

# Chapter 10

## Revolutionizing Public Sector Human Resources: A Digital Frontier for Innovative Transformation


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### ABSTRACT

*The Industrial Revolution 4.0 sometimes known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has gathered momentum, and it calls for faster production rates, more flexible scheduling, and better customer services. The advent of automated and digital technologies has already revolutionised many private industries and has the potential of revolutionising public sector human resource management in South Africa. However, the South African public sector has been lagging in digital transformation. The integration of digital advancements in Human Resource Management (HRM) within the South African public sector is imperative considering the need to improve the delivery of public goods and services. The existing Human Resource Management (HRM) processes used in the recruitment of public officials are outdated and prone to biases, which can negatively impact talent acquisition, diversity, inclusion, and employee morale. This chapter aims to delve into specific strategies and approaches necessary for effectively implementing digital transformation initiatives in HRM within the public sector context. The chapter utilised a document analysis and conceptual analysis, where traditional scholarly and peer-reviewed sources on public sector human resource management and digital examination were examined. The analysis of documents pointed to key findings regarding the pivotal role of revolutionising Public Sector HRM through digital skills development which is critical in driving the transformation of the public sector in the 4IR. The findings reflected further the underlying impact of revolutionising public sector HRM which lies in enhancing individual and organizational productivity. Human Resources (HR) emerges*

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*as a strategic facilitator in this process, necessitating job redesign and organizational restructuring to foster readiness and innovation. However, there is a notable gap in understanding tailored strategies for the unique challenges faced by the South African public sector. Policy frameworks are identified as critical enablers of ethical and effective digital transformation in HR processes.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the wake of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide adopted digital transformation as a strategic attempt to adjust to global disruption. The worldwide disruption was also highlighted by Nachit (2020) where the researcher affirms that this disruption affected both the public and the private sector. Rupeika *et al.* (2022), reiterates that the pandemic sparked a digital transformation wave across industries, giving businesses a chance to radically change their HRM processes and strategic visions, including HRM strategic business decisions to achieve long-term growth and value creation. Moreover, Juanita (2020) pointed out that the rapid advancement of information technology has made it necessary to reevaluate organizational roles, responsibilities, and HR functions.

According to Nachit (2020) numerous businesses, including state-owned enterprises, have transitioned to digital operations, spurred by the need for preventive measures amid the pandemic. The study by Brunetto and Beattie (2020) indicated that HRM in public services is significantly under-researched compared to corporate HRM. Moreover, the gap in understanding how Human Resource Management processes can be digitally transformed, particularly within the South African public sector, which is highly characterised by political interference, and corruption, is undeniable, despite extensive research based on digital transformation that has been conducted by researchers.

Continued reliance on manual HRM processes fosters biases in recruitment within the public sector, resulting in detrimental consequences. This reliance could lead to diminished public sector performance due to suboptimal talent acquisition decisions, decreased diversity and inclusion, heightened legal risks due to non-compliance with anti-discrimination laws, and erosion of employee morale and trust in the public sector.

Juanita (2020) argues that in the digital era, technology-based HR transformation is required to meet the needs of public institutions. A handful of studies have been conducted regarding the digital transformation of Human Resource management processes in the public sector. However, most of these studies have turned a blind eye to the digital transformation of the South African public sector that is characterised by, political involvement, and manipulation of public sector human resource and supply chain management processes which make it difficult to integrate new HR systems to support corrupt political appointments in the key strategic positions of the public sector.

This study aims to shed light on how public-sector HR processes can be digitally transformed by recommending strategies to enhance digital capabilities in public-sector HR, minimizing biases in recruitment and selection through technology, and proposing policy considerations for optimizing HR digital transformation in the public service. Furthermore, this study explores the challenges faced by the South African public sector and the role of digital tools in streamlining HR processes amidst those challenges. Bahiro and Imron (2024) emphasized the importance of innovative HR strategies in navigating the challenges of digital adoption.

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