

Chapter 7

Embracing Transformative Digital Human Resource Management in the Nigerian Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is generating changes in every element of society. The implication of this digital transformation continues to vary based on the readiness, available resources, and the level of development of each nation and organisation. Digital transformation is anticipated to have a far-reaching positive effect of modernising public organisations through the HR element. This chapter, based on a desktop review, explores the adoption of digital HRM in the unique context of the Nigerian public sector, characterised by inefficient bureaucratic structures, obsolete methods that foster nepotism, and limited innovation. The literature presents opportunities for transforming the longstanding HRM challenges in the sector. However, the adoption of digital HRM is faced with resistance from the workforce, political interference, inadequate infrastructures, and a lack of necessary digital skills. Digital HRM can be propelled by a strong will and commitment from all stakeholders to align with technological change imperatives and foster a more responsive sector.

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) represents a stage of technological advancement that is transforming lives and workplaces through digitalisation, including the use of the internet and the incorporation of unified devices as real-time online applications (Palos-Sánchez et al., 2022). The digital era is defined by various terms and concepts such as e-government, Information technology (IT), digitalisation, and the 4IR among others. Nalubega and Uwizeyimana (2019) assert that 4IR is a revolution propelled by

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyber-physical systems. This revolution is marked by the introduction of digital business models and digitalised human endeavours and product and service offerings. The 4IR is primarily driven by mobile internet and cloud technology, advanced manufacturing and 3D printing, big data analytics, biotechnology, advanced robotics, autonomous transport, machine learning, new technologies and energy supplies, as well as the Internet of Things (IoT) (Ojogiwa et al., 2023). The digital transformation has implications for many fields of activity and every aspect of human life. The transformative era is reshaping the global workplace, and it offers both prospects and challenges for Human Resource Management (HRM) in organisations, either in the public or private sector (Fenwick et al., 2024). This infers that smart technologies are altering existing norms of professions such as HR to improve their functions.

Nigeria has an opportunity to leverage the prospects of digitalisation to reform its public sector that is reported to be burdened by entrenched inefficiencies, nepotism and corruption, and influenced by political machinations. These challenges are connected to the existing HRM practices in the sector (Orga & Ogbo, 2012; Nosike, 2023). The Nigerian public sector struggles with outdated HRM systems, which impede both the sector's effectiveness and the country's sustainable development. Existing opaque procedures and skills gaps continue to erode the efficiency of civil servants and hinder the effective delivery of public services. Its traditional recruitment and selection processes, as well as its performance management and talent development strategies, are often flawed by bias and nepotism, requiring a paradigm shift to keep pace with global advancements (Fiias & Augustine, 2020; Yaro, 2014). The Nigerian public sector presents a unique context marked by bureaucratic structures, diverse demographics, and historical challenges. This chapter acknowledges the distinctiveness of this context, recognising that effective digital HRM strategies must be tailored to address specific contextual nuances for successful implementation.

Employees, also referred to as a human resource or human capital, are considered valuable assets for an organisation, and have been emphasised to be a country's most crucial asset, whose development and well-being should be invested in, as they make valuable contributions in accomplishing organisational objectives (Aroge & Hassan, 2011). It is evident that people are essential to the means of organisations' production. Regardless of digitisation and automation, people are still essential for setting up, operating, and maintaining machinery. Although this has generated arguments and further studies among scholars, Nardo et al. (2020) emphasised that human resources must have new skills to comprehend and analyse the growing need for innovation. An argument by Budhwar et al. (2023) indicated that the initial designs and operating procedures are often engineered by humans who have experiential knowledge of the problems that the machinery is intended to solve. Therefore, it could be inferred that with advanced algorithms, human judgement and adaptation are required in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Humans ensure that ethical issues are not overlooked and adhere to the environmental and social responsibility. The concept of Human Resource Management (HRM) transcends mere employee handling; it is a strategic and organised approach to maximise an organisation's workforce (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022). HRM oversees the various factors, strategies, practices, principles, operations, activities, functions, decisions and processes related to employees in an organisation. The growing technological landscape also associated HRM's responsibility with maintaining employment relationships and their ensuing dynamics (Van der Esthuizen, 2021). The effective management of limited talents and skills, and the recruitment and retention of trained employees are paramount issues in HRM. The quality of employment stands out as a fundamental concern for HRM, while it faces the critical challenges of framing an active work system and flexibility, reward systems, and employee or political influence in the public sector (Salau et al., 2020). This necessitates research on how the opportunities that are associated with digital HRM

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