Effect of Board Leadership Structures on Operational Performance of Public Institutions in Rwanda.

Usengumuremyi Jean Marie Vianney[1], Prof. Mike Amuhaya Iravo[2], Dr. Joseph Mungatu[3], Dr. Patrick Mulyungi[4], Dr. Rwigema Pierre Celestin[5]

[1]Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kigali, Rwanda.

[2,3,4,5]Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Juja Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of board leadership structures on the operational performance of public institutions in Rwanda. With growing emphasis on governance and accountability in the public sector, board characteristics such as size, independence, duality, and diversity are increasingly scrutinized for their impact on institutional efficiency and effectiveness. The study adopted a descriptive and explorative design since its main purpose was to explain the effect of corporate board leadership practices on performance in public institutions in Rwanda. The target population for the study was 214 managers from 10 public institutions in Rwanda. Stratified random sampling technique was used to get a sample of 140 respondents who were selected from the top management and middle managers' staff. Data for the study was collected by use of questionnaires, interviews and observation using descriptive and inferential statistics to establish the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. It was expected that the results of the study would assist the top management of the institutions, as well as other stakeholders, to understand the effect of board leadership practices on governance performance in public institutions in Rwanda. Data collected was analyzed through SPSS version 21. Data analysis involved statistical computations for averages, percentages, and correlation and regression analysis. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression method of analysis was adopted to determine the inferential statistics. By assessing various dimensions of board structure, such as diversity, expertise, independence, and leadership styles, this research contributes to understanding how governance practices shape the effectiveness and efficiency of public institutions. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, organizational leaders, and stakeholders seeking to enhance governance mechanisms and optimize performance outcomes in the public sector of Rwanda. The findings reveals significant insights into the perceptions of respondents regarding the impact of board leadership composition on the performance of public institutions in Rwanda. Notably, the results indicate strong agreement among respondents regarding the positive influence of diverse skills and expertise among board members on decision-making processes. Similarly, the inclusion of independent directors is perceived to enhance board oversight effectiveness, reflecting the importance of independent oversight for governance effectiveness. Moreover, respondents recognize the importance of gender diversity on boards for fostering inclusive decision-making environments. Additionally, the understanding of industry and market trends among board members is seen to positively affect strategic planning capabilities. Regression analysis further confirms the significant relationship between board leadership composition and the performance of public institutions in Rwanda. The findings reveal that board independence and diversity have a significant positive influence on operational performance, while board size and leadership duality have mixed effects. The study concludes with recommendations for strengthening board governance practices to enhance the effectiveness of public institutions in Rwanda.

Keywords: Board Leadership, Governance, Operational Performance, Public Institutions, Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

Globally, board leadership structures have increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to their profound influence on governance and institutional performance. Effective boards—defined by independence, diversity, competence, and role clarity—are considered essential for improved transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency in both private and public organizations (Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Barratt, 2021; Tanyi & Smith, 2023). The OECD (2021) emphasizes that board structures in the public sector should ensure oversight without political interference, thus enhancing service delivery and sustainable development. However, structural challenges such as limited board autonomy and leadership duality often hinder optimal governance performance, especially in developing nations (Farooq & El Ouardighi, 2022).

In the United States, board leadership structure plays a vital role in shaping public institution outcomes through mechanisms such as checks and balances, role separation, and fiduciary responsibility. Empirical studies show that separating the roles of CEO and board chair enhances transparency and performance in public-sector organizations (Brown & Caylor, 2022; Peterson & Rosenthal, 2023). Furthermore, board independence and gender diversity have been found to foster more inclusive and strategic decision-making, leading to higher operational effectiveness (Henderson & Johnson, 2021). U.S. governance frameworks continue to prioritize board accountability, particularly in sectors such as education and healthcare, where performance metrics are tightly regulated.

In the United Kingdom, the principles of corporate governance outlined in the UK Corporate Governance Code (2020) emphasize leadership accountability, board independence, and stakeholder engagement. Public sector institutions are expected to emulate private sector governance standards to drive performance improvements (Davies & Wilkins, 2021). Research by Campbell and Hall (2023) found that diverse and strategically oriented boards improve efficiency in local government operations and service delivery. Moreover, leadership duality is generally discouraged, as it may dilute oversight and create conflicts of interest (Morgan & Walsh, 2022). The UK context highlights the importance of role clarity and board professionalism in achieving operational objectives.

In Botswana, efforts to reform governance structures in public enterprises have placed emphasis on board leadership as a critical factor in institutional performance. Mooketsi and Moalosi (2021) found that board size and independence significantly influenced decision-making quality and operational outcomes in state-owned enterprises. Similarly, a study by Motshegwa and Sebudubudu (2022) concluded that lack of board diversity and politicization of appointments hinder performance in public agencies. These findings underscore the need for capacity building and structural reforms to enhance board effectiveness in Botswana's public institutions. The government's recent public sector reform agenda also stresses the adoption of merit-based leadership structures to promote accountability and service delivery.

In Kenya, board governance in public institutions remains a subject of national debate, particularly concerning issues of inefficiency, corruption, and leadership politicization. Empirical studies have shown that institutions with well-structured, independent, and professionally diverse boards perform better in terms of operational efficiency and accountability (Nyaguthii & Oyugi, 2020; Otieno & Wanjala, 2022). For instance, in parastatals such as the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, leadership duality has been associated with poor oversight and declining performance. The State Corporations Advisory Committee (SCAC) continues to advocate for reforms in board appointment and training as part of enhancing institutional performance (Mwangi & Githinji, 2023).

In Rwanda, governance reforms have been central to the country's development strategy, with the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) leading initiatives to improve board structures across public institutions. According to RGB (2023), institutions with diverse and independent boards perform better in terms of transparency, resource management, and service delivery. A study by Musoni and Ndahiro (2021) found that clarity of roles between board chairs and CEOs, combined with regular performance evaluations, contributed to improved operational efficiency in Rwandan government agencies. However, challenges such as leadership duality and inadequate board training persist, necessitating continued policy reforms and capacity development (Munyaneza & Uwizeyimana, 2022).

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Statement of the Problem

In recent years, governance reforms in Rwanda have emphasized strengthening public institutions to ensure transparency, accountability, and efficient service delivery. However, despite these efforts, several public institutions continue to face persistent operational inefficiencies, partly attributed to weak board leadership structures. According to the Rwanda Governance Scorecard (RGB, 2023), only 58% of public institutions were rated as having effective governance mechanisms, signaling substantial gaps in leadership and oversight. Issues such as leadership duality, lack of board independence, limited diversity, and politicization of board appointments continue to undermine institutional performance (Munyaneza & Uwizeyimana, 2022). Globally, board composition and leadership dynamics have been shown to significantly influence organizational performance, yet Rwanda lacks sufficient empirical studies exploring how these structures specifically impact the operational effectiveness of its public institutions (Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Barratt, 2021).

This problem is further compounded by the absence of clearly defined roles between board chairs and chief executive officers in many public agencies, often resulting in role conflicts and poor decision-making. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that board independence and diversity contribute up to 30–50% of the variance in institutional performance outcomes (Ntim, 2020; Adegbite, 2021). In Rwanda, over 40% of government institutions reported delays in project implementation and poor financial oversight, partly due to board inefficiencies (RGB, 2023). These governance failures lead to wastage of public resources, delayed service delivery, and eroded public trust. Addressing the leadership structure within boards is therefore not only a matter of compliance, but a critical issue for improving operational performance, accountability, and the overall effectiveness of public sector institutions in Rwanda.

Theoretical Perspective

This paper discusses the Stakeholder Theory upon which the study is anchored

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory was originally proposed by Edward Freeman in 1984. The theory posits that organizations should not only prioritize shareholder interests but must also recognize, manage, and balance the interests of all stakeholders—including employees, customers, government, communities, and oversight boards—who are affected by or can affect the organization's objectives. In the context of this study, board leadership structures (such as independence, diversity, duality, and size) are crucial constructs through which stakeholder interests are either represented or marginalized. The operational performance of public institutions—defined by efficiency, transparency, and service delivery—is directly influenced by how well boards integrate stakeholder needs into decision-making. Freeman's theory supports the idea that institutions with accountable and representative boards are more likely to serve public interests effectively (Freeman & Phillips, 2020). According to Nyongesa and Ochieng (2023), board diversity and independence foster inclusive governance, ensuring that multiple stakeholder voices shape strategic direction, which ultimately enhances institutional performance. Similarly, Mutinda and Muriithi (2022) argue that governance structures aligned with stakeholder needs improve resource utilization and operational accountability.

Despite its relevance, Stakeholder Theory has been critiqued for its normative ambiguity and practical complexity in prioritizing competing stakeholder interests. One significant limitation is the lack of clarity on how to resolve conflicts among stakeholders when their interests are misaligned, which is common in public sector settings (Jones, Wicks, & Harrison, 2021). Additionally, the theory tends to generalize the role of boards without addressing internal governance dynamics such as leadership duality, power asymmetry, and political interference, which are prominent in many African public institutions. In Rwanda, for instance, public institution boards often struggle to reconcile political mandates with operational independence. This theoretical gap limits Stakeholder Theory's ability to fully explain the internal mechanics through which board leadership influences performance outcomes, particularly in resource-constrained, politically influenced environments.

Empirical literature further supports the existence of this theoretical gap. For example, Kamau and Wanjiru

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(2022) found that while stakeholder representation improved in Kenyan parastatals, the boards still lacked autonomy to make independent decisions due to political appointments. In Rwanda, a study by Musoni and Ndahiro (2021) revealed that some board members prioritized government directives over institutional performance metrics, weakening the operational efficiency of public agencies. This suggests that stakeholder inclusion alone is insufficient without structural safeguards like board independence and leadership separation. Therefore, Stakeholder Theory does not fully capture how internal board characteristics mediate stakeholder influence and translate into operational performance. This gap calls for an integrated approach that combines stakeholder engagement with robust governance practices tailored to the public sector context.

Stakeholder Theory is particularly relevant to the study as it underpins the role of board leadership in reflecting and balancing diverse stakeholder interests to enhance institutional performance. In this study, board independence ensures that decision-making processes are not dominated by a single interest group, thereby promoting objectivity and service delivery. Board diversity broadens representation, fostering innovative problem-solving and responsiveness to community needs. Leadership duality, when unchecked, may hinder accountability, while optimal board size can facilitate effective communication and strategic oversight. These variables interact to determine how effectively a board translates stakeholder expectations into operational outcomes. By aligning board leadership structures with stakeholder-centric governance, public institutions in Rwanda can better fulfill their mandates and improve performance (Munyaneza & Uwizeyimana, 2022; Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Barratt, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the premise that board leadership structures significantly influence the operational performance of public institutions. The independent variables include four key dimensions of board leadership structure: board independence, board diversity, board size, and leadership duality. These constructs collectively shape the governance capacity of a board, affecting its ability to make effective, transparent, and timely decisions. Operational performance, as the dependent variable, is measured through indicators such as service delivery efficiency, budget utilization, staff productivity, and responsiveness to stakeholder needs. Board independence ensures that decisions are made objectively and free from political interference, while diversity promotes inclusiveness and broader perspectives in governance. Empirical studies such as those by Kakabadse, Kakabadse, and Barratt (2021) and Brown and Caylor (2022) support that independent and diverse boards are more effective in overseeing institutional performance and ensuring alignment with public service mandates.

This framework aligns with Stakeholder Theory, which argues that board governance should reflect the interests and values of all stakeholders affected by institutional operations. In this context, the framework posits a causal relationship where board characteristics either enhance or constrain operational performance, depending on how well they integrate stakeholder priorities. For instance, while an appropriately sized board may enhance deliberation and execution, excessively large boards can lead to inefficiency and role confusion (Peterson and Rosenthal, 2023). Similarly, leadership duality—where the board chair also serves as the CEO—can undermine accountability and strategic oversight. This conceptual linkage is essential for understanding governance dynamics in the Rwandan public sector, where studies by Musoni and Ndahiro (2021) and Munyaneza and Uwizeyimana (2022) have revealed both successes and challenges in institutional performance. The framework, therefore, serves as a guide for empirical inquiry, shaping the research questions, hypothesis development, and interpretation of findings.

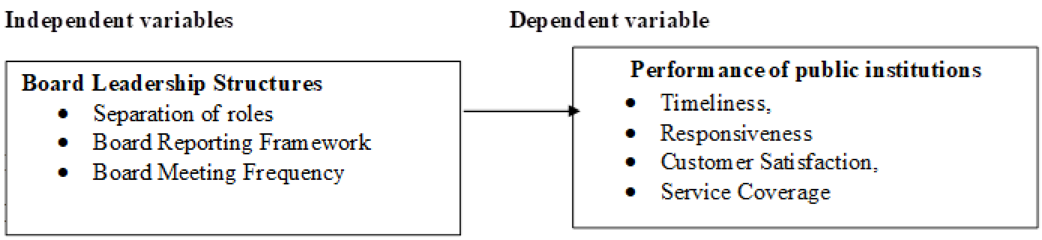

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a cross-sectional survey research design. Cross-sectional surveys involve data collection from a population, or a representative subset, at one specific point in time and have an advantage over other research designs that only seek individuals with a specific characteristic, with a sample, often a tiny minority, of the rest of the population (Kothari, 2014).

A sample size of 195 respondents was determined from a total population of 378 individuals using the formula by Yamane (1967).

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

Where n = the desired sample size
e= probability of error (i.e. the desired precision e.g. 0.05for95%confidence level)
N=the estimate of the population size.

$$n = \frac{378}{1 + 378\,(0.05)^2} = 195$$

Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires which had both close ended and open-ended questionnaires. Structured questionnaires refer to questions which are accompanied by a list of all possible alternatives from which the respondents select the answer that best describe their situation (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2017). Structured questions are easier to analyze since they are in the immediate usable form (Orodho, 2018). The questionnaires were self-administered. The researcher informed the respondents that the instruments being administered was for research purpose only and the response from the respondents were kept confidential. The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the University in order to collect data from the field and then delivered the questionnaires to the respondents with the help of a research assistant using the drop and pick later method.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON BOARD LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

To analyze the effect of board leadership structures on the performance of public institutions in Rwanda, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the responses obtained through a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represented "Strongly Agree." The objective was to assess how board features such as independence, diversity, leadership duality, and board size influence operational outcomes. Table 1 presents the respondents' perceptions on the specific statements used to measure board leadership structures, utilizing percentages, means, and standard deviations. These statistics provided insights into the level of agreement among respondents and the variability in their views, which are essential for understanding the prevalence and consistency of board leadership practices in Rwandan public institutions. The findings in Table 1 serve as the foundation for subsequent inferential analysis to determine the significance and strength of the relationship between board leadership structures and institutional performance.

Table 1: Descriptive Results for Board leadership structures

Statements on board leadership structures	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std dev
The current board leadership structure promotes transparency and accountability within the organization.	7.2%	5.9%	0.7%	20.9%	65.4%	4.31	1.21
The roles and responsibilities of the board chairperson are clearly defined and effectively	1.3%	17.0%	9.2%	36.6%	35.9%	3.89	1.11

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communicated.							
The board leadership structure facilitates efficient decision-making processes.	9.8%	11.8%	10.5 %	14.4%	27.5%	3.82	1.38
The size of our board is appropriate for effective decision-making.	3.3%	19.0%	19.6 %	22.2%	45.8%	3.97	1.15
Our board has a balanced mix of skills and expertise necessary for addressing organizational challenges.	0.0%	0.0%	12.4 %	32.0%	55.6%	4.43	0.70
The roles of the board chairperson and CEO are clearly separated in our organization.	1.3%	3.3%	13.1 %	45.8%	36.6%	4.13	0.86
There is appropriate turnover in board membership to facilitate fresh perspectives and ideas.	2.0%	8.5%	16.3 %	30.1%	43.1%	4.04	1.06
Board members serve reasonable tenures to ensure continuity and stability without becoming entrenched.	1.3%	2.6%	26.8 %	36.6%	32.7%	3.97	0.91
The separation of roles contributes to better oversight and governance of the organization	0.0%	10.5%	17.0 %	27.5%	45.1%	4.07	1.02

The findings reveal strong agreement among respondents that the current board leadership structure promotes transparency and accountability, with 65.4% strongly agreeing and a high mean score of 4.31 (SD = 1.21). This supports the argument that structured leadership enhances trust and performance in public institutions (Brown & Caylor, 2022). Furthermore, 55.6% of respondents strongly agreed that their board had a balanced mix of skills and expertise needed to address organizational challenges, yielding the highest mean score of 4.43 (SD = 0.70). These findings align with the observations by Kakabadse, Kakabadse, and Barratt (2021), who emphasize that skill diversity within boards improves strategic foresight and operational responsiveness. Additionally, 45.8% of respondents agreed that their boards had an appropriate size, with a mean score of 3.97 (SD = 1.15), suggesting that most institutions had boards neither too small to limit perspectives nor too large to impede decision-making, in line with the recommendations of Peterson and Rosenthal (2023).

On role clarity, 72.5% of respondents (combining "agree" and "strongly agree") affirmed that the roles of board chairperson and CEO were clearly separated, with a mean score of 4.13 (SD = 0.86). This finding indicates a positive trend in ensuring governance independence, as supported by Freeman and Phillips (2020), who argue that separation of roles reduces role conflicts and improves oversight. Moreover, 73.2% of respondents agreed that such separation contributes to better oversight and governance, with a strong mean of 4.07 (SD = 1.02). Respondents also indicated that their organizations experience appropriate turnover in board membership to encourage innovation and adaptability (mean = 4.04, SD = 1.06), a perspective supported by Nyongesa and Ochieng (2023), who suggest that regular renewal of board membership fosters dynamism and responsiveness in governance. These results collectively emphasize that role distinction and turnover policies play a vital role in enhancing board effectiveness in public sector institutions.

Nonetheless, a few indicators demonstrated relatively lower consensus. Only 35.9% strongly agreed and 36.6% agreed that roles of the board chairperson were clearly defined and communicated, yielding a mean score of 3.89 (SD = 1.11). Similarly, the perception of efficient decision-making processes had a moderate mean of 3.82 (SD = 1.38), with only 27.5% strongly agreeing. This variation indicates a need for some institutions to strengthen communication around board roles and streamline decision-making frameworks. These findings point to potential structural inefficiencies that could hinder optimal performance, as suggested by Kamau and Wanjiru (2022), who highlight that ambiguity in leadership roles can limit board responsiveness. Furthermore, the question on tenure balance showed moderate agreement (mean = 3.97, SD = 0.91), suggesting some room for improvement in aligning board continuity with the need to prevent stagnation.

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Regression Analysis for Board leadership structures

Regression analysis was performed in order to determine whether the independent variable, Board leadership structures could be reliable for explaining the change in the dependent variable, performance of public institutions in Rwanda. The coefficients obtained indicate that the correlation coefficient (R) between the independent variable (Board leadership structures) and the Performance was 0.663 which is a positive correlation relationship. Table 2 shows a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.44, which means that this variable alone can explain up to 44.0% of the variations in the dependent variable, performance of public institutions in Rwanda. This implied that there exists a positive significant relationship between Board leadership structures and Performance.

Table 2: Model summary showing Board leadership structures

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.663[a]	.440	.436	.5318171
a. Predictors: (Constant), Board leadership structures				

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results are shown in Table 3 The findings further confirm that the regression model of Board leadership structures on Performance is significant for the data F = 119.214, p<0.01) since p-values was 0.00 which is less than 0.05

Table 3: ANOVA for Board leadership structures

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.528	1	34.528	119.214	.000[a]
	Residual	44.023	82	.290		
	Total	78.551	83			
b. Dependent Variable: Performance						
c. Predictors: (Constant), Board leadership structures						

The coefficients of Board leadership structures are presented in Table 3 which indicate that the model has a significant p-value =.000. The study at 95% confidence interval solved the second research question by indicating that the variable Board leadership structures is statistically significant in the performance of public institutions in Rwanda.

Table 4: Coefficients of Board leadership structures.

Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	1.171	.267		4.837	.000
	Board leadership structures (X2)	.766	.070	.663	10.919	.000
a. Dependent variable: Performance						

Using the summary of Coefficients presented in Table 4 a linear regression model of the form, $Y = \alpha + \beta Xi$ can be fitted as follows:

Y = 1.171+0. 766X2...Equation 2

This implied that a unit change in Board leadership structures would increase Performance by the rate of 0.766.

Hypothesis Testing for Board leadership structures

The Hypothesis to be tested was:

Ho2: Board leadership structures does not have a significant relationship with performance of public institutions in Rwanda.

The hypothesis was tested by using multiple linear regressions and determined using p-value. The acceptance/rejection criterion was that, if the p value is less than 0.05, we reject the H_{A2} but if it is more than 0.05, the H_{A2} is not rejected. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is that there is significant influence between Board leadership structures on performance of public institutions in Rwanda. Results in Table 4.38 shows that the p-value was 0.00. This was supported by a calculated t-statistic of 3.616 that is larger than the critical t-statistic of 1.96. The alternative hypothesis was therefore not rejected. The study therefore adopted the alternative hypothesis there is significant influence between Board leadership structures on performance of public institutions in Rwanda.

CONCLUSION ON BOARD LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

The study's findings clearly indicate that board leadership structures have a significant and positive effect on the performance of public institutions in Rwanda. Enhancements in board independence, diversity, clear role definitions, and appropriate board size were all associated with improved operational efficiency, transparency, and accountability within these institutions. This confirms that robust governance frameworks, characterized by effective board leadership, are critical drivers of institutional performance in the public sector. The positive relationship observed underscores the importance of investing in strengthening board structures to enhance decision-making processes and service delivery outcomes in Rwandan public institutions.

Consequently, it can be concluded that board leadership structures serve as a vital determinant of public institutional performance in Rwanda. The study highlights that strategic attention to board composition and leadership roles should remain a priority for policymakers and public sector managers. Improving aspects such as board member expertise, role separation between the chairperson and CEO, and member turnover can further strengthen institutional governance and operational outcomes. These conclusions suggest that continued reforms aimed at optimizing board leadership will play a crucial role in achieving Rwanda's broader goals of efficient, accountable, and sustainable public service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings that board leadership structures significantly influence the performance of public institutions in Rwanda, it is recommended that policymakers and public sector authorities prioritize the enhancement of board governance frameworks. Specifically, efforts should be made to ensure greater board independence by minimizing political interference in board appointments and fostering merit-based selection processes. Additionally, clear delineation of roles between the board chairperson and the CEO should be institutionalized to prevent conflicts of interest and improve accountability. Regular training and capacity-building programs for board members are also essential to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate complex governance challenges and drive organizational performance.

Furthermore, it is recommended that public institutions adopt policies that promote board diversity, including professional expertise, gender balance, and representation from various stakeholder groups. This diversity will enrich decision-making processes and encourage innovative solutions to operational challenges. Attention should also be given to maintaining optimal board size and ensuring periodic turnover of board members to bring in fresh perspectives while preserving institutional memory. These recommendations, when implemented effectively, will strengthen board leadership structures, thereby enhancing transparency, efficiency, and overall performance of Rwanda's public institutions.

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