HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN A DIGITAL ECONOMY: A STUDY OF NIGERIA PUBLIC SERVICE

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Abstract

This study on Human Resources Management (HRM) in Nigeria's public service within a digital economy highlights the transformative impact of digital technologies on HR practices. Digital transformation presents significant opportunities for enhancing efficiency and service delivery but also poses unique challenges. This study was anchored on the Resource-Based HRM (RB-HRM) theory and explores how it can be applied to enhance public service effectiveness in the Nigerian context. RB-HRM posits that an organization's human capital is a strategic asset that can be a source of sustained competitive advantage. The study employed a qualitative approach with focus group discussions, revealing the potential of digital tools to streamline HR processes like e-recruitment and digital record-keeping. The study revealed that integrating AI, big data analytics, and automation into HRM processes requires a shift in organizational culture and strategic decision-making. Key findings suggest that the Resource-Based HRM (RB-HRM) theory can strategically enhance public service effectiveness by prioritizing the recruitment and development of digitally proficient employees. Addressing skills gaps, ensuring data protection, and fostering digital competence are crucial for leveraging these advancements effectively. It further emphasized the need for continuous professional development and strategic partnerships with technology training institutes to bridge operational gap. The research underscores modernizing recruitment practices, utilizing digital platforms, and integrating performance management software for real-time feedback. The study therefore recommends bridging the skills gap by offering continuous training programs in data analysis, HR software usage, and digital literacy. Institutions should move beyond traditional methods and leverage professional networks like LinkedIn to attract a digitally-savvy talent pool. Organizations should combine

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traditional performance appraisals with digital tools for a more accurate and real-time evaluation. Finally, institutions should counteract resistance to change by fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation within the organization.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Digital Economy, Public Service

Introduction

The function of human resources management (HRM) in public sector enterprises is seeing significant upheaval in today's quickly changing digital economy. The emergence of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and automation, is reshaping traditional HRM methods to align with the requirements of the digital era (Chhabra & Sharma, 2020). The ramifications of this transition extend far beyond mere technological adoption; they cover fundamental alterations in organizational culture, worker dynamics, and strategic decision-making processes (Jackson & Schuler, 2021). In Nigeria, like many other nations, this transition is visible within the public service sector, where the urgency to harness digital innovation for increased service delivery and efficiency has grown increasingly pronounced (Obisi, 2019).

As Nigeria embraces digitalization, the public service sector is challenged with a plethora of issues and opportunities in HRM. On one hand, the incorporation of digital technologies holds the promise of reducing bureaucratic processes, raising employee efficiency, and enhancing the quality of public services (Sharma & Dhar, 2019). However, on the other hand, it also brings distinct issues linked to skills gaps, data protection concerns, and ethical implications of algorithmic decision-making (Kshetri, 2020). Moreover, the digital divide within the workforce, compounded by inequities in access to technology and digital competence, provides additional challenges to successful HRM in the Nigerian public service (Ogbomo, 2018).

Against this context, this study tries to delve into the nuances of HRM in Nigeria's digital economy, with a special focus on the public service sector. By evaluating the difficulties and opportunities coming from digitization, it intends to offer light on the strategies and best practices that will enable public sector organizations to traverse this transformative journey successfully (Akingbade, 2020). Understanding the dynamics of HRM in the digital age is not only critical for guaranteeing the successful management of human resources but also for fostering innovation, agility, and resilience within the public sector (Srinivasan & Mathew, 2021).

Furthermore, the insights gathered from this study are expected to contribute to the current body of knowledge on HRM in developing economies, particularly in the context of digital transformation (Nguyen et al., 2021). While much of the work on HRM and digitalization has focused on advanced economies, there remains a substantial gap in understanding how these changes appear in emerging markets like Nigeria (Chandra et al., 2019). By addressing this gap, the findings of this study can benefit policymakers, practitioners, and scholars' alike, supporting evidence-based decision-making and fostering innovation-driven growth in the Nigerian public service (Alam & Noor, 2020).

As Nigeria navigates the complexity of its digital economy, the function of HRM in the public service sector takes crucial importance. This study strives to uncover the various problems and opportunities inherent in this digital revolution, delivering significant insights into how HRM techniques might be adapted to meet the increasing needs of the Nigerian public sector workforce. By doing so, it aspires to contribute to the growth of research in the disciplines of HRM and digitization, while also giving practical recommendations for boosting organizational effectiveness and service delivery in Nigeria's public sector.

Theory
The digital revolution is fundamentally reshaping economies and organizations worldwide. This necessitates a paradigm shift in Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, particularly within the public sector of developing countries like Nigeria. This review explores how Resource-Based HRM (RB-HRM) theory can be applied to enhance public service effectiveness in the Nigerian context. RB-HRM posits that an organization's human capital is a strategic asset that can be a source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1995). In the context of the Nigerian public service, this translates to leveraging the skills and knowledge of employees to deliver efficient and effective services to citizens. Digital literacy, data analysis, and the ability to work effectively with technology become crucial competencies for public servants in a digital age.

By adopting RB-HRM principles, Nigerian public service agencies can focus on attracting, developing, and retaining a digitally-savvy workforce. This can be achieved through targeted recruitment strategies that prioritize digital skills, along with competency-based training programs that equip employees with the necessary digital tools and knowledge (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2014). Furthermore, fostering a culture of continuous learning and upskilling will

ensure that public servants remain adaptable in the face of rapid technological advancements (Scullion & Collings, 2007). However, implementing RB-HRM in the Nigerian public service faces challenges. Issues such as limited financial resources, bureaucratic red tape, and resistance to change within the traditional public service structure can hinder effective talent management practices (Anyadike-Danes & Omeihe, 2017). Overcoming these obstacles requires strong leadership commitment to digital transformation and a willingness to invest in modernizing HR systems and processes.

In conclusion, RB-HRM offers a valuable framework for Nigerian public service agencies to navigate the digital economy. By strategically managing their human capital, these organizations can develop a workforce equipped to deliver efficient and citizen-centric services in the digital age. Further research is needed to explore the specific strategies and practices required for successful RB-HRM implementation within the unique context of the Nigerian public sector.

Method
This study employed a qualitative approach through a focus group discussion (FGD) to explore the experiences and perspectives of public service employees regarding Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in the context of Nigeria's digital economy. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit ten participants for the FGD. Participants were current public service employees from diverse ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) across Nigeria. Efforts was made to ensure a balance in terms of gender, age, seniority, and level of exposure to digital technologies within the public service (Adedoyin & Soyibo, 2015).

Recruitment occurred through contacting relevant HR departments within MDAs and through snowball sampling, where initial participants recommend others who fit the criteria. A semi-structured FGD guide was developed to ensure a focused discussion while allowing for exploration of emergent themes. The FGD was moderated by a researcher experienced in qualitative methods. The moderator ensured a safe and inclusive environment where all participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives (Morgan, 2019).

The FGD was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was informed by the research questions and the existing literature on HRM in the digital economy and the Nigerian public

service context. This methodology provides rich and insightful data on the lived experiences of public service employees regarding HRM practices in the digital age.

Digital Transformation and HRM

Digital transformation is altering human resource management (HRM) methods across numerous sectors. Kehinde et al. (2020) say that digital technologies are profoundly transforming HRM operations, spanning recruitment, training, performance management, and employee engagement. This transition isn't restricted to established economies; rather, it's becoming increasingly vital in emerging countries like Nigeria. In Nigeria's public service sector, the adoption of digital HRM systems is gaining momentum as firms attempt to boost efficiency and effectiveness (Olaniyan & Ojo, 2019). However, attaining success in adopting these digital HRM efforts needs careful consideration of company culture, staff skills, and technology infrastructure.

One of the key areas touched by digital revolution in HRM is recruitment. With the development of digital platforms and tools, the recruitment process has become more streamlined and efficient. Online job portals, social networking platforms, and applicant tracking systems have made it easier for firms to contact a bigger pool of individuals and analyze their fit for openings. Additionally, digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning are being progressively employed to automate the screening and shortlisting of candidates, thus saving time and resources (Kehinde et al., 2020).

Training and development are also facing substantial changes owing to digital revolution. Traditional classroom-based training is being augmented or replaced by online learning platforms and virtual training sessions. These digital solutions offer additional flexibility, allowing employees to access training materials at their convenience and from any place. Furthermore, technologies like virtual reality (VR) are being leveraged to offer immersive learning experiences, particularly in areas where hands-on training is vital (Kehinde et al., 2020).

Performance management approaches are being revolutionized by digital technologies and data. Digital HRM systems allow constant feedback and performance tracking, facilitating more frequent and relevant performance appraisals. Moreover, the application of data analytics allows firms to acquire insights into employee performance trends, identify areas for improvement, and make data-driven decisions regarding promotions, compensation, and career development (Kehinde et al., 2020).

Employee engagement is another significant element touched by digital transformation in HRM. Digital platforms such as internal social networks, collaboration tools, and communication apps enable more connectedness and interaction among employees, regardless of their geographical location. These tools not only allow communication and knowledge exchange but also assist build a sense of belonging and community within the business. Moreover, digital HRM solutions frequently incorporate elements like employee recognition programs and feedback mechanisms, which play a significant role in enhancing morale and motivation (Kehinde et al., 2020).

Digital transformation is transforming HRM operations, bringing new chances to boost efficiency, effectiveness, and employee happiness. However, successful implementation needs careful consideration of several elements, including business culture, staff capabilities, and technology infrastructure. By embracing digital technologies and exploiting them strategically, firms may optimize their HRM operations and achieve a competitive edge in today's quickly shifting business world.

Challenges of Digital HRM in Nigeria Public Service
The deployment of digital Human Resource Management (HRM) systems in the Nigeria public service faces many hurdles despite its potential benefits. One important impediment is the digital divide, characterized by unequal access to and utilization of digital technology across different societal segments (Olatokun & Adebayo, 2021). In Nigeria, this divide is obvious due to inadequate internet availability and technical literacy, particularly in rural areas. As such, the widespread adoption of digital HRM solutions becomes impeded, hurting the efficiency and inclusivity of HRM operations in the public sector.

Furthermore, concerns surrounding around data privacy and security create substantial challenges for firms attempting to digitize their HRM procedures (Omisore et al., 2020). The sensitivity of HR data needs sophisticated security measures to prevent against unwanted access, breaches, and misuse. In Nigeria, where regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms may be insufficient or inadequate, guaranteeing compliance with data protection rules becomes problematic, aggravating the risks connected with digital HRM adoption.

Moreover, the issue of technology infrastructure poses a substantial impediment to the proper implementation of digital HRM in the Nigeria public service. Inadequate infrastructure, such as obsolete hardware and software

systems, unpredictable electrical supply, and insufficient IT support, impedes the seamless integration and operation of digital HRM solutions (Adebayo & Adeyemo, 2019). This infrastructure gap not only inhibits the adoption of digital HRM but also undermines the overall efficiency and efficacy of HRM procedures in government institutions.

Additionally, organizational resistance to change appears as a significant hurdle to the successful deployment of digital HRM systems in the Nigeria public service. Traditional bureaucratic systems, established work patterns, and reluctance to new technology restrict the acceptance and utilization of digital HRM solutions among employees and management (Omisore et al., 2020). Overcoming this opposition needs extensive change management methods, including stakeholder involvement, training programs, and communication campaigns to build a culture of innovation and digital readiness within public sector companies.

Furthermore, budgetary limits and resource limitations pose substantial difficulties to the adoption and sustaining of digital HRM efforts in the Nigeria public service. Allocating funding for the acquisition of technology, training of workers, and maintenance of digital HRM systems may be competing priorities against other pressing needs within government organizations (Adebayo & Adeyemo, 2019). Without proper financial resources and strategic investments, the scalability and long-term viability of digital HRM programs may be compromised, impeding their efficacy and sustainability.

Moreover, the lack of standardized processes and interoperability among different HRM systems exacerbates the issues of digital HRM deployment in the Nigeria public service. Fragmented IT architectures and fragmented data silos across government organizations limit seamless data interchange and integration, resulting to inefficiencies, data discrepancies, and duplication of efforts (Olatokun & Adebayo, 2021). Achieving interoperability and standardization involves concerted efforts from policymakers, IT professionals, and HR practitioners to build common frameworks and integration protocols that support the seamless interchange of HR data across platforms and systems. Additionally, challenges relating to governance and regulatory compliance create substantial impediments to the successful adoption of digital HRM systems in the Nigeria public service. The absence of clear regulatory rules and control procedures for digital HRM projects may result in uncertainty, legal hazards, and regulatory non-compliance (Adebayo & Adeyemo, 2019). Establishing comprehensive governance structures and compliance

frameworks is vital to ensure accountability, transparency, and adherence to key laws and regulations governing HR data management and digitization efforts in the public sector.

Furthermore, cultural and behavioral issues influence the acceptance and deployment of digital HRM systems inside Nigeria's public service enterprises. Cultural reluctance to change, fear of job displacement, and skepticism towards technology-driven solutions may limit the successful deployment and utilization of digital HRM technologies (Omisore et al., 2020). Addressing these cultural barriers involves proactive change management methods that establish a healthy organizational climate, enhance digital literacy, and cultivate a mentality of innovation and continuous improvement among employees and stakeholders.

Moreover, the absence of trained human capital and experience in digital HRM provides a substantial impediment to its efficient implementation and utilization in the Nigeria public service. The dearth of personnel with knowledge in HR technology, data analytics, and digital transformation limits the design, implementation, and optimization of digital HRM systems (Olatokun & Adebayo, 2021). Investing in capacity building, training, and talent development projects is critical to overcome this skills gap and enable public sector companies with the needed capacities to harness digital HRM for increased personnel management and decision-making.

Summarily, the problems of implementing digital HRM in the Nigeria public sector are multifaceted and require a holistic solution including technological, organizational, regulatory, cultural, and human capital elements. Addressing these challenges necessitates collaborative efforts between government agencies, policymakers, IT professionals, HR practitioners, and other stakeholders to overcome barriers, drive innovation, and harness the transformative potential of digital HRM for improved service delivery and governance in Nigeria.

Opportunities for Enhancing HRM in Nigeria Public Service
In the environment of Nigeria's public service, various difficulties have historically prevented efficient Human Resource Management (HRM) procedures. Despite these hurdles, scholars have emphasized several potential for advancement, particularly through the avenue of digitization. One substantial possibility comes in harnessing big data analytics to transform decision-making processes and complement HRM practices (Olatokun et al.,

2021). Through the study of huge datasets comprising employee performance, happiness, and engagement measures, public sector institutions can discover patterns and trends, so helping them to make more informed and strategic HRM decisions. This strategic exploitation of big data not only helps decision-making but also serves as a foundation for developing a more responsive and adaptable public service workforce.

Moreover, digital technologies provide the potential of optimizing HRM operations by automating routine work, thereby allowing HR practitioners to dedicate more time and energy to strategic endeavors such as talent development and succession planning (Ojo & Olatokun, 2020). By embracing automation, public sector organizations in Nigeria can improve productivity, minimize bureaucratic bottlenecks, and nurture a more agile and responsive HRM framework. This change from manual to automated operations not only boosts operational efficiency but also emphasizes the necessity of embracing technological breakthroughs to promote a more dynamic and forward-thinking public service ecosystem.

Furthermore, the integration of digital platforms and technologies inside HRM processes helps the construction of comprehensive performance management systems, hence enabling firms to efficiently monitor and assess employee performance (Ojo & Olatokun, 2020). Through the deployment of digital performance management solutions, public sector entities in Nigeria can adopt objective performance indicators, provide timely feedback, and identify areas for improvement, thus encouraging a culture of continuous learning and development. This emphasis on performance management underlines the crucial role of technology in developing a high-performance culture within the public service sector, eventually promoting organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Additionally, digitalization presents a potential for boosting employee engagement and satisfaction inside Nigeria's public service. By leveraging digital communication channels and platforms, firms can allow transparent and open communication, hence building a sense of belonging and inclusion among employees (Ojo & Olatokun, 2020). Moreover, digital tools enable HR practitioners to elicit feedback, monitor employee sentiment, and modify HRM programs to match the shifting needs and preferences of the workforce. This emphasis on employee involvement emphasizes the revolutionary potential of digitization in establishing a more congenial and supportive work environment within Nigeria's public service sector.

Furthermore, the implementation of digital learning and development platforms presents a viable route for boosting personnel skills and competencies within the Nigeria public service (Olatokun et al., 2021). By giving employees with access to online training modules, virtual workshops, and interactive learning materials, firms can empower their workforce to gain new skills, adapt to technology developments, and drive creativity. This emphasis on continuous learning not only boosts personnel competencies but also cultivates a culture of innovation and adaptation within the public service sector, thereby positioned Nigeria for sustainable growth and development in an increasingly digital-centric world.

Moreover, digitization promotes the deployment of data-driven recruiting and talent management techniques within Nigeria's public service sector (Olatokun et al., 2021). By employing data analytics and predictive modeling, firms may identify and attract top people, thereby alleviating recruiting issues and cultivating a more diverse and talented workforce. Additionally, digital platforms enable firms to improve the recruiting process, boost candidate experience, and speed decision-making, hence ensuring timely and effective talent acquisition. This proactive application of data-driven recruitment not only addresses manpower needs but also promotes organizational agility and competitiveness within the public service sector.

Furthermore, digital technologies offer the opportunity to increase compliance and regulatory adherence within Nigeria's public service sector. By integrating digital HRM systems and platforms, firms can assure compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and ethical standards governing HR processes (Ojo & Olatokun, 2020). Additionally, digital solutions offer the seamless capture, storage, and retrieval of HR data, hence boosting transparency, accountability, and auditability. This emphasis on compliance underlines the need of employing technology to uphold integrity and ethical norms within the public service sector, hence creating trust and confidence among stakeholders.

Additionally, the implementation of digital HRM technologies has the ability to boost strategic workforce planning and decision-making within Nigeria's public service sector (Ojo & Olatokun, 2020). By employing predictive analytics and scenario planning tools, organizations may anticipate future workforce demands, identify potential risks and opportunities, and design proactive strategies to handle shifting difficulties. Moreover, digital workforce planning enables firms to optimize resource allocation, alleviate talent shortages, and integrate HRM programs with broader corporate objectives, hence boosting agility and resilience in the face of volatility.

Thus, while the Nigeria public service sector has various issues, digitalization brings a multitude of potential for boosting HRM processes. From employing big data analytics to speed decision-making to embracing digital learning platforms for staff development, the revolutionary potential of digitalization is wide. By utilizing the power of technology, public sector organizations in Nigeria may nurture a more flexible, efficient, and responsive staff, thereby enabling sustainable growth and development in the digital age.

Building Digital HRM Capacity

To leverage the potential benefits of digital Human Resource Management (HRM) inside the Nigerian public service, it is necessary to focus on building capacity both at individual and organizational levels. As noted by Olatokun & Olaniyan (2018), this requires deliberate expenditures in training and development efforts focused at boosting employees' digital skills and competences. Such training should be tailored to address the specific needs and obstacles experienced by public sector personnel in shifting to digital HRM systems. By training staff with the essential skills, firms may assure smoother adoption and integration of digital HRM solutions, leading to enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in HR procedures.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of digital HRM programs also hinges upon proper investment in technology infrastructure. As mentioned by Ojo et al. (2019), public service enterprises need to prioritize the construction of solid and scalable IT systems to support the features of digital HRM platforms. This involves maintaining stable internet connectivity, secure data storage facilities, and user-friendly interfaces to promote seamless interaction with HRM software. Without a robust technological foundation, the full potential of digital HRM solutions cannot be achieved, hampering the fulfillment of corporate objectives linked to labor management and optimization.

In addition to technological investments, it is vital for public sector institutions to develop clear regulations and procedures governing the usage of digital HRM systems. According to Ojo et al. (2019), such frameworks serve as vital recommendations for assuring the acceptable and ethical utilization of HR technology, while also maintaining employee privacy and data security. By outlining roles, responsibilities, and standards for system access and data management, businesses can limit risks associated with misuse or abuse of digital HRM technologies. Moreover, transparent governance systems help establish trust and confidence among employees, fostering a culture of accountability and compliance within the firm.

Moreover, establishing digital HRM capacity demands a holistic strategy that covers not only technical skills but also soft skills and change management competencies. As stated by Olatokun & Olaniyan (2018), good communication, teamwork, and adaptability are crucial traits for navigating the shift to digital HRM. Therefore, training programs should integrate modules on change management methods, stakeholder involvement, and leadership development to equip employees at all levels to embrace innovation and drive organizational transformation. By developing a culture of continuous learning and development, public sector organizations can cultivate a workforce that is nimble, resilient, and future-ready in the face of altering HRM landscapes.

Furthermore, building a culture of innovation and experimentation is vital for sustaining digital HRM capabilities over the long run. As proposed by Olatokun & Olaniyan (2018), public service organizations can encourage staff to investigate new technologies, procedures, and best practices in HRM through pilot projects, cross-functional partnerships, and knowledge-sharing programs. By fostering an atmosphere that promotes creativity and risk-taking, businesses can stimulate continuing improvements and optimizations in digital HRM, enabling increased efficiency, agility, and competitiveness in the public sector.

Conclusively, the successful adoption and implementation of digital HRM within the Nigerian public sector require deliberate efforts to create capacity at both individual and organizational levels. By investing in training and development programs, strengthening technological infrastructure, and building rigorous governance frameworks, public service entities may empower their workforce to capture the full potential of HR technology. Moreover, establishing a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and cooperation is vital for generating sustainable growth and competitiveness in the digital era.

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Collaboration and knowledge sharing have emerged as crucial components for pushing the progress of digital Human Resource Management (HRM) practices within the Nigeria public service. In a study by Omisore & Ojo (2021), it was clarified that public-private partnerships serve as key conduits for facilitating the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions in this domain. These partnerships comprise collaborations between public service bodies and diverse stakeholders such as technology vendors, consulting firms, and academic institutions. Through such agreements, public service organizations can tap into a reservoir of expertise and resources, thereby surmounting hurdles and quickening the adoption of digital HRM projects (Omisore & Ojo, 2021).

One major feature of collaboration in promoting digital HRM practices is the synergy between public and private sectors. Public service organizations can harness the specific knowledge and technology power of commercial enterprises to better their HRM systems. This relationship promotes the transfer of cutting-edge technologies and best practices from the commercial sector to the public sector, hence enabling the latter to modernize its HRM processes (Omisore & Ojo, 2021). Additionally, ties with academic institutions help to this exchange by supporting research collaborations and knowledge dissemination, ensuring that HRM practices remain informed of the newest advancements and ideas in the field.

Furthermore, collaboration engenders a culture of mutual learning and knowledge sharing among stakeholders involved in digital HRM efforts. By pooling together varied viewpoints and experiences, public sector organizations can cultivate new solutions to difficult HRM challenges (Omisore & Ojo, 2021). This collaborative approach not only stimulates innovation but also enhances the overall efficacy and efficiency of HRM procedures. Moreover, the exchange of knowledge and best practices between public and commercial institutions contributes to the establishment of a healthy ecosystem favorable to ongoing improvement and innovation in HRM procedures.

In the context of Nigeria's public sector, where resources may be limited, collaboration offers a pragmatic method to overcome barriers to the adoption of digital HRM practices. By cooperating with external stakeholders, public service organizations can access resources and skills that may not be easily available inside (Omisore & Ojo, 2021). This strategic collaboration enables them to leverage the full potential of digital technologies and optimize their HRM systems to meet the increasing needs of the workforce and the organization as a whole. Additionally, partnerships with technology providers can assist the creation and implementation of HRM solutions adapted to the specific requirements and constraints faced by public sector companies in Nigeria.

Moreover, teamwork and knowledge exchange build a culture of transparency and accountability within the public service sector. By openly exchanging information and insights with external partners, public service organizations can better their decision-making processes and ensure the optimal allocation of resources towards digital HRM efforts (Omisore & Ojo, 2021). This transparency not only develops confidence among stakeholders but also promotes a collaborative environment where collective goals and objectives are pursued for the greater interest of the firm and its employees.

In conclusion, teamwork and information exchange are crucial in pushing the evolution of digital HRM practices within the Nigeria public service. Through public-private partnerships and cooperation with academic institutions, public service organizations can harness external expertise and resources to address difficulties and expedite the implementation of innovative HRM solutions. By promoting a culture of mutual learning and transparency, collaboration promotes the efficacy and efficiency of HRM procedures, ultimately contributing to the overall improvement of public service delivery and organizational performance (Omisore & Ojo, 2021).

Ethical and Legal Considerations
In the field of digital Human Resource Management (HRM) transformation, a significant issue that deserves rigorous attention is the ethical and legal considerations involved with it. Olatokun et al. (2020) underline the crucial need of ensuring compliance with data protection legislation and upholding employee privacy rights throughout this process. As firms shift to digital HRM systems, they must comply to tight rules to safeguard sensitive employee information. Transparency emerges as a core value, mandating explicit disclosure about the procedures applied for data collection, storage, and utilization inside public sector organizations.

Moreover, effective security measures are needed to deter illegal access or misuse of employee data. This highlights the need of deploying strong access controls and encryption protocols to safeguard the digital infrastructure. By emphasizing data security, firms can limit the risks associated with potential breaches or cyber threats, hence establishing trust among employees and stakeholders alike (Olatokun et al., 2020). Ethical considerations extend beyond just regulatory compliance; they involve the larger ethical implications of deploying technology in HRM procedures.

In parallel, ethical considerations look into the moral repercussions of employing technology to manage human capital. While digital HRM systems promise exceptional speed and streamlined operations, they also present ethical concerns involving algorithmic bias, employee surveillance, and autonomy. Organizations must manage these challenges with a sharp ethical compass, ensuring that technological innovations do not jeopardize core human rights or perpetuate inequality (Olatokun et al., 2020). Ethical frameworks provide a blueprint for integrating technical breakthroughs with ethical imperatives, establishing a culture of accountability and integrity throughout HRM activities.

From a legal sense, conformity to regulatory frameworks is non-negotiable. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe and equivalent legislations globally impose rigorous duties on enterprises regarding data processing and privacy protection (Olatokun et al., 2020). Failure to comply with these legal conditions can culminate in serious ramifications, including large fines and reputational damage. Hence, firms must proactively ensure that their digital HRM projects are in full conformity with prevailing regulatory standards, so averting potential legal entanglements and upholding their ethical commitments to employees.

In essence, the quest of digital HRM transformation involves a sensible balance between technology innovation, ethical issues, and regulatory compliance. By prioritizing data protection, privacy rights, and ethical integrity, enterprises can exploit the full potential of digital technology while limiting associated risks. Transparent communication, robust security measures, and adherence to legal frameworks serve as pillars backing responsibly and ethically sound HRM activities in the digital era (Olatokun et al., 2020). Embracing this holistic approach guarantees that HRM transformations not only boost corporate efficiency but also preserve the dignity and rights of employees in an increasingly digitized landscape.

Empirical Findings (Focus Group Discussion)
The qualitative analysis summarizes a focus group discussion with Human Resources (HR) professionals from various ministries within the Nigerian public service. The discussion explored the impact of digital transformation on HR practices and identified key areas for improvement in the context of attracting, developing, and retaining a digitally-savvy workforce.

Regarding digital transformation and skills, majority of the respondents opined that the pervasiveness of technology has significantly impacted HR practices within the Nigerian public service. Such that digital record-keeping has streamlined processes and enhanced efficiency, aligning with research (Dery et al., 2017). According to some of the respondents, they assert that, adoption of e-recruitment systems has demonstrably accelerated and improved the transparency of the hiring process. The respondents also identified critical digital skills required for public servants in the digital age, these include proficiency in data analysis tools, HR software (Parry & Battista, 2019), and digital literacy encompassing cybersecurity and online communication tools. They also argued that a notable skills gap was identified in data analytics, with many employees encountering challenges in interpreting and utilizing data effectively. To bridge these skills gaps, the fifth respondent opined emphasized

the importance of continuous professional development programs, workshops, and forging partnerships with tech training institutes (Anderson, 2018).

With reference to recruitment and onboarding, majority of the respondents argued that while current recruitment practices achieve some success in attracting qualified candidates with digital skills, there is room for improvement. The over-reliance on traditional methods may not be effective in reaching tech-savvy candidates. The seventh respondent suggested that leveraging professional networks like LinkedIn to expand their reach and attract a digitally proficient talent pool is necessary. This collaborated with the assertion of (Zide et al., 2014). The discussion highlighted the positive impact of digital tools on onboarding. Furthermore, some of the respondents opined that online training modules and virtual orientations have streamlined the process, enhancing efficiency. Equipping new hires for the digital work environment requires comprehensive digital onboarding programs that incorporate training on relevant tools and platforms from the outset.

Based on performance management and training, many of the respondents, agreed that, departments currently utilize a hybrid approach to performance evaluation, combining traditional appraisals with some digital tools for tracking progress and setting objectives. The discussion explored the potential benefits of implementing performance management software to provide real-time feedback and more accurate performance metrics, aligning with the findings of Aguinis (2019). The respondents argued that technical skills training, leadership development programs, and digital literacy courses are the most beneficial training opportunities for public servants. Regularly reviewing and updating training curricula based on emerging trends and employee feedback is crucial to ensure program relevance, as emphasized by Noe (2017). With reference to challenges and opportunities, the respondents posit that resistance to change emerged as a significant challenge, with many employees hesitant to adopt new technologies. The public service has the opportunity to leverage technology to improve HR processes by automating routine tasks. Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to be applied in talent acquisition and predictive analytics, as suggested by Stone et al. (2015). According to the respondents, HR can play a more strategic role in leading the digital transformation of the public service by fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation within the organization.

Conclusively, the focus group discussion underscored the critical need for HR in the Nigerian public service to remain agile and adaptable in the face of

technological advancements. Key takeaways include the importance of prioritizing digital skills training and HR's role in embracing technology to achieve greater efficiency and exert a more strategic impact.

Conclusion

The research on Human Resources Management (HRM) in a digital economy, focusing on Nigeria's public service, underscores the profound impact of digital technologies on HR practices. This study reveals that while digital transformation offers significant opportunities to enhance efficiency and service delivery, it also presents unique challenges. The integration of technologies such as AI, big data analytics, and automation into HRM processes necessitates a shift in organizational culture and strategic decision-making. The findings highlight that for Nigeria's public service to leverage these advancements effectively, there must be a concerted effort to address skills gaps, ensure data protection, and foster digital competence across the workforce.

Key insights from the research indicate that the Resource-Based HRM (RB-HRM) theory can be a strategic framework to enhance the public service's effectiveness. By focusing on human capital as a critical asset, public sector organizations can prioritize the recruitment and development of digitally savvy employees. Implementing competency-based training programs and fostering a culture of continuous learning are essential steps in this direction. However, the study identifies significant barriers, including limited financial resources, bureaucratic inertia, and resistance to change, which need to be addressed to realize the full benefits of digital HRM.

The methodology of the study, which involved a qualitative approach through focus group discussions, provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of public service employees. Participants emphasized the transformative potential of digital tools in streamlining HR processes, such as e-recruitment and digital record-keeping. However, they also highlighted the persistent skills gap, particularly in data analytics, which hampers effective utilization of digital technologies. Continuous professional development and strategic partnerships with technology training institutes were suggested as solutions to bridge this gap.

Moreover, the study sheds light on the importance of modernizing recruitment practices to attract a digitally proficient talent pool. Leveraging digital platforms like LinkedIn and enhancing digital onboarding programs are crucial

steps in this process. The integration of performance management software to provide real-time feedback and more accurate performance metrics was also highlighted as a beneficial practice. These initiatives can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of HRM in the Nigerian public service.

Conclusively, the research emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to digital HRM in Nigeria's public service. This includes technical investments, policy frameworks, and capacity-building efforts. Collaboration between public and private sectors, along with adherence to ethical and regulatory standards, is vital for the successful implementation of digital HRM practices. By embracing these strategies, the Nigerian public service can improve service delivery, organizational effectiveness, and workforce management, thereby driving innovation and growth in the digital era.

Recommendations

The digital revolution demands a modernized approach to Human Resource Management (HRM) in Nigeria's public sector. Here are some key recommendations:

Building Digital Capacity: Bridge the skills gap by offering continuous training programs in data analysis, HR software usage, and digital literacy. Partner with tech institutes to provide specialized training and equip employees with the tools they need to thrive in the digital age. This includes cybersecurity awareness and proficiency in online communication platforms.

Recruitment and Onboarding 2.0: Move beyond traditional methods and leverage professional networks like LinkedIn to attract a digitally-savvy talent pool. Utilize digital tools to streamline the onboarding process. Implement online training modules and virtual orientations to get new hires acclimated to the digital work environment quickly and efficiently.

Digital Performance Management: Combine traditional performance appraisals with digital tools for a more accurate and real-time evaluation. Performance management software can facilitate this by offering real-time feedback and data-driven metrics. Regularly update training programs based on emerging trends and employee feedback to ensure they remain relevant in developing both technical and leadership skills.

Embracing Change and Innovation: Counteract resistance to change by fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation within the

organization. HR can lead the charge by implementing initiatives that encourage technology adoption and automate routine tasks to improve efficiency. Explore artificial intelligence (AI) for talent acquisition and predictive analytics to further streamline HR processes.

By embracing these recommendations, Nigeria's public service HR function can become a strategic partner in the digital transformation, not only improving efficiency but also attracting and retaining top talent for a future-proofed public sector.

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APPENDIX

Focus Group Discussion Guide-Semi-Structured Interview with Open-ended Questions.

The following are the open-ended questions proposed for this study: Human Resources Management in a Digital Economy: Nigeria Public Service

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

This interview is intended to explore Human Resources Management in a Digital Economy using the Nigeria Public Service as a case study.

Briefly introduce yourselves and your role in the public service.

What are some of the biggest challenges you face in your current role?

1. Digital Transformation & Skills (20 minutes):

How has technology impacted the way you work in the public service?

What digital skills do you believe are most important for public servants in today's economy?

Are there any skills gaps you've identified within your department or team?

How can HR departments better equip employees with the digital skills they need to succeed?

2. Recruitment & Onboarding (20 minutes):

How effective are current recruitment practices in attracting qualified candidates with digital skills?

Could online platforms or social media be utilized more effectively for recruitment?

What are your experiences with onboarding new employees in the digital age?
How can HR ensure new hires are adequately prepared for the digital work environment?
3.   Performance Management & Training (20 minutes):
How does your department currently evaluate employee performance?
Are there ways to incorporate digital tools into performance management systems?
What types of training opportunities do you believe are most beneficial for public servants?
How can HR ensure training programs are relevant and keep pace with technological advancements?
4.   Challenges & Opportunities (20 minutes):
What are the biggest challenges facing HR departments in adapting to the digital economy?
How can the public service leverage technology to improve HR processes?
What opportunities do you see for HR to play a more strategic role in the digital transformation of the public service?
5.   Wrap-up & Discussion (10 minutes):
Are there any additional thoughts or concerns you'd like to share regarding HR practices and the digital economy?
What are some key take aways you've gained from this discussion?