

**Mindset Transformation as a Catalyst for Responsive Governance:
Insights from Zambia's Public Service Change Management
Framework**

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of mindset transformation in promoting responsive governance in Africa, using Zambia's Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF) as a case study. The framework was introduced to break entrenched cultural and attitudinal barriers within the Zambian public service and foster a citizen-centric approach grounded in accountability, inclusivity, and service excellence.

Adapted from the Australian Public Service model and adopted across ministries and agencies, the ZPSCMF is now Zambia's national standard for managing change. Beyond reshaping institutional values and culture, the framework seeks to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and professional competence, priorities that resonate across both public and private sectors.

” Zambia's experience offers valuable lessons for African countries pursuing public sector reform through cultural and behavioral transformation. It illustrates that mindset change is not an optional add-on but a strategic tool for building sustainable, citizen-responsive institutions. The framework aligns closely with the AAPAM 44th Roundtable theme: *“Changing Mindsets – Responsive Governance for the Africa We Want.”*

Keywords: mindset change, public service reform, governance, Zambia, culture, efficiency, Africa We Want

1. Introduction

In many African countries, public service is constrained by rigid hierarchies, a culture of fear surrounding accountability, and a strong aversion to risk. Together, these organizational and behavioral characteristics produce slow, unresponsive, and remote governance that falls short of what citizens expect and deserve (World Bank, 2020; Kotter, 1996). Many African public sectors are still governance systems driven more by compliance than authentic commitment to responsiveness and service excellence, despite repeated policy and structural changes.

Therefore, changing the mindset, values, attitudes, and behavior of public service workers is no less important than any new policy or structural change (Cabinet Office of Zambia,

2025). Reforms without change in the underlying cultural foundations of public service are brittle and open to reversal and/or superficial implementation.

Zambia presents a relevant case for examining this challenge and opportunity. The Zambia Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF), launched nationally in 2025, situates explicitly, mindset transformation (as a key driver of change and cultural realignment values clarification) as the centrepiece of this public service reform process (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025). This Framework supports Zambia's ambitious decentralization and e-governance reforms, facilitating a responsive governance culture centered on citizens' needs (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

This paper helps turn understanding of mindset change into practical steps by closely examining the ZPSCMF and Lusaka City Council's innovative Change Management Project. Lusaka City Council's digital governance efforts, consistently aligned with the Framework, have clearly led to real progress in overcoming bureaucratic delays and improving service delivery (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

This paper is organized as follows: Section Two reviews key theories, such as mindset theory and systems thinking, that support cultural change in responsive governance. Section Three outlines the qualitative research approach used in the study, including ethical considerations. Section Four presents findings from Zambia's decentralization and e-government reforms, highlighting major challenges and case insights. Section Five introduces a comprehensive framework for mindset transformation, followed by practical recommendations for Zambia in Section Six. Section Seven concludes by emphasizing mindset change as a vital foundation for transforming Africa's public sector.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Many publications show the necessity of mindset change in the formation of organizational responsiveness, specifically in public sector governing. Within education, Carol Dweck's work on mindset theory differentiates between hard and growth mindsets, providing a conceptual property for behavior change in institutional settings. Hard mindsets typically exhibit behavioral resistance to any changes due to fear of failure and the need to protect identity. Alternatively, growth mindsets exhibit behavioral change with learning, adaptability, and creativity. This discussion regarding mindset theory and public administration explains why many efforts at reforms fail to change the existing compliance culture, whereas a culture that embraces change, commits to growth, and allows for service improvements is genuinely moving towards transformation (Dweck, 2006; Dweck, 2019).

In addition to the mindset theory, systems thinking provides an alternative integrated framework by conceptualizing governance as a systemic, complex system. For many years,

pioneers like Peter Senge and Donella Meadows have explained that for successful organizational change to occur, change happens by understanding the interdependencies of people, policy and environment. In other words, systems thinkers shed light on the systems changing with an awareness of the feedback loops, unintended outcomes, and the capacity of an adaptive change culture. Within the public reform, systems thinking emphasizes the integration of culture change within a transition to a governance or integrated system, as opposed to a one-off and technical fix (Senge, 1990; Meadows, 2008).

Research on public sector culture and governance shows that reform efforts in many African countries often face serious challenges. Deep-rooted bureaucratic habits such as avoiding risk, rigid hierarchies, and internal focus make it hard to achieve flexible, citizen-centered services.

Studies also highlight that top-down reforms alone are not enough, as they tend to ignore the subtle cultural factors that shape everyday behavior and institutional norms (Kalimasi & Herman, 2016; Wamundila, 2018). Owusu (2012) in his qualitative study of Ghanaian public sector organisations argued that many reform programmes fail because they ignore the internal culture, behaviours and micro-organization differences

On the other hand, classic scholarship by Lipsky (1980) on street-level bureaucracy highlights how strict procedural adherence and rule-bound behaviour constrain the discretion of public servants, producing a gap between policy intent and implementation. Campos et al. (2023) found that high levels of bureaucratic control in public organisations significantly reduce employees' psychological empowerment and engagement, thereby weakening organisational adaptability. Likewise, Asibuo (1991) attributed reform inertia in African public administrations to the persistence of hierarchical traditions that discourage innovation and learning. More recently, Owusu (2012) demonstrated that successful reformers in Ghana were those who managed to shift organisational cultures away from rigid compliance and toward more participatory, value-driven management practices. Together, these studies underscore that bureaucratic inertia is not merely structural but deeply cultural embedded in norms that prioritise control over collaboration. Consequently, efforts to modernise public administration must address both the formal hierarchies and the underlying cultural orientations that perpetuate rigidity if meaningful, citizen-responsive governance is to emerge.

Good governance depends on aligning organizational mindsets, individual behaviors, and institutional systems. Cultural transformation helps ensure that reforms are meaningful and lasting by embedding responsive attitudes and practices into the everyday work of public service workers. Scholars have increasingly suggested ways to support this transformation,

such as clarifying values, reinforcing desired behaviors, and using institutional incentives (Kalimasi & Herman, 2016; Wamundila, 2018, Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

This theoretical foundation is essential for understanding Zambia's Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF), which intentionally integrates mindset reform and cultural transformation into its agenda for transforming national governance. The ZPSCMF builds on systems thinking principles and is augmented by purposeful cultural transformation interventions such as conducting gap analyses, embedding values in HR systems, and creating change agent networks to actively bring into being the two-dimensional aspects of governance. Moreover, the Lusaka City Council's Change Management Project provides empirical evidence of these theories in action, illustrating how digital transformation initiatives supported by mindset and culture workstreams can overcome bureaucratic inertia, foster transparency, and enhance citizen engagement (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025 and Wamundila, 2018).

The literature also underscores the role of leadership in navigating and sustaining mindset transformation. Effective change requires committed executives who embody growth mindsets themselves, support capacity building, and foster open communication. Leadership approaches that emphasize emotional intelligence and relational trust further enable managers and frontline workers to embrace the uncertainty inherent in reform processes (Kotter, 1996).

Finally, the integration of implementation science frameworks such as the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) and RE-AIM adds analytical rigor, allowing governments to plan, monitor, and evaluate change initiatives systematically. These frameworks emphasize multi-level factors, including intervention characteristics, behavioral processes, organizational readiness, and sustainability planning, providing tools to measure the effectiveness of mindset transformations (Damschroder et al., 2009; Glasgow et al., 1999).

Taken together, this literature review reveals that sustainable governance reform in Africa demands more than technical or policy adjustments; it necessitates holistic, culturally grounded change processes that address mindsets at individual, institutional, and systemic levels.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, reflective approach to explore the dynamics of mindset transformation within Zambia's public sector reforms. Qualitative methodologies are particularly suited to unravel the complex social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence reform processes and outcomes, offering rich, contextually grounded insights (Fahy, 2012).

Key data sources for the study include a comprehensive document review and detailed case study analysis. The Zambia Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF) and its Toolkit serve as foundational documents that outline the conceptual and operational blueprint for the country's cultural and institutional transformation efforts (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025). Additionally, the Lusaka City Council Change Management Project provides empirical evidence of these reforms in action, particularly showcasing the integration of digital transformation and cultural remodeling in municipal governance (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Supplementary materials such as workshop reports, policy briefs, and institutional memory deepen the understanding of stakeholder engagement, implementation challenges, and capacity-building processes inherent in the reforms.

The analysis employs systems mapping to visualize the interrelations and feedback loops within Zambia's governance ecosystem, highlighting how mindset shifts translate into behavioral changes and service delivery improvements (Senge, 1990; Damschroder et al., 2009). Complementarily, a theory of change logic frames these processes by linking interventions at the cultural and structural levels with anticipated governance outcomes, guiding the evaluation of reform effectiveness (Glasgow et al., 1999).

Emphasis is placed on validating theoretical frameworks through practical examples drawn from Lusaka City Council's ongoing digital governance initiatives, thereby bridging the gap between conceptual models and real-world reform dynamics.

Through this qualitative, document- and case-driven methodology, the study offers a nuanced exploration of the role of mindset transformation in fostering adaptive, citizen-responsive governance in Zambia's public sector.

3.1 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles governing qualitative and policy research. As the research relies exclusively on publicly available institutional documents, official government frameworks, policy reports, and published academic literature, no primary data collection involving human participants was undertaken. Accordingly, formal institutional ethical review was not required. Nonetheless, the authors adhered rigorously to the ethical norms of scholarly integrity throughout the research process.

All documentary sources, including the Zambia Public Service Change Management Framework, the Lusaka City Council Change Management Project Report, and associated institutional publications, were accessed through official and publicly available channels. These materials were used strictly for the purposes of academic analysis and are cited

transparently throughout the paper in accordance with standard scholarly conventions. The study does not reproduce restricted, confidential, or proprietary institutional content.

The authors declare no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, analysis, or interpretation of the study. Three of the co-authors are affiliated with the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA), Zambia, and one is affiliated with the Lusaka City Council, both of which are referenced extensively in the paper as implementation bodies. To mitigate potential bias arising from this proximity to the subject matter, the analysis is grounded in independently verifiable documentary evidence, cross-referenced against peer-reviewed literature, and interpreted through established theoretical frameworks. The authors' institutional knowledge is treated as contextual expertise that enriches, rather than compromises, analytical objectivity.

The study further upholds the principle of epistemic justice by presenting Zambia's reform experience on its own merits, without subordinating local institutional knowledge to external frameworks in a way that distorts its significance. The paper seeks to contribute to an Africa-centered discourse on governance reform, recognizing that the voices, experiences, and innovations of African public institutions constitute valuable and legitimate knowledge in their own right.

Finally, the paper does not make individual-level claims about specific public servants or citizens, and all findings are presented at the institutional and policy level. Any references to organizational behaviors or reform outcomes are drawn from official, aggregate reporting and do not identify, stigmatize, or make adverse claims about any individual public official or community member.

4. Findings and Case Insights from Zambia

This section presents key findings from the implementation of the Zambia Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF) and the Lusaka City Council Change Management Project. It highlights persistent mindset barriers, real-world examples from decentralization and digital transformation initiatives, and lessons learned in operationalizing mindset transformations toward responsive governance.

Persistent Mindset Barriers Impeding Governance Reform

Despite the progressive reform agenda embodied in the Eighth National Development Plan (2022-2026) and the ZPSCMF, the Zambian public sector faces enduring mindset-related obstacles that hinder reform impact and service responsiveness.

Fear of Innovation and Failure: A dominant cultural theme within public institutions is risk aversion, stemming from hierarchical oversight regimes and punitive accountability

practices that discourage experimentation. This hesitance to innovate slows reform uptake and obstructs adaptive problem-solving crucial for responsive governance (Cabinet Office, 2025).

Bureaucratic Inertia and Hierarchical Control: Traditional bureaucratic systems favor rigid chain-of-command decision-making and strict adherence to established procedures. This creates organizational inertia, diminishing frontline employee empowerment and limiting responsiveness to citizen concerns. Such formalism entrenches a compliance culture to the detriment of agility (Cabinet Office, 2025).

Weak Citizen Engagement: A prevalent internal focus on regulatory compliance eclipses outward responsiveness. Public service actors often remain disconnected from communities, resulting in poor alignment between service delivery and citizen expectations (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025). This disconnection fuels public dissatisfaction and amplifies trust deficits.

Case Insight 1: Decentralization Shifts and Mindset Clashes

Zambia's decentralization reforms provide a rich context for analyzing how mindset clashes between central government and local authorities affect service delivery outcomes. The reforms seek to devolve responsibilities to local governments, aiming to enhance citizen participation and tailor services to community needs

However, traditionally centralized power structures manifest in strong top-down controls over resources, planning, and bureaucratic authorizations. Central ministries often express concerns over potential loss of oversight and accountability, leading to reinforced compliance expectations and control-oriented mindsets (Cabinet Office, 2025).

By contrast, local government officials and frontline workers strive for operational autonomy and flexibility to innovate and act responsively to localized priorities. Yet they remain hampered by restricted financial and human resource autonomy and a lack of capacity and crucially, an entrenched mindset conditioned to deter centralized decision-making (Cabinet Office, 2025).

Institutional trust deficits between levels hinder collaborative governance. Notably, sustained improvements in service delivery and citizen engagement only occur where mindset shifts have fostered a culture of partnership and mutual accountability, moving beyond control toward shared leadership and empowerment (Transparency International Zambia, 2025).

Such mindset realignment is facilitated through government-wide frameworks like the ZPSCMF, which complements decentralization by embedding values of integrity,

transparency, and citizen-centric service culture into organizational practices (Cabinet Office, 2025).

Case Insight 2: Digital Transformation and Mindset Resistance

Zambia's evolving e-government reforms and digital service innovation efforts have revealed significant challenges related to mindset. Public service workers frequently demonstrate technological anxiety rooted in fears over job displacement, relevance loss, and inadequate digital skills (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Low digital literacy levels and limited change management capacity exacerbate resistance to digital workflows and process reengineering. Absent efforts to address these fears and develop readiness can stall technology adoption and wider governance modernization (Cabinet Office, 2025).

The Lusaka City Council Change Management Project constitutes a frontline response to this challenge, combining digital infrastructure upgrades with concurrent values-based cultural remodeling and comprehensive capacity building (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

The project's dual-focus fosters employee acceptance of digital workflows by reframing transparency, efficiency, and citizen service as integral to public servant identities. Staff training encompasses digital literacy, customer service ethos, and ethics, tightly integrated with reflection on institutional values and the collective reform vision (Cabinet Office, 2025).

This blended approach mitigates typical digital transformation barriers by constructing a mindset of ownership, adaptability, and collaboration within a technological modernization framework.

Operationalizing Mindset Transformation: Lusaka City Council Project

The Lusaka City Council (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025) Change Management Project exemplifies the operationalization of mindset transformation principles through concrete digital reforms linked with cultural change.

Digitization of Revenue Collection: LCC introduced online payment portals for fees in public markets and fire services, reducing physical queues, improving compliance rates, and enhancing revenue transparency. This innovation required employees to shift from traditional cash-based systems to embracing transparent, digitized processes (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Centralized Online Service Portal: The deployment of a unified e-service portal increased citizen access to municipal services and promoted timely responses, reflecting a

cultural transition from bureaucratic gatekeeping to responsive facilitation (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Values Clarification and Organizational Realignment: The project incorporated Values Clarification and Culture Remodelling modules, fostering alignment of employee attitudes with constitutional public service values like integrity and patriotism. Reflective exercises and values integration across recruitment, performance management, and rewards institutionalized these shifts (Cabinet Office, 2025).

Stakeholder Engagement and Ownership: Multi-stakeholder collaboration among ministries, civil society, the private sector, and local communities fostered collective responsibility for reform success. This inclusive approach helped overcome siloed mentalities and anchored innovation culture (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

The Lusaka City Council experience confirms that technological tools alone do not suffice. Mindset transformation unlocks the transparency, accountability, and service-orientation essential for sustainable digital governance.

4.1 Impact and Outcomes of the Lusaka City Council Change Project

The implementation of the Council Integrated Management Information System (CIMIS) has yielded significant, measurable improvements across multiple dimensions of Lusaka City Council's operations.

Enhanced Operational Efficiency:

Manual and paper-based processes have been replaced with automated workflows, significantly reducing processing times for service applications such as fire certificates, liquor licenses, storage licenses, and health permits. The digitization of these procedures, as exemplified in the detailed *User Manual for the Lusaka City Council Web Application*, has minimized administrative bottlenecks, reduced human error, and improved the overall speed of service delivery.

Improved Transparency and Accountability:

The integration of automated receipting and QR code-enabled verification within CIMIS strengthens accountability and reduces opportunities for malpractice. Every transaction is electronically recorded and traceable through the system, providing robust transparency that enhances public confidence in the Council's operations.

Increased Revenue Collection and Financial Integrity:

CIMIS enables multiple secure online payment options, including Visa, Mobile Money (Zamtel, Airtel, MTN), and bank transfers, greatly expanding client accessibility and improving the accuracy and timeliness of revenue collection. Automated receipting ensures all payments are captured in real-time, minimizing leakages and enhancing financial reporting integrity.

Improved Data Management and Evidence-Based Decision-Making:

CIMIS centralizes data to provide a reliable source for strategic planning and monitoring. Decision-makers have access to real-time analytics facilitating informed policy formulation, performance tracking, and proactive resource allocation.

Enhanced Interdepartmental Coordination:

By integrating department operations on a unified platform, CIMIS promotes seamless collaboration and real-time alignment among all relevant Council departments, leading to coherent decision-making and improved responsiveness to public needs.

Customer-Centric Service Delivery:

The CIMIS portal allows citizens to apply for services remotely, track application progress, and make payments online without visiting Council offices, significantly elevating customer satisfaction while reducing congestion at service counters.

Capacity Building and Digital Transformation:

The rollout of CIMIS has included extensive capacity-building initiatives, equipping Council staff with digital skills and fostering an innovation culture. This digital transformation is pivotal in modernizing local governance.

Contribution to Broader Public Sector Reform Goals:

CIMIS exemplifies how digital systems can enhance accountability, efficiency, and citizen engagement at the local government level, supporting Zambia's e-Government and Public Service Reform agendas. It serves as a replicable model for other local authorities.

For detailed procedures on registration, applications for various licenses and certificates, payment methods, and user operations within CIMIS, refer to the Lusaka City Council Web App Customer User Manual available online at the Customer Web Portal:

<https://elcc.gov.zm>

or via the Lusaka City Council official website <https://www.lcc.gov.zm/> and the Council's Facebook page.

This manual comprehensively guides users on how to register, submit applications for fire certificates, business levies, health permits, liquor licenses, and more, and explains the payment gateway processes supporting various secure payment options. It is a key resource fostering user understanding and efficient use of the CIMIS platform. (*Lusaka City Council Web App External User Manual, 2025*).

5. Proposed Mindset Transformation Framework

To successfully change public service mindsets, a holistic multi-level strategy that takes into consideration individual, institutional, and policy dimensions is essential. Framed by Zambia's Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF), evidenced through the Lusaka City Council Change Management Project, this framework describes multi-layered interventions that enable long-term behavioural and cultural shifts for responsive governance (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025; Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Individual-Level Interventions

Individual transformation is essential for advancing a transformation agenda, starting with the empowerment of public officials to envision a growth mindset (a belief in the ability to learn, adapt, and get better) (Dweck, 2006).

Central to the development of a growth mindset is emotional intelligence, developing norms of self-awareness, resilience, and compassion, all foundational and meaningful attributes for leading through complex, multi-faceted, and far-reaching challenges in governance.

Related to the concept of emotional intelligence is values-based leadership. Values-based leadership training works toward embedding integrity, transparency, and citizen-orientation, non-negotiable attributes of the public service identity (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025). Reflective practices, including dialogue circles and storytelling, contribute to the establishment of safe environments for officers to name assumptions, share knowledge through experience, and build a collective narrative to spark behavior change (Senge, 1990).

Institutional-Level Interventions

At the organizational level, cultivating cultures conducive to innovation and continuous learning is imperative. The ZPSCMF promotes the establishment of “safe-to-fail” zones within institutions where experimentation is tolerated and viewed as a learning opportunity, thus reducing risk aversion (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

Peer learning platforms and networks of change agents foster communities of practice that reinforce desired behaviors, democratize knowledge, and enhance peer accountability (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025). Performance management systems are reconfigured to incentivize innovation, ethical conduct, and responsiveness, aligning individual goals with organizational transformation objectives.

Systematic embedding of values within recruitment, onboarding, and reward mechanisms ensures cultural coherence and continuity (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025). Principles of lean thinking applied to workflows and processes reduce waste and improve efficiency, aiding sustainable transformation.

Policy and Structural Interventions

To build responsive governance, public institutions must close feedback gaps with citizens and develop the ability to adapt to changing needs (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025). Digital tools that support real-time communication, transparency, and citizen involvement in budgeting, such as those used in Lusaka’s digital engagement initiatives, play a key role in enabling this shift (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Flexible planning helps governments respond quickly to changing social and environmental needs. To make this work in the long term, formal policies are needed to build skills, grow leadership, and regularly assess strategies that support lasting cultural change (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

Systems thinking specifies the interconnectedness of different levels of interaction in the system of governance, allowing one level of reforms to align and reinforce other levels of change occurring in the system (Meadows, 2008; Senge, 1990).

Practical Tools and Approaches

Several practical tools operationalize these principles within the ZPSCMF change management architecture:

Reflective Practice and Dialogue Circles: Facilitate introspection and open dialogue among staff, nurturing trust and uncovering underlying barriers to mindset change (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

Storytelling and Narrative Leadership: Harness narratives to humanize reforms, mobilize emotional commitment, and sustain momentum beyond formal policy imperatives (Senge, 1990).

Systems Mapping: Visualize institutional roles, relationships, feedback loops, and potential bottlenecks, fostering collective understanding essential for targeted interventions (Damschroder et al., 2009).

These tools, integrated within structured governance and communication frameworks, create enabling conditions for mindsets to evolve from compliance-based attitudes to sustained commitment that drives responsive, citizen-centered governance (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

6. Recommendations

Changing public sector mindsets from simple rule-following to authentic commitment is a difficult process and takes long-term, strategic effort across all layers of the institution. This section provides examples from Zambia's experience with the Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF) and its work with the Lusaka City Council in digital governance to provide concrete suggestions for governments in Africa. These suggestions will enable governments to implement flexible, citizen-centered public service delivery.

Invest in Leadership Development for Mindset Shift

A robust and recognizable leadership commitment underpins cultural transformation. Leadership development programs must prioritize emotional intelligence, values-based servant leadership, and higher-level change management abilities. Zambia's experience

with reform makes clear that senior officials specifically Permanent Secretaries, Ministry Directors, and Mayors of local governments contribute meaningfully by fostering organizational readiness and engaging employees to embrace this dynamic to transformation. (Kotter, 1996; Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025)

Leadership coaching must prepare managers to recognize and manage resistance, develop an innovation mindset, and mobilize staff at all levels. This mobilization leads to a delegation of decision-making and an increase in responsiveness from the ground level, all of which are important to mitigate bureaucratic inertia (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Integrate Mindset Transformation into Public Service Induction and Capacity Building

Embedding mindset change during the induction phase institutionalizes reform values at the entry point of the employee's journey. Induction modules should incorporate principles of growth mindset, public service ethics, and citizen-centered service orientation (Cabinet Office, 2025). The experience of the Lusaka City Council of incorporating digital literacy alongside elements of culture-specific values is an example of best practice in aligning skills and attitudes in service transformation (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

Beyond foundational learning, governments must design continuous professional development programs that include refresher training, peer learning, and systematic opportunities for reflective practice through dialogue circles. These will help deepen the internalization of new norms and strengthen culture remodelling efforts central to embedding responsive governance (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

Use Change Agents and Storytelling to Cascade Cultural Transformation

Change agents, individuals carefully chosen to work within institutions as role models and convener of peers, will be instrumental in cascading changes in mindsets within complex bureaucracies (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025). The development of Zambia's grassroots networks of change agents illustrates how distributed, collective leadership can precipitate cultural embedding.

Narrative leadership and storytelling can be a powerful means of framing reforms in familiar and motivational terms. Narrating experiences of those who have been successful, through stories of what worked and learning from failure, personalizes change and engages the emotional and cognitive domains of reform. Storytelling can translate more abstract notions of cultural values into practice-based behavior and observable outcomes, grounding new mindsets in lived experience (Senge, 1990; Freya Stark, cited in Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

Mainstream Systems Thinking into Reform Design and Implementation

Incorporating systems thinking perspectives allows organizations to see the interdependencies that shape behaviors, policies, and ultimately, outcomes (Meadows, 2008). Incorporation of these perspectives into the design of reforms promotes the anticipation of unintentional consequences, holistic problem-solving, and dynamic adjustments in response to new challenges.

Curricula focused on building capacity should include learning of systems mapping, feedback loops, and managing complexity competencies. This moves governance reform from linear siloed project implementation to sustained reform based on learning of the inter-relations of systems (Senge, 1990; Damschroder et al., 2009).

Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation of Cultural and Behavioral Change

Conventional M&E strategies prioritize technical outputs and quantitative indicators while neglecting the cultural and behavioral components that are essential for achieving sustainability in reform. Governments should work to create metrics and evaluation frameworks that can capture changes to mindsets, values, and institutional culture (Glasgow et al., 1999).

Using qualitative means, such as surveys, focus groups, and reflective reviews, to supplement quantitative data can provide actionable insights that will support adjustment to reform efforts. This will allow adaptive learning to remain a key focus throughout the implementation process (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

Align Incentives and Performance Management with Desired Mindsets

To implement responsive governance, human resource systems must be reconfigured to recognize innovation, collaboration and ethical behaviours in line with citizen-centric values. By doing so, we try to create some space for employee behaviours to be driven by not just compliance, but aspirations to serve and innovate. (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025)

Transparent appraisal systems, recognition mechanisms, and merit-based promotion pathways that reward these values will, over time, take hold of institutional culture and sustain the behavioral shifts that responsive governance demands.

Sustain Public Engagement and Transparency

Shifting mindset encompasses not only public service professionals but also citizens. Creating consistent avenues for citizen feedback, participatory budget processes, and open-data transparency cultivate accountability and engagement in collaborative governance ecosystems (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

These approaches do more than build public trust; they also contribute to learning and adaptive responses in public institutions through their essential feedback loops.

Leverage Inclusive Digital Technologies

Digital tools, including online portals, mobile applications, AI-enhanced chatbots, and open data systems, diminish barriers to citizen engagement and ensure transparency in real-time (World Bank, 2020). However, to maximize the political potential of technology, it must be accompanied by capacity development and cultural change.

Inclusive strategies for digital transformation must ensure accessibility and inclusion across different demographics and geographies, particularly in developing digital literacy to avoid creating upward inequalities (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

These recommendations in total provide a robust pathway for governments wishing to transition away from compliance-based paradigms to deeper, more committed, adaptive and inclusive cultures of governance. Zambia's leading experience, grounded in the ZPSCMF and now utilized by Lusaka in the example of its new digital governance reform, provides meaningful systemic, operational lessons that have broad applicability for the continent of Africa.

7. Conclusion

Changing mindsets within the public sector from compliance cultures to committed and responsive governance cultures is fundamental, not optional, for public service reform in Africa (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025). The Zambia Public Service Change Management Framework (ZPSCMF), which relies on cultural change (remodelling institutional cultures or values) and leadership-led change, demonstrates the centrality of mindset change for managing sustainable governance reforms (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025).

The Lusaka City Council Change Management Project shows how new ways of thinking can be put into practice. By combining digital tools, strong capacity building, and mindset shifts, cautious institutions in Lusaka City Council are beginning to move away from bureaucratic inertia. These efforts are helping to improve transparency and make service delivery more citizen-focused (Lusaka City Council Change Project 2025).

A responsive public sector requires a workforce that not only understands but embodies values such as integrity, innovation, and accountability echo (Cabinet Office, 2025). Governance systems must foster empowerment, collaboration, and continued learning. This paper has asserted the importance of creating coherence among individual emotional intelligence, institutional incentives and policy structures that can adapt to develop and sustain this form of organizational culture (Kotter, 1996; Senge, 1990).

"The Africa We Want" vision requires governments to rethink the way they think about their citizens, to empathize, and to act on their changing needs. Transforming the mindset in ways that fast-tracks transformation and position responsive governance as a consistent, institutionalized routine rather than one-off compliance (Cabinet Office of Zambia, 2025) is the achievement of this vision.

Simply put, African public service must adopt integrated reform initiatives, and reforms should draw from managing cultural transformation, technological change, and restructuring. Zambia's lessons in sequencing change, cultivating inspired leadership, and cultivating systems thinking in reform processes provide replicable learning across many (Damschroder et al., 2009; Glasgow et al., 1999). Having undertaken this commitment to the path of reform, African governments can create resilient, inclusive, and responsive public institutions that can meet development goals and democratic accountability aspirations (World Bank, 2020).

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Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the **Cabinet Office of the Republic of Zambia**, particularly the **Head of the Policy Development Unit (PDU)** and the **Decentralization Secretariat**, for their leadership in spearheading the **Zambia Public Service Change Management Framework**. Sincere appreciation is also extended to the **Lusaka City Council** for sharing valuable insights and implementation reports that greatly enriched the analysis. The authors further express their gratitude to **ZANGA Metrics** for their mentorship and consistent support.