THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN PROMOTING PROFESSIONALISM AND IMPLEMENTING THE CHARTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE IN AFRICA


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the paper on the role of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service in promoting professionalism and implementation of the Charter for Public Service, it is noted that although the Charter was adopted a decade ago, its implementation has been slow and uneven in the various African Countries.

The paper reviews the Charter for Public Service with special focus on the underlying principles, the Code of Conduct for public servants, and the obligations of the Public Service as an employer. Note is taken to the fact that:

(a) The Charter aims to enhance the image of the Public Service by upholding professionalism and ethical values in Public Service delivery.

(b) The Charter is a broad framework, so the implementation strategies may be customized to suit the peculiarities of a given Country.

(c) Sound Human Resource Management policies, systems and procedures are the bedrock for effective implementation of the Charter.

(d) In view of (c) above, Human Resource Managers must take the centre stage in ensuring the effective implementation of the Charter.
The paper recognises the need to build capacity of Human Resource Managers to attain professionalism in the design and implementation of appropriate human resource interventions as a critical factor for successful implementation of the Charter and other Public Service reform initiatives.

It also asserts that the professionalization of the human resource function will also facilitate professionalism across the Public Service because Human Resource Managers will be capable and confident enough to offer their advice to the management of human resources in other functional areas. To this end, the following interventions are proposed for building the competence and confidence of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service.

(a) Targeted training, not only in the traditional Human Resource Management competencies but in business, finance, macro Economics and information technology.

(b) The training should be mandatory and reflected in the career path of Human Resource Managers.

(c) The need to review entry requirement into the HR Management function in order to create a professional background on which professionalization will thrive.

(d) The need to formation of Human Resource Management professional Associations.
(e) The need to elevate the Human Resource Management function to the executive/strategic table to facilitate contribution to strategic discussions / planning and enhance the confidence of Human Resource Managers to offer their professional knowledge and skills to their organizations.

Lastly the paper calls on the Human Resource Managers in the Public Sector to be more innovative and continuously search for knowledge in order to promote professionalism across the Public Service. It also seeks for support from the political leadership and specifically the Ministers responsible for Public Service.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Charter for the Public Service in Africa was formally adopted at the 3rd Pan – African Conference of Ministers of Public Service in Windhoek, Namibia from 5th to 6th February 2001. The Charter was to serve as a policy framework for Public Service administrations of all African Countries and a source of inspiration for strengthening Public Services to respond in a competent manner to the development challenges faced by African Countries. This includes the need to modernize business processes and administrative structures; and to create a conducive economic environment for private sector growth.

Inspite of the fact that the Charter was adopted by the Ministers of Public Service, a decade ago and that implementation support has been provided by international and regional bodies such as UNDESA, CAFRAD, UNDP – the implementation of the Charter has been uneven among the African Countries. In some cases, the Charter is unknown.

This paper reviews the Charter and identifies a close link between the requirement of the Charter and the functions of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service. It asserts that sound Human Resource Management policies, systems, procedures and
practices will create a sound grounding for effective implementation of the Charter for Public Service in Africa. Human Resource Managers, therefore, have a key role to play in the implementation of the Charter. It recognizes however, that in order to achieve this, the competence and confidence of Human Resource Managers must be enhanced, so that the may make meaningful contributions to the implementation process.

Accordingly, the paper proposes a few strategic actions that could be taken to ensure that Human Resource Managers in the Public Service play their role effectively in implementation of the Charter for Public Service. This includes efforts to professionalise the Human Resource Management function in the Public Sector, so that the Managers can promote professionalism across the Public Service.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE CHARTER

The Charter for Public Service in Africa defines a framework to guide the Public Services in Africa in taking such legislative regulatory, technical and practical measures to create a conducive environment for their proper functioning and improve the quality of service and the speed at which they are delivered. Thus, the Charter states and defines the principles and rules of conduct for Public Services employees. On the other hand it obliges the Public Service to fulfill certain human resource management conditions in order to keep the employees committed and motivated to serve.
2.1 **Fundamental Principles of the Charter and the Code of Conduct for Public.**

The Charter is anchored on the following fundamental principles:

**(a) Equality of Treatment:** Treatment of citizens without discrimination on grounds of race, gender, religion, ethnic group, philosophical or political convictions, or other personal considerations or traits.

**(b) Neutrality:** Respect for the Government of the day

**(c) Legality:** Provisions of Public Services to be in conformity with the law and existing regulations.

**(d) Continuity:** Public Service provision to be on an on-going basis, the right to strike shall be exercised within the provisions of this principle.

In accordance with the above principles, the Code of Conduct for Public Service employees that is outlined in the Charter demand that employees conduct themselves in a manner that enhances public confidence and the image of the Public Service by upholding professionalism and ethical values in performance of their duties. Specifically, the Code of Conduct obliges Public Servants to:

**(a) Maintain high level of integrity and moral rectitude, by desisting from any act which is inconsistent with ethics and morality such as misappropriation of public funds, favoritism,
discrimination, influence peddling, and acceptance of bribes etc.

(b) Observe the principle of conflict of interest by not engaging in transactions or having any financial, commercial or material interests that might be incompatible with their functions, responsibilities or duties, and to declare interest whenever necessary.

(c) Declare personal or family assets if they occupy certain leadership positions as stipulated by law.

(d) Remain politically neutral and observe confidentiality of official information to which they are privy, even after leaving office.

In terms of service delivery, the Charter calls for:

(a) A decentralized service delivery system to ensure proximity and easy accessibility of Public Services to the recipients.

(b) Participation and consultation with civil society and other key stakeholders and means of redress for recipients of Public Services as well as the employees.

(c) Continuous review of service delivery systems to attain quality, effectiveness and efficiency.

(d) Periodic exercises to evaluate Public Service performance and dissemination of the results to the public.
(e) Transparency in dealing with service recipients by providing the necessary information and reasons for decisions taken. Hence Public Services are urged to establish and strengthen receptions and information Units.

(f) Respect for deadlines in service delivery.

(g) Observance of and respect of personal privacy, individual freedoms and human rights. Hence files should not contain information on the private life, health or any information that may violate the privacy of individuals without the express permission of the individuals concerned.

2.2 Obligations of the Public Service as an Employer.

The Charter obliges the Public Service as an employer to implement measures that ensure a relationship with the employees that is fair, objective, professional and respectful of Human Rights. Accordingly, the Charter emphasizes that:

(a) Recruitment and promotion must be competence based and follow transparent and objective procedures. The principle of equal opportunities should also be upheld.

(b) The knowledge and skill base of Public Service employees must be continuously updated through systematic staff training and development.
(c) Public Service should keep their employees motivated by fostering dialogues between management and staff on working conditions.

(d) Public Service employees should be entitled to fair remuneration which is commensurate with their responsibilities and performance and enable them to live in dignity.

(e) Mobility and deployment of Public Service employees must take due account of the exigencies of the service and as far as possible respond to aspirations of employees for a satisfactory and rewarding career development.

(f) Public Services should provide minimum standards of health, security and safety and protect employees from unjustified prosecution arising from execution of their duties.

3.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARTER LINKAGE TO THE HUMAN RESOURCE FUNCTION.

The Charter for Public Service in Africa is just a framework. Its implementation will require implementation of human designed resource management systems, policies and procedures, which is the primarily role of Human Resource managers as illustrated below:

3.1 Observance of the Code of Conduct:

This requires the design and implementation of strategies geared towards improving commitment of public officers to the
Government, public service and the people they serve. It also requires the building and maintaining an organizational culture and climate in which people have concern and commitment to serve the Government and the citizens; as well as putting in place enforcement strategies including disciplinary measures and decisively implementing them. The Human Resource Manager as a change champion is responsible for observing the behaviors of employees and developing appropriate mechanisms to address any shortcomings. This may include training/sensitization programmes, arranging counselling sessions, providing a framework for mentoring, designing and implementing realistic incentives and rewards schemes and instituting any other initiative. Besides, the Human Resource manager has a role to play in modelling the way by being exemplary in observing the code of conduct and Ethics.

3.2 Assisting the Public Service meet its Obligations to Employees.

The Charter obligates the Public Service to put in place conditions that keep public servants committed to the Public Service and providing a high return to Government through efficient and effective service delivery.

In order to fulfill the obligations of the Public Service to its employees as laid down in the Charter, the following Human policies, systems, schemes and procedures need to be carefully and professionally designed and periodically reviewed to enable employees succeed and contribute to national development.
(a) Competence based recruitment and promotion systems and processes.
(b) Work positions and structures.
(c) Pay / remuneration policies and strategies.
(d) Human Resource Development programmes.
(e) Career and succession planning policies.
(f) Employee assistance programmes.
(g) Performance management policies and processes.
(h) Reward, recognition and sanctions schemes.
(i) Code of conduct and ethics.
(j) Health and Safety
(k) Employee relations mechanisms
(l) Welfare schemes
(m) Incentive systems etc.

The responsibilities for developing, designing, and implementing all the above fall within the standard schedule of the Human Resource Managers. The question that remains is now competent and the confident Human Resource Managers in Africa are to design appropriate human systems and policies that address the unique needs of their countries.

### 4.0 ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE.

There is limited empirical data to refer to the state of Human Resource Management in Africa. Research conducted by the IPMA-HR indicates that Human Resource spends much of its time on traditional HR work such as delivering HR services and training
and in performing transactions and record keeping. Very few spend time on strategic planning. However it is equally true that globally, Human Resource Management has changed and the upward trend is common around the world, though the level of sophistication differs from country to country. Developing countries, like the ones in Africa, lag the world in some of these areas.

In majority of the African countries, Human Resource Management is still largely about personnel administration. This in turn means that Human Resource Managers are still viewed as being part of the systemizing and policing arm of management – those whose main focus is ensuring implementation of a rule book.

The need for Public Service Reforms and the introduction of initiatives to attain efficiency and effectiveness in Public Service in Africa however, has placed the Human Resource Manager in Africa at the centre of such reforms. With the emphasis of the reforms being on improved service delivery (through better efficiency and effectiveness), a large number of the initiatives introduced have been ‘people’ focused. This may be attributed to the increasing realization of the critical value of the people in driving the success of any organization, hence requiring a strategic approach to Human resource Management. In 1996, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) issued a report, “A Guide for effective Strategic Management of Human resources” The NAPA report describes five forces that have led to organizations adopting strategic human resource management, which it defines as the
merger of human resource management and strategic planning. The five forces are:
- Increased potential for accomplishing their mission
- The belief that people are their most important assets
- The existence of perpetually turbulent times
- The changing nature of work
- Changes in workers

There is therefore increased need for able and motivated human capital in organizations. Indeed, the Charter for Public Service in Africa was designed to address this very developmental agenda. The challenge for Human Resources Managers, in such a scenario is to take the centre stage in driving the development / reform efforts of the organizations they belong to.

In order to facilitate the transition of the Human Resource Management function in Africa from its traditional ‘transactional’ approach, to a contemporary strategic approach, there is a need for deliberate efforts to professionalize the function. This will allow the function, and indeed the Managers to create significant value for the Public Service through professionally designed and implemented Human Resource Management policies, programmes, systems and practices.
5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN AFRICA.

Human Resource Managers play a critical and challenging role of balancing the expectations of the employees and those of the Public Service by designing appropriate human resource policies and systems that are feasible and affordable by the Public Service while at the same time maintaining a high level of commitment and motivation of employees. The level of expertise, competence and motivation of these Managers is therefore critical in maintaining a mutually accepted relationship between the Public Service and the employees.

To this end building the capacity of Human Resource Managers will go along way in enhancing professionalism and performance in the Public Service. The following interventions are proposed:

(a) Training
As observed earlier, the evolving role of Human Resource Managers is to become strategic partners in the development / reform agenda of the Public Services. This means that in addition to being professionally competent in implementing their traditional mandate, Human Resources Managers must also develop the business related competencies so that they may know the bigger picture and engage management and clients in a knowledge driven manner. It will also allow the Managers to link Human Resources activities to the macro-economic scenario, and to drive greater benefits to the economies.
Besides, the Human Resource Manager must be competent in handling the legalities involved in managing people i.e. Employment law, Administrative law, and Human Rights are becoming very critical as people become more empowered to challenge the way they are treated by employers (as evidenced in increased administrative action in courts of law).

Human Resources Managers, especially those serving as business partners in the various Ministries and Agencies, must possess soft skills such as communication, empathetic listening, negotiation skills, among others – that would help them perform their roles better.

With the increasing usage of technology in the form of Information Management Systems and Integrated Personnel Systems, the role of the Human Resources Managers will transform. Since a lot of the transactional work will be handled by the systems, the the Human Resources Managers will need to re-tool themselves to handle a different set of activities. On the one hand they must become the points of contact for any questions that the employees may have regarding the systems. On the other, they must learn how to use the reporting capabilities of the systems so that Human Resources Analytics are used in their true form and spirit.
Accordingly, training programmes for Human Resource Managers must be designed to address all the above required competencies i.e. the technical and traditional human resource management competencies, the economic/business/finance related competencies, the legal competencies relating to the management of people, and Information technology competencies. Specific training programmes should be mandatory for all Human Resource Managers in the Public Sector at different given hierarchical levels depending on the level of competence that suit their responsibilities at any one time. Such mandatory training should be reflected in the career path for the Human Resource Professions. The training should also be a blend of both theory and practical work based to enable Human Resource Managers acquire the expertise and confidence to apply learning at the work place.

(b) Review Entry Requirements into the Human Resource Management function

As indicated earlier, the human resource function in Africa is still largely viewed to be administrative in nature, dealing with routine staff matters.

This has meant, at times, that entry criteria to Human Resource Management Departments has been lax in terms of academic and other qualifications. The need for a strategic approach to Human Resource Management calls for application of professional intelligence and human resources analysis. Hence, a professional qualification in Human Resource Management as a requirement for entry in this function should be mandatory. With such professional
background and the targeted training and capacity building efforts proposed in (a) above, it will be easy to build the expertise and professionalism that is required to move human resource management from the traditional administrative / transactional role to the strategic approach that is demanded to address the current national development programmes.

In addition to qualification – broader assessment tests that measure the communication and cognitive ability of individuals may also be run, at a mass level as a first round of selection.

(c) **Human Resource Professional Associations**

Like other professional associations, a Human Resource Professional Association will assist in enhancing professionalism in Human Resource Management in the Public Service in Africa, by:

(i) Institutionalizing a professional Code of Conduct and Ethics with a disciplinary mechanism.

(ii) Setting professional standards to be followed.

(iii) Providing opportunities for learning from colleagues through conferences, provision of reading materials, networking and benchmarking.

The Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers Network (*APS-HRNmet*) is therefore a positive move towards professionalizing Human Resource Management in Public Services of Africa. Such and other Human Resource professional associations should be supported by the various governments in Africa as mechanisms for
transforming the Public Service by improving the management of the most important resource- the people.

(d) Elevating the Human Resource Management Function to the Executive Table

In line with the traditional perception of the human resource management function, the departments of human resource management have been stifled within other departments, mainly Finance and Administration Departments, as a support service. With the changing role of Human Resource management, the function needs to be elevated to a level where the incumbents will feel motivated and confident to be able to offer their professional advice to other departments on management of their staff. In that position, the other departments will have trust and respect for the advice so provided. Otherwise, human resource managers placed in junior levels of the organizational structure will remain too timid to make any meaningful contribution towards the realization of public service new drive for efficiency and effectiveness.

In this regard, the human resource function should be positioned at the same level with other departments or even high to report directly to the Chief Executive. To facilitate this to happen, the Human Resource managers must “package” themselves in a way that attracts trust from management and staff – their outlook, their contribution to the strategic process and making human resource indispensable to organizational success. Short of this, Human Resource managers will be kept away from the executive table.
6.0 CONCLUSION

The successful implementation of the Charter for Public Service in Africa rests on sound human resource structures, policies, systems and procedures, whose development and implementation lies within the departments of Human Resource Management. In this regard, Human Resource Managers must be at the forefront of the implementation of any effort geared towards improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness like the Charter for Public Service in Africa.

While the Charter applies to the entire continent, it should be appreciated that each country or region has its own peculiarities. Hence, there is need to customize the various human structures, policies, systems and procedures to suit the pertaining conditions but keeping in harmony with the Charter. This requires a professional Human Resource Manager who can undertake the necessary human resource analytics and make meaning out of them. African governments therefore need to take deliberate effort targeted towards empowering and professionalizing the Human Resource Management Function as a strategy for attaining efficiency and effectiveness in Public Service performance and delivery, which the charter seeks to achieve.

On the other hand, Human Resource Managers must not sit back and wait to be “liberated” by the various governments. They should take the initiative to convince top management that they can add value to organizational success by doing more than the routine transactional tasks. Continuous search for knowledge will ensure
acquisition of noticeable expertise hence making the Human Resource Manager a strategic partner and change champion who is reliable, credible and respected.

With such expertise, competence and motivation, Human Resource managers will be in good position to enhance professionalism in the Public service delivery and uplift the image of the Public service before its citizens. The support of the Ministers responsible for Public Service, the International bodies (UNDESA, Commonwealth Secretariat, African Union, etc) and the Management Development Institutes will be inevitable in this development agenda.

I thank you.

REFERENCES


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