



# Human resources governance structures and practices in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations: A qualitative inquiry

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## ABSTRACT

Human resource governance refers to the structures, roles, rules, and oversight processes through which organisations direct and control human resource management. This paper examines the current status of HR governance structures and practices in quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia. Anchored primarily in the resource-based view and complemented by institutional theory and behavioural contingency theory, the study adopted an interpretivist multiple-case study design. The target population comprised the most senior HR practitioners in quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia, and purposive sampling produced a final sample of 11 participants drawn from 11 organisations. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. The findings reveal substantial variation in governance effectiveness, with statutory design, board composition, and the presence or absence of HR expertise at the governance level shaping the quality of oversight. Although all organisations maintained formal HR policy frameworks, implementation was inconsistent and strategic alignment remained weak. The study concludes that formal structures alone are insufficient and recommends legislative and institutional reforms that strengthen HR representation at the governance level, reinforce implementation systems, and professionalise HR practice in quasi-governmental organisations.

**Keywords:** Board Composition, HR Expertise, HR Governance, Policy Implementation, Public Sector, Strategic Human Resource Management, Quasi-Governmental Organisations, Zambia

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Human resource (HR) governance in quasi-governmental organisations constitutes a critical yet persistently under-researched domain within public administration scholarship. These hybrid entities occupy the contested institutional space between government and the private sector, confronting distinctive governance challenges arising from their dual accountabilities: responding to political authorities while operating with commercial discipline, serving public interests while managing resources efficiently, and maintaining bureaucratic propriety while fostering organisational agility (Seok et al., 2008). Within this complex institutional environment, the governance of human capital assumes particular strategic significance, for it is ultimately through people that public value is created or diminished, institutional mandates are realised or undermined, and public trust is sustained or eroded.

Despite the expanding significance of quasi-governmental organisations in Africa and their pivotal roles in service delivery, economic regulation, and national development, systematic evidence about how these entities govern their human resources remains sparse. The Zambian case is particularly instructive. Successive Auditor General reports reveal persistent and recurring HR governance failures: boards operating without constituted governance structures for extended periods, critical leadership roles remaining unfilled for years, statutory obligations to employees unpaid for decades, and questionable employment practices exposing institutions to substantial legal and financial liability (Zambia Auditor General, 2023). These failures are not isolated administrative shortcomings; they represent systemic governance deficiencies that undermine institutional effectiveness and compromise the delivery of essential public services.

This study addresses two inter-related research questions. First, how do statutory frameworks and board composition shape the strategic significance of HR in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations? Second, what explains the persistent gap between formal HR policy adoption and substantive implementation in these entities? These questions are addressed through in-depth interviews with eleven senior HR leaders from diverse parastatal and statutory bodies, providing a detailed, empirically grounded understanding of how governance functions in institutional reality rather than as presented in organisational charts and policy documents.



## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia face persistent and recurring HR governance failures that undermine their capacity to fulfil their public mandates. Successive Auditor General reports document governance and leadership failures, including institutions operating without functional boards for extended periods, critical workforce positions remaining unfilled for years, and statutory obligations to employees remaining unsettled for decades. The 2023 Auditor General Report specifically identifies terminal benefits owed to retired officers that remain unpaid until beneficiaries die without receiving their entitlements, representing a profound governance failure with direct human consequences (Zambia Auditor General, 2023).

Despite the compelling evidence of these failures and their consequences, a systematic understanding of how HR governance functions in quasi-governmental organisations and what factors account for variation in governance effectiveness remains underdeveloped in the literature. Generic corporate governance frameworks, developed primarily for private sector organisations in advanced economies, do not adequately account for the distinctive institutional environment of quasi-governmental entities, where political pressures, resource constraints, dual accountability obligations, and public interest mandates create a governance context unlike any other. This study addresses the gap by generating evidence that is both theoretically grounded and practically actionable, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how HR governance can be strengthened in Zambia and comparable national contexts.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the formal HR governance structures that exist within quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia and assess how these structures are constituted and operationalised in practice.
- ii. To determine the extent to which board composition and the presence of HR expertise at governance levels influence the quality and effectiveness of HR oversight.
- iii. To investigate the nature and extent of HR policy frameworks within quasi-governmental organisations and assess the degree of alignment between HR policies and broader corporate strategy.
- iv. To identify and analyse the principal gaps and challenges that limit the effectiveness of HR governance, with particular attention to the policy-implementation gap.
- v. To generate evidence-based recommendations for legislative, institutional, and professional reforms that can strengthen HR governance in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Resource-Based View

The resource-based view (RBV), advanced by Barney (1991), provides the primary theoretical foundation for this study. The RBV focuses on the strategic deployment of rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources to generate and sustain competitive advantage. When applied to the governance context, the RBV suggests that human capital expertise at governance levels constitutes precisely such a resource: governing bodies that include qualified HR professionals bring to their deliberations a knowledge base, professional judgement, and domain-specific competence that cannot be easily replicated by professionals from other disciplines. The absence of this resource, as evidenced in many of the organisations studied, creates governance disadvantages manifesting in slower decision-making, inadequate oversight, and persistent misalignment between HR practices and strategic objectives. Kanyamuna et al. (2020) have demonstrated in the Zambian context that strategic capability and the quality of decision-making are deeply influenced by the professional expertise embedded in governance structures, directly supporting the RBV's application to HR governance.

However, the RBV has been critiqued for not always explaining how resources generate value under changing institutional conditions. In the governance context, this limitation is particularly significant because the value of HR expertise depends not only on its presence but on the institutional conditions enabling it to be exercised effectively. This study therefore extends the RBV by examining not only whether HR expertise is present at governance levels but also whether the conditions exist for that expertise to be meaningfully applied.

#### 2.1.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, and specifically the concept of decoupling developed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), provides the second theoretical foundation for understanding the gap between formal HR policy adoption and substantive implementation. Institutional theory posits that organisations adopt formal structures, including governance frameworks, HR policies, and accountability mechanisms, not solely because these structures improve performance, but because their adoption confers legitimacy by demonstrating conformity with prevailing institutional expectations. When formal structures are adopted primarily for legitimacy rather than performance, they become decoupled from actual organisational practice: policies exist in documents but are not implemented, governance committees are constituted but



do not exercise substantive oversight, and accountability mechanisms are established but not enforced (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The pervasive implementation gaps documented in this study provide compelling empirical evidence of decoupling in the HR governance of Zambian quasi-governmental organisations. Ilukena et al. (2023) have demonstrated in the Zambian insurance sector that environmental factors significantly moderate the relationship between organisational resources and performance, underscoring the importance of contextual conditions in determining whether formal organisational structures translate into substantive outcomes.

### **2.1.3 Behavioural and Contingency Theory**

Behavioural and contingency theory provides the third theoretical lens, challenging the assumption that any universal optimal governance structure exists and arguing instead that effective governance must adapt to organisational context, strategy, size, workforce characteristics, and institutional environment (Charreaux, 2012; Schuler & Jackson, 1987). This perspective is essential for understanding HR governance in quasi-governmental organisations, where the intersection of public mandate, commercial operation, political oversight, and resource constraint creates governance challenges that cannot be addressed through one-size-fits-all frameworks. The significant variation in governance effectiveness documented across organisations in this study, despite their shared statutory foundation, provides strong empirical support for the contingency perspective: different governance configurations produce markedly different outcomes depending on the institutional context in which they are embedded.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Conceptualising HR Governance**

The concept of HR governance has undergone significant development in both scholarship and practice. Kaehler and Grundei (2018) define HR governance as a framework for HRM and its control within a corporation and its units, comprising formalised norms influenced by multiple stakeholders. This definition captures the multi-level, multi-stakeholder character of HR governance but understates its political and institutional dimensions, which are particularly salient in quasi-governmental organisations. Chnaida et al. (2023), in a systematic literature review spanning 2010 to 2022, identifies eight factors influencing HR governance effectiveness: regulation, ethics, risk management, leadership, stakeholder engagement, supervision and control, HR process automation, and technology support. The breadth of this framework confirms that effective HR governance is inherently multi-dimensional, requiring integrated rather than piecemeal approaches to governance improvement.

### **2.2.2 Board Composition and Governance Quality**

Research on board composition and governance effectiveness consistently demonstrates that functional expertise enhances the quality of oversight (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Cornforth (2003) established that legal form does not determine governance effectiveness; rather, it is boards' interpretation and enactment of their statutory responsibilities that constitutes the decisive variable. Zulu (2015) found analogous governance challenges in the Zambian public sector, documenting that uncoordinated recruitment processes and inadequate awareness of risk mitigation mechanisms collectively undermine institutional effectiveness.

### **2.2.3 Policy Implementation and the Decoupling Problem**

The literature on policy implementation consistently documents the gap between policy intent and implementation outcomes. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) established the foundational principle that this gap is frequently more significant and more challenging to close than policymakers anticipate. In the HR governance context, this implementation gap generates particularly serious consequences because it erodes the legitimacy of the entire governance framework. When employees observe inconsistent policy application, they lose confidence in the governance system and develop cynicism about management's genuine commitment to fairness, a self-reinforcing dynamic that further widens the implementation gap. The literature further suggests that weak monitoring, limited enforcement capacity, and the difficulty of demonstrating the costs of poor HR governance can all contribute to implementation failure.

### **2.2.4 Zambian Governance Context**

Ndlovu and Haabazoka (2024) have demonstrated that institutional frameworks, governance quality, and policy environments are critical mediators of economic and organisational outcomes in Zambia, providing an important macroeconomic lens through which the institutional failures documented in this study must be understood. The governance deficits identified in quasi-governmental organisations do not occur in isolation but are embedded within broader institutional contexts that either enable or constrain effective human capital management. Kanyamuna et al. (2020) further documented the structural and organisational challenges of monitoring and evaluation in Zambia's public sector, demonstrating systemic weaknesses in accountability mechanisms that compound the HR governance failures identified in this study.



### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study employs a multiple-case study design situated within an interpretivist philosophical paradigm. Following Yin (2009), a multiple-case study was selected over a single-case design because examining eleven organisations allows for cross-case analysis, enhances analytical generalisation, and strengthens the robustness and transferability of findings beyond any individual institutional context. Interpretivism posits that social reality is knowable but is inextricably linked to the subjective understandings of those who construct and inhabit it (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013). This epistemological orientation recognises that HR governance, as a social practice, is shaped by participants' interpretations of their institutional environments, professional identities, and power relations, and that knowledge of governance must therefore be generated through engagement with those interpretations rather than through objective observation of governance structures in isolation. The situated character of knowledge production, as Haraway (1988) has argued, is not a limitation to be overcome but a constitutive feature of social inquiry that must be acknowledged and worked with methodologically.

#### 3.2 Population, Sampling, and Participant Characteristics

The target population comprised the most senior HR practitioners employed within quasi-governmental organisations in Zambia. Given the concentration of quasi-governmental organisations in Lusaka, the study was conducted primarily within the capital. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants meeting pre-specified inclusion criteria: individuals occupying the roles of Director of Human Resources, Head of Human Resources, or Senior HR Manager within parastatal or statutory bodies; possessing a minimum of seven years of professional HR experience; demonstrating direct and substantive knowledge of governance structures and HR practices within their respective organisations; and demonstrating willingness to engage in extended in-depth qualitative inquiry. Inclusion criteria also incorporated gender diversity and organisational sector variation to ensure breadth of perspective.

The resulting sample comprised eleven key informants representing three organisational types, namely commercial parastatals, statutory regulatory bodies, and public service delivery institutions, drawn from nine distinct economic sectors. Table 1 presents the anonymised characteristics of participating organisations and informants. Data saturation, the point at which additional interviews ceased to generate conceptually novel information (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013), was reached after the tenth interview; the eleventh interview was conducted to confirm saturation.

**Table 1**

*Anonymised Participant and Organisation Characteristics*

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

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

#### 3.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted on a one-to-one basis, with only the researcher and interviewee present, in locations selected by participants to ensure comfort and professional candour. Interview duration ranged from forty to sixty minutes, with some extending beyond this range where participants provided particularly detailed and contextually rich accounts. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' explicit informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Contemporaneous field notes were maintained to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and emerging analytical insights. An iteratively refined interview guide ensured systematic coverage of the study's research questions while retaining the flexibility to pursue emerging themes and probe for richer elaboration of participants' governance experiences.



### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Phase one involved familiarisation with data through repeated reading of transcripts and listening to recordings. Phase two involved systematic initial code generation in which data segments relevant to the research questions were identified and labelled. Phase three involved thematic exploration through searching for patterns and clusters across initial codes. Phase four involved theme review to assess whether candidate themes were coherent, distinct, and adequately grounded in the data. Phase five involved theme definition and naming to produce clear analytically precise articulations of each theme. Phase six involved report production integrating themes with theoretical frameworks. Analysis was conducted manually by the lead researcher, without qualitative data analysis software, to maintain the interpretive rigour that Braun and Clarke (2019) associate with reflexive thematic analysis. Subjectivity was managed through regular analytical memo-writing in which the lead researcher documented emerging interpretations, potential biases, and alternative readings of the data. Decisions about code categorisation and theme development were discussed with co-investigators and reviewed against the raw data at each analytical phase. Table 2 illustrates the analytical trajectory from raw codes through categories to final themes.

**Table 2**

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

<b>Exemplary Raw Code</b>	<b>→ Category → Theme</b>
<i>"Lawyer placed on HR committee on the premise that employment matters are essentially legal in nature"</i>	Discipline substitution → HR Expertise Deficit → Theme 2: Board Composition and HR Expertise
<i>"Policies exist in one document and strategy in another, and the two meet only occasionally"</i>	Policy-strategy disconnection → Strategic misalignment → Theme 3: HR Policy Frameworks
<i>"Management decisions disregard policy directives"</i>	Non-compliance with policy → Implementation failure → Theme 4: Policy-Implementation Gap
<i>"Board convened daily and held monthly formal meetings simultaneously"</i>	Governance-management blur → Role confusion → Theme 1: Statutory Foundations

### 3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking in which a summary of emergent findings was shared with five participants for verification and comment, and peer debriefing in which two independent colleagues with qualitative research expertise reviewed the analytical process and emergent themes. Transferability was supported through thick description of participant contexts, organisational types, and institutional environments, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to their own contexts. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through the maintenance of an audit trail comprising raw interview recordings, verbatim transcripts, initial codes, code matrices, and analytical memos documenting key interpretive decisions. Reflexivity was maintained throughout through systematic memo-writing and regular critical reflection on the researcher's professional background in HR management and its potential influence on data interpretation.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Zambia School of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. All participants received comprehensive participant information sheets and provided voluntary informed consent, with an explicit right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Participant anonymity was maintained through the consistent use of role descriptors and pseudonyms throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team. Transcripts were anonymised prior to storage, and audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research programme. The identities of specific organisations are not disclosed to protect both participant and institutional confidentiality.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of eleven in-depth interviews yielded findings that align directly with the study objectives. The results address the formal HR governance structures in place, the influence of board composition and HR expertise, the nature of HR policy frameworks and their strategic alignment, and the principal implementation challenges that limit governance effectiveness. These themes are presented below with illustrative participant quotations.



#### 4.1 Theme 1: Statutory Foundations and Governance Architecture

Across all eleven organisations, HR governance was embedded within statutory frameworks established by Acts of Parliament. Governing boards are constituted through legislative mandate, with members typically appointed by relevant ministers or, in specified instances, by the Republican President with National Assembly ratification. This legal mandate creates a foundational governance architecture that formally requires board involvement in critical HR decisions, including the approval of organisational structures and terms and conditions of service. However, this shared statutory foundation concealed profound differences in how legislative frameworks translated into governance practice. One participant described how the enabling Act's explicit HR provisions compelled the board to engage substantively with HR matters:

*"The legislation leaves us no option but to take HR issues seriously. The Act specifies exactly what the board must approve, including our structure, our terms, our plans. That specificity is what makes the difference."* (P03, Director of Human Resources, interview on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024)

In stark contrast, a participant from another organisation observed that the institution's core operational mandate routinely superseded HR considerations, systematically relegating the HR function to a peripheral and reactive role:

*"We are primarily a technical organisation. The legislation talks about our technical mandate extensively. HR appears almost as an afterthought. So at board level, it is treated accordingly."* (P08, Senior HR Manager, interview on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024)

This divergence points to a critical finding: it is not the mere existence of enabling legislation but the specificity and explicitness of HR provisions within that legislation that determines the HR function's strategic significance at governance level. When legislation explicitly mandates board engagement with HR matters, it creates governance pressure that participants described as genuinely catalytic for effective HR oversight. When legislation is silent or vague on HR matters, HR becomes an afterthought at governance level regardless of the comprehensiveness of the organisation's internal HR policy framework.

One organisation presented a particularly instructive deviant case: a full-time board that convened daily and held monthly formal board meetings simultaneously. This model diverges substantially from conventional governance theory's insistence on a clear distinction between governance, understood as the setting of strategic direction, values, and accountability frameworks, and management, understood as the operational execution of those directions (Carver, 1997). The full-time board arrangement generated reporting duplication and a blurring of roles that one participant characterised as creating governance confusion rather than governance clarity.

#### 4.2 Theme 2: Board Composition and the HR Expertise Deficit

The most consistently significant finding concerns the composition of governing boards and HR governance committees. A striking variation was documented across the organisations studied. Some organisations benefited from purposefully constituted governance bodies that included qualified HR professionals, experienced senior managers from relevant functional domains, and, in one case, a board member legally required to possess domain-specific expertise, with the HR committee chaired by an academic holding a doctorate in human resources. Participants from these organisations described governance processes characterised by informed questioning, substantive deliberation, and meaningful strategic oversight of HR matters.

In marked contrast, the majority of participants described governance bodies from which HR professionals were structurally absent or present only in ways that were functionally marginal:

*"In the absence of an HR professional on the board, I find myself speaking a language that other board members do not understand. Decisions are made that no qualified HR professional would have sanctioned."* (P01, Director of Human Resources, interview on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024)

*"I was the lone HR voice on the committee. My recommendations were routinely overridden by board members from financial, legal, or engineering backgrounds who regarded HR as peripheral."* (P05, Head of Human Resources, interview, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024)

Several participants reported that the exclusion of HR expertise from governance bodies was not inadvertent but deliberate. One participant described the decision to place a lawyer on the HR committee on the premise that employment matters are essentially legal in nature:

*"HR is not law. HR encompasses strategy, culture, and organisational capability. A discipline with its own distinct knowledge base, professional standards, and strategic contribution that cannot be substituted by legal expertise, however accomplished."* (P09, Director of Human Resources, interview, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024)

#### 4.3 Theme 3: HR Policy Frameworks and the Strategy Alignment Challenge

All eleven organisations maintained formal HR policy frameworks, with participants enumerating comprehensive inventories covering recruitment and resourcing, performance management, disciplinary procedures, training and development, wellness, occupational health and safety, and succession planning. This near-universal policy comprehensiveness initially suggested a high degree of HR governance formalisation. However, the more significant



finding concerns not the existence of HR policies but their relationship to corporate strategy. While a small number of participants described dynamic policy environments in which HR strategy was revised in response to corporate strategy updates, the majority described persistent disconnection:

*"Policies exist in one document and strategy in another, and the two meet only occasionally and by accident."* (P06, Director of Human Resources, interview, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024).

A fundamental tension was also identified between policy rigidity, essential for consistency and fairness, and the operational flexibility required to respond to urgent organisational needs. One participant described a recruitment policy requiring a full competitive process even when a sole internal candidate existed for a promotional vacancy, rendering the process a procedural compliance exercise rather than a genuine governance instrument.

#### 4.4 Theme 4: The Policy-Implementation Gap

The most consequential governance finding is the persistent and pervasive gap between the formal existence of HR policies and their substantive implementation. Participants consistently described organisations that demonstrated considerable proficiency in policy formulation but were structurally unable to ensure consistent, principled, and strategically aligned implementation. This implementation disparity manifested across multiple HR domains: management decisions disregarded policy directives, performance management systems functioned as administrative routines rather than developmental instruments, and disciplinary processes exhibited variability dependent on the individuals concerned rather than on the gravity of the conduct in question.

The implementation gap stems from multiple interacting causes: a lack of management support for policy enforcement, employee resistance to change, resource constraints that prevent effective communication and training, and the inherent difficulty of translating written policies into consistent behaviour across large and diverse organisations. These factors collectively explain why formal compliance often coexists with weak day-to-day implementation.

#### 4.5 Discussion

##### 4.5.1 Statutory Frameworks and the Contingency Logic

The finding that governance quality varies markedly across organisations sharing the same statutory environment provides strong empirical support for the contingency perspective (Charreaux, 2012; Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Contrary to the implicit assumption in regulatory governance design that statutory requirements produce uniform governance outcomes, the evidence from this study demonstrates that the specific language of enabling legislation, the institutional culture within which it is interpreted, and the professional configuration of the board that enacts it collectively determine governance quality. Cornforth's (2003) foundational observation that legal form does not determine governance effectiveness is confirmed and extended: what matters is the granularity of HR provisions within the legal form, which either compels substantive governance engagement or permits its systematic avoidance.

The deviant case of the full-time board powerfully illustrates the contingency principle from the opposite direction. It demonstrates that violating the standard governance model, specifically the board-management separation that contingency theory regards as normatively appropriate for most organisational contexts, generates the governance confusion that the normative model exists to prevent. This case provides an empirically grounded argument for the conventional model while simultaneously demonstrating that its value cannot be assumed but must be explained contextually.

##### 4.5.2 The HR Expertise Deficit and the Extended RBV

The finding that HR expertise at governance levels functions as a strategic governance resource confirms the RBV's core proposition while extending it in an analytically significant way. The evidence from this study demonstrates that the resource, namely HR domain expertise, is only valuable if it has institutional authority to be exercised. A qualified HR professional on a board who lacks influence or whose recommendations are routinely overridden cannot generate the governance benefits that the RBV predicts. This suggests that governance value depends not only on the possession of expertise but also on the institutional conditions that enable that expertise to shape decision-making.

The finding that the exclusion of HR expertise is often deliberate, motivated by assumptions embedded in enabling legislation drafted without HR governance considerations, aligns with Ng'andu and Haabazoka (2024) observation that HR risks are characterised as soft issues by governance actors from financial and legal backgrounds. Hillman and Dalziel's (2003) general principle that diverse expertise enhances governance quality is refined by this study's finding: what matters for HR governance is not professional diversity in the abstract but the specific presence of HR domain expertise, without which no combination of other professional backgrounds can provide adequate human capital oversight.

##### 4.5.3 The Policy-Implementation Gap as Decoupling

The policy-implementation gap documented in this study represents a textbook manifestation of the decoupling dynamic that Meyer and Rowan (1977) predicted as a characteristic response to institutional pressures for legitimacy.



Organisations adopt comprehensive HR policy frameworks because such frameworks are institutionally expected and confer legitimacy, but the functional pressure to implement those frameworks consistently, even when costly, inconvenient, or culturally resistant, is far weaker than the legitimacy pressure to possess them. The result is precisely what this study documents: near-universal possession of formal HR policies coexisting with pervasive evidence of ceremonial adoption without substantive implementation.

The comparison with Zulu's (2015) findings in the Zambian Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health is particularly instructive. Zulu's finding that 58.3 per cent of respondents were unaware of the HR risk mitigation mechanisms their organisation had theoretically implemented confirms that this decoupling dynamic is not merely an isolated institutional failure but a persistent feature of the Zambian governance landscape. The present study advances this finding by identifying the specific mechanisms of decoupling in the quasi-governmental context: governance committee structures that exist but do not deliberate substantively, performance management systems that are administered rather than implemented, and disciplinary processes that are selectively enforced depending on the relational and hierarchical position of the individuals concerned. These granular empirical illustrations extend institutional theory's explanatory framework from broad institutional dynamics to the operational mechanics of decoupling in a specific national and sectorial context.

#### **4.5.4 Implications for Theory and for Zambia's Governance Context**

Taken together, the three theoretical frameworks employed in this study are mutually reinforcing rather than competing. The RBV explains why HR expertise at governance levels matters and what organisations lose by excluding it. Institutional theory explains why organisations adopt formal HR governance structures without investing in their substantive implementation, and identifies the decoupling mechanisms through which this occurs. Contingency theory explains why the same formal governance requirement produces markedly different outcomes across organisations in different institutional contexts. Together, they generate a multi-level, multi-causal explanation of HR governance variation that no single theory could provide alone.

The broader institutional context described by Ndlovu and Haabazoka (2024), in which governance quality and institutional capacity are critical mediators of economic outcomes in Zambia, situates the micro-level governance failures documented in this study within their macroeconomic consequences. The HR governance deficiencies that prevent quasi-governmental organisations from attracting, retaining, and deploying talent effectively are not merely administrative shortcomings; they represent institutional capability failures with direct implications for the quality of public services, the sustainability of public enterprises, and ultimately the pace of economic development in Zambia.

## **V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

This study examined the current state of HR governance structures and practices in Zambian quasi-governmental organisations through in-depth qualitative inquiry with eleven senior HR practitioners. The findings generate four principal conclusions of both theoretical and practical significance. First, statutory foundations are necessary but insufficient conditions for effective HR governance. The specificity of HR provisions within enabling legislation, rather than the mere existence of a governing statute, is the principal legislative determinant of governance quality. Precise, prescriptive legislative drafting that specifies board HR responsibilities constitutes an underutilised governance reform mechanism. Second, HR expertise at governance levels is not a professional nicety but a governance prerequisite. Organisations that systematically exclude HR professionals from boards and governance committees create accountability vacuums in which human capital decisions are made without the domain knowledge required to make them well. This expertise deficit is the single most consequential structural factor explaining variation in HR governance effectiveness across the organisations studied, consistent with the RBV's prediction that VRIN resources generate governance advantage.

Third, the policy-implementation gap is the central and most consequential governance challenge facing the organisations studied. The near-universal availability of formal HR policies coexists with pervasive evidence of ceremonial adoption without substantive implementation. This means that governance reform in quasi-governmental organisations must focus not only on policy design but also on enforcement, communication, monitoring, and institutional accountability.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced for policymakers, governance practitioners, and professional bodies. Legislative reform mandating explicit HR representation on governing boards of quasi-governmental organisations should be pursued as a priority. Enabling legislation should be amended to specify minimum standards for HR expertise in board composition and to establish formal HR committee structures with defined terms of reference and reporting obligations. The Zambia Institute of Human Resource Management, established under



Act No. 3 of 2022, should develop and promulgate minimum standards for HR governance in quasi-governmental organisations, including guidance on board composition, HR committee structures, governance reporting requirements, and professional development obligations for HR practitioners operating at governance levels.

Organisations should invest in policy implementation infrastructure alongside policy formulation, including systematic communication strategies, role-specific training programmes, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, and feedback loops that enable governance actors to identify and respond to implementation failures. Operational benefits of digital transformation in African institutional settings, quasi-governmental organisations should invest in digital HR information systems that provide real-time data on workforce performance, enable evidence-based governance decisions, and create auditable records that support accountability and transparency. Future research should examine whether the findings of this study extend to other national contexts, investigate how board HR expertise translates into governance outcomes through longitudinal designs, explore employee perspectives on governance effectiveness, and assess the impact of the ZIHRM Act No. 3 of 2022 on HR governance quality across the sector.

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