

# Impact of Strategic Leadership Practices on Local Authorities' Performance in Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigated the challenges facing local authorities in Zambia, where despite government efforts to improve performance through various strategies including decentralization and the Local Government Equalization Fund, many authorities continue to struggle with service delivery, financial management, and operational efficiency as documented in multiple Auditor General reports (2015-2020). Against this backdrop, the study examined the influence of strategic leadership practices on the performance of local authorities in Zambia, employing a correlational research design with a sample of 736 employees, achieving a response rate of 80.6% (593 responses). Grounded in dynamic capability theory, which emphasizes organizations' ability to adapt and reconfigure resources in changing environments, the research utilized regression analysis and found that strategic leadership practices demonstrated the positive relationship with local authority performance ( $\beta = 0.509$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 63.7% of the variance in performance alongside other capabilities. The findings revealed strong strategic planning practices (mean = 4.25) but identified significant gaps in areas such as emotional intelligence (mean = 3.41) and service delivery (mean = 2.97). The study concluded that strategic leadership is crucial for driving local authority performance and recommended investment in leadership development programmes focusing on visionary leadership, stakeholder engagement, and adaptability to improve public sector outcomes in Zambian local authorities. These findings contribute to the understanding of how dynamic capabilities, particularly strategic leadership, can enhance organizational performance in the public sector context.

## INTRODUCTION

The Local Government Act of 2019, Chapter 281 of the Laws of Zambia, mandates the local authorities to provide basic, social and economic services to the people within their jurisdiction as way of improving the wellbeing of the Zambian citizens; a primary goal of National Development. Chapter 55; Section 16 (2) of the Local Government Act of 2019 provides for the functions of Local Authority which include; general administration of councils, Advertisements, provide Agricultural support services, manage and maintain streets, provide community development services, provide manage and maintain public amenities, provide public health services, maintain public order, conduct various registration, manage a sanitation and drainages and additional devolved functions of a Local Authority.

However, most of the Local Authorities in Zambia have not managed to perform these functions effectively as evidenced by the Audit Reports on accounts of Local Authorities (2015; 2016; 2017), which cited the cases of 32 local authorities. Poor waste management, financial irregularities, failure to maintain properties, and failure to adhere to the provisions of the Environmental Management Act among others were the most prominent issues raised by the Auditor General for the above stated periods. Similarly, the audit reports (2018; 2019) revealed similar issues and this growing trend depicts continued poor performance among the Local Authorities in Zambia.

The Government of the Republic of Zambia has made several efforts to improve the performance of the Local Authorities through implementation of various strategies such as implementation of the decentralized policy, revision of the Town Planning Act to Urban and Rural Development Act as well as introduction of Local Government Equalization Fund (a grant to supplement locally generated resources). However, poor

performance has continued to be recorded by most of the local authorities in Zambia as reported by the Auditor General (2020). This shows that the strategies that have been employed so far to improve the performance of the Local Authorities are not exhaustive in that they seem to have ignored other important factors that can affect performance such as dynamic capabilities.

Zambia is currently experiencing an economic recession, and all sectors of the economy are expected to employ managerial strategies centred towards prudent utilization of scarce resources to improve performance. Therefore, it was important to examine the influence of dynamic capabilities such as strategic leadership practices on the performance of the local authorities in Zambia for the purpose of developing and a framework that explicates how the Local Authorities in Zambia can utilize such to improve performance.

### **Specific Objectives**

To examine the influence of the Strategic Leadership Practices on the performance of Local Authorities in Zambia

### **Hypothesis of the study**

There is no statistically significant influence of Strategic Leadership Practices on the performance of the employees of Local Authorities in Zambia

### **Theoretical Framework**

The dynamic capability perspective extends the resource-based view argument by addressing how valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and imperfectly substitutable resources can be created and how the current stock of valuable resources can be refreshed in changing environments (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). This theory emerged as both an extension to and a reaction against the inability of the resource-based view (RBV) to interpret the development and redevelopment of resources and capabilities to address rapidly changing environments (Helfat et al., 2009).

According to this theory, organizations are not only expected to adapt to the environment but also expected to shape their management/leadership strategies to allow systemic change to take place. In other words, this implies that the dynamic capability perspective emphasizes on two basic processes which are the need for an organization to sense the shifting character of the environment and the ability of managers to strategically manage appropriately the resources (tangible, intangible, human & capabilities) to adapt, integrate and re-configure them to attain organizational fitness in a changing environment.

Organizations have two different types of capabilities; the ordinary capabilities that refers to a firm's ability to use and coordinate tangible and intangible resources with the aim to reach a desired goal (Teece, 2014) and the dynamic capabilities that refer to an organization's ability to build upon existing capabilities and at the same time to develop new capabilities (ibid). however, in a rapid changing environment such as the one the local authorities in Zambia operate, dynamic capabilities are required to enable them sense and seize new opportunities. Dynamic capabilities create opportunities for new value-creating strategies through modifying ordinary capabilities.

The application of this perspective to the case of the local authorities in Zambia implies that achieving optimum performance requires integration, building, and reconfiguration of internal and external resources as well as processes for the purpose of achieving evolutionary fitness.

Since the Resource-Based View theory supports the identification of core dynamic Capabilities in an organization and align them with external environmental demands which calls for either adaptation or reconfiguration of resources and processes for the purpose of achieving evolutionary fitness and better performance; the dynamic capabilities theory on the other hand emphasizes the need for organizations to sense, seize and integrate new opportunities to sustain performance by creating of new products and services, innovating processes to match the changing needs of the environment. Therefore, this study examined whether

the managers in the local authorities acquires new skills and resources for the purpose of integrating them with already existing resources to produce improved products and services.

### **Empirical Literature of Strategic Leadership Methodologies and Municipal Performance**

Among the studies reviewed on strategic leadership practices and the performance of the local authorities include Munyoro et al., (2021) who examined the lack of entrepreneurial leadership in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland East province's rural local authorities and the variables contributing to this deficiency. Using a phenomenological research philosophy, a case study approach, and a qualitative research strategy, the study concluded that entrepreneurial leadership was not present in these remote local authorities and that the leadership lacked the necessary skills and expertise. In addition, the study discovered that rural local governments in the region lacked originality and innovation, as well as community involvement in council matters. In addition, the study indicated that councillors in these rural local governments were illiterate, making it difficult for them to comprehend the procedures and systems of local governance. The lack of entrepreneurial leadership in rural local authorities in the province of Mashonaland East is impeding their development and badly affecting the lives of its citizens, according to the findings of this study.

Kim (2018) also conducted a study to examine the relationship between collaborative leadership and financial sustainability in South Korean municipal administrations. The questionnaires were used to gauge collaborative leadership among a sample of 280 local revenue officials from 28 randomly chosen local governments. The study discovered a significant positive correlation between collaborative leadership and the perception of financial sustainability. The study also revealed that socio-demographic and economic characteristics, such as population size, population density, and population over 65 years old, play a role in a country's financial viability. Inconsistent results were discovered, however, in terms of objective financial sustainability. It was discovered that collaborative leadership was significantly and negatively related to objective financial sustainability (net debt) but had no meaningful association with objective financial sustainability (adjusted income statement). The study implies that collaborative leadership is required to ensure the perceived financial sustainability of local government, but additional research is required to determine its effect on objective financial sustainability.

Similar to the above cited study, the objective of the empirical study by Muhammad Shafiu et al., (2019) was to examine the correlation between effective leadership and employee performance in the Zaria local government of Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study found that effective leadership correlates positively with employee performance and corporate production. In addition, it was discovered that poor supervision and indiscipline/authoritarian leadership styles have a substantial detrimental effect on staff performance. These results are consistent with other research demonstrating the negative impact of poor supervision and autocratic leadership on staff performance and productivity. Based on these findings, the study suggests that the business should encourage employee involvement, self-discipline, and flexibility among leaders, while avoiding authoritarian traits. The leaders should also use contemporary supervision practices to enhance the effectiveness of their organizations.

Using the City of Tshwane as a case study, Manganye (2019) explores the influence of consistency on effective leadership and organizational performance in metropolitan governments. The purpose of the study is to build a framework for achieving organizational performance and strategic goals in local government by utilizing effective leadership consistency. Combining both quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques, a sequential exploratory mixed-methods strategy was adopted. Consistency of leadership in an organization connects positively with effective leadership, consistency of effective leadership correlates with the achievement of strategic objectives, and consistency of effective leadership correlates with performance. In addition, a framework describing how successful leadership consistency should be utilized to influence organizational performance was developed. The study concludes that constancy of good leadership at the top and in senior management is vital for the achievement of municipal success. The study used regression analysis to examine the effect of consistency on effective leadership among the top and senior management of the City of Tshwane Municipality. The results indicated that level of management has a significant relationship with effective leadership, with 43% of the dependent variable explained by variables such as the ability to

provide a clear picture and direction of the organization and individuals occupying leadership positions having good etiquette. Both variables have p-values that are less than 0.05, indicating that they are statistically significant. However, the results also indicated that the status of the position held had no significant correlation with leadership effectiveness.

In addition, Mickson and Anlesinya (2019) investigated the effect of transformational and transactional leadership styles on the job satisfaction of Ghanaian local government employees. A questionnaire was utilized to collect data from 322 personnel of the Ghanaian Local Government Service in the Greater Accra Region. The results indicated that both transformational and transactional leadership styles have favourable benefits on employee job satisfaction. However, the study indicated that transactional leadership behaviour is a stronger predictor of work satisfaction in Ghana's Local Government Service than transformational leadership style. In addition, the results revealed that the impact of both leadership behaviours on job satisfaction may differ depending on the age, level of education, and gender of the workers. In addition, the study discovered that transformational leadership had a substantial positive influence on job satisfaction with a beta coefficient of 0.271, and transactional leadership had a strong positive effect on job satisfaction with a beta coefficient of 0.307. The researchers suggest that public sector executives in the Ghana Local Government Service learn adequate leadership competencies for managing the variety of their employees in order to increase their job satisfaction.

Consequently, these studies by Munyoro et al., (2021); Kim (2018) and Muhammad Shafiu et al., (2019) all examined different aspects of leadership in local government authorities in Zimbabwe, South Korea and Nigeria respectively. Munyoro et al., (2021) found that entrepreneurial leadership was lacking in rural local authorities in the Mashonaland East province of Zimbabwe, and that the leadership lacked the necessary skills and expertise. Kim (2018) found that there was a significant positive correlation between collaborative leadership and the perception of financial sustainability in South Korean municipal administrations, but inconsistent results were found in terms of objective financial sustainability. Muhammad Shafiu et al., (2019) found that effective leadership had a positive correlation with employee performance and corporate production in the Zaria local government of Kaduna State, Nigeria and that poor supervision and indiscipline/authoritarian leadership styles had a negative effect on staff performance. The study by Manganye (2019) examined the influence of consistency on effective leadership and organizational performance in metropolitan government in South Africa using City of Tshwane as a case study. The study found that consistency in leadership practices can lead to better organizational performance and that effective leadership is crucial to the success of organizations.

The literature reviewed on all the objectives of the study clearly indicates that their resource mobilisation strategies, strategic leadership practices and operational process innovations have influence on the performance of local authorities in other countries. However, there is lack of empirical research specifically examining their influence on the performance of local authorities in Zambia. Most of the studies conducted in Zambia have focused on the influence of other aspects of local government management such as the use of technology and specific management practices, resource generation on the development of local government and the influence of budgeting and budgetary management on the financial performance of local governments. There is no specific study that has examined the influence of resource mobilisation strategies, strategic leadership practices and operational process innovations.

Additionally, the literature does not seem to have a clear consensus on the specific dynamic capabilities that have the greatest impact on performance. Therefore, this research seeks to fill these gaps by examining the relationship between the three identified dynamic capabilities and the performance of local authorities in Zambia for the purpose of developing a structure model on how the local authorities can utilize dynamic capabilities to improve their performance.

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

A research design is an outline or a plan on how the researcher intends to answer the research questions. It constitutes the outline of collection, measurement and analysis of data (Akhtar et al., 2016) which is structured

in a way that recognizes the type of information required to provide answers to the research question in a more realistic manner.

Therefore, among other research designs available for various research aims, in this study, Correlational research design was used for quantitative data due to its applicability to studies that seek to investigate the relationship between two or more variables and further define the association between them; as well as providing the strength of the association. Correlation research is a type of non-experimental research that facilitates for prediction and explanation of the relationship among variables (Seeram 2019).

The population of interest is the study’s target population that it intended to study or treat (Majid, 2018). In this study, the population of interest included all the Principal Officers and the Top Managers of the 116 Local Authorities who are responsible for Strategic management of the institutions, the Provincial Local government Officer who supervise the Local Authorities who are well conversant with the operations of the local authorities in Zambia.

A sample is a subset of the population, selected so as to be representative of the larger population (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). Quantitative data was therefore collected from the 736 Employees of the Local Authorities in Zambia as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Sample Size for Quantitative Data

SAMPLE SIZE					
QUANTITATIVE DATA					
S/N	Type of Council	No. LAs	No. of Principal Officers	No. of Directors	Total Sample Size
1	City Councils	5	5	35	40
2	Municipal Councils	15	15	105	120
3	Town Councils	96	96	480	576
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>736</b>

The researcher used a five-point likert scale structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data from the employees of the local authorities. A structured questionnaire is a data collection tool that has closed-ended questions with pre-selected answers to the questions. This type of data collection tool is recommended because it enables the researcher to collect accurate information and acquire high response rate as the respondents do not have to labour too much to think of what and how to respond to the research questions. Additionally, it becomes much easier for the researcher to code well-structured data in preparations for analysis unlike a situation where the researcher begins to group like terms together before coding.

Furthermore, for qualitative data, the researcher used a web based interview guide, mobile handset for phone interviews, note books for recording observations from participants as recommended by Stewart, (Stewart et al., 2007).

## FINDINGS

### Response Rate

The response rate is a crucial indicator of the study's representativeness and the reliability of the data collected. Table 2 presents the response rate achieved in this study.

Table 2 : Response Rate

Sample Size	Responses Received	Response Rate
736	593	80.6%

The study targeted a sample of 736 respondents from local authorities across Zambia. Out of these, 593 questionnaires were returned and properly filled, representing a response rate of 80.6%. This high response rate significantly enhances the validity and reliability of the study findings.

Recent literature suggests that response rates in organizational research have been declining over the past decade, with average rates ranging from 30% to 50% (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2023). In this context, the achieved response rate of 80.6% is exceptionally high and indicative of strong engagement from local authority personnel. This high rate was achieved through several strategies, including the use of an electronic questionnaire platform, personalized email invitations, and multiple follow-up reminders. Additionally, the relevance of the research topic to the respondents' daily work likely contributed to their willingness to participate (Mellahi & Harris, 2022).

The high response rate has significant implications for the study's validity. It substantially reduces the risk of non-response bias, which occurs when the opinions or characteristics of non-respondents differ systematically from those who responded (Anseel et al., 2021). Furthermore, it enhances the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of local authority employees in Zambia. As noted by Chen et al. (2024), response rates exceeding 70% in organizational research provide a robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions about the population under study.

### Strategic Leadership Practices in Local Authorities

This section presents a detailed analysis of the strategic leadership practices in local authorities. Strategic leadership is crucial for setting the direction, making key decisions, and fostering an environment conducive to organizational success. The results are based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represents Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 represents Disagree (D), 3 represents Neutral (N), 4 represents Agree (A), and 5 represents Strongly Agree (SA). For interpreting the mean scores, the following criteria are used: 4.51-5.00 (Strongly Agree), 3.51-4.50 (Agree), 2.51-3.50 (Neutral), 1.51-2.50 (Disagree), and 1.00-1.50 (Strongly Disagree). Standard deviation (SD) values indicate the spread of responses, with lower values suggesting greater consensus among respondents.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Strategic Leadership Practices

Question	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA(%)	M	SD
Our Local Authority has a clearly documented vision for the future (Strategic Plan/Integrated Development Plan)	13 (2.2)	14 (2.4)	38 (6.4)	274 (46.2)	254 (42.8)	4.25	0.850
Strategic leaders in our Local Authority share institutional Strategic Plan/Integrated Development Plan to all departments	17 (2.9)	33 (5.6)	54 (9.1)	318 (53.6)	171 (28.8)	4.00	0.928
Strategic leaders in our Local Authority demonstrate a long-term focus on organizational success through successful implementation of institutional mandates	29 (4.9)	68 (11.5)	95 (16.0)	309 (52.1)	92 (15.5)	3.62	1.035
Strategic leaders in our Local Authority possess strong analytical thinking skills to	20 (3.4)	60 (10.1)	120 (20.2)	289 (48.7)	104 (17.5)	3.67	0.989

analyse complex issues							
The strategic leaders in our Local Authority make timely and decisive decisions	26 (4.4)	75 (12.6)	119 (20.1)	284 (47.9)	89 (15.0)	3.56	1.031
Collaboration and teamwork are encouraged and fostered by the strategic leaders in our Local Authority.	34 (5.7)	56 (9.4)	54 (9.1)	316 (53.3)	133 (22.4)	3.77	1.077
Our Local Authority's strategic leaders are open to new ideas and perspectives	38 (6.4)	65 (11.0)	76 (12.8)	298 (50.3)	116 (19.6)	3.66	1.106
The strategic leaders in our Local Authority adapt effectively to changing circumstances and embrace innovation.	27 (4.6)	70 (11.8)	99 (16.7)	306 (51.6)	91 (15.3)	3.61	1.027
Effective communication skills of our Local Authority's strategic leaders enable the dissemination of information and ideas	29 (4.9)	55 (9.3)	87 (14.7)	342 (57.7)	80 (13.5)	3.66	0.988
The strategic leaders in our Local Authority demonstrate a high level of emotional intelligence (the ability to manage both your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you) in their interactions	49 (8.3)	70 (11.8)	134 (22.6)	267 (45.0)	73 (12.3)	3.41	1.106

### Clear Documentation of Vision for the Future

The presence of a clearly documented vision for the future received the highest mean score of 4.25 (SD = 0.850), falling within the "Agree" category. An overwhelming 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Local Authority has a clearly documented vision for the future in the form of a Strategic Plan or Integrated Development Plan. This result indicates a strong commitment to strategic planning among Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns well with the emphasis on strategic planning in local governance highlighted by Manganye (2019) in the context of South African metropolitan governments. The high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities have recognized the importance of having a clear, documented vision to guide their long-term development. This result also resonates with the observations of Pandisha et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of adopted strategic management practices in the governance of local government authorities in Tanzania.

The relatively low standard deviation indicates a consistent approach to vision documentation across different local authorities. This uniformity in strategic planning contrasts with the variability observed in other aspects of local governance, suggesting that Zambian local authorities have prioritized the development of strategic plans. The result underscores the potential of well-documented visions in providing direction and coherence to local authority operations, as highlighted by Kim (2018) in the context of collaborative leadership and financial sustainability in South Korean municipal administrations.

### Sharing of Strategic Plan Across Departments

The sharing of the institutional Strategic Plan or Integrated Development Plan across all departments received a high mean score of 4.00 (SD = 0.928), falling within the "Agree" category. 82.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority share the strategic plan with all departments. This result indicates a strong culture of information sharing and alignment across departments in Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns with the importance of strategic alignment emphasized by Munyoro et al. (2021) in their study of entrepreneurial leadership in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. The high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities have recognized the value of ensuring all departments are aware of and aligned with the overarching strategic direction. This result also echoes the observations of Muhammad Shafiu et al. (2019), who highlighted the positive correlation between effective leadership and employee performance in Nigerian local governments.

The relatively low standard deviation indicates consistency in the practice of sharing strategic plans across different local authorities. This uniformity in information dissemination is a positive indicator of strategic leadership practices in Zambian local authorities. The result underscores the potential of shared strategic vision in fostering organizational coherence and collective effort towards common goals, as emphasized by Awasthi and Walumbwa (2022) in their study of servant leadership in local governance.

### **Long-term Focus on Organizational Success**

The demonstration of a long-term focus on organizational success through successful implementation of institutional mandates received a mean score of 3.62 (SD = 1.035), falling within the lower end of the "Agree" category. 67.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority demonstrate this long-term focus. This result indicates a moderate to strong commitment to long-term organizational success among Zambian local authorities.

This finding partially aligns with the emphasis on long-term strategic thinking highlighted by Kim (2018) in the context of collaborative leadership and financial sustainability in South Korean municipal administrations. The moderate to high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities are generally oriented towards long-term success, but there may be room for improvement. This result also resonates with the observations of Manganye (2019), who emphasized the importance of consistency in effective leadership for achieving organizational performance in South African metropolitan governments.

The relatively high standard deviation indicates some variability in the long-term focus across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Munyoro et al. (2021), who observed varying levels of entrepreneurial leadership in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. The result underscores the need for continued emphasis on long-term strategic thinking and consistent implementation of institutional mandates in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Pandisha et al. (2023) in their study of strategic management practices in Tanzanian local government authorities.

### **Strong Analytical Thinking Skills**

The possession of strong analytical thinking skills to analyze complex issues received a mean score of 3.67 (SD = 0.989), falling within the "Agree" category. 66.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority possess strong analytical thinking skills. This result indicates a relatively high level of analytical capability among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns with the importance of analytical skills in strategic leadership emphasized by Awasthi and Walumbwa (2022) in their study of servant leadership in local governance. The moderately high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities recognize the value of analytical thinking in addressing complex issues. This result also resonates with the observations of Manganye (2019), who highlighted the role of effective leadership in organizational performance in South African metropolitan governments.

The standard deviation indicates some variability in the perception of analytical skills across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Munyoro et al. (2021), who observed varying levels of leadership capabilities in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. The result underscores the importance of continuing to develop and enhance analytical thinking skills among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Pandisha et al. (2023) in their study of strategic management practices in Tanzanian local government authorities.



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## Timely and Decisive Decision-Making

The ability of strategic leaders to make timely and decisive decisions received a mean score of 3.56 (SD = 1.031), falling within the lower end of the "Agree" category. 62.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority make timely and decisive decisions. This result indicates a moderate level of decisiveness among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities.

This finding partially aligns with the emphasis on decisive leadership highlighted by Muhammad Shafiu et al. (2019) in their study of effective leadership in Nigerian local governments. The moderate mean score suggests that while there is a general perception of timely decision-making, there is room for improvement. This result also echoes the observations of Kim (2018), who emphasized the importance of decisive leadership in ensuring financial sustainability in South Korean municipal administrations.

The relatively high standard deviation indicates variability in the perception of decisiveness across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Mickson and Anlesinya (2019), who observed varying impacts of leadership styles on job satisfaction in Ghanaian local governments. The result underscores the need for continued emphasis on developing decisiveness and timeliness in decision-making among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Awasthi and Walumbwa (2022) in their study of servant leadership in local governance.

## Encouragement of Collaboration and Teamwork

The encouragement and fostering of collaboration and teamwork received a mean score of 3.77 (SD = 1.077), falling within the "Agree" category. 75.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that collaboration and teamwork are encouraged by strategic leaders in their Local Authority. This result indicates a strong emphasis on collaborative practices in Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns well with the importance of collaboration emphasized by Kim (2018) in the context of collaborative leadership and financial sustainability in South Korean municipal administrations. The relatively high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities recognize the value of teamwork and collaboration in achieving organizational goals. This result also resonates with the observations of Manganye (2019), who highlighted the role of effective leadership in fostering a collaborative environment in South African metropolitan governments.

The standard deviation indicates some variability in the perception of collaborative practices across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Munyoro et al. (2021), who observed varying levels of community involvement in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. The result underscores the importance of continuing to promote and enhance collaborative practices in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Awasthi and Walumbwa (2022) in their study of servant leadership in local governance.

## Openness to New Ideas and Perspectives

The openness of strategic leaders to new ideas and perspectives received a mean score of 3.66 (SD = 1.106), falling within the "Agree" category. 69.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority are open to new ideas and perspectives. This result indicates a relatively high level of openness among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns with the importance of openness in leadership emphasized by Santoso (2023) in the study of public service innovation capacity in Indonesian regional governments. The moderately high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities value receptiveness to new ideas, which is crucial for innovation and adaptability. This result also echoes the observations of Mickson and Anlesinya (2019), who highlighted the importance of transformational leadership qualities in Ghanaian local governments.

The relatively high standard deviation indicates variability in the perception of openness across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Munyoro et al. (2021), who observed varying levels of innovation

and creativity in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. The result underscores the need for continued emphasis on fostering an open and innovative culture among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Pandisha et al. (2023) in their study of strategic management practices in Tanzanian local government authorities.

### **Adaptability to Changing Circumstances and Embracing Innovation**

The ability of strategic leaders to adapt effectively to changing circumstances and embrace innovation received a mean score of 3.61 (SD = 1.027), falling within the lower end of the "Agree" category. 66.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority demonstrate this adaptability. This result indicates a moderate to high level of adaptability and innovation orientation among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns with the emphasis on adaptability and innovation highlighted by Santoso (2023) in the context of public service innovation capacity in Indonesian regional governments. The moderate to high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities recognize the importance of flexibility and innovation in responding to changing environments. This result also resonates with the observations of Kim (2018), who emphasized the role of adaptive leadership in ensuring financial sustainability in South Korean municipal administrations.

The standard deviation indicates some variability in the perception of adaptability across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Munyoro et al. (2021), who observed varying levels of entrepreneurial leadership in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. The result underscores the importance of continuing to develop adaptive capabilities and fostering innovation among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Awasthi and Walumbwa (2022) in their study of servant leadership in local governance.

### **Effective Communication Skills**

The effectiveness of communication skills among strategic leaders received a mean score of 3.66 (SD = 0.988), falling within the "Agree" category. 71.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority possess effective communication skills that enable the dissemination of information and ideas. This result indicates a relatively high level of communication effectiveness among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns with the importance of communication in leadership emphasized by Muhammad Shafiu et al. (2019) in their study of effective leadership in Nigerian local governments. The moderately high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities recognize the value of clear and effective communication in strategic leadership. This result also echoes the observations of Manganye (2019), who highlighted the role of effective communication in achieving organizational performance in South African metropolitan governments.

The standard deviation indicates some variability in the perception of communication effectiveness across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Mickson and Anlesinya (2019), who observed varying impacts of leadership communication styles on job satisfaction in Ghanaian local governments. The result underscores the importance of continuing to enhance communication skills among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Awasthi and Walumbwa (2022) in their study of servant leadership in local governance.

### **Demonstration of Emotional Intelligence**

The demonstration of a high level of emotional intelligence by strategic leaders received a mean score of 3.41 (SD = 1.106), falling within the higher end of the "Neutral" category. 57.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that strategic leaders in their Local Authority demonstrate a high level of emotional intelligence in their interactions. This result indicates a moderate level of perceived emotional intelligence among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities.

This finding partially aligns with the growing recognition of emotional intelligence in leadership, as highlighted by Meričková and Muthová (2021) in their study of innovative concepts in providing local public services. The moderate mean score suggests that while there is some recognition of emotional intelligence in Zambian local authorities, there is significant room for improvement. This result also resonates with the observations of Mickson and Anlesinya (2019), who emphasized the importance of leadership behaviours that consider emotional aspects in Ghanaian local governments.

The relatively high standard deviation indicates significant variability in the perception of emotional intelligence across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Munyoro et al. (2021), who observed varying levels of leadership skills in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. The result underscores the need for increased focus on developing emotional intelligence among strategic leaders in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Awasthi and Walumbwa (2022) in their study of servant leadership in local governance.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of strategic leadership practices in Zambian local authorities reveals a generally positive picture with some areas for improvement. Strengths are evident in the clear documentation of vision (M = 4.25), sharing of strategic plans (M = 4.00), and encouragement of collaboration and teamwork (M = 3.77). However, there is room for enhancement in areas such as adaptability to changing circumstances (M = 3.61) and demonstration of emotional intelligence (M = 3.41).

These findings align with various studies on leadership in local governance across Africa, such as those by Manganye (2019), Munyoro et al. (2021), and Muhammad Shafiu et al. (2019). The results suggest that Zambian local authorities have established a solid foundation in strategic planning and information sharing but could benefit from further development in areas related to adaptability, innovation, and emotional intelligence.

The variability in scores across different aspects of strategic leadership, as indicated by the standard deviations, suggests inconsistent practices across local authorities. This highlights the need for a more standardized approach to leadership development and the sharing of best practices among local authorities in Zambia. Future research could explore the specific factors contributing to successful strategic leadership in high-performing local authorities and how these practices can be effectively disseminated and implemented across the country.

### Performance of Local Authorities

This section presents a detailed analysis of the performance of local authorities in Zambia. Performance is a critical aspect of local governance, reflecting the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery and overall organizational success. The results are based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represents Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 represents Disagree (D), 3 represents Neutral (N), 4 represents Agree (A), and 5 represents Strongly Agree (SA). For interpreting the mean scores, the following criteria are used: 4.51-5.00 (Strongly Agree), 3.51-4.50 (Agree), 2.51-3.50 (Neutral), 1.51-2.50 (Disagree), and 1.00-1.50 (Strongly Disagree). Standard deviation (SD) values indicate the spread of responses, with lower values suggesting greater consensus among respondents.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Performance of Local Authorities

Question	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M	SD
Our Local Authority consistently develops Annual Work Plans	9 (1.5)	23 (3.9)	32 (5.4)	320 (54.0)	209 (35.2)	4.18	0.818
Our Local Authority effectively implements	19	74	107	290	103	3.65	1.010

the Annual Work Plans	(3.2)	(12.5)	(18.0)	(48.9)	(17.4)		
Our Local Authority effectively perform their functions (General Administration of Councils, Regulate the display and erecting of advertisements, Agricultural Services, maintain Public Streets, provide Community Development Services, provide and manage Public Amenities, provide public health services, maintain public order, conduct registrations)	25 (4.2)	70 (11.8)	101 (17.0)	307 (51.8)	90 (15.2)	3.62	1.015
Our Local Authority provides all the services required by the public	46 (7.8)	167 (28.2)	177 (29.8)	165 (27.8)	38 (6.4)	2.97	1.062
Our Local Authority efficiently implements Institutional Programs	18 (3.0)	57 (9.6)	94 (15.9)	333 (56.2)	91 (15.3)	3.71	0.942

### Consistent Development of Annual Work Plans

The consistent development of Annual Work Plans received the highest mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.818), falling within the "Agree" category. An overwhelming 89.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Local Authority consistently develops Annual Work Plans. This result indicates a strong commitment to systematic planning among Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns well with the emphasis on strategic planning in local governance highlighted by Manganye (2019) in the context of South African metropolitan governments. The high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities have recognized the importance of annual planning in guiding their operations and achieving their objectives. This result also resonates with the observations of Pandisha et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of adopted strategic management practices in the governance of local government authorities in Tanzania.

The relatively low standard deviation indicates a consistent approach to annual work plan development across different local authorities. This uniformity in planning practices is a positive indicator of organizational discipline in Zambian local authorities. The result underscores the potential of systematic planning in providing direction and structure to local authority operations, as highlighted by Chauke (2018) in the study of budget benchmarks and financial performance in Zimbabwean local authorities.

### Effective Implementation of Annual Work Plans

The effective implementation of Annual Work Plans received a mean score of 3.65 (SD = 1.010), falling within the "Agree" category. 66.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Local Authority effectively implements the Annual Work Plans. This result indicates a relatively good level of plan execution, although there is room for improvement.

This finding partially aligns with the observations of Asumani (2019) regarding the influence of budgeting and budgetary management on the financial performance of local governments in Zambia. The moderately high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities are generally effective in translating their plans into action. However, the gap between plan development (M = 4.18) and implementation (M = 3.65) indicates potential challenges in execution.

The standard deviation suggests some variability in implementation effectiveness across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Mishi et al. (2022), who observed varying levels of financial management efficiency across local municipalities in South Africa. The result underscores the need for continued focus on enhancing implementation capabilities in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Chauke (2018) in the context of financial performance in Zimbabwean local authorities.

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## Effective Performance of Functions

The effective performance of various functions by local authorities received a mean score of 3.62 (SD = 1.015), falling within the "Agree" category. 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Local Authority effectively performs its various functions. This result indicates a relatively good level of functional effectiveness, although there is room for improvement.

This finding aligns with the multifaceted role of local authorities highlighted by Alyunova et al. (2015) in their study of economic aspects of local authorities' functioning. The moderately high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities are generally effective in carrying out their diverse responsibilities. However, the standard deviation indicates some variability in performance across different functions or local authorities.

The result echoes the observations of Lolojih (2014) and Kapambwe (2018), who identified varying levels of performance across different functions in Zambian local authorities. The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to enhancing functional effectiveness across all areas of local authority operations, as emphasized by Koma (2010) in the context of South African local government performance.

## Provision of All Required Public Services

The provision of all services required by the public received a mean score of 2.97 (SD = 1.062), falling within the "Neutral" category. Only 34.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Local Authority provides all the services required by the public. This result indicates a significant gap between public expectations and service delivery in Zambian local authorities.

This finding aligns with the challenges in service delivery identified by Masiya et al. (2019) in their study of public service delivery in urban areas across Africa. The relatively low mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities are struggling to meet the full range of public service needs. This result also echoes the observations of OSSREA (2007), which described a collapsed local government system in Zambia in terms of service delivery.

The standard deviation indicates considerable variability in service provision across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Lolojih (2014) and Kapambwe (2018), who observed varying levels of service delivery across different local authorities in Zambia. The result underscores the urgent need for improvements in service delivery capabilities and resource allocation in Zambian local authorities, as emphasized by Masuku (2019) in the context of political influence on public service delivery in South African local governments.

## Efficient Implementation of Institutional Programmes

The efficient implementation of Institutional Programmes received a mean score of 3.71 (SD = 0.942), falling within the "Agree" category. 71.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Local Authority efficiently implements Institutional Programmes. This result indicates a relatively good level of efficiency in programme implementation, although there is still room for improvement.

This finding aligns with the importance of efficient programme implementation highlighted by Ndu et al. (2019) in their study of value for money audits in Nigerian local governments. The moderately high mean score suggests that Zambian local authorities are generally effective in implementing their institutional programmes. This result also resonates with the observations of Masanja (2018), who emphasized the importance of internal control in enhancing organizational performance in Tanzanian local government authorities.

The standard deviation indicates some variability in implementation efficiency across different local authorities. This aligns with the findings of Chauke (2018), who observed varying levels of financial performance across Zimbabwean local authorities. The result underscores the need for continued focus on enhancing program implementation efficiency in Zambian local authorities, potentially through improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as suggested by Asumani (2019) in the context of budgetary

management in Zambian local governments.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of performance in Zambian local authorities reveals a mixed picture. Strengths are evident in the consistent development of Annual Work Plans ( $M = 4.18$ ) and efficient implementation of Institutional Programs ( $M = 3.71$ ). However, significant challenges are apparent in the provision of all required public services ( $M = 2.97$ ), indicating a substantial gap between public expectations and service delivery capabilities.

These findings align with various studies on local government performance across Africa, such as those by Masiya et al. (2019), Lolojih (2014), and Kapambwe (2018). The results suggest that while Zambian local authorities have established solid planning and programme implementation practices, they struggle to meet the full spectrum of public service needs. This discrepancy could be attributed to resource constraints, capacity limitations, or inefficiencies in resource allocation and utilization.

The variability in scores across different aspects of performance, as indicated by the standard deviations, suggests inconsistent practices and capabilities across local authorities. This highlights the need for a more standardized approach to performance management and the sharing of best practices among local authorities in Zambia. Future research could explore the specific factors contributing to high performance in well-functioning local authorities and how these practices can be effectively disseminated and implemented across the country. Additionally, investigating the root causes of the service delivery gap and developing targeted interventions could significantly enhance the overall performance of Zambian local authorities.

## Linear Regression Analysis

To examine the influence of dynamic capabilities on the performance of local authorities in Zambia, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. This analysis aims to determine the extent to which Strategic Leadership Practices predict the Performance of Local Authorities. The regression analysis includes a model summary (Table 5), ANOVA results (Table 6), and regression coefficients (Table 7). These tables provide comprehensive information about the model's explanatory power, overall significance, and the individual contributions of each predictor variable.

The analysis begins with an examination of the model's overall fit and explanatory power. Table 5 presents the model summary, including R, R Square, Adjusted R Square, and the Durbin-Watson statistic.

Table 5 Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.798	0.637	0.635	0.44517	1.799

The results indicate a strong multiple correlation between the predictor variables and the dependent variable ( $R = .798$ ). The R Square value of .637 suggests that 63.7% of the variance in the Performance of Local Authorities is explained by the combination of Capabilities for Resource Mobilization, Operational Processes Innovations, and Strategic Leadership Practices. This substantial explanatory power aligns with the findings of Chauke (2018), who reported that strategic management practices significantly influenced the financial performance of local authorities in Zimbabwe. The Adjusted R Square of .635 indicates that the model would generalize well to the population, supporting the robustness of the findings.

The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.799 is close to the ideal value of 2, suggesting that the assumption of independence of errors is met. This supports the validity of the regression model and aligns with the recommendations of Field (2009) for assessing autocorrelation in regression analysis.

To assess the overall significance of the model, an ANOVA was conducted. Table 6 presents the ANOVA

results, providing information about the model's ability to predict the dependent variable significantly better than the mean model.

Table 6: ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	204.796	3	68.265	344.473	.000
Residual	116.724	589	0.198		
Total	321.521	592			

The ANOVA results show that the model as a whole is statistically significant,  $F(3, 589) = 344.473, p < .001$ . This indicates that the combination of the predictor variables significantly predicts the Performance of Local Authorities better than the mean model. The large F-value and the associated p-value less than .001 provide strong evidence against the null hypothesis that all regression coefficients are zero. This finding supports the broader literature on the importance of dynamic capabilities in organizational performance, as highlighted by Teece (2018) and corroborated by Vu and Goto (2021) in their study of dynamic capabilities in emerging economies.

To examine the individual contributions of each predictor variable, we analyze the regression coefficients. Table 7 presents the unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors, standardized coefficients (Beta), t-values, and significance levels for each predictor.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	0.598	0.099		6.062	.000
Capabilities for Resource Mobilization	0.272	0.042	0.253	6.516	.000
Operational Processes Innovations	0.085	0.039	0.076	2.180	.030
Strategic Leadership Practices	0.509	0.030	0.557	16.727	.000

Strategic Leadership Practices ( $B = 0.509, t = 16.727, p < .001$ ) demonstrates the strongest positive relationship with Performance. For each unit increase in Strategic Leadership Practices, Performance is predicted to increase by 0.509 units, holding other variables constant. This strong positive relationship corroborates the findings of Munyoro et al. (2021) on the crucial role of entrepreneurial leadership in improving service delivery in local authorities. It also aligns with Kim's (2018) research on the positive impact of collaborative leadership on financial sustainability in municipal administrations.

### Conclusion Based on Objectives

Strategic leadership practices were found to be the most significant predictor of local authority performance. Leaders who articulate a clear vision, engage stakeholders, and adapt to changes contribute significantly to organizational success. The study concludes that strategic leadership is crucial for driving the performance of local authorities, as evidenced by the strong regression coefficients and correlation with performance indicators.

### Recommendations Based on the Objective

Local authorities should invest in leadership development programs aimed at enhancing strategic capabilities.

Training should focus on visionary leadership, stakeholder engagement, and adaptability to ensure leaders are equipped to navigate complex challenges. Given the strong influence of strategic leadership on performance, prioritizing leadership development is essential for improving public sector outcomes.

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