalize R-BL. While Ulrich et al. (1999) used strategic goal alignment and leadership accountability mechanism, Orey (2011) used goal-setting effectiveness and performance-driven decision-making to operationalize R-BL. Bawany (2023), like Achebelema and Achebelema (2021) before him, used stakeholder participation and stakeholder accountability for the same purpose. This study operationalized RBL using participation, coordination, transparency and accountability and strategic management. These dimensions of RBL have a significant influence on project sustainability (Ulrich et al., 1999), and have successfully been used in previous studies, such as Minja (2016) and Pham (2018) and Coleman et al. (2023). This study specifically investigates whether R-BL is the mechanism through which the governance potential of PM&E is converted into measurable performance.

Project performance, the ultimate outcome of interest, has evolved in existing project management literature beyond the narrow efficiency-based measures to now broader assessment of stakeholder, organizational and development outcomes. For instance, while DeCotiis and Dyer's (1979) and Jha and Iyer's (2007) earlier definition of performance focused on the "iron triangle" of cost, time and scope (p.527), contemporary thinkers like Zada Khan, Saeed, Zada and Yong Jun (2024) emphasize broader performance criteria, including stakeholder satisfaction, quality, environmental stewardship and long-term sustainability. Different researchers and practitioners have employed various methods to operationalize the project performance. Pinto and Slevin (1988) used cost, time, and quality and stakeholder satisfaction. In almost a similar fashion, Tsiga, Emes and Smith (2017) used schedule adherence, safety records, production volumes, and project goal achievement to operationalize project performance. Awow, Muguthu and Njoka (2025), like Shenhar et al. (2001), used short-efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, environmental impact, organizational success and future preparedness to operationalize project success. In petroleum-sector studies, researchers such as Asaolu (2021); and Sletten, Wangen Jonasmo and Solheim (2023), often assessed project performance through indicators like operational efficiency, cost control, environmental compliance, stakeholder satisfaction and goal achievement. Present study operationalizes project performance through quality (technical performance), reflecting both adherence to project standards and stakeholder satisfaction with project outcomes. This dual focus reflects the reality in the petroleum industry, where projects must go beyond meeting rigorous technical standards to addressing the expectations of investors, communities and regulators. PM&E provides the informational foundation for improving project performance, but it is R-BL that ensures that participatory evidence is strategically applied to achieve results. However, institutional weaknesses in institutionally contexts like South Sudan raise questions about whether this governance mechanism consistently deliver improved project outcomes. Towards this direction, the following paragraphs details the research problem that the current study seeks to address.

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Research Problem

Much of existing project management and governance literature assumes a relatively direct link between participation and performance, overlooking the institutional and managerial processes through which participatory inputs are converted into operational inputs. Consequently, the role leadership plays as a mediator governance mechanism remains underexplored. Conceptually, past research such as Muriungi (2015) and Mayanja (2020), often examine the direct influence of PM&E on project performance without adequately interrogating how leadership structures shape how PM&E inputs are utilized. Similarly, R-BL studies Minja (2016) and Pham (2018), with their focus on strategic management and accountability, often examine the relationships between leadership and performance independently of participatory governance models. This separation creates a significant theoretical gap within project management and governance literature. Contextually, past studies conducted outside the petroleum context, such as Pham (2018); Latif, Nazeer, Shahzad Ullah, Imranullah & Sahibzada (2020); and Zada, Khan, Saeed, Zada and Yong Jun (2024), suggest that results, accountability and performance-oriented leadership frameworks potentially mitigate the relationship between stakeholder engagement and organizational outcomes. However, this mediating influence is yet to be explored in fragile, post-conflict environments like South Sudan. South Sudan presents a particularly significant governance context because of its political volatility, institutional fragility and dependence on petroleum revenues, which usually constrain leadership effectiveness. Although PM&E may exist formally within petroleum projects, governance challenges and institutional weaknesses frequently undermine their effectiveness. Monitoring reports, stakeholder feedback and participatory recommendations may be produced without necessarily influencing project implementation practices or general strategic decisions. This raises uncertainty regarding the value of PM&E under institutionally fragile environments.

Furthermore, empirical studies on South Sudan's petroleum industry have primarily focused on immediate economic gains (Elnourani et al., 2024), conflict resolution and health and safety (Ruei, 2018; Kenyi, Gesami and Norby, 2021; Makeny, 2024), leaving limited evidence on how leadership practices influence the effectiveness of participatory governance mechanisms. This then means that there is insufficient empirical understanding how R-BL act as a mediating variable between PM&E and performance of petroleum projects in South Sudan. This gap must be addressed because failure to do so risks continuing treating participatory governance as a procedural requirement rather than strategic governance mechanism that can improve project performance. This study thus responded by specifically investigating whether R-BL is the mechanism through which the governance potential of PM&E is converted into measurable performance in the institutionally fragile South Sudanese context. This endeavor is theoretically significant. By addressing this concern, this study does not merely confirm an already established relationship between PM&E and project performance. Rather, it explains the missing organizational link through participatory insights actually become performance outcomes in institutional fragile petroleum environments.

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From a practical perspective, the study responds to the urgent need for evidence-based leadership models with the potential of strengthening project delivery in the petroleum industry, especially in fragile, post-conflict governance contexts.

Objective of the study

To determine the mediating influence of Results-Based Leadership on the relationship between Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation and the performance of petroleum industry projects in South Sudan.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

This study is anchored in stakeholder theory, assumes that better project outcomes follow automatically once stakeholders are involved in monitoring and evaluation processes (Friedman & Miles, 2006; Xiao, 2023). The current study challenges this linear, traditional normative assumption that participation naturally improves project performance by demonstrating that participation alone is not enough. Participation structures instead only become consequential when leadership possesses the strategic capacity to convert PM&E input into coordinated organizational action. To this end, therefore, it is deducible that the current study refines existing stakeholder theory by refining conceptualization of participation not just as an independent driver of project performance, but more importantly, as a governance resource whose effectiveness hinges on the agency of results-oriented leadership.

Supporting stakeholder theory is the theory of change, which provides a causal logic that links participatory inputs, processes, and project outputs and outcomes (Weiss, 1995). A key limitation of this theory is that while it explains causal chains abstractly, it inadequately specifies who operationalizes such transitions inside organizations (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Befani & Mayne, 2014). The current study addresses this limitation by repositioning R-BL as the institutional mechanism that does not only activates participatory knowledge and aligns stakeholder expectations, but also translates monitoring evidence into corrective project decisions. It thus frames theory of change as a governance-action framework rather than a mere procedural logic model.

Furthermore, the study draws upon institutional theory, which explains how formal rules, governance systems and regulatory structures influence organizational behavior (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). However, formal governance systems alone rarely guarantee successful project delivery in weakly institutionalized and politically unstable environments like South Sudan (Eisenhardt, 1989). The current study extends this theory within fragile-state governance environments by demonstrating that leadership agency holds the potential of compensating for institutional fragility because it creates strategic coordination, accountability cultures and evidence-based decision systems even where there are weak regulatory systems. As such, therefore, it introduces a leadership-centered interpretation of institutional effectiveness in an institutionally fragile extractive economy.

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Empirical Review

Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation and Project Performance

Previous empirical studies across different industries consistently demonstrate that PM&E can improve project performance, but the strength of this relationship hinges on stakeholder capacity, institutional quality and collaborative planning. For instance, Xue, Turner, Lecoeuvre and Anbari's (2013) study of over 20 China's large-scale infrastructure projects, including those in the energy sectors, demonstrated that the country's centralized institutional quality facilitated timely delivery of these projects. However, Xue et al.'s study, while providing valuable insights into how a well-structured, results-oriented M&E system can catalyze project performance in a highly centralized context when embedded within a robust institutional quality, its focus on a top-down approach overlooks how bottom-up stakeholder empowerment mechanisms, a conceptual gap addressed by Al-Haddad and Al-Abed (2021). Al-Haddad and Al-Abed show how continuous stakeholder engagement, encompassing practices like continuous communication, active involvement and mutual understanding among local, regulatory, and community participants, improved operational efficiency and financial performance in Yemen's oil sector. The two studies, while converging on the importance of structural monitoring, diverge in the locus of control, with China emphasizing institutional authority, while Yemen highlighting participatory involvement. However, neither study examined how leadership mediates these dynamics, a methodological gap the current study examines by embedding R-BL into PM&E analysis.

In another comparable study, Speckbacher (2024), who sought to make sense of the impact of integrating values-focused work with Results-Based Management practices in non-profit organizations, argues that integrating values-based work with these practices enhances transparency, accountability and stakeholder trust. However, unlike Maweu's (2015) study, which found that active involvement of project-affected communities helped identify, assess and mitigate project risks in Kenya' Tullow Oil project, Speckbacher (2024) underplays the technical training needed for effective participation of project stakeholders. This contrast reveals that while values-based work and active stakeholder engagement provide social license to operate, without capacity-building, participatory mechanism risk becoming symbolic. Both Maweu (2015) and Haddad and Al-Abed (2021) underscore the idea that stakeholder engagement is not merely symbolic but materially influences risk management and efficiency. However, they focus narrowly on engagement, leaving unexplored how institutional quality and training enable stakeholders to participate effectively. For instance, training and development, though often treated as peripheral, are essential for effective participatory governance. Participating in M&E activities requires project stakeholders, especially local communities, to have specific skills, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and communication. This then suggests that effective participation in any project necessitates targeted capacity building and knowledge transfer to ensure informed contributions to project risk management. A well-trained project team is better equipped to collect reliable data, critically

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analyses it, and then apply findings to improve program delivery.

The above line of thought is echoed in Akoon's (2023) study, which looked into effectiveness of M&E processes in enhancing accountability within the non-governmental organizational sector and highlighted inadequate M&E systems and weak institutional quality as barriers to accountability. This study, while not specifically focused on the petroleum industry, its findings underscore the broader challenge of fragile institutional contexts, which is that without capacity building and institutional quality, PM&E cannot deliver its intended benefits. However, the study failed to explore petroleum-specific complexities like collaborative planning, an emerging theme addressed by Too, Kidombo and Gakuu (2021) who suggest that collaboratively integrating environmental concerns in the M&E planning process increases the chance of petroleum projects to achieve better environmental outcomes. This study, while important, is limited to environmental outcomes, leaving unanswered how collaborative planning influences broader performance metrics such as technical quality, timeliness and cost efficiency, and a gap addressed in the current study.

Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation, Results-Based Leadership and Project Performance

While participatory governance alone influence project outcomes, existing leadership studies suggest that leadership mediates this relationship by anchoring participatory mechanisms to measurable results. In the offshore oil and gas operations in the UK, for instance, O'Dea and Flin (2001) found that transformational leadership, specifically clear communication and accountability mechanisms, both of which are indicators of R-BL, improved safety performance through improved transparency and coordination. Yet, unlike Hadi and Baskaran (2021), who emphasized strategic management, another key R-BL indicator, in Malaysia's upstream petroleum industry, O'Dea and Flin did not explore how participatory processes with leadership structures. However, while both studies agree that accountability is a non-negotiable leadership trait that strengthens project outcomes, they diverge on stakeholder integration. O'Dea and Flin largely overlook how stakeholder engagement interact with leadership, focusing instead on internal organizational systems. Hadi and Baskaran by contrast acknowledges strategic leadership but also underplay participatory practices, leaving stakeholder integration peripheral. This particular divergence reveals a significant theoretical gap in the sense that while leadership is recognized as critical, the way it mediates participatory practices is insufficient. The current study addressed this failure to test mediation by empirically examining how R-BL translates participatory inputs into project performance outcomes in South Sudan's petroleum industry.

Latif et al. (2020) and Zada et al. (2024) highlight strategic orientation and coordination as drivers of project success in Pakistan, but Coleman et al. (2023), who examined how collaborative governance benefits communities in Uganda's oil and gas sector, they failed to explicitly conceptualize R-BL. The methodological rigor of these studies rest in establishing causality between leadership and performance and emphasizing coordination and strategic clarity. However, the divergence among them shows that

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leadership improves project outcomes, but the mediating role of R-BL in participatory environments remains underexplored. The studies rely on correlational-based designs, stopping short of testing mediation models that could explain how leadership converts inputs from participatory processes into measurable project outcomes. Admittedly, other previous studies have attempted to address this gap. Pham's (2018) study of Vietnam's public sector provides crucial empirical evidence that results-driven leadership fosters participatory planning, strategic alignment and accountability. However, its focus on the public sector, limited attention to coordination dynamics and indirect treatment of project performance limit its relevance to project projects, which are not only capital-intensive, but also politically sensitive and technically complex.

Comparable results can be found in Olabode, Bakare and Iheonunekwu (2018) who quantitatively linked results-oriented transformational leadership to improved employee performance in Nigerian oil and gas sector, through accountability, participation and strategic vision. However, unlike Minja (2016) and Elhadi (2021), whom emphasize accountability in Kenya's public sector, they overlook project-level outcomes like stakeholder alignment and efficiency. The consequence is conceptual gap because leadership is shown to influence internal productivity, but not broader project performance metrics like technical quality. To address this gap, the current study explicitly modeled R-BL as a mediator between participatory governance and project performance, thereby clarifying both the theoretical systems and methodological pathways through which leadership operates in institutionally fragile petroleum contexts. In South Sudan's oil and gas sector, Makeny (2024) established that strong governance practices help enhance performance, moreso in contexts marked by weak institutional frameworks. This study is relevant to the current study because of its direct focus on governance and performance in oil and gas sector in South Sudan, providing a strong contextual foundation. However, Makeny left a conceptual gap by failing to isolate R-BL as a distinct leadership approach, limiting understanding how leadership mediates participatory practices. This gap is addressed in the current study.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded on a mediation model that positions R-BL as the key mechanism through which PM&E influence petroleum project performance in South Sudan, as shown in figure 1 below:

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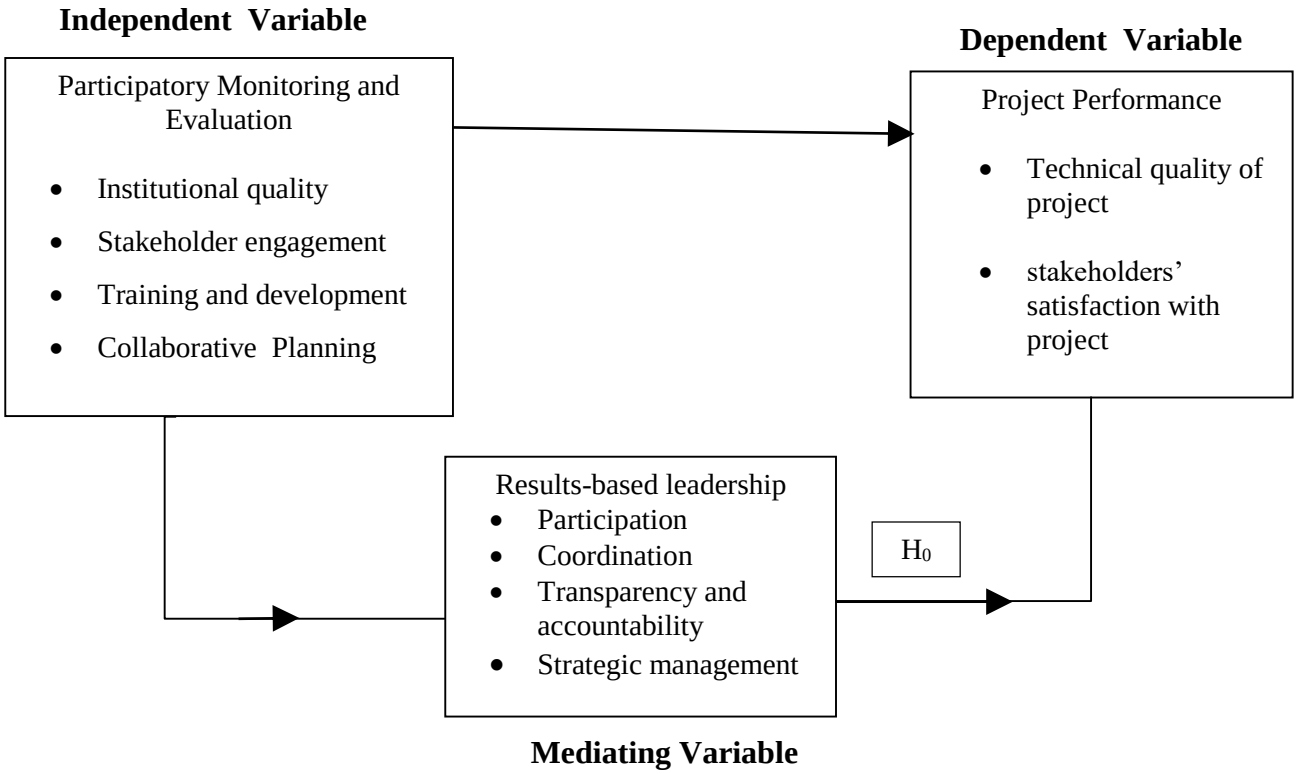


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

As shown in the framework above, PM&E is conceptually viewed as a governance process that generates information, improves stakeholder involvement and strengthens accountability. However, participation on its own does not automatically translate into improved project performance outcomes. Its effectiveness hinges on leadership practices capable of interpreting, coordinating, and strategically applying participatory evidence toward concrete project objectives. As such, R-BL is conceptualized in this study as the intervening or mediating variable that translates inputs from participatory processes into performance-oriented action. It operationalizes PM&E dimensions by aligning stakeholder engagement with structures of coordination, guiding strategic decision-making and enforcing transparency and accountability. In this study's conceptual framework above, PM&E provides both informational and relational foundation, while R-BL, on the other hand, and provides the strategic and executive capacity that transforms this foundation into improved project outcomes. The framework treats performance as a multidimensional construct encompassing efficiency, effectiveness, quality and sustainability of projects in South Sudan's petroleum industry. The underlying assumption under this framework is that PM&E indirectly enhances performance by strengthening results-oriented leadership practices.

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Research Hypothesis

Based on the study objective and the relationship depicted in the conceptual framework, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H_0 R-BL has no significant mediating influence on the relationship between PM&E and the performance of petroleum industry projects in South Sudan.

Research Methodology

Research philosophy

This study adopted a positivist research philosophy. This research paradigm enabled the collection and analysis of quantitative primary data and the testing of the above stated research hypothesis using a deductive process (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Additionally, the philosophy enabled the study to make inferences and generalizations regarding the population of study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Since the goal was to provide evidence that can inform policy and by implication, institutional reform in South Sudan petroleum projects, a positivist philosophy was deemed appropriate to generate results that are replicable, suitable for evidence-based decision-making and generalization (Saunders et al., 2016).

Research design

The study employed correlational explanatory research design to examine whether the results-based leadership (mediating variable) weakens, fails or strengths the influence of participatory monitoring and evaluation (independent variable) on the performance of petroleum projects in South Sudan (dependent variable). Unlike descriptive designs which provide mere description of phenomena without exploring relationships (Gronmo, 2020), or experimental designs that manipulate variables (Loiselle et al., 2011), a correlational explanatory research design allows researchers to identify statistical associations without necessarily establishing causation, providing insights into real-world phenomena (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Since the study focused on investigating naturally occurring governance practices within South Sudan's petroleum institutions, experimental manipulation was neither desirable nor feasible. In this sense, therefore, explanatory design provided an appropriate framework for examining results-based leadership's mediating influence on the relationship between PM&E and project performance. This design enabled the study to examine whether results-based leadership significantly enhances or weakens the influence of participatory monitoring and evaluation on project performance (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2019). The design has also been successfully used in several other related studies, such as González, Alarcón and Mundaca (2008); Ika, Diallo and Thuillier (2010); and Ika Diallo and Thuillier (2012).

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all operational petroleum projects in South Sudan. According to records from the Ministry of Petroleum (2026), there are a total of 911 operational petroleum projects in South Sudan managed by three major oil companies namely, Dar Petroleum Operating Companies (DPOC), Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC) and SUDD Petroleum Operating Company (SPOC). The projects are distributed across the three companies as shown in Table 1 below: DPOC

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with 601 wells (projects), GPOC and SPOC with 255 and 55 projects, respectively. The three companies operate under the strategic policy, regulatory and oversight mandate of South Sudan's Ministry of Petroleum. The ministry does not implement petroleum projects directly but formulates policy, license, and monitor, regulate and supervise functions over petroleum operations. Thus, its inclusion was deemed fit because the study investigated results-based leadership's mediating influence, a construct that is largely shaped by institutional leaders and project actors. Since the study examines this mediating influence on the relationship PM&E and project performance, the 911 petroleum projects (wells) collectively constituted the population of the study. The petroleum project was thus explicitly defined as the unit of analysis, while data was collected from regulatory officials and seniors project managers directly involved in project governance.

Table 1: Population Distribution and Proportionate Sample

Operating Blocks/ operating companies	Petroleum Industry Projects		Barrels per Day
	Oilfields	Wells	
Block 3E & 7E - Dar Operating Company Limited (DPOC)	Moleeta Paloch Adar Gassab, Gumry	601	130,000
Block 1,2, & 4S - Greater Pioneer Operating Company Limited (GPOC)	1. Greater Unity, 2. Greater Munga 3. El-Toor 4. EL-Har 5. El-Nar 6. Toma South, 7. Kaikang	255	50,000
Block 5A - SUDD Operating Company Limited (SPOC)	Tharjath Mala	55	15,000
Total		911	195,000

Source: Ministry of Petroleum, Republic of South Sudan. https://mop.gov.ss/partners

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Sampling Procedure

Probability sampling was employed to determine a representative sample from the population of 911 petroleum projects (oil wells) Given the quantitative, explanatory design adopted in this study, probability sampling was appropriate to ensure generalizability of the study findings (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). More specifically, stratified random sampling was used to better capture variations across the three petroleum-operating companies and the Ministry of Petroleum. This sampling procedure enhances representativeness by dividing the population into relatively homogeneous subgroups before randomly selecting samples from each subgroup or stratum (Saunders et al., 2016). Consequently, the population of 911 projects was first divided into three institutional strata corresponding to the operating companies distributed as follows: DPOC, GPOC and SPOC, 601, 255 and 55 projects, respectively. Within each stratum, operational petroleum projects were randomly selected proportionate to their share of the total population. This approach, as Saunders et al. (2016) assert, ensured that the diversity of petroleum projects across companies was adequately reflected in the sample. Yamane's (1967) formula was applied to determine the sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = sample size.

N = population size (911 petroleum projects/oil wells).

e =margin of error. In this study, 95 percent confidence level is assumed, meaning that the margin of error or level of precision is 0.05.

Therefore, the statistically determined sample sized based on this formula is 278 petroleum projects. These 278 projects were then proportionately distributed across the three joint operating companies (DPOC, GPOC and SPOC) according to their share of the total 911 projects as shown below:

DPOC: (601/911 × 278) ≈183 projects

GPOC: (255/911 × 278) ≈ 78 projects

SPOC: (55/911 × 278) ≈ 17 projects

Total = 278 projects.

Once the sample size for each stratum was determined, a simple random selection was applied with each stratum to identify specific projects included in the study. This procedure enhances representativeness, minimizes sampling bias and ensures that the 278 sample reflected the operational diversity of South Sudan's petroleum industry (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019).

Respondents

The respondents of the study were individuals working in the three oil companies that manage the petroleum oil projects together with representatives from the Ministry of Petroleum Government of South Sudan. They comprised all senior personnel occupying technical, managerial, regulatory and supervisory positions with the four institutions. According to organizational records obtained from the respective entities, a total population of ninety-four (94) senior actors distributed as shown in the Appendix was

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purposively selected. Owing to the expertise and specificity required for individuals participating within the petroleum industry, purposive sampling procedure was considered appropriate to identify and select only knowledgeable, relevant and high-ranking individuals with direct involvement in petroleum projects to take part in the study (Saunders et al., 2016). These respondents were considered best placed to respond to the questionnaire because of their direct involvement with daily project governance processes, including planning, implementation, regulatory compliance, monitoring and evaluation, and performance assessment. As such, although the unit of analysis was petroleum projects, the unit of observation that provided project-level information were knowledgeable organizational actors directly involved in project planning, implementation, monitoring, regulation and oversight. These included senior managers, regulatory officials and technical specialists working within the principal petroleum institutions.

Respondents were asked to evaluate the performance of the specific petroleum projects under their direct professional oversight, not the general performance of their parent organization. As such, although study respondents were drawn from four different entities, their assessments were anchored to the projects they directly regulate or manage. This distinction is particularly important because projects in South Sudan's petroleum industry operate under distinct operational environments and constraints. In this sense, with the performance construct centered on the project rather than organizational level the study ensured that the unit of analysis remained consistent across the three study variables. Although data was collected from the four institutions, the study did not assess the organizational performance of the institutions. It rather had the respondents evaluate the performance of petroleum industry projects implemented and overseen by their respective institutions. As a result, the dependent variable in the study is the performance of petroleum projects across South Sudanese petroleum industry, with the four institutions providing project level information. The decision to conclude multiple respondents from each of the four institutions is not only deliberate, but also theoretically justified. A single respondent cannot adequately represent multidimensional organizational phenomenon characterizing participatory monitoring & evaluation, results-based leadership, and project performance. Different senior officials at the institutions possess unique knowledge about stakeholder engagement, regulatory compliance, planning processes, monitoring systems and project outcomes. Depending on a single informant would increase the likelihood of individual respondent bias.

Procedural remedies were used to reduce the risk of methodological bias. First, role-based filtering logic was applied in the questionnaire to ensure that respondents only answered items relevant to their professional roles. This helped reduce the possibility of inflated correlations due to role mismatch (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). Data collection instruments were structured into distinct sections of Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation, Results-Based Leadership and Project Performance, with varied item formats and anchors to reduce the risk of respondents using a single cognitive frame across all questions. Second, the study lowered social desirability bias

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and encouraged candid responses by guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality of study participants. Lastly, as reported in the findings section, statistical checks were performed during regression diagnostics to examine variance inflation factors. None of the variance inflation factors exceeded the recommended threshold, implying that common method variance was not a serious concern (Saunders et al., 2016).

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used as the data collecting instrument. The study is quantitative in nature, but the diversity of respondents necessitates a structured, standardized questionnaire with both core questions and role-specific items (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). Questionnaires were designed so that questions cover several dimensions that were used to represent each study variable. Although the current study is quantitative in nature, the diversity of respondents necessitate a structured, standardized questionnaire with both core questions and role-specific items. Questionnaires were designed so that questions cover several dimensions that were used to represent each study variable. Akin to the skip logic used in surveys (Saunders et al., 2016), core questions like views on PM&E effectiveness, regulatory impact, leadership responsiveness and project outcomes were applicable to all respondents, while filtered sections designed in line with study variables have questions only applicable depending on respondent's role. For instance, while project managers answer implementation questions, institutional leaders were expected to answer items related to oversight. In so doing, the study ensured that all data remained quantifiable and comparable while simultaneously preserving relevance for different categories of respondents. The comprehensive questionnaires were disseminated by drop and pick method and depending on the structure of the organization, the study respondents were from middle and senior management of the four institutions.

The data was collected using a five-point structured, closed-ended Likert scale responses across all groups because it would capture study variables. These perceptions were done in a structured, quantifiable way, which is important for a correlational explanatory study (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The Likert-scale items and the role-based filtering logic helped maintain statistical integrity, while also reducing survey fatigue and response error due to role mismatch (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). Since the plan was to sample 94 respondents, and considering that the unit of analysis is the petroleum projects in South Sudan, the study ensured that each respondent spoke to one or more specific petroleum projects depending on their role. For example, a GPOC project manager or section head would provide information on effectiveness of PM&E and project performance for Projects A and B, while a ministry official provided strategic insights across all Projects. However, it is important to note here that although data collection instruments were distributed to all the 94, only 87 completed and returned the instruments, a response rate of 93%. The inclusion of all the 87 respondents captured the insights from highly knowledgeable, relevant, and senior respondents with direct involvement in the project governance in the subject under investigation.

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The respondents adequately represented the 278 sampled projects. While these projects were sampled from the three petroleum operating companies (DPOC, SPOC and SPOC), project-level information was not collected directly from each project in isolation. Instead, the information was collected from the 87 regulatory officials, technical specialists and senior managers who are directly responsible for managing or overseeing those projects. Each study respondent evaluated the specific projects under their professional oversight, which essentially means that one respondent could speak to multiple projects depending on their role and responsibilities. A project manager at GPOC might for example provide assessments of two or three specific projects they directly supervise, while an official at the Ministry of Petroleum could provide insights across several projects under their regulatory mandate. In this sense, therefore, the 87 study respondents collectively covered the 278 petroleum projects (oil wells), ensuring that project-level information was aptly captured through knowledgeable actors with direct involvement. In this way, the study avoided reliance on a single informant per institution, ensuring consistent representation of the unit of analysis (petroleum project) through the unit of observation (the 87 knowledgeable organizational actors).

Validity and Reliability of Measurement Instrument

The validity of research instrument was established through expert review. Content validity was assessed by aligning questionnaire items with the established dimensions of PM&E, results-based leadership and Project Performance as identified in past similar studies. Subject-matter experts from both petroleum industry and academia reviewed the data collection instrument to confirm that items adequately represented the intended constructs. The recommendations from these experts informed revisions that improved the wording, eliminated ambiguities and ensured adequate coverage of all study variables.

Reliability, which describes the consistency and stability of measurement instruments (Saunders et al., 2019), ensures that such instruments produce consistent results under the same conditions. In this study, the researcher assessed reliability using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which measures, with values ranging from 0 to 1, how close a set of items are related as a group. Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 or above is considered generally as acceptable, meaning that items within each construct, say the four PM&E dimensions, are consistently measuring underlying concept (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016). This was calculated for each dimension of the study variables to ensure their internal consistency. This cut-off point of 0.70 and above was used and adopted to verify the reliability of research study instrument. To this end, thereafter, any adjustments required were made to the questionnaire accordingly, as Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest. All study variables exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold, indicating strong reliability. More specifically, PM&E yielded α = .878, results-based leadership α = .957, and project performance items α = .862. Taken together, therefore, these findings confirm that the data collection instrument (questionnaire) consistently measured the intended concepts across respondents.

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Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data. To examine the relationships among the study variables and determine their explanatory power and significance, Multiple Regression Analysis was performed (Creswell & Clark, 2011). A regression analysis following the four steps proposed by the Baron and Kenny's (1986) test was used to test the intervening effect of results-based leadership as shown in the steps below:

$PER = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PME + \varepsilon$

$RBL = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PME + \varepsilon$

$PER = \beta_0 + \beta_1 RBL + + \varepsilon$

$PER = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PME + \beta_2 RBL + \varepsilon$; where PM&E is Performance Monitoring & Evaluation, R-BL is results-based leadership, PER is Performance quality and ε is error term.

Step 1: Testing the direct relationship between Project Performance and RBL, where RBL is R-BL

$PER = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PME + \varepsilon$

Step 2: Regression analysis to test path α for the mediating variable

$RBL = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PME + \varepsilon$

Step 3: Test if the mediating variable predicts PM&E, path β

$PER = \beta_0 + \beta_2 RBL + + \varepsilon$

Step 4: Conduct a multiple regression with RE and RBL predicting PM&E

$CS = \alpha + \beta 1RE + \beta 2BE + \varepsilon$

Baron and Kenny's framework was deemed sufficient within the context of this study for two reasons. First, it is one of the most widely recognized and foundational mediation testing approaches providing a clear stepwise procedure. The transparent and replicable procedure tests direct effects, mediator effects and combined effects. This clarity was especially important given the study's explanatory design, as well as, focus on policy-relevant findings in a fragile petroleum setting. This study simply wanted to test whether results-based leadership mediates the relationship between PM&E and project performance and not to develop a new statistical model. Second, the study's sample size of 87 respondents across 278 petroleum projects was adequate for regression-based model; it was relatively modest for more complex techniques, such as Bootstrapped indirect effects and Structural Equation Modeling, which, according to Sim, Kim and Suh (2022), require larger samples to ensure statistical power and model stability. While new methods such as Hayes PROCESS Macro, Sobel test and Structural Equation Modeling offer refinements, Baron and Kenny's framework allowed for robust, straightforward interpretation of regression coefficients and R^2 changes, in line with the studies applied orientation. The regression analysis was done using responses from all the 87 individual respondents rather than the four institutions. Since the study involved human participants, all the necessary research ethics were observed to ensure their rights; well-being and dignity are protected throughout the study.

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Findings And Discussion

Descriptive statistics for Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation, and Project Performance

The respondents were asked to rate participatory monitoring and evaluation using a scale of 1 to 5, where (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation recorded a mean score of *M*=2.78 (*SD*=0.64), with a relatively low coefficient of variation of *CV*=23.0%. This mean score finding, which reflects a neutral stance on a five-point scale, suggests that while foundational participatory governance systems are present in South Sudan petroleum industry, their integration into broader institutional performance systems remains inconsistent. The low coefficient of variation indicates high data consistency among study respondents. Among the four PM&E dimensions, training and development scored the highest (*M*=3.07, *SD*=0.62), with the lowest variability (*CV*=20.2%), suggesting a consensus among respondents that training initiatives are relatively effective. Institutional quality by contrast was rated lowest at (*M*=2.65, *SD*=0.72), with higher variability of *CV*=27.2%, reflecting respondents skepticism about institutional accountability and regulatory enforcement. Coefficient variations across individual items ranged from 20.2% to 28.8%, indicating that while some PM&E practices like training and development are consistently acknowledged, others like institutional quality and problem-solving competencies are contested. Mean scores below 3.0 more importantly indicate neutral-to-negative perceptions rather than positive ones, with an implication that participatory governance systems are present, but not strongly institutionalized. This transitional adoption is a theoretical finding, as it suggests that while participatory mechanisms like periodic meetings and standardized reporting are established as routine, their strategic optimization and stakeholder empowerment remains weak, constraining their influence on project performance.

Descriptive Statistics for Results-Based Leadership

The respondents were asked to rate the Results-Based Leadership using a scale of 1-5, where (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Results-based leadership, like Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation, was generally rated neutral (*M*=2.61, *SD*=0.74), with relatively low variability (CV=28.5%). Among its dimensions, coordination scored the highest (*M*=2.71, *SD*=0.85), with a high variability (*CV*=31.4%). Across individual items, variability ranged from *CV*=27.8% to 36.3%, indicating significant disagreement among respondents leadership consistency in South Sudan's petroleum industry. For example, while some items on transparency and accountability were rated moderately (*M*=3.0, *SD*=1.45), others such as institutionalizing participatory practices within organizational culture scored very low (*M*=1.95, *SD*=1.14) with the highest variability (*CV*=58.5%). This neutral means scores imply that leadership practices, specifically those involving strategic management and accountability, are recognized as emergent but undeveloped, lacking requisite depth to fully shape petroleum project outcomes. Respondents generally recognize leadership's role in

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communicating results-oriented rhetoric, yet still report misalignment between this language and actual operational practice, showing respondents' skepticism about whether decisions are genuinely guided by measurable results. Petroleum leaders may promote the concept of results-based management, but struggle to translate it into actionable, data driven decisions due to organizational limitations and prevailing political barriers. This lack of depth highlights that leadership serves as a latent potential in the petroleum industry, which, if leveraged effectively, could significantly reduce the compliance-heavy focus currently dominating industry operations.

Descriptive Statistics for Project Performance

The respondents were asked to rate the project performance using a scale of 1-5, where (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). Project performance was assessed with an overall mean score of *M*= 2.97 with a coefficient of variation of 26.6%, reflecting respondents' neutral evaluation of petroleum project outcomes. This neutral assessment of project performance suggests that while some aspects of petroleum project delivery meet expectations, significant areas, such as stakeholder relations and operational efficiency, face systematic constraints. Project outcomes are often realized, but outcomes and sustainable impacts fall short of expectations, most probably due to weak leadership, coordination and regulatory inconsistencies, thereby reinforcing the broader argument that institutional fragility limits the effectiveness of participatory governance and regulatory oversight in shaping project success.

Diagnostic Test

Several diagnostic tests were performed to ensure regression validity. Multicollinearity diagnostics was tested using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values. The VIF values should be less than or equal 10 and tolerance values should be less than or equal one. As shown in table 2 below, the VIF values for the Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (independent variable) and Results-Based Leadership (mediating variable) were >1 and <10, depicting a lack of multicollinearity.

Table 2: Multicollinearity of Variances

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation	.191	5.226
	Results-Based Leadership	.149	6.722

a. Dependent Variable: Project Performance

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Normality of errors was validated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The test reject the hypothesis of normality when the p-value is less than or equal to 0.05. All p-values for the variables exceeded 0.05, indicating that all the variables was normally distributed, as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Test of Normality

	Project Performance	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[b]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation	Disagree	.147	10	.200*	.948	10	.643
	Neither Disagree nor Agree	.135	37	.088	.956	37	.154
	Agree	.122	17	.200*	.955	17	.543
Results-Based Leadership	Disagree	.383	10	.000	.664	10	.056
	Neither Disagree nor Agree	.100	37	.200*	.976	37	.590
	Agree	.164	17	.200*	.926	17	.184

The assumption of homoscedasticity, which holds that the variance of error is constant for all independent variable values or whether the variance of the errors from a regression depends on the values of the independent variables, was also examined. A p-value greater than 0.05 *(p > 0.05)* in Levene's test will confirm that the assumption of homoscedasticity is met. As shown in table 4 below, the *p > 0.05* hence the data meets the homoscedasticity. Homoscedasticity and linearity checks indicated that residuals were evenly distributed and relationships among variables linear. Taken together, these diagnostics confirm that regression assumptions were met, thereby strengthening the credibility of the reported results.

Table 4: Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation	1.598	16	49	.105
Results-Based Leadership	1.423	16	49	.171
Regulatory Environment	2.254	16	49	.065

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Regression Results

Table 5 below summarizes the results of the Multiple Regression Analysis that was employed to examine the mediating influence of results-based leadership on the PM&E-performance nexus.

Table 5: Regression of Result-Based Leadership, Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation on the Performance

a) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.665[a]	.442	.435	.59597	.442	62.703	1	85	.000
2	.714[b]	.509	.497	.56275	.067	10.605	1	84	.002

b) ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.271	1	22.271	62.703	.000[b]
	Residual	28.060	85	.355		
	Total	50.331	86			
2	Regression	25.630	2	12.815	40.466	.000[c]
	Residual	24.701	84	.317		
	Total	50.331	86			

c) Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.653	.301		2.172	.033
	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation	.833	.105	.665	7.919	.000
2	(Constant)	.850	.290		2.928	.004
	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation	.171	.226	.136	1.754	.048
	Results-Based Leadership	.631	.194	.589	3.257	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Project Performance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
c. Predictors: (Constant), Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, Results-Based Leadership

Model 1 in Table 5 shows that Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation significantly influences the performance of petroleum industry with $R^2 = 0.435$, $F(1, 85) = 62.703$, $p < 0.05$. This means that Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation accounts for 43.5% of the variation in

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performance of the petroleum industry, while the remaining 56.5% is explained by other variables not considered in this study. The 43.5% influence shows a high level of influence.

Model 2 shows the inclusion of Results-Based Leadership on the model, $R^2 = 0.497$, $F(1, 84) = 10.605$, $p < 0.05$. This means, the inclusion of the result based leadership accounts for 49.7% of the variation in performance of the petroleum industry. This shows the Results-Based Leadership positively mediates the relationship between the PM&E and the performance of petroleum industry by increment of 6.2%.

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test shows the regression results. The output of model 2 indicates that Results-Based Leadership has a significant effect on performance $F(2, 84) = 40.466$, $p<.05$). Based on these results, the null hypothesis was rejected, Results-based leadership has no significant mediating influence on the relationship between PM&E and the performance of petroleum industry projects in South Sudan. The predictive equation is PER = .850 + .171PME + 631RBL which indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship on the mediating effect of result based leadership on the relationship between Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation significantly on performance. This implies that a one-unit improvement in result-based leadership significantly leads, to a 0.631 unit increase in performance. Similarly, a one-unit improvement in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation significantly leads, to a 0.171 unit increase in performance. The findings confirm that that the mere presence of participatory systems is insufficient for success in fragile contexts like South Sudan. The efficacy of participatory governance is rather contingent upon the human agency, the managerial philosophy, which significantly directs these tools.

Discussion of the findings

The significant increment realized in project performance when R-BL was introduced in PM&E-project performance relationship suggests that in the absence of this leadership variable, a break down in the causal chain occurs at the point where data transitions into decision-making, as the theory of change suggests. This mechanism is consistent with Elhadi's (2021) study of results-based management practices, including leadership participation and accountability in Kenya's public sector, which found that the success of practices hinges heavily on the commitment of leadership to make quick, yet evidence-based project decisions.

This finding resonates well with Makeny's (2024) observation in South Sudan's oil and gas sector that while governance practices in its institutions are improving, they remain hindered by constant political interference and leadership turnover. Moreover, empirical evidence from other past studies also reflects consistency with the findings of the present study. For example, O'Dea and Flin's (2001) study highlighted how safety leadership within offshore oil and gas project operations in the United Kingdom, emphasizing transformational leadership imbued with transparency and accountability, fundamentally enhances safety performance outcomes. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory explains the fundamental mechanism by which RBL influences the relationship between PM&E and project performance in South Sudan's

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petroleum industry, where RBL serves as the organizational entrepreneur to overcome institutional inertia and the isomorphic compliance risk.

Descriptive data indicated that PM&E was perceived generally as neutral, suggesting that its existence is just but an expected routine formality. In other words, it is an institution adopted in the industry not for efficacy, but legitimacy. The R-BL characterized by its special focus on accountability for measurable outcomes rather mere activities or inputs (Ulrich et al., 1999), directly stands at stark contrast this institutional complacency. A R-BL philosophy, reflecting Minja's (2016) findings about the practice of results-based management in Kenya's public sector, deliberately creates an internal work environment where PM&E generated data cannot be ignored or filed away simply for compliance purposes. Amundsen (2016) asserts argues that successful petroleum sector governance requires leaders who are truly committed to institutions frameworks that place high premium on efficiency and accountability, an emphasis that this study precisely captures through the observed influence of R-BL. Building the case for institutionalization and democratization as the decisive factors to overcoming the resource curse phenomenon, Amundsen submits that a country only the resource curse, otherwise known as paradox of plenty (p.112), will only happen to a country when the discovery of natural resources, specifically non-renewable resources like minerals and petroleum resources, is made before accountable and democratic state institutions are established and consolidated. It is cursed when even existing institutions are not strong enough to withstand the pressure from various groups for access to the newly found wealth. The implication is that in contexts like developing South Sudan, where institutional fragility, historical governance distortions and political contestations influence operations in the petroleum industry (Patey, 2014), PM&E alone cannot yield tangible project performance improvements unless there is a willing and institutionally empowered leadership to utilize evidence from monitoring and evaluation process.

The statistical significance of RBL in the present study confirms that the most successful South Sudan petroleum projects are led by leaders who embody principles advocated by Ayuk (2020), who argues that the success of future African energy depends on leaders who ensure local commitment, transparency, accountability and the delivery of shared prosperity. Ayuk's call for transparency and accountability are empirically realized through R-BL, which essentially demands that performance metrics generated by PM&E translate into tangible deliverables, and by implication, securing the social license to operate, which is the ultimate expression of stakeholder relationship management and satisfaction.

Olabode et al.'s (2018) study of Nigerian oil and gas sector, found linked results-oriented transformational leadership improved employee performance, suggesting that this leadership achieves this by creating clear, measurable performance indicators directly driven from PM&E, while also demonstrating unwavering commitment to accountability. This means that RBL, characterized by its intrinsic focus on performance metrics and deliverables, serves as the cultural engine that drives the necessary behavioral changes project success. The R-BL

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ensures that data from PM&E process that identify environmental or safety risks are responsively addressed with tangible action and consequence, helping prevent escalation of minor issue(s) into catastrophic project failures.

Hadi and Baskaran's (2021) study of Malaysia upstream petroleum industry also identifies the need for strategic commitment to social and environmental factors, underscoring the need for petroleum industry leaders who focus on sustainable outcomes that go beyond quarterly production targets. Further linking sustainable leadership with sustainable performance is Zada et al.'s (2024) study, which emphasizes the mediating role of knowledge integration, precisely what RBL must perform with data from PM&E process. It is thus inferable that without RBL, data from PM&E on environmental concerns, community grievances or land disputes remains mere reports. However, with RBL, such data becomes the strategic intelligence that prevents future conflict and maintains operational efficiency.

Conclusion

This study determined the mediating influence of R-BL on the relationship between PM&E and performance in South Sudan petroleum industry. It reveals a compelling evidence that R-BL, characterized by participation, coordination, transparency and accountability, and strategic management is a predictor of project performance and its inclusion in the regression model strengthens the predictive ability of PM&E. The RB-L's mediation effect underscores a critical governance insight and highlights those technocratic tools such as PM&E cannot deliver performance in politically complex petroleum economies like South Sudan unless leadership embodies a results-based orientation. A PM&E practice generates information, but mere information does not lead to improvement unless leader's priorities evidence over politics commit to strategic action and enforce accountability. The PM&E generate the necessary knowledge and legitimacy (social license to operate), in line with the dictates of stakeholder theory, but R-BL provides the motivational and structural capacity to act on that knowledge. Without R-BL, PM&E practices risk becoming mere ceremonial exercise that generates valuable feedback that is never integrated into the decision-making pipeline.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Theoretical implications

The study's findings contribute theoretically in several important ways. To begin with, the study integrates participatory governance and leadership into one explanatory framework that can explain project performance within institutionally fragile extractive environments. Second, the study builds the current stakeholder theory, as it shows that stakeholder participation alone does not automatically leads to accountability or improved performance outcome. Accountability does not emerge from mere participation, but from leadership responses to evidence generated by stakeholders. In this sense, leadership responses to participatory input determines whether, or not, participation becomes operationally meaningful.

Besides, the study refines theory of change by identifying R-BL as a mediating mechanism within the relationship between PM&E and performance. It demonstrates that inputs from

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participatory processes need a leadership pathway to directly translate into outcomes. Moreover, in fragile contexts, such as South Sudan, the findings of this study further enrich institutional theory by highlighting the primacy of leadership behavior and agency over formal structures in shaping project outcomes. It does not view institutions as static structures, but shows how R-BL actively shapes governance effectiveness in institutionally fragile extractive context.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study carries meaning for practitioners, as they reposition leadership as the primary lever for improving project performance in South Sudan's petroleum industry. This implies that sector leaders and project managers must go beyond mere administrative compliance and use actively PM&E input to guide their decision-making processes, coordination and corrective action. They should treat PM&E systems as strategic management assets, holding leadership accountable, not for merely collecting, but more crucially for acting on participatory evidence. To this end, therefore, practitioners in petroleum industry should institutionalize R-BL through leadership development programs that emphasize accountability, coordination, strategic management and evidence-based decision-making. Administratively, it is a question of strengthening accountability and control and institutionalization of public control mechanisms in the context of the Ministry of Petroleum.

Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of this study, policymakers should institutionalize R-BL as a governance requirement in South Sudan's petroleum industry. More specifically, they should explicitly incorporate results-based indicators, including but not limited to accountability for the use of PM&E input, in leadership competency models, performance contracts and promotion criteria. Policies should deliberately mandate evidence-based decision-making and by extension, transparent reporting of how participatory input influence project adjustments.

For practice, government agencies and petroleum operators should invest in leadership development programs focused on specifically results orientation, strategic management and coordination. They should formally integrate PM&E processes into decision-making cycles, with clearly articulated feedback-to-action mechanisms in South Sudan's petroleum industry institutions. Moreover, ensuring timely response to emerging risks and performance gaps, establishing inter-departmental and cross-institutional coordination forums that are anchored in PM&E evidence is imperative. South Sudan Petroleum industry institutions should strengthen governance standards and international best practices that institutionalize accountability, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness for proper management of petroleum resources for current and future generational benefits. They are also required to separate roles within institutions that govern the petroleum sector that should be core mechanisms for enforcement of checks and balances across the resource value chain.

Ethical Approval:

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no any conflict of interest in the research.

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Appendix: Total Number of Population

Variable	Potion of leadership	Institution				
		MoP	**DPOC**	**GPOC**	**SPOC**	**Total**
Occupation	Undersecretary	1				1
	Technical Advisor/Consultant	**3**	**1**			**3**
	Director General for Petroleum Authority	1				1
	Director General for Planning	1				1
	Director for Production and Operations	1				1
	Director for Exploration and Development	1				1
	Director for Data Management	1				1
	Director for Refineries and Pipelines	1				1
	Director for Community Development	1				1
	Vice President	1	1	1	1	3
	General Manager, Exploration and Development		1	1	1	3
	General Manager, Commercial & Services/Finance & Services/HR, GS and SCM		1	1	1	3
	General Manager, UDC		1			1
	D/General Manager, Commercial & Services/UDC		1	1		2

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	Legal Manager/ Legal Affairs	1	1	1	1	4
	Development Manager		1	1	1	3
	Exploration Manager		1	1	1	3
	Construction and Facilities Manager		1	1	1	3
	Planning Manager		1	1	1	3
	HSE Manager		1	1	1	3
	CPL Manager		1	1	1	3
	Downstream Manager			1		1
	Internal Audit and Compliance Manager		1	1	1	3
	Human Resource/ Training & Development Manager		1	1	1	3
	General Services Manager		1	1	1	1
	Community Development Manager		**1**	**1**	**1**	**3**
	Production and TS Manager		1	1	1	3
	President Office Manager			1		1
	Field-base Manager		1	1	1	3
	Deputy Drilling, Development, TS, HSE, Production		1	1	1	3
	Section Head, Business Performance, WPB/Planning		1	1	1	3
	Section Head		6	6	6	18
Total		**14**	**25**	**30**	**25**	**94**

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