

Review

Leadership challenges and organizational development in Africa: A systematic literature review of governance failures and pathways to reform

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This systematic literature review examines the complex intersection of leadership effectiveness and organizational governance within the African context, identifying these as primary barriers to the continent's economic and social progress. Drawing on established organizational development (OD) frameworks, including those advanced by Kotter, Cummings and Worley, and Harrison, the review synthesizes evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, government and institutional reports, conference proceedings, and scholarly monographs to analyse how institutional weaknesses and poor governance structures create organizational cultures resistant to positive change. A structured search strategy was applied, and thematic synthesis was conducted across five country contexts: Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Botswana. The evidence reveals four systemic patterns of institutional pathology: corruption and state capture, nepotism and patronage networks, economic mismanagement, and democratic erosion. While some nations demonstrate democratic stability, persistent implementation gaps and resource-curse dynamics undermine sustainable development even in comparatively well-governed states. The review concludes by proposing evidence-based recommendations for leadership reform and institutional strengthening, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive, systemic OD interventions that simultaneously address structural and cultural dimensions of governance. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how OD principles can meaningfully guide public sector reform across Africa.

Key words: Leadership challenges, organizational development (OD), governance failures, institutional reform, systemic corruption, African public administration, change management, state capture, institutional capacity, economic mismanagement.

INTRODUCTION

The African continent, despite its vast natural resources and human capital potential, continues to grapple with fundamental challenges in leadership effectiveness and organizational governance that have persistently undermined economic development and social progress.

The intersection of organizational development (OD) theory and public administration reveals critical insights into how leadership failures manifest at institutional levels, creating systemic barriers to sustainable development across the continent. This systematic literature review

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examines the complex dynamics of leadership challenges in Africa through the lens of OD principles, analyzing how poor governance structures, corruption, and institutional weaknesses have created what Kotter (1996) describes as organizational cultures resistant to positive change. The theoretical framework of this review draws from established OD models, particularly those outlined by Cummings and Worley (2009), who emphasize that effective organizational change requires both competent leadership and robust institutional frameworks. French's seminal work on organization development objectives and strategies, as referenced in Shafritz and Hyde (1978), provides foundational understanding of how organizational systems can be transformed through systematic intervention and leadership development. The application of these principles to African governance contexts reveals both the magnitude of existing challenges and potential pathways for sustainable reform. This review is structured to first present the search methodology and selection protocol, followed by an examination of the theoretical foundations of leadership and OD as applied to public sector governance. Subsequent sections provide thematic synthesis of the identified evidence, detailed country case analyses, cross-case comparative insights, and a discussion of recommendations for reform. Key concepts central to this review include transformational leadership as defined by Yukl (2002), organizational diagnosis methodologies outlined by Harrison (2005), and change management frameworks developed by Anderson (2010). These theoretical constructs provide analytical tools for understanding how leadership failures in Africa can be addressed through systematic OD interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Review design and protocol

This review adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, adapted for qualitative and theoretical reviews in the social sciences (Moher et al., 2009). The SLR design was selected to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and rigour in the identification, selection, and synthesis of existing scholarship on leadership challenges and OD in Africa. Given the qualitative and interdisciplinary nature of the research domain, a narrative and thematic synthesis approach was employed rather than meta-analysis.

Search strategy

A structured search was conducted across multiple academic databases and repositories, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Scopus, and institutional

repositories of key African and international universities. Search terms were constructed using Boolean operators combining: "leadership Africa," "governance failure Africa," "OD Africa," "institutional reform," "corruption Africa," "state capture," "change management Africa," "democratic governance Africa," "public administration Africa," and country-specific terms (Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana). Searches were limited to sources published between 1974 and 2026, with particular emphasis on post-2000 literature to capture contemporary governance dynamics. Grey literature including government reports, policy documents, and publications from reputable international institutions was also incorporated given the applied nature of the research domain.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Sources were evaluated against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, as summarized in Table 1. Studies were included where they addressed leadership, governance, institutional development, organizational change, corruption, or public administration in sub-Saharan African contexts. Comparative literature from other regions (notably Venezuela) was incorporated where thematically relevant to African governance patterns.

Study selection and data extraction

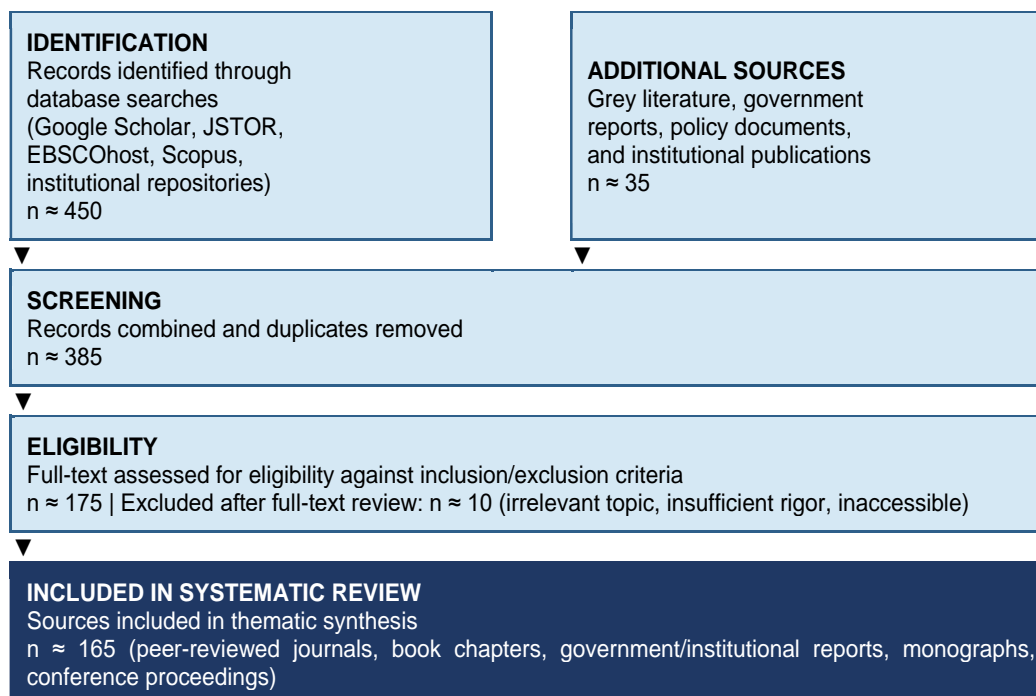
The selection process involved three screening stages: (i) title and keyword screening against the search terms and geographic scope criteria; (ii) abstract-level review against topical and quality criteria; and (iii) full-text evaluation against all inclusion/exclusion criteria. Data were extracted thematically from selected sources, with each source coded for primary themes (e.g., corruption, democratic deficit, economic mismanagement, nepotism), country context, theoretical orientation, and key findings relevant to leadership and OD in Africa. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA-adapted flow diagram illustrating the search and selection process from initial database identification through to final sources included in the thematic synthesis.

Quality assessment and synthesis approach

Given the heterogeneous nature of sources spanning peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, government reports, conference proceedings, and scholarly monographs, quality assessment was guided by criteria including methodological transparency, scholarly credibility of the publishing outlet, relevance to the research focus, and alignment with established theoretical frameworks in OD and public administration. Findings

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for systematic literature review.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Topic	Leadership, governance, institutional development, OD, corruption, public administration in sub-Saharan Africa or comparative contexts	Studies unrelated to leadership, governance or OD in African or analogous contexts
Source type	Peer-reviewed journals, scholarly book chapters, reputable institutional/government reports, conference proceedings, academic monographs	Unverified opinion pieces with no scholarly grounding; sources with no identifiable authorship or institutional affiliation
Language	English-language publications	Non-English publications without available translations
Date range	1974–2026, with emphasis on post-2000 literature to capture contemporary governance dynamics	Publications prior to 1974 (pre-dating foundational OD frameworks); sources not archived in accessible databases
Geographic scope	Sub-Saharan African nations; comparative literature from other regions included where thematically relevant (e.g., Venezuela)	Studies focused exclusively on North African, Western or East Asian governance with no transferable insights to sub-Saharan Africa
Quality	Methodologically transparent; published by credible academic publishers, reputable universities, or recognized international institutions	Predatory journals; sources lacking peer review or institutional credibility

**Figure 1.** PRISMA-adapted flow diagram search and selection process.

were synthesized thematically rather than through meta-analysis, consistent with the qualitative and interpretive nature of the review. The thematic synthesis approach

enabled identification of cross-cutting patterns in leadership failure, institutional dysfunction, and OD challenges across the five country contexts. Emerging

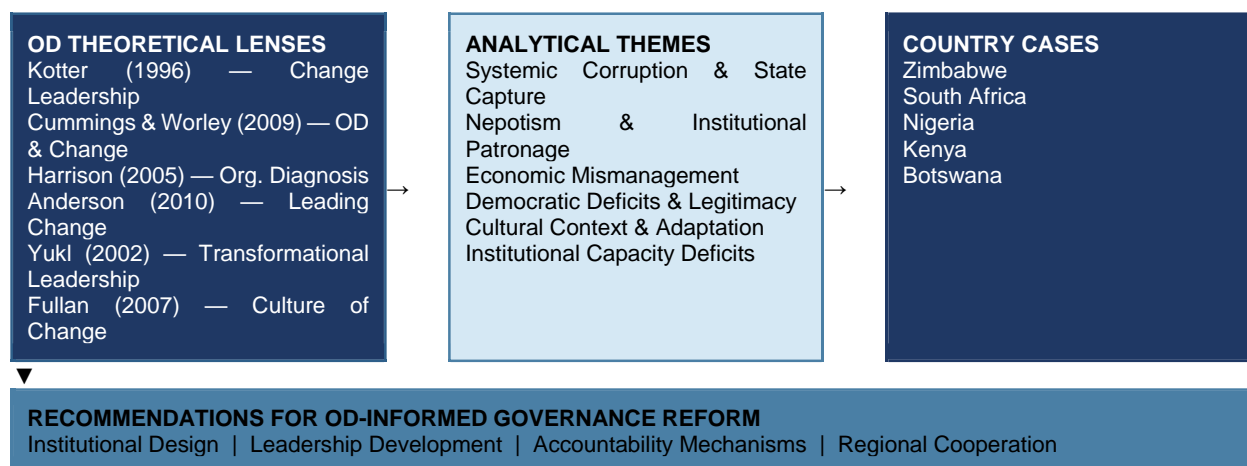


Figure 2. Conceptual framework OD theories, analytical themes, country cases, and reform outcomes.

themes were iteratively refined through constant comparison across sources until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Theoretical framework

This presents the OD theoretical lenses that underpin the thematic synthesis. Figure 2 provides an overview of the conceptual framework, illustrating how established OD theories are applied to identify analytical themes across the five country cases and ultimately inform reform recommendations.

Foundations of leadership theory in organizational development

The relationship between leadership effectiveness and organizational performance has been extensively documented in organizational development literature. Stogdill (1974)'s comprehensive survey of leadership theory and research established foundational understanding that effective leadership requires both personal competencies and supportive organizational systems. This theoretical foundation becomes particularly relevant when analyzing African governance contexts, where leadership challenges often stem from both individual failings and systemic institutional weaknesses. Kotter (1990)'s distinction between leadership and management provides a crucial analytical framework for understanding African governance challenges. His argument that leadership involves establishing direction, aligning people, and motivating and inspiring while management focuses on planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, and controlling and problem solving reveals how many African leaders have failed to

provide genuine leadership while simultaneously proving ineffective as managers of public resources. This dual failure has created what Wright (1996) identifies as a crisis of managerial leadership, where neither visionary direction nor operational competence exists at institutional levels. The organizational development perspective, as outlined by Brown and Harvey (2006), emphasizes that sustainable change requires systematic intervention at multiple organizational levels. Their experiential approach to organizational development suggests that African governance challenges cannot be addressed through surface-level reforms but require fundamental restructuring of institutional cultures and processes. This perspective aligns with Harrison's (2005) diagnostic approach, which emphasizes the importance of understanding organizational systems before implementing change interventions.

Organizational diagnosis and institutional analysis

Harrison (2005)'s framework for organizational diagnosis provides valuable tools for analyzing African governance systems. His emphasis on examining organizational structure, culture, and processes reveals how many African institutions suffer from what he terms organizational pathologies systematic dysfunctions that prevent effective performance. These pathologies manifest in African contexts through weak accountability mechanisms, unclear role definitions, and cultural norms that prioritize personal relationships over institutional procedures. The diagnostic approach advocated by Martins et al. (2017) emphasizes the importance of understanding local contexts when implementing organizational change. Their work on organizational diagnosis tools and applications for practitioners provides frameworks particularly relevant to African settings, where

cultural factors significantly influence institutional behavior. This contextual sensitivity is crucial for understanding why governance reforms that succeed in other regions often fail when transplanted to African contexts without adequate adaptation. Cummings and Worley (2009)'s comprehensive framework for organization development and change emphasizes that sustainable transformation requires alignment between organizational strategy, structure, and culture. Their model suggests that African governance challenges stem from fundamental misalignment between stated institutional purposes (public service and development) and actual operational cultures (personal enrichment and power accumulation). This misalignment has created what Anderson (2010) describes as change-resistant organizations that actively undermine reform efforts.

Change management and institutional transformation

The process of leading organizational change, as outlined by Anderson (2010), provides insights into why many African governance reform efforts have failed. His emphasis on understanding change readiness, building coalitions, and managing resistance reveals how entrenched interests within African institutions often sabotage reform initiatives. The application of change management principles to African contexts suggests that successful governance reform requires careful attention to political dynamics and stakeholder interests. Fullan (2007)'s work on leading in a culture of change offers particularly relevant insights for African leadership development. His emphasis on understanding change dynamics, building relationships, and maintaining focus during transformation processes provides frameworks for addressing the complex challenges facing African leaders. Fullan's recognition that change is fundamentally about people and relationships aligns with African cultural values while providing practical tools for institutional reform. Beer and Nohria (2000)'s analysis of breaking the code of change reveals why many African governance reforms have failed to achieve lasting impact. Their distinction between theory E (economic value) and theory O (organizational capability) approaches to change suggests that African reform efforts have often focused excessively on structural changes while neglecting the development of institutional capabilities and cultural transformation necessary for sustainable improvement.

Thematic synthesis of evidence

Thematic analysis of the reviewed literature identified four cross-cutting themes of institutional dysfunction across the five country contexts. Table 2 provides a summary matrix of these themes by country, alongside the key OD frameworks applied in the analysis.

Systemic corruption and institutional capture

The pervasive nature of corruption across African institutions represents what Cummings and Worley (2009) identify as a fundamental organizational pathology. Rather than isolated incidents of individual misconduct, corruption in African contexts has become institutionalized, creating what Harrison (2005) terms organizational cultures that actively reward unethical behaviour while punishing integrity and accountability (Hlatywyao and van der Walt, 2024). This systemic nature of corruption extends beyond individual leaders to encompass entire institutional ecosystems that have evolved to facilitate resource extraction rather than public service delivery. In Zimbabwe, the transformation from a promising post-independence economy to one of the world's most challenging cases of economic mismanagement illustrates how leadership failures can cascade through entire institutional systems (Mahuni et al., 2025). The erosion of democratic institutions, the manipulation of electoral processes, and the systematic plundering of state resources represent what Kotter (1996) identifies as leadership failures at the most fundamental level: the inability to establish legitimate direction for organizational development (Tsverere, 2015; Bratton et al., 2016; Maunganidze, 2016). The result has been what French (Shafritz and Hyde, 1978) would characterize as organizational development in reverse, where institutions become progressively less capable of fulfilling their intended functions. South Africa's post-apartheid experience provides another compelling case study of how leadership challenges can undermine institutional effectiveness despite initially strong foundations (Møller, 1998; Harrison et al., 2007). The phenomenon of state capture, where private interests effectively control public institutions, represents what Anderson (2010) describes as organizational systems that have been fundamentally redirected from their intended purposes (Kohn, 2022). The systematic weakening of institutions such as the South African Revenue Service, the National Prosecuting Authority, and various state-owned enterprises demonstrates how leadership failures can create cascading effects throughout interconnected institutional systems (Muntingh et al., 2017; Pypers, 2018; Barnard and Mamabolo, 2022; Fall, 2022; Wolf, 2023).

Nepotism and institutional patronage

The practice of nepotism across African institutions reflects deeper challenges in organizational development, particularly the tension between traditional social structures and modern institutional requirements (Kawo and Torun, 2020; Otundo Richard, 2024). Analysis of leadership in organizations reveals how personal relationships can either strengthen or undermine

Table 2. Summary of evidence by country context and analytical theme.

Theme	Zimbabwe	South Africa	Nigeria	Kenya	Botswana
Systemic corruption and state capture	Institutionalized corruption, Mugabe era; state resources plundered	Gupta capture of SARS, NPA, SOEs under Zuma; systemic institutional redirection	EFCC reform efforts repeatedly undermined; endemic patronage networks	Corruption persists despite 2010 Constitution; Ethics Commission limited impact	Comparatively low; accountability mechanisms partially effective
Nepotism and institutional patronage	ZANU-PF patronage; personal loyalty overrides institutional roles	ANC cadre deployment; appointments based on party loyalty not competence	Ethnic and political patronage; manipulation of reciprocity norms	Ethnic mobilization; appointments influenced by community ties	Mild forms observed; institutional procedures generally maintained
Economic mismanagement	Hyperinflation, land reform failure, currency collapse, mass emigration	Eskom, SAA failure; load shedding; growth stagnation post-2008	Oil dependence; failed diversification; EFCC unable to deter fiscal misconduct	Revenue mismanagement; diversification gaps; devolution underfunded	Diamond dependence (>80% exports); repeated diversification failures despite strong institutions
Democratic deficits and institutional legitimacy	Electoral manipulation, violence, intimidation; suppression of civil society	NPA compromised; judicial appointments politicized during Zuma years	Ethnic/religious manipulation; electoral malpractice in 2023 elections	2007–08 post-election violence; reformed IEBC; persistent ethnic politics	Democratic stability maintained; peaceful transfers of power; minor civil society concerns
Key OD frameworks applied	Harrison (2005); Kotter (1996); Anderson (2010); Fullan (2007)	Bradford and Burke (2005); Cummings and Worley (2009); Anderson (2010)	Obasi (2000); Yukl (2002); Cummings and Worley (2009)	Bradford and Burke (2005); Beer and Nohria (2000); Anderson (2010)	Cummings and Worley (2009); Kotter (1990); Fullan (2007); Harrison (2005)

institutional effectiveness, depending on how they are managed within formal organizational structures (Dauda, 2020). In many African contexts, the failure to establish clear boundaries between personal relationships and institutional roles has created what Wright (1996) identifies as managerial leadership crises, in which personal loyalties override institutional responsibilities (Metz, 2022). Nigeria’s experience, described by Obasi (2000) as political leadership and followership mobilization, illustrates how traditional social patterns can be manipulated to serve personal rather than institutional interests (Yagboyaju, 2014; Akinola, 2019; Arowolo, 2019).

The transformation of legitimate cultural practices of reciprocity and mutual obligation into systems of institutional patronage represents a fundamental distortion of both traditional values and modern organizational principles (ISSA et al., 2024; Iseyen, 2025). This has created what Stogdill (1974) would identify as leadership systems that lack legitimacy in both traditional and modern contexts. The challenge of nepotism extends beyond individual appointments to encompass what Harrison (2005) describes as organizational design problems. When institutional structures are systematically modified to accommodate personal relationships rather than functional requirements, the result is

organizations that are fundamentally incapable of effective performance. This has created what Brown and Harvey (2006) identify as experiential learning deficits, where organizations are unable to learn from their mistakes because feedback systems have been compromised by personal relationships and political considerations.

Economic mismanagement and development failures

The consistent pattern of economic mismanagement across African nations reflects

what Cummings and Worley (2009) identify as fundamental failures in organizational strategy and implementation. The disconnect between stated development goals and actual policy implementation suggests systemic problems in what Anderson (2010) describes as organizational change processes. Many African leaders have demonstrated what Kotter (1990) identifies as management failures, the inability to effectively plan, organize, and control organizational resources while simultaneously lacking the leadership vision necessary to inspire and direct institutional transformation. The case of Zimbabwe's economic collapse provides a stark illustration of how leadership failures can systematically destroy institutional capacity (Moyo and Besada, 2008; Munangagwa, 2009; Asante, 2013). The abandonment of sound economic policies, the destruction of productive sectors, and the manipulation of monetary systems represent what Fullan (2007) would characterize as failures of leading in a culture of change, where leaders not only fail to manage change effectively but actively create destructive change processes (Makina, 2010; Dube and Chipumho, 2016; Ellyne and Daly, 2016; Mlambo, 2017; Sibanda, 2021). The result has been what Harrison (2005) describes as organizational death, the systematic destruction of institutional capacity to fulfill basic functions. Venezuela's experience under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, while not African, provides relevant comparative insights into how populist leadership can systematically undermine institutional effectiveness (Hellinger and Spanakos, 2017; Posado, 2022; Kaleta, 2023). The parallels with certain African contexts, particularly in terms of the manipulation of democratic institutions and the systematic erosion of economic capacity, suggest common patterns in how leadership failures manifest across different cultural settings. This comparative perspective indicates that the challenges facing African leadership are not unique to the continent but reflect broader patterns of institutional decay that arise when leadership fails to maintain a focus on sustainable development goals.

Democratic deficits and institutional legitimacy

The erosion of democratic institutions across Africa represents what Bradford and Burke (2005) identify as fundamental challenges in reinventing organization development (Fombad, 2017; Hartmann, 2018; Daniel and Southall, 2019; Ndulo, 2019). The systematic weakening of electoral systems, the manipulation of constitutional processes, and the suppression of civil society organizations reflect what Jones and Brazzel (2006) describe as organizational change processes that move institutions away from, rather than toward, their intended purposes (Hearn, 2001; Lindberg, 2005; Landau, 2012; AFRICA, 2025). This has created what Gallos (2006)

identifies as organization development challenges that require a fundamental reconceptualization of institutional roles and relationships. The experience of countries such as Uganda, where constitutional term limits have been systematically removed, illustrates how leadership failures can create what Beer and Nohria (2000) describe as organizational cultures that are fundamentally incompatible with democratic governance (Muhwezi, 2013; Asiimwe, 2014; Tull and Simons, 2017). The transformation of democratic institutions into mechanisms for perpetuating personal rule represents what De Guia (2000) identifies as culture change in reverse, where institutional cultures evolve to serve personal rather than public interests. The challenge of democratic legitimacy extends beyond electoral processes to encompass what Banks and Alban (2006) describe as large-group methods for creating systemic change. The failure to develop effective mechanisms for citizen participation in governance has created what Hechanova and Franco (2008) identify as disconnects between leadership and constituencies that undermine the effectiveness of institutional reform efforts. This has resulted in what French (Shafritz and Hyde, 1978) would characterize as organizational development initiatives that lack the stakeholder support necessary for sustainable implementation.

Case study evidence: Institutional failures and leadership challenges

This presents country-specific evidence organized across the five case studies. Each case is analyzed through the OD frameworks established in theoretical framework, with cross-case patterns synthesized in cross-case analysis and systemic patterns. The cases were selected based on their representativeness of key governance typologies across sub-Saharan Africa: institutional collapse (Zimbabwe), democratic compromise under strong initial institutions (South Africa), chronic fragmentation in a large federal state (Nigeria), reform trajectory following conflict (Kenya), and comparative democratic success alongside persistent structural challenges (Botswana).

Zimbabwe: The systematic destruction of institutional capacity

Zimbabwe's transformation from a promising post-independence economy to one characterized by hyperinflation, mass emigration, and institutional collapse provides a compelling case study of how leadership failures can systematically destroy organizational capacity (Mkandawire, 2020; Bushu and Kufakurinani, 2024; Mahuni et al., 2025). The application of Harrison (2005)'s diagnostic framework reveals multiple levels of institutional

pathology that have reinforced each other to create what Cummings and Worley (2009) would identify as organizational systems in terminal decline. The systematic destruction of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector through the chaotic land reform program illustrates what Anderson (2010) describes as organizational change processes that are fundamentally destructive rather than developmental (Maguwu, 2008; Cliffe et al., 2014; Scoones et al., 2014; Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019). The failure to plan, implement, and manage the transition from large-scale commercial farming to smallholder agriculture represents what Kotter (1996) identifies as leadership failures at the most basic level, the inability to establish coherent direction for institutional change (Nyathi et al., 2025; Pocock and No, 2025). The result has been what Brown and Harvey (2006) describe as experiential learning failures, where organizations repeatedly make the same mistakes because feedback systems have been compromised by political considerations. The manipulation of electoral processes in Zimbabwe demonstrates what Wright (1996) identifies as managerial leadership failures that extend beyond individual competence to encompass systematic institutional manipulation (Tsverere, 2015; Dodo, 2016; Bratton et al., 2016). The use of violence, intimidation, and electoral fraud to maintain political control represents what Yukl (2002) describes as leadership approaches that fundamentally undermine organizational legitimacy (Mwonzora and Mandikwaza, 2019). This has created what Stogdill (1974) would characterize as leadership systems that lack both effectiveness and legitimacy, making sustainable institutional development impossible. The economic consequences of Zimbabwe's leadership failures illustrate what Fullan (2007) describes as leading in a culture of change challenges where leaders not only fail to manage change effectively but actively create destructive change processes (Moyo and Besada, 2008; Munangagwa, 2009). The systematic destruction of monetary systems, the collapse of basic services, and the mass emigration of skilled personnel represent what Harrison (2005) identifies as organizational death, the systematic destruction of institutional capacity to fulfill basic functions (Asante, 2013; Vusani, 2015; Chinembiri, 2016; Simpson et al., 2018; Jahaf, 2025).

South Africa: State capture and institutional compromise

South Africa's experience with state capture during the Jacob Zuma presidency provides insights into how leadership failures can systematically compromise institutional integrity even within relatively strong democratic frameworks (Alence and Pitcher, 2019; Budhram, 2019; Bruce et al., 2021; Koelble, 2024; Riar, 2024). The systematic weakening of institutions such as the South African Revenue Service, the National

Prosecuting Authority, and various state-owned enterprises demonstrates what Anderson (2010) describes as organizational change processes that systematically redirect institutional purposes from public service to private benefit (Kohn, 2022; Mkhwanazi, 2022; Ismail and Richards, 2023). The Gupta family's systematic capture of state institutions illustrates what Cummings and Worley (2009) identify as organizational pathologies that can develop when leadership fails to maintain appropriate boundaries between public and private interests (Shai, 2017; Myburgh, 2017; Madonsela, 2019). The transformation of public institutions into mechanisms for private enrichment represents what French (Shafritz and Hyde, 1978) would characterize as organizational development in reverse, where institutions become progressively less capable of fulfilling their intended functions (Levy et al., 2021; Pillay et al., 2023; McIntyre et al., 2025). The systematic weakening of South Africa's state-owned enterprises provides compelling evidence of what Harrison (2005) describes as organizational diagnosis challenges where institutional problems are deliberately obscured to prevent effective intervention (Barnard and Mamabolo, 2022; Moganane, 2024).

The looting of institutions such as Eskom, South African Airways, and the South African Broadcasting Corporation represents what Beer and Nohria (2000) identify as organizational cultures that have been systematically corrupted to serve private rather than public interests (Malgas, 2021; West African Social Activities and Research Association (WASARA), 2021; Abel and Lebogang, 2023; Ruiters and Bond, 2023; Yearwood, 2025). The resilience of South African democratic institutions in eventually responding to state capture demonstrates what Bradford and Burke (2005) describe as reinventing organization development processes that can restore institutional integrity when supported by strong civil society and independent media (Budhram and Geldenhuys, 2018; Gudo, 2021). The role of institutions such as the Public Protector, the Constitutional Court, and investigative journalism in exposing and challenging state capture illustrates what Jones and Brazzel (2006) identify as organization development and change processes that can restore institutional effectiveness when leadership failures are systematically addressed (De Ruyter, 2023; Bond, 2024; Uys and Radulovic, 2025).

Nigeria: Institutional fragmentation and sectarian division

Nigeria's experience with leadership challenges reflects what Obasi (2000) describes as fundamental tensions in political leadership and followership mobilization within diverse and fragmented societies (Ejimbabo, 2013; Chris, 2016; Michael et al., 2021). The systematic manipulation of ethnic and religious divisions for political advantage

illustrates what Yukl (2002) identifies as leadership approaches that fundamentally undermine organizational cohesion and effectiveness (Shehu and Jahun, 2018; Chimee and Ojiakor, 2021; Ejura and Tochukwu, 2024). The result has been what Wright (1996) describes as managerial leadership crises where institutions lack the legitimacy and capacity necessary for effective governance. The persistence of corruption across Nigerian institutions despite repeated reform efforts demonstrates what Cummings and Worley (2009) identify as organizational cultures that are resistant to change due to deeply embedded interests and relationships (Izuchukwu et al., 2024; Salau, 2024; Udochukwu and Uchenna, 2025; Oluranti, 2025). The failure of initiatives such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to achieve lasting impact reflects what Anderson (2010) describes as organizational change challenges where reform efforts are systematically undermined by entrenched interests (Obuah, 2010; Samuel et al., 2014; Umar et al., 2018; Bello et al., 2022). The ongoing security challenges in Nigeria, including the Boko Haram insurgency and widespread banditry, illustrate what Harrison (2005) identifies as organizational diagnosis problems where institutional failures in one area cascade into broader systemic challenges (Akinsowon, 2021; Nkata and Okpanocha, 2022; Ojo et al., 2023). The inability of Nigerian security forces to effectively address these challenges reflects what Stogdill (1974) describes as leadership systems that lack both effectiveness and legitimacy, making sustainable institutional development extremely difficult (Makai et al., 2024). The persistence of Nigeria's economic dependence on oil exports despite decades of diversification efforts demonstrates what Fullan (2007) describes as leading in a culture of change failures where leaders consistently fail to maintain focus on long-term development goals (Uzonwanne, 2015; Onoh and Ndu-Okereke, 2018; Ndiomaluke et al., 2025). The systematic failure to develop non-oil sectors of the economy represents what Kotter (1996) identifies as leadership failures at the strategic level—the inability to establish and maintain coherent direction for institutional development (Sola and Joachim, 2013; Ideh et al., 2021; Obafemi, 2022).

Kenya: Institutional reform and democratic consolidation

Kenya's experience with institutional reform following the 2007-2008 post-election violence provides insights into how leadership challenges can be addressed through systematic organizational development interventions (Kagwanja, 2013; Materu, 2014; Ochieng et al., 2023). The implementation of the 2010 Constitution and the establishment of new institutions such as the Commission on Revenue Allocation and the Ethics and Anti-Corruption

Commission illustrate what Bradford and Burke (2005) describe as reinventing organization development processes that can restore institutional effectiveness (Hope, 2015; Gathii, 2016; Kenya, 2017; Odhiambo, 2022). The systematic restructuring of Kenya's electoral system demonstrates what Anderson (2010) identifies as organizational change processes that address fundamental structural problems rather than merely surface-level reforms (Wandina and Ghabon, 2026). The establishment of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission and the implementation of new electoral technologies represent what Cummings and Worley (2009) describe as organizational development initiatives that align institutional structures with stated purposes (Kigwiru, 2019; Muriuki, 2022; Bosire and Mutuku, 2023; Kindi and Makhamara, 2025). However, the persistence of corruption and ethnic manipulation in Kenyan politics illustrates what Harrison (2005) identifies as organizational diagnosis challenges where surface-level reforms may not address deeper cultural and structural problems (Hope, 2014; Kisaka and Nyadera, 2019; Kivoi et al., 2022). The continued dominance of ethnic considerations in political mobilization suggests what De Guia (2000) describes as culture change challenges that require sustained effort over extended periods to achieve lasting transformation (Bedasso, 2015; Chacha et al., 2020; Ndiema, 2025). The mixed success of Kenya's institutional reforms demonstrates what Beer and Nohria (2000) identify as the complexity of breaking the code of change in contexts where multiple factors must be addressed simultaneously. The progress in some areas (electoral systems, constitutional governance) combined with persistent challenges in others (corruption, ethnic division) illustrates the need for comprehensive approaches to organizational development that address both structural and cultural dimensions of institutional change.

Botswana: Democratic stability and economic diversification challenges

Botswana's post-independence experience presents a compelling case study that illustrates both the potential for effective democratic governance in Africa and the persistent challenges of economic diversification that plague resource-rich nations (Taylor, 2003; Good, 2017; Ghebremusse, 2018; Mogotsi, 2023). Unlike many of its regional counterparts, Botswana has maintained what Stogdill (1974) would characterize as legitimate leadership systems that have sustained democratic institutions and relative political stability for over five decades (Mooketsane, 2017; Nehrbass, 2020; Sander, 2024). However, the country's continued dependence on diamond exports despite decades of diversification rhetoric demonstrates what Fullan (2007) describes as

leading in a culture of change failures similar to those observed in Nigeria's oil-dependent economy (Besada and O'Bright, 2018; Modungwa, 2018; Takala-Greenish, 2025).

Institutional strengths and democratic governance

Botswana's success in maintaining democratic institutions reflects what Cummings and Worley (2009) identify as effective organizational alignment between stated democratic purposes and actual institutional behavior (Sebudubudu and Molutsi, 2008; Lekalake, 2016). The country's leadership has consistently demonstrated what Kotter (1990) describes as management competencies in planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, and controlling and problem solving while maintaining democratic accountability mechanisms that have prevented the authoritarian drift observed in many African nations (Holm, 2000; Groop, 2017; Seabo et al., 2017). The peaceful transfer of power through regular elections and the maintenance of independent institutions such as the judiciary and auditor general illustrate what Harrison (2005) describes as organizational health, in contrast to the institutional pathologies documented in Zimbabwe and other regional cases (Molomo, 2006; Mokgosi, 2012; Good, 2017). The effectiveness of Botswana's governance systems reflects what Anderson (2010) identifies as successful organizational change processes that have enabled gradual institutional development rather than the destructive change patterns observed elsewhere in Africa (Lewin, 2011; Ghebremusse, 2018). The country's ability to maintain what Wright (1996) describes as managerial leadership competencies while avoiding the corruption and institutional capture that have characterized many African nations demonstrates the possibility of sustainable institutional development within African contexts. Botswana's approach to managing ethnic diversity provides insights into what De Guia (2000) describes as culture change processes that can strengthen rather than undermine institutional effectiveness (Phirinyane, 2013; Dryden-Peterson and Mulimbi, 2017; Gapa, 2017). Unlike Nigeria's experience with systematic manipulation of ethnic divisions, Botswana's leadership has generally managed to maintain what Yukl (2002) identifies as organizational cohesion across different ethnic groups, though this has not eliminated underlying tensions entirely.

Economic diversification failures and resource curse dynamics

Despite its political successes, Botswana's economic development experience demonstrates challenges remarkably similar to Nigeria's oil dependence, illustrating what Kotter (1996) identifies as strategic leadership

failures that persist even within otherwise effective governance systems (Ahmed and Van Hulten, 2014; Zubikova, 2018; Schilirò, 2022). The country's continued reliance on diamond exports for over 80% of export revenues and significant portions of government revenue reflects what Fullan (2007) describes as systematic failures to maintain focus on long-term diversification goals despite repeated policy commitments to economic transformation (Besada and O'Bright, 2018; Mogapi and Badirwang, 2021; Honde, 2024). The persistence of Botswana's diamond dependence despite decades of diversification planning illustrates what Anderson (2010) describes as change readiness deficits that prevent effective implementation of stated policy goals (Modungwa, 2018; Sekwati, 2010). Like Nigeria's experience with oil revenue management, Botswana has struggled to translate natural resource wealth into diversified economic capacity, suggesting what Harrison (2005) identifies as organizational diagnosis problems where policy planning processes fail to address underlying structural constraints on economic transformation (Haenze, 2014; Obi, 2017; Akpan et al., 2024). The systematic failure to develop significant non-diamond economic sectors reflects what Cummings and Worley (2009) describe as fundamental misalignment between stated economic objectives and actual resource allocation patterns (Kojo, 2010; Tusalem and Morrison, 2014; Takala-Greenish, 2025). Despite the establishment of various diversification agencies and initiatives, including the Botswana Development Corporation and the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency, the country has failed to achieve what Beer and Nohria (2000) identify as the organizational learning capabilities necessary for systematic economic transformation (Themba and Josiah, 2015; Pansiri and Yalala, 2017).

Institutional capacity and implementation challenges

Botswana's diversification challenges reflect what Brown and Harvey (2006) identify as experiential learning deficits where organizations fail to adapt their approaches based on feedback from previous implementation attempts (Mogotsi et al., 2023). The repeated establishment and restructuring of diversification agencies without achieving significant results suggests what Wright (1996) describes as managerial leadership problems in translating policy intentions into effective implementation strategies (Conteh, 2008; Haenze, 2014; Schilirò, 2022). The country's experience with initiatives such as the National Development Plans and Vision 2036 demonstrates what Stogdill (1974) identifies as leadership systems that possess legitimacy but lack the technical competencies necessary for managing complex economic transformation processes (Sechele, 2016; Statistics Botswana, 2016; Bothale, 2017). Unlike the systematic corruption and

institutional capture observed in other African contexts, Botswana's challenges appear to stem from what French (Shafritz and Hyde, 1978) describes as organizational development limitations related to capacity rather than intentional institutional manipulation. The persistence of skills shortages and limited private sector development despite significant investment in education and training programs illustrates what Jones and Brazzel (2006) describe as organization development and change challenges that require systematic attention to institutional ecosystems rather than isolated interventions (McCaig, 2015; Honde, 2024). The disconnect between educational outputs and economic diversification requirements reflects what Gallos (2006) identifies as organizational development problems that require comprehensive rather than piecemeal approaches to institutional reform (Siphambe, 2007; Sekwati, 2010; Schilirò, 2022).

Cross-case analysis and systemic patterns

The comparison between Botswana's democratic governance successes and economic diversification failures provides crucial insights into what Banks and Alban (2006) describe as the complexity of large group methods for creating systemic change. While the country has successfully maintained democratic institutions and avoided the corruption patterns that have destroyed institutional capacity elsewhere in Africa, it has proven unable to translate these governance strengths into effective economic transformation strategies. Botswana's experience suggests that effective governance institutions, while necessary, are not sufficient for addressing what Bradford and Burke (2005) describe as reinventing organization development challenges related to economic structural transformation. The country's ability to maintain institutional integrity while failing to achieve economic diversification illustrates what Hechanova and Franco (2008) identify as the need for specialized competencies in leading organizations in a changing world that go beyond general governance capabilities. The parallel between Botswana's diamond dependence and Nigeria's oil dependence, despite dramatically different governance contexts, suggests what Cummings and Worley (2009) describe as systemic challenges in resource-rich economies that transcend individual institutional arrangements. This comparative perspective reveals that economic diversification requires what Anderson (2010) identifies as specific organizational change competencies that differ from those necessary for maintaining democratic governance or preventing corruption.

Systems thinking and institutional interconnectedness

The application of systems thinking to African governance

challenges reveals the interconnected nature of institutional problems that cannot be addressed through piecemeal reforms. Cummings and Worley (2009)'s emphasis on understanding organizational systems as interconnected wholes provides crucial insights into why many African reform efforts have failed to achieve sustainable impact. The tendency to focus on individual institutions or specific problems without considering broader systemic relationships has resulted in what Harrison (2005) describes as organizational interventions that fail to address underlying structural problems. The concept of institutional ecosystems provides a framework for understanding how corruption, poor governance, and economic mismanagement reinforce each other across different sectors and levels of government. Anderson (2010)'s process-oriented approach to organizational development suggests that sustainable change in African contexts requires simultaneous intervention at multiple levels, from individual leadership development to systemic institutional reform. This systems perspective helps explain why efforts to address corruption in isolation often fail, as corrupt networks adapt and reconstitute themselves in different forms when attacked piecemeal. The interconnected nature of African governance challenges also suggests that successful reform efforts must address what French (Shafritz and Hyde, 1978) describes as the objectives, assumptions and strategies that underlie institutional behavior. Many African institutions operate according to informal rules and relationships that contradict formal organizational structures, creating what Wright (1996) identifies as fundamental tensions between stated purposes and actual behavior. Addressing these tensions requires what Banks and Alban (2006) describe as large group methods that can engage multiple stakeholders in systematic examination and transformation of institutional cultures.

Cultural context and institutional adaptation

The failure of many governance reforms in Africa reflects insufficient attention to cultural contexts and the need for institutional adaptation rather than wholesale transplantation of foreign models. De Guia (2000)'s work on culture change as key to organization development emphasizes that sustainable institutional transformation must build upon existing cultural strengths while addressing problematic cultural patterns. This perspective suggests that African governance reform must navigate the complex relationship between traditional social structures and modern institutional requirements. The challenge of adapting democratic institutions to African cultural contexts illustrates what Hechanova and Franco (2008) describe as the need for leading organizations in a changing world through approaches that respect local contexts while promoting effective

governance. Many African societies have strong traditions of consensus-building, collective decision-making, and accountability to community elders that could potentially strengthen democratic institutions if properly integrated into formal governance structures. However, the manipulation of traditional cultural practices for personal political advantage demonstrates what Yukl (2002) identifies as leadership approaches that corrupt rather than build upon cultural strengths. The transformation of legitimate cultural practices such as reciprocity and mutual obligation into systems of corruption and patronage represents what Stogdill (1974) describes as leadership failures that undermine both traditional and modern sources of legitimacy. The development of culturally appropriate governance models requires what Gallos (2006) describes as organization development approaches that can bridge traditional and modern institutional forms. This suggests the need for what Brown and Harvey (2006) identify as experiential approaches to organizational development that can help African societies develop governance systems that are both effective and culturally legitimate.

Capacity building and human development

The persistent challenges facing African institutions reflect what Harrison (2005) identifies as fundamental capacity deficits that cannot be addressed through structural reforms alone. The systematic weakening of African educational systems, the brain drain of qualified personnel, and the lack of investment in human development have created what Cummings and Worley (2009) describe as organizational capability deficits that undermine institutional effectiveness regardless of formal structures and procedures. The development of effective leadership capacity requires what Fullan (2007) describes as systematic approaches to leading in a culture of change that can prepare African leaders for the complex challenges of institutional transformation. This includes not only technical competencies but also what Kotter (1990) identifies as the leadership skills necessary to establish direction, align people, and motivate institutional change. The current emphasis on short-term political survival over long-term institutional development reflects what Anderson (2010) describes as change readiness deficits that must be addressed through comprehensive leadership development programs. The challenge of building institutional capacity in Africa also requires attention to what Jones and Brazzel (2006) describe as organization development and change processes that can systematically strengthen institutional cultures and capabilities. This includes developing what Beer and Nohria (2000) identify as organizational learning capabilities that can help African institutions adapt and improve their performance over time. The current

weakness of feedback systems and accountability mechanisms in many African institutions reflects the need for systematic capacity building that goes beyond individual training to encompass institutional culture change.

DISCUSSION

The evidence synthesized across thematic synthesis of evidence through 6 converges on several key insights: governance failure in Africa is rarely monocausal; structural reforms divorced from cultural transformation consistently underperform; and effective OD interventions must operate simultaneously at individual, institutional, and systemic levels. Drawing on these findings, this proposes evidence-based recommendations organized under four domains.

Institutional design and structural reform

The analysis of African governance challenges through organizational development principles reveals the need for comprehensive institutional design reforms that address both structural and cultural dimensions of institutional effectiveness. The application of Harrison (2005)'s diagnostic framework suggests that sustainable reform requires systematic attention to organizational strategy, structure, processes, and culture. Many previous reform efforts have failed because they focused on structural changes without addressing the underlying cultural and process problems that perpetuate institutional dysfunction. The development of effective institutional designs for African contexts requires what Bradford and Burke (2005) describe as reinventing organization development approaches that can create genuinely new forms of institutional organization rather than simply copying existing models. This includes developing what Cummings and Worley (2009) identify as organizational alignment between institutional purposes, structures, and cultural practices. The current misalignment between stated public service goals and actual institutional behavior in many African contexts suggests the need for fundamental reconceptualization of institutional roles and relationships. Specific structural reforms should include the establishment of what Anderson (2010) describes as change management capabilities within African institutions. This includes developing systematic approaches to planning, implementing, and evaluating institutional changes that can help organizations adapt to evolving challenges and opportunities. The current weakness of planning and evaluation systems in many African institutions reflects the need for systematic capacity building in organizational development competencies. The design of accountability mechanisms

requires particular attention to what Yukl (2002) identifies as the relationship between formal authority and actual influence within institutional systems. Many African institutions have formal accountability structures that are rendered ineffective by informal power relationships and cultural practices that prioritize personal loyalty over institutional responsibility. Addressing these challenges requires what Wright (1996) describes as managerial leadership approaches that can effectively integrate formal and informal organizational dynamics.

Leadership development and capacity building

The systematic development of effective leadership capacity represents a critical priority for African institutional reform. The application of Stogdill (1974)'s comprehensive framework for leadership development suggests the need for programs that address both individual competencies and institutional support systems. Many current leadership development efforts in Africa focus on individual training without addressing the institutional contexts that either support or undermine effective leadership behavior. Effective leadership development for African contexts requires what Fullan (2007) describes as systematic approaches to leading in a culture of change that can prepare leaders for the complex challenges of institutional transformation. This includes developing what Kotter (1996) identifies as change leadership competencies that go beyond traditional management skills to encompass the ability to inspire, motivate, and sustain institutional transformation processes. The current emphasis on short-term political survival over long-term institutional development reflects fundamental deficits in change leadership capabilities that must be systematically addressed. The development of leadership development programs should incorporate what Brown and Harvey (2006) describe as experiential approaches that can help African leaders develop practical skills for managing institutional change in complex cultural and political contexts. This includes developing what De Guia (2000) identifies as culture change competencies that can help leaders navigate the relationship between traditional social structures and modern institutional requirements. Leadership development efforts should also incorporate what Obasi (2000) describes as understanding of political leadership and followership mobilization within African contexts. This includes developing appreciation for the legitimate role of traditional authorities and community leaders in governance processes, while also building capabilities for democratic participation and accountability. The current tension between traditional and modern leadership approaches in many African contexts suggests the need for integrated approaches that can bridge these different leadership traditions.

Accountability mechanisms and transparency systems

The development of effective accountability mechanisms represents a critical component of institutional reform in African contexts. The application of organizational development principles suggests that accountability systems must be designed to address both formal institutional requirements and informal cultural practices that influence organizational behavior. Many current accountability systems in Africa fail because they do not adequately account for the cultural contexts within which institutions operate. Effective accountability mechanisms require what Harrison (2005) describes as organizational diagnosis capabilities that can systematically identify and address institutional problems before they become systemic crises. This includes developing what Cummings and Worley (2009) identify as feedback systems that can provide regular information about institutional performance and identify areas requiring intervention. The current weakness of monitoring and evaluation systems in many African institutions reflects the need for systematic investment in accountability infrastructure. The development of transparency systems requires particular attention to what Jones and Brazzel (2006) describe as organization development and change processes that can systematically open institutional decision-making to public scrutiny. This includes developing what Banks and Alban (2006) identify as large group methods that can engage citizens in systematic oversight of institutional performance. The current disconnect between African institutions and their constituencies reflects the need for systematic development of participatory accountability mechanisms. Transparency systems should also incorporate what Gallos (2006) describes as organization development approaches that can help institutions develop cultures of openness and accountability. This includes addressing what Beer and Nohria (2000) identify as organizational cultures that prioritize secrecy and personal relationships over institutional transparency and public accountability. The development of transparency cultures requires systematic attention to both formal procedures and informal practices that influence organizational behavior.

Regional cooperation and institutional learning

The development of effective governance systems in Africa requires what Hechanova and Franco (2008) describe as leading organizations in a changing world through approaches that can facilitate learning and adaptation across different institutional contexts. The establishment of regional mechanisms for sharing best practices, coordinating reform efforts, and providing mutual support for institutional development represents a

critical component of sustainable governance reform across the continent. Regional cooperation efforts should incorporate what Anderson (2010) describes as organizational change processes that can help African institutions learn from each other's experiences with reform implementation. This includes developing what Fullan (2007) identifies as culture of change approaches that can help institutions adapt successful practices from other contexts while maintaining sensitivity to local cultural and political conditions. The current weakness of peer learning mechanisms among African institutions reflects the need for systematic investment in regional knowledge-sharing infrastructure. The development of regional institutional learning networks requires attention to what French (Shafritz and Hyde, 1978) describes as organization development principles that can facilitate systematic knowledge transfer and adaptation across different institutional contexts. This includes developing what Wright (1996) identifies as managerial leadership competencies that can help institutional leaders effectively adapt and implement lessons learned from other contexts. Regional cooperation should also address what Stogdill (1974) identifies as the need for leadership development approaches that can prepare African leaders for the complex challenges of regional integration and cooperation. This includes developing appreciation for the benefits of collective action while maintaining respect for national sovereignty and cultural diversity. The current challenges of regional integration in Africa reflect the need for leadership development that can effectively balance local accountability with regional cooperation.

Conclusion

The analysis of leadership challenges in Africa through the lens of organizational development theory reveals both the complexity of existing problems and potential pathways for sustainable reform. The systematic application of frameworks developed by scholars such as Cummings and Worley (2009), Harrison (2005), Kotter (1996), and others demonstrates that governance challenges in Africa are not merely the result of individual leadership failures but reflect deeper institutional pathologies that require comprehensive, system-wide intervention. The case studies examined—including Zimbabwe's economic collapse, South Africa's experience with state capture, Nigeria's institutional fragmentation, Kenya's mixed reform experience, and Botswana's diversification challenges illustrate common patterns of institutional dysfunction that transcend national boundaries and cultural contexts. These patterns include the systematic capture of public institutions for private benefit, the manipulation of democratic processes to perpetuate personal rule, the erosion of accountability mechanisms, and the failure to develop effective capacity for institutional learning and

adaptation. However, the organizational development perspective also reveals significant opportunities for positive transformation. The application of systematic change management principles, comprehensive leadership development programmes, robust accountability mechanisms, and regional cooperation frameworks provides a roadmap for addressing the fundamental challenges facing African governance systems. A key insight from organizational development theory is that sustainable change requires simultaneous intervention at multiple levels individual, institutional, and systemic rather than piecemeal reforms that address symptoms rather than underlying causes. The recommendations emerging from this review emphasize the need for institutional design reforms that align organizational structures with stated purposes, leadership development programmes that prepare leaders for the complex challenges of institutional transformation, accountability mechanisms that bridge formal requirements and cultural practices, and regional cooperation frameworks that facilitate learning and mutual support among institutions. These recommendations are grounded in established organizational development principles while remaining sensitive to the unique cultural and political contexts within which African institutions operate.

The path forward requires what Fullan (2007) describes as a sustained commitment to leading in a culture of change that maintains focus on long-term institutional development goals despite short-term political pressures. This includes developing what Anderson (2010) identifies as change readiness within societies to support and sustain institutional reform efforts over the extended periods necessary for fundamental transformation. The ultimate success of governance reform will depend on the ability to develop what Cummings and Worley (2009) describe as organizational cultures that prioritize public service, accountability, and continuous improvement over personal enrichment and political manipulation. The organizational development perspective suggests that governance challenges in Africa, while complex and deeply rooted, are not insurmountable. The systematic application of proven change management principles, combined with sensitivity to local contexts and sustained commitment to institutional development, provides a viable pathway for transforming governance systems. The key requirement is the development of what Kotter (1996) identifies as change leadership capabilities that can inspire, guide, and sustain the comprehensive institutional transformation necessary to realize the continent's potential for sustainable development and prosperity. The future of governance in Africa depends on the ability to learn from both failures and successes, to adapt proven organizational development principles to local contexts, and to maintain focus on long-term institutional building rather than short-term political gains. This requires what

Yukl (2002) describes as leadership in organizations that can effectively balance competing demands while maintaining a commitment to institutional excellence and public service. The organizational development framework provides both the analytical tools and practical guidance necessary for this transformation; however, success will ultimately depend on the willingness of leaders and societies to embrace the challenging but rewarding process of systematic institutional reform.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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