

Managing people in the twenty-first century: Integrative public human resource management in sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

The past decades have witnessed dramatic social and political changes on the African continent. These changes have been evident in many countries, ranging from the end of apartheid in South Africa to presidential and parliamentary elections in countries such as Algeria, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia, Ghana and Mozambique. It is not the purpose of this article to analyse these changes. Unfortunately, the tendency has been to transfer Western management theories and techniques to the public sector in sub-Saharan Africa. Going beyond the traditional approach, this article therefore proposes a conceptual framework for the integration of institutional cultural values (indigenous knowledge) and modern management techniques and practices. The framework advocates an integrative process designed to show the diverse and integrated activities associated with public human resource management.

I. Introduction

Public human resource management is essential to governance. It forms part of the government's efforts to deliver services in an ethical and successful manner. Without the services of a professional human resources section, a situation could arise where there is high staff turnover, inappropriate persons are employed, court cases are at the order of the day and unfair salaries are paid. Therefore, systematic attention to public human resource management is fundamental to successful public administration, especially in sub-Saharan Africa countries, as they grapple with the transition to democracy. The current literature on the management of people in sub-Saharan Africa countries presents a bleak picture. Generally, public human resource management in these countries is categorised as 'fatalistic, resistant to change, reactive, short-termist, authoritarian, risk reducing, context dependent . . .' (Jackson 2002, 998). Kamoche (2002, 994) noted that 'Africa has not participated fully . . . researchers seem unsure where to locate Africa . . . A

gap, thus, remains in our understanding of the complexity of human resource management in sub-Saharan Africa as academic research in the mainstream literature focuses elsewhere.' As a result of these views, there is a rather negative picture of public human resource management in sub-Saharan Africa. This could largely be attributed to the fact that Western management concepts and research approaches have dominated the thinking and practices of academics and public managers in sub-Saharan Africa over a long period of time (Gbadamosi 2003, 274). However, given this impressive corpus of knowledge, researchers have not paid as much attention to doing research on human resource matters in the sub-Saharan Africa context. Clark, Gospel and Montgomery (Kamoche 2002, 993) identified this as a major shortcoming: 'an overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon perspective can be seen in much of the research'. Therefore, Beugré and Offodile (2001, 535) suggest a combination of the best of the two knowledge systems of the West and sub-Saharan Africa, namely an 'integrative approach'.

This article therefore attempts to reframe the understanding of managing people in the sub-Saharan African context, by employing an integrative approach that reflects the different elements that may be of importance in the public human resources field. Nonetheless, the underlying premises of this article are that an integrative approach to human resource management constitutes a major element in public administration and that line-function employees and human resources specialists should be professionally entitled to implement this new approach in meeting the expectations of those involved in the work process. Given the above, the article is based on a descriptive approach and does not offer a critique as little research has been done on public human resources matters in sub-Saharan Africa – with the exception of South Africa. Therefore, many of the examples in this article are imbedded within the South African context.

The research aim of this article is therefore to explore the implementation of public human resource management practices in sub-Saharan Africa to see whether the integrative approach (or parts of it) has been adopted by governments. The integrative approach developed by the South African public service is utilised and modified in order to examine the extent of strategic integration of the human resources function. The intention is to contribute to knowledge by providing a better understanding of implementing integrative human resource management in public service institutions. Implications of the approach will also be discussed in relation to a number of strategies adopted by the South African public service. A descriptive study of integrative public human resource management demands that answers should be provided for research questions such as: What is public human resource management? What is the relationship between management and the human resources function? What does the 'public dimension' in public human resource management entail? What are the responsibilities of the different role players in the

human resources field? What professional ethical guidelines apply to public human resource management? What processes are available to analyse integrative public human resource management?

2. The concept *public human resource management*

There are different opinions and viewpoints of the meaning of the concept ‘public human resource management’. However, in this article, public human resource management as a field of study, theory and practice is taken to be that part of management concerned with all the factors, decisions, principles, strategies, operations, practices, functions, activities, methods and procedures related to employees in institutions. It also refers to the dimensions related to people in their employment relationships, and the dynamics that flow from them, all aimed at helping to ensure continuous institutional success through ‘good fit’ employment relationships – in turbulent and ever-changing environmental conditions (Erasmus et al. 2005, 4). The perspective taken is thus broad rather than narrow, in that public human resource management is viewed as referring to all practices and decisions aimed at continuously achieving an optimal match or fit between work and the human resources required to execute the work within an institutional context and environment.

The subject of public human resource management has grown significantly over the last 30 years. A variety of titles and names have been ascribed to the concept *human resource management*, for example, *personnel management*, *personnel administration*, *manpower management*, *people power management* and *human resource management* (Van der Westhuizen 2000, 5). Given all these titles and names, it is difficult to start explaining the meaning of the concept public human resource management. However, a good starting point would be to concentrate on certain characteristics inherent to the concept. Some of the more important characteristics (which may or may not form part of the approaches or perspectives taken by others) are outlined below, and indicate that public human resource management is

- an activity that has a management perspective
- a tripartite division of responsibilities assigned to executive political heads, line-function employees and human resources specialists to achieve certain institutional objectives
- guided by certain professional ethical guidelines designed to ensure professional behaviour
- an integrated process that mainly comprises activities such as integrated planning, management of specific outcomes, and enhancement of institutional performance.

All these characteristics and other aspects that form the basis of good public human resource management will be discussed in the sections below. The aim is to provide a useful framework for organising the field of public human resource management and to produce a new approach that would be comprehensive, informative and intellectually engaging. For this reason, the first part of the article presents a conceptualisation of the most basic characteristics of public human resource management. In the last part of the article, an attempt is made to re-emphasise the importance of an integrative approach to contemporary public human resource management.

3. Management perspective of public human resource management

All public sector institutions consist of people who are supposed to interact consciously in an endeavour to achieve certain institutional goals by serving a particular need in society. Therefore, all public sector institutions strive towards being successful. Successful, in this context, means doing the right things (being effective) in the right way (being efficient) (Swanepoel et al. 2003, 2–5).

Students of Public Administration, therefore, study all the activities and decisions of public managers (including public human resources managers), which aim to ensure the success of their institutions and the gradual improvement of the quality of life of all their stakeholders (such as the citizens/customers, the employees and the community). In this sense, the institution is goal-driven and public managers are responsible for ensuring goal achievement. In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, do African public managers strive towards institutional goal achievement? Jones and others (1996) conducted a study in the public sector in Botswana and found that public managers were more concerned about establishing close relationships with their immediate managers than about succeeding as an institution. Obviously, this state of affairs is not acceptable in a free-market democratic state. It is, therefore, in the best interest of African public sector institutions that public managers move towards more hands-on professional management (including human resource management), with greater emphasis on output controls, more focused on private sector styles of management practice and greater discipline in resource use (Van der Westhuizen 2002, 70–1).

Being successful is the bottom line of managing people in the public sector and results are obtained through people. A successful orientation towards public human resource management in sub-Saharan Africa requires a focus on what public managers actually do in terms of human resource management – how they act in real-world public administration situations. What competencies (management tasks and skills) do they require to do their human resources work well? One way to elaborate on this is to create an inventory of competencies required for successful public human resource management. In South Africa, a number of research projects

have sought to identify the competencies that are critical to managerial success in the public service. Of these studies, research by the Department of Public Service and Administration is particularly helpful.

The Department of Public Service and Administration produced a description of the broad elements of managerial performance at middle and senior management level that may be used by sub-Saharan Africa countries. These sets of competencies were divided into two subcategories: core criteria (the ‘what’ or tasks of management); and the standards (the ‘how’ or skills of management). From the Department of Public Service and Administration’s prolonged observations and research, it was concluded that, as public managers move up in the organisational hierarchy, they must accumulate increasingly broader sets of skills. Hence, two different competency frameworks were introduced – the middle management competency framework and senior management service competency framework (Republic of South Africa 2004). According to the Department of Public Service and Administration research, the core criteria (tasks) for both competency frameworks include, among others, strategic capability and leadership, programme and project management, financial management, service delivery innovation, problem solving and analysis, people management and empowerment, client orientation and customer focus, communication, honesty and integrity, applying technology, information management, diversity management, planning and organising.

The Department of Public Service and Administration’s researchers recognised that managerial excellence in the public service requires not merely doing the job, but doing it well. For this reason, they developed additional standards (skills) that seem to distinguish the work of highly successful public managers. The Department of Public Service and Administration suggest, for example, that public managers must give specific direction to teams in realising objectives, defining roles and responsibilities for project team members, looking for new opportunities to save funds, encourage new ideas, use modern technology to stay abreast of global trends, consult clients to improve service delivery, demonstrate objectivity in problem solving, delegate to empower others, communicate sensitive information, report fraud, take active steps to eliminate discrimination and prioritise tasks (Republic of South Africa 2003b). Whatever the philosophy towards work, it is through management that all the efforts of a public sector institution are directed towards goal achievement. However, there are different management models that can be utilised as an analytical framework for reference to clarify the management tasks and skills. For the purposes of this article, the above framework is applied. These management tasks and skills are enabling activities that typify the work of all public sector managers, including human resources managers.

4. Public human resource management as a specific responsibility

The authority and responsibility for public human resource management are derived from constitutions, laws and regulations that give each system its own

unique character. The South African system of public human resource management is unique in sub-Saharan Africa. Before 1994, the South African public human resources system was organised around the commission and executive personnel office model. According to this model, policymaking and administrative powers and responsibilities were respectively given to a central personnel agency, a semi-independent commission (referred to as the *Commission for Administration*) and the office for the commission outside the state president and minister's chain of command. This was done to ensure that public officials were selected on the basis of merit rather than patronage and that the public service would operate in a politically neutral fashion. However, with the change of political power in 1994, the newly elected government pointed out that, from a practical point of view, this centralised system was not desirable. Firstly, it was argued that placing policymaking and administrative powers and responsibilities in the hands of a semi-independent commission divorced public human resource management from other areas of management. Secondly, this centralisation of the human resources function prevented senior public managers from exercising constructive leadership in public human resource management (Republic of South Africa 2000b; Tompkins 1995, 45). Although the commission model has been maintained, a significantly different approach is followed by the new government through the extensive professional specialisation of the human resources function. In accordance with section 7(3)(b) of the Public Service Act (Proclamation) 103 of 1994, public managers (including human resources managers) are responsible for the efficient management and administration of public sector institutions, including the effective utilisation and training of staff, the maintenance of discipline and the promotion of sound labour relations. The focus is on the term 'responsibility'. Undoubtedly, responsibility for public human resource management has far-reaching implications. The *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service* of 1997 clearly states that public human resource management will no longer be the sole responsibility of human resources specialists, but rather a dual responsibility between human resources specialists and all other public managers. Because public human resource management takes place in the public domain, another role player has to be added: 'political managers'. It thus involves a tripartite division of responsibilities between the executive political heads (political managers), the line-function employees (mostly managers) and human resource specialists (including human resources managers). Political responsibility involves the establishment of 'political' and 'executive' human resource management policy with the human resources office (the responsibility of the DPSA in South Africa), coordination of this policy between different institutions and sections/units, and ensuring that this policy is implemented successfully (Van der Westhuizen 2000, 11).

The other two role players – line-function employees and human resources specialists – have a very unique relationship that could be referred to as a *line-specialist partnership*. Exploring the meaning of this line-specialist partnership begins with a distinction between line-function employees and human resources specialists (staff employees). Line-function employees are directly involved in accomplishing institutional goals and delivering services to the public. Human resources specialists (staff employees) assist, support and advise line-function employees in accomplishing set goals. For this line-specialist partnership to be effective, line-function employees and human resources specialists will have to work together strategically and proactively to realise the central purposes of government (Tompkins 1995, 4).

5. Professional ethical guidelines for integrative public human resource management

Aristotle said: ‘moral leadership must come first from those in public office. Such people in Government exercise a teaching function. Among other things, we see what they do and think that is how we should act. Unfortunately, when they do things that are underhanded or dishonest that teaches too’ (Denhardt 1995, 107). An analysis of this quotation reveals that public officials operate in a goldfish bowl with their activities constantly under scrutiny of key segments of the public. Operating in the public’s eye immediately emphasises ethical issues from which public human resource management cannot be isolated. Over the last several years, public officials have globally been confronted with an increasing number of ethical issues in the workplace. Sub-Saharan Africa is no exception to the rule. For example, there has been a surge of interest in ethical issues in public sector institutions in South Africa. In a survey by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) in South Africa, 73 per cent of respondents indicated that they believe most of the officials working in the South African public sector are involved in corruption, while 46 per cent asserted that the government is wasting taxpayers’ money (Republic of South Africa 1998b, 3). In another survey by the Political and Monitoring Service of South Africa (PIMS-SA) and IDASA, it was established that, among other things,

- the presidency and the provinces do not implement the Executive Members Ethics Act 82 of 1998 consistently (for example, inconsistency about the date of implementation)
- at least 20 per cent of senior management in the South African public service did not submit their first financial disclosure forms (*Report on government ethics in post-apartheid South Africa* 2004, 28).

Chapter 3 of the Public Service Regulations of 2001 (Republic of South Africa 2001) requires that members of senior management disclose their financial interests. Further, Adamolekun (1999) indicated that several sub-Saharan Africa countries, such as Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, are battling with weak accountability, rigid human resource practices, political appointments, corruption and low morale. In this regard, public human resource management in sub-Saharan Africa countries is challenged to take responsibility for managing ethical strategies. Certainly, the concerns of Aristotle and others about ethics in the public sector have been triggered by dramatic events such as corruption, maladministration, lack of responsiveness, lack of skills and training, discrimination, negative behaviour of high-ranking officials, ‘covering up’ and nepotism.

The essence of acting ethically lies in the choice of sub-Saharan Africa governments to undertake institutional action themselves to ensure morally correct behaviour by public officials (Denhardt 1995, 108). Ethics management is important because the issues faced in the human resources field are rarely black or white. Therefore, line-function employees and human resources specialists should ensure that their behaviour conforms to the broader public administration framework. Selected guidelines for professional ethics in sub-Saharan Africa countries are analysed subsequently.

Firstly, one of the central aspects of ethical deliberation is the implementation of a Bill of Rights that binds all legislative and executive institutions of the state at all levels of government. The 1996 South African Constitution includes a Bill of Rights (ch. 2), which is the cornerstone for democratic public human resource management. It entrenches key democratic values such as human dignity, freedom and equality. With regard to equality, the question is: What is the proper course of action to ensure equality in the public sector? One of the most common forms of ethical deliberation in this regard is the establishment of a representative bureaucracy. According to this approach, it is argued that a public sector with, for example, a substantial number of female employees are more likely to take into consideration the views of women than an institution consisting of males (Denhardt 1995, 116–17). However, this approach has produced mixed results and has serious limitations. In the real world of public administration, there is no absolute assurance that a member (representative) of one particular group (e.g. gender or ethnic group) would necessarily reflect the group’s human resources policy preferences.

Secondly, there should be agreement on the basic values and principles of ethics management. To some extent this strategy is found in section 196(1) of the 1996 Constitution of South Africa. Under this legislation South African public human resource management is governed by, among others, democratically guided values and principles, such as a high standard of professional ethics; efficient, economic and effective use of resources; ‘good’ human resources management practices; and representivity.

Thirdly, another way to ensure that public sector employees act ethically is to involve them in the policy, planning, and decision-making processes of government. In South Africa, involvement by employees took its real impetus from the passage of the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000. It requires maximum feasible participation. Although the issue of communication/participation seems normal enough, the scandal of ‘ghost workers’ has stalked almost every public administration system in sub-Saharan Africa from the 1980s to the early 1990s. Governments in sub-Saharan Africa countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia did not have proper data collection, storage and information systems in place. As a result, these countries did not know how many public sector employees they had (Adamolekun 1999, 110). However, from 2001 on, the South African government began to pay serious attention to this. Communication and participation were also strengthened by related legislative and administrative developments, among others, the

- Public Service Act (Proclamation) 103 of 1994, which provides for the organisation and administration of the South African public service in terms of roles, functions and communication lines (authority matters)
- Section 16 of the Labour Relations Act 42 of 1995, which gives labour unions the right to access information regarding public sector employees; this emphasises the importance of keeping updated paper and electronic-based employee records
- Section 31 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997, which requires the state as employer to maintain information about public sector employees (e.g. employees’ names and occupations)
- National Archives of South Africa Act 43 of 1996, which promotes efficient and effective record-keeping management practices in the public service.

Finally, one of the key strategies for high standards of ethical behaviour in the human resources field involves the establishment of ethical structures such as the Ombudsman, Auditor-General and Public Service Commission. These structures are referred to as ‘watchdog’ agencies. They are regarded as supreme institutions because they are usually directly linked to the constitution of a country. The role and functions of these agencies were redefined in the 1996 Constitution in South Africa. For instance, the Ombudsman now constitutes an office that independently receives and investigates allegations of maladministration. Another ethical structure that has been in use for a number of years is the Auditor-General. According to the 1996 Constitution of South Africa, the main responsibilities of the Auditor-General are to audit and report on all government income and expenditure, promote efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and prevent corruption. Since the division of authority encapsulates much of the challenge that contemporary public human resource management poses for the South African government, the Public Service Commission can be used as another example to illustrate the convergence of

perspectives around the watchdog role of independent agencies. As the agency responsible for investigating, monitoring and evaluating human resources matters in the public service, the Public Service Commission also acts in terms of the 1996 Constitution. Importantly, the Public Service Commission can improve the ethical conduct of public service employees by raising awareness about ethical issues, promoting ethical behaviour and communicating codes of ethical conduct.

Many sub-Saharan Africa countries, such as Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have established ethical structures like these (Adamolekun 1999, 9). Although their performance varies significantly, their mere existence affirms a commitment to address maladministration and corruption.

6. Public human resource management as an integrated process

The exploration of public human resource management in sub-Saharan Africa above points to the fact that the human resources function has developed and expanded in response to a variety of influences from the political, social and cultural environments within which it operates. Therefore, it is evident that public human resource management systems in, for example Côte d'Ivoire, may differ from those in corresponding institutions in other sub-Saharan Africa countries. In fact, Laleye (Adamolekun 1999, 190) has observed that, in a country like Benin, one of the major weaknesses is 'the rigid personnel management practices' applied by the government. During the 1990s, the South African government abandoned this rule-bound approach and substituted it with an integrative approach. This happened when South Africa became a constitutional democracy. This new approach has not only promoted the growth of democratic public administration in general, but also infused public human resource management with a result-oriented approach. In the view of many, this integrative approach applies to all aspects of public administration in human resource management. It implies a commitment to aligning the operational vision, mission, and objectives with public human resource management functions, practices, management tasks, skills and strategies to ensure the specific outcomes demanded by the client.

A strong case could be made for the integrative approach to public human resource management. If applied correctly to its fullest consequences, there is a possibility that it will enhance overall institutional performance, and simultaneously add value to better service delivery. This approach gives public human resource management a strategic element that allows for co-operation by all role players to enhance institutional performance and service delivery capacity. However, after a comprehensive literature study of public human resource management in South Africa, it is clear that certain factors impact on an integrative approach. The 1996 Constitution, the Public Service Regulations of 2001 and the Baseline Implementation Guide of 1999 entail an integrated framework designed to promote effective performance of all public human resource management activities (Republic of South Africa 1999b). One aspect of the Minister's and Department of Public Service and

Administration's response to the rise of the integrative approach has been to increase all public managers' responsibility for people management by taking on more human resource management responsibilities. The integrative approach considerably reduces the rules-driven mindset public officials were used to and strengthens the management part of public human resource management. This requires a redefinition of the key roles of all public officials. In fact, integrative public human resource management seeks to maximise the values of efficiency, economy and administrative effectiveness through good human resources practices such as recruitment, selection, placement and the general treatment of public officials at work. In the South African public service, the underlying assumption behind the integrative approach is that the focus should be on delivering good services as opposed to the preoccupation with rules and regulations for which the public service is well known. In trying to grasp what is involved in this integrative approach, it may be useful to give an overview of the integrative approach, which the South African government refers to as the *New Integrated/Public Service Management Framework*.

7. Components of the integrative approach

As discussed above, the integrative approach in the South African public service entails the integration of many aspects of public administration in public human resource management. Several of these aspects are examined below.

7.1 Paradigm shift

It should be evident that the integrative approach involves a number of complex concerns and key features. It is not surprising, therefore, that it requires a new mindset. Some have even viewed it as a new paradigm or a new way of thinking about public human resource management. Jun (1986, 59) maintains that, in the few attempts to apply the paradigm concept to public administration, the emphasis was on a paradigm shift. This can be summarised as a shift to meet changing environmental conditions and to improve the process of public administration. As European public sector institutions have already made impressive efforts to reform, public sector institutions in sub-Saharan Africa have been accused of inefficiency and a lack of response to the demands of citizens. Many experts have voiced the opinion that sub-Saharan Africa public administration has not kept pace with international developments. Developments in the past have shown that, for sub-Saharan Africa, the 1950s and 1960s were times of political and economic advances, the 1970s years of relative stagnation and the 1980s a period of decline, also referred to as the *lost decade*. In the wider public administration context, the 1990s began with some renewed optimism mainly driven by an emphasis on democratisation and a search for administrative efficiency (Kiggundu, in World Public Sector Report 2001, 48).

Within this broad framework of pressures, and driven by political transformation, the South African government introduced the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service* of 1997. In fact, the White Paper strongly promotes this shift as one away from personnel administration to human resource management. Nowhere are these shifts more striking than in the dramatic changes already implemented in the public human resource management systems in South Africa. These changes can be seen as a fundamental shift from a centrally controlled, process-driven public human resource management system to one which

- is representative of all the people of South Africa
- is focused on service delivery outcomes
- holds public officials accountable for their actions
- assigns managerial responsibility for results
- promotes a drive for efficiency, effectiveness and economy (Republic of South Africa 1997c).

7.2 Integrated human resources planning

The shift from personnel administration to human resource management underlies the integrative approach to public human resource management. Although this seems normal enough, it has only been since the 1990s that a few sub-Saharan Africa countries began to pay serious attention to management reform aimed at professionalising the human resources function in order to provide services with the best value for money. Sub-Saharan Africa countries are moving into areas of performance management (Botswana), decentralisation (Ghana), rationalisation (Malawi), total quality management (Mauritius), and public service delivery (Namibia), to name but a few examples (Ayeni 2002). Although there are considerable variations in the human resources reform programmes of these countries, one surprising element is that the approach is not integrated. Without question, the seriousness of the integrative approach is best illustrated by the South African case, which requires all public service institutions to integrate their planning with their strategic and operational objectives. In other words, planning in every public sector institution must direct all strategies, practices, procedures and resources (including human resources) to achieving core service delivery objectives.

Although public administration systems in sub-Saharan Africa have already established certain powers for and assigned actions to the human resources function, there has long been controversy about their exact demarcation and integration. As a case in point, the South African Public Service Regulations of 2001 set the minimum requirements for the creation of a unified and integrated planning approach, which involves different but related human resources processes. The following are the most basic issues to consider (Republic of South Africa 2001): preparing a strategic plan, establishing and sustaining a service delivery improvement programme, establishing

an information plan, managing diversity, establishing sound employer/employee relations, delegating and authorising responsibilities, and submitting an annual report to the legislature (Republic of South Africa 2003a).

7.3 Managing specific human resources outcomes

An interesting issue that currently cuts across the field of South African public administration is the expectations of people that the human resources function will perform well. Underlying this notion is what people look for in terms of ‘good’ human resources services. Although there will always be considerable disagreement about what it means to perform well, it is expected of the human resources function to reach its mandated purposes efficiently and effectively. But there are different yardsticks to measure human resources performance. Therefore, public human resources specialists must have a clear understanding of how their inputs contribute to the final human resources outcomes or results. While executing human resources functions and practices, human resources specialists must bear in mind that all these activities must be performed so that specific outcomes are achieved. These outcomes can also be viewed as measurements. They are derived from the 1996 Constitution and are summarised in the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service* of 1997 as follows: promoting fairness, applying equity principles, encouraging accessibility, fostering transparency, demonstrating accountability, and increasing professionalism.

In dealing with public human resource management outcomes, it is required to balance competing pressures with one another. Clarifying outcomes raises consciousness of different aspects of public human resource management. Here too public human resources specialists have a difficult task since their actions will continually (if applied correctly) be under the spotlight to see if they have realised the specified outcomes. Public human resource management actions will always be measured against complex issues such as

- questioning, in particular instances, high remuneration levels of line-function employees when staff in other sections are paid low wages (fairness)
- complying with instructions to consider job applicants who are HIV-positive (equity)
- allowing, within the rules, outside researchers to study human resources matters in a public sector organisation (accessibility)
- reporting to fellow workers in a transparent and honest way about pending layoffs (transparency)
- accepting the decision of a disciplinary enquiry when allegations of transgressions are raised and being prepared to resign in such a case (accountability)
- reporting to a higher authority observations of employees not pulling their weight (professionalism) (Erasmus et al. 2005, 18).

Central to the understanding of the outcomes concept is that public sector institutions that succeed in achieving outcomes will deliver better services than those that do not focus on them. The outcomes identified are by no means exhaustive. However, an attempt was made to examine those that are generic to public human resource management and with which public human resources specialists are mostly concerned.

7.4 Enhancing institutional performance (better service delivery)

A question most frequently asked is: can human resource management really have a positive impact on a public service institution's performance or service delivery levels? Many stakeholders in the public administration field would say no. The most commonly quoted illustration of this is the stereotyped view of line-function employees that public human resource management is a clerical job and lacks a focus on performance. In essence, this view holds that, as a staff or advisory function, public human resource management does not have a direct link to enhanced performance or better service delivery. As a result, it is incorrectly believed that public human resource management is not associated with performance enhancement (Dessler 1981, 14–15). Fortunately, this has been proven wrong and largely rejected. It has already been found that human resource management techniques, procedures and systems, as applied by human resources specialists and line-function employees in their human resources role, have a real impact on the performance and service delivery levels of public sector institutions. Researchers found, for example, that the use of screening tests has resulted in the identification of high-potential candidates saving employers millions of rands per year. Another example refers to the implementation of occupational health and safety programmes, also a human resource management-related technique, which can reduce costs of lost time, accidents and illness. The fact is that most aspects discussed in this article – human resources planning, recruiting, selecting, appointing, appraising, remunerating and labour relations – will have a measurable effect on the performance of public sector institutions. Every human resources activity has an influence on all the others. All human resources activities – the people appointed, the training provided, how performance is measured and employees are disciplined – affect performance, not only of individuals but of institutions as a whole.

8. Impact of the integrated approach to public human resource management

The 1990s proved a turning point with respect to integrative public human resource management in South Africa. The discussion above demonstrates that the Department of Public Service Administration gradually accepted the integrative process. A good illustration is the number of official documents (acts,

regulations, white papers and management guides) generated on the integrative approach. This interest in the integrative approach creates a framework for the inclusion of human resource management as an integral part of the corporate (governmental level) and business (public service institutional level) strategies. Hence, human resource management is viewed strategically in the submission of an annual strategic plan. The integrative approach is organised around various components within which human resource management strategies can be developed in the public service. These components form the building blocks of the current approach followed in the South African public service.

One question is how the integrative approach affects public managers in general. As a public manager, integrative human resource management is critical to the success of the public service, quite simply because the emphasis is on managing results and better service delivery. But what is good human resources management in terms of better results and service delivery? There can be no one answer, because there are many managerial and operational dimensions attached to this. In recent years, the Department of Public Service Administration has paid a good deal of attention to categorising the different dimensions of this integrative way of managing people in the public service. One way to approach integrative public human resource management is to accept that it brings about a fundamental shift in the roles required. It would be reasonable to expect that a human resource management system that functions in an environment of integration with elected political executives, line-function employees and human resources specialists fully aware of taking greater responsibility for people management is likely to have new roles. For example, in South Africa, elected political executives will be significantly involved in integrated human resource management. Part of the reason for this is that ultimate responsibility for the overall economical, efficient and effective management of public service institutions and their human resources rests with the elected representatives as the legally appointed executing authorities.

The key to integrative human resource management at political level is that it will be for national public service institutions and provincial administrations to determine, within nationally defined acts, their human resource management policies and practices. Flowing from this, a quite different role has emerged for line-function employees and human resources specialists within the context of the integrative approach. To understand the distinction between the roles of these two players, consider the following quotation from the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service* (1997c), ‘human resource management will therefore no longer be the sole responsibility of personnel practitioners, but rather will become a core competency for all public service managers.’ This clearly indicates that there is a growing emphasis that the day-to-day management of human resources is primarily the responsibility of line-function managers (Republic of South Africa 1997c). This shift of responsibility to line-function managers has important implications. In essence, line-function managers will have increasing

freedom, within the limits of budget allocations, to manage the human resources function independently. As a line-function manager one of the primary concerns is to understand the competencies and skills underlying integrative human resources work in the public service. Guidance on this new human resources culture (the way public service employees are expected to behave) is given in the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service of 1997* (1997c). It describes, among others, different ways for managing the human resources function in future: developing human resources strategies that are integrated with strategic and operational plans in order to ensure that future staffing needs are met; managing peaks and troughs of workflow through mechanisms such as part-time work, job-sharing and more flexible working hours; offering opportunities for development through improved performance, removal of unnecessary barriers between occupational groups and increased opportunities to compete for positions at higher levels; identifying and keeping updated with selection criteria that are based on the inherent requirements of the position to be filled; designing cost-effective recruitment strategies to reach and attract candidates from all sections of the population; assessing every public service employee's performance annually against mutually agreed objectives; institutionalising diversity management by integrating it with the public service institution's management practices.

But integrative human resource management certainly does not only impact on the roles of political executives and line-function employees. As already indicated, a third group, human resources specialists, who are probably some of the most important role players, is also involved. Managing people in an integrative way requires a new dual role for human resources specialists. On the one hand, they will be expected to provide professional support and guidance to line-function employees on matters such as employment legislation, public service policies, labour market trends and employee development issues. This role is normally referred to as the 'consultative' role. On the other hand, it will also be vital to draft comprehensive human resources policies for consideration by senior management, participate in strategic planning sessions of public service institutions, and ensure that human resources systems contribute effectively to the attainment of institutional objectives. This role is generally known as the 'policy development/planning' role (Republic of South Africa 1997c).

9. Conclusion

This article introduced the nature and content of integrative public human resource management and how it fits into the South African public service. Specific attention was devoted to the meaning of public human resource management, the management part of the human resources function, the key responsibilities of a public human resources manager and the integrated nature of the field. The starting point of this article, as outlined above, was to explore the different elements of public human resource management and the implications of

the integrative approach for the analysis of the human resources function. More specifically, the aim was systematically to introduce to the field of public human resource management, dominated by the line/specialist partnership, the integrative approach as an additional and new perspective for explaining the shaping of human resource management in the South African public service. Based on the work of Ayeni, Beugré, Denhardt, Kiggundu and Erasmus et al, and guidelines of the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service* of 1997, the focus was on new mechanisms that affect the human resources function and related practices. It was apparent from the research that the human resources function could become more integrative in its approach and way of operating in the South African public service. It appears that the South African public service has moved closer to achieving best practice in integrative public human resource management in sub-Saharan Africa.

The impact of the strong push for integrative public human resource management, linked to the wave of democratic transformation, is likely to mark public administration systems in many sub-Saharan Africa countries in the twenty-first century. The findings in this article demonstrate that the South African public service has introduced a period of change in the management of people. This new integrative approach provides the impetus for line-function employees and human resources specialists to reposition the human resources function by adopting new roles. These new roles require the acquisition of new skills so that they can add value to the overall service delivery function of the public service. The concepts used in this article shift the attention to an interactive level of managing people irrespective of the institution involved. The integrative approach can clearly be used in different sub-Saharan Africa institutional settings. This implies that there is no need for the development of a separate approach. In this way, the integrative approach presented in this article offers a fruitful perspective for cross-African comparative research into the effect of integrative human resources practices and their positive relationship with improved service delivery.

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