

# Chapter 1

## Streamlining Public Sector Human Resource Recruitment and Selection Processes Through Digitalisation: Prospects and Challenges for African Bureaucracies

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has had a profound impact on technological advancements in different development sectors around the world through digitalisation. In public sector human resource management, particularly in the areas of recruitment and selection of employees, the deployment of technology has enabled human resource managers to eliminate physical interactions in the processes of hiring employees through the digitalisation of the human resource management function. Through a desktop review methodology, which is anchored on the conceptual content analysis technique, this chapter argues that the digitalisation of recruitment and selection processes has created opportunities to curb challenges such as bureaucratic delays, nepotism and corruption which undermine fairness in the hiring processes. However, as the chapter reveals, challenges such as underdeveloped technological infrastructure, resistance to change, lack of digital literacy skills and the digital divide continue to plague the efforts to digitalise recruitment and selection processes in public sector institutions in African bureaucracies.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The public sector refers to the collection of institutions that are managed and controlled by the government (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). Institutions in the public sector include central government ministries, departments, agencies and the local government. Public sector institutions provide a wide range of services to the citizens, including but not limited to education, public healthcare, electricity, water and sanitation, transport, defence, policing and law enforcement (Kuwali, 2024). The public sector is regarded as the biggest employer in any country as it requires many employees (Erin et al., 2024). Many people often prefer to work in the public sector because of the high job security and tenure of employment in comparison to the private sector. In the same vein, many experienced workers often leave public sector institutions to search for better salaries in the private sector. Moreover, public sector institutions continue to expand their mandate and size, which makes them require more personnel. For these reasons, public sector institutions never stop recruiting. The role of human resource managers in the public sector is highly demanding as they deal with many applications throughout the year.

In the 4IR era, which is characterised by rapid technological advancements, the public sector urgently needs to modernise its human resource recruitment and selection processes through digitalisation. Digitalisation depicts the augmented use of digital and computer technologies to facilitate work processes (Dabić et al., 2023). Recruitment is concerned with attracting qualified candidates for a vacant or newly formed job role while selection entails the systematic process of selecting the right candidate for the job from the pull of applicants (Metz, 2022). As governments across the African continent strive to establish more efficient, transparent, and meritocratic systems for hiring talent, it is crucial to understand the transformative potential of digitalisation in recruitment and selection. This chapter provides a unique analysis that not only highlights the benefits of embracing digital tools in human resource management but also recognises the unique challenges that undermine digitalisation initiatives in the African context.

The emergence of digital technologies offers an opportunity to enhance public sector human resource recruitment and selection by addressing biases embedded in talent hiring through human interface platforms (Singh & Sahoo, 2023). Habitually, in African countries such as Nigeria, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa, the competition for jobs is intense because of high job demands, which leaves job seekers susceptible to fraudulent or clandestine recruitment and selection practices (Okolie & Irabor, 2017; Zinyama, 2021; Mokgolo & Dikolola, 2023; Saad & Itika, 2024). Subsequently, by being the key human resource management functions, responsible for deciding who joins the organisations and who does not, the recruitment and selection process is often infested by nepotism and corrupt tendencies (Mugari et al., 2023). In some cases, formal recruitment is never done, or when it is done, it is only a formality because the advertised jobs would have been 'taken' already by those with 'effectual ties' with the human resource managers (Choto & Poshai, 2023; Metz, 2022). Thus, the use of technology can enable applicants to send their job applications directly to the human resource managers or recruitment and selection officers. While these benefits are glaring, implementing digital solutions in the African context comes with challenges. These challenges include underdeveloped technological infrastructure, socio-economic disparities, and cultural distinctions.

The digitalisation of recruitment and selection procedures in the public sector is one of the essential transformations in contemporary African bureaucracies. Previous research has concentrated on the utilisation of big data to inform human resource management practices like recruitment and selection in the public sector (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022) and the integration of Artificial Intelligence in these processes (Chilunjika et al., 2022). Majam and Jarbandhan (2022) also emphasise the benefits of employing big

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