



## Assessing the role of leadership style in conflict resolution in public organizations: A study of selected prisons in Tanzania

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### ABSTRACT

This study assessed the role of leadership styles in conflict resolution in selected Tanzanian prisons, precisely Ukonga, Keko, and Segerea, in Dar es Salaam. The study aimed to assess the leadership styles used in prisons, evaluate procedures applied to conflict resolution, and identify the challenges faced by prison leaders. The study was guided by the Transformational Leadership Theory, which was proposed by Bernard Bass and Riggio, and the Transactional Leadership Theory by Burns. Applying a qualitative research approach and case study design, the population of the study was 100 participants, consisting of 30 prison leaders and administrative staff and 70 inmates. The sample size was 15 prison leaders, 15 administrative staff, 20 inmates (served up to 4 years), 20 inmates (served 5-10 years), 15 inmates (served 11-15 years), and 15 inmates (served over 15 years) by using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data collected in the field by coding and creating themes. The findings discovered that Tanzanian prisons mainly applied transactional, transformational, and participative leadership styles. The transformational leadership style, characterized by empathy, open communication, and respect, proved to be most effective in attaining sustainable conflict resolution and constructive behavioral change amongst inmates. Besides, collaborative leadership allowed inmate participation in decision-making, which was rare but demonstrated considerable potential for fostering permanent peace and cooperation. The study identified challenges facing prison leaders, such as resource limitations, overcrowding in prisons, insufficient training, low morale, and rigid hierarchical structures obstructing effective conflict management. Recommendations emphasized the need for comprehensive leadership training encouraging emotional intelligence, as well as adaptive conflict resolution policies and structural reforms promoting inmate involvement and procedural justice. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical understandings into the practical application of leadership concepts and theories in conflict resolution circumstances within correctional organizations, contributing valuable direction for policymakers and prison administrators looking for enhancement of the institutional harmony and rehabilitative outcomes.

**Keywords:** Conflict Resolution, Leadership, Leadership Style, Public Organizations

### I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership style plays a crucial role in organizations, no matter their size or whether they're public or private, and it cuts across all sectors (Lindsay et al. 2011). This is because the way leaders choose to lead can shape the organization's direction, how plans and strategies are carried out, and even how motivated the employees feel. Typically, leadership styles encompass various ways of exercising authority that fit different types of organizations and environments, all aimed at reaching specific goals and objectives (Haslam, et al. 2019).

On a global scale, leadership styles often mirror a country's political beliefs. For instance, liberal democratic nations like the United States, the European Union (EU), Canada, South Africa, Japan, and Korea tend to adopt participatory styles, such as democratic or transformational leadership. These approaches focus on collaboration, human rights, and inclusivity, making up about 60–70% of leadership styles in these regions (Caza, et al. 2021). On the flip side, non-liberal states like China, North Korea, and Rwanda lean towards authoritarian or autocratic styles, which account for roughly 80–90% of leadership methods in those contexts (Kann, 2022). These styles prioritize control, discipline, and enforcement, closely aligning with the ideologies of the state (Shwan & Shapiro, 2021).

When it comes to prisons, which serve as tools of state authority, leadership and conflict resolution strategies can vary significantly across different jurisdictions. In liberal democracies like the United States, the UK, and Australia, prison leadership often incorporates participatory principles, highlighting human rights and collaboration (Shwan &



Shapiro, 2021). In these countries, around 60–70% of leadership practices in prisons are rooted in democratic ideals. In contrast, non-liberal states such as China, Rwanda, and Cuba predominantly use autocratic practices, focusing on enforcement and control (Turning, 2022). The leadership in these prisons reflects broader governmental directives and usually prioritizes compliance over inclusivity (Kann, 2022).

Challenges in prison environments go beyond just the leadership styles at play. Take gang violence in Latin American prisons, for instance; it presents serious hurdles for conflict resolution. Inmates often band together for protection, which can lead to violent confrontations. This situation calls for leadership styles that can adapt to the complexities of these conflicts (Vidal, 2021).

In African countries, the prison landscape is influenced by distinct socio-economic conditions, where limited resources can impact management and daily operations (Goleman, 2021). Unlike prisons in the Americas, Europe, or parts of Asia, African prisons typically do not see strong gang formations due to cultural differences (Shwan & Shapiro, 2021). Instead, conflicts are more likely to arise between inmates or between inmates and guards, often revolving around issues of authority and respect within the prison community (Legood, 2021).

Conflict resolution in African prisons is shaped by leadership styles that focus on collective well-being and social harmony, reflecting traditional African practices. Leadership in these environments is influenced by cultural values like communalism and respect for hierarchy. These values guide conflict resolution methods that prioritize mediation, dialogue, and community involvement. Moreover, the behaviors and actions of prison staff, which are often shaped by the region's cultural diversity, also play a significant role in developing leadership and conflict management strategies (Legood, 2021).

In Tanzania, various public and private organizations have embraced leadership styles that fit their unique operational environments (Waigara, 2015). Prisons, being public institutions, function within military-style frameworks aimed at managing inmates from a wide range of cultural, social, and psychological backgrounds (Skinner, 2020). The Prisons Standing Order acts as the main guideline for resolving conflicts, offering structured yet flexible procedures for different scenarios (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2019). However, how effective these procedures are often hinges on the discretion of the leadership.

Conflicts in prisons whether they arise among inmates, between inmates and officers, or with outside stakeholders demand a nuanced approach to leadership to tackle their complexities (National Audit Office of Tanzania, 2023). The prison setting is inherently tough due to the diverse mix of individuals involved. Inmates can range from those serving short sentences to those facing life terms, each with their own specific needs. Meanwhile, the prison staff, primarily made up of military personnel, must find a balance between exercising authority and facilitating inmate rehabilitation. The interactions with external parties, like visitors, add another layer of complexity to these dynamics (Amlike, 2020).

While the leadership styles in Tanzanian prisons do influence how conflicts are resolved, applying these styles is not always a straightforward task. Even though the Standing Orders lay out a framework, the real-world application of leadership styles often requires adjustments based on the context. Existing research highlights the complexities of leadership within Tanzanian prisons but tends to fall short in detailing how these leadership styles are specifically utilized in conflict resolution. For example, while Skinner (2020) and the National Audit Office of Tanzania (2023) discuss the challenges of managing a diverse inmate population, they do not delve deeply into how leadership styles are put into practice, especially in situations that call for discretion and adaptability.

This study set out to bridge a significant gap by looking into how leadership styles are actually put into practice in Tanzanian prisons, especially when it comes to resolving conflicts. The research delved into how prison leaders adjust their methods to handle the intricate relationships between inmates, staff, and outside parties, as well as how they tackle the various challenges that arise from the differing needs of these groups.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Conflict is a significant problem in Tanzanian prisons, surfacing among staff, between staff and inmates, and even among the inmates themselves (Robins, 2019; Grip & Kotajoki, 2022; Hamad, 2023; Amlike, 2020; Makinde & Olabode, 2020; Thadeo, 2020; Sibisi & Olofinbiyi, 2021). These conflicts undermine the fundamental goals of prisons, which are to rehabilitate individuals, maintain order, and ensure the safety of everyone involved. Leadership is crucial in managing and resolving these conflicts, but the leadership styles currently used in Tanzanian prisons, like transformational and transactional leadership, have not been very effective in tackling these issues (Robins, 2019; Mgebeke, 2020).

As a result of ongoing conflicts, Tanzanian prisons are grappling with a host of challenges, including overcrowding, limited resources, and strained relationships, all of which exacerbate existing tensions and obstruct the achievement of institutional objectives (Robins, 2019). For example, some prisons are operating at over 109% of their capacity, which leads to heightened stress, increased violence, and fewer chances for rehabilitation (Bippa, 2024; Robins, 2019; Grip & Kotajoki, 2022). If these challenges are not effectively addressed, they risk creating a cycle of violence, lowering staff morale, and undermining efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate inmates.



Despite the attempts by prison leadership to tackle these conflicts through mediation, negotiation techniques, leadership training programs, inmate rehabilitation initiatives, and grievance redress mechanisms, prisons still face ongoing violence, high recidivism rates, and a persistent failure to meet basic human rights standards (Mgbeke, 2020). If these issues continue to go unresolved, they could lead to institutional failure and diminish the effectiveness of prison management. This study set out to explore how different leadership styles, especially transformational and transactional approaches, can help resolve conflicts in public institutions like prisons in Tanzania.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To evaluate the leadership styles used by leaders in resolving conflicts in Tanzanian prisons.
- ii. To assess the leadership procedures applied in conflict resolution within the prisons.
- iii. To identify the challenges that prison leaders face when applying different leadership styles to resolve conflicts in Tanzanian prisons.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership theory shines a light on how leaders can truly inspire and motivate their teams. It's all about creating a shared vision and goals, paying attention to individual needs, and fostering innovation. This approach puts the well-being of team members front and center while also aiming for long-term success. Key leadership behaviors like individualized consideration and inspirational motivation play a vital role in resolving conflicts, especially in high-pressure environments such as prisons. Transformational leadership brings the emotional intelligence and flexibility necessary to meet the varied needs of both prison staff and inmates.

The essential elements drawn from Transformational Leadership Theory offer a thorough perspective on how leadership impacts conflict resolution. The independent variables include behaviors like idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration. These traits shape how leaders guide and uplift their teams, building trust, collaboration, and adaptability. On the flip side, the dependent variables focus on the results of these leadership behaviors, particularly in conflict resolution scenarios. This includes positive outcomes like reduced violence, better relationships, and improved harmony within institutions. Together, these elements lay the groundwork for understanding how effective leadership strategies can lead to real organizational benefits.

However, Transformational Leadership Theory is not without its flaws. A significant challenge is its dependence on a high level of trust and commitment between leaders and their followers, which can be tough to cultivate in hierarchical and authoritarian environments like prisons (Skinner, 2020). Additionally, implementing this theory often requires a considerable investment of time and effort, which can be a hurdle in resource-strapped institutions. Moreover, it may not offer quick fixes for urgent conflicts, as its emphasis on long-term change can sometimes postpone immediate resolutions.

Leadership training programs should really focus on building emotional intelligence and the ability to adapt to different situations. This approach can significantly improve how transformational principles are put into practice. Plus, having regular feedback and structured performance evaluations can foster the trust and commitment needed to effectively implement this theory (Chandolia, 2020).

#### 2.1.2 Transactional Leadership Theory

To tackle the shortcomings of Transformational Leadership Theory, especially in strict environments like prisons, Transactional Leadership Theory was introduced as a helpful alternative. This approach, first put forth by Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bass in 1985, centers on structured interactions between leaders and their followers. It highlights the importance of clear roles, expectations, rewards, and consequences.

In contrast to Transformational Leadership, which aims for long-lasting, transformative change, Transactional Leadership is more about maintaining stability and achieving immediate results. This practical method focuses on reaching specific goals through straightforward exchanges between leaders and followers.

One of the key strengths of Transactional Leadership is its knack for providing quick solutions to conflicts, making it particularly effective in settings like prisons where swift action is crucial. By establishing clear expectations and rewards, it creates a stable environment where individuals understand what's required of them, which helps reduce uncertainty and boosts overall compliance. Moreover, the theory's focus on order and discipline proves especially useful for managing everyday conflicts that arise in prison settings.

By blending the immediate, practical conflict resolution strategies of Transactional Leadership with the long-term motivational and inspirational elements of Transformational Leadership, leaders can effectively tackle both short-term challenges and promote lasting institutional change. Transactional Leadership lays the groundwork for daily order,



while Transformational Leadership fosters trust, collaboration, and personal commitment, ultimately enhancing conflict resolution outcomes over time.

### **2.1.3 Relevance of the Theory**

As noted above, the purpose of applying transformational and transactional leadership theories in this study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of how leadership styles influenced conflict resolution within Tanzanian prisons. These theories offered contemporary insights, accumulated research, and conceptual explanations on how leadership behavior affected prison environments and the interactions between leaders and inmates. This study adopted these perspectives because transformational leadership focused on inspiring and motivating subordinates, fostering collaboration, and promoting positive change elements that were essential in rehabilitative settings. On the flip side, transactional leadership focuses on structure, enforcing rules, and implementing disciplinary actions to maintain stability and compliance in correctional facilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006). A key idea behind these leadership styles is that leaders can influence their subordinates' behaviors, just as those subordinates can affect how effective the leadership is. This dynamic is particularly relevant in prison settings, where the way leaders approach their roles can shape inmate behavior, while the challenges faced within the prison system can also impact leadership choices. By adopting transformational leadership, prison officials have been able to foster a rehabilitative atmosphere that promotes positive behavioral changes, mentorship, and builds trust between officers and inmates. At the same time, transactional leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring that rules are followed, providing a structured framework that upholds order and security in correctional institutions.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Leadership Styles Used in Resolving Conflicts**

The research on leadership styles in conflict resolution offers a detailed perspective on how different leadership approaches impact conflict management in various settings around the world, including Africa and specifically Tanzania.

Globally, studies have shown that leadership styles are crucial in resolving conflicts. For example, transformational leadership, as noted by Goleman (2021), is well-regarded for its ability to ease tensions and encourage teamwork. This style, which focuses on empathy, open communication, and emotional intelligence, proves especially effective in places like correctional facilities, where managing emotions is key to resolving disputes. On the flip side, some research indicates that transactional leadership, which emphasizes structure and compliance, can also be beneficial in certain situations, particularly when quick decisions are necessary (Atkin-Plunk & Armstrong, 2023). Conversely, authoritarian leadership often worsens conflicts, especially when it suppresses collaboration and prioritizes control (Talv, 2022). Meanwhile, participative leadership has been shown to foster inclusivity and shared decision-making, leading to more lasting solutions (Lindsay et al., 2011; Vidal, 2021).

### **2.2.2 Leadership Procedures in Resolving Conflict**

Leadership procedures in conflict management are essential for resolving disputes effectively within organizations. According to Lindsay et al. (2011), key strategies like mediation, negotiation, and consensus-building are fundamental to conflict management frameworks. Nkosi and Maweni (2020) emphasized the importance of structured communication channels, which help foster transparency and understanding among all stakeholders. Additionally, restorative justice practices, as discussed by Mssawe (2023) and Chandolia (2020), focus on mending broken relationships instead of just punishing wrongdoers, ultimately encouraging long-term reconciliation.

### **2.2.3 Challenges Faced by Prison Leaders in Applying Leadership Styles**

Leadership challenges around the world have a big impact on how well conflicts are resolved. Issues like overcrowding and limited resources are often highlighted as major hurdles in correctional facilities (Bippa, 2024; Mwankenja, 2024). According to Nkosi and Maweni (2020), the low staff-to-inmate ratios make these problems even worse, hindering leaders' ability to manage conflicts effectively.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

Research design refers to the general strategies used to conduct a study, it gives the direction on how data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted. According to (Miles & Huberman, 1994), a research design refers to the arrangement of conditions for collecting and analyzing data in a way that ensures relevance to the research purpose while maintaining economy in procedure it serves as the framework within which the study was conducted, outlining the approaches and strategies employed. The study chose a case study design because it provided a deep dive into the different leadership styles used in conflict resolution at Ukonga, Keko, and Segerea prisons. This approach allowed for



the exploration of real-life experiences, giving a clearer picture of how prison leaders managed conflicts. It also made it possible to gather information from various sources, like interviews and observations, to build a well-rounded understanding. Since the focus was on specific prisons, this design was perfect for comparing leadership methods and pinpointing effective strategies for resolving conflicts within the prison systems.

### 3.2 Population of the Study

According to Nachmias (2018), the population refers to the total set of cases that met specific criteria. The study population referred to the group of individuals or entities that possessed specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. This group formed the basis from which data were collected to address the research questions (Creswell, 2014). For this study focused on the entire population of prison staff and officers as well as all the inmates at Ukonga, Keko, and Segerea Prisons. The study chose these groups because they are uniquely positioned to share valuable experiences and insights about the leadership styles in these facilities and how they affect conflict resolution within the prison system. The targeted population was selected for their direct involvement in leadership and conflict resolution processes in the chosen prisons. Prison leaders and administrative staff offered important information about the strategies they used, the challenges they encountered, and how effective different leadership styles were in resolving conflicts (Herzog-Evans et al., 2023). At the same time, inmates provided their perspectives and experiences, shedding light on how leadership practices influenced their interactions and overall well-being.

### 3.3 Sample Size

Since this research was qualitative, the aim was not to apply the findings to a broader population but rather to dive deep into specific experiences and phenomena. This meant that the study prioritized selecting a sample rich in information instead of one that represented the entire population. The sample size was guided by the concept of data saturation, which is reached when enough data has been gathered to thoroughly understand and describe the phenomenon being studied (Lakens, 2022; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Verma & Verma, 2020). In this case, the study included 100 participants, made up of 30 prison leaders and administrative staff, along with 70 inmates. This mix ensured a variety of perspectives and experiences while keeping the data collection and analysis manageable.

**Table 1**  
*Sample Composition*

Group	No. of Participants
Prison Leaders	15
Administrative Staff	15
Inmates (served up to 4 years)	20
Inmates (served 5-10 years)	20
Inmates (served 11-15 years)	15
Inmates (served over 15 years)	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.4 Sampling Procedures

Sampling procedures outline how researchers select a smaller group from a larger population for their studies, and they generally fall into two categories: probability and non-probability methods. Probability sampling techniques, like simple random, systematic, stratified, and cluster sampling, give every individual a known chance of being chosen, which helps in making the findings more generalizable. On the other hand, non-probability sampling methods such as purposive, convenience, snowball, and quota sampling do not guarantee equal chances of selection but are great for honing in on specific traits and gathering deeper insights. For instance, purposive sampling is a popular non-probability method in qualitative research where researchers intentionally pick participants who can offer valuable and relevant information. In this study, the researcher specifically selected prison staff, management, and convicted prisoners because their unique experiences and expertise directly relate to the research questions, allowing for a more thorough and meaningful analysis.

### 3.5 Data Generation Process and Methods

Data generation was the systematic process of collecting information to address the research questions and achieve the study objectives. This research employed both primary and secondary data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive exploration of leadership styles, conflict resolution procedures, and the challenges faced within Ukonga, Keko, and Segerea prisons in Tanzania.



### 3.5.1 Primary Data

Primary data is all about the original information that researchers gather specifically for their projects. In this study, collected primary data directly from participants through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The semi-structured interviews were more like guided conversations, allowing the researcher to dive deep into the participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies while still keeping a consistent framework throughout all the interviews. This approach was chosen because it offered the flexibility to dig for detailed insights while ensuring that all the important topics were covered. In this study conducted these interviews with prison leaders and administrative staff.

These participants had a unique vantage point, providing firsthand accounts of how different leadership styles transformational, transactional, and participative were put into practice within the prison system and how effective they were in resolving conflicts. The interviews gathered qualitative data on leadership practices, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution strategies, which helped us evaluate the various leadership styles and assess the overall leadership procedures.

On another note, focus group discussions were all about moderated group interviews that allowed participants to share and reflect on their shared experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015). These FGDs really shone when it came to capturing a variety of perspectives and understanding the dynamics within the group. In this study, held FGDs with inmates to gather their thoughts on how leadership behaviors influenced conflict resolution in the prison setting. Each focus group had about 8 to 10 participants, and organized three separate groups.

The reason for having three groups was to make sure got a range of viewpoints, possibly divided by factors like how long someone had been incarcerated or other demographic differences. This strategy helped us achieve data saturation and allowed for some comparative analysis. The FGDs tackled the challenges faced by prison leaders by delving into inmates' views on leadership effectiveness, communication gaps, and how conflict resolution practices impacted their well-being.

All in all, these methods gave us a well-rounded understanding of leadership styles, procedures, and the hurdles in conflict resolution within Tanzanian prisons. The semi-structured interviews provided rich individual stories from those directly involved in management, while the FGDs offered a wider perspective on how inmates experienced and perceived these leadership practices.

### 3.5.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data is all about information that someone else has gathered for reasons that are different from what the researcher is currently working on. In this study, secondary data played a vital role in enhancing the primary data by adding historical and institutional context (Patton, 2015).

The study gathered secondary data from a variety of official documents that shed light on leadership and conflict resolution within Tanzanian prisons. These included prison regulations and policies, like the Prisons Standing Orders (URT, 2019), which laid out the formal procedures for leadership and conflict resolution; leadership training manuals that provided insights into the skills and strategies imparted to prison leaders; and conflict resolution reports, which encompassed grievance logs, mediation records, and disciplinary reports detailing past conflicts and their resolutions. Moreover, administrative and inspection reports brought to light operational challenges, resource limitations, and overall institutional performance, while previous research studies offered an academic lens on leadership and conflict resolution in correctional environments.

The study analyzed these documents using content analysis, a method that involves a thorough review and coding of textual data to pinpoint key themes and patterns. This approach allowed the study to extract valuable information regarding formal conflict resolution procedures, the effectiveness of leadership training, trends in conflict occurrences, and the operational hurdles faced.

The secondary data evaluated the leadership procedures employed in conflict resolution and highlighted the challenges that prison leaders encounter when trying to implement various leadership styles. This provided a well-rounded institutional and historical perspective that enriched the primary data collected from interviews and focus group discussions.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is all about taking raw data and turning it into insights that really matter insights that can help answer research questions or test hypotheses. This process includes organizing, cleaning, transforming, and interpreting data to spot patterns, relationships, and trends (Selvan & Balasundaram, 2021; Byrne, 2022).

In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to dive into data gathered from interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis is a powerful method that allows researchers to pinpoint, analyze, and report on patterns within the data, making it perfect for exploring leadership styles and conflict resolution practices in Tanzanian prisons. This approach not only provided structure but also offered the flexibility needed to examine participants' experiences while ensuring transparency and rigor throughout the analysis.



All interview data underwent a thorough thematic analysis, guided by transformational and transactional leadership theories. The analysis kicked off with a verbatim transcription of each audio-recorded interview in Microsoft Word, which was chosen for its reliability and ease of use. The transcripts were meticulously checked against the recordings to fix any errors, ensuring that the participants' words were accurately captured. Each transcript was labeled with demographic details like role, gender, and years of service to make it easier to compare responses across different groups.

Once the transcripts were ready, the researcher kicked off the initial coding phase, known as open coding, right in Word. During this stage, each line of text was carefully scrutinized, and meaningful snippets were tagged with provisional labels that captured the essence of what participants had said. For instance, when an officer described how calmly explaining the rules helped ease tension, it was labeled as transformational communication. On the other hand, comments about swiftly imposing sanctions for rule violations were categorized as transactional enforcement. This inductive method allowed the data to reveal relevant concepts organically, without being constrained by any preconceived notions.

After completing the open coding for all transcripts, the researcher organized the emerging codes into an Excel spreadsheet to make grouping and comparison easier. Codes that shared similar themes were grouped under broader categories like Transformational Practices (which included codes such as empathetic dialogue and inspirational framing) and Transactional Measures (which encompassed codes like contingent reward and rule-based sanctions). The spreadsheet also tracked how many respondents mentioned each code, giving a sense of their relative importance without oversimplifying the rich narratives into mere numbers.

With these provisional categories in place, the researcher then refined the themes, drawing on established theoretical frameworks. The components of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration were used to shape and name the themes that highlighted supportive, trust-building behaviors.

This comparative analysis led to the identification of three core themes: Empathetic Engagement, Structured Enforcement, and Hybrid Strategies that blended both approaches.

The final themes were woven together into a clear narrative framework. Key quotes were chosen to bring each theme to life. For example, one warden shared, "I remind them of our shared goal: everyone's safety, and then The study followed up with clear consequences if needed," which perfectly captured the hybrid approach. This way, the analysis stayed true to the voices of the participants, creating a transparent audit trail that showed how the themes were developed.

To boost credibility, the study looked at perspectives from different respondent groups. By comparing the views of wardens, officers, and inmates, the researcher was able to spot both common ground (like a general appreciation for empathetic engagement) and differences (such as varying opinions on the long-term effectiveness of punitive measures). In the end, the themes were connected to existing literature on leadership and conflict resolution, showing that transformational practices often build trust and lower recidivism rates, while transactional methods, though effective for immediate compliance, can risk damaging morale over time.

Additionally, thematic analysis was used to tackle the study's objectives. When identifying leadership styles in conflict resolution, the data was sorted into themes related to transformational and transactional approaches.

### 3.7 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are the backbone of any solid research, ensuring that the results truly reflect what's being studied and that similar outcomes can be achieved under the same conditions (Creswell, 2018). Validity is all about whether the tools and methods used actually measure what they're supposed to (Patton, 2015). In this study, enhanced validity by using a mix of methods interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to back up our findings and reduce bias (Creswell, 2014). As Palermo et al. (2021) point out, for research to be considered valid, it needs to show both internal consistency and external relevance.

On the other hand, reliability refers to how consistent the results are when the same methods are used repeatedly (Palermo et al., 2021). To improve reliability, the study made sure to audio-record all in-depth interviews and transcribe them word-for-word, capturing the participants' exact words. Our research assistants were trained to stick closely to the interview guide, and study carefully reviewed the data for consistency across different methods. By combining in-depth interviews, structured questionnaires, and document reviews, this study ensured that each method, when applied under similar conditions, produced stable and reproducible results.

### 3.8 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are all about the principles and guidelines that shape how researchers act before, during, and after their studies. They ensure that integrity, respect, and protection are upheld for all participants. In this particular research, the investigator made sure to get permission from the appropriate prison authorities and consulted with social welfare officers and administrative staff to obtain the necessary institutional clearance. Before each interview, participants were given clear information about the study's purpose, their right to refuse or withdraw at any time, and



the steps taken to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. Only those who provided informed, voluntary consent were included in the research.

To maintain ethical standards, the identities of interviewees were coded, and any personal identifiers were stripped from transcripts and reports. All data was securely stored, accessible only to the research team, and used exclusively for academic purposes. The researcher also followed strict anti-plagiarism guidelines by properly citing all sources and ensuring that no respondent's words were altered in a way that could misrepresent their intended meaning.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Leadership Styles Used in Resolving Conflicts in Prisons

The study intended to determine leadership styles used by prison leaders in resolving conflicts in prisons. This section includes subthemes such as the leadership style most commonly used in resolving conflicts in prison, the effectiveness of the leadership style in resolving conflicts, and the leadership style best suited for conflict resolution in prisons. The interviews highlighted three broad leadership approaches: authoritarian/transactional leadership, supportive/transformational leadership, and collaborative/participative leadership. Each group of responders emphasized different aspects of these styles based on their role, proximity to leadership individuals, and frequency of involvement in conflict resolution situations.

The study intended to establish which leadership style is most commonly used in resolving conflicts in prison. A considerable proportion of prison officers, particularly those in higher positions, recognized authoritarian leadership as the most prevalent and anticipated style of leadership within the institution. Officers regarded it as a sensible and essential response to the prison's overcrowding and tense and high-risk conditions. PRO-01 stated,

*"The only way to maintain order is by command. In prison, delay causes disorder, so we move quickly, punish when necessary, and strictly enforce the regulations."*

Another officer, PRO-11, stated,

*"We are trained that power must be evident. If you are too lenient, the convicts take advantage, and the problems escalate."*

However, inmates were more critical of this leadership approach. Many people said that authoritarian leadership failed to address the underlying reasons for conflict, instead encouraging fear, silence, or secret animosity. PR-24, an inmate in Keko Prison, explained that police frequently come in shouting. When two individuals argue, they do not ask questions; they simply punish both. Even if you were defending yourselves. " Another inmate, PR-39, stated that

*"When an officer utilizes threats or force to resolve a conflict, it works in that time. But the rage persists, and individuals find new ways to settle scores."*

These insights reveal that authoritarian leadership may achieve short-term order but risks fueling long-term resentment and unresolved tensions. From my perspective, the comments by PRO-01 and PRO-11 reflect the institutional pressure to maintain strict control, which is understandable given the volatile environment. Yet the concerns of PR-24 and PR-39 highlight that such methods may worsen hidden grievances and undermine rehabilitation goals.

This aligns with Talv (2022), who found that authoritarian leadership in correctional facilities often escalates tensions rather than providing sustainable solutions. Furthermore, this observation resonates with Transactional Leadership Theory, which stresses command, rules, and immediate compliance but may overlook long-term rehabilitation goals (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1994). In contrast, Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) emphasizes trust, individualized consideration, and inspiration, offering more sustainable pathways for reducing tensions and promoting positive behavioral change in prisons. Similar findings are echoed by Atkin-Plunk and Armstrong (2023), who argue that transactional approaches are effective only for immediate order but fail to reduce recurring conflicts, and by Goleman (2021), who emphasizes the value of emotional intelligence and transformational practices in fostering durable rehabilitation and conflict prevention.

The study intended to establish the effectiveness of the leadership style in resolving conflicts. In contrast, both officers and convicts identified supportive/transformational leadership as a more constructive and humane approach. This style was distinguished by open communication, emotional intelligence, mutual respect, and the ability to influence behavior change. Officers who adopted this method frequently sought to identify the root causes of conflicts and to educate rather than punish. PRO-07 observed that

*"Sometimes a fight is about impatience rather than contempt. When we take the time to discuss, we discover answers without repercussions."*

Inmates acknowledged these efforts and thanked the cops who engaged them respectfully. PR-28 stated,

*"There's an officer in our block who listens." If you're upset, you can speak with him. That has ended numerous battles."*

Another inmate added,

*"When someone treats you like a person, you don't want to let them down." It alters the way you think."*



These accounts suggest that transformational leadership fosters trust, respect, and long-term conflict prevention within prisons. From my perspective, the voices of PRO-07 and PR-28 illustrate how empathy and dialogue can transform potential hostilities into opportunities for learning and mutual respect. Their experiences demonstrate that when leaders employ listening and individualized consideration, inmates are more likely to adopt cooperative behaviors. This observation aligns with Goleman (2021), who emphasized that emotional intelligence in leadership significantly reduces conflict and supports rehabilitative goals in correctional settings. Further support is provided by Lindsay et al. (2011), who highlight that participative and transformational practices encourage inclusivity and improve institutional harmony, and by Mssawe (2023), who stresses that restorative leadership approaches foster reconciliation and long-term peace in correctional environments.

Some officers and inmates described instances of collaborative or participative leadership, albeit this was uncommon in practice. This leadership style included inmates in decision-making, peer mediation forums, and systematic feedback sessions. Officers who applied this technique observed that it reduced mistrust and enabled inmates to take responsibility for maintaining peace.

PRO-15 stated that

*“Following a heated argument in our wing, we formed a committee of inmates and officers to discuss problems weekly.”*

Since then, fights have decreased. A convict from Ukonga, PR-50, remarked,

*“I once helped mediate between two prisoners. The officer encouraged it. That gave us pride and power over our surroundings.”*

Participatory methods were hailed for increasing morale, trust, and self-governance within prisons. Nonetheless, collaborative leadership has been observed to confront problems. Some police saw it as hazardous, fearing that giving inmates more say might lead to manipulation or a loss of power. PR-20 noted that

*“Not every officer is willing to involve convicts. Some are concerned that it diminishes control or reveals weakness.”*

Despite the benefits, cultural and institutional barriers hampered the adoption of participatory activities. The research also found that many cops lack formal training in leadership and conflict resolution skills. Several participants stated that their understanding of leadership styles was based on observation and imitation rather than formal instruction. From my perspective, the voices of PRO-15, PR-50, and PR-20 reveal the dual nature of participative leadership: it empowers inmates to take responsibility and fosters collaboration, yet it also raises concerns among officers about losing authority. Linking this with transformational leadership theory, participatory practices mirror the emphasis on shared vision and empowerment, encouraging inmates to internalize responsibility for peace (Bass & Riggio, 2006). At the same time, aspects of Transactional Leadership Theory remain relevant, as officers still require clear rules and boundaries to ensure stability during such initiatives (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1994). This is further supported by Vidal (2021), who found that participative forums reduce mistrust and foster self-governance in correctional settings, and by Herzog-Evans et al. (2023), who highlighted that culturally adaptive leadership styles enhance collaboration and conflict resolution outcomes in African prisons.

#### **4.2 The Leadership Procedures used in Resolving Conflict in the Prisons**

The second research objective was to evaluate the leadership techniques utilized to resolve conflict in prisons. This section included the research on how prison authorities and other stakeholders handle conflicts in Tanzanian correctional facilities. These findings are based on data collected from interviews (with prison personnel, inmates, and community service officers), observations within prisons, and document analysis of prison regulations. Both formal and informal dispute resolution techniques were identified, and their application reveals significant trends, inconsistencies, strengths, and limitations.

The study intended to establish which procedures are commonly used to resolve conflicts in prison. One prominent topic emerging from the interviews was jail leadership's use of formal procedures to manage conflicts, particularly serious ones. Prison officers outlined a formal disciplinary process required by prison laws for violations such as fights, assaults, and insubordination. For example, a senior prison officer (PRO-01) stated that

*“When inmates fight or break the rules, we have to write a report and conduct a disciplinary hearing in front of the Officer-in-Charge.”*

This means that an official inquiry or hearing has been scheduled, during which the incident will be investigated and the inmate will be given the opportunity to respond to the claims. Document examination of the Tanzanian Prisons Act and rules confirmed this practice, indicating that an official investigating a prisoner's disciplinary infraction has the authority to invite witnesses and examine evidence as part of a formal hearing. From PRO-01's perspective, this procedure provides transparency and ensures that even within a restrictive environment, fairness is observed by allowing inmates to be heard before judgment is passed. This viewpoint echoes findings by Goleman (2021), who emphasized that structured hearings anchored in procedural justice enhance legitimacy in correctional settings, and Mssawe (2023), who argued that adherence to disciplinary frameworks can reduce tension and improve institutional order by balancing

authority with fairness. These insights also link with transformational leadership theory, which stresses fairness, motivation, and trust-building as ways to inspire compliance, and transactional leadership theory, which emphasizes structured rules, rewards, and sanctions to maintain order in hierarchical contexts such as prisons. According to another officer (PRO-03),

*“The hearing gives the inmate a chance to explain their side of the story, then a punishment is decided based on the prison guidelines.”*

From PRO-03’s perspective, the procedure not only enforces rules but also upholds a culture of fairness where inmates perceive that their voice is valued. This resonates with Bass and Riggio (2006), who emphasized that fairness and consideration within disciplinary structures encourage compliance and reduce resistance, and with Nkosi and Maweni (2020), who found that transparent grievance-handling procedures in correctional facilities enhanced trust and institutional legitimacy. In concept, this formal procedure is designed to provide fairness and accountability by incorporating components of procedural justice, in which judgments are made in a fair manner and the affected person’s perspective is heard. When correctly followed, such procedures can increase the legitimacy of outcomes; as one officer (PRO-07) explained,

*“If we follow the rules and an inmate is heard, even if they are punished, they know it was done by the book.”*

This point of view is consistent with the idea that transparent and fair processes promote decision acceptability. From PRO-07’s viewpoint, following established guidelines not only preserves order but also reassures inmates that decisions are anchored in fairness rather than arbitrariness. This aligns with Atkin-Plunk and Armstrong (2023), who noted that adherence to structured disciplinary processes improved inmate perceptions of justice, and with Mwankenja (2024), who highlighted that consistent application of formal procedures reduces conflict recurrence by strengthening institutional authority. These perspectives also connect with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes motivating and inspiring trust by ensuring fairness and inclusivity in decision-making, and with transactional leadership theory, which underscores the importance of clear rules, sanctions, and rewards in maintaining compliance and institutional order. This point of view is consistent with the idea that transparent and fair processes promote decision acceptability.

#### **4.3 Challenges Faced by Prison Leaders in Applying Different Leadership Styles**

The third objective of the research aimed to uncover the difficulties faced by prison leaders in employing various leadership styles to manage conflicts in Tanzanian prisons. This study found that prison administrators face numerous cultural and systemic challenges when attempting to utilize leadership strategies (transformational, transactional, situational, etc.) to handle and alleviate conflicts. The conditions within Tanzanian prisons are marked by severe overcrowding and a lack of resources, which create a tense atmosphere for both staff and inmates. These circumstances heighten the frequency and severity of conflicts, making effective leadership essential yet challenging. Moreover, existing institutional norms and limited training restrict prison leaders’ capacity to adjust their leadership style to suit different conflict situations. Data gathered from field interviews supports these conclusions, with respondents detailing obstacles such as insufficient leadership training, rigid hierarchical structures, overwhelming inmate numbers, restricted decision-making authority, conflicting institutional goals, and low staff morale. These findings align with Skinner (2020), who emphasized that transformational leadership in hierarchical prison systems is hindered by limited trust and inadequate training, leading to reduced effectiveness in conflict resolution. Likewise, Herzog-Evans et al., (2023) demonstrated that transactional leadership approaches often struggle in overcrowded correctional facilities, where structural rigidity undermines reward and punishment mechanisms. Both studies affirm the present research by showing that without institutional support and contextual adaptability, neither transformational nor transactional leadership theories can fully address the persistent conflict management challenges in Tanzanian prisons.

The study intended to establish the major challenges faced in resolving conflicts in prison. A significant issue is the absence of formal leadership training for prison staff and management. Many prison leaders ascend through the ranks without receiving specific education in management or conflict resolution methods. Consequently, they often resort to trial-and-error approaches or conventional authoritarian techniques. This challenge is consistent with findings by Mssawe (2023), who reported that insufficient training in Tanzanian prisons perpetuates authoritarian conflict management styles, thereby limiting the adoption of transformational and transactional strategies.

PRO-01 remarked that

*“I have never received any special training on how to lead or resolve conflicts we just learn on the job procedures.”*

Underscoring the lack of leadership development initiatives within the prison system, this observation aligns with the understanding that in multiple countries there is little concept of prison management as a profession which requires specific training and development. Newly appointed prison directors are expected to intuitively possess the management skills necessary for the complex and high-stakes environment they enter. Similar concerns were raised by Vidal (2021), who found that in Latin American prisons, the absence of structured leadership training programs led to

inconsistent conflict resolution outcomes. In addition, Chandolia (2020) emphasized that equipping prison leaders with transformational and transactional leadership skills through formal training significantly improved their ability to manage disputes and build institutional trust.

PRO-11 stated that...

*“Most of us only have the basic officer training; we lack advanced skills in mediation or transformational leadership, so we stick to what we know.”*

The National Institute of Justice similarly highlights that enhancing staff training and leadership development is an urgent need in corrections. In the absence of adequate training, prison leaders feel unprepared to apply contemporary leadership methods (such as collaborative or transformative tactics) for conflict resolution. This deficiency in training not only hampers individual leadership capabilities but also reinforces a cycle of reliance on outdated, punitive practices. In alignment with global standards, experts have long advocated for ongoing leadership training for correctional staff; for example, Penal Reform International (1996) stressed that enhanced staff training is essential for professionalism and better prison conditions. The lack of such training in Tanzanian prisons continues to be a critical impediment to the adoption of varied leadership styles. Supporting this, Robins (2019) found that Tanzanian prison officers often lacked exposure to modern leadership frameworks, resulting in reliance on coercive methods. Likewise, Makinde and Olabode (2020) observed that in African prisons, limited professional development constrained leaders' ability to apply transformational and transactional leadership principles effectively in conflict resolution.

Another significant challenge identified is the institutional resistance to adopting new leadership styles, stemming from a rigid, hierarchical prison culture. Tanzanian prisons (similar to many worldwide) have historically been governed by a paramilitary discipline and a punitive mindset. This cultural approach can be deeply resistant to change, often regarding innovative or participatory leadership styles skeptically. Consistent with this, Thadeo (2020) reported that rigid organizational hierarchies in East African prisons undermined efforts to implement transformational leadership practices. Similarly, Sibisi and Olofinbiyi (2021) found that transactional strategies were frequently limited by entrenched punitive traditions, reducing leaders' ability to integrate participatory conflict resolution mechanisms. PRO-05 commented that

*“If you try a soft approach or involve juniors in decision-making, some old guards think you are weak here, they expect the boss to be strict.”*

Such attitudes reflect a persistent “us-versus-them” mentality and inflexibility in leadership methodologies. Research indicates that the cultural practices among prison staff in many countries have persisted largely unchanged and punitive throughout history. Even when new leaders enter with novel concepts (for example, focusing on rehabilitation or open communication), the ingrained norms tend to re-emerge swiftly. PR-07, said that

*“I wanted to encourage officers to talk calmly with inmates to defuse tensions, but the typical response here is to show force. Changing that mindset is very hard.”*

This aligns with findings from another study that examined a different scenario: while initial training may instill rehabilitative principles, these are often contradicted by the punitive organizational culture present in prisons. In practice, prison administrators discover that attempts to implement transformational or democratic leadership approaches face resistance.

One of the primary challenges faced by prison leaders is resistance from employees who are accustomed to transactional, command-and-control directives. Such employees often oppose or even sabotage leaders who attempt to implement more participatory or inclusive approaches. This challenge is rooted in the entrenched institutional culture of prisons, which prioritizes discipline, obedience, and authority over dialogue and shared decision-making. Leaders in this environment must strike a delicate balance, often modifying their leadership style to align with existing norms while attempting to introduce alternative methods. As one prison officer (PRO-11) noted:

*“I usually begin by listening and advising, but in the end, I must be strict because that's the only language our system acknowledges.”*

This statement reflects how the dominance of tradition and group norms within prison systems restricts leaders' ability to adopt diverse conflict resolution strategies. Similar findings were highlighted by Bass and Riggio (2006), who argued that transformational leadership thrives only when leaders can build trust and openness, conditions often undermined in rigid institutional cultures. Likewise, Burns (1978) observed that transactional leadership, though effective in enforcing compliance, can stifle innovation and dialogue when overly entrenched, making it difficult for leaders to shift toward transformational practices in conflict management.

Overcrowding emerged as a significant contextual hurdle that hampers the effectiveness of leadership in conflict situations. Prisons in Tanzania are accommodating significantly more inmates than their original capacities, with over 45,000 prisoners in facilities built for around 22,669 (exceeding capacity by over 100%). This challenge echoes findings by Bippa (2024), who noted that prison congestion in Tanzania undermines leaders' ability to apply transformational leadership practices, since they spend more time on crisis management than on inspiring or motivating subordinates. Similarly, Mwanjenja (2024) emphasized that overcrowding in African prisons reinforces transactional approaches



focused on control and compliance, leaving little room for participatory conflict resolution. PRO-03 illustrated the situation vividly, stating,

*“We have 150 inmates packed into a unit designed for 30, and tensions are perpetually high.”*

Severe overcrowding results in conflicts (whether among inmates or between inmates and staff) that can ignite easily and frequently due to shortages of space, food, or essential services. In this crisis-driven context, prison leaders dedicate most of their time to responding to emergencies rather than proactively applying more sophisticated leadership strategies. As highlighted in an international prison management guideline, when prisons become overcrowded and under-resourced, management might be confined to providing the essential necessities of life. Ensuring that prisoners receive food, water, a bed, and fresh air may become a full-time role. This is consistent with Robins (2019), who found that overcrowding in Tanzanian prisons forces leaders into transactional modes of management, prioritizing immediate survival needs over transformational practices aimed at rehabilitation and dialogue. PRS-03 validated this by saying,

*“Most days, I’m just putting out fires, distributing food, and defusing fights; there’s no opportunity for team meetings or coaching sessions with staff.”*

Overcrowding is further exacerbated by understaffing and limited resources, leaving officers overwhelmed and supervision inadequate. Skinner (2020) notes that a staffing shortage impacts many prisons, diminishing leaders’ ability to maintain order and mentor their subordinates. In Tanzania, a single officer might oversee numerous inmates, fostering a security-first environment where nuanced aspects of leadership style take a back seat. PRO-08 pointed out that

*“Due to our insufficient number of officers, we depend on strict rules and penalties to maintain control we simply cannot afford to try a lenient approach amidst this chaos.”*

This indicates that under such pressure, leaders revert to a directive or authoritarian approach as the only viable option. The path-goal theory of leadership posits that leaders should remove barriers and offer support so followers can achieve their goals. However, in this case, many obstacles, such as chronic overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and health crises, are beyond the influence of local prison leaders. These resource limitations significantly constrain the practical application of leadership styles that necessitate calm environments or additional programs (such as conducting conflict mediation workshops or staff training sessions). Instead, leaders operate in “crisis mode,” prioritizing immediate survival and security needs. This context illustrates how material conditions (overcrowding, insufficient funding, and limited staffing) diminish the effectiveness of even the most competent leaders and restrict the range of leadership styles they can adopt to address conflicts.

Prison leaders in Tanzania also contend with limited autonomy and bureaucratic barriers, which impede their adaptability in conflict resolution. The prison system functions under a highly centralized structure within the Tanzania Prison Service, meaning that critical decisions often necessitate approval from headquarters or must comply with stringent regulations. This aligns with findings by Mssawe (2023), who emphasized that bureaucratic rigidity in Tanzanian prisons constrains leaders’ ability to apply transformational leadership principles, forcing them instead toward transactional compliance. PRO-11 clarified that

*“Even if I notice a more effective method to address a conflict here, I must obtain authorization through the chain of command, which can be time-consuming or denied.”*

This hierarchical bureaucracy provides little opportunity for situational leadership, the notion that a leader can quickly adapt their style to meet the demands of a particular conflict. Instead, wardens and officers are required to follow standardized procedures and are often concerned about facing consequences for deviating from directives. Research on prison management indicates that many wardens have become “more politically inclined and less independent” over time, as they are accountable to departmental authorities and political supervisors. Ultimately, all wardens “function within their department’s bureaucracy,” which can limit innovative or immediate responses to on-the-ground conflicts. For example, a prison leader may want to adopt a more rehabilitative strategy (like involving counselors after an inmate altercation), yet the official policy may specify a punitive reaction (such as solitary confinement), restricting the leader’s discretion. These challenges resonate with Talv (2022), who found that rigid hierarchical structures in correctional systems suppress transformational leadership by curbing leaders’ flexibility. Similarly, Vidal (2021) highlighted that authoritarian approaches, reinforced by bureaucracy, tend to escalate tensions rather than resolve them, making transactional compliance the default mode for leaders. PRO-06 remarked that

*“We are bound by regulations; if two inmates fight, we are required to punish them according to the rules, not mediate. Departing from that could get me in trouble.”*

This showcases a traditional bureaucracy that values adherence to procedure more than individual judgment. The lack of autonomy also influences how leaders manage their teams: opportunities to reward initiative or address staff concerns may be limited due to civil service regulations and top-down decision-making. From a leadership theory perspective, this environment aligns with a contingency viewpoint. In Fiedler’s terms, a leader’s effectiveness depends on situational control. The situation (strict bureaucratic control) is unfavorable for leader flexibility, often compelling a more transactional or directive style, regardless of a leader’s personal preferences. This observation is consistent with Herzog-Evans et al., (2023), who found that socio-political constraints in African correctional institutions restrict leaders’ ability to exercise adaptive or transformational strategies, reinforcing reliance on transactional approaches.



It also presents a challenge to Path-Goal theory, which asserts that leaders should modify their style (directive, supportive, participative, or achievement-oriented) based on followers' needs. In a rigid structure, leaders cannot easily adopt a participative or supportive approach if the framework does not allow for subordinate involvement in decision-making. Consequently, the restricted autonomy creates a disparity between the leadership styles advocated in theory and those permitted in practice. The conflicting responsibilities of security and rehabilitation further complicate prison leaders' implementation of leadership styles. By the nature of their positions, prison managers must guarantee safety, order, and custody (a commitment to security), while also ideally fostering inmate rehabilitation and conflict resolution through constructive methods. These objectives can push leaders in opposing directions. This tension reflects findings by Nkosi and Maweni (2020), who noted that limited decision-making latitude in African prisons hinders leaders' ability to apply participative and supportive approaches. Likewise, Hamadou (2023) observed that rigid organizational frameworks in correctional facilities create structural contradictions between security priorities and rehabilitative goals, limiting the applicability of adaptive leadership theories such as Path-Goal. PRO-02 pointed out that

*"Our instructions from HQ are unmistakable: no escapes, no riots. Rehabilitation is mentioned, but if there's a conflict, we're expected to enforce strict measures, not to be lenient."*

This statement highlights the pressure on leaders to emphasize immediate security over longer-term relational or rehabilitative approaches. Effective leadership in corrections truly necessitates "balancing security and rehabilitation: security is crucial, but it should not undermine rehabilitation efforts." According to one corrections expert, the most effective supervisors discover ways to ensure safety while advocating for programs that prepare inmates for reintegration. However, in Tanzania's prisons, interviewees indicated that the system continues to focus heavily on control. This reflects findings by Makinde and Olabode (2020), who emphasized that African prison systems often prioritize custodial security at the expense of rehabilitative programs, thereby constraining the application of transformational leadership. PRO-11 conveyed that

*"We are caught between two roles theoretically I should rehabilitate offenders, but in practice, my performance is evaluated based on discipline and order."*

This conflict complicates the ability to consistently utilize a transformational leadership approach, which would promote personal growth and positive change. Transformational leaders aim to inspire and motivate towards a shared vision; in a prison environment, this could involve encouraging both staff and inmates to cultivate a peaceful, reform-focused setting. This aligns with Goleman (2021), who demonstrated that high-stress correctional environments hinder the capacity of leaders to apply motivational and emotionally intelligent practices, limiting the effectiveness of transformational strategies. However, when a conflict emerges, a prison leader may revert to transactional tactics (punishments, strict enforcement) due to the pressure to demonstrate that the situation has been controlled swiftly. A participant noted that any indication of leniency could be seen as a loss of authority:

*"If I attempt to negotiate with inmates during a standoff, my superiors question my toughness. Consequently, I often resort to using force to assert my control," PRO-10 acknowledged."*

This situation aligns with perspectives indicating that many African prisons continue to prioritize containment over rehabilitation, favoring punitive actions instead of restorative ones. The conflicting directives also create confusion among front-line staff: one leader might advocate for a more communicative method to minimize future conflicts, but the line officers may resist, believing that only strict discipline fulfills institutional expectations. The outcome is that leadership approaches aimed at resolving conflicts through dialogue or rehabilitation are undermined by a predominant focus on security. Leaders find it challenging to balance these competing mandates, frequently defaulting to authoritarian conflict management measures (lockdowns, transfers, punishments) instead of transformative conflict resolution strategies (mediation, counseling, problem-solving), even though the latter are more aligned with contemporary leadership theories and favorable long-term outcomes. This reflects Bass and Riggio (2006), who contended that transformational leadership requires trust and space for dialogue, both of which are constrained in punitive prison cultures. In contrast, Burns (1978) and later Bass (1985) explained that transactional leadership thrives under conditions where compliance and discipline are prioritized, which explains why prison leaders often revert to transactional practices under pressure. Finally, low staff morale and subsequent burnout among prison officers present a major hurdle to leadership initiatives, a challenge also observed by Nkosi and Maweni (2020), who found that chronic stress and rigid expectations reduce leaders' ability to apply transformational strategies effectively.

The interviews unveiled that ongoing stress, subpar working conditions, and lack of acknowledgment have left many prison personnel feeling demoralized. PR-04 commented:

*"Officers here feel overlooked and drained. Many only do the bare minimum they're uninterested in any new initiatives from management."*

This level of apathy or cynicism among subordinates complicates prison leaders' efforts to apply a collaborative or inspiring leadership style. Transformational leadership depends on encouraging and uplifting followers; however, with staff morale at such low levels, there is minimal openness towards inspiration. This corresponds with Mssawe (2023), who observed that demoralized staff in Tanzanian prisons resist transformational initiatives, while transactional directives remain more effective in compelling short-term compliance. PRO-11 explained that



*“My staff have experienced ‘vision’ and ‘reform’ discussions before and seen no changes in their compensation or safety. They are disillusioned. Winning their trust is a challenge.”*

This corresponds with the belief that effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the internal culture and morale. Ineffective leadership or a lack of support can create a divide and a culture of distrust between officers and management, further diminishing morale. Indeed, research by Pittaro suggests that the primary source of stress among correctional staff is “inadequate and weak leaders,” rather than solely the inherent risks of the profession. In Tanzanian prisons, the causality appears to operate in both directions: ineffective leadership fails to address officers' concerns (e.g., low salaries, long hours), resulting in low morale; and conversely, low morale makes it increasingly difficult for leaders to guide effectively, creating a vicious cycle. Furthermore, many Tanzanian prison staff are compensated poorly and receive limited training, which contributes to minimal professional pride or commitment. As one report notes, if officers are “poorly trained and underpaid... it is predictable that they possess little professional pride in their duties... and have no perception of serving a meaningful public role.” PRO-08 agreed, stating,

*“Most of our officers feel unappreciated. They don't view this as a career merely a demanding job. Thus, motivation is extremely low.”*

In such an environment, leaders often resort to a purely transactional style, issuing orders with the threat of punishment to get compliance, since fostering higher motivation seems daunting. However, this can further depress morale, as staff feel their contributions are only met with criticism or disciplinary action. The challenge for prison leaders is how to break this cycle: without improving morale, advanced leadership styles (like supportive or participative leadership) may not take root, yet without adopting those people-oriented styles, morale will not improve. This aligns with Vidal (2021), who found that authoritarian and transactional strategies tend to escalate tensions in correctional settings, undermining long-term morale. Similarly, Atkin-Plunk and Armstrong (2023) noted that transformational practices, such as dialogue and motivation, require a foundation of trust and recognition—conditions often absent in prisons dominated by transactional enforcement.

Burnout also means high turnover and absenteeism, which undermines any consistent leadership strategy. The qualitative evidence thus paints a picture of a demoralized workforce that limits a leader's influence beyond basic command authority. Addressing staff welfare through recognition, support, and fair treatment is necessary before styles like transformational leadership can be effective. As one article suggests, correctional supervisors must “actively work to build morale through recognition, professional development, and support,” but doing so is challenging amid systemic issues. Low morale is both a symptom and a cause of leadership difficulties in the prison context.

These challenges faced by prison leaders in Tanzania can be further understood through the lens of leadership theories. They illustrate a gap between idealized leadership styles and the realities of a high-stress institutional environment. Transformational leadership theory posits that leaders who inspire a shared vision and attend to followers' needs can achieve remarkable change.

In correctional settings, transformational leadership has been linked to positive outcomes like reduced violence and improved staff job satisfaction. However, our findings show that the preconditions for transformational leadership—trust, motivation, and a supportive culture are often absent. It is difficult for a prison leader to act as a transformative role model when they lack training, operate in a punitive culture, and oversee demoralized staff.

The challenges of low morale and institutional resistance mean that attempts at inspiration may be met with skepticism or fail to take hold. This does not negate the value of transformational leadership; rather, it explains why leaders struggle to practice it. Indeed, traditionally, transactional leadership has been the norm in prisons, focusing on order through rewards and punishments.

Moreover, the dominance of transactional approaches in Tanzanian prisons (seen in leaders emphasizing discipline and rule enforcement) aligns with transactional leadership theory, which is effective for maintaining baseline compliance but often insufficient for deeper conflict resolution or cultural change. Transactional methods might stop an incident in the moment (through punitive action) but do not address root causes of conflict or build commitment. Over-reliance on this style can thus perpetuate a cycle of conflict and control, rather than conflict resolution.

Situational leadership theory (Hersey and Blanchard) and contingency theories argue that effective leaders adjust their style (from directive to delegative, for example) based on follower readiness and contextual demands. In an ideal case, a prison leader would be more directive during a riot (high structure needed) but could be more participative when brainstorming improvements with experienced staff. In practice, the challenges identified, especially bureaucratic constraints and low skill levels, limit such adaptation.

Leaders in Tanzanian prisons often face a uniformly high-pressure situation with “unready” followers (due to limited training and morale), which in effect forces them into a constant directing (or commanding) style. There is little opportunity to display a supportive or delegating style when even basic safety is at stake daily.

Despite this, situational theory highlights the source of leaders' frustrations: they understand that alternative methods may be more effective in specific conflict scenarios (such as mediating a minor disagreement between two inmates instead of opting for punishment), yet situational factors (overcrowding, unavailability of counselors, and pressure from higher-ups) drive them toward a more authoritarian style. Path-goal theory adds further perspective by



proposing that a leader's responsibility includes setting goals, clarifying the route, eliminating barriers, and providing support for subordinates to achieve success.

In the context of prisons, a warden applying Path–Goal principles would ensure that officers are aware of the objective (for example, maintaining a safe and conflict-free prison), outline the necessary procedures, eliminate obstacles (potentially by securing funding or modifying workloads), and encourage the staff (through recognition or rewards). The situation in Tanzania demonstrates that many barriers are beyond a leader's ability to address (such as overcrowding and insufficient budgets) and that support mechanisms are limited (with few incentives or training options for staff).

Leaders often cannot fully implement the supportive or participative elements of Path-Goal theory when the existing structure does not allow it. For instance, even if a warden aims to support overwhelmed officers by enhancing working conditions, they may lack the financial resources or permission to make changes. This frequently forces prison leaders to resort to a directive approach (similar to directing subordinates on precisely what to do) since it is the only feasible method in an environment fraught with crises. Tackling the difficulties highlighted in this research objective is crucial for enabling prison leaders to utilize a wider range of leadership styles for resolving conflicts.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study found that while prison leaders in the sampled Tanzanian facilities use a mix of formal and informal conflict-resolution procedures, authoritarian/transactional leadership remains dominant, producing short-term order but failing to address root causes of disputes and contributing to ongoing tension, mistrust, and low morale among staff and inmates.

Supportive/transformational and participative practices where they occur were associated with better outcomes: greater trust, fewer repeat incidents, and more willingness by inmates to accept decisions. However, these approaches are rare and uneven because most officers lack formal training in mediation, emotional intelligence, and restorative techniques; informal mediation is common but undocumented and inconsistent.

Systemic constraints critically limit leaders' ability to adopt alternative styles. Severe overcrowding (facilities holding many more inmates than designed), understaffing, limited resources, rigid bureaucracy, and low staff morale force leaders into "crisis mode," where directive, rule-bound responses are the only practicable option. These contextual factors both precipitate conflicts and reduce the space for transformational or participative interventions.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that sustainable improvements in prison conflict management require both (a) changes in leadership capacity and practice (training, recognition of restorative/participative methods, clearer guidance on when to use alternatives to punishment) and (b) structural reforms that reduce the chronic pressures on leaders (address overcrowding, increase staffing and resources, decentralize limited decision-making authority where appropriate).

### 5.2 Recommendations

The Prisons Headquarters and the Ministry of Home Affairs should adopt a formal mixed-leadership policy that clarifies when to apply directive/transactional responses (for immediate security threats) and when to use transformational/participative approaches (for routine disputes and rehabilitation). This policy should be developed within six months and rolled out over the following 6-12 months, and its success can be measured by the existence of the published guidance and an increasing percentage of incidents managed under non-punitive approaches. Additionally, human resources units should incorporate leadership-style criteria into staff performance appraisals within 6-12 months so that promotions and evaluations incentivize use of mediation, participative methods, and restorative practices; an appropriate indicator is the proportion of appraisals recording demonstrated use of these techniques.

The Prisons Headquarters (with legal and psychosocial partners) should standardize and formalize simple Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that define steps for immediate crisis management, mediation/restorative processes, and documentation/escalation pathways; these Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) should be drafted in 3-6 months and piloted in a few facilities within 6-9 months, with uptake measured by the presence of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) document and the percent of incidents logged using the standard form. Facility management, supported by civil-society partners, should also establish supervised peer-mediator programs and unit-level prisoner councils with clear selection criteria, training and oversight, piloting them in 6-9 months and scaling over 12-24 months; success indicators include the number of active peer-mediators and reductions in repeat incidents in pilot units. Finally, facility record officers and central monitoring units must introduce a lightweight register for informal mediations within 3-6 months so that informal resolutions are recorded and trends can be analysed; the indicator is the percentage of informal mediations entered into the register and evidence of management follow-up.

The Prisons Training Institute, with NGOs and universities, should launch mandatory in-service modules on transformational leadership, mediation, emotional intelligence, basic counselling and de-escalation, combining



classroom work, role-play and on-the-job coaching; training should begin within three months for priority cohorts and reach full roll-out within 12 months, measured by the percentage of staff trained and pre/post training assessment improvements. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Prisons Service should prioritise recruitment to reduce vacancy rates and assign psychologists, social workers and conflict-resolution specialists to high-need facilities within a 12-24 month hiring window, with interim secondments from partners where possible; success can be tracked by reductions in vacancy rates and improved staff-to-inmate ratios. In parallel, Ministries and development partners must invest in decongestion measures (alternative sentencing, improved case processing) and immediate small infrastructure fixes (mediation rooms, private interview spaces) on a medium time horizon (12-36 months for larger policy changes; 6-12 months for small fixes), monitored through occupancy-to-capacity rates and the number of mediation spaces created. To encourage uptake, Prisons Service leadership should introduce an incentive scheme within 6-12 months to recognise units or officers who reduce repeat incidents through non-punitive means, with documented cases and measurable reductions in incident recurrence as the key indicators.

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