Note on Professionalizing Human Resources Management: Status and the Way Forward

1: Introduction

This note on status and way forward on professionalising human resource management in the Public sector in Africa is derived from the discussion during the 29th AAPAM Roundtable Conference, (Mbabane, Swaziland, (3 – 7 September 2007). The AAPAM Roundtable conference constituted a Working Group to discuss the problematic of professionalising human resource management in the Public sector in Africa. The Group was composed of 30 members from ten countries and UNDESA. The Working group considered the proposal for the establishment of an International Public Sector Management Association for Human Resources Africa Chapter (IPMA-HR Africa) which was developed by the Group that was formed in Cape Town during the IPMA-HR Symposium and training Conference.

2: The need for professionalising Human Resource management in the Public Sector in Africa

It was considered critical that the initiative of professionalising human resource management in the Public Sector in Africa be given serious attention because the Working group considered that:

- Professional Human Resource Management (HRM) is a critical component of strategic public service delivery given their understanding of human resources and what makes them productive.
- The value of professional human resource management is either misunderstood or not appreciated within most bureaucratic structures
- Human resource management experts are non-existent, not positioned strategically and in some cases marginalised from strategic decision-making structures.
- There is a need to formulate and advise on best practice on design of Human resource policies and strategies
- Human resource policies and strategies have to be geared towards the effective utilisation of resources towards bringing about change that adds value to the bottom-line of public service delivery
- Professional Human Resource Management has to be premised on competence and ethics and at a later stage be supported by standards, codes and legislation
- Like other professions, Human Resource management professionals need to development their capacity through their home-grown networks and institutes.
- Reputable Human Resource Management networks, associations and institutes are critical in the development of professional HRM professionals.
3: Some observations on the African context in relation to Human Resource management in the Public Sector

The group discussed the African context as it relates to the problematic of professionalising human resource management in the public sector. The following were noted:

- Some ministries still operate in the Personnel Management paradigm as opposed to the Human Resource Management paradigm.
- Consequently, some ministries and countries relegate the Human Resource issues to administrative/clerk levels while others position Human Resource management at strategic/director levels.
- Some countries have Legislation for the Human Resource management profession stipulating: Minimum Qualifications, Accreditation, Human Resource management training courses, Certification, Human Resource Management Practitioners based on career paths, Codified Human Resource Management Ethics, Continuous certified professional development, etc.
- Some employers insist on Statutory and Professional requirements for Human Resource Managers.
- Some executive managers have negative attitudes towards Human Resource management practitioners.
- Some bureaucracies have rigid rules that frustrate Human Resource management innovation.
- There are no regulatory mechanisms for Human Resource management variables.
- Some ministries lack documented Human Resource Management Strategies.

4: Recommendations from the Group

It was recommended that the core group that developed the IPMA-HR Africa proposal facilitates a Network of the Working Group and other Human Resource management experts in existing associations and networks for the exchange of ideas on the professionalization of Human Resource Management in Africa. In its pursuit of the professionalization of human resource management, the members of the network will seek to define the mandate of human resource management in the form of well defined human resource management roles and a well constituted professional Human Resource Management body for Africa. The initial efforts should be put into creating a strong Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers Network (APS-HRMnet) which may then later be turned into an Association if need be. The Group further requested UNDESA to continue supporting the initial nurturing of the Network in collaboration with AAPAM as part of support for capacity building of the Public Service in Africa.

4.1: Recommended Network Objectives

The group recommended that the objectives of the Network should include the following:

- Promoting excellence in the practice of human resource management in the public sector.
- Identifying and sharing the best practice of human resource management so as to assist public sector organizations improve their performance in the public service in general.
- Providing human resource management practitioners in the Public Sector in Africa with tools, models, methods, and data to improve the effectiveness of their human resource management and development programs.
- Promoting continuous learning, enhancing knowledge, improving skills and developing the next generation of human resource management professionals and leaders in the public sector in Africa.
- Placing the Human Resource Managers in the public sector in their right position as strategic partners in public service development planning and management.
- Supporting continental and regional efforts in Africa to implement harmonized Public Service commitments such as the Charter for Public Service in Africa and Human Resource Development efforts of NEPAD.

4.2: Recommended Considerations

The group further recommended that the Network should focus its consideration, among many other issues and challenges, the following:
- Recognition of the Human Resource Management function as a strategic function
- Determination of human resource management standards including the Accreditation of Human Resource management Practitioners, training components and codification of HRM ethics
- Definition of the roles of the human resource management function
- Determinations of institutional and individual human resource management skills gaps
- Capacity building for local human resource management associations, institutions and experts.
- The regulation of human resource management practice through legislation
- Best practice in other strategic professional networks

4.3: The Working Group’s view of an Idea Human Resource Manager

The diagram below specifies what the working Group recommended as the ideal Human Resource manager in the Public Sector.

5: Conclusion

In concluding this note, it is befitting to quote the Communiqué from the AAPAM Roundtable Conference in Mbabane: “The conference noted that the human resource management functions continued to be taken as clerical/operational functions in the public services. This tends to downplay the critical strategic role which the human resource plays in organizational performance. There is need for countries to accord this function a higher status and develop some specific training for the cadres responsible for this function. In that regard the conference commended the efforts that were being spearheaded by the United Nations to launch an initiative for strengthening and professionalizing the management of the Human Resource function in governments. This initiative should be encouraged and supported as a key component or a network operating under the auspices of AAPAM”.

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