Human resource management and good governance

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Introduction

Good governance is often used to describe the desired objective of a nation’s political development. Even though it is a relatively new term, the principles of good governance, however, are not new. Good governance is, in short, anti-corruption where the authorities and its institutions are accountable, effective and efficient, participatory, transparent, responsive, consensus-oriented and equitable.

World leaders at the 2005 World Summit concluded that good governance is integral to economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and sustainable development, and requires the participation of civil society and the public and private sectors. Therefore, promoting good governance in the public sector is crucial for economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and sustainable development.

The Thematic Adviser’s role is to promote public sector development through strategic interventions in the fields of leadership development and human resource management (HRM) to achieve governance related outcomes and contribute towards pro-poor growth and sustainable development in Commonwealth countries.

This is in alignment with the Commonwealth’s mission: to work as a trusted partner for all Commonwealth people as a force for peace, democracy, equality and good governance; to act as a catalyst for global consensus-building; and be a source of assistance for sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The issues

Many developing Commonwealth countries are faced with major issues such as poor leadership to motivate and manage and having outdated HRM policies, plans, processes and structures in key public institutions. These problems can lead to poor morale and high staff turnover, including talent migration towards stronger economies, thereby inhibiting the countries’ progress towards promoting good governance and achieving sustainable development.

Most of the available skilled leadership retiring within the next three to five years will also impact negatively on the performance of the member countries, due to lack of succession planning. The issues are compounded when the public sector keeps growing in most of the countries and when governments are not in a position to recruit highly skilled professionals or even retain such professional who are already in the service due to poor salaries or poor working conditions, among other issues.

In this context, the development of strategies to improve leadership and the governance capacity of public sector institutions in Commonwealth countries is essential. Among the leadership attributes requiring the most improvement in the eyes of public managers are integrity, honesty, openness, transparency, and valuing and caring for people.

Another factor to consider in many Commonwealth countries is the decentralisation of the human resource (HR) functions to ministries and agencies to speed up recruitment, promotion, recognition and discipline processes. In addition to this, many countries have decentralised public services from central to local government, with the resulting structures sometimes not having the necessary authority and resources to deliver the services required.

An increasing range of instruments and institutions have been developed in Commonwealth countries that take these factors into consideration in order to promote effective leadership, management and governance, although many of these are weak or poorly developed, and the capacity to implement them is limited.

Performance management systems and related performance contracts, appraisals and rewards have been used to improve individual, team and institutional performance. However, most have proven too complex to administer in the absence of adequate training, merit-based mechanisms and transparent accountability processes and have failed to demonstrate positive improvements in performance.

The need for capacity-building

As countries undertake policies of public service renewal, aimed at enhancing the capacity of public institutions, to fulfil their duties both to elected governments and citizens with the highest degree of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as with the highest degree of responsibility, responsiveness and professionalism, the HRM within governments of these countries becomes crucial.

Instead of relegating HR issues to administrative/clerical levels, it should be positioned at a much higher level in the organisation. There is a need to professionalise HRM in order to enhance the capacity in the public sector in Commonwealth member countries. A HRM model is needed that will enable governments to manage their staff and achieve key objectives.

Leadership development is also an essential component to advance these Commonwealth mandates. This will enable the leaders to play the roles of strategy experts and change agents. The reforms being introduced should embrace changes to the systems by which public servants themselves will be recruited, trained, appraised, promoted, disciplined and declared redundant.
The objectives being pursued

In order to promote public sector development through strategic interventions in the fields of leadership development and HRM, the following four objectives are being pursued by the Secretariat’s Adviser of Human Resource Management.

1. Developing leadership competencies

The primary action has been to raise the awareness of policymakers about developments in public sector management; to equip them with skills and tools to implement sustainable and results-oriented reforms; and to provide a platform for networking and learning from each other’s experiences.

The Secretariat conducted a pan-Commonwealth flagship programme in partnership with Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, focusing on leadership reform in the public sector. It will also be conducting a similar programme in partnership with York University, Canada, focusing on developing leadership competencies, which must be exercised within the principles of good governance as defined by international standards.

The pan-Commonwealth programmes not only increase the quality and quantity of people available for leadership roles but also enable current and potential public sector leaders to assess different governance models internationally, through their interaction with other Commonwealth participants. It gives them the opportunity to selectively transfer effective practices to their local circumstances, thereby contributing towards the development of the governance capacity in member countries.

In addition to these flagship leadership programmes, the Secretariat will be conducting regional leadership development programmes to meet the needs of Commonwealth countries to build an excellent public service.

Many small nations find it extremely difficult to release officials for such overseas training due to the shortage of staff in the public service and the prohibitive costs they have to incur for overseas travel. Talent migration is another issue faced by these countries. In order to overcome such issues a programme on talent management has been developed with specific focus on providing the necessary peer mentoring tools to promote group learning without having to rely heavily on external resource persons.

Such a programme was recently conducted in St Lucia for a group of selected senior government officials in order to develop the leadership capacity at all managerial levels in the public sector.

To a great extent, the concept of peer mentoring will contribute towards sustainable development by ensuring a continuous supply of officials with leadership qualities to fill the vacuum left by the retirement of senior officials. The competencies of public managers will be strengthened for leadership and implementation of comprehensive public sector reforms in their governments as a result of these initiatives.

Efforts will continue to ensure equal participation of male and female participants in programmes, as well as balanced representation from all regions, small states and younger public servants (under 40). Programmes aimed at strengthening the political-administrative interface also involve cabinet ministers.

2. Strengthening leadership and human resource management (HRM) policy

HRM priorities for policy attention across the Commonwealth emanate from the 1991 Harare Declaration and the need for honest and just governance; from the Commonwealth Ministers Forum on Public Sector Development in Barbados in 2008; and from surveys by international agencies and discussions with...
Background

The Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) is a comprehensive public institution established in 1962 as the University of Ife. It is situated on a vast expanse of land totalling 11,861 hectares in Ile-Ife, Osun State, in the southwest of Nigeria. The Ife campus is regarded as ‘Africa’s most beautiful campus’.

In the 1970s and the early 1980s, the University attained a foremost position among universities in Africa, with a vibrant academic and social atmosphere and a high international reputation. Today, the University celebrates a rich tradition of excellence, having produced from among its staff, a Nobel Laureate and five National Merit Award winners.

The University is a top-rated university in Africa, whose products occupy leadership positions in the public and private sectors of the Nigerian and global economy. Each year over ninety thousand university matriculation applicants make the University their first choice of admission. A lot of them yearn for the unique ‘Great Ife’ experience – liberal education, critical and productive scholarship, cutting-edge research and a dynamic vibrant daily life in a lush serene, and beautiful semi-urban campus environment.

Facilities

The University has a college of Health Sciences; a Postgraduate College; 13 Faculties with 92 Departments; staff totalling 4,106; and a student population of 31,945 (including postgraduates).

The medical programme, from its inception in 1972, rests on a unique integration of the medical college concept with community/grassroots-based hospital training.

The University comprises the central campus, the student residential area, the staff quarters and a teaching and research farm. The central campus houses the academic and administrative units and service centres. The students’ residential area is made up of 10 undergraduate hostels and a postgraduate hall of residence. Many restaurants are located here. There is a power station, a dam and a water treatment plant.
ICT leader

OAU is the leading ICT institution in the country and, indeed, West Africa. The University has a state-of-the-art computer assembly plant, and an intra-net (OAUNET) since 1996. Terminals with a bandwidth of 11/3Mbps, covering almost the entire central campus, with 18 subnets based on wireless (radio) technology is currently in use.

The Central Science Laboratory provides, upon recommendation from its users (academics, postgraduate and undergraduate students), top grade equipment to meet the cutting-edge research needs of our nation in the 21st century.

Centre for Distance Learning

The Obafemi Awolowo University Centre for Distance Learning was established in August 2002 and is charged primarily with providing qualitative tertiary education to Nigerians in particular and the world in general. The lecture delivery is a combination of direct contact, audio and on-line modes. The course content is the same as for on-campus students of OAU. Degrees, diplomas and certificates are the same as for full-time students.

Achievements

To date, the University has produced five laureates of the Nigerian National Merit Award in Science (Geology), Technology (Agricultural Engineering), and Arts (African Languages and Literatures), while the world acclaimed authors and playwrights, Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka and the late Ola Rotimi taught at the University.

The University, being one of the most stimulating educational environments in the world, presently hosts some national and international research centres on its campus. These include the Centre for Energy Research Development (CERD); the Regional Centre for Training in Aerospace Surveys (RECTAS) which is UN/CECA funded; the National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM); and the African Regional Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in English (ARCSSTE-E).

The University is a convergence of art and nature. Buildings and the general landscape provide the dramatic effect of that exquisite convergence. The aesthetic quality of the scenery on campus juxtaposed with the sculptures – done in concrete, metal, and fibreglass - accentuates the beauty, serenity, and magnificence of the major buildings, and leaves a lasting impression even on the most critical connoisseurs of art and aficionados of architecture.

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Playwright, Poet, Novelist and Essayist, Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986
representatives from Commonwealth countries. Even though reform implies moving from a less desirable state to a more desirable state, the implementation of reforms has very much depended upon the nature of the administrative-political systems in which they take place.

Improved HR policy-making and strategic HRM at the national level will be the outcome that is expected, as a result of helping Commonwealth countries implement reforms that are geared to enhancing policies, systems and practices in the field of HRM.

Discussions were held with senior government officials in Sri Lanka and a workshop was conducted to assist the formulation of a strategic HR policy framework for the public sector. The Sri Lanka Development Administration is collaborating in this ongoing activity.

A regional programme titled ‘Improving Service Delivery through Strategic Human Resource Management in the SADC Public Sector’ was conducted in Botswana in partnership with the Centre of Specialization in Public Administration and Management (CESPAM), University of Botswana, for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries.

The main objective of the programme was to promote an understanding of strategic HRM among the participants. An interactive approach was adopted, giving the participants the opportunity to discuss issues in order to enable them to benchmark best practices in the design, development, implementation and delivery of enhanced HRM in the SADC region.

A regional programme for the Caribbean on public sector performance management was held in St Vincent and the Grenadines in May 2010, in collaboration with the Government of Singapore. The programme provided an interactive forum for officers to share, explore and discuss concepts and issues relating to managing public sector performance and also to provide them with a good insight into the process of developing an effective policy and framework that incorporated performance management.

3. Strengthening the role and capacity of public service training institutes

The 2006 Commonwealth Forum of Ministers set the stage under the sub-theme of ‘Renewing Human Resources for Leadership Development’. Ministers requested the Secretariat’s Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) to strengthen public service training institutes (PSTIs) in partnership with other Commonwealth associations. Since then, GIDD has been working with the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), the West African Management Development Institutes Network (WAMDEVIN), the Association of Management Development Institutions in South Asia (AMDISA) and other organisations to build institutional capacity in support of public sector reform and leadership development.

Experts from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) were placed in PSTIs to build institutional capacity, and PSTI heads were invited to forums, such as the Africa Heads of Public Service meetings. GIDD also facilitated placements for PSTI heads in counterpart PSTIs to create awareness of best practices.

The pan-Commonwealth Training for Trainers (TOT) programme was conducted in October, in partnership with NZAID and Victoria University of Wellington, to support public sector reform capacity-building. Twenty-six participants from eighteen countries covering all regions of the Commonwealth took part in this programme.

The TOT programme dealt with topics in public sector reform in the Commonwealth, which included the New Zealand experience and the implications for designing training and development programmes. Participants were exposed to the Action Learning process, issues and challenges of professional development, online communities of practice, blended learning and case study approaches to learning.

Participants were also provided with opportunities to learn from fellow participants through presentations and discussions. Everyone was required to prepare a pre-seminar assignment, setting out training issues, and finish the two-week programme with an action plan to encourage the implementation of lessons learned from the seminar.

Following the seminar, an interactive online community network was created (using Moddle interactive software) for TOT participants and contributors to share information and discussions over training issues/challenges and best practices. This will serve as a tool to obtain information about the progress being achieved by the participants, provided they participate on a regular basis.

These activities will strengthen the institutional capacity of PSTIs and enable these institutions to conduct programmes and provide consultancy services to the public sector to promote good governance initiatives.

4. Promoting the sharing of best practices in HRM and leadership development

Through research, we hope to add value and knowledge to the development of HRM policy and practice. At present, research is being conducted in the area of contract employment in the Pacific region. Such activities will assist with the identification of successful innovations and also the failures, thereby raising the awareness of member countries to avoid pitfalls and adopt good practices. Dissemination of such information can help countries to save time and promote new reforms to leapfrog stages of development.

However, we have to be aware that successful implementation of practices in one country does not imply that it will be effectively replicated in another. Practices will only be effective if they are tailored to local needs.

Conclusion

All the initiatives being planned in the areas of developing leadership competencies, strengthening of leadership and HRM policy, strengthening the role and capacity of public service training institutes, and promoting the sharing of best practices in HRM and leadership development are being targeted to achieve governance related outcomes. This will contribute towards improving public service delivery, which in turn will contribute towards the reduction of poverty and promote sustainable development among Commonwealth countries.