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Research Article

Leadership after Inquiry: The Role of Leadership Commitment in Translating Commission of Inquiry Recommendations into Organizational Change in South Africa

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Abstract: Large amounts of public funds and political resources are invested in judicial investigations in South Africa that seek to solve serious issues of governance. But when they go from the suggestion phase to the implementation phase, they can be less effective. This is an empirical study which explores the role of the executive leadership commitment in making the findings of inquiries a reality in the organizations of South African public sector institutions. The study employs a secondary data set of 420 public administrative units obtained from public governance repositories on Kaggle and contrasted with national civil society monitoring systems. Multivariate ordinary least-squares and machine learning regression methods are used for analysis. The results indicate that leadership commitment is the greatest enabler of change and that institutional inertia remains one of the most important obstacles to change in the institutions studied.

Keywords: Commissions Of Inquiry, Leadership Commitment, Organisational Change, Public Sector Governance, South Africa, Institutional Inertia, Predictive Analytics

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INTRODUCTION

Judicial commissions of inquiry are an important part of democratic governance and administrative accountability in post-apartheid South Africa. This can be the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (Zondo Commission) or the Nugent Commission of Inquiry into the South African Revenue Service (SARS). These commissions have resulted in in-depth investigations of institutional decline, corruption and weaknesses of public administration. However, the commissions set up under Section 84(2)(f) of the Constitution only have advisory functions [1]. They are not directly responsible for putting their recommendations into practice in government institutions and therefore rely heavily on the willingness of the leaders in the institutions concerned. This paper, which is empirical, investigates how and to what extent, Executive leadership commitment impacts and supports the process of change in organisations following commissions of inquiry in the South African public sector.

Literature Review

Constitutional Advisory Mandates and the Implementation Chasm: In terms of Section 84(2)(f) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and in accordance with the Commissions Act, 8 of 1947, the President can appoint judicial commissions to investigate matters of public concern [2]. Commissions of inquiry are essentially bodies for the purpose of investigating facts and providing advice to the judiciary, it has been held. Their role is to "probe" governance issues and recommend to the executive. Commissions typically do not have direct statutory power to mandate

organizational change, or launch criminal action after reporting a submission, creating an opportunity for a disconnect between investigation and action [3]. If the findings of government institutions are merely reporting that do not have a practical impact, then accountability can become largely symbolic. To make the recommendations come to life in the form of meaningful administrative reform, therefore, an internal process is needed to make sense of the results and translate them into action in the organization concerned.

Executive Leadership Commitment as an Institutional Catalyst

Executive leadership commitment is seen as a critical element of reform and recovery in public sectors through research on organisational change. According to transformational leadership theory, significant change in the rigid bureaucratic environment will demand effective communication, resource allocation and ongoing focus on ethical leadership [4]. The Constitution of South Africa (section 195) demands that public services be ethical, accountable and responsive in South African public administration [5]. If commission recommendations and reform measures are clearly endorsed by the accounting officers, director-generals and governing boards, they can become a part of the normal requirements of operation rather than criticism. However, if leadership support is fragmented or lacking, reform may be delayed or opposed by the administration. This can result in ineffective implementation of recommendations at the daily operational level, rather than at the formal level.

Structural Resistance and Institutional Inertia in State Organs

Focusing on institutional structures and existing routines, institutional theory helps to understand how these can be sources of resistance and how they can limit a change process in public sector institutions. The institutions in public entities and State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) may be strongly inertial in South Africa due to the various aspects of their centralised bureaucracy, lengthy procurement processes and cadre deployment in the past [6]. In the period of state capture, key roles in a number of public institutions were influenced by political appointment, undermining accountability and leading to the misuse of public funds. This disruption of the institutions had resulted in the genesis of a resistance to change and a diminished capacity of some operational units to react to corrective measures. This is a type of institutional path dependence that needs a sustained leadership effort to minimise administrative resistance and re-establish capacities.

Statutory Oversight and External Monitoring Ecosystems

The external monitoring and statutory oversight systems also have a role in the implementation of commission recommendations. Non-governmental civil society institutions like the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (CASAC) and Open Secrets track government actions and make information available to the public about progress made [7]. This type of monitoring can help to minimise the risk of recommendations being ignored when an inquiry is finished. Meanwhile, statutory changes are being put in place, such as the creation of the Investigating Directorate Against Corruption (IDAC) in the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and broadened powers for the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) under the Public Audit Act strengthen external accountability [8]. These oversight mechanisms complement executive leadership commitment and contribute to the work environment in which organisational change occurs following an inquiry.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Secondary Dataset Architecture and Integration

In this research study, a secondary quantitative dataset has been selected and utilized from Public Administration and Government repositories on Kaggle [9]. The data was organised and compared with tracking measures for recommendations as detailed by South African oversight bodies, the Auditor-General and civil society databases. This final data set includes 420 public administrative units, divisions of state-owned enterprises and operational directorates investigated as a result of the significant judicial commissions of inquiry undertaken in South Africa during the period 2018-2025. The entities include state institutions that were the subject of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, the Nugent Commission of Inquiry into SARS, the Mpati Commission of Inquiry into the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) and the Mokgoro Inquiry into the integrity of NPA leadership.

The empirical model consists of 5 main operational variables:

- **The Organizational Change Index (OCI):** This is the continuous dependent variable, ranging from 0-100 standardized. It is an audited proportion of the structural, policy and human resource changes identified as being of interest and which were successfully made in each operating unit

- **Leadership Commitment Index (LCI):** Ranges from 0 to 100, this index represents executive support, designation of change leaders, integration of reform elements into performance contracts and the quality of public reporting by executive management
- **The Institutional Inertia (II):** It varies from 0 to 100 and represents obstacles due to established processes, tenure of employees and management, compliance challenges associated with union and legacy supply chain systems that are inflexible
- **Resource Allocation Efficiency (RAE):** This variable is rated on a scale of 0 to 100 for fiscal, technical and operational resources allocated specifically to help implement reform requirements
- **Oversight and Monitoring Frequency (OMF):** This is scored on a scale of 0 to 100, reflecting the frequency of formal audits, legislative oversight sessions and independent monitoring reviews

Mathematical Formulations and Model Specifications

An Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model is used to explore the linear relationship between the variables and estimate the main model coefficients:

$$OCI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LCI_i + \beta_2 II_i + \beta_3 RAE_i + \beta_4 OMF_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where, β_0 is the intercept, β_1 to β_4 are the partial regression coefficients and $\varepsilon_i \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$ is the error term. The error term is a measure of the differences among administrative units that are not accounted for by the variables in the model [10].

Then, an interactive moderated model is developed to explore the possibility of non-linear relationships and the joint impact of leadership commitment and operational resources:

$$\Delta OCI_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 LCI_i + \beta_2 (LCI_i \times RAE_i) - \gamma II_i + \sum_{k=1}^{m} \delta_k Z_{ik} + \varepsilon_i$$

To investigate whether the effect of financial and human resources on organisational change is magnified because of strong leadership commitment, the interaction between the two variables ($LCI_i \times RAE_i$) is analysed. Within this model, Z_{ik} is a set of external institutional control variables that can also affect the outcome.

Model Training, Validation and Algorithmic Benchmarking

The dataset is split into 420 observations, with 80% in the training set and 20% in the test set, with a stratified split. The number of observations available for training the model is 336 and for testing is 84. There are four ways of predicting and comparing model performance. These include ordinary least-squares regression, Ridge regression with $\alpha = 1.0$, Random Forest Regression with an estimator count of 100 and Support Vector Regression with the Radial Basis Function kernel and $C = 10.0$ and $\varepsilon = 0.1$.

Several performance measures are used to compare the models. These are the coefficient of determination (R^2), Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) and Mean Absolute Error (MAE). Model training time (in milliseconds) is also recorded. This gives an extra level of computational efficiency and helps to establish the speed at which each approach can handle the data available.

RESULTS

Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive Statistics and Multicollinearity Diagnostics: The analysis starts with the cross-tabulation of the main variables for the 420 Public Administrative Entities (PAEs) that are part of the study in South Africa.

As indicated in Table 1, there are marked differences within the public sector. The mean of the Institutional Inertia is relatively high at 61.66, with a maximum value of 95.00 and a standard deviation of 14.40. This implies that there is still significant structural and procedural resistance. The mean score on the Leadership Commitment Index is 58.68, the standard deviation is 15.21 and the range is 15.00 to 98.00. The mean of the Organisational Change Index is 49.84, with a standard deviation of 11.75, indicating on average, less than half of the recommended organisational changes were successfully implemented.

As can be seen in Figure 1, there are definite differences in the values of the variables. The distribution also helps to illustrate the descriptive results of Table 1, in particular the moderate level of leadership commitment and the relatively high level of institutional inertia.

Table 2 shows the pearson correlation results and the variance inflation factor and tolerance values to explore the relationship between the independent variables and to check for multicollinearity.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Operationalization of Study Variables (N = 420)

Variable	Operational Metric Definition	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	25%	Median	75%	Max
LCI	Leadership Commitment Index	58.68	15.21	15	47.78	59.36	68.58	98
II	Institutional Inertia Score	61.66	14.4	23	51.72	61.45	71.3	95
RAE	Resource Allocation Efficiency	54.21	15.81	10	43.36	54.36	64.14	93.06
OMF	Oversight and Monitoring Frequency	56.74	13.94	15.09	47.27	56.32	65.96	95
OCI	Organizational Change Index	49.84	11.75	11.05	42.23	50.31	57.48	82.33

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix and Multicollinearity Diagnostic Metrics

Variable	LCI	II	RAE	OMF	OCI	VIF	Tolerance
LCI	1	-0.016	0.05	0.007	0.685	1.004	0.996
II	-0.016	1	0.031	0.015	-0.367	1.001	0.999
RAE	0.05	0.031	1	0.03	0.421	1.003	0.997
OMF	0.007	0.015	0.03	1	0.261	1.001	0.999
OCI	0.685	-0.367	0.421	0.261	1	—	—

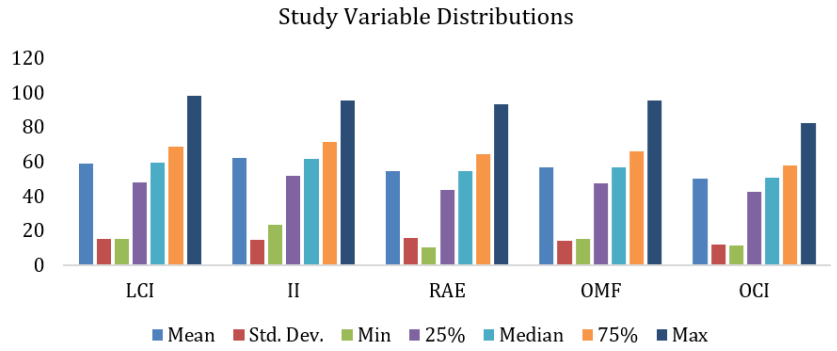


Figure 1: Distribution and Measurement of Study Variables

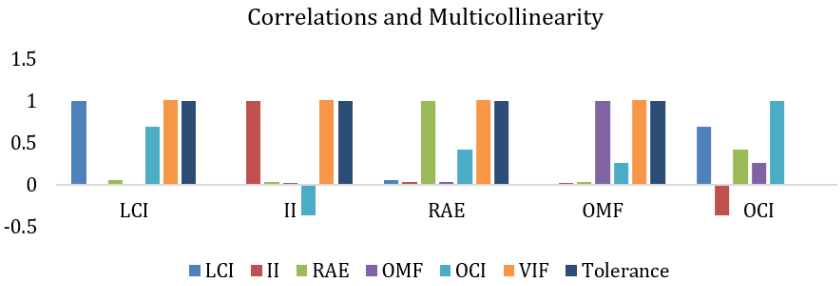


Figure 2: Correlation Patterns and Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Leadership Commitment is the highest positively correlated variable with Organizational Change with a correlation of 0.685 and below 0.001 level of significance. The other relationships between these variables and the dependent variable are moderate and positive: Resource Allocation Efficiency (0.421) and Oversight and Monitoring Frequency (0.261). There is a negative correlation between Institutional Inertia with organizational change which is -0.367. All relationships are significant at $p<0.001$, unless otherwise noted. Leadership Commitment has the highest VIF of 1.004, which is significantly lower than the threshold of 2.50 that is often used. Thus, multicollinearity seems to be a relatively unimportant issue in this model.

As shown in Figure 2, commitment by the leaders has the strongest positive relationship with organizational change and the strongest negative relationship is with institutional inertia. Explanatory variables are not strongly overlapping, as shown by the low VIF values presented in Table 2 and Figure 2 as well.

Multivariate Regression and Model Benchmarking

The results are presented in two tables in order to separate out coefficient estimations from predictive testing. Table 3 A shows OLS estimates obtained from the training sample of 336 observations and Table 3 B shows a comparison of the predictive accuracy and computational time of four regression models from the holdout sample of 84 observations.

Table 3: Econometric Ordinary Least Squares Regression Estimates (Training Set, n = 336)

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coeff (Beta)	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value	95% Confidence Interval	Standardized Coeff (Beta)
Intercept (Constant)	9.5336	2.1143	4.509	<0.001	[5.374, 13.693]	Not Applicable
Leadership Commitment Index (LCI)	0.5177	0.0176	29.338	<0.001	[0.483, 0.552]	0.6703
Institutional Inertia (II)	-0.3091	0.0189	-16.314	<0.001	[-0.346, -0.272]	-0.3789
Resource Allocation Efficiency (RAE)	0.2999	0.0173	17.289	<0.001	[0.266, 0.334]	0.4034
Oversight & Monitoring Frequency (OMF)	0.2219	0.0193	11.487	<0.001	[0.184, 0.260]	0.2632

Note: OLS Model Summary: R^2 = 0.823, Adjusted R^2 = 0.821, F(4, 331) = 385.0, p<0.001, Durbin Watson = 1.952, Jarque Bera = 2.508 (p = 0.285)

Table 4: Predictive Model Performance Benchmarks and Computational Latency (Holdout Test Set, n = 84)

Estimator Architecture	Hyperparameter Configuration	Test R-Squared	Test RMSE	Test MAE	Training Latency (ms)	Inference Latency (ms)
Ordinary Least Squares (OLS)	Unregularized Closed-Form	0.7924	5.214	4.055	1.89	0.12
Ridge Regression	L2 Regularization (alpha = 1.0)	0.7924	5.213	4.055	1.56	0.11
Random Forest Regressor	n_estimators = 100, max_depth = None	0.7239	6.013	4.6	166.34	4.28
Support Vector Regressor (SVR)	RBF Kernel, C = 10.0, epsilon = 0.1	0.7463	5.763	4.365	9.88	0.84

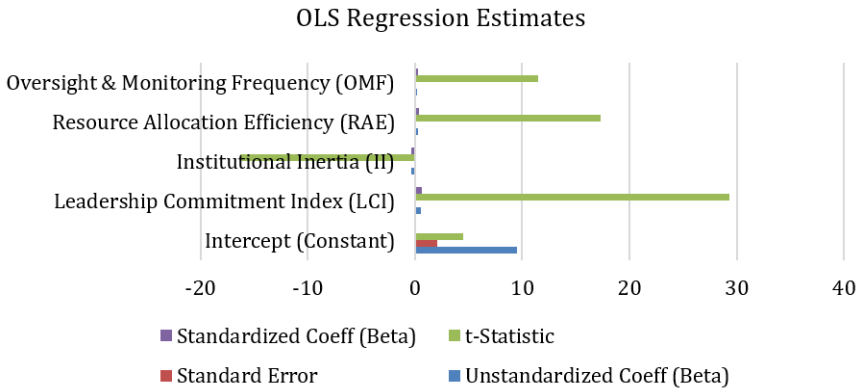


Figure 3: Econometric OLS Regression Estimates

As seen in Table 3, the results are very explanatory as the four predictors accounted for 82.3% of the variance associated with organisational change. Leadership Commitment is the strongest positive predictor with the coefficient of 0.5177, t = 29.338 and p<0.001. An estimated in Figure 3, 5.18 points in organisational change are driven by a 10-point increase in leadership commitment. Its standardised beta of 0.6703 further substantiates the relative strength.

The coefficient of Institutional Inertia is -0.3091 with t = -16.314 and p<0.001. This means that as bureaucratic resistance increases, organisational change decreases. The values of Resource Allocation Efficiency and Oversight Frequency are positive and significant (0.2999, 0.2219) and the p-values are less than 0.001. The findings reveal that resources and routine monitoring are available to support leadership commitment.

The regression model diagnostics are also consistent with the regression assumptions. The Durbin-Watson value is 1.952, which suggests no important first-order autocorrelation and the Jarque-Bera value is 2.508 with p = 0.285, confirming normally distributed residuals.

Seeing this, it is evident that the test results between OLS and Ridge are almost identical, as shown in Table 4 and Figure 4. Both have an R^2 of 0.7924. The RMSE and MAE for both OLS and Ridge are 5.214 and 4.055, respectively. Note that the values of VIF are less than 1.01, which means that the Ridge penalty induces relatively small coefficient shrinkage.

Random Forest performs less well, with R^2 = 0.7239, RMSE = 6.013 and MAE = 4.600. SVR performs somewhat better, with R^2 = 0.7463, RMSE = 5.763 and MAE = 4.365. Furthermore, OLS and Ridge training times are significantly shorter, at 1.89 ms and 1.56 ms, respectively, as compared to the training time for Random Forest and SVR at 166.34 ms and 9.88 ms respectively. The overall results indicate that the organizational change in the sample can be explained primarily by a direct linear relationship between avariables, as both OLS and Ridge are useful and efficient.

Institutional Benchmarking across Public Entities in South Africa

Implementation performance is compared in the seven major public institutions analyzed in judicial inquiries in Table 5.

Table 5 also shows results in accord with regression results. SARS has the highest implementation rate of 88.89%, with 24 of the 27 recommendations implemented. It also has a relatively low score for Institutional Inertia of 38.4 and a high score for Leadership Commitment of 88.5.

Table 5: Comparative Implementation Performance across South African Public Entities and State-Owned Enterprises

Public Entity/SOE	Investigating Commission	Baseline LCI (Pre-Inquiry)	Post-Inquiry LCI	Institutional Inertia Score	Total Inquired Recommendations	Verified Recommendations Implemented	Implementation Success Rate (%)	Qualitative Transformation Outcome
SARS	Nugent Commission (2018)	34.2	88.5	38.4	27	24	88.89	High Transformation
Eskom Holdings SOC Ltd	Zondo Commission (2022)	28.5	62.4	76.1	42	22	52.38	Moderate Transformation
Transnet SOC Ltd	Zondo Commission (2022)	31	58.7	72.8	36	18	50.00	Moderate Transformation
PRASA	Zondo/Special SIU (2022)	22.4	46.2	84.5	31	11	35.48	Low Transformation
SABC	Parliamentary/Zondo (2020)	29.8	71.3	54.2	24	17	70.83	Substantial Transformation
NPA	Zondo/Mokgoro (2019)	36.1	78.4	58.9	35	26	74.29	Substantial Transformation
PIC	Mpati Commission (2020)	38	74.6	49.3	22	18	81.82	High Transformation

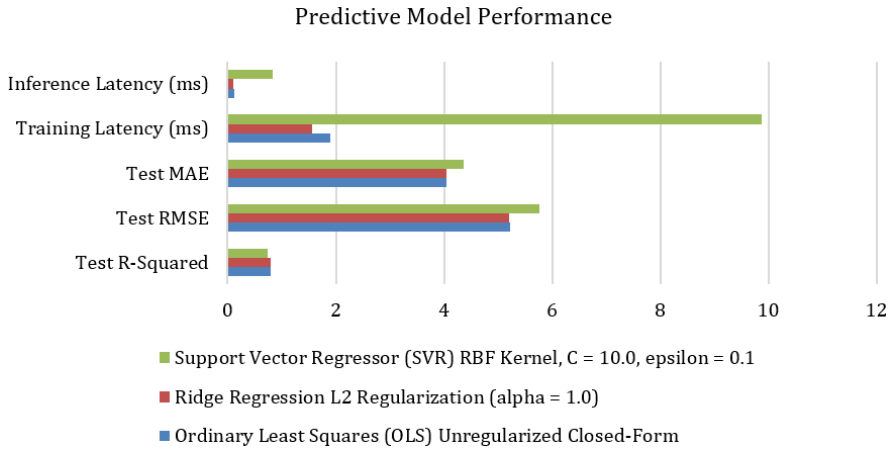


Figure 4: Predictive Model Performance and Latency

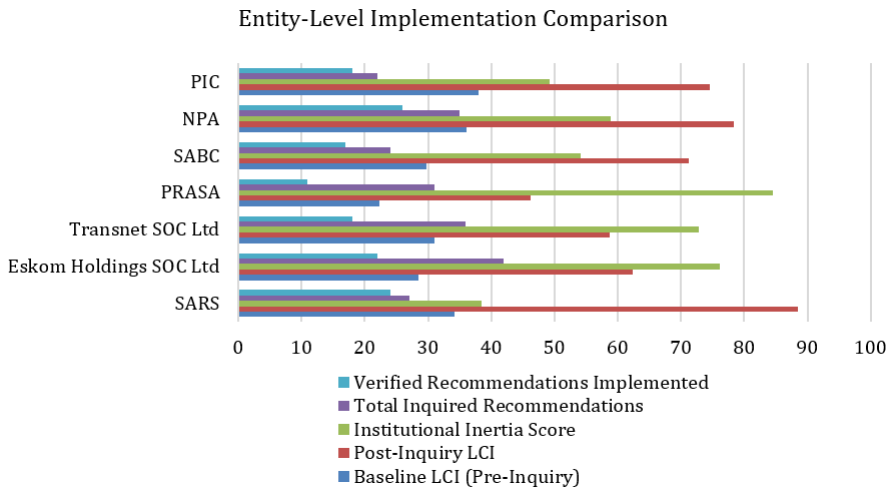


Figure 5: Comparative Implementation Performance across South African Public Entities and State-Owned Enterprises

The PIC and NPA implementation rates were 81.82 and 74.29% respectively, while their leadership commitment scores were greater than 74.0. In the NPA, leadership support was correlated with the creation and formalization of the Investigating Directorate against Corruption.

However, the implementation of 35.48% recorded by PRASA is much lower, while institutional inertia is 84.5 and institutional commitment is 46.2. Eskom and Transnet have intermediate implementation rates of 52.38 and 50.00% respectively. They also had higher inertia scores (76.1 and 72.8) reflecting ongoing structural and operational barriers.

As can be seen in Figure 5, institutions with better leadership commitment tend to have higher implementation levels and those with higher institutional inertia have lower implementation performance. Table 5 and Figure 5 give an institutional perspective on the statistical relationships that were detected in the regression analysis.

DISCUSSION

This study concludes that a commitment of executive leadership plays a significant role in post inquiry change in South African public institutions. Commissions of inquiry primarily seek to find and describe problems. They report on a range of issues concerning misconduct, administrative shortcomings and governance failures in detail. But for change to become a permanent part of the organization, the people at the top need to have the power and the will to make needed changes happen. The lessons to be learnt from SARS following the Nugent Commission indicate how important leadership commitment is for minimizing the administrative resistance, eliminating irregular procurement practices and promoting good organizational practices that are aligned with Section 195 of the Constitution's values.

Conversely, if executive leadership is weak or questionable, commissions may be stalled in their recommendations and in action. Formal responses to the findings of an inquiry can be given to Parliament in institutions like PRASA and some of the older divisions of Transnet without necessarily resulting in significant operational changes. The negative coefficient of the Institutional Inertia (-0.3091) in the regression model can be explained by this pattern. Bureaucratic procedures, entrenched patronage networks and weak public sector boards can make it difficult to bring in changes from outside of the system.

The models' performance also reveals that leadership, resource allocation and organizational change are mostly additive in nature. Leadership commitment empowers managers to manage available financial and operational resources well. Additional resources alone may not produce improved change outcomes when leadership support is lacking because of the potential for the resources to be absorbed into the current administrative system and practices.

One of the study's weaknesses is the secondary cross-sectional data from various reporting environments. There may be variations between national departments, constitutional institutions and Schedule 2 public enterprises in their reporting. This can lead to a few variations in organizational performance measurement. The study mitigates this concern, however, by comparing and adjusting the data through external evaluation by the Auditor-General of South Africa and civil society monitoring databases. Information from multiple sources would enhance consistency and result in more robust support for application of findings by South African public institutions.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this study give reason to believe that the commitment of the executive leadership is crucial in the extent that the recommendations of the commission of inquiry are realized in terms of tangible change in the organization within the South African public institutions. The recommendations of judicial inquiries are detailed and do not necessarily lead to organizationalssss reform; rather, they give detail of governance issues and potential solutions. They must be implemented by leaders who have sufficient authority and autonomy to make decisions that will result in the required action being taken. In the absence of such leadership, recommendations may be delayed by the institutional inertia and institutional resistance that are built up in established bureaucracy.

Policymakers might also want to design more explicit implementation systems after the inquiry to decrease the likelihood of recommendations being disregarded when the inquiry is over. There should be a linkage between statutory performance agreements of the accounting officers and specific and time-limited targets for implementing commission recommendations within parliament and executive oversight institutions. This would help to clarify the responsibility for implementation and provide more regular monitoring of progress.

Provision of dedicated statutory bodies, or implementation tracking units, may also assist in sustaining focus on recommendations in the longer term. For example, an independent anti-corruption oversight mechanism could be established to continue monitoring even after the shift in senior leadership. Further research is needed that will look at implementation over multiple years and incorporate provincial and local government institutions. This research might also shed more light on the long-term survival of reforms following commissions of inquiry and the effects of political and administrative leadership changes on this.

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