

# Transformational Leadership and the Implementation of Reformatory Change in the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service

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## ABSTRACT

The transition from punitive correctional systems toward reformatory and rehabilitative models has become a defining feature of contemporary criminal justice reforms globally. In Zimbabwe, the transformation of the Zimbabwe Prison Service into the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) under the 2013 Constitution signalled a significant institutional commitment to rehabilitation, reintegration, and human rights-oriented corrections. However, the successful implementation of reformatory change within correctional institutions depends heavily on effective leadership. This paper examines the extent to which leadership influences the implementation of reformatory change within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service. Drawing from change management theories, institutional theory, systems theory, and empirical literature on correctional reform, the paper argues that leadership is a central determinant of organizational transformation in highly structured public sector institutions. The discussion highlights how leadership shapes institutional culture, employee engagement, stakeholder collaboration, policy implementation, and resistance management during reform processes. The paper further explores the challenges confronting leadership within correctional environments, including bureaucratic rigidity, resource limitations, entrenched punitive cultures, and political pressures. The study concludes that transformational, participatory, and adaptive leadership approaches are essential for facilitating sustainable reformatory change within ZPCS.

**Keywords:** leadership, reformatory change, correctional services, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service, change management, public sector reform.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global correctional landscape has undergone significant transformation over the past few decades as criminal justice systems increasingly shift from punitive models toward rehabilitative and reintegrative approaches. This transition reflects broader changes in criminological thought, human rights discourse, and evidence-based correctional practices that emphasize rehabilitation as a means of reducing recidivism and promoting social reintegration [20,23]. Contemporary correctional systems are no longer viewed solely as institutions of punishment and containment but increasingly as institutions responsible for facilitating behavioural transformation and societal reintegration.

In Zimbabwe, this paradigm shift gained formal recognition through the 2013 Constitution, which transformed the Zimbabwe Prison Service into the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS). The constitutional reform represented a deliberate institutional move toward correctional rehabilitation, reintegration, and human rights-oriented service delivery. However, transforming deeply entrenched correctional institutions involves more than legislative or policy reform.

It requires profound organizational transformation encompassing institutional culture, operational practices, leadership orientation, staff attitudes, and stakeholder engagement. Leadership plays a central role in facilitating such transformation. Organizational change literature consistently identifies leadership as one of the most important determinants of successful institutional reform [22,21]. Within correctional institutions, leadership is particularly important because prisons are highly hierarchical, bureaucratic, and culturally rigid organizations that often resist change. Leaders are therefore expected to articulate reform visions, mobilize institutional support, manage resistance, allocate resources, and foster organizational commitment toward change.

The Zimbabwean correctional environment presents unique leadership challenges due to resource constraints, historical punitive traditions, overcrowding, institutional inertia, and socio-political complexities. These conditions create tension between reform aspirations and operational realities. Consequently, understanding how leadership influences reformatory change within ZPCS is essential for evaluating the sustainability and effectiveness of ongoing correctional reforms.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

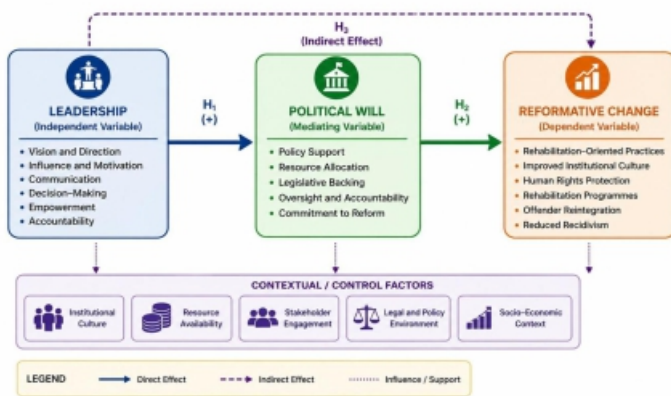


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Model of Leadership and Reformative Change

Source: Author's compilation

Reformative change within correctional institutions is a complex and multifaceted process shaped by a combination of organizational, institutional, and contextual factors. Its successful implementation depends not only on effective leadership but also on organizational culture, institutional structures, employee attitudes, resource availability, and the quality of stakeholder collaboration [13,16,18]. Although leadership is widely acknowledged as a critical driver of organizational transformation, its influence is often contingent upon broader institutional conditions that either facilitate or constrain change initiatives. Within correctional settings, efforts to implement reformative practices frequently encounter resistance arising from deeply entrenched punitive traditions, bureaucratic rigidity, limited resources, and occupational cultures that continue to prioritize security and control over rehabilitation and offender reintegration [6,10,17]. This study conceptualizes reformative change as the successful transition from punitive correctional practices towards rehabilitation-oriented correctional systems that emphasize offender reintegration, human rights, behavioural transformation, and social inclusion. Leadership is treated as the principal independent variable influencing reform implementation, while reformative change constitutes the dependent variable. However, the relationship between leadership and reformative change is neither linear nor direct. Organizational culture, employee commitment, institutional legitimacy, stakeholder engagement, and resource capacity function as intervening and enabling variables that influence the extent to which leadership initiatives translate into sustainable institutional transformation.

The analytical framework guiding this study integrates Transformational Leadership Theory, Systems Theory, Institutional Theory, and Lewin's Change Management Theory. Transformational Leadership Theory explains how leaders inspire institutional commitment towards rehabilitation-oriented reforms. Systems Theory highlights the interconnected nature of correctional institutions and the importance of coordination among organizational subsystems. Institutional Theory explains the persistence of established punitive norms and organizational resistance to change, while Lewin's Change Management Theory provides insight into the processes through which reform initiatives are introduced, implemented, and institutionalized.

The framework therefore, assumes that leadership influences reformative change both directly and indirectly through its effect on organizational culture, employee attitudes, communication systems, stakeholder collaboration, and institutional readiness for change. Sustainable reformative change is expected to occur where leadership is supported by favourable institutional conditions, adequate resources, and a shared commitment to rehabilitation-oriented correctional practices.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ANCHORS

### 3.1 Theoretical Anchors

#### 3.1.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, developed and subsequently expanded within leadership scholarship [4,2], provides one of the most influential frameworks for understanding organizational transformation within public institutions. The theory explains how leaders inspire followers to transcend individual interests and collectively pursue broader organizational goals. Transformational leadership is anchored on four major dimensions, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Through these dimensions, leaders cultivate trust, organizational commitment, innovation, and institutional adaptability. Within correctional institutions, transformational leadership is particularly relevant because reformative correctional systems require deep cultural and behavioural transformation. Traditional prison systems have historically prioritized punishment, security, and control, while contemporary correctional reforms increasingly emphasize rehabilitation, offender reintegration, procedural justice, and human rights protection. Transformational leaders are therefore expected to communicate a compelling reform vision capable of reshaping institutional attitudes and operational practices.

Recent studies indicate that transformational leadership positively influences employee engagement, institutional morale, organizational innovation, and support for correctional reform initiatives. Transformational leadership has been shown to strengthen institutional adaptability within overcrowded correctional institutions [19]. Similarly, transformational leadership enhances employee commitment toward organizational change through improved trust, communication, and participation [5]. Leadership behaviour has also been found to significantly shape workplace culture and staff wellbeing within correctional environments [16].

The theory is highly applicable within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service because the transition toward rehabilitation-oriented corrections requires leaders capable of challenging entrenched punitive cultures and promoting rehabilitation-centred institutional values. Transformational leadership, therefore, provides an important theoretical lens for understanding how leadership influences reformative change within correctional institutions.

#### 3.1.2 Systems Theory

Systems Theory, advanced by Bertalanffy [3], conceptualizes organizations as interconnected systems composed of interdependent units that interact continuously with both internal and external environments. According to this perspective, institutional outcomes are shaped by interactions among organizational components rather than isolated activities.

Organizational subsystems such as administration, staff welfare, rehabilitation programming, security management, stakeholder engagement, and policy implementation are mutually dependent.

Within correctional institutions, leadership decisions affect multiple institutional processes simultaneously. Decisions relating to rehabilitation programmes influence offender behaviour, staff morale, institutional legitimacy, and operational effectiveness. Similarly, ineffective communication, inadequate resources, or poor leadership coordination within one institutional area frequently affects broader organizational performance. Systems Theory is highly relevant in analyzing correctional reform because prisons operate within broader criminal justice, political, social, and economic systems. Reformative correctional change, therefore, requires coordination between correctional administrators, courts, healthcare professionals, psychologists, community organizations, government ministries, and rehabilitation specialists. Studies examining organizational dynamics within correctional institutions demonstrate that institutional dysfunction in one subsystem often undermines broader reform objectives [6,18].

The systems perspective further emphasizes that sustainable correctional reform requires holistic leadership approaches capable of integrating institutional resources, stakeholder collaboration, employee development, and offender rehabilitation into a coordinated organizational framework. Leadership, therefore, becomes central in managing institutional interdependence and ensuring operational alignment during reform implementation.

### 3.1.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory explains how organizations are shaped by established norms, routines, traditions, values, and social expectations that influence institutional behaviour over time. Institutions frequently conform to socially accepted practices in order to maintain legitimacy and stability [8]. Within correctional institutions, punitive traditions, bureaucratic authority structures, occupational cultures, and institutional routines significantly influence organizational behaviour. The theory is particularly relevant in understanding resistance to reform within correctional systems. Correctional institutions are historically characterized by rigid hierarchies, command-and-control management structures, and deeply embedded punitive philosophies [6,16]. These institutional norms frequently persist even after legislative and policy reforms are introduced. Consequently, organizational transformation within prisons often becomes difficult because employees and institutional actors may continue adhering to established operational traditions [6,18]. Recent scholarship demonstrates that institutional culture significantly affects correctional reform outcomes. Organizational identity and institutional culture influence employee acceptance of transformation initiatives within correctional services [14]. Correctional officers' attitudes toward rehabilitation significantly affect institutional support for offender reform programmes [10]. Occupational correctional cultures often reinforce resistance toward institutional change [6]. Institutional Theory, therefore, provides an important framework for understanding how deeply embedded punitive traditions within correctional institutions may constrain the implementation of rehabilitation-oriented reforms within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service.

Leadership becomes important in navigating institutional resistance, creating legitimacy for reformative practices, and gradually transforming organizational culture.

### 3.1.4 Lewin's Change Management Theory

Lewin's Change Management Theory remains one of the foundational frameworks for understanding organizational transformation. Lewin [12] conceptualized change as a three-stage process involving unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. During the unfreezing stage, leaders challenge existing institutional practices and create awareness regarding the need for organizational transformation. The changing stage involves the implementation of new practices, structures, and behavioural patterns. The refreezing stage institutionalizes new organizational norms and reinforces sustainable behavioural change.

The theory is highly applicable to correctional reform because prisons are traditionally resistant to organizational transformation due to bureaucratic rigidity, occupational traditions, and security-centred institutional cultures [6,18]. Correctional leaders are therefore expected to facilitate institutional readiness for change through communication, employee engagement, participation, and strategic coordination. Contemporary organizational change literature indicates that leadership effectiveness significantly influences successful institutional transformation. Leadership quality positively affects organizational adaptability, employee engagement, and acceptance of institutional reforms [13]. Similarly, leadership approaches that promote procedural justice and participation strengthen employee trust and institutional commitment within correctional environments [1]. Research further suggests that correctional reforms are more sustainable when leaders continuously reinforce rehabilitation-oriented values and operational practices across institutional levels [17]. Lewin's framework, therefore, provides a useful theoretical explanation for understanding how reformative correctional philosophies can gradually become embedded within institutional culture and operational practice through effective leadership and sustained organizational support.

### 3.2 Literature Review

Leadership and organizational change remain deeply interconnected concepts within correctional administration and public sector management scholarship. Contemporary studies increasingly demonstrate that successful correctional reform depends not only on policy or legislative change but also on leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, institutional legitimacy, and employee commitment [13,16,18]. Correctional institutions are traditionally characterized by authoritarian management styles, rigid bureaucratic structures, and punitive organizational cultures that often resist reformative transformation [6,18].

Globally, correctional systems are transitioning from punishment-oriented models toward rehabilitation and reintegration frameworks [9,11]. This transformation reflects broader developments in criminological thought, human rights discourse, and evidence-based correctional management. Research indicates that rehabilitation-oriented correctional systems contribute positively toward reducing recidivism, improving offender behaviour, and promoting social reintegration [11,9].

Modern correctional leadership requires balancing institutional security with rehabilitation objectives, offender welfare, procedural justice, and institutional accountability. Studies examining correctional institutions reveal that leadership quality significantly influences employee morale, institutional trust, communication systems, and rehabilitation programme effectiveness [16,19]. Leadership affects institutional readiness for reform, organizational adaptability, and stakeholder collaboration. Research conducted in correctional environments further demonstrates that employee attitudes significantly influence the implementation of rehabilitation-oriented reforms. Correctional officers who support rehabilitation philosophies are more likely to engage positively with offender reform programmes [10]. Similarly, correctional officers' perceptions toward rehabilitation significantly affect offender reintegration outcomes within correctional centres [15].

Leadership also plays a significant role in reducing institutional resistance to reform [5,13]. Organizational resistance frequently emerges due to uncertainty, fear of change, increased workload, or attachment to traditional institutional practices [5,18]. Transformational leadership approaches that promote communication, participation, trust, and employee empowerment are increasingly associated with successful organizational transformation. Transformational leadership positively influences employee commitment toward institutional change [5]. Research suggests that participatory leadership strengthens organizational ownership of reform initiatives and reduces employee resistance. Institutional communication and stakeholder collaboration additionally remain critical components of successful correctional reform [1,18]. Correctional systems involve multiple stakeholders, including government ministries, healthcare professionals, educators, psychologists, community organizations, courts, and rehabilitation specialists. Effective leadership, therefore, requires collaborative governance approaches capable of coordinating institutional actors and maintaining policy coherence. Poor coordination and centralized institutional control frequently undermine correctional reform effectiveness [18].

Leadership also influences institutional legitimacy and accountability within correctional systems. Correctional institutions frequently face criticism regarding overcrowding, violence, corruption, human rights concerns, and ineffective rehabilitation programmes. Studies on procedural justice demonstrate that institutional fairness, transparency, respectful treatment, and ethical leadership significantly improve institutional legitimacy and public trust [7,1]. Ethical leadership, therefore, becomes essential in strengthening institutional credibility and promoting support for rehabilitation-oriented correctional reform.

Within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service, the transition from punitive imprisonment toward rehabilitation-oriented corrections represents a major institutional transformation requiring sustained leadership commitment. Although constitutional and policy reforms provide the legal framework for rehabilitation, operationalizing reformative correctional practices requires organizational leadership capable of transforming institutional culture, employee attitudes, and operational systems. The literature, therefore, demonstrates that leadership remains a central determinant of successful reformative change within correctional institutions.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a mixed-methods research approach consistent with the broader dissertation from which these findings are drawn. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative survey data and qualitative interview findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of leadership and reformative change within ZPCS. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to correctional officers, administrative staff, and institutional managers across selected ZPCS facilities. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to examine the direct and indirect effects of leadership on reformative change outcomes. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected participants, including senior officers, middle managers, and frontline staff. Thematic analysis was applied to interpret qualitative findings, and triangulation was used to validate and integrate both data strands.

#### 5. DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis utilized Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to assess the relationship between leadership and reformative change implementation. The model tested direct effects, indirect pathways, and mediating variables influencing institutional transformation within ZPCS. The SEM results provided standardized path coefficients and p-values, enabling systematic assessment of leadership's statistical contribution to reform outcomes. Qualitative thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts, systematically coding emerging themes related to leadership visibility, institutional culture, reform communication, resistance management, and leadership challenges. Triangulation integrated findings from both data sources to develop a more robust and contextually grounded interpretation of the relationship between leadership and reformative change.

#### 6. FINDINGS

##### Leadership and Reformative Change

Path / Relationship	Standardized Beta ( $\beta$ )	p-value	Statistical Significance	Hypothesis Status
Leadership Reformative Change	0.085	0.232	Insignificant	Not Supported (Direct)

**Statistical Result:** Beta ( $\beta$ ) = 0.085, p = 0.232 (Statistically Insignificant)

**Application Narrative:** Structural Equation Modelling indicates that leadership has a positive but statistically insignificant direct effect on reformative change. This demonstrates that leadership alone does not directly determine reform outcomes within ZPCS. While it serves a strategic and symbolic role in setting direction and articulating the reform vision, its practical effectiveness remains dependent on contextual enablers such as organizational culture, political backing, and resource availability.

The qualitative findings provide deeper insight into how leadership is experienced within the institution. Participants consistently acknowledged visible leadership commitment toward reform. Respondents highlighted examples such as ministerial visits and high-level engagement as evidence that leadership supports the transition toward reformative correctional practices. One participant noted that "Minister visits show leadership commitment," while another observed that "when HQ leadership visit unannounced, issues are addressed." These findings suggest that leadership visibility enhances institutional legitimacy and signals commitment to reform.

However, the findings also reveal a significant symbolic-operational gap. While leadership is perceived as visibly committed to reform at policy and rhetorical levels, participants indicated that reform initiatives are inconsistently implemented across operational levels. One participant observed that leadership commitment is "mixed... some practices still punitive." This reflects the persistence of traditional punitive institutional cultures despite official reform agendas.

The triangulated findings further demonstrate that leadership within ZPCS is more effective at communicating reform direction than embedding reformative practices into institutional culture. This distinction is important because sustainable institutional transformation requires more than strategic vision; it requires consistent operationalization of reform values at all institutional levels.

## 8. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a complex and context-dependent relationship between leadership and reformative change within ZPCS. Although leadership demonstrated a positive relationship with reformative change, the relationship was statistically insignificant. This finding suggests that leadership alone may not be sufficient to produce sustainable institutional transformation within correctional systems characterized by bureaucratic rigidity, resource limitations, and entrenched punitive cultures. The findings support Institutional Theory, which argues that organizational behaviour is shaped not only by leadership actions but also by deeply embedded institutional norms, routines, and operational traditions [8].

The findings are consistent with empirical correctional studies conducted in other jurisdictions. Institutional reform frequently encounters structural limitations associated with centralized bureaucratic systems, inconsistent policy implementation, and operational resource constraints [18]. Similarly, organizational identity and deeply rooted institutional cultures within correctional services often undermine the implementation of transformational reforms despite visible leadership commitment [14]. The ZPCS findings therefore reinforce broader international evidence showing that institutional reform within correctional environments is influenced by multiple organizational and contextual variables beyond leadership alone.

The qualitative findings indicating visible leadership commitment toward reform are also supported by contemporary empirical literature. Participants acknowledged ministerial visits, senior leadership engagement, and symbolic leadership visibility as evidence of institutional support for rehabilitation-oriented reform. These findings align with transformational leadership scholarship, which emphasizes that leadership visibility and symbolic commitment strengthen institutional legitimacy and employee confidence during periods of organizational change [2,4]. Visible transformational leadership has also been shown to strengthen institutional morale and organizational adaptability within overcrowded correctional institutions [19].

The findings also reveal a significant symbolic-operational gap within ZPCS. While leadership commitment was visible at strategic and rhetorical levels, participants reported inconsistent implementation of reformative practices at operational levels. This finding is particularly important because it demonstrates that institutional transformation requires more than symbolic leadership gestures or policy articulation. Organizational culture within correctional institutions frequently shapes operational behaviour more strongly than formal policy directives [16]. Frontline correctional staff often continue relying on established occupational norms and informal institutional practices even when formal reforms advocate rehabilitation-oriented approaches [16]. In the same vein, correctional occupational cultures often reinforce resistance toward institutional transformation through informal socialization processes and group identity preservation [6]. These findings closely mirror the ZPCS context, where participants acknowledged the persistence of punitive practices despite official rehabilitation-oriented reform agendas. The current findings, therefore, suggest that transformational leadership within correctional institutions may struggle to operationalize reform where punitive institutional cultures remain deeply entrenched.

The findings support Lewin's Change Management Theory, particularly regarding the difficulty of institutionalizing reform during the refreezing stage of organizational transformation. Although ZPCS leadership appears to have initiated the unfreezing and changing stages through constitutional reform and policy direction, the persistence of punitive operational practices suggests that the institutionalization of rehabilitation-oriented norms remains incomplete. Sustainable reform requires continuous reinforcement of new institutional values, employee training, behavioural modelling, and long-term organizational support mechanisms [17]. Without consistent reinforcement, organizations frequently revert to established institutional practices.

The statistically insignificant direct effect of leadership also suggests the existence of mediating institutional variables influencing reform outcomes. Systems Theory provides an important explanation for this finding by emphasizing the interconnected nature of organizational subsystems. Leadership effectiveness within correctional institutions is influenced by resource allocation, staff capacity, institutional communication, political support, rehabilitation infrastructure, and stakeholder collaboration. Leadership effectiveness is often mediated by organizational support systems, employee engagement, and institutional climate [13]. Similarly, offender rehabilitation outcomes improve significantly where rehabilitation programmes are adequately supported by institutional resources, professional coordination, and organizational commitment [11].

The findings highlight the importance of employee attitudes in determining the success of reformative correctional initiatives. Participants indicated that some correctional officers continue adhering to punitive approaches despite institutional reform policies. This finding supports previous empirical studies demonstrating that employee perceptions significantly affect rehabilitation implementation. Correctional officers who maintain punitive attitudes are less likely to support offender rehabilitation programmes and institutional reform initiatives [10]. Likewise, correctional officers' perceptions toward rehabilitation significantly influence offender reintegration outcomes within correctional institutions [15].

Leadership communication also emerged as an important factor influencing reform credibility and institutional trust. Participants indicated that leadership visibility positively influenced perceptions of institutional commitment toward reform. This finding aligns with procedural justice scholarship, which argues that leadership fairness, transparency, communication, and consistency strengthen institutional legitimacy and employee trust [1,7]. Empirical correctional studies further indicate that employees are more likely to internalize institutional reforms where leadership demonstrates consistency between organizational rhetoric and operational practice.

The findings suggest that leadership remains an important but insufficient determinant of reformative change within ZPCS. While transformational leadership contributes positively toward institutional vision, communication, and symbolic reform commitment, the successful operationalization of rehabilitation-oriented correctional systems requires broader institutional alignment. Sustainable correctional reform, therefore, depends on the interaction between leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, employee attitudes, institutional resources, stakeholder coordination, and long-term political commitment. These findings contribute to correctional reform scholarship by demonstrating that leadership effectiveness within correctional institutions must be understood within its broader institutional ecosystem rather than as an isolated determinant of organizational transformation.

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

First, ZPCS leadership should develop structured leadership development programmes specifically designed for correctional environments. Such programmes should incorporate transformational, participatory, and adaptive leadership competencies aligned with rehabilitation-oriented correctional management.

Second, institutional leaders should establish clear and consistent communication systems capable of translating reform vision into operational practice. Communication strategies should engage all institutional levels, from senior administrators to frontline officers, ensuring that reform values are understood and operationally embedded.

Third, leadership accountability systems should be strengthened to monitor the translation of reform commitments into institutional practice. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should assess the alignment between leadership rhetoric and operational reform outcomes.

Fourth, government and institutional leadership should ensure adequate resource allocation for reform implementation. Leadership effectiveness is significantly constrained where institutional resources are insufficient to support operational transformation.

Fifth, participatory leadership models should be adopted to increase institutional ownership of reform processes. Involving correctional officers and staff in reform design and implementation reduces resistance and strengthens organizational commitment.

#### **9. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Although this study provides important insights into the role of leadership in facilitating reformative change within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service, several areas warrant further investigation. First, future studies should examine the mediating and moderating variables that influence the relationship between leadership and reformative change. The findings of this study suggest that organizational culture, employee attitudes, institutional resources, and stakeholder collaboration may exert significant influence on reform outcomes and therefore require more detailed examination.

Second, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustainability of correctional reforms over time. Organizational transformation within correctional institutions is often gradual, and future research should investigate how leadership practices influence the institutionalisation of rehabilitation-oriented values and operational practices across different stages of reform implementation.

Third, comparative studies involving correctional services from other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries could provide valuable insights into regional best practices, contextual challenges, and leadership approaches that support successful correctional transformation. Such studies would enhance understanding of how different political, economic, and institutional environments shape reform outcomes.

Fourth, future research should explore the perspectives of offenders, former offenders, community reintegration partners, and civil society organizations regarding the effectiveness of reformative correctional initiatives. Incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives would provide a more holistic understanding of correctional reform and its impact on rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes.

Finally, future studies should investigate emerging issues affecting correctional administration, including digital transformation, institutional resilience, crisis management, radicalization management, and the role of innovation in enhancing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes within contemporary correctional systems.

#### **10. CONCLUSION**

This paper examined the extent to which leadership influences the implementation of reformative change within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service. The findings demonstrate that leadership is an important but contextually constrained determinant of reformative change within ZPCS. While leadership contributes to institutional direction-setting, visibility, and reform communication, its ability to embed reformative practices into institutional culture and daily operations remains limited by resource constraints, entrenched punitive cultures, bureaucratic rigidity, and the complexity of correctional institutional environments.

The study concludes that transformational, participatory, and adaptive leadership approaches are essential for facilitating sustainable correctional reform. However, leadership effectiveness must be understood within its broader institutional ecosystem.

Sustainable reformative change within ZPCS requires not only visionary leadership but also aligned organizational systems, institutional accountability, continuous employee development, adequate resource support, and political commitment capable of sustaining long-term correctional transformation.

### Disclaimer

*The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the research team and do not necessarily represent the views of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service, the Government of Zimbabwe, or any affiliated institutions. The data and analyses presented herein are intended solely for academic and policy research purposes. All statistical results have been reported in good faith based on the primary data collected. The research team has taken all reasonable steps to ensure accuracy and integrity in the analysis and reporting of findings. Any errors or omissions are unintentional.*

### Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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