

## **Digital HR, Public Service and Sustainable Governance**

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts a prospective analysis of the application of a growing Human Resource Philosophy - Digital HR - to government bureaucracies, being large scale employers who recruit and deploy workforce in the delivery of public services. There exist in the global HR literature references to the pivotal place of the human resource for organizational success. It is the interest of this paper, however, to examine the emergent interplay between the trio of digital transformation, public sector workforce planning and sustainable governance. In the ultimate the paper analytically examines the prospects of the adoption of E-HR Management philosophy and practices in the management of the human resources of government ministries, departments and agencies in developing nations. Accordingly, the paper explored a conceptual analysis of the following: digitization, digitalization digital transformation and sustainable governance, among others. The paper discovered that for effective human resources planning architecture, government workforce managers in developing nations stand to benefit from the digital transformation which E-HR engenders. Conversely, the paper discovered that a well managed Public Service workforce will birth a sustainable governance mechanism for the delivery of common goods; security, health and education, among others. While digital HR not only transforms prevailing prebendal personnel processes to objective, transparent and accountable processes, it also invariably births a functional mechanism for sustainable development. In conclusion, the paper recommends policy frameworks for digital transformation of the planning and management of public sector workforce in developing nations, for sustainable governance.

**Keywords:** digital HR, public service, sustainable governance, digitization, digitalization, digital transformation

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

Incontrovertibly, one of the perennially present challenges of developing nations in the 21st century is that of sustainable governance (Martin, 2007). Sustainable governance, however, is a phenomenon that is almost inseparable from a carefully planned and functional civil or public service delivery mechanism - the Public Service or the Civil Service. To a large extent, both Services - Public and Civil - though, with borderline differences, are used interchangeably to refer to that organ of government that drives the development trajectory of a nation. The Services are organs of the state – bureaucracies - which provide non-partisan platform for democratic governance (Morgan, et.al. 2013).

Thus, this paper deploys an interchangeable use of the terms Public Service and Civil Service to refer to that workforce engaged by the State to perform duties and provide services in the interest of the citizenry and, in the ultimate, in the interest of the State. For the State to deliver on democratic dividends – peace, security, and safety of lives and properties – it must establish and sustain a functional Public Service.

A dysfunctional Public or Civil Service necessarily births a dysfunctional public service delivery system. It is therefore a desideratum for any nation desirous of sustainable development to have a planned, people-centric and dynamic Public Service (Jega, 2018).

Key to Public Service planning, however, is human resource planning. The Public Service, like enterprises and organizations in the private sector, is manned by humans, who in management parlance have been variously described as human resources, staff or personnel (Hollenbeck, 2015). We submit therefore that instrumental to the organizational success of the Public Service is the quality of its planning with respect to human resources: recruitment, staffing, promotion and deployment, among others.

Now, there is an emergent global phenomenon - a trending HR philosophy - in the field of Human Resource Management: Digital Human Resource Management, also known as Digital HRM (Waddill, 2018). In tandem with the objective of this paper - to analytically examine the prospects of the adoption of Digital HR Management philosophy and practices in the management of the human resources of government ministries,

departments and agencies - we proceed in the following thematic sections: in the next section, that is Section II, we outline what is meant by *digital transformation* and E-HR Philosophy. In the third section the paper attempts an explorative analysis of the interplay between digitization, Public Service workforce and sustainable governance. In the fourth and concluding section, we attempt to recommend policies for digital planning and management of government workforce in developing nations for sustainable public service delivery.

## **II. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND E-HUMAN RESOURCES PHILOSOPHY**

The reality of human existence today is that man lives in a fast paced and constantly changing global society. In all spheres - law, governance and education, among others, - the existence of man is today shaped by technology (Rapp, 2012). Technology is today disrupting and reconstructing the whole gamut of human existence to the extent that the present age is a defining moment for birthing a paradigm shift from the third industrial revolution to the fourth revolution. As noted by Schwab, the fourth revolution is among others characterized by the interplay or combination of Internet of Systems or cyber-physical systems (Schwab, 2017).

Technology is in the 21st century redefining philosophies across the globe. Taking as a worldview, which encompasses the totality of the belief system of a people in relation to the totality of nature, philosophy is today being globally shaped by the realities and dynamics of science and technology (Rapp, 2012). The emergent global philosophy is 'E' (or *Electronic*). It will be apposite to describe the contemporary global philosophy as E-Philosophy - by which we mean a system of beliefs and practices shaped by the dynamics and trajectories of electronics. Paradigmatic of E-Philosophy beliefs and practices are emergent e-driven phenomena such as E-governance, E-Commerce, E-agriculture, the Internet of Things, among others.

Human Resource management and administration is not insulated from what we have identified above as an emergent global E-Philosophy. The Internet of Things - a world of connected devices, people and objects is founded, for instance, on the belief system of a networked or global village that will change the way we live and work (Waher, 2015).

Traditionally conceived, Human Resources Management involves planning or organizing the personnel or staff of an organization in such a manner that organizational goals and objectives are achieved (Mathis et al., 2015) Traditionally, Human Resources Management is a phenomenon that dates back to the twentieth century human relations movement, which laid the foundations for managerial emphasis and focus on the human aspect of the workforce (Obedgiu, 2017).

Historically, human resources managers have had to manually warehouse staff or personnel records in documents, files and physical strongholds. Retrieval of personnel information for the purposes of promotion and deployment planning, among others, has traditionally been analog, time-demanding and cumbersome: going through several records, files and cabinets to take informed personnel decision.

The phenomenon E-Philosophy is however transforming the landscape of managing human resources across the globe. Reflective of the new global philosophy which is dynamically impacting all spheres of human endeavors, the intertwined phenomena of *electronics* and *Information and Communication Technology* engenders a digital trend in planning human resources, that is E-Human Resources Management Philosophy (or E-HR, for short). E-HR involves the deployment or application of the tools of information and communication technology in the planning or management of the personnel or human resources of an organization for organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Thite, 2018).

E-HR management invariably implies *digital transformation* of the planning process of the personnel or workforce of an organization. Digital transformation, essentially, is a broad concept encompassing *digitization* and *digitalization*. By digital transformation we mean strategic transformation that requires cross-cutting organizational change as well as the implementation of digital technologies. Digital transformation embeds the interwoven phenomena, *digitization* and *digitalization* (Bloomberg, 2018).

To digitize is to convert a piece of information - idea, picture or sound - into an electronic format that can be processed through a computer system. Digitization as Bloomberg notes of Gartner's IT Glossary, "is the process of changing from analog to digital form". With further reference to Gartner's IT Glossary, Bloomberg informs that digitalization imply "the use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities".

Thus digital transformation of HR is a construct with which we refer to the processes of both digitizing and digitalizing staff or personnel management processes for an effective and efficient workforce. Pursuant to the objective of this paper, we shall in the next session attempt to explore the interplay between digital transformation, Public Service workforce and sustainable governance.

### III. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, PUBLIC SERVICE AND SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE

Indubitably, the success of any government lies in the caliber or quality of its workforce or personnel. A well planned and functional government workforce is therefore a sine qua non for good governance and sustainable development. The bedrock of sustainable development is sustainable governance.

By sustainable governance we mean the process of policy formulation and implementation adopted, by government, to meet present social and political challenges in such a manner that policies derived from such processes do not constitute potential social and political dangers or threats for future generations. Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI), a Bertelsmann Foundation initiative, notes for example that "the quality of governance is most important in ensuring sustainable policy outcomes". SGI further notes that "good executive management performance, a sound democratic order and an effective inclusion of societal actors into policymaking processes are more successful in terms of sustainability and also in terms of social justice" (SGI Survey, 2017).

Thus sustainable governance implies equity, justice and fairness in the planning and allocation of state resources. The human resource is a fundamental resource of government. Sustainable governance is driven by government employees who administer the public policy environment. Therefore a planned government workforce is a prerequisite for sustainable governance (UNPAN, 2018)

Contextually conceived, the workforce of government is variously identified as either the Public Service or the Civil Service. The Public or Civil Service of any nation is essentially the totality of its workforce which drives the entire policy environment of that nation - from policy formulation, implementation, evaluation and monitoring. The Public Service is instrumental to the success of both the Public and the Private Sectors of the economy. Being the machinery or engine-room of government, the Public or Civil Service of a nation drives its development trajectories (Massey, 2011)

What the preceding exposition underscores is the place of a planned Public or Civil Service in birthing sustainable governance. Now, and with particular reference to Digital HR vis-à-vis the realities of personnel planning in developing economies, we ask the critical question: what are the prospects of digital planning of the Public or Civil Service of developing nations?

Now, against the background of the global and dynamic transformations being powered by information and communication technologies across the globe - and across disciplines, theories and practices - planning the Public or Civil Service for effectiveness in the 21st century implies embracing digital transformation of HR processes and practices.

Digitalizing the personnel management processes of the Public or Civil Service will imply deploying information technology infrastructure to plan the workforce of government. Now, personnel management in the Public or Civil Service in most countries is, mostly, a traditional function of an independent body usually referred to as the Civil Service Commission. It is the constitutional mandate of the Civil Service Commission in most parts of the world to plan the key human resources processes of the Public or Civil Service: recruitment, promotion and discipline (FRN, 1999). Ancillary responsibilities of the Civil Service Commission include granting approval for second-ment and transfer of service, among others.

Thus the Civil Service Commission is a gatekeeper for sustainable governance: the quality of its recruitment, promotion and disciplinary processes and procedures invariably impacts on the quality of service delivery by the Public Service. A critical look at the recruitment and appointment processes into the Public Service of most developing nations reveals practices and processes that are antithetical to sustainable governance: favoritism, nepotism and over-politicization among other *prebendal* considerations.

No doubt, a Civil Service that is founded on prebendalism - in the guise of the principle of national character, for example - cannot be promotive of quality service delivery and, more importantly, sustainable governance. Thus there is the need for Civil Service Commissions or similar bodies in developing nations to embrace best personnel planning practices that would appropriately re-position the Public Service as a viable machinery of government for good governance.

The emergent tool of technology, which is gradually being deployed by the private sector to drive human resources planning, provides a veritable platform for planners of the Public Service personnel in developing nations. E-HR tools, among other digital devices provide a foundation for an objective human resources planning architecture that is devoid of bias, sentiments and prejudice.

The global HR management landscape is today characterized by a large number of E-HR tools that managers of the human resources of Public Services in developing nations must key into for competitive and global relevance. Emergent E-HR or digital tools for managing the workforce of governments in developing nations include for example digital systems that use automated workflows, self-service portals, collaboration tools, data and dashboards, among others.

Learning Management Systems (LMS), for instance, provides employers of government personnel a veritable platform for providing new recruits, among others, with requisite job skills and trainings through

videos, e-courses and e-resources, among others. In addition, with Performance Management Systems, there is the paradigm shift from the traditional paper-based and manual Annual Performance Appraisal and Review (APER) to a system of continuous performance feedback that is supportive of personnel from the day of first appointment and throughout the years of career.

With particular reference to addressing the problems of nepotism, favoritism and partisanship in the recruitment process of government workforce in developing nations, there abound in the recruitment industry today, non-subjective digital recruitment tools such as RoboRecruiter and Cloud-based Hiring. With Cloud-based hiring for example, it is possible to digitally process an entire recruitment exercise online devoid of the traditional phenomenon of the 'African' or the 'Nigerian' factor (of 'who you know') for example. From job vacancies announcements, short-listing, interviewing and selection process, digital phenomena, like Cloud Hiring, provides automated recruitment environments: online submission of application, online selection and video interviewing, among others. The future of work lies in the *Cloud*. In the ultimate the ongoing digital transformation of HR is birthing a new phenomenon, *Cloud HR* (Sage People, 2018).

The contemporary ecosystem of human resources solutions technology engenders an enabling environment for timely and objective decision making with respect to recruitment and promotion processes within the Public Service. Against the background of the fact that planning ahead is the lifeblood of any human resource manager, it is instructive that managers of Public Service personnel in developing nations deploy workforce solution technologies for insightful decision making that is not only people-centric and analytics-driven, but also enables a just society.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above expository analysis of the interplay between the phenomena *digital transformation*, *public service* and *sustainable governance* is instructive of the trajectories for managing the public service workforce of developing nations for sustainable governance. Public Service personnel managers - qua Civil Service Commissions - in developing nations, must as a matter of policy adopt digital mindsets and practices for driving inclusive, open and transparent recruitment processes, among other key personnel functions and processes.

A foreseeable challenge to sustaining a digital Public Services personnel management culture in developing nations is the phenomenon of epileptic energy. There is no digitization (nor digitalization) without electronics (or electricity). Electricity is the backbone of digital transformation. Thus, to maximize the cost benefits of digitizing and digitalizing personnel processes of Public Services, governments in developing nations must adopt appropriate energy policy frameworks for sustainable digitization.

For a professional and non-partisan Public Service, and, by extension, for sustainable governance, developing nations must as a matter of policy create enabling environment for mass digital literacy to drive e-recruitment and e-governance practices among others. Thus with appropriate policy frameworks, developing nations have the opportunities to leverage on emergent human resources technology innovations to establish and sustain a functional, inclusive and professional 21st century Public workforce that is promotive of sustainable governance.

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