

The Role of Human Resource Managers in Transforming the Public Service in Africa

Benson A. Bana*

Abstract

Starting from the premise that the smooth-functioning of the public services and governments depends significantly on human resource managers, this article examines their roles as critical drivers and champions of change in the public service. The article advances the argument that the transformation of the public service depends on a reformed and modernized human resource function. Human resource managers should be dynamic and responsive and supportive of the strategic mission of the public service. This presupposes a re-orientation of human resource managers and their departments in order to enable them carry out their duties in line with the HRM model. Human resource managers should become full-fledged members of the public service's senior management team, capable of linking human resources policies to the public service's vision, mission, strategic goals and objectives. To meet these challenges, human resource managers need a broad-ranging professional development, multiple skills and a comprehensive understanding of the roles associated with the HRM approach to the management of employment relationships in the public service. Human resource managers must play a pivotal role in helping organizations formulate human resource policies and strategies relevant to the needs of the public service.

Introduction

Staff responsible for human resources should not be confined to playing a restricted, bureaucratic and reactive role, limited by and large to routine decisions about staff entitlement to pay increments and the like. Instead they should have real input into strategic decisions about staff management as well as decisions on how to achieve the core objectives of government. This calls for the upgrading of the status and influence of human resource managers in organizational structures and decision-making processes in the public sector. (UNDESA, 2005: ix)

* Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Dar es Salaam.

The quote preceding this section paves the way for an examination of the new role and responsibilities of human resource managers as professionals, rather than amateurs, in transforming the public service in Africa. The field of human resource management has a long history starting in the eighteenth century during the days of the social reformers in the dawn of industrial revolution in Europe lasting up to the current era of incipient Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) reform initiatives in the public services. Consequently, overtime there have been tumultuous moments and instances of profound changes in the management of employment relationships in the public service. Moreover, a shift in the roles and responsibilities for the staff entrusted with the management of employment relationships has been a characteristic feature in the management of employment relationships in organizations, including public service entities.

This article examines the role and responsibilities of human resource managers in transforming the public service, particularly in African countries. In order to accomplish this task, I first examine how the roles of people entrusted with the management of employment relationships in organizations have changed overtime. One of the best ways to understand and explain the present roles of human resource managers, as well as to predict their future functions in the public service, is to examine the past. In this regard, the past is essentially our prologue (Beach, 1975). Second, I interrogate the theoretical and conceptual premises that inform the different roles and responsibilities of staff vested with authority and responsibilities to oversee employee management functions in organizations, including the public service.

Third, I examine the major tenets of the Human Resource Management (HRM) model to discern what makes it distinctive from other approaches to the management of employment relationships. It is imperative to recognize that the job designation and the professional title, "Human Resource Manager" are derived from the HRM model. Fourth, in a general way I highlight the roles that human resource managers, as professionals, should play in the public service in order to justify their professional status. Fifth, I demonstrate that human resource management is one of the strategic functions in organizations and therefore deserves a professional status. Moreover, I demonstrate that human resource managers and practitioners, with the right qualifications and demonstrable competencies, must be identified as professionals *per excellence*.

Sixth, I explore the role that human resource managers should play in formulating policies and strategies for strengthening institutional and human capabilities in the public service. I also show the context, including the constraints, within which human resource managers in the public service carry out their roles and responsibilities. Seventh, I point to the challenges and problems afflicting HR managers in executing their professional and transformative roles in the public service and, lastly, by way of conclusion, I suggest the way forward to professionalizing and enhancing the role of human resource managers in transforming the public service.

The Shifting Roles of Staff Management Practitioners over Time

Developments in the history of the management of employment relationships reveals that the dominant roles of staff entrusted with staff management in organizations have been changing overtime. This has been due to a number of factors, including developments and innovations in science and technology as well as philosophical thought and new knowledge in human psychology.

Drawing from the historical development of employment management in Europe, we recall the era of the Utopian Social reformers, who included Lord Shaftesbury and Robert Owen, regarded as the fore fathers of orthodox personnel management. They were known for their opposition to de-humanizing labour practices that preceded the period of the “welfare officers”. Sisson (1994) refers to this as the period of the welfare officers as “acolyte of benevolence” where the welfare officers acted as a buffer between the organization and its employees. The roles of the welfare officers were limited to canteen services, sick-visiting, hiring, grievance handling and clerical duties. The phase of the employment manager, usually referred to as the period of the “Humane Bureaucrat”, followed the phase of the welfare officers in the early 1900s. The employment managers’ dominant roles were largely in wages and salary administration, collective bargaining and ensuring that employees were tightly controlled. Employment management paved the way for a new title for the employee management function, namely “personnel management” or personnel administration. The roles of personnel managers and personnel officers were, by and large, confined to collective bargaining, which made them equated to “consensus negotiators.” Their key responsibilities included recruitment and selection, job evaluation, training as well as employee control to ensure compliance with set policies and procedures.

From the 1960s to the early 1980s the personnel management function acquired a “professional-cum-specialist status”. The major roles and responsibilities of the personnel professionals focused more on recruitment and selection; performance evaluation; training and development, compensation and benefits; personnel auditing and legalistic control of the management relationship. Bodies such as the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) in the UK pioneered the ‘professionalization’ of personnel management. The IPM also served as an agent for proselytizing for the professional cause (Tyson and Fell, 1986). Taking into account the roles and responsibilities that the “personnelists” carried out, they were labelled “organizational men” or “manpower analysts”. Large public sector bureaucracies with complex structures, including the public service, had such personnel officers. The “personnelists” adopted more purposive policies aimed at either to enhancing their power, or enabling them to do good by stealth.

The title of staff entrusted with employee management in organizations got a “face lift” since the 1980s. The “personnelists” and personnel management model paved the way for human resource managers and the Human Resource Management (HRM) approach. The HRM model, which is quite distinctive from personnel management, creates new roles and responsibilities for the staff vested with staff management authority in the public service. The role of personnel management staff must also be understood in the light of available theoretical and conceptual premises. It is to these that we turn.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations for Human Resource Managers’ Roles

In order to facilitate the discussion on the different roles of the staff who oversee the management of employees in organizations, including the public service, there are theories and conceptual premises that should guide the analysis. The role of personnel professionals or human resource managers is not just dependent upon their position in the organizational hierarchy. The expectations held about personnel staff are conditioned by the traditions from which HRM has emerged.

Tyson and Fell (1986) used an analogy drawn from the building and civil engineering profession to characterize the roles played by the staff tasked with the management of employment relationships in organizations, including the public service. Tyson and Fell used the “building site”

metaphor to delineate three distinctive roles of HR staff which they labelled as the “clerk of works”; “contract managers”; and “architect”. Although each of the three models may have different variants, they nonetheless help to illuminate the roles of human resource managers.

The Clerk of Works Role of Human Resource Managers

All authority regarding roles is vested in the line managers and essentially the human resource manager serves the line managers, and does not report directly to the Chief Executive Officer in the organization. All that is expected of the human resource manager is that the day-to-day operation is kept on schedule. A ‘clerk of works’ approach is all that is required where representing the line managers interests is total and unquestioning. The ‘clerk of works’ ensures the fulfilment of the routine and immediate tasks. There is no interest in looking at the long term needs of the needs of the organization. Human resource policies are formed after needs are demonstrated. The policies are not pre-set nor are they seen as an integral part of an organization’s policy. Personnel systems are created in an ad-hoc way. The human resource department will administer basic routines like record keeping, the first-interview of applicants for employment, prepare letters and documents on instructions and provide standard letters.

Human resource officers report to senior managers, for example the finance and administration director or chief accountant. They do not need to have specialist qualifications. The most likely career path is to start from another junior post in the organization. In the light of the ‘clerk of works’ model, the role of human resource manager is passive, reactive and of minimal value to the organization. In some organizations they play a role of visiting sick employees and interviewing employees with personal and social problems. These roles are analogous to those carried out by the ‘welfare officers’ in the 1840s. The role of the personnel office is merely regulatory, and indeed assumes a “clearing house function” (Condrey, 2005). Such roles have minimal managerial significance and lack the strategic input (Taylor, 1992: 194). Such a situation was observed long ago and it is well documented, that:

In most developing country governments, personnel departments play a relatively passive (sometimes even negative) role, administering these (mostly outdated) rules rather than actively developing and pursuing policies for improving public sector management (Osgediz, 1983: 42).

The preceding observation is further echoed by Taylor whose empirical study of three African countries, namely Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe in the early 1990s, revealed that:

Staff responsible for human resources played a restricted, bureaucratic and restrictive role, confined by and large to routine decisions about staff entitlement to pay increments and the like, very many of which could be 'read' off the administrative regulations governing staff behaviour. They had little or no real input into strategic decisions about staff management, let alone decisions on how to achieve the overall core objectives of the government (found in UNDESA, 2005: 78).

Contracts Manager Role of Human Resource Managers

This role is expected to dominate in well established organizations such as the public service. The personnel specialists perform the main industrial relations activity. The personnel specialists, by virtue of their roles and responsibilities, are equated to "consensus negotiators." They must have grown up and been developed within the system. Employment relationships are very controlled with an accent on procedures for the resolution of discipline problems, grievances and disputes. There are formal bargaining and consultation systems, with an "espoused" and an "operational" employee relations policy. The staff manager's role is mainly to interpret existing procedures, agreements and contracts, although they may make minor modifications to adapt to new circumstances. The personnel specialists serve as reactive paper processors.

The personnel officers are usually highly qualified and their main achievements are in the pragmatic resolution of day-to-day problems. They are rewarded for their technical skills in negotiation and abiding by the 'rule books' (Standing Orders, Employment Regulations, Terms and Conditions of Employment and other staff management policies) as well as for keeping the existing system intact and operational. They are not risk-takers or entrepreneurs and strive to maintain the *status quo*.

The 'clerk of works' and 'contract manager' roles conform with what Condrey (2005: 3) refers to as the 'traditional model' of public human resource management, which focuses on a central personnel organization dictating rules and procedures, ostensibly to achieve fairness and equity in public sector organizations. The human resource profession is viewed as a

stilted and isolated administrative function under the both the 'clerk of works' and 'contract manager' models.

Architect Role of Human Resource Managers

This role gives the opportunity for human resource managers at the senior level to take critical organizational decisions with consequences for the management of people. There is often representation of specialized human resource management at the highest decision making level in the organization. As such, key decisions take into account people management issues, recognizing that human resources are a valuable organizational asset. The organizational strategic plan is prepared with people consequences in mind with explicit links between the organization's strategic plan and the human resource management function, including its key practice areas. Human Resource Planning (HRP) is designed into the organization's strategic plan.

A creative role is expected from the specialist HRM staff. The policy initiation and development role is in the hands of the human resource department. The human resource managers are expected to scan the internal and external environments and then foresee how likely changes will affect the organization in terms of job satisfaction, the psychological contract, attracting and retaining core staff and talents. Human resource managers are expected to foresee connections between proposed actions and likely reactions of employees. The 'architect' role is used fully when changes are planned and human resource managers act as partners with senior line managers to produce orderly changes. The human resource managers initiate, drive and champion the cause for change in the organization.

The human resource managers strive to build and maintain harmonious relationships with the trade union. The individualistic tactic to employee relations and negotiations is more preferred to a collective bargaining approach. The human resource manager regards himself as a 'business manager' first and as a professional manager second (Tyson and Fell, 1986: 26-27). The 'architect' role requires human resource managers to decentralize authority and decision making to the line managers in various organizational units, allowing them to make crucial decisions concerning employee recruitment, selection, classification and remuneration.

There is however, a profession application to human resource work. Hence technical competency is one of the essential necessities. Human resource

managers are responsible for creating the vision and mission involving long-term strategic goals for the organization, taking into account the fact that HRM takes place throughout the organization and should support, not hamper or subvert, the organization's overall strategic goals. The architect role corresponds to the 'reform' and 'strategic' models explained by Condrey (2005: 6-8). A number of distinguishing features in the three archetypes of the human resource manager are summarized in Table 1.1 taking into account the findings revealed in the seminal works of Tyson and Fell (1986) as well as Condrey (2005).

Professional and Job Titles matching Human Resource Roles

In the light of the preceding, it seems plausible to delineate three lessons related to the roles that human resource managers can play in an organization. First, the 'clerk of works' role corresponds to the personnel administration role. It has the major hallmarks of the 'welfare officer' era in the history of the human resource function in organizations. The human resource role is reduced to the maintenance of personnel records, administering conditions of service, monitoring manpower levels and devoting attention to employees' welfare. The title for human resource manager befitting this kind of role is 'Personnel Administrator' or 'Establishment Officer'.

Second, the 'contract manager' model largely resembles the period of the 'personnelists'-cum-'consensus negotiator' in which the major human resource role is confined to industrial relations. The suitable job title for people engaged in human relations work consonant with the model is 'Personnel Manager' or 'Industrial Relations Manager'.

Third, the architect' role has a resemblance to the HRM model, which is quite distinctive from the rest. The human resource practitioner subscribing to and conducting a human resource professional role and taking responsibilities in accordance with the principles enshrined in the 'architect' model deserves the title 'Human Resource Manager'. The roles of human resource manager are fundamentally derived from the major tenets of HRM model. Table 1.1 provides a comparison of the different models for managing staff.

Table 1.1: Comparison of Three Models on the Role of Human Resource Managers

Role dimension	“Clerk of Works”	“Contract Manager”	“The Architect”
Roles of HR manager	Enforcer of merit and guardian of the merit principle	Diminished authority and control	Organizational consultant and advisors, change agent
Perception of HRM profession	Hindrance to effective organizational functioning	Adjunct collection of skills	Full managerial partner
Role of education	Public personnel administration	Adjunct to managerial skills	HRM, general management, practical focus
Goal orientation	Uniform enforcement of rules, policies and procedures	Manager centred	Respectful of HRM and organizational goals
Value orientation	Merit	Consensus builder	Effective organizational functioning and respect for effective HRM
Policies	Not preset or integrated into the organizational strategic objectives. Stem from the Chief Executive.	Well established, often implicit, heavy employee relations emphasis, employer association derived	Explicit policies giving effect to organizational strategic plan, concept of HRP
Policy/planning horizon	Short term, immediate, emphasis on budget not on corporate plans	Short-term possibly one to two years	View of tactical and strategic horizons
Authority	Vested in line managers	Vested in senior line managers	HR presence at highest levels, people as business resources

Power and influence of HR function	Nil or very low	Usually low but high in times of crises	Consistently high
Systems	Ad hoc, related to legal requirements, payroll based	Sophisticated systems to help with negotiation and manuals of rules.	Sophisticated and proceduralized, concepts of HRP and HRIS are used extensively. Not focused on relationships.

Role dimension	“Clerk of Works”	“Contract Manager”	“The Architect”
Control	Line managers control subordinates	High trade union density	HR managers and line managers move towards extensive integration, rational decision taking obviates need for traditional idea of control.
HR activities	Routine, not business-centred, routine administration, welfare, selection of junior staff	Support senior line management, act as buffer between management and employees, high interpretative role, involved in formal relationships but not power-broking	HR Manager as business manager looks for opportunities which make optimal use of available competencies. Technically competent in diagnosis and analysis.
HR reporting	To senior line manager, works manager, company secretary, director of administration and finance	Senior line manager, policeman role	To the Chief Executive
HR career path	From another post likely a promotion from clerks, senior secretary trainer	Junior HR staff still drawn from other functions, selection on the basis of day-to-day crisis management skills, resolution of immediate problems,	Both full-time career professionals and a sufficiently high status function to attract line managers permanently or

		narrow base of operation	for a spell.
Communication pattern	Top-down	Two-way	Multi-directional

Hallmarks of a Distinctive HRM Approach to Staff Management

We cannot understand the roles of professional human resource managers unless we are aware of the 'nuts and bolts' of the HRM rubric. The roles of human resource managers in the public service, like in any other organization, largely depend on the interpretive criteria used to facilitate an understanding of the HRM model. The HRM model has its 'dos and don'ts'. The model has distinctive features which must inform the formulation of human resource policies, strategies and the implementation of the key levers of human resource management. These are worth paying attention to.

HRM is about ensuring that the policies and practices of managing people in the organization are directed at achieving the organization's mission, strategy, strategic goals and objectives. The HRM model presupposes 'strategic integration' or a 'strategic fit' of human resource policies and practices, both at the macro- and micro- levels. This entails the strategic linkage between the organization's overall strategy and the human resource strategy. This is what is referred to as 'vertical integration' at the macro level. Strategic integration also refers to the linkage between different key practice areas or components of HRM so that they are implemented in a manner that ensures coherence and are that they are mutually supportive and reinforcing of each other. This is what we refer to as 'horizontal integration' at the micro-level. For example, the recruitment and selection strategies must support training and development strategies and the reward strategy must reinforce the performance management plan and *vice versa*. The horizontal integration of human resource practices enables the organization to attain the most aspired synergy in human resource work. Most writers (Beer et al, 1984; Fombrun, et al, 1984; Mabey and Salaman, 1995; McCourt, 2003) believe that strategic orientation is the heart and soul of HRM and that is why it is dubbed Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM).

The HRM model places more emphasis on winning the 'hearts and minds' as well as the commitment of employees, rather than striving for optimal control and compliance through the rule books and rigid personnel management procedures, policies and practices. HRM advocates for policies that generate employee commitment to the immediate job they face, the current goals and strategy of the organization, and values that the organization promotes.

Effective implementation of the HRM model presupposes a certain structural arrangement. A decentralized structure is one of the pillars upon which the HRM model rests. Consequently, a devolved human resource management function is preferred to centralized staff management structures and systems. As such, the HRM framework requires the devolution of staff management authority to the line managers rather than concentrating employee management power in the hands of human resource specialists. Given the fact that the human resource is the most valuable asset for the organization's success, the human resource function is a vital strategic requirement, which is too important to be left solely in the hands of human resource specialists. Hence, HRM is a central concern of top management in terms of strategy, and a central concern of line managers in terms of implementation. The human resource specialist, then, is left in the role of an internal consultant-cum-facilitator. As such, human resources managers should serve largely as strategists, experts, stimulators and change agents.

HRM stresses the approaches to the staff management that cultivate avenues for the creation of a healthy *psychological contract* between all parties involved in the employment relationship. The concept of a *psychological contract* refers to the perceptions of parties to the employment relationship, of the reciprocal expectations, promises and obligations implied in the relationship. The contract is not generally written down and cannot be enforced in a court of law or tribunal. In order to gauge the psychological contract, regular workforce attitude surveys are encouraged. An unhealthy psychological contract breeds undesirable behaviours, including distrust, de-motivation and leads to poor staff retention and an increased employee turnover rate.

The HRM model suggests that in order to achieve high performance levels, specific bundles or sets of HRM practices should be implemented simultaneously. These are usually referred to as High Performance Work Practices (HPWPs). Emphasis should not be placed on a single practice area of HRM in isolation. The examples of HPWPs are outlined in Table 1.2.

HRM encourages flexible work practices, including numerical flexibility, which entails alterations in work hours, job sharing, or the number of workers; functional flexibility which presupposes empowering employees in order to enable them perform a wide variety of tasks; pay flexibility which entails linking pay to performance; and outsourcing which involves identification of core and non-core employees and tasks. Subcontracting,

using part-timers and short term contracts for non-core function entails replacing employment contracts with contracts of service.

Transformative Roles of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service

The roles of human resource managers in transforming the public services should be informed by the key defining features of the HRM model. The transformation of the public service in Africa and other developing countries, among other things, requires human resource managers who are aware of the 'nuts and bolts' of the HRM model, which is fundamentally different from its predecessor, the personnel management approach. A classificatory matrix of 27 points of difference between personnel and industrial relations practices and HRM has been developed and it is available in the mainstream HRM literature (see for example Storey, 1992: 38). The managers in the public service who play the strategic staff management role consonant with the HRM model will need to be specialists, advisers and consultants and in our own context government business partners.

The Strategic Role of the Human Resource Manager in the Public Service

Human resource managers must play a role in formulating the Vision, Mission and Values (VMV) and strategic goals and objectives for the public service. They must serve the public service as proactive partners in the strategy formulation process. Human resource managers must be part of the hierarchy that is vested with the authority and responsibility to devise the public service strategy and ensuing strategic plans.

The word strategy is of Greek origin and has military connotations, including manoeuvring in order to execute plans for conducting offensive and defensive campaigns against the enemy. The following definition sheds light the concept of strategy. Thus strategy denotes "a decision or series of decisions made by or on behalf of an organization or organizational sub-unit which determines its medium to long term objectives, priorities and overall direction; and which, repositions the organization in relation to its changing external environment, including competitive pressures and the availability of key resources" (Walton, 1999: 16). In our context *strategy* denotes a conscious plan or course of action directed toward definite goal. It is a sense of what an organization, such as the public service, is trying to achieve over the long term and it will direct its actions. It is a process for getting the public service from here to there. Strategy can, therefore, be seen as a link between what

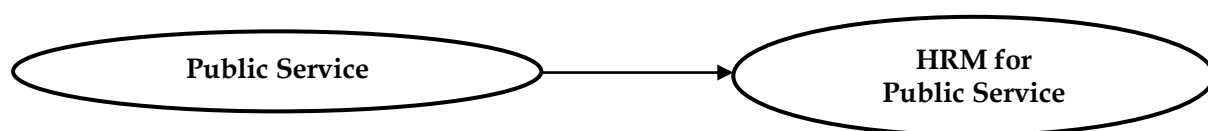
the organization wants to achieve - its objectives - and the policies adopted to guide its activities (Bowman and Asch, 1987).

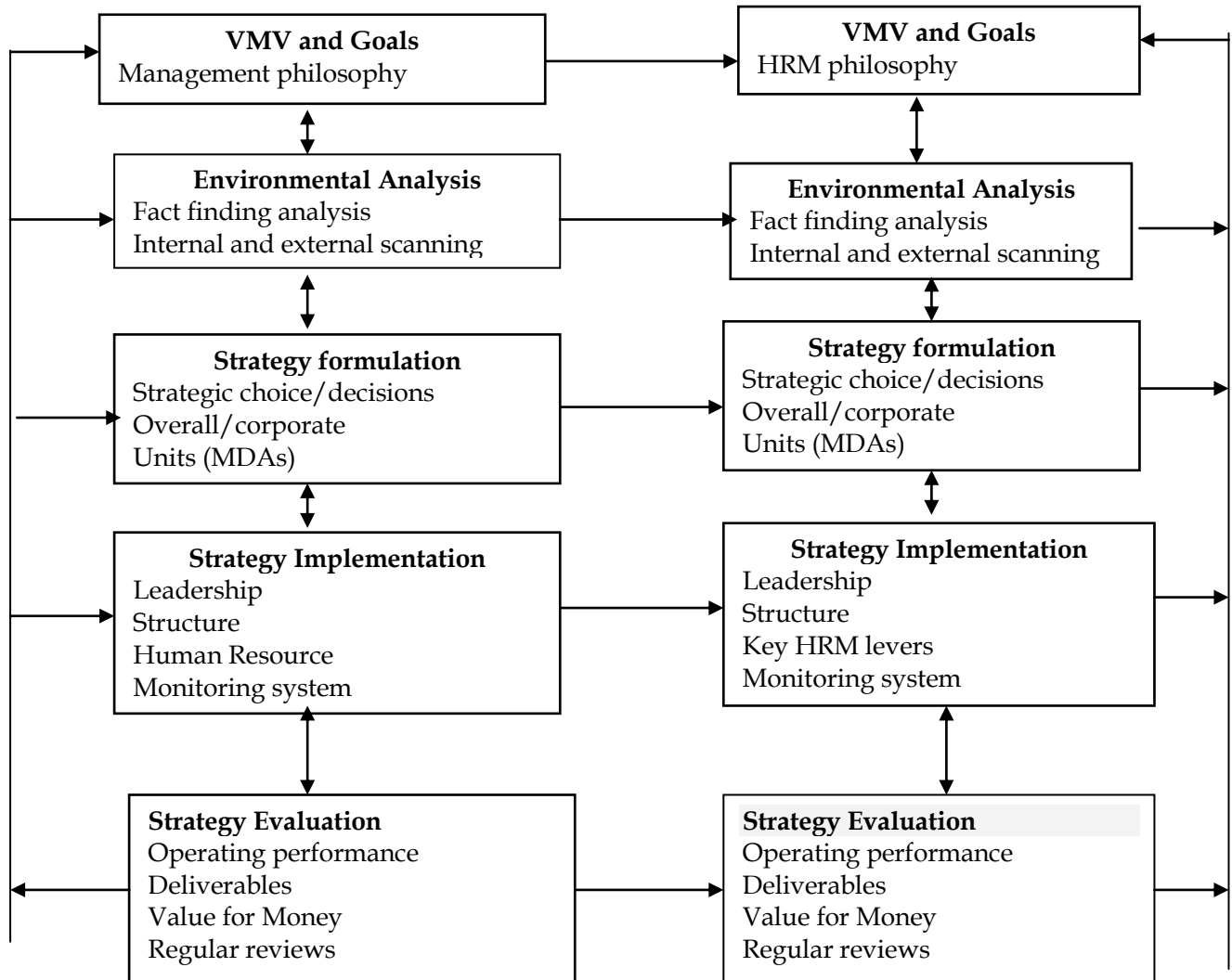
The involvement of professional human resource managers in strategic formulating permits them to ensure that people management issues feature in the public service strategy. Moreover, human resource managers should play the role of formulating specific HR-VMV for the public service, which should be derived from and nested into the overall strategic objectives.

Human resource managers in the public services should play a critical role in all stages of the strategy development process and subsequent activities (Figure 1.1). This includes taking a leading role right from the articulation of the public service VMV, delivery of the strategies as well as evaluation and review or reformulation of the strategies. In this process the Human Resource Manager must ensure that the HRM objectives and goals are derived from the overall strategic objectives of the public service, hence achieving vertical integration. The strategy plan of the human resource function in a department or ministry with HRM portfolios must be strategically derived from the overall strategy of the public service.

Moreover, human resource managers must ensure that strategies are developed for various key practice areas in HRM. They must lead the team of line managers in the public service to develop the human resource planning strategy, recruitment and selection strategy; training and development strategy; remuneration strategy; performance management strategy (including performance appraisal), and employee relations strategy. In addition they must ensure that the various key levers in HRM are implemented strategically in order to realize the overall strategic goals and objectives of the public service.

Figure 1.1: Formulation of Strategy for the Public Service and HRM





Professional Role of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service

Human resource management is a profession because it meets the essential requirements of the interpretive criteria attached to the concept of a profession. HRM as a profession performs an essential function in organizations, including the public service. Moreover, HRM is founded on a systematic body of knowledge, which is acquired through a lengthy period of prescribed academic training and practical experience. It is important to recognize that HRM, as an occupation, has an accreditation system and

professional associations. In countries such as the UK there are HRM professional associations such as the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD), International Personnel Management Association (IPMA), and the Society for Human Resource Management. These are professional bodies for human resource practitioners. HRM also has codes of ethical conduct; mechanisms and structures for enforcing ethics; and it is a profession that is held in high esteem by informed organizational management. The role of human resource managers in the public service is to perform their duties and responsibilities in a professionally acceptable manner, which entails abiding by the code of HRM professional conduct as well as promoting and enforcing ethical behaviour in HR work. Human resource managers have a role of making sure that their profession deserves respect, and to make people understand that it is as important as other professional cadres in the public service. They must enhance the image of the human resource profession, not only in the public service but also to the public.

Consultant Role of HRM Managers in the Public Service

Human resource managers need to serve as consultants in their respective public service institutions. They have the responsibility of offering professional expertise and advisory services to the line managers on how to implement a plethora of human resource management activities including strategic selection, strategic training, strategic performance appraisal, and handling of grievances. They must serve as organizational experts and champions of change in transforming the public service into a continuous learning organization and result-focused entity. All in all they must empower the line managers to take ownership of the human resource strategy, implementation of the key practice areas in HRM and related activities.

Research Role of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service

Research is one of the most important but often neglected components in the management of staff in the public service. One of the major roles of human resource managers is to conduct research in order to generate useful information, which facilitates rational and informed decisions for the effective implementation of the public service strategic goals and human resource strategy. Some writers argue convincingly that models of HRM developed elsewhere have little or no value in African organizations, including the public service. It is through research that alternative HRM

models for the public service could be designed. Anecdotal evidence reveals that organizations that regularly carry out employee attitude surveys are dynamic, proactive and responsive to the human resource needs and interests. Human resource managers should conduct regular surveys of employee attitudes toward the public service and its management. Through research, organizations are in a position to create harmonious relationships because the surveys generate information on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for both management and staff. Human resource managers must conduct regularly such useful surveys in the public service. The findings of surveys should be used as a basis for formulating new human resource policies and practices or revising the existing ones. Human resource research findings should also be used to advise on whether there is a need to change the legal regime, including the law, regulations, rules and standing orders governing the management of staff in the public service.

Innovative Role of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service

The public service is not a static organization. Public servants, specifically human resource managers, should play an innovative role in order to enable the public service to introduce good and dynamic people management practices, which will enhance performance. Research evidence reveals that the implementation of specific bundles of human resource practices has a positive correlation with the performance levels of the organization. The role of human resource managers is to identify a set of bundles, or HPWPs, which, if implemented appropriately, may pave the way for enhanced performance in the public service.

The findings from empirical research reveals that specific sets of good human resource practices (HRM bundles) shown in Table 1.2, if implemented properly, lead to superior performance in organizations. It is the role of human resource managers in the public service to identify the specific HRM bundles most likely to enhance performance and institute them in the public service in order to deliver the public service strategic plans, and the ensuing goals and objectives.

Thus, human resource managers are valuable sources of innovation in the public service. Through research they must identify areas which need to be transformed and, consequently, initiate and champion appropriate reforms for the betterment of the public service. Human resource managers, by virtue of their duties and responsibilities, should be change initiators in the public

service and champions of the reform cause. They must play a pivotal role in the management of change.

Table 1.2: High Performance Work Practices (HPWPs)

Pfeffer (1994)	McDuffie (1995)	Becker and Gerhart (1996: 785)
Employment security	Work teams	Self-directed work teams
Selective recruiting	Problem solving groups	Job rotation
High wages	Employee suggestions	Problem solving groups
Incentive pay	Job rotation	TQM
Employee ownership	Decentralization	Suggestions (received/implemented)
Information sharing	Recruitment and hiring	Hiring criteria (learning <i>vs</i> current job)
Participation	Contingent compensation	Contingency pay
Empowerment	Status differentiation	Status barriers
Training & development	Training and development	Information sharing
Cross-utilization		Job analysis
Symbolic egalitarianism		Hiring (internal <i>vs</i> external)
Wage compression		Attitude survey
Promotion from within		

Human Resource Managers' Developmental Role in the Public Service

There is a consensus in the human resource literature on the fact that employees in organizations, including the public service, must be viewed as valuable assets rather than costs. Human resource managers have a role of identifying competency gaps in the public services and devising appropriate ways and strategies for reducing these gaps. Human resource managers should serve as agents of continuous development. They must act as

advisors and consultants on matters pertaining to the development of staff, management and leadership competencies. They should ensure that both the non-professional and non-managerial public servants access training and development opportunities to meet the needs of the public service. They should also serve as advisers on organizational development matters; including making sure that the public service has appropriate structures for implementing its strategies, including the HRM strategy. By creating opportunities for employee training and development, human resource managers will gradually transform the public service into a continuous learning organization.

Human Resource Managers' Monitoring and Evaluation Role in the Public Service

The human resource function must be planned in such a way that it adds value in terms of enabling the public service to meet its strategic goals and objectives. The human resource strategy must be implemented in a cost-effective manner that demonstrably justifies the concept of "value for money". As such, human resource managers must continuously monitor and evaluate the efficacy and contribution of the human resource function to the overall public service strategic goals and objectives. They must monitor the implementation processes of the human resource strategy, ensuring that different components of HRM are mutually supportive and structurally reinforce each other in order to attain synergy. Moreover, they must ensure that the human resource strategy is aligned to, and supports, the overall public service strategic goals and objectives.

Human resource managers must play an auditing role of the human resource function using both hard and soft measures and real or proxy indicators. They must be able to engage themselves in 'number crunching' tasks, including tracking expenditures on staffing; staff training days ; calculating Returns on Investment (ROI) from training and development; and determining annual employee turnover (turnover analysis) and stability analysis (retention rate). They must analyze the absence rate trends, the number of grievances and time spent to fill vacancies; human resource managers must evaluate the extent to which the senior and line managers in the public service are satisfied with advice and services they get from the human resource department.

Human resource managers have the responsibility of ensuring that the strategies for the key practice areas of HRM are carried out efficiently. As

such, their role is to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the key practice areas in the public service. In doing so they must be in a position to suggest areas of improvement, revision of strategies and even recommend discarding practices unable to deliver results for the betterment of the public service.

Necessary Competencies for HRM Managers

In the light of the preceding context, we should reiterate that the employees vested with roles and responsibilities of managing the human resource function in the public service should be specialists, advisers, consultants and partners in the business of the public service. They must be human resource professionals, not amateurs. The human resource department in the public service should not become an enclave of the 'cult of the generalists'. Professional human resource managers should have a solid knowledge of the 'nuts and bolts' of the HRM model; and they must have a broad understanding of the internal and external environment, including the legal and institutional contexts, within which the public service operates. HRM scholars and practitioners (Redman and Wilkinson, 2001: 19; Ulrich, 1998: 20-21; Ban, 2005: 31) have identified the key competencies of human resource professionals as shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Competency Model for Human Resources Professionals

Business Partner	HR Expert	Leader	Change Agent	Advocate
Mission-oriented	Knows HR principles	Takes risk	Manages change	Values diversity
Understands culture	Customer oriented	Ethical	Consults	Resolves conflict
Strategic planner	Applies business procedures	Decisive	Analyses	Communicates well
System innovator	Manages resources	Develops staff	Uses coalition skills	Respects others
	Uses HR tools	Creates trust	Influences others	

Source: Condrey, 2005.

The role of HR Managers in the transformation of the public services requires different competencies which are, by and large, compatible with the major tenets of the HRM model. The competencies outlined in Table 1.3 are the most efficacious tools of the human resource manager in their endeavours to transform and modernize the staff management function in the public service. The formulation of policies and strategies for strengthening institutional and human capabilities in the public service require human resource managers equipped with the essential competencies for human resource work.

Human Resource Managers' Role in Formulating Viable Policies and Strategies

The transformation of the public service in African countries requires the formulation of deliberate but reliable policies and strategies to guide actions and inform decisions. Human resource managers are required to participate effectively in all stages of the policy and strategy formulation *fora* and processes. Their participation is important in order to ensure that personnel issues are adequately addressed and accommodated in the policies and strategies formulated to transform the public service. We learn from the policy management literature that there are five mutually supportive stages in the policy process (Anderson, 1984; Anderson, Brandy, and Bullock, 1978). Human resource managers in the public service are supposed to play an active role in each of the policy stages. The following sections discuss the role of human resource managers in specific stages of the policy process

Initiation of Policies and Strategies

Human resource managers are duty bound to take part in the policy and strategy initiation process. They are supposed to issue technical and professional advice during the agenda setting stage or initiation. They are supposed to aggregate diverse interests, concerns and demands as articulated by different stakeholders or constituencies regarding HRM issues in the public service. This may entail bargaining consultations and consensus building on HR issues, which, in the opinion of stakeholders, deserve attention and possibly new policy and strategies. Developments in science and technology and staff opinion, expressed through their participatory organs and employee surveys, are the major drivers or initiators of the policy agenda in the public service.

Human resource managers analyze and filter the problems, complaints and concerns they receive from employees, trade unions, senior managers, consumers of public services and the public, which may necessitate the formulation of policy actions and subsequent strategies. The human resource managers in the public service should be able to filter the stakeholders' demands by identifying the real policy issues and matters of opinion and value judgment regarding the human resource function in general and, in particular, the specific key practice areas. They must be able to define accurately a policy problem, and devise strategies to get it on the agenda of senior management forums and the government. It is imperative to note that not all problems afflicting the public service are policy problems. Thus, at the policy agenda setting stage, the human resource managers are responsible for identifying the actual policy problem, which calls for a definite policy and strategy. The human resource manager has to guide the decision making process on human resource matters in the public service, which requires a new policy and strategy.

Human Resource Managers' Role in the Policy Formulation Stage

Once a decision has been taken to address a specific problem; a policy or strategy must be formulated. The human resource managers' role is to use their expert knowledge to systematically search for the most efficient and effective means of achieving the anticipated goals. Human resource managers should weigh the efficacy and implications of available policy options resulting from sometimes contradictory goals of different actors.

The human resource manager must formulate clear options and weigh the outcomes and impact (consequences) of each policy option before deciding on the most cost-effective policy measure. This exercise is usually referred to as a Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA). The manager must give a monetary value (positive or negative) to every consequence of choosing each option and then select the option with the highest net benefit. This is an exercise that requires knowledge of policy formulation models, particularly the rational (synoptic) and incremental models of policy making (Simon, 1983; Lindblom, 1959: 78-88). It is imperative to recognize that policy and strategy can be formed for any of the key practice areas of HRM in the public service. It is the role of Human Resource Manager to ensure that the policy formulated to address a felt need or problem in the public service is supported by stakeholders in order to ensure that the policies and strategies are authorized by government.

Human resource managers must ensure that an appropriate Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system for the public service and human resource policies and strategies are designed in order to ensure that useful information is generated to justify whether the intended objectives and goals are being achieved. The M&E system is one of the essential prerequisites for the effective management of the public service and human resource policies and strategies. The system should specify a set of indicators for tracking the results of the policy and strategies, data sources, key information products and tools for data collection.

Human Resource Managers' Role in Policy Implementation

The implementation of policies and strategies in the public service requires the active participation of human resource managers. They must apply the approved policy to human resource related problems. Human resource managers must make sure that the prescriptions embodied in the formulated policy and strategies are interpreted correctly. They must also ensure that the required resources are made available and used in a cost-effective way in order to achieve the intended strategic goals and objectives. The human resource managers must ascertain that appropriate structures are created in order to facilitate the implementation process of the public service policy and strategy. They must follow-up closely the implementation process of the policies and strategies. They should ensure that an appropriate M&E system is designed and used for monitoring the implementation process of human resource policies and strategies, both at the macro- and micro- levels.

Human Resource Managers' Role in Policy Evaluation

Human resource managers should ensure that useful information is generated using the M&E system regarding the policy implementation process and the extent that the policy and strategy are achieving intended goals and objectives. Human resource managers must collect information on the implementation of the public service and human resource policies and strategies from different data sources, including surveys; routine component level monitoring reports; and routine activity-level monitoring reports. Appropriate tools should be designed for collecting the required data on activities designed to implement policy and strategy in the public service. The gathered data should enable human resource managers to generate key information products including baseline reports; semi-annual progress reports; annual progress reports; mid-term evaluation reports; phase completion reports; and impact evaluation reports. The information

generated must enable different stakeholders to determine whether the public service policy and strategies have achieved the intended strategic goals and objectives in terms of outputs, outcomes and impact. Policy outputs are what the public service does in terms of the planned and actual implemented activities. These are tangible policy deliverables and somewhat easy to measure. Policy outcomes are what the public service achieves. The outcomes are both the intended and unintended (i.e. unforeseen) effects and consequences. The human resource manager should be able to distinguish outputs and outcomes, including those pertaining to the human resource function. Evaluation has to be predicated on wide and full collaboration of all policy and strategy stakeholders of the public service, including agents (funders, implementers), beneficiaries (target groups, potential adopters) and the public.

Human Resource Managers' Role in Policy and Strategy Reviews in the Public Service

Once human resource managers have evaluated the policies and strategies used in the public service, they must under normal circumstances enable the appropriate authority - that is government - to make rational and informed decisions. On the basis of reliable and valid information generated at the policy evaluation stage, the government ought to make some critical decisions. These decisions may culminate in three possibilities, namely the continuation, revision or termination of the policy. The human resource managers' role in this regard is to enable the government to make a correct decision in the public interest. Thus, human resource managers must serve as advisors and facilitators during the decision making process.

Challenges Facing Human Resource Managers in the Public Services in Africa

The human resource managers' role is important for transforming the public service in Africa into a vibrant, vigorous and value-adding institution that promotes economic growth and the development of the people. At the heart of a public service are the roles of human resource managers. Research shows a positive correlation between dismal performance in the public service in Africa and the efficacy of the staff entrusted to oversee the management of human resources. However, human resource managers in the public service in Africa face a number of challenges, which undermine their roles, professionalism and restrain the transformation of the public service into an effective organization.

In most African countries, the dominant model upon which the management of staff in the public service rests is, by and large, personnel management. Research and experience suggests that the personnel management model can no longer accurately inform the management of staff in the public service. It has outlived its usefulness. By-gone is the era of the 'clerk of works' and 'contract managers'; the contemporary era is for the 'architects' to carry out human resource work. Human resource managers should accept this reality and they should make efforts to adopt, adapt and institutionalize the strategic HRM model in the management of staff in the public service. This presupposes a new orientation to human resource work, including the acquisition of new competencies for human resource managers, if they are to meaningfully contribute to transforming the public service.

Human resource management in the public service is not carried out in a vacuum. It is a function influenced by a country's legal and institutional frameworks as well as other factors in the socio-economic and political milieu. Human resource managers, by themselves, cannot change the legal and institutional frameworks that govern the human resource function in the public service. They must work within the constraints posed by the constitution and other relevant primary and subsidiary legislation. Some institutional and legal frameworks may undermine the institutionalization of the HRM model. For instance, individual sectors in the public service domain, including ministries, independent departments and agencies have little or no jurisdiction to design their own or context-specific human resource systems. Moreover, most heads of government have excessive powers on human resource matters in the public service.

In most African governments, the personnel department was, for a long time (in some cases even today), confined to the role of serving a supportive-cum-administrative role to other departments. Human resource managers were neither regarded as core staff nor accorded a professional status. The human resource function is still regarded as being at the periphery and not at the centre of government business. Human resource managers in the public service have a challenge to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that they are professionals *per se*, and their role is as strategic as other departments in the public service. They must elevate their role to a strategic level and enhance the image of the human resource function in the public service. They must claim a position in the central policy and strategic decision making

organs in the public service. In order to achieve this end, the human resource managers must first transform their own departments by institutionalizing a new human resource management regime consonant with HRM model before they can be trusted to transform the public service in its entirety.

In most African countries the advent of the HRM model was received with anxiety. The first reaction in most organizations, including the public service, was changing the names of departments, jobs, professional titles, institutions and colleges, and courses from personnel management to human resource management. This was simply done in order to capture the emerging fad. There was no deliberate effort to interpret the model and adapt it to the realities of the public service. A comprehensive and thorough understanding of the 'nuts and bolts' of the HRM model is acutely lacking among the many human resource managers and practitioners in the public service. Human resource managers have a challenge to thoroughly understand the 'dos and don'ts', principles and the requirements of the SHRM model before they can effectively implement it in the public service.

Human resource management is a professional discipline much as engineering, accountancy, law and medicine. The human resource function and competent human resource managers deserve a professional status. Human resource staff in the public service should be specialists, advisers, and consultants who act as partners in government business. They must seriously consider the need for an accreditation system and the importance of creating networks in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience in human resource work. The managers should defend their professional status. Human resource managers have a challenge of devising the means and strategies to enable other senior officials, as well as political leaders, to appreciate the fact that human resource managers play a sensitive, critical and strategic role in the public service.

Conclusion

Human resource managers are valuable assets for the public service in Africa and elsewhere. The smooth-functioning of the public services and, indeed, governments depends significantly on them. Human resource managers are expected to serve as critical drivers and champions of change in the public service. The transformation of the public service depends entirely on a reformed and modernized human resource function. It is important to note that the role of human resource managers should be dynamic and

responsive. The role of the human resource function and human resource managers should be to support the strategic mission of the public service. This presupposes a re-orientation of human resource managers and their departments in order to enable them carry out their duties consonant with the HRM model. Human resource managers should become full-fledged members of the public service's senior management team, capable of linking human resources policies to the public service's vision, mission, strategic goals and objectives.

To these challenges, human resource managers will need broad-ranging professional development, multi-skilling and a comprehensive understanding of the roles associated with the HRM approach to the management of employment relationships in the public service. The HRM model is relatively new in Africa, and its core knowledge is still gradually unfolding. Universities and public service colleges must attune their human resource learning packages to the basics of the HRM model. Professional associations for human resource managers must provide continuous professional training as they endeavour to promote and enforce ethical conduct and accountability in human resource work.

Human resource managers must play a pivotal role in helping organizations to formulate human resource policies and strategies that are relevant to the felt needs of the public service. The creation of enduring human resource policies and strategies should not suggest a search for the holy grail of policy or an immutable mission. Policy that endures means a policy making machinery that recognizes and adapts to ever changing challenges. Enduring policies recognize the need for change by adapting to evolving realities. The policies, strategies and mission of a human resources department must respond to the needs of the public service they serve. Human resource policy must be a living, developing tool; not a burden of guides, a handbook of rules or a 'box' of control devices to get tangled in and tripped over.

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