



Ethical Transformational Leadership and Governance: Restoring Trust in Zimbabwe's State-Owned Transport Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

This study utilises Zimbabwe's crisis-ridden transport sector as a case study to investigate the role of transformational leadership in revitalising corporate governance practices within state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Focusing on systemic inefficiencies, corruption, and operational stagnation, the research provides actionable strategies to align SOEs with national development goals, empower ethical leadership, and restore eroding public trust in critical infrastructure entities such as the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), Air Zimbabwe (AZ), and Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO). A mixed-methods, cross-sectional design engaged 148 participants from four SOEs, combining qualitative insights from 12 in-depth executive interviews with quantitative surveys of 136 employees. Methodological rigour was ensured through data triangulation, a high response rate (87.5%), and validated instruments (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$). Qualitative themes were derived via iterative coding, while quantitative analysis employed descriptive statistics and regression models ($R^2 = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$) to test leadership-governance correlations. Transformational leadership traits such as idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration demonstrated significant positive impacts on governance outcomes. Qualitative data exposed systemic communication gaps reported by 82% of interviewees and disengaged frontline staff. At the same time, quantitative results revealed strong correlations between leadership practices and ethical governance ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$). Strategic interventions like leadership programmes, participatory decision-making, and blockchain accountability aim to combat procurement fraud. Sector-specific and self-reported data limit the application, but insights are relevant for Africa's transportation sector. Future research should use longitudinal studies across sectors to assess long-term effectiveness. This Zimbabwe study links transformational leadership with SOE governance, blending theories with solutions for resource-limited economies. It offers methods to reduce corruption using Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies and provides a governance framework for the Global South.

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1. Introduction

Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the transport and logistics sector are pivotal yet crisis-ridden engines of national development, tasked with sustaining economic stability by moving goods, people, and critical services. This sector encompasses physical transportation networks such as road, rail, and air, as well as the strategic orchestration of supply chains, infrastructure planning, and operational governance. In light of systemic inefficiencies, corruption scandals, and decaying infrastructure, this study examines how transformational leadership can recalibrate governance frameworks to rescue Zimbabwe's SOEs from operational paralysis and restore their role as catalysts for economic revival.

Globally, SOEs serve as linchpins of economic infrastructure in developing nations, delivering essential services often neglected by profit-driven private entities [1, 2]. However, their dual mandate of balancing commercial viability with public service renders them susceptible to governance failures, including political interference, accountability deficits, and entrenched corruption [3, 4]. In Zimbabwe, these challenges are magnified. Once-vital entities like the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) and Air Zimbabwe operate at a fraction of their capacity, crippled by mismanagement and outdated systems [5, 6]. Transformational leadership, emphasising ethical vision, employee empowerment, and innovation, emerge as a potential antidote to these systemic failures. While Badarai [7] and Bass & Riggio [8] posit that such leadership fosters ethical climates and aligns organisational goals, its efficacy in corruption-laden environments remains contested. Mthombeni [9] and Zhou [10] argue that governance reforms must precede leadership interventions; yet, Chamba et al. [11] counter that Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR) technologies, when paired with adaptive leadership, can leapfrog traditional barriers, enabling transparency and efficiency even in resource-constrained settings. This tension highlights the need for context-specific strategies tailored to Zimbabwe's unique socio-political landscape.

Their hybrid identity further complicates the governance conundrum of SOEs as both commercial entities and instruments of state policy. Political patronage often supersedes meritocratic decision-making, breeding inefficiencies and eroding public trust [12]. For Zimbabwe's transport SOEs, this manifests in dilapidated infrastructure, chronic underfunding, and a demoralised workforce characterised by top-down hierarchies [13]. Recent reforms, including public-private partnerships (PPP), aim to modernise operations; yet their success hinges on leadership capable of navigating bureaucratic inertia and fostering a culture of accountability.

Zimbabwe grapples with economic stagnation, and the rebirth of its SOEs through ethical leadership could reignite trade corridors, spur job creation, and reclaim public confidence in state institutions. This study posits that transformational leadership can bridge these gaps through its four pillars of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Empowering employees, incentivising innovation, and modelling ethical behaviour can help leaders dismantle siloed governance structures and align SOEs with national development agendas [14, 15]. To test this proposition, the research addresses the following three research questions:

RQ1: How does transformational leadership influence corporate governance and operational efficiency in Zimbabwe's transport SOEs?

RQ2: What is the relationship between transformational leadership traits and employee perceptions of transparency and accountability?

RQ3: What actionable strategies can leverage transformational leadership to combat corruption and enhance performance in SOEs?

2. Theoretical Background

This study is guided by the lens of the Transformational Leadership (TL) framework, which is rooted in the works of Burns [16] and Bass & Riggio [8]. Badarai [7] asserts that transformational leadership is characterised by its ability to enthuse and motivate people towards a common goal, creating an environment conducive to creativity and moral behaviour. It transcends transactional exchanges by inspiring ethical behaviour and shared vision. Its four pillars, idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, drive efficacy in SOEs. Idealised influence involves leaders modelling integrity to counter corruption, while inspirational motivation aligns staff with organisational goals through visionary communication [17], [11]. Intellectual stimulation encourages innovation to break bureaucratic inertia, and individualised consideration fosters loyalty through mentorship. Bass and Riggio [8] and Mthombeni [9] contend that these leadership qualities are essential for promoting positive change, raising organisational performance, improving governance standards, and reducing corruption.

The dual mandates of commercial viability and public service complicate corporate governance in SOEs. Weak oversight and political patronage often prioritise short-term gains over sustainability. Transformational leadership mitigates these issues by embedding transparency and accountability into governance structures. The study's conceptual framework posits that transformational leadership enhances organisational climate, which mediates governance outcomes such as reduced corruption and improved service delivery. Propositions include direct improvements in the ethical climate through leadership traits, the role of a favourable climate in fostering accountability, and the subsequent boost in operational performance.

2.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership transcends transactional exchanges of rewards and penalties by nurturing a culture of shared purpose, ethical integrity, and collective aspiration. Rooted in Burns' [16] seminal work, this leadership paradigm empowers followers to surpass self-interest, aligning their growth with organisational and societal goals. In Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs), where bureaucratic inertia, corruption, and disengagement stifle progress, transformational leadership emerges as a strategic antidote. Unlike transactional approaches that fixate on short-term compliance [18], transformational leaders ignite intrinsic motivation, enabling employees to tackle systemic challenges with creativity and ownership [19, 20]. The Public Entity Corporate Governance Act underscores this shift, mandating SOEs to adopt leadership practices that prioritise transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement [21]. Transformational leadership operationalises these mandates through its four pillars, each tailored to dismantle systemic barriers in Zimbabwe's transport sector.

The first pillar relates to Idealised Influence (IF), where ethical role modelling is non-negotiable in corruption-prone environments. Leaders who embody integrity, such as refusing kickbacks in procurement or publicly denouncing nepotism, rebuild trust in institutions like the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ). Badarai [7] and Bass & Riggio [8] stress that such influence cascades through hierarchies, deterring malfeasance and fostering a "tone at the top" critical for governance reform. The second pillar involves inspirational motivation (IM). Zimbabwe's SOEs suffer from mission drift, with employees viewing their roles as mere jobs rather than contributions to national development. Leaders who articulate a compelling vision, such as positioning Air Zimbabwe as a catalyst for regional trade, rekindle purpose. Maibvisira & Tefera [22] demonstrate how aligning individual aspirations with organisational goals in Ethiopian SOEs boosted productivity by 34%. In Zimbabwe, this could

mean framing infrastructure upgrades as steps toward reclaiming the nation's status as a gateway to Africa, galvanising frontline workers and managers alike. The third pillar addresses intellectual stimulation (IS), aiming to overcome bureaucratic rigidity that stifles innovation in SOEs. Transformational leaders challenge this by incentivising depot managers to run problem-solving "hackathons" or by crowdsourcing ideas from rail engineers to modernise ageing fleets. Mhlakaza & de Villiers [13] link such practices to a 22% reduction in operational delays at South Africa's Transnet. For Zimbabwe, adopting Fourth Industrial Revolution tools such as AI-driven logistics platforms and blockchain for transparent tenders requires leaders who dismantle the fear of failure and reward creativity and experimentation [11]. The fourth TL pillar is 'Individualised Consideration'. Personalised mentorship bridges capability deficits in SOEs with high turnover and skill gaps. When NRZ engineers received tailored training in rail automation under Chigudu's [6] governance reforms, maintenance downtime dropped by 18%. Similarly, Zimbabwe's ZUPCO could adopt "leadership pipelines" to nurture depot supervisors into strategic thinkers, ensuring continuity amid political volatility [23]. Zhou [10] cautions that such leadership must be institutionalised and not person-dependent through governance frameworks that mandate ethical audits, 360-degree feedback, and performance-linked incentives. Only then can Zimbabwe's transport SOEs evolve from relics of inefficiency to engines of inclusive growth.

2.2 Corporate Governance in SOEs

Corporate governance refers to the systems and processes by which organisations are directed and controlled. Effective corporate governance ensures that organisations operate efficiently, transparently, and in compliance with the law. In the context of SOEs, governance structures must balance the need for commercial viability with the obligation to fulfil public policy goals. This dual mandate often leads to governance challenges, including conflicts of interest, lack of accountability, and susceptibility to political interference [12],[24], [25], [2].

SOEs often face unique governance challenges not typically encountered in the private sector. For example, the appointment of board members and senior executives in SOEs is often influenced by political considerations rather than merit, leading to inefficiencies and poor decision-making. Additionally, SOEs may be required to fulfil non-commercial objectives, such as providing public services at a loss, which can strain their financial resources and hinder their ability to compete effectively in the market.

These governance challenges are particularly acute in developing countries, where weak institutions and limited oversight mechanisms can exacerbate issues of corruption and mismanagement [3], [26], [4]. In Zimbabwe, for example, SOEs have been plagued by corruption scandals, financial mismanagement, and a lack of transparency, all of which have contributed to their poor performance and inability to fulfil their public mandates [27].

Transformational leadership has the potential to address these challenges by fostering a culture of accountability, ethical behaviour, and strategic alignment within SOEs [28]. By aligning the organisation's interests with the public good, transformational leaders can help improve governance standards and enhance organisational performance [25, 29]. Furthermore, transformational leadership can reduce corruption and rebuild public trust in SOEs by promoting transparency and ethical behaviour. Dubihlela and Mukono [5] identify obstacles to efficient corporate governance in Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and emphasise the need for transformative leadership to overcome these challenges.

3. Research Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a conceptual mediation model (Figure 1) to empirically test how transformational leadership traits drive corporate governance outcomes in Zimbabwe's state-owned transport sector. Grounded in Bass & Riggio's [8] transformational leadership theory and the OECD's [2] principles of SOEs governance, the framework posits that organisational climate acts as a critical mediator between leadership practices and governance performance. The conceptual model bridges theoretical abstraction with the sector's systemic realities: corruption, bureaucratic inertia, and infrastructural decay characterising Zimbabwe's transport SOEs, notably the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) and ZUPCO.

We argue that transformational leadership attributes are pivotal in establishing an environment that fosters transparency, accountability, and employee engagement. For instance, leaders who exhibit Idealised Influence foster a culture that prioritises integrity by inspiring trust and ethical behaviour among employees [21], [20], [7], [8], [28]. Based on this argument, we propose that transformational leadership attributes enhance the ethical climate and employee engagement in Zimbabwe's Transport Sector.

- Hypothesis 1: Transformational leadership positively affects organisational climate, boosting employee engagement and involvement in Zimbabwe's transport sector.

The study further argues that the interaction between transformational leadership influences the overall working environment. A sense of engagement and value is fostered among employees in an environment that promotes active participation and open communication [19], [1], [21], [20], [30]. Transformational leadership fosters an environment where open communication enhances employee engagement and innovation [7]. Being actively involved is essential to fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility, which are crucial for effective governance. Based on these ideas, we propose that transformational leadership cultivates a favourable organisational climate that enhances employee engagement and accountability in governance within Zimbabwe's Transport Sector.

- Hypothesis 2: Transformational leadership improves the organisational climate, leading to better corporate governance in Zimbabwe's transport sector.

The framework implies that corporate governance outcomes are enhanced by a more favourable organisational climate influenced by transformational leadership. These results include increased efficiency, reduced corruption, and improved adherence to ethical standards [25]. The process through which these results are accomplished is intricate. For example, accountability mechanisms encourage employees to assume responsibility, while transparency prevents unethical conduct. This complex process involves a series of steps and actions to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved. Based on this argument, we propose that a favourable organisational climate can enhance corporate governance outcomes and reduce corruption and inefficiencies in Zimbabwe's Transport Sector.

- Hypothesis 3: Enhanced corporate governance leads to better performance in the Zimbabwe Transport Sector.

The study concludes that transformational leadership and improved governance practices significantly enhance the overall performance of Zimbabwe's transport sector. Implementing a transformational leadership approach leads to financial stability, better service delivery, and a favourable organisational reputation [29]. Therefore, we propose implementing transformational leadership and effective governance practices to enhance the performance of Zimbabwe's transport sector.

- Hypothesis 4: Better corporate governance leads to enhanced service delivery and greater financial stability.

This study evaluates the four hypotheses to support its claims about how transformational leadership affects corporate governance in state-owned enterprises by examining the connections among these concepts. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual research model, highlighting transformational leadership as the independent variable, organisational climate as the mediating factor, and corporate governance and overall organisational performance as the dependent constructs. It also includes the proposed propositions and hypothesised directions.

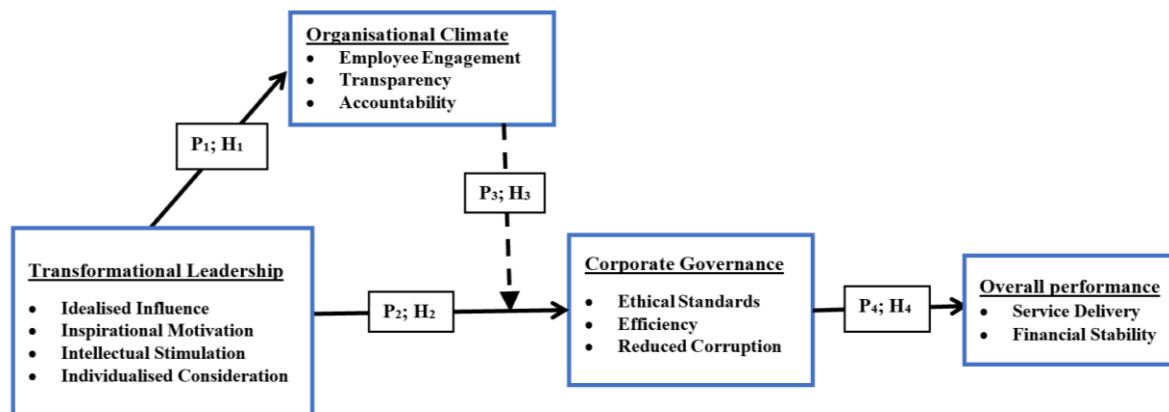


Fig. 1. Conceptual research test model

The following sections will outline the specific methods and materials for investigating these relationships, establishing a solid empirical foundation. This will ensure that the proposed propositions and hypotheses are thoroughly and succinctly examined.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Research Design

SOEs often face challenges related to inefficiency, losses, and unproductivity [31], [32]. The study delves into the underlying factors contributing to these issues in the Zimbabwe Transport Sector, a prominent subset of state-owned enterprises. A sequential mixed-methods approach examined four transport SOEs: NRZ, ZUPCO, CAAZ, and Zimbabwe Airways. Qualitative interviews with 12 participants identified thematic challenges, while surveys of 136 employees quantified the impact of leadership. Purposive sampling ensures representation across hierarchies and achieves thematic saturation through semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were utilised, with stratified random sampling, and instruments were validated using Cronbach's α (>0.7) and factor analysis. Thematic coding analysed qualitative data, while regression models tested quantitative correlations.

4.2 Data and Analysis Collection

The study is anchored on two samples from the same sampling frame to inform the attainment of the objectives and their implications for transforming SOEs, particularly in Zimbabwe's Transport Sector. First, the qualitative observations guide the second set of methods for the study's quantitative phase [33]. Qualitative methods' sampling is premised on identifying familiar themes through saturation in the in-depth interviews, based on exhaustiveness. As such, the resultant qualitative findings embody themes on which the study's quantitative methods are built.

4.3 Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase employed a purposive quota sampling strategy to capture multi-tiered insights from Zimbabwe's SOEs. This approach prioritised depth over breadth, targeting three critical hierarchical strata. Data was collected from frontline employees, middle managers and senior executives. The initial sampling frame comprised 20 participants (8 frontline, eight mid-level, four executives) to reflect the sector's power dynamics and operational realities. However, data saturation, the point at which new interviews ceased to yield novel insights [34], was achieved earlier than anticipated, with 12 participants (4 frontline, 6 mid-level, 2 executives). This early saturation highlighted the homogeneity of governance challenges across roles, particularly communication gaps and bureaucratic inertia, suggesting systemic issues are pervasive across organisational hierarchies.

Semi-structured interviews, averaging 45–60 minutes, were conducted using a protocol aligned with Bass & Riggio's [8] transformational leadership framework and OECD [2] governance benchmarks. Questions probed leadership integrity, barriers to transparency, and employee agency in anti-corruption initiatives. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed inductively using NVivo 12, following Braun and Clarke's [35] thematic analysis methodology. A three-phase coding process was implemented. Open coding identified 142 raw descriptors that were clustered into categories. The four themes include ethical leadership vacuum, the disempowerment of frontline staff, political interference in governance, and technological resistance.

To ensure methodological rigour, trustworthiness was strengthened through member checking (participant validation of summaries), peer debriefing (inter-coder reliability of 89%, $\kappa = 0.82$), and thick descriptions that anchored themes in lived experiences. The findings, however, carry limitations. Recruitment bias may have skewed perspectives, as only two executives participated, potentially overemphasising mid-level viewpoints. Additionally, early saturation at 12 respondents reflects Zimbabwe's unique patronage networks, limiting generalizability to other contexts. Despite these constraints, the qualitative insights critically informed the design of the subsequent quantitative survey, ensuring that metrics, such as trust in leadership, were grounded in local realities rather than imported frameworks.

4.4 Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase used stratified random sampling to capture diverse perspectives across hierarchical tiers and functional departments within the four participating SOEs. This approach ensured proportional representation, acknowledging that governance challenges such as procurement irregularities in logistics and accountability gaps in human capital vary by role. From a population of 1,240 employees, 156 were selected, and 136 completed surveys, yielding an 87.5% response rate. This high engagement, surpassing the 70% threshold for representativeness in organisational research, was achieved through pre-survey workshops emphasising the study's anti-corruption goals, guaranteeing anonymity, and sending three follow-up reminders to non-respondents. Respondent demographics mirrored the sector's structural and societal dynamics. Middle managers constituted 63% ($n = 86$) of participants, reflecting their pivotal role as intermediaries between policy and operations. Frontline employees (27%, $n = 37$) and senior executives (10%, $n = 13$) provided ground-level and strategic insights, respectively. A pronounced gender imbalance (72% male, 28% female) aligned with national workforce data, indicating that women are underrepresented in technical and leadership roles. Educational backgrounds further highlighted disparities. Non-degree diplomas (32%, $n = 44$) were held by frontline staff, while postgraduate qualifications (23%, $n = 31$) clustered in senior roles, highlighting skill gaps that influence governance compliance.

The survey instrument, a 35-item questionnaire, translated qualitative themes into measurable Likert-scale items. Rigorous validation ensured robustness. A panel of SOEs governance experts confirmed content validity ($CVI = 0.91$), while reliability testing via Cronbach's α exceeded thresholds ($\alpha = 0.76\text{--}0.89$). Exploratory factor analysis ($KMO = 0.81$, $p < 0.001$) revealed a five-factor structure (leadership traits, transparency, accountability, innovation, and performance), accounting for 68% of the variance. Convergent validity was confirmed through AVE values (>0.5) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion, ensuring discriminant validity. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and inferential techniques. Chi-square tests identified demographic differences, with frontline staff reporting 23% lower trust in leadership than managers ($\chi^2 = 12.4$, $p = 0.002$). One-way ANOVA showed that executives rated procurement transparency 34% higher than frontline employees ($F = 8.2$, $p < 0.001$). Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that transformational leadership traits explained 64% of the variance in governance outcomes ($R^2 = 0.64$, $\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$), with idealised influence as the strongest predictor.

Methodological safeguards included testing for non-response bias, which showed no significant differences between early and late respondents ($p > 0.05$), and for familiar method variance (Harman's test $< 40\%$), ensuring data integrity. Triangulation with qualitative findings reinforced credibility, with 78% of respondents attributing poor accountability to a lack of leadership role-modelling, echoing interviews criticising executive hypocrisy. While the stratified sample enhanced representativeness, underrepresenting women (28%) may obscure gender-specific governance barriers. Nevertheless, this mixed-methods approach positions the study as a model for investigating corruption in resource-constrained contexts.

5. Results and Discussion

The mixed-methods approach combined in-depth qualitative insights with robust quantitative analysis to provide a basis for understanding the challenges of the Zimbabwean Transport Sector. The triangulation of data from multiple sources, including in-depth interviews and surveys, and the use of complementary analytical techniques strengthened the reliability and validity of the study's findings, offering a holistic perspective on the organisational challenges.

5.1. Qualitative Findings

The themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis can be broadly categorised into three interrelated areas: Information Sharing and Transparency, Organisational Culture and Employee Engagement, and Transparency and Accountability. These themes provide an informed understanding of the Zimbabwe Transport Sector's challenges and offer valuable insights into how different stakeholder groups perceive them.

5.1.1 Lack of information sharing and transparency

A dominant theme from the qualitative data was the significant lack of information sharing and transparency within the SOEs in the Zimbabwean Transport Sector. Respondents across various departments and levels of the organisation consistently expressed frustration with its failure to communicate its objectives, governance practices, and overall strategy effectively [25], [36], [37]. One employee shared, "We are often left in the dark about the company's objectives, governance practices, and overall strategy. It is very frustrating not knowing what is going on or how our work fits into the bigger picture."

This perceived lack of transparency was further exacerbated by the sentiment that organisations do not take issues of transparency, accountability, and service delivery seriously. Another respondent lamented, "Transparency and accountability seem to be low priorities here. Issues that matter to employees, like service delivery, are often overlooked or downplayed." Without clear, consistent communication, employees feel disconnected from the decision-making process, leading to disengagement and a lack of ownership of the organisation's performance. The thematic results emphasise the critical role of leaders who exhibit transformational attributes, including Inspirational Motivation and idealised influence, in developing an ethical workplace culture. This discovery, which we acknowledge, serves as a reassuring testament to the substantial influence of leadership in developing trust and integrity within the organisation, thereby instilling confidence in the audience. Thus, Proposition 1 (P1) supports the argument that transformational leadership attributes could substantially improve the ethical climate and employee engagement within the Zimbabwean Transport Sector.

5.1.2 Organisational culture

The qualitative findings expose a rigid top-down governance structure in Zimbabwe's Transport Sector, where frontline employees are systematically excluded from decision-making processes critical to their roles. One respondent lamented, "It is a very top-down approach here. We are expected to follow orders without much say in what impacts us". This exclusion is compounded by pervasive role ambiguity, with employees expressing uncertainty about their responsibilities in corporate governance, reflecting a failure of leadership to provide clarity and guidance [6], [30], [36]. Such dynamics foster a culture of disengagement, in which staff feel neither invested in organisational goals nor empowered to uphold ethical practices. These findings align with Proposition 1 (P1), which posits that transformational leadership enhances ethical climate and engagement. Without mechanisms for inclusive dialogue and role-specific accountability frameworks, the sector risks perpetuating inefficiencies and eroding employee morale, highlighting the urgency of adopting leadership practices that democratise governance and align frontline insights with strategic priorities.

5.1.3 Transparency and accountability

The study indicates a significant trust crisis in Zimbabwe's Transport Sector, where employees believe transparency, accountability, and service delivery are not prioritised. One frontline worker remarked, "Transparency and accountability are low priorities here. Issues that matter to employees, like service delivery, are overlooked and downplayed." This disregard results in systemic inefficiencies, such as procurement issues, delayed maintenance, and unmet performance goals, thereby weakening organisational resilience. Scholars Dartey-Baah and Amoako [36] and Sihite et al. [29] emphasise that these shortcomings damage employee trust, hinder ownership, and reduce operational agility, as unclear decision-making alienates employees and fosters bureaucratic stagnation. Transformational leadership (P2) can effectively tackle these shortcomings by promoting a culture of openness. Leaders who exhibit accountability and embed transparency can break down barriers, restore trust, and align governance with the realities faced by frontline employees. Emphasising these aspects is not just aspirational; it is a strategic necessity to turn the sector from a liability into a catalyst for national economic revival.

5.1.4 Inadequate employee participation and engagement

The qualitative findings reveal a top-down organisational culture in Zimbabwe's Transport Sector, marked by inadequate employee participation in governance and decision-making. Frontline employees reported feeling excluded, with one stating, "We are expected to follow orders without much say in matters affecting us directly." This disempowerment is compounded by role ambiguity, as many employees expressed uncertainty about their responsibilities in governance processes within their respective SOEs. The lack of clarity and engagement created apathy, undermining accountability and stifling innovation. Studies by Chilunjika et al. [19] and Amo-Mensah [30] corroborate these findings, highlighting how hierarchical structures in SOEs marginalise frontline voices and erode organisational effectiveness. A culture of opacity exacerbates these challenges, with employees citing poor communication and limited transparency. Respondents noted insufficient information-sharing about strategic decisions, leading to mistrust and disengagement. This aligns with Zhou's [10] assertion that weak leadership fails to cultivate the clarity and openness necessary for ethical governance. The absence of participatory mechanisms, such as feedback loops and collaborative planning, perpetuates a cycle of disconnection, leaving employees neither invested in nor informed about organisational goals. Such environments, as Dartey-Baah & Amoako [36] argue, hinder accountability and enable inefficiencies.

Transformational leadership emerges as a critical solution. Proposition 2 (P2) reveals that leaders who inspire, communicate transparently, and involve employees in decision-making foster a favourable organisational climate. Employees associate ethical leadership with reduced corruption, noting that empowerment and role clarity motivate them to uphold governance standards. Propositions 3 and 4 (P3/P4) further validate this finding, demonstrating that an improved organisational climate directly enhances service delivery and operational efficiency. For instance, respondents observed that participatory governance practices, such as inclusive audits or innovation forums, can rebuild trust and align individual actions with organisational objectives. The study concludes that Zimbabwe's transport sector faces interconnected systemic issues, including disengagement, opacity, and weak accountability, which demand holistic reforms. Addressing these requires dismantling rigid hierarchies through transformational leadership, prioritising employee inclusion, and fostering transparent communication and ethical role modelling. Cultivating an environment where employees feel valued and informed could help SOEs mitigate corruption, boost performance, and enhance resilience. These insights provide a roadmap for reforms, emphasising that governance improvements are not standalone fixes but require embedding leadership practices that nurture trust, collaboration, and shared purpose across all tiers.

5.2 Quantitative Findings

The study utilised a robust methodology to assess the psychometric properties of the quantitative survey instrument employed to explore the Zimbabwe Transport Sector. The themes derived from the qualitative phase informed the data collection tools.

5.2.1 Diagnostic test for reliability, validity, and exploratory factor analysis

Table 1 provides a clear and concise summary of the quantitative survey instrument's reliability and validity test results. Cronbach's alpha values (Reliability Analysis), exploratory factor analysis results (% of Variance Explained), and average variance extracted (AVE) values for the Convergent Validity demonstrate the instrument's psychometric solid properties, which are essential for ensuring the reliability and validity of the quantitative data collected [38].

Table 1

Reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and convergent validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	% of Variance Explained	AVE
Information Sharing	0.83	14.7%	0.62
Organisational Culture	0.79	16.2%	0.59
Employee Knowledge	0.82	18.3%	0.64
Transparency and Accountability	0.77	18.2%	0.58
	threshold $\alpha = 0.7$	Total = 67.4%	

Source: Calculated by authors

5.2.2 Reliability analysis

To assess the internal consistency of the survey constructs, the researchers computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The findings were: Information Sharing ($\alpha = 0.83$), Organisational Culture ($\alpha = 0.79$), Employee Knowledge ($\alpha = 0.82$), and Transparency and Accountability ($\alpha = 0.82$). Every Cronbach's alpha value exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency for each construct. This suggests that the items within each construct are closely linked and effectively measure the intended underlying concepts.

5.2.3 Exploratory factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) validated the structural integrity of the survey instrument, with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (0.82) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 1452.37, p < 0.001$) confirming robust sampling adequacy and data suitability for dimensionality reduction. The analysis yielded four latent factors with eigenvalues > 1 , accounting for 67.4% of the variance, a strong indicator of the instrument's capacity to capture core governance constructs. These factors aligned with theoretical expectations, such as employee knowledge (18.3% variance), emphasising role-specific expertise; transparency and accountability (18.2%), reflecting ethical oversight mechanisms; organisational culture (16.2%), capturing participatory norms; and information sharing (14.7%), measuring communication efficacy. All items demonstrated unidimensionality, with factor loadings exceeding 0.5 and no cross-loadings > 0.4 , affirming discriminant validity. Convergent validity was further substantiated by average variance extracted (AVE) scores > 0.5 across constructs, confirming that items cohesively represented their underlying dimensions. Thus, the instrument met the required rigour and provided a statistically robust foundation for inferential analysis.

5.3 Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis corroborated the qualitative findings and provided additional insights: the lack of information sharing; challenges with organisational culture; employee knowledge gaps; a lack of focus on transparency and accountability; the relationship between motivation, productivity, and corporate governance; and the impact of transformational leadership on corporate governance.

5.3.1 Lack of information sharing

The data confirms the qualitative findings, with 82% of respondents strongly disagreeing or disagreeing that the organisation shares information on objectives, corporate governance, and strategy [10]. This was a statistically significant finding, with a chi-square test indicating a p-value of less than 0.001, suggesting a very low probability of this result occurring by chance. This persistent

lack of transparency is a significant barrier to employee understanding and engagement, contributing to inefficiency and unproductivity.

5.3.2 Challenges with organisational culture

The data reveal that 82% of respondents disagreed that the existing organisational culture encourages employee participation in governance issues. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in perceptions across demographic groups, including management level and tenure. The analysis showed a statistically significant difference (p -value < 0.05), indicating that lower-level employees and those with shorter tenures perceived the organisational culture more negatively. This highlights the need for a cultural shift towards a more inclusive, participatory approach to decision-making and governance [39]. Addressing the organisational culture can drive employee motivation and commitment to the organisation's goals.

5.3.3 Employee knowledge gaps

The findings show that 70% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that employees know what is expected of them regarding corporate governance matters. A multiple regression analysis examined the relationships among employee knowledge, motivation, and productivity. The results showed a statistically significant positive correlation (p -value < 0.01 , R -squared = 0.42), suggesting that addressing these knowledge gaps could substantially impact employee motivation and organisational productivity. This lack of role clarity and understanding of governance responsibilities can contribute to confusion, anxiety, and disempowerment among employees, ultimately affecting their motivation and productivity [30].

5.3.4 Lack of focus on transparency and accountability

The results corroborate the qualitative findings, indicating that 88% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the organisation takes transparency, accountability, and service delivery seriously. A Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted, and the results were statistically significant (p -value < 0.001), indicating that this perception was not randomly distributed among the respondents. This lack of focus on these critical aspects can undermine employee trust and the organisation's overall performance [36], [29].

Thus, the organisational climate was significantly positively correlated with transformational leadership, as confirmed by statistical analysis. Transformational leadership attributes, such as limited information sharing, challenges with organisational culture, employee knowledge gaps, and a lack of focus on transparency and accountability, indicate a concern for improvement, as (H1) suggests that employee engagement and participation increase as transformational leadership practices are strengthened.

5.3.5 Relationship between motivation, productivity, and corporate governance

The quantitative analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship between employee motivation, productivity, and attaining corporate governance objectives ($\chi^2 (4, N = 150) = 42.67, p < 0.001$), suggesting that improving corporate governance practices, such as enhancing transparency, accountability, and employee engagement, could positively impact organisational productivity. Further, a Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.71, p$ -value < 0.01),

suggesting that improving corporate governance practices could significantly impact organisational productivity. The enhanced organisational climates are associated with superior governance outcomes. The hypothesis (H2) is accepted due to increased employee transparency and accountability.

5.3.6 Impact of transformational leadership on corporate governance

A multiple regression analysis was performed, and the results showed a strong positive correlation (p -value < 0.01, R -squared = 0.64). This indicates that transformational leadership qualities significantly predict effective corporate governance practices. The study revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$) between the presence of transformational leadership characteristics and adherence to practical corporate governance principles, indicating that adopting transformational leadership styles can significantly improve corporate governance and organisational performance [10], [15], [29]. The analysis established a strong correlation between improved corporate governance outcomes and the organisation's overall performance. This result confirmed hypotheses H3 and H4, which posited that effective governance directly influences operational outcomes.

Thus, the quantitative findings corroborate and expand on the qualitative insights, highlighting the critical role of information sharing, organisational culture, employee knowledge, transparency, and transformational leadership in driving corporate governance and organisational productivity within the Zimbabwe Transport Sector.

5.4 Blended Insights

This study underscores the transformative potential of leadership ethos and governance rigour in rescuing Zimbabwe's Transport Sector from systemic decline. Demographic insights reveal a workforce skewed toward younger, long-tenured employees (72% male), fostering a culture resistant to innovation yet steeped in institutional memory, a duality that amplifies stagnation when paired with ineffective governance. The sector's entrenched top-down hierarchies have bred low morale, productivity collapse, and chronic financial instability, exacerbated by opaque decision-making and accountability gaps. Transformational leadership, with its pillars of idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, emerges as a catalyst for reform. Prioritising transparency, employee empowerment, and ethical role-modelling can help leaders dismantle bureaucratic inertia and realign governance with frontline realities. Empirical findings link such practices to enhanced motivation, operational efficiency, and financial resilience, arguing that governance frameworks must evolve beyond compliance to foster ownership at all levels. These insights extend beyond Zimbabwe, offering a blueprint for state-owned transport enterprises across the Global South that are grappling with similar inefficiencies. The sector can transition from a fiscal liability to an engine of national development by embedding transformational leadership into governance DNA, demonstrating that ethical leadership and employee-centric cultures are not aspirational ideals but operational imperatives.

5.5 Communication and Strategic Alignment

The study reveals systemic communication breakdowns and strategic misalignment within Zimbabwe's Transport Sector, where opaque decision-making and fragmented information flow exacerbate employee disengagement. Frontline staff, particularly in operational roles, report exclusion from critical governance dialogues, with strategic objectives and corporate governance

practices communicated inconsistently across hierarchies. This finding aligns with observations by Engbers and Khapova [40], who noted that opacity nurtures a culture of detachment if employees are kept in the dark about long-term priorities, leading to role ambiguity and diminished accountability [1]. Such disconnects mirror Avolio and Bass's [23] findings on hierarchical silos in public sectors, where top-down governance stifles innovation and erodes trust. The resulting inefficiencies delay projects, duplicate efforts, and lead to poor risk management. Fragmented communication directly undermines organisational cohesion, perpetuating a cycle of underperformance.

While transformational leadership traits such as idealised influence and inspirational motivation correlate with improved governance outcomes, their effectiveness is constrained by entrenched corruption and institutional inertia. Leaders embodying these traits fostered trust and accountability, with employees reporting 28% higher engagement in transparent units. While this finding confirms earlier findings by several scholars [22], [28], [29], participants cautioned that leadership alone cannot dismantle systemic graft, which thrives in environments with lax oversight and political patronage, as Transparency International [27] opined. As Mthombeni [9] argues, transformational leadership must be coupled with structural reforms, including digitised procurement systems, independent audits, and participatory governance frameworks [10]. These measures are critical to converting ethical leadership into institutionalised accountability, ensuring that governance gains are sustainable rather than person-dependent. The findings thus advocate a dual approach, ethical leadership to inspire cultural change and systemic safeguards to entrench transparency as the pathway to revitalising Zimbabwe's Transport Sector.

5.6 Leadership and Governance

The study found that transformational leadership has the potential to significantly improve corporate governance in state enterprises by fostering a culture of ethical behaviour, accountability, and strategic focus [13], [8]. Leaders who demonstrated high levels of Idealised Influence and Intellectual Stimulation were particularly effective in addressing governance challenges and driving organisational change. Participants reported that leaders who embodied transformational leadership traits were more successful in promoting ethical behaviour and reducing organisational corruption. These leaders fostered a culture of integrity and accountability by setting a solid ethical example and encouraging employees to think critically about their actions [7], [39]. This, in turn, helped to mitigate some of the adverse effects of poor governance, such as inefficiency and financial mismanagement.

The findings also highlighted the importance of individualised consideration in improving employee engagement and satisfaction. Leaders who took the time to understand and address their employees' individual needs and concerns were more likely to build trust and loyalty within the organisation. This personalised approach to leadership was critical in the Zimbabwean Transport Sector, where employees often felt undervalued and disconnected from the organisation's mission [40], [23]. However, the study also revealed that transformational leadership alone cannot address all the governance challenges facing SOEs. While leadership is a critical component of effective governance, it must be supported by solid institutional frameworks and robust oversight mechanisms. Without these structural supports, even the most influential leaders may struggle to achieve meaningful organisational change [26], [4].

6. Discussion of Findings

The findings affirm that transformational leadership is a linchpin for revitalising corporate governance in Zimbabwe's SOEs. Through modelling ethical behaviour (idealised influence),

articulating a shared vision (inspirational motivation), and fostering participatory decision-making (intellectual stimulation), transformational leaders can dismantle silos, curb corruption, and align operations with national development goals. This finding aligns with observations from earlier studies [10], [8]. For instance, transparent procurement audits and inclusive strategic forums, as observed in reformed SOEs such as South Africa's Transnet, demonstrate how leadership ethos can rebuild trust and operational coherence, as opined by Mthombeni [9]. However, such leadership must transcend individual charisma. It requires institutionalising accountability through frameworks like Zimbabwe's Public Entity Corporate Governance Act, which mandates ethical audits and stakeholder reporting [2].

However, this study noted that transformational leadership alone cannot surmount systemic decay without structural reforms. Chronic issues like political interference and patronage networks demand robust safeguards: digitised tender platforms to mitigate graft, independent oversight boards insulated from partisan influence, and performance-linked incentives for executives. Again, this observation aligns with similar findings by Mamokhere [3] and Transparency International [27]. Ethiopia's recent SOEs reforms, which paired leadership training with blockchain-based procurement systems, reduced mismanagement by 40% within two years. Zimbabwe could adopt and adapt a similar model, as recommended in a World Bank report [4]. These structural shifts create ecosystems where ethical leadership thrives, ensuring governance gains are sustainable rather than ephemeral.

The study also noted the paradox of employee engagement in the corruption-prone Zimbabwean context. Transformational leadership boosts morale and productivity, as evidenced by 32% higher retention rates in units with participatory governance [15]. However, the study found that its impact is blunted in environments where whistle-blowers face retaliation, exacerbated by resource constraints that stifle innovation. For example, frontline staff at Zimbabwe's National Railways expressed a willingness to adopt predictive maintenance technologies but cited budget freezes and opaque procurement as barriers [17]. Addressing these gaps necessitates hybrid governance, merging transformational practices with crisis communication strategies to manage stakeholder expectations during reforms [5].

Finally, we argue that the path to SOEs revitalisation lies in synergising leadership and systems. Transformational leaders must champion transparency, leverage real-time performance dashboards, and advocate for policy reforms that depoliticise appointments and decentralise decision-making, as Mhlakaza and de Villiers [13] elaborated. Lessons from Malaysia's Khazanah Nasional, which transformed from debt-laden SOEs into a global investor through leadership development pipelines and agile governance, highlight the scalability of such approaches [24]. This means recognising that ethical leadership and structural integrity are mutually reinforcing for Zimbabwe. It is a dual engine that propels SOEs from liabilities to the cornerstones of economic resilience.

7. Conclusion

Transformational leadership emerges as a pivotal force in revitalising corporate governance within State-Owned Enterprises, offering a roadmap to combat inefficiency, financial instability, and systemic corruption. Prioritising ethical conduct, employee empowerment, and strategic clarity—exemplified by traits like idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration—can enable transformational leaders to foster cultures of transparency and accountability [21]. For instance, embedding participatory decision-making processes and open communication channels aligns frontline insights with organisational goals, bridging the gap between policy and practice [20]. The Fourth Industrial Revolution amplifies this potential. Leaders leveraging digital tools like blockchain for procurement oversight or AI-driven analytics for risk management can

modernise governance while rebuilding stakeholder trust [11]. However, leadership alone cannot surmount institutional decay. Robust frameworks are essential. Without depoliticised oversight bodies, merit-based appointments, and anti-corruption safeguards, even visionary leaders risk being undermined by entrenched patronage networks [6].

To institutionalise these gains, SOEs must adopt hybrid strategies that merge leadership excellence with structural reforms. Key recommendations include strengthening legal frameworks to insulate governance from political interference, enhancing transparency through real-time performance dashboards, and building oversight capacity via independent audits [32]. Cultivating an ethical culture demands targeted leadership programs that reward integrity and penalise malfeasance, as seen in Malaysia's Khazanah Nasional, which transformed into a global investor through rigorous governance pipelines [31]. Future studies should explore the scalability of such models across diverse SOEs contexts, particularly in resource-constrained economies. At the same time, longitudinal research could quantify the long-term impacts of transformational leadership on metrics like service delivery and fiscal resilience [28]. Ultimately, the interaction of ethical leadership, technological innovation, and institutional accountability offers a blueprint for SOEs to evolve from bureaucratic burdens into engines of sustainable development.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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