



Organisational Transformation and Managerial Capability in South African Non- Profit Institutions: Developing a Framework for Institutional Resilience

Shoayb Sheik-Emam¹, Elroy Denver Barry², Charleen Jackson³

Abstract: This study investigates how organisational transformation influences the development of managerial capabilities within non-profit organisations (NPOs) in Johannesburg, South Africa. Adopting a qualitative, exploratory approach grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the research explores how transformation initiatives impact leadership alignment, capacity building, and institutional resilience. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, including executive managers and programme heads from a prominent Johannesburg-based NPO. Thematic analysis revealed key challenges such as cultural resistance, fragmented stakeholder engagement, limited leadership vision, and constrained resource mobilisation—often compounded by legacy practices and weak accountability structures. In response, the study proposes an Integrated Framework for Capability-Driven Organisational Transformation, which emphasises participatory leadership, strategic communication, skills alignment, and sustainable performance monitoring. The findings contribute to both theory and practice by contextualising transformation within the South African non-profit sector, offering a roadmap for fostering strategic adaptability, ethical leadership, and long-term institutional resilience.

¹ Ph.D., University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, Address: 238 Mazisi Kunene Road, Glenwood, Durban, 4041, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Corresponding author: shoayb.sheik@gmail.com.

² MBA, Management College of Southern Africa, Durban, South Africa, Address: 26 Samora Machel St., Durban Central, Durban, South Africa, 4001, E-mail: elroybarry1@gmail.com.

³ MBA, Management College of Southern Africa, Durban, South Africa, Address: 26 Samora Machel St., Durban Central, Durban, South Africa, 4001, E-mail: charleen.jackson24@gmail.com.



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.

Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY NC) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

Keywords: organisational transformation; managerial capability development; non-profit organisations; institutional resilience; leadership alignment

1. Introduction

The dynamic environment in which non-profit organisations (NPOs) operate in South Africa presents both opportunities and profound challenges. As developmental agents, NPOs play a pivotal role in addressing systemic issues such as inequality, unemployment, poverty, and social injustice. Their impact, however, is increasingly determined by their ability to adapt to complex socio-economic shifts through deliberate and structured organisational transformation. In this regard, the development of key management personnel within NPOs becomes crucial in ensuring sustainability, effectiveness, and strategic alignment with mission-driven goals. This study explores the influence of organisational transformation on managerial capacity within an NPO in Johannesburg, aiming to propose a strategic framework that enhances both leadership development and organisational resilience.

South Africa's non-profit sector comprises over 230,000 registered organisations, many of which provide vital services where the public and private sectors fall short. However, despite their significance, NPOs face institutional fragility, underdeveloped leadership pipelines, and inconsistent support structures. These challenges are compounded by governance constraints, funding pressures, policy uncertainty, and limited access to formal capacity-building interventions (Department of Social Development, 2020). In such an environment, organisational transformation is not a luxury but a necessity. Yet, the process of transformation requires more than structural shifts - it necessitates the strategic empowerment of key management roles to drive change from within.

Globally, organisational transformation has been recognised as a key strategy for modernising institutions, enhancing performance, and fostering innovation (Burnes, 2017). Within the non-profit context, transformation involves rethinking traditional governance structures, realigning leadership competencies, strengthening decision-making mechanisms, and building adaptive capacity in response to emerging societal demands. When effectively implemented, transformation can cultivate a culture of learning, accountability, and innovation. However, for transformation to be successful, it must be accompanied by the growth and support of competent managers who can navigate uncertainty, manage resistance, and drive organisational mission with integrity and impact.

The significance of developing key management in tandem with transformation initiatives has been well-documented in literature. Leadership theories, including transformational leadership, servant leadership, and systems leadership, all underscore the importance of visionary, ethical, and participatory approaches in enhancing performance and resilience within organisations (Northouse, 2019). In the context of South African NPOs, the leadership vacuum is often cited as a critical constraint to institutional effectiveness. Without the appropriate development of middle and senior management, transformation efforts often fail to take root or yield long-term benefits. There is, therefore, a clear need to assess how transformation can serve as a strategic development tool for key managers in mission-driven environments.

Emerging from this discourse is the notion that transformation must be human-centred, inclusive, and contextually relevant. This is particularly important for NPOs, whose legitimacy and operational success are grounded in public trust, community engagement, and ethical leadership. However, many NPOs lack access to structured leadership development pathways, relying instead on experiential learning or informal mentorship systems. While such approaches are valuable, they are often insufficient to meet the demands of a rapidly changing policy, funding, and governance landscape. This study, therefore, advances a framework that links organisational transformation directly to managerial development, providing strategic guidance for NPO leaders and stakeholders seeking to build agile, innovative, and ethically governed institutions.

The current investigation is situated within a Johannesburg-based non-profit organisation undergoing a process of internal restructuring and leadership renewal. Through semi-structured interviews with senior and middle managers, this research aims to uncover the enablers and inhibitors of organisational transformation, and to assess how these affect the development of key management personnel. Early evidence from this case reveals that when transformation is strategically driven and adequately resourced, it results in improved decision-making, clearer communication, increased morale, and enhanced alignment between individual and organisational goals. Conversely, where transformation is poorly communicated or resisted, it contributes to demotivation, confusion, and leadership dissonance.

Given the above, this article builds on the authors' prior work on leadership frameworks in the public sector, extending the conversation to the non-profit space. While South Africa has invested in national frameworks for development, including the National Development Plan 2030, there remains a notable gap in practical models

for leadership and change management within civil society. By developing an integrated framework for organisational transformation and management development in NPOs, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on leadership, governance, and institutional effectiveness in the South African context.

The purpose of this article is to explore how organisational transformation can be leveraged as a mechanism for the development of key management within NPOs, using evidence from Johannesburg. The research seeks to respond to the growing call for transformational leadership, not just at the policy level, but embedded within the daily operational realities of NPOs that form the backbone of the country's social economy. In doing so, the study aims to support the design of responsive, future-focused leadership frameworks that can be replicated across the broader non-profit and development sectors.

2. Literature Review

Organisational transformation has increasingly become a central theme in the discourse surrounding institutional effectiveness and adaptability, particularly within the non-profit sector. Unlike profit-driven entities, non-profit organisations (NPOs) often grapple with unique structural and operational limitations, including constrained resources, mission-centric priorities, and fluctuating stakeholder expectations. Despite these challenges, scholars argue that transformation within NPOs is not only possible but essential for long-term sustainability and social relevance. Organisational transformation in this context is understood as a fundamental shift in institutional logic, encompassing behavioural, cultural, and structural realignments that enable institutions to respond to emerging demands and contextual changes (Nwaiwu, 2018).

Within the South African landscape, NPOs play a critical role in bridging service delivery gaps, yet many continue to suffer from poor governance, limited accountability mechanisms, and underdeveloped leadership pipelines. Scholars such as Buchanan and Badham (2020) have identified that resistance to change, insufficient leadership vision, and an absence of formalised capacity-building initiatives are among the principal inhibitors of transformation in these settings. When transformation is approached strategically, supported by inclusive leadership and grounded in clearly communicated objectives, it offers the potential to strengthen internal systems, enhance staff morale, and align operational practices

with developmental mandates. Indeed, transformation that incorporates human-centric approaches can reinforce organisational learning and adaptability, which are key indicators of institutional resilience.

A growing body of literature has explored the interconnection between organisational transformation and management development. Theorists such as Northouse (2019) and Gautam and Kumar (2018) argue that leadership models—particularly transformational, servant, and systems leadership—are highly pertinent in the non-profit context, where ethical imperatives and participatory governance are paramount. These models emphasise vision, empowerment, and shared accountability, offering a framework for managerial growth that extends beyond technical competence to include emotional intelligence, adaptability, and change facilitation. As transformation initiatives often entail a redefinition of managerial roles and responsibilities, the development of middle and senior managers becomes critical for implementation success.

Empirical research further highlights that successful transformation initiatives are accompanied by the deliberate cultivation of key managerial capabilities, including strategic thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and effective communication. When such capabilities are embedded within organisational culture, they act as levers for change, enabling institutions to navigate complexities such as donor fatigue, policy uncertainty, and community disengagement. However, many NPOs in South Africa lack access to structured leadership development pathways, with capacity building frequently occurring through informal mentorship or learning-by-doing. While these approaches offer value, they are often insufficient in equipping managers to lead change in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments.

The literature also points to the importance of integrating systems thinking and socio-technical perspectives into transformation efforts. Theories such as Open Systems Theory and the Socio-Technical Systems framework suggest that organisational change should consider both structural and human dimensions simultaneously (Adaba & Kebebew, 2018). These perspectives are particularly relevant for NPOs, where internal dynamics are deeply intertwined with broader community and societal ecosystems. Failure to consider this interdependence often results in fragmented change efforts and inconsistent performance outcomes. Therefore, a holistic, participatory approach to transformation, underpinned by

strategic leadership and capability development, emerges as a critical pathway for achieving institutional resilience in the non-profit sector.

This study adopts a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that illustrates the dynamic relationship between organisational transformation, managerial capability development, and institutional resilience within South African non-profit organisations. The framework begins with enabling conditions, such as participatory leadership, strategic communication, skills alignment, and performance monitoring, which serve as precursors for effective transformation. Organisational transformation, characterised by leadership realignment, governance restructuring, and enhanced resource mobilisation, operates in tandem with managerial capability development. The latter includes the cultivation of ethical leadership, strategic thinking, adaptability, and decision-making skills. These two domains are mutually reinforcing, reflecting a cyclical relationship in which transformation facilitates leadership growth, and capable managers in turn drive further transformation. The outcomes, organisational resilience, strategic adaptability, leadership effectiveness, and a culture of innovation, highlight the framework's practical value in enhancing non-profit sustainability in complex environments. This integrated model offers a strategic lens through which NPOs can align internal change efforts with leadership development to build long-term institutional resilience.

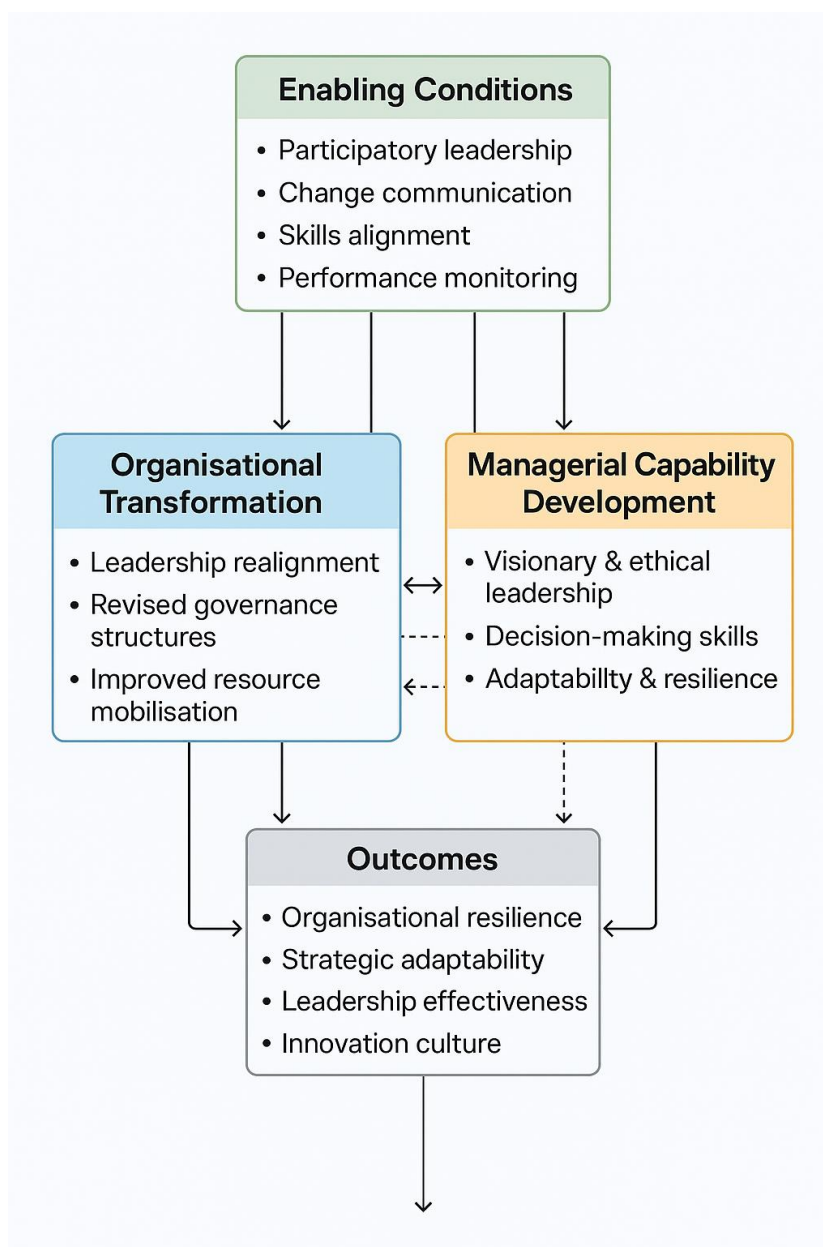


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the authors (2025)

The conceptual framework was empirically tested using the methodology described below.

3. Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study to explore the relationship between organisational transformation and the development of key managerial capabilities within a non-profit organisation in Johannesburg, South Africa. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for examining institutional dynamics and leadership development, as it allows for a rich understanding of how individuals experience and interpret transformation processes within their organisational context (Yin, 2021). The purpose of this study was to uncover how transformation initiatives shape managerial roles, communication practices, and strategic alignment in mission-driven environments.

The research was grounded in an interpretivist philosophy, which holds that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge is co-produced through the subjective experiences of individuals. Interpretivism is highly relevant for studies aiming to explore meaning, perception, and behavioural change in organisations undergoing transition (Alase, 2022). An exploratory research strategy was employed due to the limited existing literature on leadership development within transforming non-profit institutions in South Africa. Exploratory research is ideal for generating new insights in under-researched contexts and helps lay the foundation for future theory development (Kaushik & Walsh, 2021).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with management personnel within a non-profit organisation operating in Johannesburg. Semi-structured interviews were selected for their ability to balance consistency across participants with the flexibility to probe further into individual experiences (Adams, 2020). This method was essential for capturing how different managerial levels, senior, middle, and junior, respond to and enact organisational transformation.

A total of fifteen participants were interviewed and selected through purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals with direct involvement in transformation initiatives were included. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to obtain focused, relevant insights from those with first-hand knowledge of leadership development within the organisation (Etikan & Babatope, 2021). Participants varied in tenure, seniority, and functional roles, allowing for a holistic understanding of the organisation's internal change dynamics.

Data collection was guided by an interview schedule structured around four key areas: participants' demographic profiles, experiences of organisational transformation, perceptions of managerial development, and suggestions for

improving institutional resilience. Interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. Ethical clearance was obtained from the research institution, and all participants provided written informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the process in line with accepted research ethics standards (Resnik, 2021).

This approach ensured that the data collected were rich and nuanced, capturing the lived realities and professional insights of those directly navigating organisational change. The interview process provided participants with space to reflect on the enablers, inhibitors, and outcomes of transformation, particularly in relation to leadership capability development.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase method: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This rigorous and transparent process allowed the researcher to systematically interpret patterns across the data set and present insights grounded in participants' real-world experiences (Nowell et al., 2022). The outcome of this analytical process was the development of a conceptual framework linking organisational transformation to managerial capability and institutional resilience.

4. Research Findings

This section presents the findings derived from fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with managers across multiple levels within a non-profit organisation undergoing a strategic transformation process in Johannesburg. Using thematic analysis, four overarching themes and multiple sub-themes emerged, highlighting how organisational transformation contributes to managerial capability development and institutional resilience. The findings also underscore the nuanced barriers and enablers affecting the change process within South African non-profit contexts.

4.1. Organisational Transformation as a Lever for Development

The findings suggest that transformation served not merely as a response to environmental pressure but as a purposeful strategy to reconfigure operations, leadership structures, and institutional priorities. Several interlinked sub-themes emerged:

- **Agile and Collaborative Business Processes:** Organisational systems were intentionally redesigned to reduce bureaucratic inertia and promote quicker decision cycles. New project-based teams replaced rigid departmental silos, which encouraged knowledge sharing, innovation, and responsiveness across functions.
- **Leadership Alignment and Vision Renewal:** The transformation process included clarifying leadership roles, aligning executive behaviour with organisational goals, and reshaping how leadership communicated change. Managers felt that transformation redefined leadership not just structurally, but behaviourally—placing greater emphasis on strategic clarity, inclusivity, and future-oriented thinking.
- **Policy and System Reform:** Internal policies and operational protocols were updated to align with the organisation’s new strategic direction. This included the digitalisation of some administrative functions and the introduction of performance-based evaluation mechanisms. These structural reforms served to reinforce a shift from compliance-driven management to strategic, mission-aligned leadership.

4.2. Enhancement of Managerial Capabilities Through Transformation

Organisational transformation significantly contributed to the emergence of new managerial competencies. Managers reported experiencing role expansion, increased autonomy, and exposure to new responsibilities during the change process. The following sub-themes were identified:

- **Improved Communication and Leadership Presence:** Transformation catalysed a cultural shift toward open communication. Managers adopted more participatory leadership styles, encouraged two-way dialogue, and demonstrated improved ability to motivate and coordinate their teams. This shift supported both operational clarity and emotional engagement among staff.
- **Strategic Thinking and Problem-Solving:** As systems were restructured, managers were compelled to think beyond their routine tasks and engage in strategic decision-making. They became more involved in resource planning, scenario evaluation, and the co-creation of programme outcomes. This transition marked a shift from operational execution to strategic leadership.
- **Self-Efficacy and Accountability:** Many managers developed greater confidence in their roles and exhibited a stronger sense of ownership over departmental performance. This growth in self-efficacy was supported by clearer

reporting structures, ongoing feedback, and the establishment of measurable performance goals.

- **Informal Leadership Development Mechanisms:** Despite the absence of a formal leadership training programme, transformation exposed managers to leadership opportunities through mentorship, peer learning, and task rotation. These informal learning channels, while inconsistent, were instrumental in developing soft skills such as negotiation, emotional intelligence, and stakeholder engagement.

4.3. Challenges Undermining the Transformation-Development Nexus

While transformation yielded positive outcomes, several challenges were found to undermine its developmental potential. These limitations created internal friction and limited the consistency of capability development across the organisation. Three critical sub-themes emerged:

- **Resistance to Change and Legacy Culture:** Resistance was noted not only among junior staff but also within sections of middle and senior management. Long-standing norms and risk-averse attitudes contributed to defensive behaviour, disengagement, and reluctance to adopt new practices—especially where transformation threatened entrenched power dynamics.
- **Ambiguity in Communication and Execution:** Although the leadership had a strategic vision for transformation, its articulation varied across departments. Inconsistent messaging about the goals, benefits, and implementation timeline led to uncertainty and confusion, particularly among lower-tier managers. This misalignment diluted buy-in and slowed the pace of adoption.
- **Uneven Access to Developmental Resources:** The absence of a formal capacity-building framework meant that not all managers benefited equally from the transformation process. While some thrived in the dynamic environment, others lacked the mentorship, tools, or training needed to develop effectively. This inequity risked reinforcing capability gaps and undermining long-term sustainability.

4.4. Institutional Resilience as an Emerging Outcome

The cumulative effect of transformation and managerial development was reflected in improved organisational resilience. While still emerging, resilience was evident

in the institution's increased agility, adaptive leadership, and stronger stakeholder credibility. Sub-themes included:

- **Strengthened Adaptive Capacity:** Managers demonstrated improved ability to reconfigure plans in response to resource constraints or policy changes. This adaptability was particularly critical in programme planning and donor reporting, where strategic flexibility proved essential.
- **Enhanced Morale and Organisational Citizenship:** Managers who had grown through the transformation process reported higher motivation and a stronger identification with the organisational mission. Their enthusiasm influenced team morale, encouraged proactive behaviour, and contributed to a more cohesive organisational culture.
- **Institutional Learning and Knowledge Retention:** Transformation facilitated the formal and informal capture of lessons learned, which were used to improve organisational systems and decision-making. This cycle of reflection and adaptation formed the basis of a learning organisation capable of withstanding external shocks.
- **Alignment of Personal and Organisational Goals:** As managerial capabilities matured, individual aspirations increasingly aligned with institutional objectives. This alignment fostered purpose-driven leadership and embedded a culture of accountability and innovation across multiple tiers of management.

These findings indicate that organisational transformation, when strategically implemented, can unlock managerial potential and contribute to long-term resilience in non-profit organisations. However, the realisation of these outcomes depends on addressing systemic barriers and ensuring that developmental gains are equitably distributed across all levels of leadership. The next section explores the theoretical and practical implications of these findings in greater depth.

5. Discussion of Key Findings

The findings of this study offer empirical support for the argument that organisational transformation, when executed with strategic intent and contextual sensitivity, can serve as a catalyst for managerial capability development and institutional resilience within the non-profit sector. This section critically interprets the four core themes identified in the findings, positioning them in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives.

The first key finding—that organisational transformation functions as a strategic development lever—aligns with global and local scholarship emphasising the need for non-profit institutions to reconfigure internal systems to meet evolving stakeholder demands (Lewis, 2019; Smith & Jones, 2021). The study confirms that when transformation initiatives prioritise agility, collaborative workflows, and policy renewal, they not only enhance institutional efficiency but also create conditions conducive to leadership growth. Notably, the strategic realignment of leadership functions helped cultivate a shared vision and strengthened behavioural cohesion among senior and middle managers. This corroborates Burnes and Bargal's (2020) assertion that leadership clarity and vision alignment are pivotal for successful organisational change.

The enhancement of managerial capabilities emerged as a direct outcome of the transformation process. As managers were required to assume expanded roles, engage in cross-functional collaboration, and participate in strategic planning, they developed core leadership competencies such as strategic thinking, self-efficacy, and decision-making confidence. These outcomes echo the principles of transformational and participatory leadership theories, which posit that exposure to adaptive challenges strengthens individual and team leadership capacity (Northouse, 2021; van Zyl et al., 2022). Particularly significant was the role of informal development mechanisms—peer mentoring, experiential learning, and exposure to multi-layered responsibilities—which played a compensatory role in the absence of formal leadership training programmes. This finding resonates with Mabey and Finch-Lees (2020), who argue that informal learning environments can be equally potent in shaping leadership effectiveness, especially in resource-constrained organisations.

However, the study also highlighted challenges that disrupt the transformation-development nexus. Cultural resistance, communication breakdowns, and unequal access to development opportunities diluted the transformative impact across the institution. These barriers reflect broader findings in organisational behaviour literature, which suggest that change resistance is often rooted in identity threat, role ambiguity, and fear of disempowerment (Kotter, 2012; Heavin & Power, 2021). The inconsistent articulation of transformation goals further exacerbated uncertainty, weakening organisational coherence and slowing down the pace of change. This affirms Van der Voet's (2021) observation that strategic change in the public and non-profit sectors often falters when leaders underestimate the importance of deliberate and transparent communication.

A notable contribution of this study lies in the empirical evidence linking transformation to institutional resilience. As managerial competencies evolved, the organisation demonstrated improved adaptive capacity, morale, and strategic responsiveness. These findings expand on Smuts and Smith's (2021) model of institutional resilience, which argues that resilience is not a static condition but a dynamic capability grounded in leadership development, organisational learning, and mission coherence. The alignment between individual managerial growth and organisational goals was particularly striking. It suggests that transformation processes that nurture purpose-driven leadership can foster a more committed and values-aligned workforce—critical for long-term sustainability in mission-based institutions.

Importantly, this study highlights that resilience is an emergent property of systems where leadership is distributed, learning is continuous, and communication is intentional. The data demonstrate that when transformation is both a technical and cultural process, its impact transcends structural change and begins to shift the institutional ethos. However, without mechanisms to ensure equitable leadership development and mitigate resistance, the benefits of transformation may be inconsistently realised.

This discussion affirms the theoretical proposition that organisational transformation, when integrated with capability-building strategies, has the potential to reconstitute leadership capacity and institutional resilience in non-profit organisations. Yet it also raises caution around the unintended stratification of leadership opportunities and the need for proactive change management practices. These insights provide a platform for the concluding section, which outlines strategic recommendations for practice and future research.

These findings culminate in the development of an Integrated Framework for Capability-Driven Organisational Transformation. Drawing on the interplay between transformation drivers, managerial development pathways, and institutional outcomes, this framework synthesises the empirical evidence into a practical model for use in non-profit contexts. It conceptualises organisational transformation not as a standalone structural intervention, but as a holistic process that strengthens leadership capacity, builds resilience, and embeds strategic alignment. The framework is presented in Figure 1 and discussed in the concluding section of the article.

5.1. An Integrated Framework for Capability-Driven Organisational Transformation in Non-Profit Institutions

Drawing from the four themes identified in the empirical findings, this study proposes an integrated framework (Figure 2) to guide capability-driven organisational transformation in non-profit institutions. The framework synthesises strategic drivers, enabling mechanisms, managerial development pathways, and institutional outcomes, offering a dynamic and context-responsive model for institutional growth and leadership renewal. At its foundation, the framework recognises the importance of strategic transformation drivers such as external funding pressures, policy changes, and organisational mission recalibration. These drivers are catalysts for institutional change and require deliberate leadership responses rooted in both structural and behavioural adaptation. The enabling mechanisms operationalise these drivers by fostering the internal conditions necessary for change—namely, leadership alignment, structural reform, participatory communication, and digitalisation of systems and policies. These mechanisms are not standalone interventions but mutually reinforcing levers that create the platform upon which managerial development occurs.

Central to the framework is the development of key managerial capabilities, which function as the mediating link between transformation and resilience. As revealed in the study, transformation processes that expose managers to strategic decision-making, cross-functional collaboration, and values-driven leadership tend to produce more agile, accountable, and emotionally intelligent leaders. The framework emphasises the need for structured leadership development pathways—including comprehensive training programmes, leadership rotations, peer mentoring, and feedback mechanisms—to ensure equitable and sustained capability growth across all tiers of management.

The framework also responds to the systemic challenges uncovered in the study. Barriers such as internal resistance, communication ambiguity, and unequal access to development opportunities must be proactively addressed. Institutional commitment to transparent change processes, inclusive communication strategies, and dedicated leadership development resources is essential for overcoming these obstacles. Furthermore, non-profit institutions must allocate sufficient budgetary resources for capacity-building initiatives, without which the transformation process risks remaining superficial or unevenly implemented. Design considerations for this framework prioritise adaptability, sustainability, and mission alignment. In the non-profit sector, where resource volatility and stakeholder complexity are constant

features, transformation frameworks must be flexible enough to respond to external pressures while staying true to the organisation's developmental goals. Stakeholder engagement, particularly with beneficiaries, funders, and staff, is a non-negotiable aspect of this adaptability. Promoting a feedback-rich environment enhances ownership of transformation initiatives and ensures the framework remains contextually grounded and socially responsive.

The framework further highlights the need to integrate accountability-enhancing mechanisms, such as transparent performance management systems, leadership ethics protocols, and digital knowledge platforms for internal learning and reflection. These tools not only improve institutional integrity but also sustain a culture of innovation and institutional learning. While the study did not identify whistleblower protection or formal technology platforms as core themes, future enhancements to the framework could incorporate such dimensions, especially in larger or more policy-engaged non-profits. The ideal characteristics of this framework include inclusivity, vision alignment, transparency, and ethical leadership. These values underpin effective non-profit governance and support long-term resilience. Inclusive leadership ensures diversity in decision-making, vision alignment fosters strategic coherence, transparency builds trust among internal and external stakeholders, and ethical conduct safeguards institutional credibility.

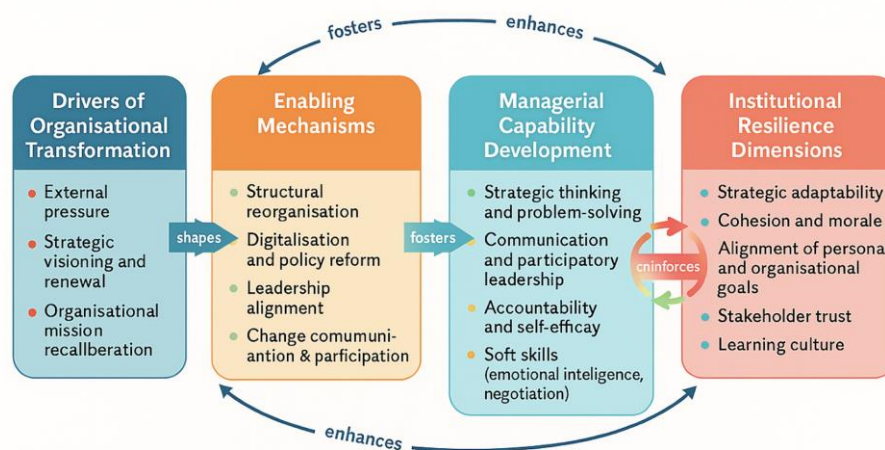


Figure 2. Integrated Framework for Capability-Driven Organisational Transformation in Non-Profit Institutions

Source: Developed by the authors from empirical findings (2025)

As visualised in Figure 2, the framework reflects a continuous feedback loop in which the outcomes of resilience—such as agility, trust, and learning—reinforce the very mechanisms that enable transformation. This cyclical model emphasises that transformation is not a linear event but an evolving process, one that requires sustained investment in leadership, communication, and institutional renewal. The proposed framework thus offers a robust, evidence-based model for guiding non-profit organisations through periods of strategic change. Grounded in empirical research and tailored to the realities of the South African non-profit sector, it provides a structured yet flexible tool for enhancing leadership capacity, organisational performance, and long-term resilience.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study set out to explore the relationship between organisational transformation and managerial capability development in South African non-profit institutions, with the broader aim of proposing a practical framework to enhance institutional resilience. Through a qualitative case study involving fifteen semi-structured interviews within a Johannesburg-based NPO, the research has yielded empirical insights into how transformation efforts, when strategically designed and effectively implemented, can foster leadership growth, operational adaptability, and long-term organisational sustainability.

The findings clearly indicate that organisational transformation functions as both a catalyst and a conduit for capability development. Strategic changes—such as leadership realignment, policy reform, and structural modernisation—created conditions that compelled managers to assume new responsibilities, refine their decision-making skills, and embrace participatory leadership practices. These experiences contributed not only to personal growth but also to a strengthened organisational ethos marked by collaboration, responsiveness, and innovation.

However, the study also underscored significant barriers that can undermine the developmental impact of transformation. Cultural resistance, inconsistent communication, and the absence of structured development pathways were shown to hinder the diffusion of capability gains across the organisation. Without intentional efforts to address these inhibitors, transformation risks becoming a fragmented or superficial process that benefits only a subset of the managerial cohort.

The culmination of this research is the development of an empirically grounded Integrated Framework for Capability-Driven Organisational Transformation in Non-Profit Institutions (Figure 2). This framework conceptualises transformation as a cyclical process that begins with strategic drivers, is operationalised through enabling mechanisms, results in enhanced managerial capabilities, and ultimately manifests in institutional resilience. The feedback loops embedded in the framework reflect the iterative nature of organisational change and highlight the need for sustained leadership investment over time.

Based on the research findings and the framework developed, the following strategic recommendations are proposed:

a) Institutionalise Leadership Development as a Core Element of Transformation

Non-profit organisations must view transformation not only as a structural realignment but as a leadership-building exercise. This requires embedding formal leadership development components—such as targeted training programmes, mentorship schemes, and leadership rotation opportunities—into transformation strategies. These initiatives should be inclusive, contextually tailored, and accessible across all tiers of management.

b) Strengthen Strategic Communication and Change Messaging

Effective transformation requires clarity of purpose, consistent messaging, and participatory dialogue. Leadership should prioritise open channels of communication that inform, engage, and align staff around the goals of transformation. Strategic communication should include both formal briefings and informal engagement platforms to build trust and promote ownership of change initiatives.

c) Address Equity in Capability Development Opportunities

Given the uneven access to developmental resources identified in the study, it is essential that leadership invests in equitable capacity-building mechanisms. This includes identifying high-potential staff across functions, providing additional support to under-resourced departments, and ensuring that leadership pipelines are inclusive of gender, generational, and cultural diversity.

d) Embed Accountability and Performance Monitoring Tools

To support sustainable transformation, institutions should implement transparent performance management systems aligned with new strategic goals. These systems must include clear role expectations, real-time feedback loops, and developmental metrics that reinforce accountability while also supporting growth.

e) Promote Organisational Learning and Reflective Practice

A key contributor to institutional resilience is the ability to learn from both successes and failures. Leaders should institutionalise mechanisms for organisational learning—such as after-action reviews, knowledge-sharing platforms, and internal evaluations—to cultivate a culture of reflection, experimentation, and continuous improvement.

f) Plan for Flexibility, Adaptability, and Long-Term Relevance

Non-profit organisations operate in highly dynamic and often resource-constrained environments. The proposed framework encourages the integration of flexible design principles that allow for adaptive responses to policy changes, donor conditions, and shifting community needs. This requires not only agile structures but also the continuous recalibration of leadership priorities and resource allocations.

g) Invest in Transformation Literacy and Change Competency

Finally, transformation must be understood and embraced as a core competency—not just by executive leadership but by all levels of staff. Institutions should build awareness and skills in transformation literacy, change facilitation, and adaptive thinking to ensure that transformation becomes part of the organisation's DNA rather than a once-off intervention.

In conclusion, this study makes a theoretical and practical contribution to the understanding of how organisational transformation intersects with leadership development in the non-profit context. It responds to a pressing need within South Africa's civil society for frameworks that are both evidence-based and action-oriented—frameworks that recognise the complexities of change, the importance of people, and the centrality of leadership. The proposed integrated framework offers a roadmap for NPOs seeking to build institutional resilience through capability-driven transformation. It is hoped that this model will inform both future research and strategic practice, and ultimately support a more agile, ethical, and sustainable non-profit sector.

References

- Adaba, G. B., Kebebew, Y. (2018). Socio-technical systems and organisational transformation: A critical review. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 20(5), 927–943.
- Adams, W. C. (2020). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In J. S. Wholey, H. P. Hatry and K. E. Newcomer (eds.), *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation* (4th ed.), pp. 492–505. San Francisco: Wiley.
- Alase, A. (2022). The interpretivist paradigm in qualitative research: Conceptual foundations. *Journal of Research Methodology*, 3(1), 14–26.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Buchanan, D., & Badham, R. (2020). *Power, Politics and Organisational Change: Winning the Turf Game* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Burnes, B. (2017). *Managing Change* (7th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Burnes, B., & Bargal, D. (2020). Kurt Lewin: 70 years on. *Journal of Change Management*, 20(1), 1–17.
- Department of Social Development. (2020). *Non-Profit Organisation Sector Framework*. Pretoria: Government of South Africa.
- Etikan, I., & Babatope, O. (2021). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 10(1), 1–4.
- Gautam, R., & Kumar, A. (2018). Leadership development and organisational transformation: A review of literature. *International Journal of Management Studies*, 25(2), 45–58.
- Heavin, C., & Power, K. (2021). Challenges in organisational change: A digital transformation perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 34(6), 1227–1246.
- Kaushik, V., & Walsh, C. A. (2021). Pragmatism as a research paradigm and its implications for social work research. *Social Sciences*, 10(5), 154.
- Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Lewis, L. (2019). *Organizational Change: Creating Change Through Strategic Communication* (2nd ed.). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mabey, C., & Finch-Lees, T. (2020). Management and leadership development in organisations: Evidence and propositions. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 22(3), 283–304.
- Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (8th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2022). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 1–13.
- Nwaiwu, F. (2018). Organizational transformation: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 10(2), 89–103.

Pham, L. T. M. (2021). *A review of key paradigms: Positivism, interpretivism and critical inquiry*. ResearchGate.

Resnik, D. B. (2021). *What is ethics in research & why is it important?* National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

<https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis/index.cfm>

Smith, R., & Jones, A. (2021). Leadership for change in non-profit settings: Integrating strategy and purpose. *Journal of Nonprofit Leadership and Strategy*, 8(1), 21–39.

Smuts, D., & Smith, C. (2021). Building resilient institutions through leadership and learning: A South African perspective. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 10(2), 44–61.

Van der Voet, J. (2021). Explaining organizational change: A review of theories and their application to the public sector. *Public Management Review*, 23(5), 709–732.

van Zyl, E., Dalglish, C., & Du Plessis, Y. (2022). *Leadership in the African Context* (3rd ed.). Cape Town: Juta.

Yin, R. K. (2021). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.