

Resource sovereignty and the planning-execution gap: Institutional constraints on strategic management in the defence sector of Zambia

Peter Leonard Daka¹
Austin Mwange²
Francis Simui³

¹pldaka@yahoo.com (+260976100892)

^{1,2,3}The University of Zambia

<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.2.11>

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between strategic plans integration and resource utilisation effectiveness in the Defence Sector of Zambia. It starts by posing this question: Why does the defence sector of Zambia consistently craft refined strategic plans that fail in execution? Through a mixed-methods investigation involving a structured survey of 135 senior officers (drawn from 171 eligible officers via stratified proportional sampling) and in-depth interviews with 21 purposively selected key informants across the Defence Sector of Zambia, the study documents a remarkable inconsistency. This research was guided by dynamic capabilities and institutional theories. Quantitative data were analysed using Spearman's rank correlation and descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. The quantitative results indicate a strong positive association between strategic plan integration and resource allocation planning (Spearman's $\rho=0.635$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests a high planning alignment (cognitive seizing) capacity. However, execution-related ratings remain only slightly above neutral, with low mean scores for timeliness of resource availability ($M=3.28$, $SD=1.05$) and efficiency of resource utilisation in daily operations ($M=3.22$, $SD=1.01$). Qualitative interviews attributed this planning-execution gap to a resource utilisation bottleneck in which approved strategic budgets face delayed disbursement, rigid procurement controls, and operational tempos that outpace central public financial management processes. Because the evidence is cross-sectional and largely perceptual, the findings should be interpreted as strong associations and convergent institutional explanations rather than definitive causal effects. Zambia's fiscal volatility compels the Treasury to treat defence strategic capital as expendable fiscal buffers for short-term crises. This study advances Dynamic Capabilities Theory by showing how institutional environments in developing economies constrain the transition from a seizing-to-transforming pathway. This study introduces the concept of resource sovereignty, which is the institutional capacity to shield mission-critical budgets from political interference. This is a necessary statutory mechanism and a reliable governance solution for African defence sectors facing fiscal volatility. Without it, defence organisations remain perpetual good planners but inconsistent executors. This also undermines SDG 16 on institutional effectiveness goals. The study concludes that the resource utilisation bottleneck is an external institutional failure rooted in fiscal volatility, IFMS rigidity, and budget-cash decoupling. This is not an internal planning weakness. This study recommends statutory budget protection and financial system decentralisation as complementary resource sovereignty mechanisms to enable consistent strategic execution in the defence sector of Zambia.

Keywords: Dynamic Capabilities, Defence Sector, Institutional Theory, Public Financial Management, Resource Sovereignty, Strategic Planning

I. INTRODUCTION

Strategic resource management has emerged as a critical determinant of national security posture and operational effectiveness across global defence establishments (Hartley, 2012; Markowski et al., 2009). In an era characterized by evolving security threats and fiscal constraints, defence organizations worldwide face mounting pressure to optimize resource allocation while maintaining operational readiness (Béraud-Sudreau & Giegerich, 2018). This imperative is particularly acute in developing economies where defence expenditures compete directly with pressing socioeconomic priorities (Omitoogun & Hutchful, 2006).

In 2023, despite the Government of the Republic of Zambia's approval of K47 million for the Defence Sector of Zambia's (DSZ) strategic infrastructure modernization program, only K34 million (72%) was disbursed (Government of the Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Finance and National Planning (GRZ MOFNP), Budget Report, 2023). This exemplifies the resource utilization bottleneck identified in the study, and this variance has reflected a characteristic pattern for years. Effective resource management serves as the foundational pillar of national security, operational readiness, and strategic success for defence organizations globally. Additionally, resource management serves as a critical mechanism for translating national security objectives into tangible military capabilities.

In the DSZ, resources remain perpetually scarce and subject to intense political scrutiny amid competing national development priorities. Strategic Plans (SP) serve as primary institutional instruments for aligning resource allocation with strategic imperatives in this challenging environment. The preliminary fieldwork revealed that officers in the DSZ consistently distinguished between planning "what we need and getting what was planned." This phenomenon and gap map onto the Seizing and Transforming distinction in Teece's (2007) Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT). This resource mobilisation process corresponds directly to the Seizing dimension of the DCT, which encompasses an organisation's capacity to mobilise resources and make investment decisions necessary to exploit identified strategic opportunities (Teece, 2007, 2014; Schilke et al., 2018).

The formal adoption of the Balanced Scorecard Performance Management System (BSC PMS) was mandated by Zambia's 1993 Public Sector Reform Program (PSRP). These reforms were explicitly intended to ensure that resource planning was not merely strategic in intent but also measurable, accountable, and aligned with national security outcomes (Banda, 2022; Mubanga & Lesa, 2024). Contemporary defence management literature has identified a persistent disconnect between strategic planning sophistication and operational execution across multiple contexts (Erbel & Kinsey, 2018; Lundberg & Rova, 2022). This implementation gap has been documented in both developed and developing economies, though with distinct causal mechanisms (Malisase, 2016; Glas et al., 2020). The DSZ implemented sophisticated strategic planning frameworks, yet departments and units struggle with basic resource deployment. Despite institutional adoption of advanced performance management systems, persistent operational challenges continue to undermine mission readiness.

This disconnect between planning capability and execution failure motivated this study. The GRZ MOFNP Budget Report 2023 documented a positive variance (i.e., underspending). However, interviews revealed a pattern of reluctance to spend, attributable to the inability to access approved funds within operational windows. During the investigations, the recurring theme was that the 18% annual underspending documented in the 2023 GRZ MOFNP Budget Report was not due to inefficiency but to delayed disbursement tied to revenue shortfalls. Prior research establishing the Critical Implementation Gradient demonstrated a systemic asymmetry in which the DSZ's planning capabilities (Sensing and Seizing) significantly exceed its execution capabilities (Transforming). This creates a persistent gap between strategic intent and operational reality (Mwanza & Dar, 2025; Chabala & Nyirenda, 2025). This article focuses on the linkage between seizing and transforming. This linkage is fundamentally mediated by the effectiveness of resource management. The core paradox arises from contradictory empirical evidence: senior officers perceive a strong correlation between SP quality and the effectiveness of resource allocation planning. This suggests cognitive Seizing capacity. Yet the quantitative measures of operational resource utilisation, timeliness, and deployment efficiency received the lowest mean scores across the entire performance management assessment. This is indicative of profound execution failure.

1.1 Research Questions

- (i) What is the relationship between SP integration and resource utilisation effectiveness in the DSZ?
- (ii) What institutional mechanisms explain the gap between resource planning and operational implementation?
- (iii) How can this gap be theorised and addressed through policy intervention?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Dynamic Capabilities Theory

The Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) addresses the changing nature of resource deployment in volatile environments. It provides a suitable structure for understanding resource management in the defence sectors of developing countries. Teece's (2007, 2014) framework identifies three meta-capabilities: identifying opportunities and threats (Sensing); mobilising resources (Seizing) to address them; and continuously reconfiguring organisational assets and processes (Transforming). The Seizing dimension encompasses the ability to mobilise resources, make investment decisions, and commit financial capital toward strategic priorities. In the DSZ, the Strategic Plan (SP) process embodies the capability to Seize through a mechanism in which the defence organisation identifies strategic gaps and allocates financial and human capital to close them. A strong correlation between SP quality and resource planning effectiveness indicates a strong cognitive Seizing capability, as the organisation knows which resources are needed and how and where they should be allocated.

This study introduces a theoretically important distinction within the Seizing dimension: cognitive Seizing versus operational Seizing. Cognitive Seizing refers to the organisational capacity to identify, plan for, and formally allocate mission-critical resources—the intellectual and institutional act of knowing what is needed and committing it on paper. Operational Seizing denotes the actual mobilisation and deployment of those committed resources within planned timelines—the act of obtaining what was planned. While Teece (2007, 2014) treats Seizing as a unified meta-capability, this bifurcation is warranted in public-sector contexts in developing economies, where the planning function

and the resourcing function are institutionally separated. The former resides within the organisation, and the latter is governed by external fiscal authorities. In such environments, an organisation may demonstrate high cognitive Seizing while being systematically constrained in operational Seizing by disbursement delays, procurement rigidity, and budget-cash disconnects. The critical failure occurs in the transition from Seizing to the Transforming process, which requires organisational capacity for continuous reconfiguration and execution. If planned resources aren't delivered on time, or rigid financial systems impede necessary changes, transformation efforts will fail regardless of how excellent the initial planning was.

2.1.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory provides a framework for understanding how organisations conform to rules, norms, and routines established by institutional environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In public sector contexts, institutional pressures significantly shape organisational structures and practices, often leading to isomorphism—the tendency of organisations to adopt similar practices regardless of their efficiency. Three mechanisms drive institutional isomorphism: coercive (formal and informal pressures exerted by other organisations upon which they depend), mimetic (imitation of other organisations' practices in response to uncertainty), and normative (pressures arising from professionalization) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In developing economies, coercive isomorphism is particularly evident through donor-mandated public financial management reforms and international standards adoption.

Institutional Theory helps explain the phenomenon of decoupling, where formal structures and actual practices become separated (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In public sectors, strategic plans may be ceremonially adopted to gain legitimacy while actual resource allocation follows different logics dictated by political bargaining and short-term fiscal needs (Andrews, 2013; North, 1990). The concept of institutional voids (Khanna & Palepu, 2010) is particularly relevant to developing economies where formal institutional mechanisms for resource control may be weak or inconsistently enforced. These voids create challenges for strategic implementation as organisations struggle to navigate environments where formal rules may be undermined by informal practices or competing institutional logics.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Strategic Plans Integration and Resource Utilisation Effectiveness

Resource management in defence organisations encompasses complex processes including identifying capability requirements, allocating scarce financial and human capital, procuring necessary assets, and deploying these resources efficiently to achieve strategic objectives. While private-sector resource management operates within relatively predictable market mechanisms, public-sector defence organisations in developing economies confront unique constraints including political budget cycles, donor conditionality, volatile national revenues, and competing social development priorities. The Resource-Based View (RBV) suggests that long-term competitive advantage derives from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). In defence contexts, these resources include specialised human capital, advanced equipment, and protected financial capital. However, the RBV assumption that organisations possess relative control over resource acquisition and deployment breaks down in public-sector contexts in developing economies, where financial resources are neither fully controlled nor predictable.

Western management theories, including the RBV and DCT, emerged from studies of firms in stable institutional environments with predictable access to resources and functional market mechanisms (Nkomo, 2011). Their wholesale adoption in African organisational contexts represents what some scholars term "epistemological capture", the imposition of knowledge systems designed for Western realities onto fundamentally different institutional landscapes (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The concept of Resource Sovereignty extends these theories by adding an institutional layer absent from their original formulations, recognizing that resource control cannot be assumed but must be institutionally secured where external fiscal volatility and political interference routinely override organisational strategic plans. This represents a decolonial approach to management theory through critical reconstruction to address African institutional realities (Nkomo, 2015; Zoogah et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Institutional Mechanisms Explaining the Planning-Execution Gap

External donor pressure for conformity and transparency often drives developing countries to implement Integrated Financial Management Systems (IFMIS). While IFMIS enhances accountability, it imposes bureaucratic rigidity ill-suited to defence operational tempo (Mate, 2006), resulting in procurement processes that are slow, inflexible, and unresponsive to rapid strategic needs. Many developing countries rely heavily on volatile commodity prices (e.g., copper in Zambia) or external aid, resulting in unstable national revenues. This volatility is managed by central ministries through short-term fiscal adjustments, frequently resulting in in-year budget cuts or disbursement delays. Strategic capital projects requiring multi-year funding commitments are particularly vulnerable to these adjustments. The DSZ's reported 18% underspending represents not a failure to spend but a failure to obtain timely disbursements (GRZ MOFNP, Budget Report, 2023).

In many public sectors, the budget process is institutionally decoupled from strategic planning. The SP is treated as a ceremonial document for legitimacy purposes, while actual budgets are determined through political bargaining and short-term fiscal needs (Andrews, 2013; North, 1990). This institutional separation ensures that even high-quality strategic plans become functionally irrelevant to cash flow, reinforcing the critical implementation gradient.

2.2.3 Theoretical Frameworks and Policy Interventions

To address external constraints imposed by Public Financial Management systems, this article introduces the concept of Resource Sovereignty as a vital institutional mechanism for strategic organisational management in public defence sectors. Resource Sovereignty denotes the institutional capacity of a strategic public entity to maintain autonomous control over the funding and deployment of its mission-critical capital resources, shielding them from short-term fiscal or political interference. Resource Sovereignty is not about unlimited funding or budget autonomy but about safeguards, predictability, and protections deliberately designed to ensure that resources allocated to approved strategic plans are available for deployment within planned timelines. Without this institutional safeguard, defence organisations can achieve cognitive Seizing capability (excellent planning) but will never attain operational Seizing capability (effective execution), thus perpetuating the Resource Utilisation Bottleneck (RUB).

This concept expands Institutional Theory by identifying a specific mechanism through which coercive isomorphic pressures (PFM mandates) may be offset by normative pressures (professional military planning standards), enabling substantive rather than ceremonial strategic management in defence organisations. Figure 1 illustrates the RUB framework that depicts how institutional constraints disrupt the Seizing-to-Transforming pathway in the DSZ context.

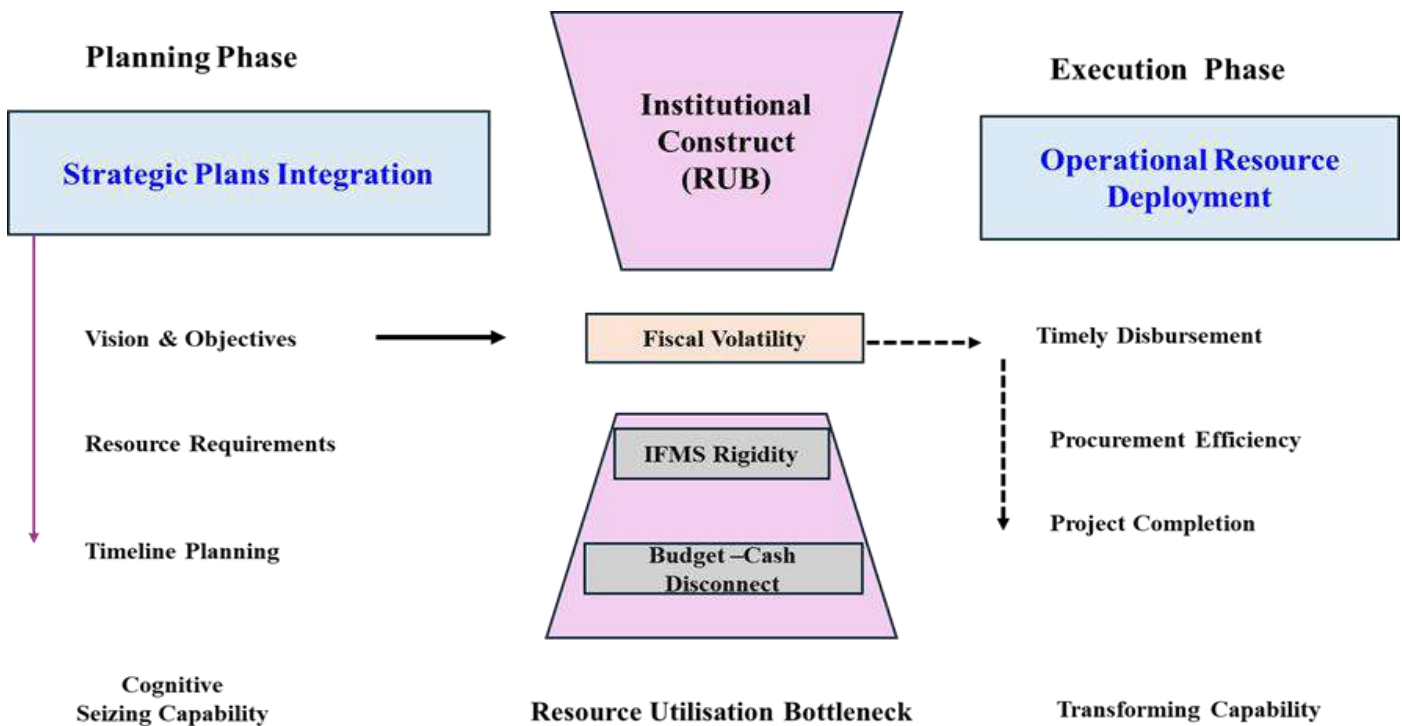


Figure 1
The Resource Utilisation Bottleneck Framework

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological Design

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (QUAN → QUAL) structured to investigate the RUB. This is an inherently paradoxical phenomenon in which substantial quantitative associations between strategic planning and resource deployment coexist with qualitative evidence of execution failure. The quantitative phase established the statistical reality of the paradox through correlation analysis and descriptive statistics, while the qualitative phase provided contextual explanation by identifying the institutional mechanisms causing the bottleneck. This two-phase approach secures both breadth by measuring the problem's extent across the DSZ and depth through understanding institutional causes. This agrees with the pragmatist philosophy that prioritises pragmatic problem-solving through methodological pluralism (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.2 Quantitative Phase: Measuring Resource Utilisation

The quantitative phase comprised a structured survey administered to 135 senior officers across the DSZ. The senior officers were selected through stratified proportional sampling to ensure representation across services and functional domains of operations, logistics, training, finance, and administration. The survey was distributed to 171 eligible senior officers with strategic planning responsibilities. The survey yielded 135 completed responses (response rate: 78.8%). Non-response analysis comparing respondents and non-respondents on available demographic data (service branch and rank) revealed no statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 2.34$, $p = 0.51$). This indicates that the sample achieved is representative of the target population and is not subject to systematic response bias. The resource outcomes were measured using four Likert-type items (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). These items were intentionally separated into planning-alignment and execution dimensions to avoid conflating distinct stages of resourcing. Item 1 ("The Strategic Plan guides resource allocation decisions") captures planning-alignment (cognitive seizing). Item 2 ("Resources allocated are sufficient to meet strategic objectives") measures perceived adequacy. Items 3 ("Timeliness of resource allocation supports operational tempo") and Item 4 ("Efficient resource utilisation in daily operations") capture execution performance.

The analysis reports each item descriptively. An execution subscale was computed as the mean of items 3-4. Sensitivity analyses compared results using the four-item composite versus the execution-only subscale. Internal consistency is reported for the SP integration scale and for multi-item outcomes. Inter-item correlation is reported alongside alpha given the small number of items. The composite Resource Utilisation scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$). Statistical analysis used Spearman's rank correlation to test the relationship between variables. Strategic Plan Integration (independent variable) was measured via a 5-item composite scale ($\alpha=0.84$).

The procedural and statistical checks to address common method bias. Procedurally, the questionnaire separated predictor and outcome blocks. Respondents were assured of anonymity to reduce evaluation apprehension. Statistically, the study assessed whether a single latent factor dominated the item set. The study also compared association patterns using the execution-only subscale (items 3-4), which has less conceptual overlap with SP integration. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated for individual items to identify specific components influencing the RUB. The study received ethical clearance from the University of Zambia Research Ethics Committee (Ref: UNZA HSSREC-2025 JULY 027; IORG No.0005376; HSSRECC IRB No.00006464). The DSZ Command approved the study (Trg/108/C dated 16 April 2024/HQAF/1950/11/AD/30/09/24; HQZNS/TRG/23/30/09/24). All respondents provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity.

3.3 Qualitative Phase: Probing Institutional Barriers

The qualitative phase consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 purposively selected key informants. The key informants included Directors of Finance ($n=3$), Directors of Planning ($n=3$), senior operational commanders ($n=8$), logistics officers ($n=4$), and procurement specialists ($n=3$). This ensures representation of execution covering strategic, operational, and administrative perspectives. The interview protocol was designed to probe the disconnect identified in the quantitative data. The protocol used open-ended questions such as: "How often does actual disbursement of funds correspond to the Strategic Plan's timeline?"; "What are the main system-wide barriers preventing productive resource utilisation once funds get disbursed?"; "Describe the process of reallocating funds for a mission-critical, unforeseen operational requirement." Interviews lasting 45-90 minutes were conducted in English (the official DSZ language), audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarisation, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Coding was both deductive and guided by constructs from DCT and Institutional Theory. Inductive coding, which allows for emergent themes, was conducted using NVivo 12 to facilitate data management. Inter-coder reliability was established through independent coding of 20% of transcripts by a second researcher, yielding a Cohen's kappa of 0.81. This was indicative of substantial agreement.

3.4 Integration and Meta-Inference

The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings was achieved through joint display analysis. This systematically mapped low-scoring quantitative items to corresponding qualitative themes that explained the causes. The integration enabled meta-inferences about the institutional nature of the RUB, demonstrating that the bottleneck is not an internal management failure but an external institutional constraint requiring policy-level intervention. The integration followed convergence model where quantitative results provided the "what" of the RUB, while qualitative data explained the "why" and "how" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This enabled meta-inferences that transcend mono-method limitations.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Quantitative Results: Planning-Execution Disconnect

Correlation analysis confirmed the strength of the DSZ's cognitive Seizing capability. The relationship between Strategic Plan Integration (independent variable) and the Resource Utilisation composite score was strong, positive, and statistically significant (Spearman's $\rho = 0.635$, $p < 0.001$). This coefficient indicates a strong, positive monotonic association between SP integration and perceived resource planning-alignment. Given that the statistics reported is Spearman's ρ (appropriate for ordinal Likert scale type data), the study interprets the result as evidence of a robust association rather than as variance explained in the regression sense. Substantively, the result supports the claim that officers perceive SPs to meaningfully structure allocation decisions (cognitive seizing). At the same time, the descriptive execution indicators (timelines and day-to-day utilisation efficiency) remain low. This suggests that factors outside SP quality -identified in the qualitative phase as disbursement volatility, procurement rigidity, budget cash flow decoupling constrain implementation.

These identified external constraints were fiscal volatility, rigid financial systems, and political interference. This statistical pattern provides quantitative evidence supporting the core argument that the RUB is fundamentally an external institutional problem rather than an internal management weakness. Additionally, this result strongly supports the proposition that the DSZ possesses internal strategic competence to link plans to resource needs. Thus, the Strategic Plans are strong documents that yield clear guidance on resource prioritisation. The Strategic plans demonstrate a high level of cognitive Seizing capability. Despite the strong correlation, descriptive statistics for individual Resource Utilisation items indicated critical execution failure. This empirically establishes the RUB, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Resource Utilisation Items

Item	Resource Utilisation	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	SP guides resource allocation decisions	3.91	0.80
2	Resources allocated are sufficient.	3.56	0.95
3	Timeliness of resource allocation supports operational tempo	3.28	1.05
4	Efficient resource utilisation in daily operations	3.22	1.01

The mean score of $M=3.22$ for operational capability (Item 4) was the lowest mean recorded for any strategic management construct in the entire study. This barely exceeded the neutral midpoint (3.0) and indicated general dissatisfaction with the deployment of practical resources. The timeliness item (Item 3; $M = 3.28$) similarly reflects execution failure. In contrast, the planning guidance item (Item 1, $M=3.91$) approaches the "Agree" threshold, confirming strong planning capability. The high standard deviations for execution items ($SD>1.0$) suggest that resource efficiency is inconsistent and unreliable across the organisation. The RUB is thus empirically defined by the significant gap between high planning correlation ($\rho=0.635$) and low execution means ($M=3.22-3.28$), representing a 0.63-0.69-point differential on the 5-point scale, a substantively meaningful gap indicating systematic execution failure despite planning competence.

4.2 Qualitative Results: Thematic Analysis of the RUB

Thematic analysis of key informant interviews identified three interconnected institutional barriers explaining the RUB, with 89 coded references across 21 transcripts converging on these themes.

4.2.1 Theme 1: External Fiscal Volatility and Disbursement Delays

The key informants consistently cited unpredictable government funding as the primary barrier to execution. They stated that the strategic budget approved by Parliament did not materialise as actual cash flow as stated by one of them:

"We plan based on the approved budget, but the Ministry of Finance and National Planning determines actual cash release on a month-to-month basis, depending on national revenue. This means that our strategic capital projects, such as infrastructure or major equipment, are always deferred first. We underspend not because we don't need the money, but because the money arrives six months too late for the operational window. The volatility kills the plan." (Int SQ 10:09 September, 2025).

This theme confirms that the RUB is essentially an external constraint rooted in the macro-fiscal environment. It exerts coercive pressure that weakens the DSZ's internal capacity for execution. The key informants also reported average delays of 6-9 months in strategic capital disbursements, rendering the multi-year projects unviable.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Systemic Rigidity of Centralised Financial Systems

The second key barrier was the inflexibility of the centralised Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS), which governs all procurement and expenditure. While designed for transparency and accountability, its bureaucratic structure was deemed incompatible with military operational requirements as asserted by one key informant:

"The IFMS is designed for compliance, not for speed. If a strategic initiative requires the rapid reallocation of funds or emergency procurement, the system cannot accommodate it. The process can take weeks or even months. By the time the resource is acquired, the strategic opportunity has passed. We are forced to choose between following the slow, rigid rules and achieving the mission." (Int SQ 05:19 August, 2025).

This rigidity prevents the DSZ from exercising the necessary Transforming capability. This is the ability to reconfigure processes and assets quickly, thereby alleviating bottlenecks. Informants described procurement cycles of 4-6 months for standard items, compared to operational requirements of 2-4 weeks.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Disconnect Between Budget Approval and Cash Flow

An important distinction emerged between formal budget approval (the political act of Seizing) and operational cash disbursement (the execution act of transforming):

"The budget is approved in December. That is the political victory. However, the Treasury manages cash flows and prioritises salaries, debt, and immediate political needs. Our strategic capital budget is treated as a reserve. This disconnect means that our carefully planned strategy is purely theoretical, whereas our operations are driven by short-term, reactive cash management. We have the plan, but we don't have the cash to execute it consistently." (Respondent SQ 12:11 September 2025)

This theme directly supports the hypothesis that the RUB is caused by institutional separation between planning and funding mechanisms. Thus, strategic budgets serve as "fiscal buffers" for short-term national cash-flow crises rather than as protected investments in long-term capability development.

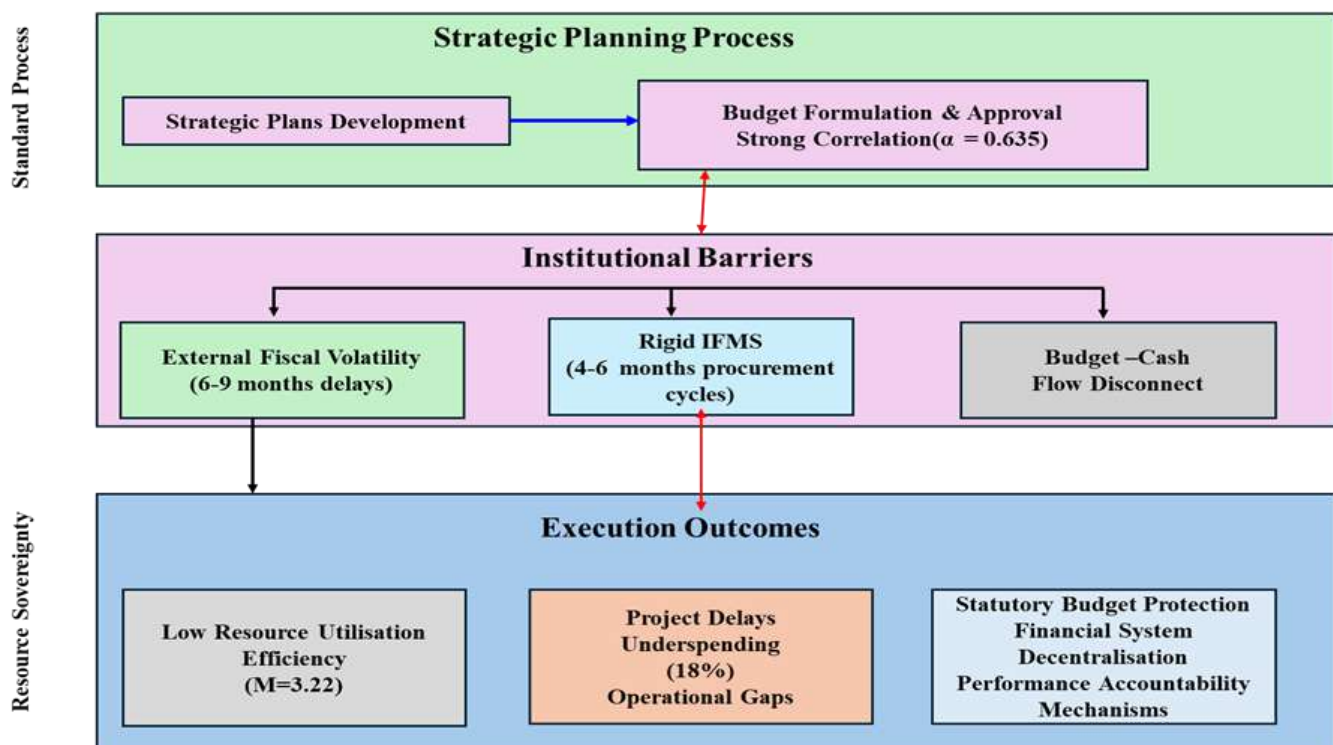


Figure 2
Creation of Fiscal Volatility and Rigid Financial Systems Bottleneck

4.3 Integrated Meta-Inference: The Institutional Nature of the RUB

Joint display analysis (as depicted in Table 2) mapping quantitative items to qualitative themes revealed that the RUB is fundamentally an external institutional constraint, not an internal management failure:

Table 2*Joint Display Mapping Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

Quantitative Evidence	Qualitative Explanation	Meta -Inference
Strong correlation ($\rho=0.635$) between SP and RU planning	Theme 1: Fiscal volatility; Theme 3: Budget-cash disconnect	Cognitive Seizing capability is high, but the external fiscal environment prevents translation to operational Seizing
Low execution means ($M=3.22-3.28$)	Theme 2: IFMS rigidity; Theme 1: Disbursement delays	Transforming capability is constrained by rigid PFM systems and unpredictable cash flows
High standard deviations ($SD>1.0$) for execution items	All themes: Inconsistent external pressures across services/time periods	RUB severity varies based on national fiscal conditions, not internal DSZ management quality.

The meta-inference indicates that the RUB reflects a systemic institutional failure in the linkage between strategic planning and asset deployment. This necessitates policy-level intervention beyond internal DSZ management reforms.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The empirical findings resolve the resource management paradox by demonstrating that the RUB is an institutional-execution problem rooted in external fiscal volatility and rigid public financial management systems. It is not an internal strategic-planning weakness. This discussion examines how the RUB constrains DCT's transforming capabilities, elucidates the institutional mechanisms that perpetuate the bottleneck, and derives policy implications for implementing Resource Sovereignty as the necessary solution.

4.4.2 Resolving the Paradox: Cognitive Versus Operational Seizing

The strong correlation between Strategic Plans integration and resource planning ($\rho = 0.635$, $p < 0.001$) provides empirical evidence that the DSZ possesses a highly developed cognitive Seizing capability. This aligns with Teece's (2020) recent refinement of DCT, which distinguishes between the cognitive and operational dimensions of organizational capabilities, where it is asserted that sensing and seizing opportunities require not just resources but the ability to orchestrate them effectively within the institutional constraints. The DSZ leadership understands strategic resource needs and articulates them in formal planning documents, demonstrating what Schilke et al. (2018) identify as "strategic cognition." However, the critically low operational implementation means ($M=3.22-3.28$) confirm that this cognitive capability is rendered ineffective by the RUB. This finding resonates with Zoogah et al.'s (2015) observation that African organizations often demonstrate sophisticated strategic thinking constrained by institutional environments that impede execution. The RUB represents the institutional barrier that prevents the transition from cognitive Seizing (knowing what to do) to operational Seizing (doing it).

This finding is theoretically impactful because it shifts the locus of strategic failure from military command (internal management) to the national institutional framework (external constraints), demonstrating that within resource-constrained developing economies, strategic management effectiveness depends as much on the institutional environment as on organisational competence. As Andrews (2013) argues, institutional constraints in developing economies often render Western management approaches ceremonial rather than substantive. This extends DCT by identifying external institutional constraints as critical moderators of the Seizing-to-Transforming pathway, suggesting that DCT's assumption of relative resource control requires considerable modification in public-sector contexts in developing economies.

The RUB represents the definitive operational mechanism that sustains the broader Critical Implementation Gradient (CIG). The CIG describes the asymmetry between the DSZ's strong Sensing and Seizing capabilities and its weak Transforming capability across every dimension of strategic management. This asymmetry aligns with what Pritchett et al. (2013) term "capability traps" in developing country institutions, where formal adoption of advanced management practices fails to translate into improved performance. Correspondingly, the RUB specifies the institutional mechanism that causes this asymmetry in resource management. This distinction is epistemologically important because while internal management reforms might address other CIG components (such as performance measurement or leadership development), only external institutional intervention, through resource sovereignty, has the capacity to dismantle the RUB. This conclusion supports Nkomo's (2015) argument that African management challenges require contextually appropriate solutions rather than imported Western models.

4.4.3 RUB as a Constraint on Transforming Capability

The RUB directly and severely limits the DSZ's transforming capability by constraining the organisational capacity for continuous reconfiguration, learning, and modification. As Teece (2014) emphasizes, transforming requires predictable, timely, and flexible resource deployment to enable consistent investment in multi-year capital projects necessary for long-term capability development, prompt adaptation to unforeseen operational needs through flexible reallocation, and effective organisational learning. These requirements align with Zollo and Winter's (2002) conception of dynamic capabilities as learned patterns of collective activity that systematically generate and modify operating routines. When strategic funds are delayed by 6-9 months, diverted to short-term fiscal crises, or subject to rigid 4-6-month procurement cycles, the organisation cannot execute any of these processes. This finding aligns with Schick's (2014) analysis of performance budgeting failures in developing countries, where formal budget processes are disconnected from actual resource flows. The consequences are evident in multi-year capital projects that remain stalled and in unforeseen, unmet operational obligations, reflecting what Markowski et al. (2009) identify as the "implementation deficit" in defence resource management.

The performance feedback becomes meaningless because the resources required to implement corrective actions are unavailable. This creates what Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) describe as a "capability gap," where organizations cannot develop the dynamic capabilities necessary for environmental adaptation. Accordingly, the RUB is the principal mechanism sustaining the overall CIG. The DSZ remains locked in a cycle of excellent planning followed by paralysed execution, unable to develop the dynamic capabilities indispensable for sustained performance in volatile security environments, a phenomenon that Béraud-Sudreau and Giegerich (2018) have observed across multiple developing country defence establishments.

4.5 Institutional Mechanisms Perpetuating the RUB

The qualitative findings identified three interconnected institutional mechanisms that perpetuate the RUB. These mechanisms align with distinct dimensions of institutional theory as articulated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and elaborated by contemporary institutional scholars (North, 1990; Malisase, 2016). The first institutional mechanism is external fiscal volatility, which constitutes coercive isomorphism at the macro level (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This is the level at which international financial institutions and donor agencies impose requirements for fiscal discipline that prioritise short-term budget balance over long-term strategic investment. This finding aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013) critique of postcolonial African states' continued subjection to external economic governance regimes that constrain sovereign decision-making.

The second institutional mechanism is Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) rigidity, which reflects mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Zambia adopted Western-designed financial management systems to gain legitimacy without adapting them to local operational contexts (Pritchett et al., 2013). This results in systems optimised for compliance rather than execution, a phenomenon that Mubanga & Lesa (2024) has documented across Zambian public institutions. Mate's (2006) earlier analysis of Balanced Scorecard implementation in the Zambian Public Service similarly identified the adoption of management tools without contextual adaptation as a key factor in implementation failure. The third mechanism is the budget-cash disconnect, which represents institutional decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Formal budget approval serves symbolic legitimacy functions (demonstrating government allegiance to defence) while actual cash-flow decisions are made through separate, opaque Treasury processes driven by short-term political priorities. This aligns with Andrews' (2013) concept of "isomorphic mimicry," where institutions adopt the forms of effective organizations without their functionality. These mechanisms collectively ensure that, even when the DSZ produces high-quality Strategic Plans and demonstrates strong cognitive Seizing capability, the institutional environment impedes substantive execution, resulting in ceremonial compliance rather than genuine strategic management. This supports Nkomo's (2011) argument that management practices in African contexts must be understood within their specific institutional and historical contexts.

4.6 Policy Imperative: Resource Sovereignty as Solution

The empirical evidence demonstrates that internal management reforms, improved planning templates, enhanced BSC metrics, and better training are futile when the external institutional environment is averse to execution. This conclusion aligns with Pritchett et al.'s (2013) argument that capability traps persist because reforms target symptoms rather than underlying institutional causes. The only viable solution to dismantle the RUB is to grant the DSZ a degree of resource sovereignty over its strategic capital budget through fundamental political and statutory intervention that recognises the unique nature of defence expenditure. The resource Sovereignty may be implemented through Statutory Budget Protection and Financial System Decentralisation as complementary mechanisms. Statutory Budget Protection entails legal modifications that isolate strategic capital expenditure lines from in-year fiscal adjustments, ensuring predictability and enabling long-term contractual commitments. This approach aligns with what Schick (2014) identifies as "protected expenditures" in advanced budgeting systems, where certain strategic investments receive statutory protection from short-term fiscal adjustments.

Financial System Decentralisation involves establishing a dedicated financial management sub-system for the DSZ that operates under different procurement and reallocation rules, optimised for operational tempo rather than bureaucratic compliance, while maintaining external audit oversight to guarantee accountability. This recommendation reflects Glas et al.'s (2020) finding that defence procurement effectiveness requires specialized systems distinct from general public procurement frameworks. Without these institutional safeguards, the DSZ will continue to produce world-class Strategic Plans destined to fail in execution, perpetuating the paradox of high planning intent and low operational reality. This conclusion supports Zoogah et al.'s (2015) argument that organizational effectiveness in Africa requires institutional innovations that address contextual constraints.

4.7 Comparison with International Best Practices

International defence organisations in developed economies achieve effective resource management using mechanisms that essentially provide Resource Sovereignty. The U.S. Department of Defence operates under multi-year appropriations for major procurement programs, insulating key investments from annual budget volatility (Gerrish, 2016). Similarly, the UK Ministry of Defence maintains a dedicated Defence Equipment and Support organisation with streamlined procurement authorities separate from general civil service financial management systems (UK National Audit Office, 2018). These mechanisms enable consistent execution of strategic plans by providing the predictability and flexibility that the DSZ lacks. However, direct adoption of these models is constrained by Zambia's fiscal realities, a limitation that Hartley (2012) acknowledges in comparing defence management across economic contexts. Zambia may not provide multi-year budgetary certainty, given volatile revenues and dependence on aid, a challenge that Omitoogun and Hutchful (2006) identify across African defence sectors.

Therefore, resource sovereignty for the DSZ must be attuned to the Zambian context. Protected budgets, rather than unlimited funding, accompanied by operational flexibility within clear accountability frameworks, represent a middle path between Western resource abundance and the fiscal constraints of developing countries. This approach aligns with Lundberg and Rova's (2022) concept of "contextually appropriate defence management" that adapts international best practices to local institutional realities. This intervention provides an affordable, yet replicable model for SADC defence sectors encountering similar challenges, addressing what Erbel and Kinsey (2018) identify as a critical need for regionally appropriate defence management models that balance international standards with local constraints.

4.8 Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 16

The RUB directly undermines Zambia's progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) by preventing the defence sector from developing the institutional capacity indispensable for effective security governance. SDG 16 emphasises accountable, effective institutions. However, accountability without effectiveness merely results in ceremonial compliance, a phenomenon documented across Zambian public institutions. The DSZ can demonstrate budget transparency and formal planning processes yet fail to deliver tangible security outcomes. This research identifies the institutional mechanisms that drive the RUB and proposes Resource Sovereignty as a solution that provides a path to genuine institutional effectiveness. While protected strategic budgets enable consistent capability development, versatile financial systems allow responsive security operations. The linkage between resource protection and performance accountability ensures that sovereignty is tied to demonstrable results.

This model contributes to regional governance reform by showing that effective institutions in developing contexts require fundamental institutional innovations that address local constraints, rather than merely adopting Western management tools. This conclusion supports Chabala & Nyirenda's (2025) argument that sustainable institutional development in Zambia requires contextually appropriate reforms rather than imported models and aligns with adaptive governance that responds to local institutional realities while advancing toward international standards.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the paradoxical relationship between Strategic Plans and resource management effectiveness in the Defence Sector of Zambia (DSZ). Using sequential explanatory mixed-methods research, the investigation revealed that the DSZ shows strong cognitive Seizing capability, evidenced by a strong positive correlation (Spearman's $\rho=0.635$, $p<0.001$) between the integration of strategic plans and resource allocation planning. However, operational resource utilisation efficiency remains critically low ($M=3.22$, $SD=1.01$), defining the RUB. Qualitative analysis identified three interconnected institutional mechanisms that sustain the RUB: coercive isomorphism (fiscal volatility imposing 6–9-month disbursement delays), mimetic isomorphism (IFMS rigidity creating 4–6-month procurement cycles incompatible with operational tempo), and institutional decoupling (formal budget approval disconnected from actual Treasury cash flow). These forces collectively reduce strategic capital budgets to short-term fiscal buffers for crises. The study resolves the planning-execution paradox by demonstrating that resource management

failure is an institutional execution problem stemming from a lack of Resource Sovereignty rather than internal planning weakness.

This research advances Dynamic Capabilities Theory by formalising the RUB as an important external constraint on the Transforming capability. In resource-constrained public sectors, the Seizing-to-Transforming pathway is fundamentally moderated by the institutional environment, not solely determined by organisational competence. This broadens DCT's application to developing-country contexts and demonstrates that the theory's implicit assumption of relative resource control does not hold in certain environments. The study also contributes to Institutional Theory by demonstrating how multiple isomorphic pressures interact to create systematic execution failures despite formal strategic planning competence. The introduction of Resource Sovereignty as a theoretical construct provides a counterbalancing mechanism and pathway from ceremonial compliance to substantive strategic management. Several limitations define the study's boundary conditions. Caution should be exercised when generalising findings to other national contexts with different fiscal environments, institutional structures, and political systems. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to observe how the RUB evolves over time through different political administrations and economic cycles. Common method bias concerns exist, though several design measures were implemented to mitigate this risk. Security constraints limited access to detailed financial data and perspectives from external stakeholders such as Treasury officials. The concept of Resource Sovereignty may have different applications across other public sectors, and the proposed policy steps remain theoretical until implemented and evaluated.

The RUB represents a fundamental institutional failure that undermines both national security effectiveness and fiscal accountability in Zambia's defence sector. The central insight is that this failure occurs within the institutional environment governing resource deployment, not within the DSZ's planning processes. Internal management reforms cannot overcome external institutional constraints, no matter how sophisticated. Only through Resource Sovereignty can the DSZ close the gap between planning intent and operational reality, requiring institutionalised protection of strategic budgets from short-term fiscal volatility and operational manoeuvrability within rigid financial systems. This research enhances institutional development in African contexts, demonstrating that competent governance requires more than the adoption of Western management tools but fundamental institutional innovations calibrated to local fiscal realities. The Resource Sovereignty framework delivers a replicable model for SADC defence sectors, potentially transforming organisations from perpetual planners into consistent executors.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings deliver implementable guidance for DSZ leadership and decision-makers briefly depicted in Table 3. For immediate implementation, the various stakeholders should:

DSZ Command: Initiate legislative advocacy for Statutory Budget Protection amendments through the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Finance and National Planning, using the empirical evidence of the RUB to justify the need for protected strategic capital budgets.

Ministry of Defence: Develop a detailed proposal for a dedicated, versatile financial management sub-system optimised for defence operational tempo while continuing accountability through external audit mechanisms.

Legislature (Parliament): Establish a Resource Sovereignty Task Force comprising senior finance, planning, and operational officers to design implementation protocols and negotiate with Treasury officials. For decision-makers, the study recommends amending the Public Finance Management Act to create a new category of "Strategic Security Expenditure" with statutory protection from in-year budget cuts and piloting the versatile financial management sub-system in the DSZ before potential expansion to other security agencies and linking resource protection to performance accountability by requiring quarterly reporting regarding strategic capital budget implementation rates as a condition toward maintaining protected status. These recommendations provide a replicable governance model for SADC defence sectors confronting similar fiscal volatility and institutional constraints.

Table 3

Policy Recommendations

Stakeholder	Recommendation	Implementation
DSZ Command	Legislative advocacy for statutory Budget allocation	Immediate (0-6 months)
Ministry of Defence	Develop dedicated financial management sub-system proposal	Short term (6-12 months)
Legislature (Parliament)	Amending Public Finance Management Act	Medium Term (1-2 years)

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not

necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Defence Sector of Zambia or the Government of the Republic of Zambia.

REFERENCES

- Andrews, M. (2013). *The limits of institutional reform in development: Changing rules for realistic solutions*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139108393>
- Banda, C. T. (2022). Evaluating the implementation of components of a performance management system in the Zambian public service: A case of the Development Bank of Zambia. *Texila International Journal of Academic Research*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.21522/tijar.2014.09.03.art014>
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108>
- Béraud-Sudreau, L., & Giegerich, B. (2018). NATO defence spending and European threat perception. *Survival*, 60(4), 53–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1495429>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chabala, S., & Nyirenda, S. N. (2025). Institutional challenges impeding the effective implementation of health sector devolution in Lusaka Province. *Journal of Business and Economics in 4IR*, 2(3).
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities: What are they? *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(10–11), 1105–1121. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266\(200010/11\)21:10/11<1105:AID-SMJ133>3.0.CO;2-E](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266(200010/11)21:10/11<1105:AID-SMJ133>3.0.CO;2-E)
- Erbel, M., & Kinsey, C. (2018). Think again—supplying war: Reappraising military logistics and its centrality to strategy and war. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(4), 519–544. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2015.1104669>
- Gerrish, E. (2016). The impact of performance management on performance in public organisations: A meta-analysis. *Public Administration Review*, 76(1), 48–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12433>
- Glas, A. H., Hofmann, E., & Eßig, M. (2020). Performance-based logistics: A portfolio for contracting military supply. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 50(3), 335–355. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPDLM-01-2019-0030>
- Government of the Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Finance and National Planning. (2023). *Budget report*. <https://www.mofnp.gov.zm>
- Hartley, K. (2012). *The economics of defence policy: A new perspective*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203838778>
- Khanna, T., & Palepu, K. G. (2010). *Winning in emerging markets: A road map for strategy and execution*. Harvard Business Press.
- Lundberg, A., & Rova, E. (2022). Management reforms in the defence sector. *Defence and Peace Economics*, 33(4), 454–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2021.1888014>
- Malisase, R. (2016). Public sector reforms' contribution to poor public service delivery in Zambia: Poor implementation or defective programmes. *ZANGO: Zambia Journal of Contemporary Issues*, 32, 59–76. <http://journal.unza.zm/index.php/ZJOI/article/view/297>
- Markowski, S., Hall, P., & Wylie, R. (2009). *Defence procurement and industry policy: A small country perspective*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203013694>
- Mate, K. (2006). *Balanced scorecard implementation in the Zambian public service* (Working Paper No. 2006/12). Public Service Management Division, Cabinet Office. Government of the Republic of Zambia.
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340–363. <https://doi.org/10.1086/226550>
- Mubanga, A., & Lesa, C. N. (2024). Evaluation of factors influencing the implementation of strategic plans in public universities: A case of the Copperbelt University. *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.4236/ajibm.2024.142007>
- Mwanza, P., & Dar, J. A. (2025). The role of strategy implementation practices on performance in public sector organisations. *Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review*, 13(1), a891. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v13i1.891>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonisation*. CODESRIA.
- Nkomo, S. M. (2011). A postcolonial and anti-colonial reading of “African” leadership and management in organization studies: Tensions, contradictions, and possibilities. *Organization*, 18(3), 365–386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508411398731>

- Nkomo, S. M. (2015). Challenges for management and business education in a “developmental” state: The case of South Africa. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 14(2), 242–258. <https://doi.org/10.5465/aml.2014.0323>
- North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808678>
- Omitoogun, W., & Hutchful, E. (Eds.). (2006). *Budgeting for the military sector in Africa: The processes and mechanisms of control*. Oxford University Press.
- Pritchett, L., Woolcock, M., & Andrews, M. (2013). Looking like a state: Techniques of persistent failure in state capability for implementation. *Journal of Development Studies*, 49(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2012.709614>
- Schick, A. (2014). The metamorphoses of performance budgeting. *OECD Journal on Budgeting*, 13(2), 49–79. <https://doi.org/10.1787/budget-13-5jz2jw9szgs8>
- Schilke, O., Hu, S., & Helfat, C. E. (2018). Quo vadis, dynamic capabilities? A content-analytic review and future research agenda. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12(1), 390–439. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0014>
- Teece, D. J. (2007). Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(13), 1319–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640>
- Teece, D. J. (2014). The foundations of enterprise performance: Dynamic and ordinary capabilities in an economic theory of firms. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 28(4), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2013.0116>
- Teece, D. J. (2020). Hand in glove: Open innovation and the dynamic capabilities framework. *Strategic Management Review*, 1(2), 233–253. <https://doi.org/10.1561/111.00000010>
- UK National Audit Office. (2018). *The defence equipment plan 2018–2028 (HC 1519)*. The Stationery Office. <http://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-defence-equipment-plan-2018-to-2028/>
- Zollo, M., & Winter, S. G. (2002). Deliberate learning and the evolution of dynamic capabilities. *Organization Science*, 13(3), 339–351. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.13.3.339.2780>
- Zoogah, D. B., Peng, M. W., & Woldu, H. (2015). Institutions, resources, and organisational effectiveness in Africa. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 29(1), 7–31. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0033>