

Enhancing human resources governance for risk mitigation: Pathways to resilience in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations

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ABSTRACT

"Human resources governance enhancement" refers to strengthening the structures, capabilities, and practices through which organisations oversee people-related decisions and risks. This paper examines how such enhancement can improve risk mitigation and organisational resilience in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations. Guided by resource dependency theory, organisational learning theory, and technology acceptance theory, the study adopted an interpretivist multiple-case study design. The target population comprised the most senior HR practitioners in quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia, and purposive sampling yielded eleven participants drawn from eleven organisations across diverse sectors. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. The findings identify three interdependent pathways to stronger HR governance: strategic HR representation at board level, targeted technology adoption for standardisation and data-driven monitoring, and the professionalisation of the HR function. The study further shows that these pathways are only effective when supported by leadership commitment and an organisational culture that treats risk management as a shared responsibility. The paper concludes that HR governance enhancement requires structural, technological, and cultural change and recommends deliberate board-level inclusion of HR expertise, phased investment in HR technologies, and stronger professional standards for HR practice in quasi-governmental organisations.

Keywords: HR Governance Enhancement, Leadership, Professionalisation, Quasi-Governmental Organisations, Organisational Resilience, Risk Mitigation, Technology Adoption, Zambia

I. INTRODUCTION

Enterprise risk management has evolved substantially over the past two decades, producing sophisticated frameworks for addressing financial, operational, and technological vulnerabilities in organisational settings. Progress has, however, been markedly uneven: human resource risk management remains persistently undertheorised and deprioritised in both academic scholarship and organisational practice (Meyer et al., 2011). This disparity is particularly pronounced in quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia, where the interplay of public mandate, political influence, and commercial operations amplifies HR risks while simultaneously limiting the governance capacity to identify and address them proactively.

The consequences of these governance limitations are both documented and significant. The 2023 Zambian Auditor General Report reveals pervasive HR governance failures across parastatal bodies and statutory institutions: prolonged board vacancies creating accountability vacuums; critical workforce positions remaining unfilled for extended periods; contractual provisions exposing governments to financial losses; and statutory obligations to employees remaining unpaid for decades (Zambia Auditor General, 2023). Ndlovu and Haabazoka (2024) have situated such institutional governance failures within the broader context of Zambia's economic development trajectory, demonstrating that governance quality and institutional capacity are critical mediators of development outcomes at the national level.

Building on earlier evidence that HR governance weaknesses remain a persistent challenge in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations, this paper addresses the forward-looking question: How can HR governance practices in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations be systematically enhanced to more effectively manage HR risks? By interviewing HR practitioners who face these challenges daily, the study generates evidence-grounded insights into three interconnected enhancement pathways, the barriers obstructing them, and the enabling conditions under which they are most likely to succeed.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia face persistent HR governance failures that existing frameworks have proven inadequate to prevent. These failures include inadequate strategic HR representation at governance levels, the systematic underutilisation of technology for risk identification and management, and an insufficient degree of professionalisation in the HR function. Together, these deficiencies create a governance environment in which HR risks are routinely underestimated, inadequately monitored, and poorly managed, with direct consequences for institutional performance and public service delivery.

The problem is compounded by cultural and perceptual barriers that impede governance improvement. In many organisations, HR risk management is perceived as a nascent compliance obligation rather than a strategic management imperative. Reactive organisational cultures that prefer immediate responses to problems over systematic risk prevention create conditions in which governance enhancement initiatives face entrenched resistance. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of HR governance enhancement in principle, the specific pathways through which enhancement can be achieved in the distinctive context of quasi-governmental organisations in sub-Saharan Africa remain inadequately documented. This study addresses this gap by generating contextually grounded evidence on enhancement pathways, barriers, and enabling conditions.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the principal deficiencies in current HR governance frameworks that limit their effectiveness in managing HR risks in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations.
- ii. To investigate the role of strategic HR representation at board and governance committee level as a pathway to enhanced HR governance and risk mitigation.
- iii. To assess the potential of technology adoption, including HR information systems, biometric management systems, and data analytics capabilities, as instruments for improving HR risk identification, monitoring, and management.
- iv. To explore the relationship between the professionalisation of the HR function and the quality of HR governance and risk management.
- v. To identify the cultural, structural, and leadership conditions that enable or obstruct HR governance enhancement initiatives.
- vi. To develop an evidence-based framework of actionable recommendations for enhancing HR governance and risk management capacity in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Resource Dependency Theory

Resource dependency theory, developed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), argues that organisations are dependent on their environments for critical resources and that governance structures are shaped by the need to manage these dependencies. In the HR governance context, resource dependency theory directs attention to the ways in which quasi-governmental organisations depend on human capital resources and on the governance structures that enable them to attract, retain, and deploy these resources effectively. The theory predicts that organisations will seek to incorporate in their governance structures expertise that addresses their most critical resource dependencies, suggesting that the inclusion of HR professionals on governing boards represents a strategic response to organisations' dependence on human capital. Zulu (2015) have demonstrated in the Zambian context that organisational performance is positively associated with the quality of strategic resource management, providing empirical support for the application of resource dependency theory to HR governance in this institutional setting.

2.1.2 Organisational Learning Theory

Organisational learning theory, as synthesised by Argyris and Schon (1978), distinguishes between single-loop learning, which involves correcting errors within existing frameworks, and double-loop learning, which involves questioning the underlying assumptions of those frameworks. Applied to HR risk management, this perspective suggests that genuine governance enhancement requires organisations to interrogate the assumptions embedded in their current governance practices rather than merely refine existing procedures. Drawing on Toft and Reynolds' (1999) work on learning from failure, organisations can accelerate learning by systematically studying governance failures and successes in comparable institutional settings and adapting the lessons derived to their own contexts. Ilukena et al. (2023) have demonstrated that environmental factors significantly moderate the relationship between organisational resources and performance in the Zambian institutional context, underscoring the importance of contextually sensitive learning processes in HR governance enhancement.

4.1.3 Technology Acceptance and Digital Transformation Theories

Technology acceptance theory, as developed by Davis (1989) and subsequently extended by Venkatesh et al. (2003), provides a framework for understanding the conditions under which HR professionals and governance actors accept and effectively utilise technology tools for risk management purposes. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and the quality of organisational support for technology adoption are the principal determinants of technology acceptance. Digital transformation theory, as elaborated by Marlapudi and Lenka (2024), extends this framework by examining how digital technologies fundamentally transform HR processes, decision-making capabilities, and governance architectures rather than merely automating existing manual processes. Ng'andu and Haabazoka (2024) have generated important evidence on the governance and efficiency implications of digital transformation in African institutional settings, demonstrating that digitisation generates significant operational benefits when accompanied by appropriate organisational change management.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Strategic HR Representation and Governance Quality

Research on board composition and governance effectiveness consistently demonstrates that functional expertise enhances the quality of governance oversight (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Brown and Caylor (2009) found a positive relationship between board composition quality and firm operating performance, providing empirical support for the principle that governance quality depends on the expertise available to governance actors. Kaehler and Grunde (2018) define HR governance as a framework for HRM and its control within a corporation and its units, comprising formalised norms influenced by multiple stakeholders, establishing that effective governance is inherently multi-dimensional and requires integrated rather than piecemeal enhancement strategies. Recent systematic review evidence likewise suggests that governance improvement requires simultaneous attention to structures, processes, capabilities, leadership, and risk management rather than isolated procedural reform.

2.2.2 Technology and HR Risk Management

Digital transformation in HRM encompasses the adoption of digital technologies to enhance HR processes, improve employee experience, and drive organisational performance (Marlapudi & Lenka, 2024). Bondarouk and Ruel (2009) examine the challenges and opportunities of electronic HRM, demonstrating that technology adoption generates significant efficiency benefits but requires sustained attention to cultural and organisational change management factors. Nicolas-Agustin et al. (2022) extend this analysis by examining the role of HR management in digital transformation processes, finding that HR professionals play a critical role in managing the organisational change dimensions of technology adoption. In this study, participants similarly emphasised that the governance value of technology lies not merely in automating transactions, but in improving consistency, traceability, and early detection of HR-related risks.

2.2.3 Professionalisation of the HR Function

The professionalisation of HR management has been identified as a critical driver of governance quality. Becker and Smidt (2016) argue that effective management of HR-related risks requires integration of HRM and risk management expertise, implying that HR practitioners must develop competencies in risk identification, assessment, monitoring, and mitigation to govern human capital risks effectively. The ZIHRM Act No. 3 of 2022 explicitly incorporates risk management within its definition of HR management, providing a legislative mandate for this integration and creating accountability mechanisms that hold HR practitioners responsible for the quality of risk governance in their organisations. Zulu (2015) found that despite formal governance mechanisms being in place, the majority of employees were unaware of them, highlighting the need for enhanced communication and engagement strategies that professionalisation can enable.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study employs a multiple-case study design situated within an interpretivist philosophical paradigm. Following Yin (2009), a multiple-case study was selected to allow cross-case comparison of governance enhancement experiences across diverse institutional settings, strengthening the analytical transferability of findings beyond any single organisational context. Interpretivism recognises that HR governance enhancement, as a social practice, is shaped by participants' interpretations of their institutional environments, professional identities, power relations, and organisational cultures, and that knowledge of governance must therefore be generated through engagement with those interpretations (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013). The situated character of knowledge production, as Haraway (1988) has argued, is a constitutive feature of social inquiry that must be acknowledged and worked with methodologically.

3.2 Population, Sampling, and Participant Characteristics

The target population comprised the most senior HR practitioners employed within quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants meeting pre-specified inclusion criteria: individuals occupying the roles of Director of Human Resources, Head of Human Resources, or Senior HR Manager within parastatal or statutory bodies; possessing a minimum of seven years of professional HR experience; demonstrating direct knowledge of governance enhancement initiatives, technology adoption experiences, and professionalisation challenges within their organisations; and demonstrating willingness to engage in extended reflective discussion of governance experiences. Inclusion criteria also incorporated gender and organisational sector diversity.

The resulting sample comprised eleven key informants representing commercial parastatals, statutory regulatory bodies, and public service delivery institutions across nine distinct economic sectors. Table 1 presents the anonymised characteristics of participating organisations and informants. Data saturation was achieved following ten interviews, with the eleventh conducted to confirm saturation.

Table 1

Anonymised Participant and Organisation Characteristics

Code	Role	Organisation Type	Sector	Years in HR
P01	Director of Human Resources	Commercial Parastatal	Energy	17
P02	Head of Human Resources	Statutory Regulatory Body	Financial Services	12
P03	Director of Human Resources	Service Delivery Institution	Health	21
P04	Senior HR Manager	Commercial Parastatal	Transport	9
P05	Head of Human Resources	Statutory Regulatory Body	Communications	15
P06	Director of Human Resources	Service Delivery Institution	Education	18
P07	Head of Human Capital	Commercial Parastatal	Mining & Industry	11
P08	Senior HR Manager	Statutory Regulatory Body	Agriculture	8
P09	Director of Human Resources	Service Delivery Institution	Water & Sanitation	23
P10	Head of Human Resources	Commercial Parastatal	Media	14
P11	Senior HR Manager	Statutory Regulatory Body	Labour & Employment	7

Note. All identifying information has been removed. Years in HR refers to total professional HR experience.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting between forty and sixty minutes, conducted in locations selected by participants to ensure professional comfort and candour. All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Contemporaneous field notes were maintained to capture non-verbal cues and emerging analytical insights. An iteratively refined interview guide addressed governance enhancement recommendations, barriers to improvement, experiences with change initiatives, technology adoption challenges, and professionalisation perspectives, while retaining the flexibility to pursue emerging themes.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework was employed, supported by NVivo qualitative data management software for systematic coding and theme development. Phase one involved familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts; phase two involved initial code generation; phase three involved the identification of candidate themes through clustering codes; phase four involved theme review against the full dataset; phase five involved theme definition and naming; and phase six involved report production. The analysis proceeded inductively, with themes emerging from participant accounts rather than being imposed by prior theoretical frameworks, though extant theory provided interpretive resources.

Reflexivity was maintained throughout through regular analytical memo-writing, in which the lead researcher documented emerging interpretations, potential biases, and alternative analytical pathways. Key decisions about code categorisation and theme boundaries were reviewed with co-investigators and checked against the raw data. Table 2 illustrates the analytical trajectory from raw codes through categories to final themes.

Table 2*Illustrative Analytical Process: From Code to Category to Theme*

Exemplary Raw Code	→ Category → Theme
<i>"By the time HR issues reach governance structures, we are purely operational, responding to problems that could have been prevented"</i>	Strategic exclusion → Governance marginalisation → Theme: Structural Deficiencies in HR Governance Frameworks
<i>"Technology brings standardisation, which eliminates subjectivity"</i>	Standardisation benefit → Process integrity → Theme: Technology Adoption Pathway
<i>"HR is being treated as a welfare function rather than a strategic discipline"</i>	Functional mischaracterisation → Status deficit → Theme: Professionalisation Pathway
<i>"Risk management responsibilities embedded in every performance contract"</i>	Distributed accountability → Cultural embedding → Theme: Proactive Risk Culture

3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking in which five participants reviewed and verified emergent findings, and peer debriefing with two independent qualitative research colleagues. Transferability was supported through thick description of participant contexts, organisational types, and institutional environments. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through the maintenance of a comprehensive audit trail comprising raw interview recordings, verbatim transcripts, initial codes, code matrices, and analytical memos. Reflexivity was maintained through systematic memo-writing throughout the analytical process.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia School of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. All participants received comprehensive information sheets, provided voluntary informed consent, and retained the right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Anonymity was maintained through consistent use of role descriptors and pseudonyms. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team, and audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research programme. Organisations are not individually identified in the findings.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of eleven in-depth interviews yielded findings that correspond directly to the study objectives. The results first identify the principal deficiencies in existing HR governance frameworks, then examine strategic HR representation, technology adoption, and professionalisation as pathways to stronger governance, before concluding with the cultural and leadership conditions that enable or obstruct successful reform. These findings are presented below with illustrative participant quotations.

4.1 Deficiencies in Current HR Governance Frameworks

4.1.1 The Absence of Strategic HR Representation

A pervasive and foundational governance deficiency identified across multiple organisations is the relegation of the HR function from a strategic partner to a purely administrative role. This marginalisation is most visibly manifested in the absence of HR practitioners from the highest echelons of organisational decision-making:

"By the time HR issues are brought to the attention of governance structures, the HR function is often operating purely at the operational level, responding to problems that could have been prevented by earlier strategic engagement." (P07, Head of Human Capital, interview, 6th May, 2024).

A knowledge gap at governance level compounds this structural marginalisation. One participant articulated the irony of an experienced HR director with over thirty years of professional experience being supervised by a board member with less than ten years in any management role, an asymmetry of expertise that creates a power and knowledge imbalance fundamentally incompatible with effective governance.

4.1.2 The Governance-Operations Disconnect

A significant gap identified in participant accounts is the disconnect between documented governance structures and the actual conduct of HR management in daily operations. Institutions may possess sound governance architectures on paper while practical implementation remains disjointed and inconsistent. One participant described a situation in which a higher supervisory body deployed personnel who were professionally unsuitable for the roles assigned, creating operational inefficiencies and resource wastage. The rigid policy framework governing transfers required newly

deployed employees to serve two years before becoming eligible for redeployment, preventing prompt correction of this misalignment.

4.1.3 Cultural and Perceptual Barriers

Cultural and perceptual barriers constitute the most entrenched challenges to effective HR governance enhancement. The predominant organisational culture in many quasi-governmental entities favours reactive problem-solving over systematic risk prevention and perceives HR risk management as a nascent compliance obligation rather than a strategic management imperative:

"Risk management is a new field whose significance has not yet been adequately appreciated within HR functions or at governance levels." (P04, Senior HR Manager, interview, 6th May, 2024).

Employee-level resistance to technology-driven accountability systems represents a further cultural barrier. Participants described employees resisting the transition from manual to automated systems precisely because automation eliminates informational opacities that enable various forms of misconduct:

"Employees accustomed to arriving late and leaving early resist biometric attendance systems precisely because such systems make previously invisible behaviours visible and subject to accountability." (P02, Head of Human Resources, interview, 6th May, 2024).

4.2 Pathway 1: Technology and Data Analytics for Risk Mitigation

4.2.1 From Manual Processes to Automated Efficiency

The most consistently expressed enhancement recommendation concerns the transition from manual, paper-based HR systems to automated digital platforms. Participants characterised manual systems as tedious, error-prone, prone to manipulation, and fundamentally incompatible with evidence-based governance. Specific areas identified as priorities for automation include recruitment portals, payroll management, performance contract monitoring, leave and attendance management, and compliance tracking for statutory obligations:

"Paper-based systems create delays whenever key signatories are unavailable and generate errors through human calculation and transcription that are both costly and difficult to detect and correct." (P10, Head of Human Resources, interview, 7th May, 2024).

"Technology brings standardisation, which eliminates subjectivity. When a system applies the same rules to every transaction, manipulation becomes detectable. That is a fundamental governance enhancement." (P01, Director of Human Resources, interview, 7th May, 2024).

4.2.2 Data Analytics and Proactive Risk Identification

Beyond basic process automation, participants identified data analytics as a transformative capability enabling the transition from reactive to proactive HR risk management. One participant described the governance value of a performance monitoring dashboard that provides real-time visibility into departmental performance against contracted targets, enabling governance actors to identify underperforming units and emerging organisational risks before they escalate into serious operational problems. Absenteeism analysis, productivity monitoring, turnover pattern analysis, and statutory obligation tracking were identified as high-priority analytics capabilities that transform HR risk management from a retrospective into a prospective activity.

4.3 Pathway 2: Strategic HR Representation as Governance Enhancement

Participants consistently and emphatically recommended HR representation at the highest governance levels as the most structurally significant enhancement pathway. The comparison, made by multiple participants, between the standard practice of including legal experts on boards to manage legal risks and the need to include HR professionals to manage human capital risks, captures the essential logic with compelling clarity:

"Every board has a lawyer for legal risk and an accountant for financial risk. Human capital is equally significant, yet no one on the board is professionally qualified to oversee it. The logic is compelling." (P03, Director of Human Resources, interview, 7th May, 2024).

The practical challenges of this pathway were acknowledged: legislative constraints on board composition in some organisations, the limited pool of HR professionals with board-level governance experience, and organisational cultures that have historically marginalised HR. The ZIHRM Act No. 3 of 2022 provides an important advocacy resource: by establishing HR management as a recognised profession with defined competency standards, the Act creates the institutional foundation for arguments that HR professionals possess the distinctive expertise that governance of human capital requires.

4.4 Pathway 3: Professionalising the HR Function

The characterisation of HR as a welfare function rather than a strategic management discipline reflects a misunderstanding with significant governance consequences. Multiple participants described board members dismissing HR as merely a social function:

"Board members tell us that HR is just a support function. Yet they ask us to manage the organisation's most complex, most expensive, and most volatile asset. The contradiction is remarkable." (P06, Director of Human Resources, interview, 7th May, 2024).

The recommendation to professionalise HR, ensuring that only trained and qualified practitioners manage HR matters, is grounded in the recognition that effective HR governance requires specialist knowledge that cannot be improvised by professionals from other disciplines. The ZIHRM Act No. 3 of 2022's explicit incorporation of risk management within its definition of HR management provides a legislative mandate for this integration, creating accountability mechanisms that hold HR practitioners responsible for the quality of risk governance in their organisations.

4.5 Enabling Conditions: Risk Culture and Leadership Commitment

Beyond structural and technological changes, participants consistently emphasised the need for deep cultural transformation as a prerequisite for effective HR governance enhancement. Embedding risk management responsibilities in individual performance contracts was identified as a particularly effective mechanism for democratising risk governance and ensuring that risk awareness becomes a collective rather than a departmental responsibility:

"When risk management is in everyone's performance contract, it stops being the HR department's problem and becomes the organisation's priority. That shift is transformative." (P09, Director of Human Resources, interview, 7th May, 2024).

Leadership commitment emerged as the non-negotiable enabling condition. Participants universally observed that governance enhancement initiatives in their organisations had succeeded or failed in direct proportion to the visibility and authenticity of senior leadership support. Technical excellence in governance design is insufficient when leadership signals, through resource allocation decisions, personal behaviour, and accountability enforcement, that risk management is a compliance exercise rather than a genuine management priority.

4.6 Discussion

The findings of this study generate important theoretical and practical insights when read through the lenses of resource dependency theory, organisational learning theory, and technology acceptance theory, and when situated within the broader literature on HR governance and risk management in quasi-governmental organisations.

4.6.1 The Structural Pathway and Resource Dependency Theory

The finding that strategic HR representation at board level constitutes the most significant structural enhancement pathway provides strong empirical support for resource dependency theory's (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) prediction that governance structures will seek to incorporate the expertise required to manage their most critical resource dependencies. The evidence from this study demonstrates that most quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia have not yet made this structural adaptation, leaving their most critical resource dependency, namely human capital, without the governance expertise required to manage it effectively. Hillman and Dalziel (2003) established that diverse expertise enhances governance quality, but this study refines that principle: what matters is not expertise diversity in the abstract but the specific presence of the functional expertise that addresses the organisation's most significant governance challenges. In quasi-governmental organisations dependent on human capital for mission achievement, that expertise is HR domain knowledge.

The evidence from this study indicates that governance improvement is not merely structural, adding HR professionals to boards, but also cultural. The pathway to enhanced governance depends on organisational conditions that make HR expertise actionable rather than ceremonial. This extends resource dependency theory by showing that the boundary-spanning roles the theory identifies as valuable can only generate governance benefit when cultural conditions enable their effective exercise.

4.6.2 The Technological Pathway and Technology Acceptance Theory

The finding that technology adoption constitutes a transformative governance enhancement pathway is consistent with Davis's (1989) technology acceptance model and its extension by Venkatesh et al. (2003): participants consistently report that the perceived usefulness of HR information systems, specifically their ability to make risks visible, standardise processes, and generate accountability, is clear when demonstrated effectively, and that adoption barriers are primarily cultural rather than technical. The finding that biometric attendance systems face resistance from

employees seeking to preserve the informational opacities that enable misconduct represents a particularly compelling illustration of technology's governance value precisely through the resistance it generates.

The technology findings show that digitisation can generate governance value only when organisations move beyond routine administrative automation toward strategic uses such as workforce analytics, succession monitoring, and early risk identification. Participants consistently reported that this transition remains incomplete in many institutions, indicating that a substantial portion of technology's governance potential is still unrealised.

4.6.3 The Cultural Pathway and Organisational Learning Theory

The finding that cultural transformation is the most challenging and most essential enhancement pathway reflects the double-loop learning challenge that Argyris and Schon (1978) identify as the most demanding form of organisational development. The reactive cultures documented in this study, which prefer immediate responses to problems over systematic risk prevention, represent precisely the single-loop learning patterns that double-loop transformation must displace. Chnaida et al. (2023) observation that organisational isomorphism can accelerate HR risk management learning, by enabling organisations to draw lessons from comparable institutional contexts, suggests that governance enhancement initiatives in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations should be systematically connected to learning networks that enable cross-institutional knowledge sharing.

The finding that embedding risk management in individual performance contracts is the most effective mechanism for cultural change reflects the deep insight that culture is ultimately constituted by the accumulated individual behaviours that organisational incentive structures encourage and reward. When risk management becomes a personal accountability rather than a departmental responsibility, the cultural change that governance reformers seek follows from structural incentive redesign rather than having to precede it. This finding extends organisational learning theory by demonstrating that cultural transformation in governance contexts can be generated through incentive alignment rather than being a prerequisite for incentive change.

4.6.4 The Interdependence of Pathways and the Role of Leadership

The most analytically significant finding of this study is the interdependence of the three enhancement pathways. Neither structural representation without technological capability, nor technological capability without professional expertise, nor either without cultural change generates the sustained governance enhancement that organisations require. This interdependence means that partial implementation of one pathway, without corresponding investment in the others, generates not enhancement but a new configuration of governance weakness. The evidence therefore supports a holistic model of HR governance reform in which structural, technological, and cultural changes must advance together.

Leadership commitment is the meta-condition that determines whether any of the three pathways succeeds. This finding directly confirms the centrality of leadership in governance quality identified by Ndlovu and Haabazoka (2024) in the Zambian macroeconomic governance context. The governance enhancement agenda that this study identifies requires leadership that goes beyond rhetorical commitment to risk management to demonstrate its priority through visible resource allocation, personal accountability for governance outcomes, and the protection of governance practitioners from the organisational resistance their initiatives inevitably generate.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusions

This study investigated how HR governance practices can be systematically enhanced to more effectively manage HR risks in quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia. The findings identify three interconnected pathways to sustainable governance enhancement: strategic board-level representation of the HR function, targeted technology adoption for process standardisation and risk analytics, and the professionalisation of the HR function through competency development and legislative mandate. The study concludes that sustainable risk mitigation requires not just technical solutions but a simultaneous structural, technological, and cultural transformation. Technical excellence in governance design is insufficient when leadership signals that risk management is a compliance exercise rather than a genuine management priority. Leadership commitment is the non-negotiable enabling condition that determines whether governance enhancement initiatives translate into substantive governance improvement.

The paper contributes to HR governance literature by providing a contextually grounded, empirically validated framework of three interconnected enhancement pathways, their barriers and enabling conditions, and the theoretical mechanisms through which each pathway generates governance improvement. By demonstrating empirically that sustainable HR governance enhancement requires interdependent structural, technological, and cultural transformation, the study advances the understanding of governance improvement beyond single-lever reform prescriptions.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced for policymakers, governance practitioners, and professional bodies. Quasi-governmental organisations should institute strategic HR representation at the highest governance levels by ensuring that boards and HR governance committees include qualified HR professionals with substantive governance authority rather than merely advisory roles. Relevant ministries should review enabling legislation to incorporate explicit requirements for HR expertise on governing boards, following the legislative design that participants in this study identified as catalytic for effective HR oversight. The Zambia Institute of Human Resource Management should leverage its mandate under Act No. 3 of 2022 to develop governance competency standards for HR practitioners and to advocate for legislative amendments requiring HR board representation.

Organisations should transition systematically from manual, paper-based HR processes to integrated digital platforms that enable process standardisation, real-time risk monitoring, and evidence-based governance decision-making, prioritising capabilities for succession planning, workforce analytics, and compliance monitoring alongside the administrative systems already in widespread use. HR practitioners in quasi-governmental organisations should proactively develop risk management competencies, treating the ZIHRM Act No. 3 of 2022's incorporation of risk management within the HR professional mandate as an accountability framework rather than a nominal designation. Senior leaders should visibly demonstrate commitment to proactive risk management, including through the integration of risk responsibilities in all employees' performance contracts and through the cultivation of psychological safety for risk identification and reporting. Future research should examine the effectiveness of specific enhancement strategies through longitudinal designs, investigate employee perspectives on governance improvement initiatives, and assess whether governance improvements translate into measurable reductions in HR risks and improvements in organisational performance.

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