GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE: A FRAMEWORK FOR REFORM ADDRESSING CORRUPTION, LOW MORALE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY CHALLENGES

Dr. John Motsamai Modise[*]

Tshwane University of Technology

Corresponding Author Dr. John Motsamai Modise

Tshwane University of Technology

Abstract: This study investigates the critical challenges facing the South African public service, focusing on corruption, low employee morale, and accountability deficits. Despite ongoing reforms, governance weaknesses continue to undermine service delivery and public trust. The research aims to develop a comprehensive framework for reform that addresses these challenges through enhanced leadership, ethical practices, and institutional accountability. Drawing on recent empirical data and policy analyses, the study offers practical recommendations to strengthen governance and revitalise the public sector's role in democratic development. The purpose of this study is to examine the underlying factors contributing to corruption, low morale, and weak accountability within the South African public service, and to propose a robust, context-specific governance reform framework. This framework intends to guide policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders in improving institutional integrity, employee engagement, and service delivery outcomes. South Africa's public service continues to grapple with systemic corruption, low staff morale, and inadequate accountability, which hinder effective service delivery and erode public confidence. Previous reform efforts have been hampered by poor implementation, institutional weaknesses, and political interference, leaving governance challenges unresolved. There is a pressing need for a holistic and practical reform framework that can address these interrelated issues to restore the public sector's legitimacy and performance. Corruption remains deeply entrenched in multiple layers of government, undermining transparency and resource allocation. Low employee morale is linked to insufficient leadership development, poor recognition systems, and lack of career progression opportunities. Accountability mechanisms are often weak due to fragmented oversight, political pressures, and under-resourced institutions. Successful reform requires integrated governance frameworks that combine ethical leadership, effective internal controls, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. This study contributes a comprehensive, evidence-based framework for public service reform tailored to the South African context. By synthesizing recent empirical research and policy evaluations, it provides actionable strategies for combating corruption, boosting employee morale, and enhancing accountability. The framework is designed to support sustainable improvements in governance and public sector performance, informing both academic discourse and practical policy-making. Addressing governance challenges in the South African public service demands coordinated reform efforts that tackle corruption, low morale, and accountability deficiencies simultaneously. This study's proposed framework offers a pathway for strengthening institutional integrity, empowering employees, and restoring public trust. Implementing these reforms will be essential for achieving effective, ethical, and responsive governance that supports South Africa's democratic and developmental goals.

Keywords: Good Governance, Public Service Reform, Corruption, Accountability, Employee Morale, South African Public Sector, Institutional Integrity, Leadership Development, Anti-Corruption Strategies, Public Administration, Service Delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Good governance is a cornerstone of effective public administration, playing a vital role in fostering transparency, accountability, integrity, and efficient service delivery. In South Africa, the public service is constitutionally mandated to deliver equitable, responsive, and developmental services. However, in recent years, it has been plagued by systemic challenges including corruption, weak oversight, political interference, and declining employee morale. These issues have significantly eroded public confidence in state institutions and undermined efforts toward social and economic transformation (Public Service Commission, 2023).

Despite a progressive legal and institutional framework, corruption remains deeply entrenched in many sectors of the public service. High-profile scandals such as those revealed during the

Zondo Commission have highlighted the extent of state capture and the manipulation of public resources for private gain (Zondo Commission, 2022). Additionally, the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) continues to report widespread irregular expenditure and governance failures across all spheres of government (AGSA, 2023). These issues are compounded by poor leadership, lack of consequence management, and weak enforcement of ethics and accountability mechanisms.

Low morale among public servants further exacerbates the problem. The 2022 Public Service Commission (PSC) report indicates that many government employees feel demotivated due to inadequate support, poor working conditions, and the perception that corruption and incompetence go unpunished (PSC, 2022). This disillusionment directly impacts productivity and service quality, especially in under-resourced departments and rural areas. Globally, countries like Singapore, Rwanda, and Botswana have implemented successful reforms rooted in ethical governance, strong leadership, and performance-based accountability. Drawing lessons from such contexts, this study seeks to develop a reform framework tailored to the South African public service—one that addresses systemic corruption, promotes employee engagement, and fosters institutional accountability.

Ultimately, this proposal argues that for South Africa to meet its development goals, it must urgently reform its public administration systems through a context-specific, values-driven, and enforceable framework for good governance.

BACKGROUND

The South African public service has undergone significant transformation since the advent of democracy in 1994, guided by a constitutional mandate to ensure accountability, transparency, and equitable service delivery. However, despite this progressive foundation, the public administration system continues to struggle with persistent governance failures, particularly in areas of financial management, ethics, and human resource development.

The scale of governance challenges has become increasingly evident in recent years. The **Zondo Commission** (2022) uncovered widespread corruption, political interference, and mismanagement within key state institutions, revealing how state capture systematically undermined public sector effectiveness. According to the **Auditor-General South Africa (AGSA)**, more than R60 billion in irregular expenditure was recorded in the 2022/23 financial year, reflecting chronic non-compliance with procurement laws and internal controls (AGSA, 2023). These financial losses are compounded by the lack of consequence management, with very few officials held accountable for misconduct or maladministration.

In parallel, employee morale within the public service is deteriorating. The **Public Service Commission (PSC)** reported in 2022 that job dissatisfaction, leadership failures, and the erosion of professional values are demotivating public servants and contributing to inefficiency (PSC, 2022). Furthermore, many departments face critical capacity shortages, outdated skills, and poor performance management systems. This weakens institutional resilience and responsiveness to the needs of the public, especially in disadvantaged communities.

From an international perspective, countries such as Rwanda and Singapore have demonstrated that strategic governance reforms—rooted in integrity, performance evaluation, and citizen engagement—can transform public services. South Africa's current frameworks, such as the **National Development Plan 2030 (NDP)** and the **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030)**, provide important policy direction but have yet to be fully implemented or institutionalised across government sectors.

The failure to enforce ethical standards, professional conduct, and accountability mechanisms continues to undermine efforts to professionalise the public service. As such, this research seeks to develop a pragmatic and actionable governance reform framework that strengthens institutional capacity, curbs corruption, and restores public trust in South Africa's public service.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the existence of a robust constitutional and legislative framework, the South African public service is increasingly characterised by systemic corruption, poor accountability, and low employee morale. These governance deficiencies continue to weaken institutional integrity, erode public trust, and compromise the delivery of essential services. At the core of the problem is the failure to institutionalise and enforce ethical governance, professional conduct, and effective oversight across public institutions.

Corruption remains deeply entrenched in various levels of the public sector. The **Auditor-General South Africa (AGSA)** reported R60.44 billion in irregular expenditure across national and provincial departments in the 2022/23 financial year (AGSA, 2023). The **Zondo Commission Report** (2022) further exposed how political patronage and state capture facilitated the misappropriation of public resources, undermining the rule of law and governance accountability. These failures are not isolated but systemic, reflecting an environment where misconduct is rarely penalised and internal controls are routinely bypassed.

Simultaneously, morale among public servants has deteriorated. The **Public Service Commission (PSC)** notes a rise in job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and resignation rates, with many employees citing poor leadership, lack of recognition, and politicisation of appointments as key concerns (PSC, 2022). This low morale diminishes productivity, fosters a culture of disengagement, and leads to inefficiencies that directly affect service delivery outcomes.

Although policy instruments such as the **National Development Plan (NDP) 2030** and the **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030)** outline strategic objectives for improving governance, implementation has been weak, fragmented, and poorly monitored. Institutional reforms are often met with resistance due to entrenched interests, lack of political will, and capacity constraints at senior management levels (OECD, 2023).

The problem therefore lies not in the absence of policy frameworks, but in the failure to enforce and operationalise them effectively. Without urgent and targeted reform efforts, the public service will remain vulnerable to corruption, incapable of enforcing accountability, and unable to meet the developmental needs of South Africa's citizens.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to develop a comprehensive reform framework that strengthens good governance within the South African public service by addressing systemic corruption, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and improving employee morale. The study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on public sector reform by proposing actionable,

evidence-based strategies that can restore institutional integrity and improve service delivery.

This aim is grounded in growing concerns about the persistent governance failures highlighted in recent findings by the **Auditor-General South Africa (2023)**, the **Zondo Commission (2022)**, and reports from the **Public Service Commission (2022)**, all of which underscore the urgent need for ethical leadership, professional conduct, and transparent management within the public sector.

Furthermore, the study aligns with strategic policy frameworks such as the **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030)** and the **National Development Plan 2030**, which emphasise the importance of an efficient, ethical, and development-oriented public administration. However, these plans require renewed commitment, institutional capacity, and robust monitoring mechanisms to translate their vision into tangible governance outcomes.

By identifying the key factors contributing to the erosion of public sector performance and proposing targeted interventions, the study aims to offer practical recommendations that can support national efforts to rebuild a professional, accountable, and citizen-focused public service.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND INTERRELATED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is guided by a set of research objectives and questions that are interlinked to ensure a coherent inquiry into the root causes of governance failures and the development of a viable reform framework for the South African public service.

Objective 1

To investigate the systemic causes of corruption and poor accountability within the South African public service.

Research Question 1:

What are the primary institutional, political, and socio-economic factors contributing to corruption and poor accountability in the public service?

Objective 2

To examine the impact of low employee morale on public sector performance and service delivery.

Research Question 2:

How does low morale among public servants affect administrative efficiency and service delivery outcomes?

Objective 3

To assess the effectiveness of current governance frameworks and anti-corruption strategies in addressing public service challenges.

Research Question 3:

To what extent have existing policies such as the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030) and the National Development Plan 2030 improved transparency, integrity, and oversight in public administration?

Objective 4

To identify best practices and lessons from other countries that has successfully reformed their public service sectors.

Research Question 4:

What governance reforms and accountability models from other countries can be adapted to the South African context?

Objective 5

To propose a practical framework for reforming the South African public service based on research findings.

Research Question 5:

What key elements should a governance reform framework include to effectively address corruption, improve accountability, and enhance employee morale in South Africa's public service?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform the urgent need for structural and ethical reforms in South Africa's public service, which has been severely weakened by corruption, ineffective leadership, and declining public trust. By focusing on the interlinked issues of governance, morale, and accountability, the study contributes to national and institutional efforts to professionalize the public sector and improve service delivery outcomes.

According to the **Auditor-General South Africa (2023)**, persistent financial mismanagement and irregular expenditure have become normative across government departments, with minimal accountability. These governance failures severely affect the government's ability to deliver basic services such as health care, education, and infrastructure—disproportionately impacting vulnerable and marginalized communities.

The **Public Service Commission (2022)** has also highlighted a growing crisis of confidence within the civil service, driven by inadequate support systems, political interference, and lack of performance-based incentives. These challenges result in low productivity, poor work culture, and weak enforcement of ethical standards, which further compromise institutional effectiveness.

This study is significant in three major ways

Policy Impact:

The research findings and proposed reform framework can guide policymakers, senior government officials, and oversight bodies in strengthening internal controls, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and promoting ethical governance in line with the **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030)**.

Public Sector Transformation:

By identifying root causes of corruption and low morale, the study provides practical solutions for building a motivated, competent, and principled public workforce—key to achieving the goals of the **National Development Plan 2030**, which envisions a capable and developmental state.

Academic Contribution:

The study adds to the growing body of literature on governance and public administration in South Africa, offering new insights on institutional reform, leadership ethics, and international best practices that can be tailored to local needs.

Overall, the study is significant in addressing both the theoretical and practical dimensions of public sector reform, with the goal of fostering an accountable, transparent, and citizen-centric government.

GAPS IN THE STUDY

Despite the extensive policy documentation and investigative reports addressing governance failures in South

Africa, several critical knowledge gaps persist, especially regarding practical and enforceable reform frameworks:

Limited Empirical Research on Implementation Failures:

While frameworks like the **National Development Plan (NDP) 2030** and **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030)** exist, little empirical research has examined *why* these policies have not been effectively implemented, particularly in decentralised and rural public institutions (DPME, 2021; AGSA, 2023).

Insufficient Focus on Employee Morale and Institutional Culture:

Most governance studies in South Africa focus on financial irregularities and political interference, often neglecting how employee morale, leadership style, and organisational culture impact the effectiveness of governance reforms (PSC, 2022).

Lack of Context-Specific Reform Models:

Current literature often draws on generic international governance models, but few studies propose context-specific, locally adaptable frameworks that account for South Africa's unique political, historical, and socio-economic dynamics (OECD, 2023).

Weak Integration of Governance Theories in Reform Proposals:

While normative values like transparency, accountability, and participation are promoted, there is limited theoretical integration guiding the reform approaches in practice, which weakens their sustainability and academic rigour.

This study aims to fill these gaps by combining empirical analysis with relevant governance theories and proposing a pragmatic framework that integrates policy, personnel, and institutional reform dimensions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in two key governance theories: **New Public Management (NPM)** and the **Good Governance Theory**, both of which provide useful lenses for analysing and improving public service performance in democratic states like South Africa.

New Public Management (NPM) Theory

NPM promotes efficiency, performance management, and accountability by adapting private sector practices to the public sector. It emphasises decentralisation, output-based performance, and customer orientation. In the South African context, NPM is particularly relevant in addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies and in professionalising service delivery (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2021).

Relevance to the Study:

NPM informs the study's approach to improving staff morale, leadership competence, and performance evaluation within public institutions.

Good Governance Theory

Good Governance Theory is based on principles of transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness, equity, and participation (UNESCAP, 2023). This theory is commonly used in assessing the quality of governance in developing countries and guides reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions.

Relevance to the Study:

This theory underpins the study's evaluation of corruption, political accountability, and ethical leadership, as emphasised in the Zondo Commission's findings and the National Anti-Corruption Strategy.

Integration of Theories

By integrating NPM and Good Governance Theory, the study adopts a dual lens—one that focuses on internal performance and human resource efficiency (NPM), and another that ensures democratic values and ethical standards (Good Governance Theory). This hybrid approach supports a more holistic and practical framework for public service reform in South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Good governance in the public sector is a cornerstone for achieving sustainable development, efficient service delivery, and public trust. This literature review explores recent academic and institutional contributions that address corruption, accountability, and morale in the South African public service, while situating the discourse within broader theoretical and policy contexts.

Corruption and Its Systemic Impact

Corruption in the South African public sector has been well-documented, most notably through the findings of the **Zondo Commission Report (2022)**, which exposed how political patronage and state capture undermined public institutions. According to **AGSA (2023)**, irregular expenditure remains a persistent issue, with over R60 billion reported in the 2022/23 audit cycle, pointing to entrenched governance failures and weak oversight mechanisms.

The **OECD (2023)** notes that public sector corruption in South Africa is often systemic rather than incidental, sustained by poor enforcement of anti-corruption laws, lack of political will, and institutional capture. These findings align with the **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030)**, which outlines key reforms but has faced slow implementation due to fragmented coordination across departments.

Accountability and Ethical Leadership

Accountability in the public service requires more than policy—it demands robust enforcement and a culture of ethical leadership. The **Public Service Commission (2022)** identified leadership instability and political interference as major impediments to accountability. Ethical breaches often go unpunished, and disciplinary processes are delayed or abandoned altogether.

International literature suggests that accountability is best ensured when it is embedded in institutional culture through transparency, citizen engagement, and autonomous oversight bodies (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2021). However, in South Africa, oversight mechanisms such as internal audit units, municipal public accounts committees, and the PSC itself often lack the independence or capacity to hold officials accountable effectively (OECD, 2023).

Employee Morale and Organisational Culture

Low employee morale has received comparatively less attention in governance literature, yet it remains a critical determinant of institutional performance. The **PSC (2022)** reported increasing dissatisfaction among public servants, citing poor recognition, limited career mobility, and exposure to political

pressure. This contributes to a demotivated workforce that is disengaged and resistant to reform.

Studies like **Madumo (2021)** argue that morale in the public sector is shaped by organisational justice, transparent recruitment processes, and the presence of strong internal leadership. Without addressing the internal environment of public institutions, external governance reforms are likely to be ineffective or unsustainable.

Governance Reform Frameworks: Lessons from International Practice

Comparative studies from countries such as Rwanda, Singapore, and Botswana illustrate how strong political will, institutional integrity, and performance-based public management can transform governance outcomes (OECD, 2023). These cases stress the importance of aligning incentives with ethical behaviour, fostering leadership accountability, and enforcing zero-tolerance policies on corruption.

While South Africa has attempted similar reforms through the **Public Administration Management Act (2014)** and the **NDP 2030**, implementation has been slow and uneven due to capacity constraints and weak interdepartmental coordination (DPME, 2021).

Summary of Literature Gaps

The literature reveals a strong consensus on the causes of governance failure—corruption, lack of accountability, and poor leadership. However, there is a noticeable gap in studies that integrate these issues into a unified, actionable reform framework. Furthermore, limited attention is given to the internal culture of public service institutions and the lived experiences of public servants, both of which are essential for sustainable governance transformation.

THEMES OF THE STUDY

The study revolves around four interrelated themes that reflect the core challenges and reform imperatives in the South African public service. These themes are drawn from recent academic literature, government policy documents, and institutional reports.

Corruption and State Accountability

Corruption remains a systemic issue in South Africa's public administration, often undermining trust in democratic institutions and distorting service delivery. The **Zondo Commission Report (2022)** revealed the depth of state capture, showing how corruption networks eroded governance structures. According to **AGSA (2023)**, irregular and wasteful expenditure continues to plague national and provincial departments, indicating weak internal controls and poor accountability mechanisms.

Key Focus:

➢ Forms and patterns of corruption

➢ Impact of corruption on service delivery

➢ Institutional and legal mechanisms for promoting accountability

Employee Morale and Organisational Culture

Low morale in the public service is a less visible but equally damaging issue, affecting productivity, ethical conduct, and retention of skilled personnel. The **Public Service Commission (2022)** has reported growing dissatisfaction among civil servants due to inadequate leadership, poor incentives, and

lack of career development opportunities. Studies such as **Madumo (2021)** argue that morale is intrinsically linked to organisational culture, ethical management, and clear performance metrics.

Key Focus:

➢ Factors affecting staff morale and motivation

➢ Links between morale and service delivery outcomes

➢ Strategies to enhance public service professionalism

Effectiveness of Governance Reforms and Anti-Corruption Strategies

Despite several reform efforts—including the **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020–2030)** and the **National Development Plan (NDP) 2030**—implementation gaps persist. Governance reforms often fail due to poor interdepartmental coordination, lack of political will, and under-resourced institutions (DPME, 2021; OECD, 2023).

Key Focus:

➢ Assessment of current anti-corruption frameworks

➢ Barriers to policy implementation

➢ Institutional capacity and political leadership in reform

Frameworks for Public Sector Reform

The need for a practical, context-specific framework is critical for transforming governance in South Africa. Drawing from international best practices—such as those in Botswana and Rwanda—this theme explores how ethical leadership, performance management, and citizen engagement can be harnessed to rebuild public sector integrity (OECD, 2023; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2021).

Key Focus:

➢ Components of effective reform frameworks

➢ Adaptation of global models to local contexts

➢ Recommendations for sustainable governance improvement

Impact of Articles

Recent scholarly and institutional articles have significantly shaped the discourse on good governance, corruption, and public service reform in South Africa, providing critical insights and evidence that underpin this study.

Enhancing Understanding of Corruption Dynamics

The extensive investigations and reports, such as the **Zondo Commission Report (2022)** and analyses by the **Auditor-General South Africa (2023)**, have exposed the systemic nature of corruption within public institutions. These articles have shifted the focus from isolated incidents to understanding corruption as embedded in institutional and political structures, emphasizing the need for comprehensive reform rather than piecemeal interventions.

Highlighting the Role of Leadership and Accountability

Research by the **Public Service Commission (2022)** and scholars like **Madumo (2021)** has brought to light the critical role that ethical leadership and accountability mechanisms play in sustaining good governance. These works have influenced policy

discussions by demonstrating how leadership styles and organisational culture impact morale and performance, thus reinforcing the call for leadership development and stronger oversight.

Evaluating Governance Reform Efforts

Evaluative studies, including reports by the **OECD (2023)** and the **Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME, 2021)**, have critically assessed the successes and shortcomings of governance reforms and anti-corruption strategies in South Africa. These articles provide empirical evidence on implementation barriers, institutional weaknesses, and political factors that hinder reform progress, informing this study's focus on practical, context-specific solutions.

Informing Framework Development

Comparative analyses from international literature (e.g., **Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2021**) have influenced the conceptualisation of reform frameworks by identifying best practices in public management that are adaptable to the South African context. This has encouraged a blended theoretical approach, integrating New Public Management with Good Governance principles to design sustainable reform models.

IMPACT OF THE STUDY

This study on good governance and reform in the South African public service is poised to have meaningful impacts across multiple stakeholders including government institutions, public departments, employees, and unions.

Impact on Government

Policy Improvement and Accountability:

The study's findings can support the government in refining policy frameworks by identifying practical barriers to effective governance reforms and anti-corruption strategies, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms (DPME, 2021; OECD, 2023).

Strengthening Institutional Integrity:

By proposing a context-sensitive reform framework, the government can better target state capture vulnerabilities and improve institutional checks and balances (AGSA, 2023; Zondo Commission, 2022).

Impact on Public Departments

Enhanced Service Delivery:

Departments may benefit from actionable recommendations aimed at boosting organisational culture and operational efficiency, leading to improved public service quality and reduced wasteful expenditure (PSC, 2022).

Capacity Building and Leadership Development:

The research highlights the need for leadership training and performance management systems, helping departments build a skilled and motivated workforce aligned with governance principles (Madumo, 2021).

Impact on Employees

Improved Morale and Job Satisfaction:

By addressing organisational culture and career development concerns, the study offers insights that can help improve working conditions and employee motivation, reducing burnout and turnover (PSC, 2022).

Empowerment and Ethical Awareness:

The study advocates for ethics training and empowerment of employees to act as custodians of good governance, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility within the public service (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2021).

Impact on Trade Unions

Advocacy and Collective Bargaining:

The study equips unions with evidence-based arguments to advocate for fair treatment, transparent disciplinary processes, and improved working conditions, enhancing their role in protecting workers' rights (Madumo, 2021).

Participation in Reform Processes:

Recognising the importance of inclusive governance, unions can use the framework to engage constructively with government and management in shaping reforms that consider employee welfare (PSC, 2022).

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's themes and findings from recent literature, the following practical recommendations are proposed to improve governance and service delivery in the South African public service:

For Government

Strengthen Anti-Corruption Agencies and Oversight Bodies:

Enhance the independence, capacity, and resources of institutions like the Public Protector, Auditor-General, and Special Investigating Units to ensure rigorous enforcement of anti-corruption laws (OECD, 2023).

Implement Integrated Governance Frameworks:

Develop and enforce a cohesive national governance reform framework that aligns policies, monitoring, and evaluation systems to improve coordination across government departments (DPME, 2021).

Promote Transparency through Digital Platforms:

Invest in e-governance tools that increase public access to information, enabling real-time tracking of government spending and procurement processes (AGSA, 2023).

For Public Departments

Enhance Leadership and Ethical Training:

Institutionalise continuous leadership development programs focused on ethics, accountability, and transformational leadership to foster a culture of integrity and service excellence (Madumo, 2021).

Strengthen Internal Control Systems:

Improve financial management and internal audit mechanisms to detect and prevent irregular expenditure and waste (PSC, 2022).

Foster Employee Engagement and Recognition:

Establish clear career progression paths, regular feedback systems, and employee recognition programs to boost morale and retention (PSC, 2022).

For Employees

Participate in Ethics and Governance Training:

Engage actively in workshops and programs that build awareness of ethical standards and employees' role in combating corruption (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2021).

Promote Whistleblowing and Reporting:

Utilize protected and anonymous reporting channels to raise concerns about unethical practices without fear of retaliation (OECD, 2023).

Advocate for Fair Work Conditions:

Collaborate with management and unions to identify challenges affecting morale and propose solutions that improve work-life balance and job satisfaction.

For Trade Unions

Champion Employee Rights and Ethical Governance:

Advocate for transparent disciplinary processes and fair treatment of members while supporting initiatives that promote integrity in the public service (Madumo, 2021).

Engage in Constructive Dialogue on Reforms:

Participate actively in governance reform discussions to ensure that employee welfare is integrated into policy development and implementation (PSC, 2022).

Support Capacity Building:

Facilitate access for members to training programs on governance, leadership, and ethics to strengthen the workforce's role in institutional reform.

CONCLUSION

The South African public service stands at a pivotal moment in its democratic journey, where the persistent challenges of corruption, weak accountability, and low employee morale threaten the integrity and effectiveness of governance. This study has underscored the systemic nature of these issues and proposed a comprehensive, context-specific framework for reform grounded in principles of ethical leadership, institutional transparency, and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

The impact of this study extends beyond academic discourse. For government policymakers, it offers practical tools for strengthening public institutions and aligning governance strategies with the National Development Plan and anti-corruption priorities. For departments, it introduces mechanisms to professionalise management, enhance service delivery, and rebuild public trust. Public employees will benefit from morale-enhancing strategies, improved recognition, and capacity-building initiatives, while trade unions are empowered with evidence-based approaches to advocate for transparency and fairness in labour relations.

Ultimately, the findings and recommendations of this study contribute to a national call for transformation in public service — one that prioritises integrity, responsiveness, and accountability as core values. Implementing this governance reform framework can serve as a catalyst for restoring citizen confidence, revitalising state institutions, and ensuring that the public service truly serves the public good.

REFERENCES

➢ Auditor-General South Africa (AGSA). (2023). *Consolidated General Report on National and Provincial Audit Outcomes 2022/23*. Pretoria: AGSA.

➢ Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). (2021). *National Development Plan 2030: Ten-Year Review Report*. Pretoria: The Presidency. Retrieved from https://www.dpme.gov.za.

➢ Madumo, O.S. (2021). "Public Administration and Morale in the South African Public Service." *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 13(1), 35–49.

➢ OECD. (2023). *Integrity Review of South Africa's Public Service: Strengthening Ethical Conduct and Anti-Corruption Measures*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

➢ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2023). *Integrity Review of South Africa's Public Service: Strengthening Ethical Conduct and Anti-Corruption Measures*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

➢ Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2021). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis – Into the Age of Austerity* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

➢ Public Service Commission (PSC). (2022). *State of the Public Service Report 2022*. Pretoria: Public Service Commission. Retrieved from https://www.psc.gov.zaPublic Service Commission (PSC). (2023). *Ethics and Integrity in the Public Sector: Challenges and Interventions*. Pretoria: PSC.

➢ Republic of South Africa. (2020). *National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2020–2030*. Pretoria: Government Printing Works.

➢ Republic of South Africa. (2022). *Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture: Final Report (Zondo Commission Report)*. Pretoria: Government Printing Works. Retrieved from https://www.statecapture.org.zaSouth African Government. (2020). *National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2020–2030*. Pretoria: Government Printing Works.

➢ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). (2023). *What is Good Governance?* Available at: https://www.unescap.org.