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MILITARY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: A MULTI-THEORETICAL APPROACH TO STRATEGY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ADAPTATION

Suleiman Abubakar Babagana, PhD Department of Management, Nigerian Army University Biu

Salihu Mamman Badar Department of Management, Nigerian Army University Biu

Olorunfemi Ololade Adedoyin Department of Management, Nigerian Army University Biu

Abstract

Performance management (PM) in military institutions presents distinctive complexities shaped by hierarchical command, mission-critical outcomes, and multi-stakeholder environments. Unlike civilian settings where efficiency and profit dominate, military performance is inseparable from national security, accountability, and strategic readiness. This conceptual research integrates recent literature and empirical evidence to examine theoretical foundations and contextual challenges of military performance management (MPM). Drawing from institutional theory, contingency theory, resource-based view, systems theory, and the balanced scorecard framework, the study integrates insights into a unified conceptual model tailored for defence organizations. The Findings highlight persistent implementation challenges, including measurement deficits, political interference, resource constraints, and cultural resistance. The study underscores the need for context-specific frameworks such as the Defence Performance Measurement Framework (DPMF) that align strategic intent with operational realities. Practical implications are discussed across policy, organizational, and operational levels, emphasizing leadership commitment, accountability, and learning-oriented cultures. The study recommends for integrating human resource management and data-driven analytics into MPM, and proposes future research directions focused on contextualization, comparative studies, and empirical validation.

Keywords: Military Performance Management, Defence Accountability, Systems Theory, Leadership, Institutional Theory, Contingency Theory

1. Introduction

Performance management (PM) has long been recognized as a foundation of organizational effectiveness; however, its application within military institutions remains complex and context-dependent (Soares et al., 2022). Unlike civilian organizations where performance goals often center on profitability, efficiency, or service delivery, military organizations are primarily mission-driven and operate within high-risk, uncertain, and politically sensitive environments. In these settings, effective PM goes beyond administrative function which is integral to national security, strategic readiness, and institutional legitimacy. As Taylor (2019) notes, performance failures in the military context carry consequences that extend beyond financial losses to include human casualties and threats to sovereignty.

The distinctiveness of military performance management (MPM) stems from several factors. First, hierarchical and command-driven structures require PM systems capable of balancing strategic directives with operational realities at multiple levels. Second, the presence of multiple stakeholders which comprises political leaders, allied forces, civilian populations, and oversight institutions introduces competing expectations and accountability pressures (Smith & Jones, 2021).

Third, mission-critical outcomes such as peacekeeping, counterinsurgency, and cyber defence necessitate reliable and adaptive performance frameworks that integrate both quantitative and qualitative metrics.

The advent of digital warfare, artificial intelligence, and hybrid threats has further complicated the PM landscape. Modern militaries must now assess performance across technological domains, including cyber resilience, intelligence integration, and unmanned systems (Nelson et al., 2022). Accordingly, PM in defence settings is not an optional management exercise but a strategic imperative that ensures readiness, accountability, and governance across all levels of military command (Tornero-Aguilera et al., 2024).

Garcia and Liu (2022) emphasize that without a systematic approach to PM, military readiness risks becoming subjective, leaving institutions vulnerable to operational shocks. Conversely, effective PM systems enhance transparency and provide measurable indicators of preparedness, resource utilization, and outcomes. In fragile states, accountability mechanisms embedded in PM frameworks can also mitigate the mismanagement of defence resources and strengthen public trust (Thompson et al., 2021). Thus, performance management serves as a vital link connecting strategic objectives with operational realities in military governance.

Despite significant reforms and the adoption of various PM frameworks across public sector organizations, military institutions continue to face distinctive challenges in implementation. Conventional frameworks such as the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and Logic Models, though widely applied, often fail to capture the complexities of military hierarchies, rapid decision-making environments, and mission-driven objectives. Empirical evidence highlights persistent deficiencies in areas such as leadership accountability, resource management, and cultural adaptability. These limitations create “strategic blind spots” that hinder alignment between institutional objectives and field operations. The absence of defence-specific frameworks supported by empirical validation restricts both scholarly advancement and practical reform. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a conceptual synthesis that integrates theoretical insights, contextual factors, and empirical findings to guide defence policymakers and practitioners.

Moving forward, this study aims to conceptually explore military performance management by integrating theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and contextual realities. It critically examines the theoretical and empirical foundations of performance management in military organizations while identifying the key challenges and gaps that hinder its effectiveness and accountability. Furthermore, the study proposes an integrated framework with practical directions for enhancing strategic alignment, operational efficiency, and accountability within military institutions, and offers insights for future research to deepen theoretical and empirical understanding in this domain.

Following this introduction, the next section presents the review of related literature, examining key theoretical perspectives such as Institutional Theory, Contingency Theory, the Resource-Based View, Systems Theory, and the Balanced Scorecard. The subsequent section develops the conceptual framework, integrating theoretical insights to explain the dynamics of performance management in military organizations. This is followed by sections on empirical insights, contextual challenges, and practical implications for enhancing accountability and operational effectiveness. The paper concludes with directions for future research and key recommendations for advancing a multi-theoretical understanding of military performance management.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Issues

The study of performance management (PM) in the military extends beyond managerial practice into the realm of theory. While civilian PM systems are often grounded in organizational behavior and managerial control theories, military performance management (MPM) requires theoretical perspectives that capture its hierarchical, mission-driven, and complex institutional

environment. This section examines key theories informing MPM which are; Institutional Theory, Contingency Theory, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), the Resource-Based View (RBV), and Systems Theory by integrating them to form a conceptual understanding of performance within military organizations.

i. Institutional Theory

Institutional theory underscores the role of norms, values, and institutional environments in shaping organizational behavior (Scott, 2014). Within the military, performance systems are embedded in a network of institutional pressures which are both internal and external that influence their design and execution.

Internal institutional pressures stem from hierarchical command structures, doctrinal traditions, and codes of conduct that define the military's organizational identity. However, external pressures include political oversight, public expectations, international norms (such as the Geneva Conventions), and alliance obligations (Smith & Jones, 2021). Together, these forces shape PM frameworks that emphasize legitimacy, accountability, and compliance rather than efficiency alone.

Military organizations, therefore, adopt PM practices that mirror institutional logics of discipline and legitimacy, even when such practices appear inefficient compared with private-sector models (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). For instance, standardized training metrics and rigid appraisal procedures persist largely because they symbolize conformity with military doctrine. Oliver (1997) argues that these institutionalized practices endure because they reinforce organizational legitimacy rather than functional optimality.

ii. Contingency Theory and Contextual Adaptation

Contingency theory posits that there is no universal model of organizational effectiveness; instead, success depends on the fit between structure, environment, and managerial practices (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). This principle is particularly relevant to MPM, where missions vary across warfare types, political contexts, and threat environments.

PM frameworks must therefore adapt to operational contingencies. In conventional warfare, performance may be gauged through tangible indicators such as territorial control or casualty ratios, while in peacekeeping or counterinsurgency operations, qualitative outcomes like civilian trust or regional stability become more salient (Kilcullen, 2009). In cyber warfare, performance is tied to threat-detection speed, network resilience, and information integrity.

Leadership style and culture also constitute key contingency factors. Transformational leadership fosters innovation and adaptability, whereas transactional leadership aligns better with routine operations (Bass, 1990). Effective MPM systems, therefore, must incorporate flexibility to accommodate diverse missions and leadership approaches.

iii. Balanced Scorecard and Strategic Alignment

Developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1996), the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) translates strategic goals into multidimensional performance indicators. Although, originally intended for corporate settings, it has been adapted for public-sector and defence organizations to ensure strategic alignment between objectives and outcomes.

In military contexts, the BSC can be reframed around four interrelated perspectives:

1. Resource Perspective which is associated efficient management of defence budgets, logistics, and procurement.
2. Stakeholder Perspective relates to fulfillment of obligations to political authorities, allies, and civilian populations.
3. Internal Process Perspective is concerned with operational efficiency, command coordination, and inter-unit collaboration.
4. Learning and Growth Perspective covers capacity building, technological innovation, and professional development.

NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP) demonstrates a BSC-inspired approach that links national contributions to alliance objectives (Anderson & Williams, 2023). Nonetheless, overreliance on rigid scorecards can constrain adaptability; thus, military versions of the BSC often blend quantitative and qualitative indicators (Taylor, 2019).

iv. Resource-Based View (RBV) and Capability Development

The RBV emphasizes that sustainable advantage arises from unique and valuable resources that competitors cannot easily replicate (Barney, 1991). In military institutions, these resources encompass not only material assets but also human, social, and technological capital.

Human capital which borders on skills, morale, and leadership remains a decisive determinant of readiness. Social capital, including trust among allied forces and with local communities, shapes mission legitimacy. Technological capital, such as intelligence and cyber capabilities, enhances situational awareness and response capacity (Miller & Santos, 2020). PM frameworks grounded in RBV therefore assess how effectively these tangible and intangible assets are cultivated and deployed over time.

The U.S. military's "Total Force" strategy and African peacekeeping missions emphasizing community engagement are typical example of RBV-aligned practices that integrate capability development with operational performance (Johnson & Lee, 2021).

v. Systems Theory and Organizational Interdependence

Systems theory conceptualizes organizations as interconnected subsystems that exchange inputs, processes, and outputs with their environments (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This perspective is critical to MPM because military performance depends on the synchronized functioning of logistics, intelligence, combat, and civil-military relations.

Breakdowns in one subsystem can undermine overall mission success. For instance, logistical failures may compromise combat readiness, while intelligence lapses can nullify tactical superiority. A systems-based PM framework thus evaluates not only individual unit efficiency but also cross-functional coordination and environmental responsiveness (Harris & Patel, 2021). Recognizing the military as an open system reinforces the need to incorporate external feedback such as public opinion and alliance solidarity into performance evaluations.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Building on the reviewed theories, this study proposes a multidimensional conceptual framework that integrates institutional, contingency, resource-based, systems, and Balanced Scorecard perspectives to explain the dynamics of Military Performance Management (MPM). The framework as depicted in figure 1 emphasizes that performance outcomes such as readiness, accountability, and learning depend on the interaction between institutional legitimacy, contextual adaptability, capability development, and system interdependence. Leadership adaptability and organizational culture act as mediating mechanisms that connect these theoretical dimensions to tangible performance outcomes.

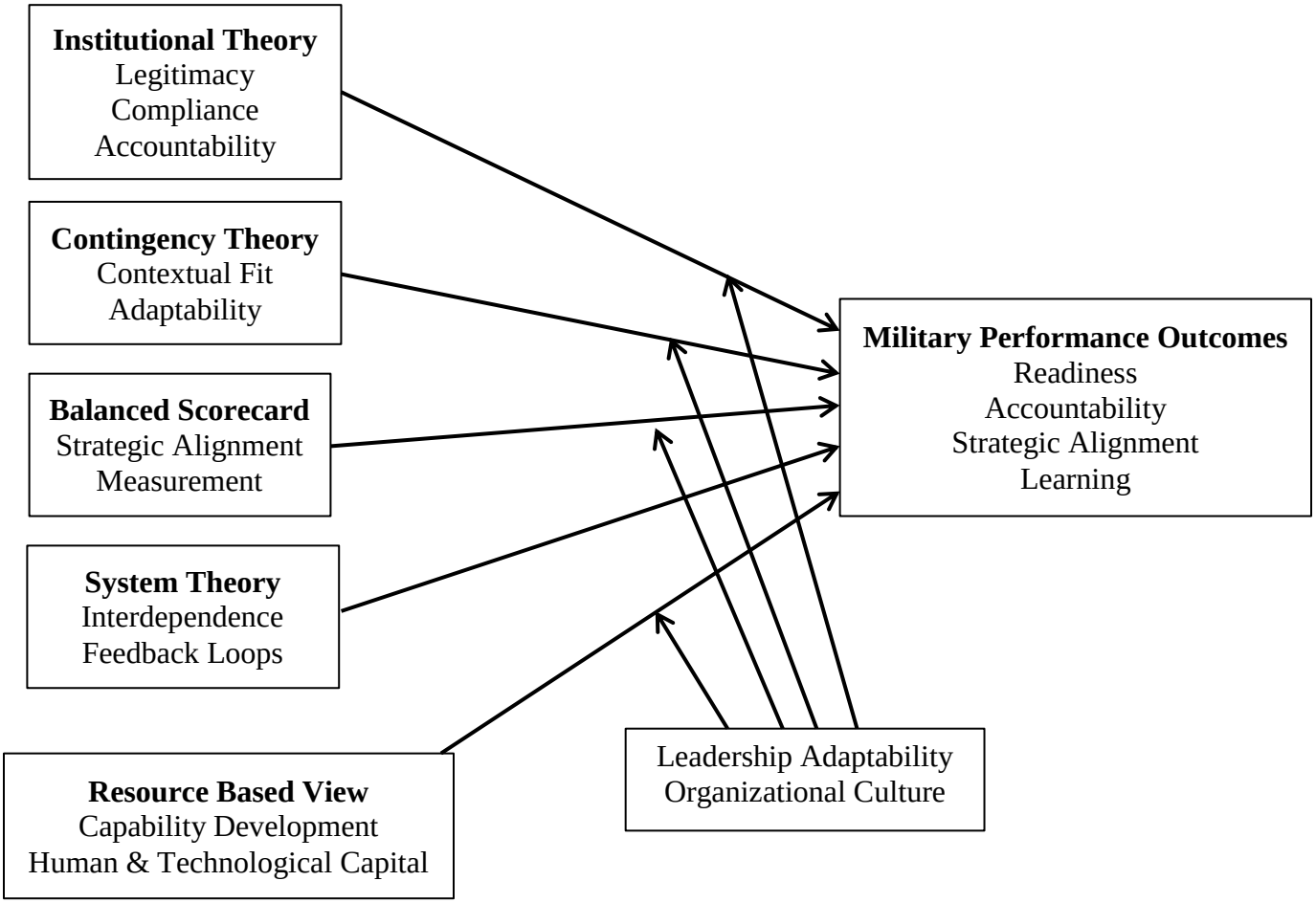

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework for Military Performance Management*

Source: Framework developed by the authors, adapted from Scott (2014); Lawrence and Lorsch (1967); Kaplan and Norton (1996); Barney (1991); and Katz and Kahn (1978).

The figure illustrates the interaction of five core theories that jointly explain the determinants of military performance. Institutional pressures, contextual contingencies, resource capabilities, system interdependencies, and strategic alignment (via the Balanced Scorecard) interact dynamically to influence performance outcomes. Leadership adaptability and culture mediate these relationships, linking strategic design to operational behavior.

A robust theoretical foundation is essential for understanding Military Performance Management (MPM) within complex defence institutions. Diverse organizational and strategic management theories provide complementary insights into how institutional norms, contextual factors, strategic alignment, and resource capabilities influence performance outcomes. Accordingly, Table 1 presents and outlines the key theoretical perspectives underpinning Military Performance Management.

Table 1: Theoretical Foundations and Their Contributions to Military Performance Management (MPM)

Theory	Key Constructs	Core Assumptions	Contribution to Military Performance Management (MPM)
Institutional Theory	Legitimacy, compliance, normative pressures	Organizations seek legitimacy by conforming to formal and informal rules (Scott, 2014).	Explains how defence institutions design PM systems emphasizing accountability, conformity to doctrine, and alignment with national defence policies.
Contingency Theory	Environmental fit, situational alignment, adaptability	Organizational effectiveness depends on the fit between context, structure, and processes (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).	Highlights the need for adaptive PM frameworks that vary by mission type (e.g., combat, peacekeeping, cyber operations).
Balanced Scorecard (BSC)	Strategic alignment, multidimensional performance metrics	Performance should be measured through multiple, interrelated perspectives (Kaplan & Norton, 1996).	Provides a structured framework for linking defence strategy to operational outcomes using financial, stakeholder, process, and learning perspectives.
Resource-Based View (RBV)	Capability development, human capital, technological assets	Sustainable advantage stems from unique, valuable, and inimitable resources (Barney, 1991).	Emphasizes the importance of building human, social, and technological capabilities to sustain readiness and innovation.
Systems Theory	Interdependence, feedback, open-system dynamics	Organizations consist of interrelated subsystems interacting with external environments (Katz & Kahn, 1978).	Encourages holistic PM systems that capture inter-unit coordination, learning loops, and responsiveness to external feedback.

Source: Adapted from Scott (2014); Lawrence and Lorsch (1967); Kaplan and Norton (1996); Barney (1991); and Katz and Kahn (1978).

Conceptual Propositions

The following conceptual propositions synthesize institutional, contingency, leadership, and resource-based theories to explain the factors influencing military performance management frameworks. They provide a theoretical basis for empirical research focused on optimizing the design and implementation of performance systems to improve effectiveness, accountability, and strategic coherence in military organizations.

P1: Institutional pressures positively influence the design and implementation of military performance management frameworks through mechanisms of legitimacy, compliance, and accountability.

P2: The degree of alignment between environmental contingencies (e.g., mission type, threat level, political context) and performance management frameworks enhances operational adaptability and mission effectiveness.

P3: Leadership adaptability and organizational culture mediate the relationship between institutional pressures and performance outcomes by shaping how accountability mechanisms are enacted in practice.

P4: Integration of resource-based and systems approaches strengthens the relationship between performance frameworks and organizational outcomes by promoting capability development, inter-unit coordination, and learning.

P5: The alignment of Balanced Scorecard dimensions (strategic, operational, and learning indicators) with defence objectives positively influences readiness, accountability, and long-term strategic coherence.

2.3 Empirical Review

While theoretical foundations provide conceptual clarity, practical experiences reveal how military performance management (MPM) varies across national and institutional contexts. Empirical evidence from Africa, particularly Nigeria, and multinational missions such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), illustrates the influence of political environments, institutional maturity, and technological capacity on PM implementation.

African Militaries: Emerging Practices and Constraints

African militaries face persistent challenges in adopting systematic PM frameworks due to limited resources, fragile governance structures, and high security demands (Okafor & Mohammed, 2022). Nonetheless, gradual reforms are emerging.

In Nigeria, for instance, the Armed Forces have attempted to institutionalize PM through initiatives such as:

i. The Defence Headquarters Performance Monitoring Unit (PMU), established to track operations against insurgency and banditry.

ii. Operational Readiness Assessments, evaluating troop morale, logistical adequacy, and mission outcomes.

iii. Human Capital Development Programs, coordinated through the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and international partnerships.

Despite these developments, evaluations still tend to focus on inputs such as troop strength or equipment acquisition rather than on mission outcomes like community security or civilian confidence (Adebayo, 2021). Political interference, resource misallocation, and bureaucratic inertia further weaken credibility.

Peacekeeping Operations and Multinational Coordination

Multinational operations such as AMISOM demonstrate the complexity of aligning performance indicators across diverse national contingents. Although AMISOM achieved measurable territorial gains against Al-Shabaab, coordination difficulties, uneven troop quality, and fragmented data systems impeded sustained progress (Williams, 2018). These lessons underscore the necessity of systems theory–informed PM frameworks that integrate interoperability and cross-contingent evaluation mechanisms.

Challenges and Gaps in Military Performance Management

Despite conceptual advances, several barriers continue to undermine PM effectiveness in military institutions. These challenges, drawn from cross-national evidence, include institutional complexity, political interference, measurement deficiencies, resource constraints, cultural resistance, and stakeholder pressures.

1. **Institutional Complexity and Multi-Stakeholder Involvement**
   Military organizations operate in multi-actor environments that include defence ministries, political leaders, allies, and the public. These competing interests generate fragmented accountability, where metrics may be politicized or inconsistently applied (Baxter et al., 2019). Civil–military tensions and alliance dependencies further complicate uniform measurement.

2. **Political and Bureaucratic Interference**
   Politicization of leadership appointments and shifting policy agendas often compromise PM

objectivity (Okafor & Mohammed, 2022). Bureaucratic bottlenecks also delay decision-making and hinder alignment between resources and operational needs (Adebayo, 2021).

3. **Measurement Difficulties and Strategic Blind Spots**
   Unlike corporate environments, military success is difficult to quantify. Overemphasis on inputs (weapons, sorties, or personnel) obscures qualitative outcomes such as trust-building and regional stability (Kim & Roberts, 2021). Even advanced frameworks like the Defence Performance Measurement Framework (DPMF) remain inconsistently implemented (Anderson & Williams, 2023).

4. **Resource and Technological Constraints**
   PM requires robust data systems and analytic tools. Many militaries lack the technology and trained personnel necessary for reliable measurement. Advanced forces employ predictive analytics and digital dashboards, but developing militaries remain constrained by funding and data reliability (Miller & Santos, 2020).

5. **Cultural and Leadership Challenges**
   Military culture emphasizes hierarchy and obedience, which may hinder open feedback and innovation. Resistance to performance evaluation often arises from fear of accountability or perceived external interference (Evans & Clark, 2020). Leadership style strongly moderates PM outcomes—empowering leadership fosters cohesion and adaptability, whereas autocratic styles suppress initiative (Johnson & Lee, 2021).

6. **External Stakeholder and Legitimacy Pressures**
   Societal and international scrutiny increasingly demands transparency. Militaries involved in governance or human rights controversies face legitimacy crises that weaken PM credibility (O'Neill & Fisher, 2022). Donor-imposed frameworks often fail to align with local contexts, creating further implementation challenges.

7. **Fragmented Integration with Natural Systems**
   Defence PM often operates in isolation from broader public-sector accountability systems, resulting in duplication and weak policy coherence. Integrating military PM with national audit and oversight mechanisms, as practiced in South Africa, enhances transparency and efficiency (Garcia & Liu, 2022).

Practical Implications for Military Leaders and Policymakers

Effective performance management in defence institutions requires leadership commitment at three interconnected levels: policy, organizational, and operational.

Policy-Level Implications

At the policy level, effective military performance management requires institutionalizing defence-specific frameworks that align with the unique missions and operational environments of armed forces. Integrating defence performance systems within broader national accountability mechanisms enhances civil–military oversight and strengthens democratic governance. Ensuring policy continuity is equally essential, as frequent political transitions often disrupt long-term performance cycles and institutional learning. Furthermore, sustainable implementation depends on deliberate resource allocation for robust data infrastructure, personnel capacity building, and independent evaluation mechanisms. Collectively, these policy measures promote transparency, stability, and strategic coherence in defence performance management.

Organizational-Level Implications

At the organizational level, effective military performance management depends on strong leadership commitment, where senior officers actively engage with performance systems to build trust and accountability. Integrating performance management with broader human resource processes such as recruitment, training, and promotion ensures that evaluation serves developmental rather than punitive purposes. A culture of learning and adaptation should also be fostered through regular after-action reviews and continuous feedback mechanisms that drive improvement across units. Additionally, leveraging technology through data analytics and digital monitoring tools enhances the timeliness, accuracy, and transparency of evaluations, ultimately strengthening institutional effectiveness and operational readiness.

Operational-Level Implications

At the operational level, effective military performance management emphasizes outcome-oriented metrics that assess mission success rather than mere activity counts. Empowering mid-level leaders through training in evaluation techniques, data interpretation, and constructive feedback delivery enhances accountability and performance quality at the unit level. Balancing transparency with the need for operational secrecy is also essential to maintain the credibility of internal assessments while safeguarding classified information. Moreover, adopting team-based evaluation approaches that capture unit cohesion and collective effectiveness ensures that performance management reflects the interdependent nature of military operations and fosters a culture of shared responsibility and continuous improvement.

Cross-Cutting Implications

Regular audits, stakeholder engagement, ethical compliance, and linking resources to measurable results should underpin all levels of PM implementation. Ethical and human rights metrics, in particular, enhance legitimacy and align military practice with international norms (Johnstone, 2019).

5. Conclusion

Managing performance in military organizations requires frameworks that integrate theoretical insight with practical adaptability. This paper has argued that military performance management (MPM) differs fundamentally from civilian PM, necessitating approaches that account for hierarchy, accountability, and mission complexity. By synthesizing Institutional, Contingency, RBV, Systems, and BSC perspectives, it proposed a holistic conceptual model capturing interdependence, adaptability, and legitimacy. Empirical evidence from Nigeria and multinational operations underscores persistent gaps especially in measurement, resource constraints, and political interference. Strengthening PM in defence institutions therefore demands leadership commitment, technological integration, and institutionalized accountability. Future research should focus on contextual and comparative validation to advance both theory and practice toward resilient, mission-ready military institutions.

6. Recommendations

Drawing from the findings and theoretical synthesis, this paper proposes the following recommendations to strengthen Military Performance Management (MPM) and enhance accountability, adaptability, and strategic effectiveness in defence institutions:

i. Leadership commitment and accountability
ii. Institutionalization of defense-specific frameworks
iii. Technological and analytical capacity building
iv. Integration with human resource management
v. Adaptive and learning-oriented culture
vi. Resource allocation and policy stability
vii. Civil-military accountability integration
viii. Further research and empirical validation

7. Areas for Further Research

Despite growing scholarly interest, military PM remains under-theorized and empirically underexplored. Future research should address the following:

i. Contextualization of Performance Frameworks: How do hierarchical and collectivist military

cultures influence adaptation of civilian PM models such as the BSC? What indicators most accurately capture readiness and adaptability?

ii. Integration with Human Resource Management: How can PM be embedded within officer education and career progression to strengthen competence and fairness?

iii. Comparative and Cross-National Analysis: How do PM practices differ across advanced and developing militaries, and how can multinational operations harmonize divergent frameworks?

Answering these questions will deepen theoretical understanding and improve the design of defence-specific PM systems that combine strategic alignment with contextual responsiveness.

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