



Bridging the Gap for Effective Public Sector Management – Reviewing the Critical Role of Strategic Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT –

The effectiveness of Public Sector Management in most countries has been marred by the gap between the strategic level of the organization and the Operational level causing ineffectiveness, and unrealized public goals, and mismanagement of the organization's human and material resources. This review paper, therefore, aims to critically explore the importance of strategic human resource management (SHRM) in bridging the gap for effective public sector management. The abstract review critical aspects of SHRM and how they impact public sector management. It highlights the key challenges faced by public sector organizations and the potential benefits of implementing SHRM practices. The paper concludes with recommendations for public sector organizations to adopt SHRM practices to enhance organizational performance and achieve better outcomes.

Key Word: SHRM, Public Sector Management, Gaps, New Public Sector Management

I. Background Introduction

The public sector is responsible for providing essential services to citizens, such as healthcare, education, and public safety. However, many public sector organizations face significant challenges in delivering these services effectively. These challenges include budget constraints, changing political priorities, bureaucratic structures, and a lack of accountability (Pollitt, 2013).

One critical challenge faced by public sector organizations is the gap between their strategic objectives and their operational capabilities (Bakker et al., 2015). This gap can arise due to a lack of resources, unclear goals, or ineffective management practices. As a result, public sector organizations may struggle to deliver services efficiently and effectively, leading to public dissatisfaction and a loss of trust in the government (Pollitt, 2013).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in human resource management (HRM) in the public sector along with many papers expressing the need for SHRM in enhancing public sector performance. SHRM involves aligning human resource policies and practices with the overall strategic objectives of the organization (Wright & McMahan, 2011). By adopting SHRM practices, public sector organizations can better manage their workforce, align their employees' skills with their strategic objectives, and enhance their operational capabilities.

However, there is a lack of consensus on the effectiveness of SHRM practices in the public sector (Bakker et al., 2015), especially in addressing the seeming gap between the Strategic and Operational levels in the Public Sector in most countries. While some studies have found a positive impact of SHRM practices on organizational performance, others have found no significant impact (Wright & McMahan, 2011). Therefore, there is a need for further research to understand the role of SHRM in bridging the gap in public sector organizations.

In addressing this research gap, this paper aims to draw the attention of both researchers and HR practitioners in the Public Sector that the gap between the strategic objectives and operational capabilities of public sector organizations is a critical challenge that needs to be addressed and hence proposes that SHRM practices have the potential to bridge this gap by aligning human resource policies and practices with the organization's strategic objectives.

II. Strategic Human Resources Management - Theoretical and Conceptual Relevance

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) is a concept that has gained increasing attention in both academic and practitioner circles over the past few decades. At its core, SHRM is about aligning human resource policies and practices with the overall strategic objectives of the organization (Wright & McMahan, 2011). SHRM involves the integration of human resource management (HRM) with the strategic planning process of the organization, resulting in a more holistic and coordinated approach to managing human resources (Boxall & Purcell, 2011).

The concept of SHRM has evolved from earlier HRM frameworks, which tended to focus on the administrative aspects of managing employees, such as recruitment, training, and compensation (Jackson & Schuler, 2003). SHRM emphasizes the strategic role that human resources play in achieving organizational goals and creating sustainable competitive advantage (Wright & McMahan, 2011). It also recognizes that human resources are a source

of heterogeneity among organizations and that effective management of human resources can lead to superior organizational performance (Barney, 1991).

The SHRM concept is grounded in several theoretical perspectives, including resource-based theory (Barney, 1991), the contingency approach (Fombrun et al., 1984), and institutional theory (Scott, 2014). Resource-based theory suggests that organizations can achieve sustained competitive advantage by acquiring and deploying unique resources, such as human capital, that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate (Barney, 1991). The contingency approach suggests that the effectiveness of HRM practices depends on the organization's internal and external context, such as its size, industry, and business strategy (Fombrun et al., 1984). Institutional theory suggests that organizations adopt certain HRM practices to gain legitimacy and conform to social norms and expectations (Scott, 2014).

SHRM is a concept that has emerged as a result of the need to align HRM with the strategic objectives of the organization. SHRM has evolved from earlier HRM frameworks, and it emphasizes the strategic role of human resources in achieving organizational goals and creating sustainable competitive advantage. SHRM is grounded in several theoretical perspectives, including resource-based theory, the contingency approach, and institutional theory.

III. Public Sector Management – The Gap & Consequences on Organizational Effectiveness and Performance

Public sector management has been an area of significant concern for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, given the complexity and size of public organizations, the multiplicity of stakeholders involved, and the diversity of tasks they perform (Perry & Rainey, 1988). Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of public sector management, there are still significant gaps in its effectiveness and efficiency, leading to dissatisfaction among stakeholders and negative consequences for society at large (Fryer & Antony, 2017).

One of the main gaps in public sector management is related to the lack of alignment between the strategic objectives of the organization and its operational practices (Morgeson et al., 2013). This gap is often the result of a fragmented organizational structure, bureaucratic procedures, and a culture of risk aversion that discourages innovation and change (Fryer & Antony, 2017). The consequences of this gap include reduced effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness to changing societal needs (Morgeson et al., 2013).

Another gap in public sector management is related to the quality of leadership and management practices (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Public sector organizations often suffer from a lack of leadership development, succession planning, and performance management practices, leading to ineffective decision-making, poor employee morale, and low levels of accountability (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). This gap is compounded by the political nature of public sector organizations, which often results in a focus on short-term objectives rather than long-term strategic planning (Morgeson et al., 2013).

A third gap in public sector management is related to the effective utilization of human resources (Kettl, 2012). Public sector organizations often struggle to attract and retain high-quality employees due to a variety of factors, including limited opportunities for career development, low compensation, and bureaucratic procedures (Kettl, 2012). This gap is particularly problematic given the importance of human resources in achieving organizational goals and creating sustainable competitive advantage (Wright & McMahan, 2011).

Several empirical studies have examined the gaps in public sector management and their consequences. For example, a study by Fryer and Antony (2017) found that the lack of strategic alignment in public sector organizations led to reduced organizational performance and increased stakeholder dissatisfaction. Similarly, Morgeson et al. (2013) found that the fragmentation of public sector organizations resulted in reduced effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness to changing societal needs.

In terms of leadership and management practices, Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) found that public sector organizations with higher levels of leadership development and performance management practices had higher levels of employee morale, satisfaction, and accountability. Kettl (2012) found that public sector organizations that effectively utilized their human resources had higher levels of innovation, organizational performance, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that the gaps in public sector management have significant consequences for organizational performance, stakeholder satisfaction, and societal outcomes. Addressing these gaps requires a more strategic and holistic approach to public sector management that integrates leadership development, human resource management, and strategic planning practices.

IV. Role of SHRM in Bridging the Gap in Public Sector Management

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) has been recognized as a critical tool for bridging the gap in public sector management by aligning organizational objectives with HR practices (Purcell et al., 2003). SHRM emphasizes the importance of human capital in achieving organizational goals and creating sustainable competitive advantage (Wright & McMahan, 2011).

Several studies have explored the role of SHRM in bridging the gap in public sector management. For example, a study by Lawler et al. (2012) found that SHRM practices were positively associated with organizational performance and stakeholder satisfaction in public sector organizations. Similarly, Balan and Raja (2016) found that SHRM practices such as recruitment, training, and performance management were positively associated with employee satisfaction and organizational performance.

The importance of SHRM in addressing the gap in public sector management has also been highlighted in several conceptual frameworks. For example, the High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) framework emphasizes the importance of HR practices in achieving organizational objectives, including recruitment, training, performance management, and compensation (Gollan et al., 2012). Similarly, the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework highlights the strategic importance of human capital in creating sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

Also, an empirical study by Vandenberghe (2007) found that SHRM practices were positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment in public sector organizations. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2018) found that SHRM practices were positively associated with employee engagement and organizational performance in Chinese public sector organizations.

Another study by Ahmad et al. (2018) found that the adoption of SHRM practices such as performance management, training, and compensation was positively associated with organizational performance in Malaysian public sector organizations. The authors also found that the adoption of SHRM practices mediated the relationship between HR practices and organizational performance.

Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that SHRM can play a critical role in bridging the gap in public sector management by aligning HR practices with organizational objectives, improving employee satisfaction and engagement, and enhancing organizational performance. However, the adoption of SHRM practices in public sector organizations is often hindered by a lack of leadership support, limited resources, and bureaucratic procedures (Balan & Raja, 2016).

V. Discussions and Implications for HR Practitioners in the Public Sector

The critical role of strategic human resource management in bridging the gap in public sector management and improving organizational performance has been demonstrated by empirical evidence. This implies that HR practitioners need to adopt a more strategic and proactive approach to managing human resources in the public sector.

HR practitioners in the public sector need to recognize the importance of aligning HR strategies with the organization's goals and objectives. They should focus on recruiting, developing, and retaining high-performing employees to ensure that the organization has the necessary skills and competencies to achieve its goals. They should also invest in training and development programs to enhance employee skills and knowledge, which will improve organizational performance and competitiveness.

Moreover, HR practitioners should be proactive in implementing performance management systems to monitor and evaluate employee performance. This will help in identifying performance gaps and developing appropriate strategies to address them. The implementation of a reward and recognition system can also help to motivate and retain high-performing employees.

In addition, HR practitioners should ensure that the organization's culture and values are aligned with the HR policies and practices. They should promote a culture of openness, transparency, and accountability to enhance employee engagement, trust, and commitment. This will result in improved organizational performance and customer satisfaction.

Finally, HR practitioners in the public sector have a critical role to play in bridging the gap in public sector management through the implementation of strategic human resource management practices. By adopting a more proactive and strategic approach in managing human resources, they can contribute to improving organizational performance and achieving the organization's goals and objectives.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has contributed to the growing literature on SHRM in the public sector by expressing the potential and/or role it has in bridging the seeming gap that exists between the strategic and operational levels in most public sector institutions resulting in ineffectiveness and inefficient management of human and material resources.

I therefore herewith recommend in summary the following under-listed practical ways in which strategic human resource management (SHRM) can help bridge the gap in the public sector and aid organizational effectiveness as found in the HRM Literature:

1. **Alignment of HR Strategy with Organizational Goals:** SHRM should ensure that HR strategies are aligned with organizational goals and objectives. This alignment ensures that the HR department contributes to the overall success of the organization by recruiting, developing, and retaining high-performing employees who possess the skills and competencies necessary to achieve the organization's goals (Huselid, M. A., Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1997), Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1995), Wright, P. M., & McMahan, G. C. (1992)
2. **Employee Development:** SHRM should invest in employee development programs to enhance employee skills and knowledge. This approach will not only improve employee performance but also contribute to the organization's overall success (Guest, D. E. (1997), Noe, R. A., Hollenbeck, J. R., Gerhart, B., & Wright, P. M. (2017), Tymon Jr, W. G., Stumpf, S. A., & Doh, J. P. (2010)
3. **Performance Management:** SHRM should implement a performance management system to monitor and evaluate employee performance. This approach will help in identifying performance gaps and developing appropriate strategies to address them (Armstrong, M., & Baron, A. (2017), Lawler III, E. E., & Bourdreau, J. W. (2012), Wright, P. M., Gardner, T. M., Moynihan, L. M., & Allen, M. R. (2013).

4. **Rewards and Recognition:** SHRM should implement a reward and recognition system to motivate and retain high-performing employees. This approach will contribute to the organization's overall success by retaining employees who possess the skills and competencies necessary to achieve the organization's goals (Farndale, E., & Kelliher, C. (2018), Lawler III, E. E., & McDermott, M. (2012), Wright, P. M., Gardner, T. M., & Moynihan, L. M. (2003).
5. **Organizational Culture and Values:** SHRM should ensure that the organization's culture and values are aligned with the HR policies and practices. This approach will promote a culture of openness, transparency, and accountability to enhance employee engagement, trust, and commitment (Albrecht, M. H., & Andretta, M. (2010), Hrebiniak, L. G., & Alutto, J. A. (1972), Pfeffer, J. (1998), Schneider, B., & Brief, A. P. (1997).
6. **Adopting a Flat Structure:** Adopting a flat structure can help eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and increase transparency, leading to a more responsive and agile organization. This approach has been shown to improve employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Ahearne et al., 2015).
7. **Effective Communication:** Effective communication is critical for building trust, promoting collaboration, and ensuring that employees have a clear understanding of organizational goals and expectations. When communication is open, transparent, and two-way, employees feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to the organization's success (Kurland & Egan, 2013).
8. **Teamwork:** Teamwork can help create a culture of collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement. When employees work together toward a common goal, they can leverage their strengths, share knowledge and expertise, and solve problems more effectively (LePine et al., 2015), Rami Shani, A., & Docherty, P. (2019).
9. **Employee Involvement:** Employee involvement is also essential for bridging the gap in Public Sector Management. When employees are involved in decision-making processes, they feel more connected to the organization and are more likely to be committed to its goals (Kim et al., 2013). This approach can also lead to increased job satisfaction, employee empowerment, and organizational performance (Lapsley, I., & Wright, C. (2019), Rami Shani, A., & Docherty, P. (2019).
10. **Emphasizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)** - SHRM could promote DEI initiatives within the public sector by implementing policies that promote diversity and inclusion in recruitment, retention, and promotion Cox, T. (1994), Davis, J. H. (2017). This approach will ensure that the organization has a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the community it serves (Konrad, A. M., Prasad, P., & Pringle, J. K. (2006), Mor Barak, M. E. (2017), Van Dijk, H., Van Engen, M. L., & Paauwe, J. (2018).
11. **Building a Learning Culture** - SHRM could foster a learning culture in the public sector by encouraging continuous learning and development for employees. This approach could involve offering opportunities for training, education, and skill development, which will enable employees to acquire new skills and competencies (Jashapara, A., & Gardiner, P. (2019), Kraiger, K., Ford, J. K., & Salas, E. (2020), Mishra, J. K., & Poonia, P. (2020).
12. **Effective Change Management** - SHRM could help to manage change effectively in the public sector by providing support for employees and managers during times of transition. This approach could involve developing change management plans, providing training and support for employees, and developing effective communication strategies (Bower, P., & Hales, C. (2018).
13. **Promoting Employee Engagement**- SHRM could promote employee engagement in the public sector by creating a positive work environment that encourages employee involvement, motivation, and commitment. This approach could involve implementing strategies that promote work-life balance, recognition, and rewards (Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002), Kehoe, R. R., & Wright, P. M. (2013), Meyerson, D. A., & Scully, M. A. (1995)

In conclusion, this paper argues that strategic human resource management (SHRM) can play a critical role in improving the effectiveness of public sector management. By creating a positive work environment that encourages employee involvement, motivation, and commitment, SHRM can help to promote employee engagement, which in turn can lead to better performance and outcomes in the public sector. This approach could involve implementing strategies that promote work-life balance, recognition, and rewards.

Overall, the research suggests that SHRM can be an effective tool for bridging the gap between public sector management and employees, and for improving the overall performance of public sector organizations. However, it is important to note that implementing SHRM strategies requires a strong commitment from organizational leaders, as well as a willingness to invest in employee development and engagement initiatives.

VII. Limitation and Future Research Direction

While the literature suggests that strategic human resource management (SHRM) can play a critical role in bridging the gap in Public Sector Management thus improving organizational effectiveness, it has several limitations:

- This review focuses mainly on the gap that exists between the strategic and operational level and its attendant consequences highlighting the critical role SHRM may play in bridging this gap. I have not highlighted other factors underlining public sector performance such as the Political Situation of a country, Leadership style or pattern etc. We therefore call on future researchers to consider these as they equally have a critical influence on the public sector performance.

- Secondly, this is mainly a review paper and therefore required empirical support. Further and future empirical investigations are required to test this proposition.
- This study is built on a general presumption that there is a seeming tendency for gap in most public sector organizations. I call for more empirical investigations, especially cross-national and comparative studies to test the validity of this claim.

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