

The Effectiveness of Emergent Strategic Change Practices on Service Delivery Outcomes in the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka District

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Abstract

Worldwide, policing organizations have adopted dynamic and adaptive strategies to address rising crime complexity, resource constraints, and public accountability demands. Emergent strategic change has become critical as police agencies confront unpredictable challenges such as cybercrime, community unrest, and technological disruptions. Studies show that emergent strategic approaches such as problem-oriented policing innovations, decentralized decision-making, community feedback loops, and operational improvisations improve responsiveness and service delivery when properly supported. This study aims to generate evidence-based insights into how emergent strategic change influences police service delivery, identify strengths and weaknesses in current practices, and provide recommendations for improving organizational responsiveness and performance. The specific objectives of the study were to identify the key emergent strategic change practices adopted within the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka District, to examine the relationship between emergent strategic change and service delivery outcomes in the Zambia Police Service, and to assess the challenges affecting effective implementation of emergent strategic change practices in Lusaka District. The researcher adopted a mixed approach and employed qualitative and quantitative research designs. The study employed random sampling techniques to mobilize the quantitative and qualitative data. The random method was used to identify and select a homogenous sample of 354 service officers with 30 interview schedules within the Lusaka district that met the predetermined criterion of importance. The research comprised questionnaires and interview schedules. The questionnaires were used because they are the main means of collecting quantitative primary data. The questionnaires enabled quantitative data collected in a standardized manner to ensure the data is consistent and coherent for the analysis. From the findings, the study concludes that supervisors do not support flexible and adaptive approaches to problem-solving in the Zambia Police Lusaka district, with 119 respondents representing 42.5% remaining undecided on this question and more than 45% of respondents strongly disagreeing that officers introduce informal innovations to improve operations. The study found that 72.4% of respondents indicated that hierarchical structures limit officers' ability to innovate, with more than 83% of respondents indicating that some supervisors resist informal or new practices. The study found that more than 76% of respondents indicated that communication gaps hinder adaptation within the Zambia police service in Lusaka, with more than 77% indicating that limited resources hinder emergent strategies. Furthermore, the study found that more than 87% of respondents indicated that officers lack training in adaptive policing, with 86% indicating that good emergent practices are rarely documented and 74% indicating that skills for strategic adaptation are not well-developed.

Keywords: Zambia Police, Service Delivery, Emergent Strategic Change

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1. Introduction and Background

Public sector organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and rapid change. Police agencies, in particular, face evolving crime patterns, emerging technologies, rising public expectations, and socio-political pressures that demand flexible and adaptive strategic responses. Unlike deliberate strategic change—planned and executed systematically—emergent strategic change arises organically from day-to-day interactions, operational challenges, and innovations by frontline officers (Lynch, 2021). Understanding how such emergent changes influence service delivery outcomes is vital for improving policing effectiveness. Within the Zambia Police Service (ZPS), ongoing reforms aimed at enhancing response efficiency, professionalism, community relations, and crime-fighting capacity provide an opportunity to assess the extent to which emergent strategic practices impact performance.

In today's dynamic environment, organizations must constantly adapt to remain effective. Unlike planned strategies, emergent strategic change evolves in response to unforeseen challenges and opportunities, allowing for flexibility and continuous improvement. For public institutions such as the Zambia Police Service, this adaptability is crucial in addressing operational inefficiencies, resource limitations, and changing public expectations. Despite various reform efforts, the Zambia Police Service continues to face challenges that affect its performance. This study, therefore, seeks to assess the effectiveness of emergent strategic change practices on service delivery outcomes in the Zambia police service in Lusaka District.

Worldwide, policing organizations have adopted dynamic and adaptive strategies to address rising crime complexity, resource constraints, and public accountability demands (Maguire & King, 2022). Emergent strategic change has become critical as police agencies confront unpredictable challenges such as cybercrime, community unrest, and technological disruptions (Johnson et al., 2023). Studies show that emergent strategic approaches—such as problem-oriented policing innovations, decentralized decision-making, community feedback loops, and operational improvisations—improve responsiveness and service delivery when properly supported (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2021).

In Africa, police organizations similarly face an environment of growing uncertainty driven by socio-economic instability, urbanization, and increasing public scrutiny (Adebayo, 2023). Research suggests that emergent changes such as informal coordination mechanisms, adaptive patrol strategies, and officer-initiated community safety initiatives often fill gaps left by inadequate formal strategies (Mapuva, 2022).

The Zambia Police Service is a very important institution which is mandated to enforce the law of the land in collaboration with other law enforcement institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC) and so on. The Public image of the Zambia Police Service or Public views of the service are important, and understanding these views is a crucial first step in improving Police Public Relations. Since the Zambia Police was set up to provide services to the Public, the Police Service should ensure that they live up to that expectation. If members of the public are satisfied with the services, they are going to have trust and confidence in the Zambia Police Service. For the Zambia Police to ensure this, they are expected to be professional, fair and effective in executing their duties without fear or favor.

However, in Zambia, policing challenges include rising crime rates, limited resources, public mistrust, and delays in service delivery, which have prompted ongoing organizational reforms. Recent reports highlight that Lusaka District in particular faces increased urban crime, congestion at police stations, delayed response times, and complaints on police professionalism (Zambia Police Annual Report, 2024). Despite reforms such as the introduction of digital crime reporting, community policing expansion, and internal organizational restructuring, evidence suggests mixed outcomes, raising the need to assess the effectiveness of emergent strategic practices shaping service delivery.

Due to the numerous problems faced by the Zambia Police, in 1994, the Zambian Government approved police reforms aimed at re-organization, accountability and efficiency in service delivery. Policy reforms were perceived with mixed feelings by the public. The introduction of community-based policing such as police posts in areas of high crime were welcomed and these have helped members of the public to access police services near their houses. This meant that police were responding to community needs and thus facilitating police public relations. In short, these reforms were aimed at making police officers work effectively, fairly and professionally, so as to win public trust and confidence. However, the reforms left out the issue of improving working conditions for police officers.

However, despite putting in place the reforms, service delivery still remains undesirable in the service. In consideration of the failures of the Police Public Complaints Authority, the Government changed the strategy by establishing an independent Police Public Complaints Commission (PPCC) through the 2016 constitutional amendment which culminated into the enactment of the Police Public Complaints Commission Act No. 18 of 2016. The Committee learnt that the main function of Police Public Complaints Commission was to investigate all complaints against police actions, which resulted in serious injury or death of a person. On the other hand, organizational performance is fundamental to the survival of any organization. According to Nuhu et al., (2020), the extent to which an organization positions itself effectively with the help of its informational, financial, and human resources is what defines organizational performance (Nuhu, 2016). Since organizational strategic change is linked to employee performance and the organization's overall performance, managing change is crucial to achieving successful results (Sarwar, 2022).

Moreover, according to the Zambia Police Act, Chapter 107 of the Laws of Zambia, the Service is provided with the organization, functions and discipline of the Zambia Police Service. The Zambia Police Service is superintended by the Inspector-General who, subject to the orders and directions of the President, is mandated to command, superintend, direct and control the Service. In this regard, from time to time, the Inspector-General makes standing orders which are used to generally govern police officers in relation to their training, clothing, equipment, places of residence, classification and duties, as well as promoting efficiency and discipline of police officers in the discharge of their duties (NAZ, 2023). Notwithstanding this legal provision and other adaptive reforms evolutionary, it is common cause that the Service is not yet at optimal base in the discharge of its services to the public. According to the National Assembly Report (2023), the Zambia Police Service faces several challenges that hinder its performance, including resource limitations, inadequate training, and issues with public perception. These factors contribute to inefficiencies in crime prevention and detection, affecting public safety and trust in law enforcement though the scale of the phenomena and its impact still remain inclusive.

It is against this background that the study seeks to assess the effectiveness of emergent strategic change practices on service delivery outcomes in the Zambia police service in Lusaka District.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Zambia Police Service has historically and progressively introduced several deliberate reforms in which much of its operational adaptation occurs through emergent strategic change such as informal adjustments, frontline innovations, technological integration, and unplanned responses to real-time challenges. However, the effectiveness of these emergent practices on service delivery outcomes remains unclear and insufficiently researched.

Recent statistics reveal operational challenges indicating inconsistent service delivery outcomes. For instance, Lusaka recorded a 14% increase in urban crime between 2022 and 2024, particularly theft, assault, and cyber-enabled crimes (ZP Crime Statistics, 2024), while public satisfaction with police services in Lusaka remains low, at 38%, citing delayed responses and inadequate communication according to Afrobarometer (2023). Moreover, the average police response time in Lusaka remains above 45 minutes, which is far higher than the recommended 15–20 minutes for effective urban policing (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). Furthermore, internal audits show inconsistencies in implementing formal reforms, with operational officers relying heavily on discretionary or improvised practices (ZPS Internal Review, 2023).

Notwithstanding the foregoing indicators, scholarly work examining how emergent strategic changes affect service delivery in the Zambia Police Service (ZPS), especially in Lusaka District, remains limited. Existing research has focused predominantly on deliberate reforms, organizational leadership, and police professionalism, without exploring how organically developed or unplanned practices shape performance outcomes. For instance, Mwape and Chanda (2021) assessed the effectiveness of deliberate police reforms on crime reduction but did not consider adaptive, bottom-up changes. Nswana (2022) examined leadership styles and their influence on police discipline, while Zimba and Phiri (2023) investigated professionalism and ethical conduct in the ZPS. Regionally, Adebayo (2023) and Mapuva (2022) emphasized planned structural and governance reforms in African police systems. Although these studies offer valuable insights, none assessed emergent strategic change as a distinct driver of service delivery, thereby leaving a critical empirical gap. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of emergent strategic change on service delivery outcomes in the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka as not addressing this gap might result into socio-economic down turns as the city will turn into a den of criminals, which is inimical to investment and business growth.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

Previous literature has shown that organizational performance is a comprehensive and complex concept and necessary results must be achieved. Better performance means work is carried out efficiently and effectively (Rooney, 2023). The achievement of an organization concerning its expected aims and objectives is known as operational efficiency. The ability of an organization to meet its targets effectively and efficiently is organizational performance. Understanding the success of the organization compared to its competitors is very relevant for staff and management and what improvements must be made to ensure they maintain a competitive advantage in the market (Simons, 2019). Top managers find it difficult to implement transitions if they do not have the necessary skills and experience and this can have a negative impact on operational efficiency. Previous literature has shown that organizational performance is a comprehensive and complex concept and necessary results must be achieved. Better performance means work is carried out efficiently and effectively (Rooney, 2023).

Emergent strategy change management is a systematic and structured process of developing and implementing strategies and interventions for organizations that are transitioning from current conditions to desired conditions (Aslami & Husni, 2023). Change management is typically concerned with incremental change, or first-order change, and transformational change, or second-order change (Waddel et al., 2019). Typically, first-level changes do not challenge the overall system and context of the organization. This is often related to changes in policies and procedures, individual needs, task requirements and skills, so that these changes are gradual. Sometimes also called transactional change. On the other hand, the second level of change involves changes in fundamental assumptions about reality accompanied by a shift and realignment of vision, values, culture, beliefs and attitudes, as well as core processes, so it is called transformational change. Change management is a process for managing change from the human side (Pasmore et al., 2019; Oreg & Berson, 2019). The main goal of change management is to improve organizational performance capabilities and capabilities through proactive or reactive actions to overcome changes caused by internal or external causes (Mansaray, 2019).

The goal is to respond to, or anticipate, changes in the internal and external environment to achieve the organization's strategic goals (Walter, 2021). Emergent change management has always been an integral part of organizational management. This is often part of the HRM process (Aditya & Merthayasa, 2023). Change management plays an important role in today's organizations, not only in maintaining existing operational variations, but also in shaping the future direction of an organization. Successful change management is able to lead and enable employees to accept a new vision, new behavior, and new culture (Jami Pour, 2021). Regardless of facing proactive or forced change, successful change management can determine the future status of an organization in terms of survival, development, and strategic direction. A number of change management models or processes are available. Although they differ in specifics, most change models include three main phases. This phase prepares for change which involves planning analysis in strategy development. The goal of this phase is to analyze the scope of change by answering the following questions: How big is this change, how

many people are affected and is this gradual or radical change (Okwata, 2022).

Delving into systematic literature, global literature recognizes that policing organizations routinely develop emergent, frontline-driven practices as responses to complexity and uncertainty rather than solely through top-down plans (Mintzberg, 1987; Cilliers, 1998; Snowden & Boone, 2007). Empirical studies from high-income countries document numerous forms of such emergent practices: adaptive patrol scheduling and hot-spot improvisation (Maguire & King, 2022), officer-initiated problem-solving and place-based innovations that begin at unit level (Johnson, McGuire, & Zhao, 2023), and local experiments with body-worn cameras and community engagement that spread organically when successful (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2021). Organizational studies show these practices are often labelled as “innovation,” “local experimentation,” or “problem-oriented policing” rather than explicitly as “emergent strategic change,” but they share the same characteristics of being informal, adaptive and context-driven (Heifetz et al., 2020; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022). Across these global accounts, two recurrent patterns emerge: (1) frontline actors create practical solutions to immediate problems, and (2) successful emergent practices are sustained only when there are mechanisms for organizational learning and managerial endorsement (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Kaplan & Norton, 2020).

On the African continent, scholars emphasize that limited resources, rapid urbanization and governance gaps increase reliance on informal, emergent policing practices (Adebayo, 2023). Comparative reviews note frequent use of community-based intelligence networks, ad-hoc multi-agency task teams, and localized patrol innovations that are not part of formal reform blueprints (Mapuva, 2022).

Regional (Southern African) studies show similar patterns: police units adapt patrol patterns to informal settlements, form inter-ward intelligence sharing arrangements, and initiate community outreach driven by officers on the ground rather than central directives (Mapuva, 2022; Adebayo, 2023).

Zambia-specific documentation and operational reports indicate frontline improvisations such as unit-level schedule adjustments, informal community liaison mechanisms and spontaneous coordination with local councils—practices that are recorded in operational narratives but rarely treated as research variables (ZPS Internal Review, 2023; Zambia Police Service, 2024). Local public surveys corroborate the presence of these informal adaptations by officers, noting community reports of increased ad-hoc neighborhood patrols and informal complaint handling in some Lusaka wards (Afrobarometer, 2023). Collectively, the literature establishes a diverse repertoire of emergent practices in policing globally and within Africa, while also highlighting that systematic measurement and classification of these practices—especially in Zambia—remains thin (Johnson et al., 2023; Mwape & Chanda, 2021).

Global theorists and empirical researchers argue that emergent strategic practices have the potential to improve service-delivery outcomes—such as response times, crime clearance, and public satisfaction—but that this effect is conditional. Complexity and organizational learning frameworks posit that bottom-up innovation improves local problem solving and responsiveness when organizations can capture and scale lessons (Cilliers, 1998; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022). Empirical policing studies in developed settings demonstrate localized gains: adaptive patrols and officer-led community problem solving have been associated with reduced incidents in hot spots and improved citizen perceptions where these practices were supported by data feedback and managerial backing (Maguire & King, 2022; Andrews & Van de Walle, 2021). Johnson et al. (2023) shows that without mechanisms for institutionalization, benefits of emergent practices often remain ephemeral; similarly, Kaplan and Norton (2020) emphasize that performance measurement and feedback loops are necessary to translate frontline experimentation into sustained service-delivery improvements.

On the African continent, evidence is more mixed. Case studies and NGO evaluations report that community-driven initiatives and officer improvisations can increase reporting and local cooperation, thereby improving some service metrics in specific locales (Adebayo, 2023; Mapuva, 2022). However, where emergent practices bypass accountability structures or occur in contexts of weak oversight, improvements in service delivery are uneven or even counterproductive (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2021). Southern African research points to context dependency: emergent adaptations in better-resourced urban units sometimes yield measurable improvements in response time and case handling, while in under-resourced settings informal practices provide short-term relief without altering systemic performance (Mapuva, 2022; Mwape & Chanda, 2021).

In Zambia, operational reports and public surveys suggest localized pockets of improved service (e.g., quicker informal responses in particular wards), but official metrics such as average response time and public satisfaction remain problematic at the district level (ZPS Internal Review, 2023; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2023). The synthesis across levels thus indicates a plausible positive relationship between emergent strategic change and service outcomes, but one that is strongly moderated by organizational learning capacity, leadership support, communication systems and available resources (Heifetz et al., 2020; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022; Otley, 2021). According to Hallahan (2015), it could be daunting for managers who have worked within linear processes guided by specific goals and organizational mission statements to adopt an emergent strategy that develops over time in the absence of specific mission goals, or despite specifying a mission and goals. It is clear, however, that change is required and the influence of postmodern management practices is evident in how organizations are structured and managed in terms of the flattening of hierarchies, the delegation of responsibility, the rise of work teams, the shift from specific to general rule making, and the encouragement of innovation.

Research that identifies any limitations and critiques of emergent communication strategy is also required. A practice perspective can help to see any tensions that exist between deliberate planning practices and emergent strategies, which some see as representing a false dichotomy (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016). According to Hallahan

(2015), managers must occasionally impose their desires or intended outcomes on the organization to provide a sense of direction, noting that in certain circumstances, it might be appropriate to abandon emergent strategies and to pursue intentions with as much determination as possible. In-depth observations of practice could show that communication practitioners' different strategizing, discursive and legitimizing practices advance both emergent and deliberate strategies. Managers adapt their supposedly deliberate intentions continuously in response to the strategies that emerge from the autonomous actions of managers at multiple levels of the firm (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Thus, the tension between deliberate and emergent strategizing in the literature exists because of assumptions that deliberate strategy practices, such as planning and ploys, are enacted as formally described. How such processes work within strategic communication will only be understood through further research.

In the instant subject matter, a convergent finding across global and policing literatures is that several recurring barriers limit the capacity to implement and sustain emergent strategic practices. Globally, rigid hierarchical cultures, lack of adaptive leadership, weak formal mechanisms for knowledge capture, and constrained resources are cited as principal inhibitors (Heifetz et al., 2020; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2021; Argyris & Schön, 1978). Research in policing contexts adds that legal and policy constraints, fear of disciplinary sanction, and risk-averse managerial norms lead frontline officers to conceal innovations rather than share them (Johnson et al., 2023; Maguire & King, 2022). Studies emphasize that without deliberate leadership efforts to legitimize experimentation and embed learning processes, emergent practices will remain fragmented and unstained (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022; Kaplan & Norton, 2020).

In African and Southern African contexts, additional constraints—politicization of the security sector, corruption, extreme resource scarcity, and fragile civil-society oversight—compound the problem (Adebayo, 2023; Mapuva, 2022). Field reports note that in many units' informal practices are adopted out of necessity but are rarely scaled because senior managers either mistrust bottom-up innovations or lack the means to evaluate them (Mwape & Chanda, 2021).

Zambian documents mirror these concerns: internal audits cite inconsistent implementation of reforms, poor communication between command and operational levels, limited training in adaptive methods, and logistical shortfalls that prevent emergent practices from becoming institutionalized (ZPS Internal Review, 2023; Zambia Police Service, 2024). Public perception data also indicate that even when officers make adaptive efforts, persistent trust deficits mean citizens do not uniformly register improved service (Afrobarometer, 2023). Consequently, the literature identifies both universal and context-specific barriers to effective emergent strategic change; overcoming these requires targeted leadership development, deliberate organizational learning systems, improved resource allocation, and stronger accountability mechanisms areas that remain under-researched empirically in Zambia and across much of Sub-Saharan Africa (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2021; Otle, 2021; Mwape & Chanda, 2021).

This chapter has reviewed mosaic literature from the global, continental, regional and national fronts on the subject matter with a view to ascertain the status quo and decipher the gap(s) necessary of the study's focus. Reports and documentary evidence have also been incorporated in trying to balance the survey of literature. Nonetheless, existing research has focused predominantly on deliberate reforms, organizational leadership, project change management, general organizational change, and police professionalism, without exploring how organically developed or unplanned practices shape performance outcomes. For instance, Mwape and Chanda (2021) assessed the effectiveness of deliberate police reforms on crime reduction but did not consider adaptive, bottom-up changes. Nswana (2022) examined leadership styles and their influence on police discipline, whileimba and Phiri (2023) investigated professionalism and ethical conduct in the ZPS. Regionally, Adebayo (2023) and Mapuva (2022) emphasized planned structural and governance reforms in African police systems. Although these studies offer valuable insights, none assessed emergent strategic change as a distinct driver of service delivery, thereby leaving a critical empirical gap. This study, therefore, addresses this gap by assessing the effectiveness of emergent strategic change on service delivery outcomes in the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka as not addressing this gap might result into socio-economic down turns as the city will turn into the den of criminals which is inimical to investment and business growth

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three theories that align closely with the nature of emergent strategic change and its influence on service delivery outcomes in policing environments.

Complexity Theory

This theory was progressively developed by Ralph Stacey (1990s), Paul Cilliers (1998), and Snowden & Boone (2007). Complexity theory posits that organizations operate as dynamic systems influenced by unpredictable interactions and environmental changes (Snowden & Boone, 2021). In other words, it views organizations as dynamic, nonlinear systems made up of interacting components that continuously adapt to internal and external changes. In such systems, outcomes often emerge from the interaction of individuals, processes, and environmental uncertainties rather than from top-down planning (Colliers, 1998; Snowden & Boone, 2007). This means organizational behaviours cannot always be predicted or controlled through formal strategies alone.

In line with the study focus, The Zambia Police Service operates in a complex social environment marked by unpredictable crime patterns, resource constraints, and socio-political pressures. As frontline officers respond to real-time challenges, emergent strategic changes naturally develop from their adaptive behaviours. Complexity Theory supports Objective 1 by explaining how these practices arise organically and why they may significantly shape service delivery outcomes. It also

frames the study's understanding that effective policing involves continuous adaptation rather than rigid adherence to predetermined plans.

Adaptive Leadership Theory

This theory's proponent is Ronald Heifetz (1914) and later expanded it in 2009 and 2020. Adaptive Leadership Theory argues that leaders must promote learning, encourage experimentation, and enable followers to respond effectively to complex operational challenges (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2020). Unlike authoritative leadership, adaptive leadership focuses on mobilizing individuals to tackle difficult problems by adjusting norms, values, and operational approaches. In the ZPS, the ability of officers and supervisors to adapt quickly through improvisations, innovative patrol methods, or new ways of engaging communities depends heavily on leadership support. Adaptive leadership facilitates emergent strategic change by encouraging frontline officers to innovate, supporting decentralized decision-making, enabling rapid learning from operational experiences, and reducing resistance to change. This theory aligns with Objective 2 as it explains how leadership behaviors influence the extent to which emergent strategies translate into improved service delivery.

Organizational Learning Theory

This theory was founded in 1970s by Chris Argyris (1977), Donald Schön (1978), and later expanded by Linda Argote (2013 onwards). Organizational Learning Theory posits that organizations improve performance by continuously acquiring, interpreting, and applying knowledge gained from experience (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022). Learning occurs at individual, team, and organizational levels, enabling organizations to institutionalize effective practices while discarding ineffective ones.

Emergent strategic changes within the ZPS often arise from the accumulated experiences of officers such as refining patrol routes, using community intelligence, or adjusting crime reporting procedures. Whether these emergent practices lead to improved service delivery depends on the organization's ability to learn from them, document them, and integrate them into formal procedures.

The theory aligns with Objective 3 by explaining how organizational learning supports adaptation, how barriers such as rigid culture or poor communication inhibit emergent change, and why some innovative practices remain informal and fail to influence service delivery outcomes.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework establishes a causal relationship between emergent strategic change practices (independent variable) and service delivery outcomes (dependent variable).

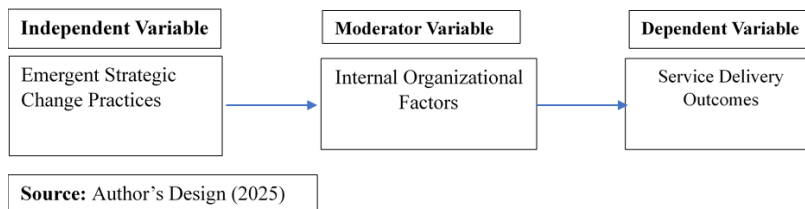


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Operationalization of Variables (Conceptual Framework)

This study is anchored on the relationship between Emergent Strategic Change Practices (Independent Variable) and Service Delivery Outcomes (Dependent Variable) within the Zambia Police Service (ZPS). The framework integrates theoretical insights from Complexity Theory, Adaptive Leadership Theory, and Organizational Learning Theory in which Complexity Theory explains why emergent change arises while Adaptive Leadership Theory explains how leadership behaviors shape emergent adaptation, and Organizational Learning Theory explains how emergent practices become institutionalized and improve performance.

Independent Variable (IV): Emergent Strategic Change Practices

Emergent strategic change refers to adaptive, informal, and unplanned operational practices that arise from day-to-day frontline interactions (Lynch, 2021; Johnson et al., 2023). These practices include:

- Adaptive Decision-Making – officers adjusting operational responses based on real-time demands.
- Informal Operational Innovations – improvisations in patrol patterns, reporting processes, or coordination.
- Officer-Initiated Community Engagement – spontaneous safety initiatives and intelligence gathering.
- Decentralized Operational Responses – unit-based or individual adaptations to immediate policing challenges.

These elements reflect the organization's ability to respond to complexity through emergent patterns rather than through formal planning (Cilliers, 1998; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

Dependent Variable (DV): Service Delivery Outcomes

Service delivery outcomes capture the effectiveness and efficiency of policing services, commonly measured through response time and operational efficiency, crime management outcomes, public trust and satisfaction, and professional

conduct and accountability (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2021; Maguire & King, 2022).

Improved service delivery occurs when adaptive operational practices enhance the organization's ability to address community needs promptly and effectively.

Moderating Variables: Internal Organization Factors

The influence of emergent practices on service delivery is shaped by key internal organizational factors:

- Leadership Support / Adaptive Leadership – Leaders facilitate or hinder emergent strategies based on their willingness to encourage innovation, learning, and decentralized decision-making (Heifetz et al., 2020; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2021).
- Organizational Culture – Flexible, learning-oriented cultures strengthen emergent practices, while rigid, hierarchical cultures suppress them (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2022).
- Communication Systems – Effective communication enables frontline insights to be shared, institutionalized, and scaled across units (Otley, 2021).
- Resource Availability – The presence of logistical and human resources determines whether emergent practices can be sustained and translated into improved outcomes.

3 Research Methodology and Design

In order to provide accurate results, the researcher adopted a mixed approach and employed both quantitative and qualitative research designs (Bless, 2002). A population is a complete set of people with specified characteristics, while a sample is a subset of the population (Hulley SB, 2013). The study population comprises officers and staff within the Zambia Police Service (ZPS) stationed in Lusaka District, as they are directly involved in the implementation and experience of emergent strategic change practices. The Zambia Police Service is a key law-enforcement institution mandated to maintain internal security, protect life and property, and ensure public safety across the country (Government of Zambia, 2022). The sampling frame for this study is the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) database, which shows that Lusaka District has 4,481 police officers. There are equally over 2,000,000 members of the general public in Lusaka District (ZamStats, 2022), from which community participants and crime victims will be drawn to enrich the representativeness and depth of the study.

Quantitative data was counter-checked and coded. The quantitative data was being double-checked, cleaned, and then coded. Coding of quantitative data was followed by entering it on statistical package for social sciences software for analysis. The goal is to produce statistics called descriptive, and finally micro soft excel was used where some statistics were manipulated to make figures and graphs. Data was turned into tables, allowing for a variety of graphical presentations. After the statistics are used to create tables, graphs, and figures, objectivity in terms of interpretation, valid conclusions, and recommendations became possible. The data gathered from key informants through in-depth interviews were qualitatively analyzed based on the themes and contents. Content or thematic analysis is beneficial because it groups similar items or themes from a large number of words.

4 Findings

4.1 What emergent strategic change practices are being adopted within the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka District?

The study found that supervisors do not support flexible and adaptive approaches to problem-solving in Zambia Police Lusaka district with 119 respondents representing 42.5% remaining undecided on this question and more than 45% respondents strongly disagreed that officers introduce informal innovations to improve operations. However, this finding disagrees with Mapuva, (2022) who suggested that emergent changes such as informal coordination mechanisms, adaptive patrol strategies, and officer-initiated community safety initiatives often fill gaps left by inadequate formal strategies. Furthermore, the study found that informal adjustments contribute more effectively in daily policing with 169 respondents representing 60.4% indicating that police has worked well with informal operations, and 48.6% strongly disagreed that officers proactively engage the community outside formal programmes. However, the study found that more than 78% shows that community feedback informally influences operational decisions with 63% respondents indicating that units have no autonomy to create local solutions, and more than 70% indicated that frontline officers are not trusted to make quick decisions, when necessary, by the community. These findings agree with Rooney (2023) who found that top managers find it difficult to implement transitions if they do not have the necessary skills and experience and this can have a negative impact on operational efficiency. Previous literature has shown that organizational performance is a comprehensive and complex concept and necessary results must be achieved. Better performance means work is carried out efficiently and effectively. Delving into systematic literature, global literature recognizes that policing organizations routinely develop emergent, frontline-driven practices as responses to complexity and uncertainty rather than solely through top-down plans (Mintzberg, 1987; Cilliers, 1998; Snowden & Boone, 2007). Empirical studies from high-income countries document numerous forms of such emergent practices: adaptive patrol scheduling and hot-spot improvisation (Maguire & King, 2022), officer-initiated problem-solving and place-based innovations that begin at unit level (Johnson, McGuire, & Zhao, 2023), and local experiments with body-worn cameras and community engagement that spread

organically when successful (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2021). Table 4.1 below shows descriptive statistics accordingly.

Table 1: Emergent Strategic Change Practices Adoption

		Statistics							
		Officers adjust operational decisions to meet real-time challenges?	Supervisors support flexible and adaptive approaches to problem-solving?	Officers introduce informal innovations to improve operations?	Informal adjustments contribute to more effective daily policing?	Officers proactively engage the community outside formal programmes?	Community feedback informally influences operational decisions?	Units have autonomy to create local solutions?	Frontline officers are trusted to make quick decisions when necessary?
N	Valid	280	280	280	280	280	280	280	280
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.3929	3.3786	1.9357	3.2536	2.0071	3.7107	2.6036	2.2036
Median		4.0000	3.0000	2.0000	4.0000	2.0000	4.0000	2.0000	2.0000
Mode		4.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	1.00	4.00	2.00	2.00
Std. Deviation		1.07227	0.88773	1.03495	1.13118	3.33977	1.01170	0.95226	1.23769
Variance		1.150	0.788	1.071	1.280	11.154	1.024	0.907	1.532
Skewness		-0.641	-0.479	0.872	-0.781	14.445	-1.194	1.143	1.001
Std. Error of Skewness		0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146
Minimum		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00
Maximum		5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Table 1 shows the statistical outcomes arising from data collected using a Likert scale as follows; on whether officers proactively engage the community outside formal programmes was represented by median =2 suggesting a negative response; frontline officers are trusted to make quick decisions when necessary was represented by Median = 2 suggesting a negative outcome; whether community feedback informally influences operational decisions was represented by Median = 4 indicating a positive outcome; units have autonomy to create local solutions was represented by Median = 2 indicating a negative feedback; supervisors support flexible and adaptive approaches to problem-solving was represented by Median = 3 showing somewhat undecided; officers introduce informal innovations to improve operations was represented by Median = 2 indicating a negative feedback. Generally, the results shows that emergent strategic Change practices are not being adopted within the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka District.

4.2 How does emergent strategic change influence service delivery outcomes in the Zambia Police Service?

The study found that 65.7% respondents indicated that emergent practices have improved police response time and with 68.6% indicating that adaptive strategies help reduce operational delays. Furthermore, the study found that more than 77% indicated that emergent practices contribute to better crime prevention with only 22.1% in disagreement. The study found that more than 85% respondents indicated that collaboration with communities improves crime intelligence with more than 82% indicating adaptive policing contributes to improved professionalism. The study found that more than 70% respondents indicated that emergent practices enhance transparency in service delivery with 21% only disputing. The study shows that 65.7% indicated that police-community relations have strengthened with 68.6% respondents indicating that public satisfaction has improved due to adaptive strategies. The findings agree with Southern African research points to context dependency: emergent adaptations in better-resourced urban units sometimes yield measurable improvements in response time and case handling, while in under-resourced settings informal practices provide short-term relief without altering systemic performance (Mapuva, 2022; Mwape & Chanda, 2021). In Zambia, operational reports and public surveys suggest localized pockets of improved service (e.g., quicker informal responses in particular wards), but official metrics such as average response time and public satisfaction remain problematic at the district level (ZPS Internal Review, 2023; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2023). The synthesis across levels thus indicates a plausible positive relationship between emergent strategic change and service outcomes, but one that is strongly moderated by organizational learning capacity, leadership support, communication systems and available resources (Heifetz et al., 2020).

Table 2: Emergent Strategic Change Practices Influence

		Statistics							
		Officers adjust operational decisions to meet real-time challenges?	Supervisors support flexible and adaptive approaches to problem-solving?	Officers introduce informal innovations to improve operations?	Informal adjustments contribute to more effective daily policing?	Officers proactively engage the community outside formal programmes?	Community feedback informally influences operational decisions?	Units have autonomy to create local solutions?	Frontline officers are trusted to make quick decisions when necessary?
N	Valid	280	280	280	280	280	280	280	280
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.3929	3.3786	1.9357	3.2536	2.0071	3.7107	2.6036	2.2036
Median		4.0000	3.0000	2.0000	4.0000	2.0000	4.0000	2.0000	2.0000
Mode		4.00	3.00	1.00	4.00	1.00	4.00	2.00	2.00
Std. Deviation		1.07227	0.88773	1.03495	1.13118	3.33977	1.01170	0.95226	1.23769
Variance		1.150	0.788	1.071	1.280	11.154	1.024	0.907	1.532
Skewness		-0.641	-0.479	0.872	-0.781	14.445	-1.194	1.143	1.001
Std. Error of Skewness		0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146
Minimum		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00
Maximum		5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistical outcomes arising from data collected using a Likert scale as follows; on whether officers proactively engage the community outside formal programmes was represented by median =2 suggesting a negative response; frontline officers are trusted to make quick decisions when necessary was represented by Median = 2 suggesting a negative outcome; whether community feedback informally influences operational decisions was represented by Median = 4 indicating a positive outcome; units have autonomy to create local solutions was represented by Median = 2 indicating a negative feedback; supervisors support flexible and adaptive approaches to problem-solving was represented by Median = 3 showing somewhat undecided; officers introduce informal innovations to improve operations was represented by Median = 2 indicating a negative feedback. Generally, the results shows that emergent strategic Change practices are not being adopted within the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka District.

4.3 What challenges affect the effective implementation of emergent strategic change in Lusaka District?

The study found that 72.4% respondents indicated that hierarchical structures limit officers’ ability to innovate with more than 83% respondents indicating that some supervisors resist informal or new practices. The study found that more than 76% respondents indicated that communication gaps hinder adaptation within Zambia police service in Lusaka with more than 77% indicating that limited resources hinder emergent strategies. Furthermore, the study found that more than 87% respondents indicated that officers lack training in adaptive policing with 86% indicating that good emergent practices are rarely documented and 74% indicating that skills for strategic adaptation are not well-developed. However, more than 90% indicated that emergent strategic change positively impacts overall service delivery with a statistical Mean =4 and 93.9% respondents show that lack of equipment affects operational flexibility. These findings agree with previous studies have shown that emergent strategic approaches such as problem-oriented policing innovations, decentralized decision-making, community feedback loops, and operational improvisations improve responsiveness and service delivery when properly supported (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2021). Furthermore, the study fits into the conceptual framework upon which its anchored on the relationship between Emergent Strategic Change Practices (Independent Variable) and Service Delivery Outcomes (Dependent Variable) within the Zambia Police Service (ZPS). The framework integrates theoretical insights from Complexity Theory, Adaptive Leadership Theory, and Organizational Learning Theory in which Complexity Theory explains why emergent change arises while Adaptive Leadership Theory explains how leadership behaviors shape emergent adaptation, and Organizational Learning Theory explains how emergent practices become institutionalized and improve performance. Descriptive statistics has been shown under table 4.3 below;

Table 3: Emergent Strategic Change Practices Challenges

Statistics										
		Hierarchical structures limit officers’ ability to innovate?	Some supervisors resist informal or new practices?	Limited resources hinder emergent strategies ?	Lack of equipment affects operational flexibility	Communication gaps hinder adaptation ?	Good emergent practices are rarely documented?	Officers lack training in adaptive policing?	Skills for strategic adaptation are not well-developed ?	Emergent strategic change positively impacts overall service delivery?
N	Valid	280	280	280	280	280	280	280	280	280
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.64	3.86	3.76	4.12	3.98	3.83	3.89	3.67	4.11
Median		4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Std. Deviation		0.951	0.947	0.985	0.716	0.619	0.901	0.833	1.057	0.920
Variance		0.904	0.897	0.969	0.513	0.383	0.812	0.694	1.117	0.847
Skewness		-0.844	-1.648	-1.101	-1.887	-1.267	-1.958	-1.851	-1.200	-1.896
Std. Error of Skewness		0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146	0.146
Minimum		1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Maximum		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

Table 3 shows the statistical outcomes as follows; adaptive strategies was represented by Median=4 indicating a positive result; Police–community relations have strengthened was represented by Median = 4 indicating a positive response; emergent practices enhance transparency in service delivery was represented by Median = 4 indicating a positive result; adaptive policing contributes to improved professionalism was represented by Median=4 indicating a positive result; collaboration with communities improves crime intelligence was represented by Median =4, emergent practices contribute to better crime prevention was represented by Median =4; adaptive strategies help reduce operational delays was represented by Median=4; emergent practices have improved police response time was represented by Median=4. Therefore, emergent strategic change influence service delivery outcomes in the Zambia Police Service positively. However, statistical outcomes show that there are various challenges preventing the successful implementation of emergent strategies in Zambia Police within Lusaka district.

4.4 Summary of Findings

Objective 1

In line with the first objective, the study found that supervisors do not support flexible and adaptive approaches to problem-solving in Zambia Police Lusaka district. However, the study found that community feedback informally influences operational decisions of police, but indicating that units have no autonomy to create local solutions, and more than 70% respondents indicated that frontline officers are not trusted to make quick decisions, when necessary, by the community. Generally, the results shows that emergent strategic Change practices are not being adopted within the Zambia Police Service in Lusaka District with statistical calculations at Mean=2. The lack of support from supervisors for flexible and adaptive problem-solving in the Zambia Police may hinder operational effectiveness, reduce officer morale, and exacerbate occupational stress. Without adaptive leadership, officers may struggle to respond effectively to dynamic situations, leading to poor service delivery. Supervisors who fail to encourage innovation or accommodate diverse approaches can stifle initiative, especially in high-pressure environments like urban policing. This aligns with broader concerns about officer wellbeing and stress, which are critical to maintaining performance and public trust.

Objective 2

In line with the second objective, the study concludes that communication gaps hinder adaptation within Zambia police service in Lusaka with more than 77% indicating that limited resources hinder emergent strategies. Communication gaps in the Zambia Police hinder effective information sharing between officers and the public, reducing transparency and public trust. The absence of inter-operable communication channels limits real-time coordination during crises and impedes community engagement. These gaps compromise operational efficiency, especially during emergencies or crime prevention efforts. Strategic investments in ICT infrastructure and standardized communication protocols such as those highlighted in recent initiatives are critical to bridging these divides and modernizing police-public interactions.

Objective 3

In line with the third objective, the study concludes that officers lack training in adaptive policing with 86% indicating that good emergent practices are rarely documented, and 74% indicating that skills for strategic adaptation are not well-developed. The lack of adaptive policing training among Zambian officers undermines their ability to respond effectively to evolving crime patterns, community dynamics, and human rights standards. Inadequate or superficial training limits officers' capacity to de-escalate conflicts, build public trust, and operate ethically issues exacerbated by systemic underfunding and historical gaps in professional development. While some pre-deployment training for peace operations shows promise, it does not address broader domestic policing challenges. Without sustained investment in adaptive, context-specific training, the police force risks remaining reactive rather than proactive, perpetuating inefficiency and mistrust.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Home Affairs through Zambia police service may consider introducing supervisory course. Supervisory training programs in the Zambia Police could enhance leadership skills, improve decision-making, and strengthen accountability at the station level. These programs foster better team management, increase operational efficiency, and promote ethical conduct. By equipping supervisors with conflict resolution and strategic planning abilities, they contribute to improved community relations and more effective crime prevention. Additionally, such training supports professional development, boosts morale, and helps address systemic challenges like gender-based violence (SGBV) through specialized investigative skills and sensitivity training.

The study recommends that the Ministry of Home Affairs through Zambia police service may consider improving communication infrastructure. Improving communication infrastructure in the Zambia Police could enhance real-time information sharing, strengthen crisis response coordination, and improve public engagement. Modernized ICT systems enable electronic policing, boosting operational efficiency, reducing response times, and supporting data-driven decision-making.

Furthermore, the study recommends that Zambia Police may consider adopting emergent strategic change widely. Adopting emergent strategic change in the Zambia Police can enhance adaptability to evolving security challenges, improve responsiveness to community needs, and foster innovation through decentralized decision-making. This approach supports incremental improvements based on real-time feedback, strengthening trust and legitimacy. It aligns with broader public sector reform goals in Zambia, promoting accountability, efficiency, and citizen-centered policing.

Declaration of Competing Interests

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Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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