

# Strategic Human Resource Management in Tanzania Public Service College: *Reality or Rhetoric?*

Ausi Nchimbi

Tanzania Public Service College, P.O. Box 1534, Singida-Tanzania

E-mail address: [nchimbiausi@gmail.com](mailto:nchimbiausi@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Management literatures now argue for the organizations to take more strategic approach to the management of people who are the most valued asset of the organization. However the discussion of Strategic Human Resource Management mainly took place on the business environment very little research has been done in the public sector especially in developing countries like Tanzania. This study therefore seeks to explore the extent to which strategic Human Resource Management exist in reality within Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC) by using the Ulrich's HRM four-role Model Survey. A sample of 33 respondents was randomly selected from TPSC. In addition the study examines the potential barriers that may prevent HR personnel from acting strategically. The findings of the study show that HR personnel at TPSC were weak and unable to act strategically. Furthermore, the study revealed that lack of knowledge and strategic capacity among HR personnel, lack of involvement of HR Personnel from setting corporate goals and policies; lack of clear organizational structure and lack of strategic integration between HR strategy and business strategy hinders HR personnel at TPSC to act as strategic partners. Implications and recommendations are offered and future research agenda is proposed.

**Keywords:** Human Resource, Human Resource Management & Strategic Human Resource Management

## 1. Introduction

From literatures of Human Resource Management it has become more evident that Human Resource Management should be managed in accordance with the strategic Human Resource Management approach. The study by Gichui & Ragui (2013) confirmed this view as they noted that in the turbulence environment facing organizations, strategic Human resource Management is looked upon as the savior to the strategy implementation. It is common believe in both the business and the academic World that the Human Resource of an organization is a source of competitive advantage, provided that the policies for managing people are integrated with strategic Business planning and organizational culture. (Beer et al.... 1985)

According to Armstrong (2009 pg 48) Human Resource strategies set out what organization intends to do about its Human Resource Management policies and Practices and how they should be integrated within the business strategy and each other.

Therefore it can be concluded that Human resource strategies can play a major part in the creation of an environment that enables people to make the best use of their capacities, to realize their potentials to the benefit of both the organization and themselves. The Human Resource management literature have discussed a lot about the evolution of Human Resource Management however many of them emphasizes on empirical works from the private sector (Armstrong 2009, Guest 2003, Purcell 2002). The above assertion is also supported by Royor and Sarip (2014) who noted that

*"an extensive literature had discussed the evolution of HR field. Many of the empirical works however took place in the private sector. This is probably because of the fast changing market in the private sector makes the discussion of HR in the sector more intriguing to researcher"*.

As in the business sector public sector also can benefit a lot in the discussion of HR field. (Yahiaui et al....2015) believed that, administration efficiency depends on Human Resources. Therefore, Public institutions should be managed through modernized and improved Human Resource Management by building up individual's efficiency which will automatically improve their performance. This resulted to the growing body of opinion that public services must be more effective. This forced governments across the World to consider new management practices in the public service. During the last two decades, the public sector has implemented a number of changes to its managerial structures, systems and processes, including restructuring, performance auditing, programme management and budgeting, and privatization of State-owned entities (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Taylor and Warrack, 1998 in Teo 2002). Some have termed this development in the public sector the 'new public management' (e.g. Kearney and Hays, 1998 in Teo, 2002) and it allows bureaucrats to manage public-sector organizations within the competitive market environment.

Like other Countries Tanzania also has undertaken considerable reforms in managing public service in the shape of new Public management. Among other things Human Resource management constitutes the core focus of Tanzanian's Public service reform agenda. See Bana (2009). The Public Service Reform Program (PSRP) introduced by Tanzanian Government in the year of 2000 aimed at improving Public service delivery and policy management in deed every public organization is required to introduce new management system so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its service delivery and to ensure that value for money is achieved. ( Bana 2009, Sulle 2014 and Rugumyamheto, 2005). The emphasis is on achieving efficiency, effectiveness and economy in the activities performed by public-sector organizations, and on an ability to compete with private-sector organizations which operate in similar markets.

This paper, therefore, seeks to explore the extent to which strategic HR exist in reality within Tanzania Public Service College as it applied in the business environment. In addition the study examined the obstacles that currently prevent the HR professionals from acting in a strategic capacity. This is followed by an outline of the methods that were used to conduct this study. The latter part of the paper presents the literature review followed by the methodology used, next is the discussion of the findings, the paper ends with conclusion, Implications, limitations and the areas for further studies.

## 2. Literature Review

Human Resource Management as a field of study passed through a complex history from simply being the Personnel function to strategic partner to the organization. Traditionally HR was viewed as the conscience of the organization and the employee advocate: now HR is expected to be a strategic partner to the Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O) and partner to the line management. As correctly posited by Weiss (1999) Strategic Human Resource Management has been and remains, one of the most powerful and influential ideas to have emerged in the field of business and management during the past twenty five years.

The development of HRM can be traced back from 1900's when companies started to hire someone to manage the welfare of employees. The first HR department was only established in 1920 (Jamrog and Overhalt 2014 in Royo and Sarip 2014) The discussion continues about how HR personnel moved from just handling the files of employees to proper HR functions such as Job scope, etc. Royo and Sarip (2014) they further argued that strategic issues in Human Resource Management did not become a topic of discussion for practitioners and academicians until the mid of 1990s. There were a number of reasons that makes Human Resource Management to move from just handling file of employees to the proper HR functions i.e. strategic partner. Yeung and Brockbank (1994) were able to identify the reasons for this move; according to them pressure to reduce costs, higher expectations of customers, the constant drive to meet global competitive challenges and the opportunities offered by advancement in information technology were the driving forces behind the movement of Human Resource management from just handling file of employees to strategic partner to the organization.

As you can see HR has transformed from Personnel to strategic human resource management. Thus the focus of HRM today is on the effective overall management of an organization's workforce in order to contribute to the achievement of desired objectives and goals. All the HR process e.g. recruitment, human resource development, performance appraisal, remuneration are seen to be integrated components of overall HRM strategies hence the strategic nature of HRM. (Rotich, 2015)

In order to understand the application of Strategic Human Resource Management it's better to understand the roles of Human resource Management that have changed as a result of movement of human resource management from just handling file of employees to strategic partner. Discussions about the roles of Human Resource Management were mainly based on Ulrich's model of multiple roles of Human Resource Management. A number of Researchers used this model to discuss the roles of Human Resource Management such as Royo and Sarip (2014), Brockbank (1999), Buyens& De Vos (2001) Truss (2008) and Marler (2009).

According to Ulrich (1997) there are four key HR roles namely administrative expert, employee champion, change agent and strategic partner. The role of administrative expert focuses more on the administrative side, for example improving work processes, reducing operational costs and increasing efficiency. For him this is the most important role of HR departments. The second role of HR department is employees champion; this is associated with the HR role to be an intermediary between the management and the employees. According to Ulrich this role is very important because the commitment of employees depends much on whether their needs are being met or not. The third role of HR department is Change agent in which HR is expected to facilitate change in the organization. According to Ulrich being a change agent HR become a clearly part of the value

added role of the HR professionals. As a business partner; the highest role of all is the strategic partners here HR departments are expected to assist their organizations in achieving its targets. HR department must be able to translate the organizational objectives in to policies and activities that help to achieve those targets. Many scholars see this role as critical one since it is the one that can strategically integrate the HR planning with the organizational planning.

Other scholars such as Weiss (2013) suggested that HR roles should focus on three major areas people, processes, organizational processes, and business transformation. According to Weiss people processes involves the employment life cycle that employees engage, ongoing assistance and support, to when they eventually leave. Organizational processes covers the value added organizational processes, here HR department is expected to contribute to the organization by creating a learning process whereby people can share their experience of what works and what doesn't work. The business transformation in this area HR department works at the strategic level. They help organization deal with issues and gain its competitive position within the market place.

The various discussions about the role of Human Resource Department bring this paper to the question of how the HR department is actually playing this strategic role that has given so much emphasis in the literature. Since it has been proved in the literature that Human Resource is the most valued asset of the organization the Human Resource function is expected to play more strategic role than ever before due to the rapid changing nature of the business environment. They are expected to be involved strategically in the organization. The theme behind strategic Human Resource management is the integration of the Human resource Policies, processes and practices with the overall business strategy of the organization. The study conducted by Gichuhi and Ragui (2013) concluded that Kenya like other developing countries, require the implementation of strategic Human Resource Management to sustain investments and growth. Similarly Westhuizen (2006) noted that the concept of Strategic Human Resource Management in the public sector holds a considerable promise for improving service delivery in the South African Public Sector.

Therefore it is clear that in today's environment Human Resource Department is expected to be involved strategically in the organization. Unfortunately, many discussions about strategic Human Resource Management took place in private sector very little research has been done in the Public Sector especially in Developing Countries like Tanzania. Therefore, this study focused on the question how the HR department in Tanzania Public Service College fulfills its roles by using the Ulrich Model of HR roles. The next section will discuss the research methods used in this study.

### 3. Research Methodology

In order to explore the roles of Human Resource Department in Tanzania Public Service, Tanzania Public Service College was chosen. TPSC was chosen because as an executive agency is semi-independent public institution, designed to operate at arm's-length from its parent Minister. Its oversight is exerted through a Ministerial Advisory Board (MAB), chaired by the Permanent Secretary (PS). Generally, TPSC have well defined customers (or service users) as well as some degree of financial autonomy. Customers of TPSC tend to be charged (at least partially) for the services they receive. In its operation TPSC borrow several key characteristics from the private sector. First, its management is devolved, with day to day operations removed from the influence of parent Minister. Second, have some degree of financial independence; High level manager, such as the Chief Executive is typically employed on a performance contract basis, linked to its outputs. TPSC Executive is also recruited openly and on a competitive basis. The above statements make TPSC more responsible to employ modern approaches to the management of its most valued asset (people) than other government institutions.

Since the main objective of this study was to explore the roles of Human Resource Department in Tanzania Public Service, a case study approach was applied because it helps to understand complexity of the HR functions in Tanzania Public Service. It is impossible to gain an in-depth understanding by using surveys only. According to Royo and Sarip (2014) a case study should be used to understand complex issues. Interview guidelines and questioners were developed. The questions in the interview and questioners only acted as a guide for the researcher. The interview questions and questioners were prepared based on the criteria in Human Resource role assessment by Ulrich and Conner (1997) the assessment then used to analyze the data. A number of 33 respondents were involved in this study including HR director based on Cooperate office, HR manager also based on Cooperate office, Human Resource officers, Campus directors and Heads of Departments from all six campuses. The study used quantitative techniques with some aspects of qualitative methods.

The Tanzania Public Service College (TPSC) was established in year 2000 under the ambit of the Executive

Agencies Act (Act No 30 of 1997) The aim of its establishment was to fill an extant void in terms of a comprehensive training facility for Public Service, the changing needs of Public Services resulting from instituted reforms, and the need for an autonomous financially sustainable public service College. It is in light of the above that the TPSC is the preferred service provider of knowledge, skills, and consultancy services to the Tanzania Public Service and a part of building a culture of continuous learning for public servants. TPSC has six campuses strategically located in four zone, namely the Coastal zone (Dar es Salaam campus), the Southern zone (Mtwara campus), the Northern zones (Tanga campus), the Central zone (Singida and Tabora campuses) and the Southern highland zone (Mbeya campus).With the total of more than 170 full time employees who are fully engaged in the delivering short and long term training programmes, undertaking action researches and consultancies aimed at improving public service delivery.

### 3.1 The instrument used

The data collection instrument (Ulrich’s HRM Four-role model Survey) was used in the first part of this study. The tool was developed by (Conner & Ulrich, 1996) in order to test the theoretical model of HR roles discussed in Conner and Ulrich (1996) and Ulrich, (1997). The instrument used in this study is survey designed to determine the existence and the extent, of four HR roles outlined by Ulrich (1997) and Conner and Ulrich (1996) the 40 items on the instrument were arranged in groups of four (strategic partner, Administrative expert, Employee Champion and change agent) A likert scale was used on the questionnaire with the following ratings: 1= To very little extent, 2= To little extent, 3=To some extent, 4= To a large extent, 5= To a very large Extent. Conner and Ulrich (1996) found that the survey instrument provided reliability for the measurement the HR roles. It was further determined that the survey has both content and construct validity (Conner, 1999).

In addition participants were also asked to mention the obstacles that currently prevent the HR professionals of Tanzania Public Service College from acting in a strategic capacity.

## 2. Findings

Table, 1 Sum and Mean scores for each Domain of Human Resource Roles

	N	Sum of score	Mean of score per item	Std. deviation
Strategic Partner	33	1022	3.09	0.74
Administrative Expert	33	1336	4.04	0.51
Employee Champion	33	1325	4.01	0.58
Change Agent	33	1028	3.11	0.69

Source: field data

Table 1 show that the highest sum and mean score of HR roles is that of the Administrative expert. It obtained the sum score of 1336 out of maximum score of 1600. (10 items x 5 points of maximum score per item times 33 respondents) It has also the highest mean score per item of 4.04 out of maximum mean score of 5.0 (points of Maximum score per item). HR role of employee champion ranks second with sum score of 1325 and mean score of 4.01. Strategic partner role is ranked the last which only obtained score of 1022 out of 1600 and the mean score of 3.09.

One of the objective of the study has been to explore the extent to which strategic human Resource Management exist in reality within Tanzania Public Service College as it applied in the business environment. The Results in table one shows that the scores are higher for the administrative expert and employee champion and lower for strategic partner and change agent roles. These findings look similar with that of (Conner & Ulrich, 1996) which found that the HR function is stronger in the day to day operational area than in strategic and change agent area. The findings also concur with that of (long, 2008) which revealed that HR professionals in Malaysian Manufacturing sector do not play their roles as strategic partner and change agent. The results of this study provides a clear evidence that Human resource function of Tanzania Public service college particularly HR professionals seem not playing their role as strategic partners and change agent. The results do not correspond with the considerable reforms undertaken by the Tanzania government in managing public service in the shape of new Public management. In which among other things Human Resource management constituted the core focus of Tanzanian’s Public service reform agenda. See Bana (2009). The Public Service Reform Program (PSRP) introduced by Tanzanian Government in the year of 2000 aimed at improving Public service delivery and policy

management in deed every public organization is required to introduce new management system so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its service delivery and to ensure that value for money is achieved. ( Bana 2009, Sulle 2014 and Rugumyamheto, 2005).

Table, 2 Perceived obstacles facing HR professionals from acting as strategic partners

	N	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Knowledge and Strategic Capability among HR professionals	33	25	75.75
Lack of involvement of HR professionals from setting corporate goals	33	20	60.60
Lack of Clear organizational structure	33	18	54.54
Lack of Strategic integration between HR strategy and Business Strategy	33	27	81.81

Source: Field Data

In the second part respondents were asked to mention the obstacles that currently may prevent the HR professionals of Tanzania Public Service College from acting in strategic capacity. As it shown in the table 2 above; Lack of knowledge and strategic capacity among HR professionals to act as strategic partners by 25 respondents out of 33 which is equals to 75.75%; lack of involvement of HR professionals from setting corporate goals was mentioned by 20 respondents which is equal to 60.60%; lacks of clear organization structure was mention by 18 respondents which is equally to 54.54%; lack of strategic integration between HR strategy and business strategy was mentioned by 27 respondents which is equal to 81.81%.

The results above provides a clear evidence that Lack of knowledge and strategic capacity among HR professionals to act as strategic partners, lack of involvement of HR professionals from setting corporate goals, lacks of clear organization structure and lack of strategic integration between HR strategy and business strategy are the major obstacles that prevent the HR professionals at Tanzania Public Service from acting as a strategic partners. There is clear evidence that the shift of HR professionals at TPSC from being operational and functional experts to taking a strategic HR role is not easy. The same assertion was supported by Teo, 2002.

## 5. Conclusion, implication and Limitations

### 5.1. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that at TPSC HR professionals are viewed as the conscience of the organization and the employee advocate. They lacked capacity to play an important role as Strategic partner and change agent. Among the barrier that prevent HR professionals from acting as strategic partner were that they lack Knowledge and Strategic Capability, Lack of involvement of HR professionals from setting corporate goals, Lack of Clear organizational structure and lack of Strategic integration between HR strategy and Business Strategy.

### 5.2. Implications

Basing on the empirical findings, this study has been able to provide a more comprehensive understanding whether strategic Human Resource of the HR professionals at TPSC exists in reality or not. The study also has been able to identify the main barriers that prevent HR professionals from Tanzania Public Service College to act as strategic partners to CEO and line managers. Furthermore, the study has been able two implications, those for the CEO of Tanzania Public Service College and those for HR professionals.

#### Implication for Principal and CEO

This study revealed that HR personnel at TPSC were weak to act in a strategic approach. Definitely lack of knowledge and strategic capacity among HR personnel, lack of involvement of HR Personnel from setting corporate goals and policies, lack of clear organizational structure and lack of strategic integration between HR strategy and business strategy result for this problem. To conquer the above situation this research suggests the following actions to be taken by the Principal and Chief Executive Officer of Tanzania Public Service College.

- Allocate fund to upgrade HR personnel competences, especially in the areas of business related knowledge therefore they will be able to understand the HR implications and act strategically.
- Give HR Personnel an opportunity to become involved in the process of setting corporate goals and policy planning.
- To rethink and take corrective actions on the present organizational structure of the HR function since the present chain of command is not very clear (e.g. the relationship between HR manager base at cooperate office and HR officers base at the Campuses)
- Make sure that there is integration between HR strategy and the Business strategy.

### Implication for HR Personnel

The study recommends that HR Personnel should be proactive and flexible in their mindset. They should understand that apart from performing traditional HR functions they are also required to act as strategic partners and the agents for change in order to impact organizational performance. They should volunteer to participate in the process of developing business strategy and provide their input. Also they should continue to acquire knowledge of the firm's business, customers, competitors, products and services. Last but not least, HR Personnel should understand key HR processes such as TNA, Business process reengineering, Talent Management, succession planning and e.tc.

### 5.3. Limitations

Although the findings of the study found to be reliable due to the instrument used, the fact that a small sample size of the respondents (33) were involved and restricted to a single Public organization (TPSC) the results limit the possibility of generalizing the findings to the entire public service organizations. Future research on this subject could focus on extending the studies of this nature to a wide range of Public Organizations to include diverse respondents. However despite the aforementioned limitations the study findings offer a profound contribution to the ever expanding knowledge on Strategic Human Resource Management in the Public sector in Tanzania and East Africa.

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