Enhancing Professionalization of Human Resource Management in the Public Service in Africa

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

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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 (including the public service—our emphasis)\(^1\)

1.0 Introduction

The quote preceding this section paves the way to the 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 right from the Eighteenth Century during the days of the social reformers in the dawn of industrial revolution in Europe up to the current era of incipient Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) reform initiatives in the public services. Consequently, there has been tumultuous moment and instances of profound changes in the management of employment relationship in the public service entities overtime. Moreover, a shift of role and responsibilities of the staff entrusted with the management of employment relationship has been a characteristic feature in the management of employment relationship in organizations, including the public service entities.

In this paper we examine the role and responsibilities of Human Resource Managers in transforming the public service particularly in African countries. In order to accomplish this task, first, we examine how the roles of people entrusted with the management of employment relationships in organizations have been changing overtime. We need to examine the current and future transformational roles of Human Resource Managers in the public service in the light of the past. One of the best ways to understand and explain the present roles of HR 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. Second, we interrogate the theoretical-cum-conceptual premises which 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, we examine the major tenets of the Human Resource Management (HRM) model which makes it distinctive from other approaches to the management of employment relationship. It is imperative to recognize the fact that the job designation and the professional title, “Human Resource Manager” are derived from human resource management model. Fourth, in a general way we highlight the roles which human resource managers as professionals should play in the public service in order to justify their professional status. Fifth, we demonstrate that human resource management as one of the strategic functions in organizations deserves a professional status. Moreover, we demonstrate that HR managers and practitioners with the right qualifications and demonstrable competencies must be identified as professionals per excellence.

Sixth, we explore the role that HR managers should play in formulating policies and strategies for strengthening institutional and human capabilities in the public service. We also show the context, including the constraints within which HR managers in the public service carry out their roles and responsibilities. Seventh, we 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, we suggest the way forward to professionalizing and enhancing the role of HR Managers in transforming the public service.

2.0 Antecedents on Shifting Roles of Staff Management Practitioners:

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The chronology of developments in the history of the management of employment relationship reveals that 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 thoughts and new knowledge in human psychology.

Drawing from the historical development of the employment management at least in Europe, we recall the era of the Utopian Social reformers\(^3\) and their attitude against de-humanizing labour practices which preceded the period of “welfare officers” Which Sisson refers to as the period of the “acolyte of benevolence” in which the welfare officers acted as a buffer between the organization and its employees\(^4\). The role of the welfare officers were limited to canteen services, sick-visiting, hiring, grievance handling and clerical duties. The phase of employment manager usually referred to as the period of the “Humane Bureaucrat” came after the welfare officers in the early 1900s. Their dominant role was largely on wages and salary administration, collective bargaining and ensuring that employees are tightly controlled.

Employment management paved the way to a new title for the employee management function, namely “personnel management” or personnel administration in organizations. 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 also included recruitment and selection, job evaluation, training as well as employee control to ensure compliance to set policies and procedures.

From the 1960s to early 1980s the personnel management function acquired a “professional-cum-specialist status”. The major role and responsibilities of the personnel professionals focused more on recruitment and selection;

\(^3\) The social reformers included Lord Shaftesbury and Robert Owen which are regarded as fore fathers of orthodoxy personnel management.

performance evaluation; training and development, compensation and benefits; personnel auditing and legalistic control of the management relationship. The bodies such as the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) in the UK pioneered the stimulus for the ‘professionalization’ of personnel management. The IPM also served as an agent for the occupation proselytizing the professional cause.\textsuperscript{5} Taking into account the roles and responsibilities that the “personnelists” carried out, they were labeled “organizational men” or “manpower analysts”. Large public sector bureaucracies, including the public service with more complex structures had such personnel officers. The personnelists adopted more purposive policies aimed at either to enhancing their power, or to enable them do good by stealth.

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

3.0 Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations for HR-Managers’ Role:

In order to facilitate the discussion on the roles of staff employed to oversee the management of employees in organizations, including the public service there are theories and conceptual premises which 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 human resource management has emerged.

Tyson and Fell (1986) used an analogy drawn from the building and civil engineering profession to characterize the roles which are played by the staff tasked with the management of employment relationship in organizations, including the public service. Tyson and Fell used the “building site” metaphor to delineate three distinctive roles of HR staff which they labeled as the “clerk of works”; “contract managers”; and “architect”. Although each of the three models may have different variants, however, they help to illuminate the corresponding roles of human resource managers. In the following section, we examine each of the three roles in turn.

3.1 The Clerk of Works Role of HR Managers

All authority regarding HR roles is vested in the line managers and essentially the HR Manager serves the line managers, and does not report directly to the Chief Executive Officer in the organization. All that is expected of HR-Manager is the day-to day operation kept on schedule, a ‘clerk of works’ approach is all that is required, where representation of the client line managers interest is total and unquestioning. The “clerk of works” ensures the fulfillment of the routine and immediate tasks. There is no interest at looking the long term needs of the organization. HR policies are formed after the actions which demonstrate the need. The policies are not pre-set nor are they seen as an integral part of the organization policy. Personnel system are created in ad-hoc way. The HR Department will administer basic routines undertaking record keeping; first-interviewing some applicants for
employment; preparing letters and documents on instructions; providing standard letters.

HR officer reports to senior manager for example the Finance and Administration Director or Chief Accountant. They do not need to have specialist qualifications. The most likely career path is from another junior post in the organization. In the light of the ‘clerk of works’ model, the role of HR Manager is largely passive, reactive and somewhat of little value to the organization. In some organizations they play a role of sick-visiting 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”\(^6\). Such roles have minimal managerial significance and lack the strategic input\(^7\). 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\(^8\).

The preceding observation if further attested and echoed by Taylor whose empirical study in 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

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staff management, let alone decisions on how to achieve the overall core objectives of the government\(^9\).

The findings, to a great extent, reveal that the role which the staff managers played in the public service could be equated to the “Clerk of works” metaphor in an attempt to explain various roles of people in-charge of employee management in organizations.

### 3.2 Contracts Manager Role of HR Managers

This role is expected to dominate in well established organizations such as the public service. The personnel specialists and professionals perform the main industrial relations activity. The personnelists by virtue of their roles and responsibilities are equated to “consensus negotiators.” They must have grown up and developed within the system. Employment relationships are very controlled with the 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 game of the old hand practitioner is to achieve the latter without compromising the former. The staff manager’s role is mainly in the interpretation of existing procedures, agreements and contracts, although they may make minor modifications to these, adapting to new circumstances. The “personnelists” 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\(^{10}\) as well as keeping the existing system intact and operational. They are not risk-takers or entrepreneurs and strive to maintain the *status quo*.

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\(^9\) UNDESA (2005), op. cit. p.78. The synopsis of the findings of Harry Taylor cited in footnote number 6 are paraphrased in the World Bank Public Sector Report.

\(^{10}\) This includes instruments such as the Standing Orders, Employment Regulations, Terms and Conditions of Employment and other staff management policies.
The “clerk of works” and “Contract Manager” roles sit down well with what Condrey 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 HR profession is viewed as a stilted and isolated administrative function under the clerk of works and contract manager models.

3.3 Architect Role of HR Managers

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

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

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The HRM managers strive to build and maintain harmonious relationships with the trade union. The individualistic tactic to employee relations and negotiations is more preferred to collective bargaining approach. The HR manager regards himself as a ‘business manager’ first and as a professional manager second.\textsuperscript{12} The “architect” role requires HR 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 and the like.

There is however, a profession application to HR work, hence technical competency is one of essential necessities. The HR 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 explicated by Condrey (1998: 6-8). A number of distinguishing features in the three archetypes of the HR 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 (1998; 2005).

### 3.4 Professional and Job Titles Matching HR Role Models

In the light of the preceding, it seems plausible to delineate three lessons related to the role models of HR managers. First, the ‘clerk of works’ model corresponds to the personnel administration role. It has the major hallmarks of the “welfare officer” era in the history of HR function in organizations. The HR 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 HR befitting this kind of HR role is “Personnel Administrator or “Establishment Officer”.

\textsuperscript{12} Tyson and Fell, op. cit. pp. 26-27.
Second, the ‘contract manager’ model largely resembles the period of the personnelists-cum-'consensus negotiator’ in which the major HR role is mainly confined to industrial relations”. The suitable job title for people engaged in HR work consonant with the model is “Personnel Manager” or “Industrial Relations Manager.”

Third, the “architecture” model and its associated roles sit down well and bear a resemblance to Human Resource Management model, which is quite distinctive from the rest. The HR practitioner subscribing and conducting HR professional role and responsibilities in accordance with the principles enshrined in the “architect” model deserves the title “Human Resource Manager”. The roles of HR manager worth a name are fundamentally derived from the major tenets of HRM model. We cannot understand the roles of professional HR managers unless we are very much aware of the “nuts and bolts” of HRM rubric.

4.0 Hallmarks of distinctive HRM Approach to Staff Management

The roles of Human Resource Managers in the public service like in any other organization largely depend on the interpretive criteria used to facilitate 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 HR policies, strategies and implementation of the key levers of human resource management. These are worth paying attention to.
Table 1.1: Comparison of Three Models on the Role of Human Resource Managers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role dimension</th>
<th>“Clerk of Works”</th>
<th>“Contract Manager”</th>
<th>“The Architect”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main role of HR Manager</td>
<td>Enforcer of merit</td>
<td>Diminished authority and control</td>
<td>Organizational consultant and advisors, change agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of HRM Profession</td>
<td>Hindrance to effective organizational functioning</td>
<td>Adjunct collection of skills</td>
<td>Full managerial partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Education</td>
<td>Public personnel administration</td>
<td>Adjunct to managerial skills</td>
<td>HRM, general management, practical focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Orientation</td>
<td>Uniform enforcement of rules, policies and procedures</td>
<td>Manager centred</td>
<td>Respectful of HRM and organizational goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Orientation</td>
<td>Merit</td>
<td>Consensus builder</td>
<td>Effective organizational functioning coupled with a respect for effective HRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>Not-preset nor integrate to the organizational strategic objectives. Stem from the Chief Executive</td>
<td>Well established, often implicit, heavy employee relations emphasis, employer association derived</td>
<td>Explicit policies giving effect to organizational strategic plan, concept of HRP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy/ Planning Horizon</td>
<td>Short term, immediate, emphasis on budget not on corporate plans</td>
<td>Short-term possibly one to two years</td>
<td>View of tactical and strategic horizons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Vested in line Managers</td>
<td>Vested in senior line Managers</td>
<td>HR presence at highest levels, people as business resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Influence of HR function</td>
<td>Nil or very low</td>
<td>Usually low but high in times of crises</td>
<td>Consistently high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>Ad hoc, related to legal requirements, payroll based</td>
<td>Sophisticated systems to help with negotiation and manuals of rules, etc.</td>
<td>Sophisticated and procedurized, concepts of HRP and HRIS are used extensively. Not focused on relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role dimension</td>
<td>“Clerk of Works”</td>
<td>“Contract Manager”</td>
<td>“The Architect”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Line managers wholly control subordinates</td>
<td>High trade union density</td>
<td>HR managers and line managers move towards extensive integration, rational decision taking obviates need for traditional idea of control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR activities</td>
<td>Largely routine, person not business-centred, routine administration, welfare, selection of junior staff</td>
<td>Support to senior line management, act as “buffer” between management and employees, high interpretative role, involved in formal relationships but not power-brokering</td>
<td>HR Manager as business manager looks for opportunities which make optimal use of available competencies. Technically competent in diagnosis and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR reporting</td>
<td>To senior line manager, works manager, company secretary, Director of administration and Finance</td>
<td>Likely to senior line manager, policeman role</td>
<td>To the Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Career path</td>
<td>From another post likely on promotion clerks, senior secretary trainer</td>
<td>Junior HR staff still drawn from other functions, selection on the basis of day-to-day crisis management skills resolution of immediate problems, narrow base of operation</td>
<td>Both Full-time career professionals and a sufficiently high status function to attract line managers permanently or for a spell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication pattern</td>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Two-way</td>
<td>Multi-directional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HRM is about ensuring that the policies and practices of managing people in the organization are all directed at achieving the organization’s mission, strategy, strategic goals and objectives.

The HRM model presupposes “strategic integration” or “strategic fit” of HR policies and practices both at the macro and micro levels. This entails, on the one hand the strategic linkage between the organization’s overall strategy and the HR strategy. This is what we refer to as ‘vertical integration’ at the macro level. On the other hand strategic integration refers to the linkage between different key practice areas or components of HRM in such a way that they are implemented in a manner which ensures that they cohere and are mutually supportive and reinforcing or complementing 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 performance management plan and *vice versa*. The horizontal integration of HR practices enables the organization to attain the most aspired synergy in HR work. Most writers on HRM such as 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 that is why it is dubbed ‘Strategic Human Resource Management’ (SHRM).

Human Resource Management 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 the 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 certain structural arrangement. A decentralized structure is one of the pillars upon which HRM
model rest. Consequently, a devolved HR management function is more 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 HR specialists. Given the fact that the human resource is the most valuable asset for the organization’s success then HR function is a vital strategic requirement, which is too important to be left solely in the hands of HR specialists. Hence HRM is a central concern of top management in terms of strategy, and a central concern of line managers in terms of its implementation. The HR specialist then is left in the role of an internal consultant –cum- facilitator. As such HR managers should serve largely as strategists, experts, stimulator and change agent.

HRM stress the approaches to the staff management which cultivate avenues for the creation of a healthy psychological contract on all parties involved in the employment relationship. Consequently, regular workforce attitude surveys are encouraged. Unhealthy psychological contract breeds the undesirable behaviour, including distrust, demotivation and, indeed, poor retention of staff and therefore increased employee turnover rate.

The HRM model suggests that in order to achieve high performance levels, efficiency and effectiveness in organizations, specific “bundles” or set 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;

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13 The concept ‘psychological contract’ refers to the perceptions of both 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.

14 The acronym “HPWPs” stands for, and denotes the High Performance Work Practices.
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\textsuperscript{15}.

5.0 Transformative Roles of HR Managers’ in the Public Service

The roles of HR 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 HR managers who are very much aware of the “nuts and bolts” of the HRM model which is fundamentally different from its predecessor the ‘personnel management’ approach to staff management in organizations. 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\textsuperscript{16}. The managers in the public service who play the strategic staff management roles consonant with the HRM model will need to be specialists, advisers and consultants and in our own context government business partners.

5.1 Strategic Role of HR Manager in the Public Service

The HR managers must play the role of 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 or strategists in the strategy formulation process. The HR managers must be part of the hierarchy which is vested with the authority and responsibility to devise the public service strategy and ensuing strategic plans.

\textsuperscript{15} This entails subcontracting, using part-timers and short term contracts. In such a situation employment contracts are replaced by contracts of service.

The word strategy is of Greek origin and has always had military connotations, including maneuvering in order to execute plans for conducting offensive and defensive campaigns against the enemy. The following definition appears to shed much light to understanding the concept 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.¹⁷

In our context *strategy* denotes a conscious plan or course of action directed toward definite goal. It is a sense of what the organization such as the public service is trying to achieve over the long term that will direct its actions. It is a process adopted 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.¹⁸

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

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 and those of the HR department; delivery of the strategies as well as evaluation and review or reformulation of the strategies. In this process the HR Manager must ensure that the HRM objectives and


goals are derived from the overall the strategic objectives of the public service, hence achieving what we refer to as vertical integration. The strategy plan of the HR function in the department or ministry with HRM portfolios must be strategically derived from the overall strategy of the public service.

Moreover, the HR 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), employees relations strategy; etc. In addition they must ensure that various the key levers in HRM are implemented strategically in order to realize the overall strategic goals and objectives of the public service.

5.2 Professional Role of HRM Managers in Public Service

Human resource management is a profession function because it meets the essential requirements of the interpretive criteria attached to the concept profession. The 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\textsuperscript{19}; codes of ethical conduct; mechanisms and structures for enforcing ethics; and it is a function which is held in high esteem by informed organizational management. The role of HR managers in the public service is to perform their duties and responsibilities in a professionally acceptable manner, which entails to abiding by the code of

\textsuperscript{19} In other 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), Society for Human Resource Management, etc. These are professional bodies for HR Practitioners.
HRM professional conduct as well as promoting and enforcing ethical behavior in HR work.

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

They have also a role of making sure that their professional role deserves respect, and it is as important as other professional cadres in the public service. They must enhance the image of the HR profession not only in the public service but also to the public in its entirety.
5.3 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, to whom the HR work is devolved on how well to implement a plethora of human resource management activities including strategic selection, strategic training, strategic performance appraisal, handling of grievances, disciplinary matters, etc. They must serve as organizational experts and champions of change in the transformation processes of the public service into a continuous learning organizations and result-focused entity. All in all they must empower the line managers so as to enable them take ownership of the HR strategy, implementation of the key practice areas in HRM and related activities.

5.4 Research Role of HR Managers in the Public Service

Research is one of the most important but often the most neglected component in the management of staff in the public service. One of the major roles of HR managers is to conduct research in order to generate useful information which facilitates rational and informed decisions for effective implementation of the public service strategic goals and HR strategy. Some writers argue convincingly that models of HRM developed elsewhere have little or no value in the 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 which regularly carry out employees’ attitude surveys are dynamic, proactive and responsive to the HR needs and interests. HR managers should conduct regular surveys of attitudes of the employees toward the public service and its management.

Moreover, 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. The HR Managers must conduct regularly such useful surveys in the
public service. The findings of surveys should be used, on the one hand as basis for formulating new HR policies and practices or revising the existing ones. On the other hand the HR research findings should be used to advise on the need to change the legal regime, including the law, regulations, rules and standing orders governing the management of staff in the public service.

5.5 Innovative Role of HR Managers in the Public Service

The public service is not a static organization. The public servants, specifically HR Managers should play an innovative role in order to enable the public service introduce good and dynamic people management practices which are most likely to enhance performance. Research evidence reveals that the implementation of specific bundles of HR practices has a positive correlation with the performance levels of the organization. The role of HR managers is to identify a set of bundles, which are sometimes referred to as High Performance Work Practices (HPWP) which, if implemented appropriately, they may pave the way for enhanced and superior performance in the public service.

The findings from empirical researches reveal that specific sets of good HR practices (HRM bundles) shown in Table 1.2, if implemented properly tend to lead to superior performance in organizations. It is the role of HR Managers in the public service to identify specific HR bundles which are 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, HR Managers are valuable sources of innovation in the public service. Through research they must identify areas which need to be transformed and, consequently initiate appropriate reforms and champion them for the betterment of the public service. HR Managers by virtue of their duties and responsibilities should be change initiators or triggers 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment security</th>
<th>Work teams</th>
<th>Self-directed work teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selective recruiting</td>
<td>Problem solving groups</td>
<td>Job rotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High wages</td>
<td>Employee suggestions</td>
<td>Problem solving groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive pay</td>
<td>Job rotation</td>
<td>TQM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee ownership</td>
<td>Decentralization</td>
<td>Suggestions (received/Implemented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>Recruitment and hiring</td>
<td>Hiring criteria (learning vs current job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Contingent compensation</td>
<td>Contingency pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Status differentiation</td>
<td>Status barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training &amp; development</td>
<td>Training and development</td>
<td>Information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-utilization</td>
<td>Job analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic egalitarianism</td>
<td>Hiring (internal vs External</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage compression</td>
<td>Attitude survey</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion from within</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5.6 HR Managers’ Developmental Role in the Public Service

There is a consensus in the HR literature and, indeed on the fact that employees in organizations including the public service must be viewed as valuable assets rather than costs. HR managers have a noble role of identifying competency gaps in the public services and devising appropriate ways and strategies for reducing competency (skills and knowledge) gaps among the public servants. HR managers should serve as agents of continuous development; they must act as advisors and consultants on matters pertaining to 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, HR Managers will gradually transform the public service into a continuously learning organization.

5.7 HR Managers’ Monitoring and Evaluation Role in Public Service

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

HR managers must play an auditing role of the HR function using both the hard and soft measures and real or proxy indicators. They must be able to engage themselves in “number crunching” tasks, including tracking expenditure on staffing; staff training days and cost; as well as calculating Returns on Investment (ROI) in training and development function; and determining annual employee turnover (turn over analysis) and stability analysis (retention rate). They must analyze the absence rate trends, number of grievances and time spent to fill vacancies; HR managers must evaluate the extent to which the senior and line managers in the public service are satisfied with advises and services they get from the HR department.
HR managers have also the responsibility of ensuring that the strategies for the key practice areas of HRM are carried out efficiently to a successive end. 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 discarding those which are unable to deliver results for the betterment of the public service.

6.0 Necessary Competencies for HRM Managers

In the light of the preceding context, it seems plausible to point out that the employees who should be vested with roles and responsibilities of managing the HR function in the public service should be specialists, advisers, consultants and partners in the business of the public service. They must be HR professionals not amateurs. The HR department in the public service should not become an enclave of the “cult of the generalists”. Professional HR managers should have a solid knowledge on 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\(^\text{23}\) have identified the key competencies of HR professionals as shown in Table 1.3.

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 HR-Manager in their endeavours to transform and modernize staff management function in the public service. The formulation of policies and strategies for strengthening institutional and

human capabilities in the public service require competent HR managers who are equipped with essential competencies for the HR work.

Table 1.3: Competency Model for Human Resources Professionals

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


7.0 HR 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. HR managers are required to participate effectively in all stages of the policy and strategy formulation *fora* and processes. Their participation is very important in order to ensure that people issues are adequately addressed and accommodated in the policies and strategies which are formulated to transform the public service. We learn from the policy management literature that there are five mutually supportive stages in the
policy process. The HR managers in the public service are supposed to play and active role in each of the policy stages. In the following sections we discuss the role of HR managers in specific stages of the policy process

7.1 Initiation of Policies and Strategies

HR managers are duty bound to ensure that they 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 the staff opinion expressed through their participatory organs, and employee surveys are the major drivers or initiators of policy agenda in the public service.

HR Managers analyze and filter the problems, complaints and concerns they receive from employees, trade unions, senior managers, consumers of public services and the public in its entirety which may necessitate the formulation of policy actions and subsequent strategies. The HR 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 HR function in general and particularly 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 forum and 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 HR managers are responsible to identify the actual policy problem which calls for a definite policy and

strategy. The HR manager has to guide the decision making process on HR matters in the public service which require a new policy and strategy.

7.2 HR Managers’ Role in Policy Formulation Stage

Once a decision has been taken to address a specific problem, policy or strategy must be formulated. The HR managers’ role is to use his/her expert HR knowledge to systematically search for the most efficient and effective means of achieving he anticipated goals. The managers should weigh the efficacy and implications of available policy options resulting from a compromise or even contradictory goals of different actors or demand articulators.

The HR manager must formulate clear options and weight the outcomes and impact (consequences) of each policy option before deciding on the most cost-effective and cost-efficient policy measure. This exercise is usually referred to as 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 the exercise which require knowledge on policy formulation models, particularly the rational (synoptic) and incremental models\(^{25}\) of policy making. It is imperative to also recognize the fact 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 HR 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 legitimized or authorized by government.

The HR Managers must ensure that an appropriate Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system for the public service and HR 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 essential prerequisites for effective management of the public service and HR 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.

7.3 HR Managers’ Role in Policy Implementation

The implementation of policies and strategies in the public service require the active participation of HR Managers. They must apply the approved policy to HR related problems. The HR 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 managers must make ascertain that appropriate structures are created in order to facilitate the implementation process of public service policy and strategy. The managers must follow-up or monitor closely the implementation process of the policies and strategies. They should ensure that an appropriate Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system of policy is designed and used as meaningful tool for monitoring the implementation process of HR policies and strategies both at the macro and micro levels.

7.4 HR Managers’ Role in Policy Evaluation

The HR Managers should ensure that useful information is generated using the Monitoring and Evaluation system regarding the policy implementation process and the extent to which the policy and strategy are achieving the intended goals and objectives. The HR managers must collect information on the implementation of the public service and HR policies and strategies form 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 HR managers to generate key information products which include baseline reports; semi-annual progress reports; annual progress report; 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 or not. These are in terms of outputs, outcomes and impact of the public service policies and strategies. Policy outputs are what the public service does in terms of the planned and actual implemented activities. These are policy deliverables which are tangible 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 HR Manager should be able to distinguish outputs and outcomes of the public service’s policies and strategies, including those pertaining to HR 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 in its entirety.

7.5 HR Managers Role in Policy and Strategy Reviews in the Public Service

Once the HR Managers have evaluated the policies and strategies in use 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. The decision may culminate into three possibilities, namely the continuation, revision or termination of the policy and strategy. The HR managers’ role in this regard is to enable government make a correct decision in the public
interest. Thus HR manager must serve as an advisor and facilitator during the decision making process.

### 7.6 Challenges Facing HR Managers in the Public Services in Africa

The HR managers’ role is very important in the transformation process of the public service in Africa into a vibrant, vigorous and value-adding institution; as well as the engine for economic growth and development of the people. At the heart of a public service institution are the roles of HR managers. Research evidence show a positive correlation between dismal performance levels in the public service in Africa and the efficacy of the staff entrusted to oversee the management of human resource function in the service. However, the HR managers in the public service in Africa face a number of challenges, which undermine their roles, professionalism and contribution to transforming 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, the personnel management and its prescriptions. Research evidence and experience has proved that personnel management model can no longer inform accurately the management of staff in the public service in the contemporary era. It has outlived its usefulness and it can no longer stand the test of time. By-gone is the era of the “clerk of works” and “contract managers”, the contemporary era is for the “architects” to carry out HR work. HR managers should accept this reality, and they should make effort to adopt, adapt and institutionalize the strategic HRM model and its subsequent principles in the management of staff in the public service. This presupposes new orientation to HR work, including acquisition of new competencies for HR managers if at all they have to contribute meaningfully in the transformation of the public service through HR interventions.
Human Resource Management in the public service is not carried out in a vacuum. It is a function that is influenced by the country’s legal and institutional frameworks as well as other factors in the socio-economic and political milieu. HR managers, by themselves cannot change the legal and institutional frameworks which govern the HR function in the public service. They must work with the constraints posed by the constitution and other relevant primary and subsidiary legislation. Some of the 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 (MDAs) have no or little jurisdiction to design their own or context-specific HR systems. Moreover, most heads of government have excessive powers on HRM matters in the public service.

In most African governments, the HR or rather 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. The HR managers were neither regarded as core staff nor accorded a professional status. The HR function is still regarded as a function which is at the periphery not at the center of government business. The HR 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 demonstrably elevate their role to a strategic level and enhance the image of the HR function in the public service. They must claim a position in the central policy and strategy decision making organs in the public service. In order to achieve this end, the HR managers must first transform their own departments by institutionalizing a new HR management regime consonant with HR model before they can be trusted to transform the public service in its entirety.

In most African countries the advent of HRM model was received with anxiety. The first reaction in most organizations, including the public service was changing of titles and names of department, job and professional titles,
names of institutions and colleges, titles of courses, office labels 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 HRM model is acutely lacking among the many HR managers and practitioners in the public service. Human Resource managers have a challenge of understanding thoroughly the “dos and don’ts”, principles and the requirements of the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) model before they can effectively implement it in the public service.

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

8.0 Concluding Remarks

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 partly but significantly on the role of human resource managers. HR 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 HR function. It is important to note that the role of HR Managers should be dynamic and
responsive. In the current epoch the role of the HR function and HR managers should be to support the strategic mission of the public service. This presupposes a re-orientation of the HR managers and their departments in order to enable them carry out their duties consonant with the HRM model. HR managers should become full fledged members of the public service’s senior management team capable of linking human resources and HR policy and strategies to the public service’s vision, mission as well as its strategic goals and objectives.

To meet the challenges outlined in the previous section, HR managers and practitioners 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 being formulated and gradually unfolding. Universities and public service colleges must attune their HR learning packages to the basics of the HRM model. Professional associations for HR Managers and practitioners must provide continuous professional training much as they endeavour to promote and enforce ethical conduct and accountability in HR work.

The HR managers must play a pivotal role in helping organizations to formulate HR policies and strategies which are relevant to the felt needs of the public service. The creation of enduring HR policies and strategies should not suggest a search for a holy grail of policy or an immutable mission. Policy that endures means policies and policy making machinery that recognizes and adapts to ever changing challenges; policies that recognize the need to adapt to evolving reality and the need for change. The policies, strategies and mission of HR function and department must respond to the needs of the public service they serve. HR policy must be living, developing tool, not something to get tangled in and tripped over. An effective HR policy must be a tool not a burden, a collection of guides, not a handbook of rules or a ‘box’ of control devices.


