

Globalisation and human resource management: an integrated framework for the African public service

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Abstract

In the past decade we witnessed dramatic changes in public administration, mainly due to the challenges posed by globalisation. This article argues that these changes are spilling over into the public human resource management (PHRM) field worldwide. However, it is unfortunate that in many cases contemporary ideas and thoughts on how to manage people have gradually been transferred from the developed world (the West) to the developing world (in this case sub-Saharan Africa, further referred to as 'Africa') without any relevance to their particular circumstances. As a result, there is a paucity of research in Africa on PHRM problems, and these issues have not been addressed critically in the mainstream literature. This article attempts to reframe our understanding of the management of people in the African context, and suggests a combination of the best of the knowledge systems in both worlds. By combining the knowledge, we might broaden our understanding of the impact of globalisation on PHRM. On the basis of the globalisation literature, the author develops an integrative framework that advocates a synthesis between the modern PHRM perspectives of the developed world and the experience of managing people as it unfolds on the African continent.

Key words: diversity management, ethnicity, extended family, globalisation, merit, public human resource management, public service, teamwork

1 INTRODUCTION

The management of human resources in the public service in today's environment – particularly given the challenges of globalisation – has become an ever-increasing demand. As African states are increasingly drawn into the hypercompetitive international world of well-developed state economies through the forces of globalisation, the capacity to achieve some degree of synchronicity with international

role-players has become critical. Many observers agree that globalisation has forced Africa towards the larger domain of the developed world, and that international human resource management (HRM) problems in the African context have not been strategically and critically addressed (Kamoche, Debrah, Horwitz, Muuka and Nkombo 2004: xvi). Although a lot of human resources (HR) information is available in different parts of the globe, the terrain of HRM in Africa remains largely unexplored. As a consequence, the corpus of knowledge on HR issues has mainly been created from the perspective of the developed world (Dederling 2002: 275). These realities suggest that in order to strengthen the theoretical underpinnings of PHRM and bring about more effective and integrative HRM in the public service workplace, much reflection is needed on the way people are managed in Africa (Wilkinson, Bacon, Redman and Snell 2010: 395). Over the years, researchers have placed too much emphasis on HRM research in the European Union and North America (the West) and have adopted, often without question, generic theories and paradigms for the rest of the world. Many of these theories and paradigms were developed for the West without taking cognisance of the cultural and practical nature of the work life of Africans (Van Zyl, Dalglish, Du Plessis, Lues and Pietersen 2009: 53).

This article reports on an investigation that was done in an attempt to solve the following main research problem (rationale): How can contemporary HRM thinking be integrated into the HRM systems of the African public service? In this context, the primary goal of the research was to determine what the current global perspectives on PHRM are. The secondary goal was to highlight these perspectives in the context of the developed world and the African domain of managing people. This was done to present the reader with an integrated framework that reflects the most important trends and patterns of managing people, and simultaneously supports Africa in confronting pressing global HR challenges in the public service.

The applied research methodology (which provided both secondary and primary data) unfolded in four phases:

- (1) the secondary data involved a literature review as the basis for examining the theoretical framework, as articulated in international and national sources. The review assessed, in a concise way, the exposition of HRM and globalisation and the current challenges African governments face to become actively involved in the international world;

- (2) an analysis was done of the literature on contemporary thinking about international PHRM (mainly in the developed world). In this regard, the body of literature that is most relevant (focus) to this article, attempts to compare

contemporary global thinking on PHRM with managing HR in the context of the African public service;

(3) a smaller body of literature was used to evaluate HRM in the African context, in order to critically interpret certain phenomena in PHRM. The analysis was based on the most familiar components of the collectivist approach to PHRM in Africa, including the importance of the extended family and ethnicity. An attempt was made to rely largely on primary data (units of observation) collected from reports such as the *World Public Sector Report* (2005 and 2008), the *African Governance Report* (2005 and 2009), the *Overview Report of the State of Local Government in South Africa*, and speeches of politicians and senior public officials, in order to enrich the descriptive and analytical reviews;

(4) a synthesis was reached in a descriptive way and presented components of a possible PHRM model that relates to an integrative framework for the African public service.

The sample for the research comprised a randomly selected number of African governments including Morocco, Botswana, Tanzania and South Africa. It should be noted that the limited use of case study research in the selected African countries and the selective sampling of African governments might not be adequate to draw generalised conclusions about PHRM and globalisation and, more particularly, in the African context. In this article, extensive empirical verification of HRM practices in Africa is therefore woefully lacking. Hence, because much of the analysis is based on a descriptive collation of secondary research (and, to a limited extent, primary research), caution should be exercised in cross-country comparisons since the political, social and economic environments differ significantly from country to country. Thus, because of the inherent dilemmas experienced in this regard, the author is of the opinion that any data about the general utility of the integrative framework for PHRM in Africa should be offered with an appropriate measure of caution. This article nevertheless establishes the groundwork from which further research can be undertaken to provide a framework of better practice for African HR problems.

2 OVERVIEW OF HRM AND GLOBALISATION

This part of the article is aimed at shedding light on the nature and content of the precursors of globalisation, and analysing the current challenges for PHRM in a globalising world. It indicates that the way in which HR is managed currently is, to

some extent, a creation of the developed world and that less attention has been paid to the developing world – more specifically, Africa.

2.1 History of globalisation

Many authors believe that globalisation is not a new phenomenon. Globalisation, in its most basic form, refers to the integration of economies throughout the world through trade, financial flows, the exchange of technology and information, and the movement (migration) of HR (Address by the Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund at the Southern Africa Economic Summit 2009: internet). Beyond this simplistic analysis of globalisation, Akindele, Gidado and Olaopo (2002: 3) argue that globalisation is principally aimed at ‘the universal homogenisation of ideas, cultures, values and even lifestyles’. Indeed, the interdependence and interconnections among nation states have a long history possibly dating back to as early as the 16th century – or even earlier, to the time of the Roman, the Hellenistic and the Persian Empires (United Nations 2001: 8). There is also evidence that interaction between Africa and the rest of the world is not new. There appears to have been many different trade links between Africa and the Mediterranean, the Arab world and the East, even from the seventh century (Van Zyl et al. 2009: 45). Although many of these early interconnections were mainly economic, there were also political interests.

Globalisation, which can be categorised into three main phases, has largely been driven by the interests and needs of the developed world. The *first phase* of globalisation began before the First World War. One of the key patterns that characterised interconnectedness during this phase was that developing countries specialised in primary commodities which were exported to developed countries in return for manufactured goods (Fernandez 2005: 10; United Nations 2001: 7; Van Ginneken 1990: 441). This resulted in a situation where the African continent (economy) became a producer of raw materials for industries in advanced capitalist societies in the developed world (Akindele et al. 2002: 2).

After World War II, a *second phase* of globalisation continued the level of global capital flows and international trade patterns emanating from the first phase. What is important to understand about globalisation during this phase, is that there was a need for greater openness in competitive international trade and for the intensification and liberalisation of investment policies. More specifically, the liberalisation policies included financial sector deregulation, the removal of controls over foreign exchange and enhanced freedom of trade (United Nations 2001: 9–10). There was also an increase in the mobilisation of skilled labour in the tradable goods sectors, which put the focus on HRM. With the expansion of economic activities,

unskilled labour found increased employment opportunities in non-tradable sectors such as construction and transportation (Address by the Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund of the Southern Africa Economic Summit 2009: internet). On the negative side, as was the case in the first phase, the economies of most developing countries remained stuck in exporting primary commodities, and these countries were increasingly isolated from global capital flows. To a certain extent, this was as a result of the developing countries' own inward-oriented public policy frameworks (Fernandez 2005: 10; Pillay 2003: 262–266).

Since the 1980s, the concept 'globalisation' has become increasingly popular. This new intensified attention to global issues has also become fashionable in the speeches of world leaders. Examples that come to mind are the Soviet reformist Michael Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain. These leaders were the first to ask for global restructuring, openness, a new way of global thinking, cooperation between superpowers, administrative reform (for example, massive privatisation of state assets and rationalisation of government functions) and an end to the Cold War (Farazmand 2007: 464). Many people see this period as the *third phase* of global integration which has been spurred on by the dismantling of the nation state, a drastic increase in technological innovation and the establishment of international social networks (Farazmand 1999: 3; Kettl 2000: 491). Some analysts even go as far as to suggest that globalisation during this era has forced countries to live in a market economy rather than in the traditional nation-state structure, with its shrinking national political power where government's role in economic affairs is now deemed obsolete (Huddleston 2000: 673; United Nations 2001: 11). However, the single most important development during this phase is that globalisation has had disastrous consequences for the African continent. It is argued that this third phase of globalisation can be considered a 'lost decade' for Africa, in terms of the multiple crises (for example, the drop in the price of primary products, the burden of external debt and rapid population increases) the continent is experiencing (United Nations 2003: 4–5; United Nations 2005b: 9; United Nations 2005c: 27). A review of the literature shows that globalisation has deepened the integration of African countries into the global systems of production, finance and administrative reforms that relate to the functioning of the state in the international sphere. This has encouraged capital inflow mainly from developing countries and, unfortunately, has brought about Western ownership of formerly African public-owned enterprises. As is pointed out by Akindele et al. (2002: 6), this has led to the obliteration of the African culture and to a Eurocentric view of the realities of Africa. Dederling (2002: 275) states that 'globalisation is nothing but another stage in the history of the imperialist conquest of the continent'.

What is clear from the above analysis is that in most cases during these three phases, the different role players have, to a certain extent, neglected to deal with HRM matters in particular. In general, many of the issues that have been identified as contributing to globalisation were economic and political in nature. However, a more substantial rise in international HRM is reflected in the gradual rise of international social networks during the last period of the third phase. It has become clear that technological innovations have facilitated greater global integration and awareness through the establishment of worldwide international organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). These social movements are mainly driven by a concern for, amongst others, democratic ideals, human rights, the environment and poverty. However, as was the case during the first two phases, there is relative weakness in terms of integrating Africa into the structures of the international world. Currently, no African country is a member of the G8 (countries with the strongest international economies) and, apart from South Africa, none was invited to be included in the newly-formed G20 (United Nations 2001: 50). However, within Africa itself, there are several inter-governmental organisations with which particular African governments are associated. The most renowned are the Economic Commission for Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Association for Public Administration and Management. The substantive aspects of activities associated with these organisations are usually complex, and often overshadow the significance of their international cooperation with developed countries. However, to defend themselves against claims of global isolation, the African Management Development Institutes' Network was established as a regional online centre of the United Nations Public Administration Network to ensure international cooperation, especially in the field of training (United Nations 2009a: internet).

The above concerns also relate to the overall relatively weak and stagnant influence of Africa in international PHRM matters (Budhwar and Debrah 2001: xvii). The continuing absence of Africans as representatives of their countries at international PHRM discussion forums is a visible obstacle that shows the pervasive weakness of the African system to interact globally. Representation of African countries on the reputable, accredited International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR), for example, has not been altogether satisfactory. No representative from Africa has been included in a leadership position of the IPMA-HR, which is currently governed by a 17-person Executive Council (International Public Management Association for Human Resources 2009: internet). Another example of the inherent difficulty of introducing Africa to international PHRM is found in the continent's under-representation on the advisory (editorial) boards of

international subject-related journals. As is the case with IPMA-HR, there is no representation of Africa on the advisory boards of the two well-known PHRM journals: *Public Personnel Management Journal* and *Review of Public Personnel Administration Journal* (Public Personnel Management 2009: internet; Review of Public Personnel Administration 2009: internet). These journals focus on international trends, case studies, and the latest research by top HR scholars and industry experts. Another obstacle is the fact that Africa is lagging behind and is not fully integrated into the international PHRM research agenda. This is based on the fact that during the last decade or so, scholars such as Blunt and Jones (1992), Budhwar and Debrah (2004), and Jaeger and Kanungo (1990) have highlighted the dearth of HRM research in Africa. A survey of the literature shows that until recently only a small number of studies have been conducted on HRM in Africa (see Budhwar and Debrah 2001; Haruna 2003; Kamoche 2002; Mellahi and Wood 2003). Although there is sufficient reliable scientific data on the nature of HRM systems in the developed world, researchers are still looking for answers on HRM in the developing world, including Africa (Wilkinson et al. 2010: 394). Findings from an analysis of all 16 editions of the *Public Personnel Management Journal* of IPMA-HR during 2006 to 2009 suggest that Africans do not publish enough in accredited international research journals to ensure that the global world becomes familiar with PHRM affairs in Africa. From 2006 to 2009, only one article from South Africa (under the HIV/AIDS theme) appeared in one of the four 2006 editions of this journal (Ramsingh and Van Aardt 2006: 181).

The above situation poses a great challenge to governments on the African continent to become actively involved on the international PHRM scene, so that they can reap the benefits of globalisation. In the absence of reliable knowledge on the PHRM situation in Africa, one clear lesson is emerging: in order to benefit from globalisation, African countries should consider a broader perspective on PHRM, which attempts to develop an integrative framework that consists of those aspects of HRM that are recognised as ‘best practices’ and are acceptable in the global world. It therefore seems worthwhile to point out aspects in the global world (in this case, the developed world) that can be included to strengthen and enhance the systems of managing people in the African public service.

3 CONTEMPORAY GLOBAL THINKING ABOUT PHRM

To date, four distinct theoretical perspectives have dominated (and continue to dominate) the focus and locus of PHRM. This review shows that there is empirical support for all these perspectives, albeit to diverse degrees. A useful framework for discussing what a PHRM system might look like is provided from four different

perspectives: (1) administrative management; (2) positive personnel management; (3) strategic planning; and (4) human resource management. These perspectives are positioned in a general PHRM context that is mainly based on the developed world experience. Today, increasing attention is being paid to the global context, where more recent efforts such as the cognitive perspective (which suggests that employees are not merely passive responders in the world of work) and the human (social) capital management perspective (where employees are treated as social beings in the workplace) are on the foreground. Yet, the focus remains on the above four perspectives and their implications for PHRM.

3.1 The administrative management perspective

This PHRM perspective is associated with traditional public administration and embodies a set of rules about merit-based HRM. HR functions such as hiring, testing, recruitment and promotion, are overseen by a centrally driven HR authority that dictates the rules and procedures to help the government take politics out of PHRM, with the ultimate aim of eliminating political patronage and enhancing effective service delivery (United Nations 2005d: 8). The intention is to professionalise the workforce and provide neutrality (in terms of the merit system), equity and fairness in the distribution of public goods (Condrey 2005: 6–7).

Although they are not fully in use globally, the principles of this perspective continue to influence contemporary PHRM. They also impact significantly on the HR function in Africa, and will continue to do so in future. In trying to redress merit-based employment, individual countries in Africa are opting for the administrative style of management that has its origin in the developed world philosophy and rationality of administration. For example, as regards performance management in the public service in Botswana, the Directorate of Public Service Management is centrally responsible for the administration of government employees. This implies that the directorate furnishes all public service ministries and departments (top-down) with job descriptions and performance appraisal instruments, and it is expected of these ministries and departments to make recommendations to the directorate for follow-up or other actions (Kamoche et al. 2004: 30). An analysis of the directorate's work reveals that one of the major focus points is on performance management. There is also a separate Performance Management Unit which operates from the specifically defined performance management philosophy of improving productivity on a sustained basis and inculcating a culture of performance, accountability, quality service delivery and citizen satisfaction (The Directorate of Public Service Management 2009: internet).

3.2 The positive personnel management perspective

This perspective posits that HR specialists and line function managers should work together to enhance employee morale and organisational performance. This shift away from the past is not unrelated to the principles of the administrative perspective, but is accompanied by the idea that in order to enhance public service delivery, there should be no separation between HRM and general management (Bernhardt 2001: 25–26; Tompkins 1995: 10–11).

The positive personnel perspective is now well established in most parts of the world. It should be noted, however, that all the work on this perspective has taken place in the developed world. It is not uncommon, however, to find that a few African countries are implementing the principles of this perspective, and that it manifests in different forms. For example, by drawing on the principles of this perspective, the South African government has decided to eliminate the multiplicity of unnecessary control measures in HRM affairs and has initiated the Public Service Management Framework. This framework makes provision for devolving and decentralising HR powers to lower levels of management. The management case for this framework rests on closer cooperation between line function managers and HR practitioners, thus assisting the government in bringing service delivery closer to its citizens and improving its responsiveness to public demands (Department of Public Service and Administration 2008: internet; Erasmus, Swanepoel, Schenk, Van der Westhuizen and Wessels 2005: 69).

3.3 The strategic planning perspective

This perspective has evolved with the logic that an institution should be managed strategically and proactively. Its proponents note that HR managers should be fully involved in the strategic planning process as an important first step toward integrating HRM with general management. The primary goal is to ensure that HR policies and programmes are systematically linked to the strategic needs of the organisation (Swanepoel, Erasmus and Schenk 2008: 148–149). This perspective also entails a new power relationship within the institution, which implies that HR staff become major role players in the management teams of institutions when policy or programme decisions are being made, and also in ensuring that HR implications are considered (Berman, Bowman, West and Van Wart 2006: 311).

Many countries are very enthusiastic about this perspective and have implemented its principles widely. Although the perspective was designed in the developed world, its spill-over effect has been noted in some African countries. In Tanzania, for example, the compilation of a strategic plan is a stipulated criterion for HRM in the

public service. This new form of people management in the Tanzanian government is a direct response to the Public Service Management and Employment Policy (PSMEP), which has resulted in a fundamental shift to the strategic management of human resources that has been initiated by the President's Office of Public Service Management. Under the PSMEP, the focus is mainly on the evaluation of future tasks that the institution expects to perform, the skills required to perform them and the available resources to support these actions. Strategic HRM is an essential part of the PSMEP: it is given serious consideration and is applied to HR activities such as recruitment, promotion, training, retirement and resignation. Due to its emphasis on the strategic management of people in the public service, the Tanzanian government has also integrated strategic HRM into its budgetary programme, where provision has to be made for it in the Public Service Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (Kamoche et al. 2004: 75; President's Office of Public Service and Administration 2009: internet).

3.4 The human resource management perspective

In recent times there has been a rediscovery of the critical role of HR in enhancing institutional efficiency and improving service delivery. This implies that the HR element has become key in managing public affairs (Sikula 2001: 427). This new development – where human resources are regarded as the most valuable asset of institutions – has resulted in the evolution of the HRM perspective. An overwhelming feeling has emerged that government employees are now operating in a different (postmodern) environment and are engaging in complex, knowledge-intensive jobs that create public value through the use of their intellectual capital. The main goal of this perspective is to invest more on the human side of the public service, to increase employee motivation and commitment through a process that can include strategies such as participative management programmes and team-based arrangements (Berman et al. 2006: 13; Nigro, Nigro and Kellough 2007: 43–48).

Although the African continent is more cautious, the seeds of this perspective can be seen in a few countries, such as Mauritius. The Mauritian government announced a 2005/2010 Government Programme, in which it undertook to make significant strides towards modernising its public service in terms of HRM. Through this programme, the government has been able to provide (empower) the public service with a 'Master Plan' to enhance the work environment of public officials by giving them facilities such as information technology and modern, functional materials (including stationery), to improve efficiency. The importance of training public officials has also grown into a national concern, especially since the establishment of a Civil Service College and an Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB).

The Civil Service College will lay the foundation for the promotion of institutional capacity to ensure lifelong learning, e-learning and multi-skilling. An important feature of the IVTB relates to the refunding of training costs (referred to as the ‘levy grant scheme’), to act as an incentive for training programmes that are undertaken by employing institutions in Mauritius. It is worth noting that the Mauritian government is taking steps to eliminate bureaucratic red tape and administrative bottlenecks, in order to manage the HR function more efficiently. This is an attempt to reduce time and cost in employees’ service provision and to promote effectiveness in terms of public service delivery (Address of the President of the Republic of Mauritius to the National Assembly 2009: internet; Kamoche et al. 2004: 75; United Nations 2005a: 143).

Although not exhaustive, the above discussion of the four perspectives highlights the diversity of views and practices in the history of PHRM worldwide. This research shows that considerable progress has been made in Africa in terms of changes in the HRM field. However, several scholars have noted that Western management concepts and writings have dominated the thinking of academics and managers in Africa, and that very little effort has been made to test indigenous knowledge scientifically in order to develop it into a coherent body of knowledge, for the purpose of guiding HRM practices in the African public service (United Nations 2009b: 10). Although some African countries have embarked on creative change programmes to introduce contemporary HRM principles, their effective implementation has been slow and far from satisfactory, and has often been neglected for political and ethnic reasons.

4 PHRM IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

The previous section of this article showed that PHRM has been largely informed by the developed paradigm. Since the African public service is our focus, the analysis in this part of the article will be based on a review of HR trends experienced in the context-specific environment of Africa.

4.1 African framework for PHRM

One possible way to investigate HRM in Africa, is by identifying and examining key factors that are context-specific and can be of value in strengthening the theoretical underpinnings of managing people in the African public service. It is important to note that in many African countries, factors such as traditional cultural beliefs, Western colonial processes and religious influences are more highly valued than in the developed world (Budhwar and Debrah 2001: 5–6). This implies that most Africans have maintained their work-related cultural values, and as a consequence

have distinct approaches towards public employment. For example, in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya, traditional beliefs in spirits, witchcraft and gods are still emphasised (Wilkinson et al. 2010: 397). According to Kiggundu (in Jaeger and Kanungo 1993: 147–148), these traditional practices tend to have negative effects on work performance. This inference is based on the premise that these beliefs often compromise key business principles (integrity, efficiency and effectiveness) in the formal bureaucratic system. In their critical analysis of the existing public management systems in Africa, Beugre and Offodile (2001: 538) illustrate that a high degree of subjectivity is also embedded in HR functions such as recruitment, selection and promotion. These authors are further of the opinion that such practices remove fairness from the treatment of public officials.

Along similar lines, Budhwar and Mellahi (2006: 292–295) analysed HR-related issues in African countries with colonial traditions, and found that in countries such as Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, the impact of French colonialism is clearly evident in their application of HRM policies. The authors point to the predominance of the French language as a criterion for employment in the public service, and are of the opinion that this approach overrides the principle of efficient public service delivery since it results in inequitable criteria for appointment. In a study by Jackson (2004: 23–34), on the impact of religion on HRM practices in Africa, the findings indicated the strong prevalence of Islam and Buddhism in countries such as Morocco and Egypt. The study also showed that Islamic and Buddhist beliefs have a high degree of homogeneity around the values of power distance and collectivism. In practice, this tends to produce rigidly designed HRM policies, where loyalty to (amongst others) one's family and friends (extended family) and the culture group (ethnicity) is expected when strategic employment decisions are made.

4.1.1 Importance of the extended family

It is worthwhile to note that in most parts of Africa, the extended family is the building block of any organisational structure. In fact, it is generally recognised that the extended family system socialises the individual employee into the structure of the organisation and offers a sense of security and belonging (Buegré and Offodile 2001: 537). This, in essence, is manifested in the adoption of strategies such as in-group favouritism and nepotism. Essentially, such strategies remove fair and equitable HRM from the public workplace and suggest a set of practices where jobs are reserved for relatives and friends (Beugré 2002: 1097; Mellahi and Wood 2003: 378).

Needless to say, the selection procedures of governments all over the world should not only be impartial, but should also be based on administrative competence and performance. Experience in the international environment has demonstrated that where criteria are based on principles other than performance, institutional capacity is undermined, the integrity of the public service is compromised and corruption is promoted (Denhardt and Denhardt 2006: 293–294). Many African countries have strict rules to safeguard the public service from the corrupt practices of the extended family. For example, Nigeria has different laws (such as the Public Procurement Act, 2007, the Code of Conduct Act, 1989, and the Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2007) to combat corruption. In countries such as South Africa and Ghana, the law requires public officials to declare their income, assets and liabilities before assuming office, and again when they leave office (United Nations 2009b: 215). Despite these positive strategies, the general trend is that public officials in Africa make arbitrary use of public funds and engage in corruption. In this regard, the *African Governance II Report* of 2009 (United Nations 2009b: 218) revealed that ‘corruption in the civil service is almost a universal problem in Africa’. In South Africa, for example, the Auditor-general’s 2006/2007 report on provincial affairs indicated that more than R120.9 million had been paid from the Mpumalanga fiscus to officials in the province for own business (including that of family members and friends) they conducted with the government in the 2005, 2006 and 2007 financial years (Republic of South Africa 2009b: internet). Corruption in the South African Police Service is also an enormous problem. An example of this is that 222 members of the Police Service were suspended on corruption charges in 2006/2007 (United Nations 2009b: 215). Apart from the South African examples, many other African countries face serious problems in this regard. In a survey done by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the perception of the experts who were interviewed on this matter was that many public services in Africa are fairly or completely corrupt. These experts were of the opinion that in many cases corruption has reached endemic proportions in Africa. A study conducted by the World Bank found that the rising culture of corruption was the most important factor in weakening public service institutions. A 2004 survey conducted by Transparency International suggests that corruption perceptions for all African countries, except for Botswana, rate five or lower on a 10-point scale. In Kenya, for instance, ministers have been implicated in corrupt deals such as bribery and favouritism, for awarding scholarships, government positions and contracts to relatives (United Nations 2005a: 149).

Many authors (Beugré and Offodile 2001; Budhwar and Debrah 2004; Wilkinson et al. 2010) maintain that in a global world that relies on contemporary global thinking on PHRM, one can no longer focus on organisational structures that are built on the practice of the extended family, unless it facilitates organisational

performance. In order to compete in the global world, African PHRM should, therefore, be receptive to the basic norms of performance that are based on the principles of the administrative management perspective, which promotes performance management where merit is the basic yardstick for the rewarding, selection and placement of government employees (Bovaird and Löffler 2003: 128). Efforts to rescue and redesign the African public service from the disadvantages of the extended family concept of managing HRM (i.e. nepotism) will require innovative programmes. By far the most important challenge is effective PHRM reform, which should include a radical overhaul of its compensation system, the revival of a commitment to professionalism, and mechanisms to get rid of those who are redundant, unproductive or corrupt (United Nations 2009b: 220).

4.1.2 Ethnicity

The ethnic diversity of Africa has played a major role in designing HRM systems for the public service all over the continent. It has been observed that ethnic diversity has much to do with group formations, where one ethnic group rules over another in order to gain control of resources – something which simultaneously gives them power and puts them in a privileged position. History indicates that ethnicity has been one of the major HR strategies African governments have opted for over the years, and it has manifested in an approach of exclusion (Nyambegera 2002: 1078–1083). Hence, it is not uncommon to find public service institutions in Africa comprising of mainly one ethnic group. According to the *African Governance Report II* of 2009 (United Nations 2009b: 142–143), this weakness stems partly from the postcolonial African state that developed after independence, where the public service was controlled by strong political leaders and their supportive elites. It is, therefore, important to recognise that today recruitment and career prospects continue to be greatly influenced by ethnic, political, cultural, linguistic and religious affiliations, rather than by contemporary HRM principles of objectivity, equity, transparency and merit.

Unfortunately, ethnic diversity (as applied in Africa) is seen as institutional discrimination, because it leaves people in certain ethnic groups (especially minorities) without access to equal opportunities and rewards. It has played a major role in excluding talented and capable people, and has led to talent wastage, organisational conflict and poor service delivery. As a result of this exclusionary approach, many African countries have no balanced representation when it comes to the different sectional interests in senior appointments in the public service. In a 2009 survey by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, at least 50 per cent of respondents in Chad, Togo, Madagascar, Egypt and Kenya, indicated that the

composition of senior appointees hardly reflected a cross-section of society at large (United Nations 2009b: 145). This strengthens the argument that progress towards merit-based HRM has been slow in Africa. In Botswana, for example, the selection of public officials is based on merit, i.e. vacancies are usually publicly advertised, but promotions are based on long service, not on merit or performance. This is equally true in Burkina Faso where, despite prescribed merit-based regulations, access to senior positions in the public service often depends on declared membership of the ruling party. The foregoing is further corroborated by the fact that a significant majority (more than 75%) of respondents in Niger opined that the public services were rarely or never governed by principles of merit (United Nations 2009b: 143). The institutionalisation of a merit-based public service is also problematic in South Africa. In the same survey of 2009, a significant percentage (more than 25%) of the consulted experts indicated that merit-based principles are rarely or never applied in the South African public service (United Nations 2009b: 144). To comprehend the practical implications of ethnicity in the workplace, it is essential to note the findings of the 2009 *Overview Report of the State of Local Government in South Africa of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs*. The striking point in this report is that it is now being acknowledged that there are too many opportunities for fraud and corruption at local government level in South Africa – something which can be attributed to issues such as nepotism (Republic of South Africa 2009a: internet).

The above reasoning makes it clear that because of the plural and ethnic nature of their workforces, it would be beneficial for African governments to recognise and accommodate diversity in their HRM systems. In terms of the principles of the strategic planning perspective, it is in the best interest of African PHRM that public service institutions move towards a more inclusive and integrative style of managing HR. This change in management style, which is more in line with contemporary global thinking, implies the adoption of the management diversity discourse. In other words, African PHRM will have to commit to managing ethnic diversity positively. There is, nevertheless, the need for convergence between ethnic balancing and diversity management, in the sense that governments should institutionalise policies that guarantee inclusivity – a theme greatly relevant in an era of globalisation (United Nations 2005a: 52). The way forward is to ensure that African PHRM systems are strengthened by diversity management practices, and that they explore other possibilities of promoting inclusivity in a rapidly globalising world.

5 TOWARDS A NEW SYNTHESIS

Although the above analysis is not exhaustive, it helps to clarify the state of managing people in the international public administration environment. It appears that a new PHRM framework is necessary to align global perspectives with African HRM. However, it is worthwhile to note that a framework that is advocated and implemented in the developed world, reflecting the main work patterns of these countries, will not be easy to transfer to developing countries in Africa.

This article, therefore, does not promote the blind transfer of HRM perspectives and practices from the developed world to the African public service. The rationale behind this is that some perspectives and practices in the developed world will apply to the African public service context because this is an age of internationalisation and global interdependence. This approach, called the ‘integrative framework’, amalgamates Western (developed world) HRM perspectives into indigenous African PHRM practices. Of course this does not mean a rejection of the premises of the African PHRM approach. Rather, as this article suggests, it refers to a combination of the different approaches, in order to improve the way in which the African public service manages its HR function.

An important challenge that PHRM researchers and managers face, however, is how to incorporate desirable traditional public service perspectives, while at the same time promoting contemporary global thinking about HRM and integrating this with African PHRM (United Nations 2005d: ix). As pointed out, a new PHRM synthesis should concentrate on the best attributes of the four PHRM perspectives. The administrative management perspective, for example, is anchored in the enduring HR principles of professionalisation, merit and neutrality in terms of employment in the public service. Although it has been applied in a few African countries, as the preceding discussion indicated, the application of merit principles is missing from many contemporary African public service settings (United Nations 2005a: 16). The strategic planning perspective stresses the need to elevate the HR function and provides it with a strategic element to ensure cooperation between all the different role players, to enhance public service performance. This article suggests that the unifying perspectives of such a PHRM synthesis are necessary for the African public service to compete globally. Although it might be somewhat idealistic to try to identify a universalist style of PHRM for Africa, it is worth pointing to aspects that such a style might include. The above discussion presented the following components of a possible PHRM synthesis as it relates to an integrative framework for the African public service:

- A politically neutral, professional public service that promotes merit-based principles rather than operating through the practices of patronage and nepotism, which undermine quality service delivery;
- A system that makes provision for a strategic role for HRM in the public service that facilitates a more inclusive and integrative style of managing the HR function and emphasises opting for the diversity management discourse.

The above discussion highlights an important challenge for HRM researchers in Africa. The most important challenge, according to Wilkinson et al. (2010: 400–403), is to develop theoretical/conceptual models that can highlight the context-specific nature (for example, the impact of patronage and nepotism) of the activities of the HRM office in the African public service. Deliberate steps should be taken to ensure that the unique aspects of indigenous African HRM policies and practices are highlighted, to achieve a balance with the changing emphasis of HRM functions in developing countries.

6 CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the complexity of globalisation and its possible influences on PHRM in Africa. It is argued that HRM in the African public service, which is confronted by the challenges posed by globalisation, is an urgent priority. The situation calls for a new synthesis of PHRM, in accordance with the contemporary perspectives and practices of the developed world. By combining and reconciling the different perspectives and practices of PHRM, as applied in different contexts (in both the developed and the developing world), the continent can meet the challenges of the future. The article highlighted that the kind of professional PHRM that is needed in Africa relates, in many respects, to an integration of the principles of HRM in the developed world (modern perspectives) and the indigenous experiences of Africa. In this regard, it is observed that the principles of merit and diversity management have not been given sufficient attention. Consequently, it would be helpful if researchers examined more fully their impact on employment relations in the African public service.

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