

Employee resourcing strategies in local authorities in Zimbabwe: Contestations and fortuity

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ABSTRACT

The study assesses the contribution of employee resourcing strategies to effective local government systems in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a mixed methods methodology. More succinctly, it followed an exploratory sequential mixed method methodology underpinned by pragmatism. The study was confined to local authorities in Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe. Quantitative data was collected first using questionnaire surveys and was analysed using SPSS. The results of the quantitative data were then used to develop questions for the qualitative data. Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs), interviews and content analysis were used to collect the qualitative data. A total of 200 questionnaires were issued, and 77 were returned, giving a return response rate of 39%. Questionnaires were analysed using SPSS whilst data collected through interviews, FGDs and primary sources was analysed using thematic analysis. The study confirmed the existence of people resourcing strategies in local authorities. There was, however, a dearth of resources to fully actualise the people resourcing strategies. In addition, the study found out that local authorities were 'theatres' for national politics, and hence, this militated against successful implementation of people resourcing strategies. There was evidence of excessive intervention in the day-to-day operations of local authorities by both the Government Officials and the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. The study recommended that appointments in local authorities be based on merit. Government should set aside at least 5 % of its budget to local authorities to enable them to have a sound financial base to fund resourcing strategies among others.

KEYWORDS: Employee resourcing, local authorities, strategic employee resourcing, local government



Introduction

Local authorities globally, and in Zimbabwe in particular, are under intense pressure to deliver services to the citizens. Like all other organisations, they deliver their services through employees. However, any employee strategy to be deployed by a local authority is expected to be in sync with national policies. The reason being that local authorities act in subordinate to Central Government, which is the embodiment of government at the macro level. In fact, local authorities, sometimes referred to as municipal authorities, are rural or urban subdivisions below the national level which are constituted by law and have substantial control of local affairs (Nissen,2021; Huq,2018). In Zimbabwe, examples of local authorities include rural district councils, urban councils, town councils, local boards, municipal councils and city councils.

Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia, South Rhodesian and Zimbabwe-Rhodesia was formerly a British colony. The country attained its independence on 18 April 1980 following a protracted armed struggle (Nyamunda, 2021). On attainment of majority rule, the country pursued equity-based economic policies to redress the imbalances of the past (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). The rationale was to improve the socio- economic situations related to poverty, migration, refugees, unemployment, illiteracy, to state a few concerns (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). Pursuant to this, from 1980 to date, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) is implementing a series of Public Service reform initiatives meant to improve service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector (Mundondo et al., 2019). Local authorities being closest to the employees, are tasked with the responsibility to implement these policies. Implementation of policies is done through the human capital. Doubts, however, began to be cast around the mid-1980s, on the competency of public entities to deliver services.

A Public Service Review Commission, set up by Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) in 1989 to monitor the performance of the Public Sector (including local authorities and other government agencies), reported the prevalence of inefficiency, ineffectiveness and corruption within the public service (Chipangura & Musekiwa, 1998)when they do not control the resource inputs. Indeed, the civil service top managers, the permanent secretaries, rejected the concept of their being put on a contract by government because of the uncertainty in resource mobilisation and control; (4. Another popular complaint about the government and its agencies (including local authorities) was that, it did not focus on results and wasted money. This was indicative of public

demands for quality services at affordable prices. The implication of which was better performance (Zinyama et al., 2015; Mutongoreni, Thakhathi & Mupindu, 2024).

Today, local authorities in Zimbabwe are faced with a myriad of challenges. These challenges include decreased budgetary support from the Central Government, a dwindling resource base, corruption, inefficiency, poor service delivery, mounting debts and a dearth of human, and material resources. Poverty remains widespread, as more than 70% of Zimbabweans resident in local authorities are living under the national poverty lines, and 22.5% (2.8 million employees) are in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2024). At the time of this study, the maternal mortality ratio in Zimbabwe was one of the highest in the region. In addition, there are approximately more than one million orphans in Zimbabwe all requiring service interventions from local authorities (Cilliers, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Aside from the above, residents of local authorities are reportedly dying from mostly preventable and treatable conditions such as HIV / AIDS, tuberculosis, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections, malaria, malnutrition, injuries, hypertension, pregnancy related and perinatal complications; mental health disorders to name a few (WHO, 2023; Moyo, 2023). Against a backdrop of these challenges, also lies a strong public perception of many Zimbabweans that corruption in the country is endemic and increasing. It has been argued that 60% of Zimbabweans believed that corruption increased between 2018 and 2019 (Maverickcitizen, 2021).

The coming of the new dispensation under Emerson Mnangagwa brought with it an aura of excitement which reverberated throughout Zimbabwe (Macioci, 2018). There were renewed calls for better services from the government and its agencies. Public officers were called upon to serve the taxpayers, who pay their salaries. More importantly, those who occupy key positions in the public service sector were implored to deliver expected results and contribute meaningfully towards Vision 2030 (Zimbabwe, *The Herald*, 4 February 2022). This call culminated in the signing of performance contracts by Cabinet Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Chief Executive Officers of Public Enterprises, Vice Chancellors of State Universities, Chief Directors and Directors of line Ministries (*The NewsDay*, 15 February, 2022). This breath of fresh air in terms of direction of the public sector presented new dilemmas for local authorities to perform to expectations. It raised questions on the calibre of human capital to take local

authorities forward in line with the demands of government. In other words, the resourcing strategies of local authorities were brought into the spotlight.

Zimbabwe, under the Mugabe administration, witnessed a multiplicity of policy interventions by the 'Mugabe' government, aimed at dealing with various challenges but without success (ZEPARU, 2012). Upon assuming office, Emerson Mnangagwa promised to take the country, mired in political and economic crisis for nearly two decades, to a new direction (Noyes, 2020). The human capital was the one tasked to take the nation forward. Consequently, whilst addressing Permanent Secretaries at the signing ceremony of their performance contracts on 18 December 2020, the President proclaimed that the system was envisaged to result in robust public sector institutions, and a leadership that was results oriented. The President also stressed that the 'Second Republic' was about action and results, and that all activities were expected to be streamlined accordingly, to make positive and lasting impacts for the growth of the economy, and overall improved quality of life for the employees (*The Herald Newspaper*, 18 December 2020).

Bureaucracy and old ways of doing business and resolving problems, it was argued, had no place under the Second Republic. To that end, coordination architecture was placed at the centre of Government (*The Herald Newspaper*, 18 December 2020). This, it was argued, encompassed three apex agencies, which were the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC), the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (*The Herald Newspaper*, 18 December 2020).

With this background, the challenge before local authorities, related to how they source their human capital to translate national policies into practical actions that meet the demands of the population. In other words, for local authorities to deliver services and also move at the pace dictated by the Central Government, they should have competent human resource to execute the strategy. How the human capital is resourced in a society riddled by corruption, poverty, inefficiency, perceived incompetence and general economic decline matters. Resourcing is a vital organisational activity that recognises that the strategic capability of a firm, for instance local authorities, depends on its resource capability in the shape of employees (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Employees resourcing in the context of local authorities in Zimbabwe is concerned with ensuring that the organisation obtains and retains the human capital it needs and employs them productively (Armstrong, 2016; Mutongoreni, Thakhathi & Mupindu, 2024).

Local authorities in Zimbabwe are hence expected to concentrate more on the attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of their employees to attain superior performance (Armstrong, 2016). Employee resourcing strategies if fully deployed has potential to spur the development of effective local government systems nationally. Taken within the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a local government system with the right calibre of staff has tremendous potential to drive a nation into attaining the United Nations' 17 SDGs (Ansell, Sørensen & Torfing, 2022).

Within the context of Zimbabwe, local authorities are widely understood as being enmeshed in a myriad of problems. In an effort to understand the mystery surrounding the challenges that local authorities faced, academics largely utilised socioeconomic and political perspectives. None of these has focused lens of analysis on employees resourcing strategies. This is notwithstanding the fact that strategies, by their nature are executed by employees. How local authorities undertake their employee resourcing has a bearing on their ultimate performance in terms of service delivery as well as steering communities to meet its entire gamut of needs (Ansell, Sørensen & Torfing, 2022). Whilst studies abound on the effect of employee resourcing strategies on organisational performance, there is a dearth of literature on the same in Zimbabwe's local authorities. This study seeks to close the gap by assessing the contestation and fortuity of employee resourcing strategies in local authorities in Zimbabwe.

In view of this, the study purport to assess the contestation and fortuity of employee resourcing strategies to effective local government systems in Zimbabwe. The objectives undergirding the study were:

- i) *To find out whether local authorities in Zimbabwe have adopted employees resourcing strategies as they strive for an effective local government system.*
- ii) *To determine whether existing employee resourcing strategies are contributing to an effective local government system in Zimbabwe.*

Employee resourcing: A brief review

The term 'employee resourcing', sometimes known as 'employees resourcing' or 'simply resourcing,' refers to employment initiatives aimed at ensuring the organisation has the human capital it requires and it deals with staff issues such

as absenteeism and turnover (Armstrong & Taylor, 2022). It is that segment of personnel and development that focuses on hiring new employees, management of their stay as well as managing their performance and potential whilst they are employed by an organisation (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Employee resourcing is a key component of human resource management. It entails matching human resources to the strategic and operational needs of the organisation and ensuring the full utilization of those resources (Armstrong, 2016).

Finding employees whose attitudes and behaviour are likely to be congruent with what management believes to be appropriate and conducive to success is one of the key objectives of human resource management. The human resource strategy according to Armstrong, (2016) addresses two critical questions which are foreseeable future, whether we have to do to attract, develop and keep these employees?

On the other hand, strategic resourcing, also known as strategic employees resourcing, focuses on ensuring that the business acquires, retains, and employs the employees it needs. It is an essential step in the process of managing strategic human resources, which is primarily about aligning human resources to the strategic and operational goals of the business and ensuring that those resources are fully utilized (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Strategic human resource management, according to Storey and Wright (2023), is the nexus of strategic management and human resource management. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2023), strategic management entails appreciating the organisation's circumstances, making future-focused decisions, and putting the strategy into action. The rationale for strategic management is to elicit the present action for the future and become action vehicles-integrating and institutionalising mechanisms for change (Armstrong & Brown, 2019). Taken into this context, strategic human resource management purports to keep the strategy, structure and human resource dimensions of the firm in direct alignment (Armstrong & Brown, 2019).

Strategic resourcing is thus concerned with choosing and promoting individuals who suit the cultural and strategic needs of the business in addition to finding and retaining the amount and quality of employees that are required (Armstrong & Taylor, 2024). It suggests that businesses are focusing on the attitudes and behaviours of their workforces (Armstrong, 2016; Kapur, 2021).

The purpose of an employee resourcing strategy is to make sure that an organisation gains a competitive edge by luring and keeping more qualified

candidates than its competitors and using them more effectively. Taken in the context of local authorities, it implies that employees have a wider and deeper range of skills, and will behave in ways which will maximize their contribution (Mutongoreni, Thakhathi & Mupindu, 2024). The business establishes itself as an employer of choice by providing an enticing employee value proposition and employer brand, as well as superior chances and rewards than others (Armstrong and Taylor, 2024). Additionally, the business employs its personnel in ways that maximize the value they provide (Armstrong, 2010; McGurk & Meredith, 2023).

Aside from the foregoing, strategic resourcing is intended for a firm to become an employer of choice, an organisation employees yearn to work for and stay with. What seems to be happening, according to Storey and Wright, (2023), is that successful organisations are able to satisfy employees' desires for both a great job and a wonderful place to work. They produce quality work and a positive workplace. They accomplish this by being a preferred employer. Employees are inclined to work there because it meets their specific demands for a good job with prospects related to training, appraisal, and working with a good boss who listens, gives some autonomy, but also offers coaching and direction (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Another goal of strategic resourcing is to develop an employee value proposition. These are the benefits that an organisation provides for potential or current employees that they are likely to value and that could help to entice them to join or stay with the organisation in question and this includes pay and benefits. There are non-financial benefits which could also be of importance and crucial in attracting and retaining employees. These include the attractiveness of the organisation, its reputation as a good employer, the degree to which it acts responsibly, treats employees with dignity and respect, and provides for diversity and inclusion, work-life balance and personal and professional growth (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023)

Strategic resourcing is also used by a company as part of its employer branding strategy. This is an amalgam of traits and characteristics, many of which are intangible, that distinguishes an organisation, guarantees a specific kind of job experience, and attracts employees who will flourish and perform at their best in its culture. It involves developing the organisation's brand image for potential personnel (Armstrong, 2010; McGurk & Meredith, 2023).

Philosophy behind strategic resourcing

The strategic resourcing approach is based on the idea that employees carry out the strategic plan (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). In other words, the strategic plan is done with the employees in mind. The organisation's strategic direction serves as the basis for the integration of business and resourcing strategies. This includes the human resources needed to meet business demands, the skill sets and behaviours necessary to support the execution of business strategies, the effects of organisational restructuring brought on by rationalisation, decentralisation, delayering, acquisitions, mergers, the development of new products or markets, or the introduction of new technology, such as cellular manufacturing, and plans for modifying the organisational culture in areas like the capacity to deliver. The resourcing strategies that emerge from the process of strategic resourcing exist to provide the employees and skills required to support the business strategy. They should also contribute to the formulation of that strategy (Armstrong, 2016).

In addition to the above, strategic resourcing places more emphasis than traditional personnel management on finding employees whose attitudes and behaviour are likely to fit what management believes to be appropriate and conducive to success (Armstrong & Taylor, 2022). Firms are concentrating more on the attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of employees (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Armstrong and Taylor (2023) argued that employee resourcing is not just about recruitment and selection. It also entails any means available to address the firm's requirements for unique skills and behaviours. A talent management strategy may start with recruitment and selection but would extend into learning and development to enhance abilities and skills, modify behaviours and succession planning. Performance management processes can be used to identify development needs (skills and behaviours) and motivate employees to make the most effective use of their abilities. Competency frameworks and profiles can be prepared to define the skills and behaviours required and can be used in selection, employee development and employee reward processes. The aim should be to develop a reinforcing bundle of strategies along these lines (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

The components of strategic employee resourcing

Armstrong and Taylor, (2022) argued that the overarching component of strategic resourcing is the integration of resourcing and business plans. Within this framework strategic resourcing includes specific strategies for workforce planning, alternatively called human resource planning which entails assessing future business needs and deciding on the numbers and types of employees required. In addition to the above strategic resourcing, it also entails developing the organisation's employee value proposition and its employer brand. The employee value proposition is what an organisation offers prospective or existing employees to help persuade them to join or remain with the business. In other words, employer brand is the image presented by an organisation as a good employer.

Strategic resourcing implies development of resourcing plans. These are plans for finding employees from within the organisation and/or for learning and development programmes to help them learn new skills. If needs cannot be satisfied from within the organisation, it involves preparing longer-term plans for ensuring that recruitment and selection processes will satisfy them. Aside from the foregoing, strategic resourcing encompasses retention plans and flexibility plans. These are plans for retaining the employees the organisation needs whilst the later entails planning for increased flexibility in the use of human resources to enable the organisation to make the best use of employees and adapt swiftly to changing circumstances (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Furthermore, strategic employee resourcing encompasses talent management. This involves ensuring that the organisation has the talented employees it requires to provide for management succession and meet present and future business needs (Armstrong & Taylor, 2022).

Following from the above, it is noted that employee resourcing is the bedrock of every progressive organisation in today's competitive environment. Local authorities that yearn to succeed today and, in the future, therefore should have a robust employee resourcing strategy. Employee resourcing strategy is emerging against a backdrop of globalisation, privatisation, the growing interest in environmental and ecological concerns, the changing nature of customer expectations, increasing competitiveness, changing customer expectations and the impact of demographic change on employee resourcing (Storey & Wright, 2023). It is therefore the purpose of this study to unravel strategic employee resourcing in local authorities and decipher its contribution to effective local government systems in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

The study examined strategic employee resourcing in local authorities and decipher its contribution to effective local government systems in Zimbabwe. It adopted a mixed methods methodology in order to address the research objectives and research questions (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021). More succinctly, the study applied an exploratory sequential mixed methods methodology. In terms of research philosophy, the study was underpinned by pragmatism. In terms of research design, the study adopted a mixed methods research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was confined to local authorities in Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe. The province had a population of 2,037,762 (ZIMSTAT, 2022).

The study was carried out in seven Rural District Councils in Manicaland notably. Chipinge, Chimanimani, Mutare, Makoni, Mutasa, Nyanga and Buhera Rural District Council), two (2) town councils (Chipinge Town Council and Rusape Town Councils, and one municipal council, that is Mutare City Council. Manicaland is one of the ten provinces in Zimbabwe and it provided a clue of the general status of employee resourcing strategies in local authorities in Zimbabwe.

Local government officials, unions officials in the various local authorities and staff involved in employee management constituted participants of this study. They were selected through purposive sampling methods. A total of 200 questionnaires were administered in the ten local authorities in Manicaland. The sample size for the qualitative study was ten. This was in line with the view of scholars that the sample size for qualitative study should range from 10-30 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data was collected through the use of questionnaires and it was collected first and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) method of analysis. The results were then used to design questions for the qualitative part of the study which involved interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis. The qualitative data gleaned from content/documentary analysis and interviews was analysed using thematic analysis.

Results

Of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 77 were completed representing a return rate of 39%. Of these, 64% of the respondent were males whilst 36% were females. Thirteen percent (13%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18-25 years, 27% were aged between 26-35 years, 39% were aged 36 -45 years ,14% were aged 45-55 years and 7% of the respondents were above the age of

55 years. In terms of level of education, (39%) of the respondents reported that they had reached diploma level (27%) had first degrees, (17%) had professional certificates, whilst (10%) had no professional qualifications.

Aside from the above (62%) of the respondent were in the category of white-collar employees whilst (31%) were in the category of blue collar. Five (7%) respondents could not be categorized whether they were in the white collar or blue-collar positions. In terms of length of service, the response showed that 13% had served their respective local authority for a period of 0-1 years 16% had served a period of between 2-5 years, 26% had served for a period of between 6 -10 years, 20% had served for a period of between 11-15 years, 13% had served a period of between 16-20 years and another 13% had served a period in excess of 20 years.

The respondents made responses in respect of employee resourcing strategies such as attracting, developing and retaining high quality employees resourcing strategy, talent management, developing a distinctive organisational culture, the design of pay, the design of jobs, learning and development, knowledge management, setting standards of performance, attitude and motivation strategies. The summary responses in respect of the employee resourcing strategies are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Employee resourcing strategies to effective local government systems in local authorities.

Strategy	Ranking employees' level of agreement					Total %
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Attracting, developing and retaining high-quality employees-resourcing strategy	18.2	33.8	29.9	10.4	7.8	100
Talent management	7.8	29.9	44.2	14.3	3.9	100
Developing a distinctive organisational culture	13.0	31.2	36.4	14.3	5.2	100
The design of pay	6.5	31.2	40.3	15.6	6.5	100
The design of jobs	10.4	37.7	39.0	9.0	3.9	100
Learning and development	18.2	28.6	37.7	9.1	6.5	100

Strategy	Ranking employees' level of agreement					Total %
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Knowledge management	9.1	45.5	31.2	9.1	5.2	100
Setting standards of performance, attitude & behaviour.	15.6	33.8	31.3	16.9	2.6	100
Motivation	5.2	32.5	27.3	14.3	20.8	100

n=77

Of the 77 respondents who responded to the questionnaires, 52% agreed that local authorities had strategies for attracting developing and retaining high quality employees whilst 18% disagreed and about 30% were neutral. What this indicated is that there were strategies for attracting, developing and retaining high quality staff. This is supported by the presence of lucrative conditions of service in local authorities in Zimbabwe. The problem bedeviling most local authorities was the inability to pay the agreed remuneration packages due to shrinking revenues. Employees for City of Mutare, Buhera and Chimanimani Rural District Councils went for some months without being paid salaries. The Executive Officers responsible for human resource and administration in one of the local authorities pointed out that their local authority had strategies for attracting employees, developing and retaining high quality staff. They also had very good human capital strategies but there were, however, no resources to anchor the strategies. In a nutshell, it can be said that there existed strategies in local authorities in Zimbabwe for attracting employees, developing them as well as retaining them.

On the application of talent management strategies, 38% agreed that their local authorities apply talent management strategies whilst 18% had negative responses. The rest were neutral partly because of the evident failure by major local authorities such as City of Mutare in paying salaries, a factor which militates against talent management practices in place.

With respect to strategies for development of a distinctive organisational culture in local authorities, 44% agreed whilst 20% disagreed. The rest were neutral. Again, the sizeable percentage of those who could not give their positions is explained by the apparent disillusionment of employees in local authorities as a result of non-payment of their salaries. The failure to pay

agreed salaries or to abide by collective bargaining agreements was noted as a source of disgruntlement among the employees.

Aside from the above, 38% of the respondents agreed that local authorities had strategies on the design of pay, whilst 22% gave negative responses. The rest did not give their positions. This position is supported by collective bargaining agreements arrived at in local authorities suggesting how the pay had to be designed. The National Employment Council (NEC) for the Rural District Councils in Zimbabwe provides for the remuneration levels to be paid for non-managerial employees in grades 1-9. Those in managerial positions negotiate for their salaries with their respective local authorities and have them approved by the parent Ministry. The salaries set out by NEC are a statutory provision as they are registered by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. The agreed pay levels are, however, not being implemented due to budgetary constraints on the part of the local authorities.

Of the respondents, 48% agreed that there were strategies for the design of jobs whilst 13% disagreed. The rest were neutral. What this shows is that the positive responses indicated that local authorities had strategies for the design of jobs. Documents accessed indicated that jobs in local authorities, for example, rural local authorities, were explicitly stated in the collective bargaining agreements including the salaries payable. In addition, job evaluations were undertaken; for example, for Chipinge Town Council, in a bid to ensure that available jobs were well designed. The latest job evaluation for Chipinge Town Council was undertaken in June 2013. What was also evident in the official documents analysed, focus group discussions, interviews as well as survey results, was that jobs in local authorities were benchmarked with what was obtaining in other local authorities in the countrywide.

On the evidence of learning and development strategies in local authorities, 47% of the responses were positive indicating that they indeed existed whilst 16% were negative while the rest were neutral. The negative responses and those who could not give their opinion could be explained by the erratic nature of the learning and development strategies in local authorities.

The responses, however, substantiate the view that local authorities had strategies for learning and development of their staff but at times the obligation is not met due to budgetary constraints. A senior official of one of the local authorities indicated that at one point their monthly revenue was US\$ 1,700,000.00 per month but this had declined to a monthly revenue of less than US\$

1000 000 per month in 2024. In addition, documentary sources accessed in local authorities shows evidence of availability of training manuals and policies (Mutongoreni, 2015). The provisions of training policies are, however, not being followed due to budgetary constraints.

With respect to strategies for knowledge management, 55% agreed that there were strategies for knowledge management in the local authorities whilst 14% disagreed. The high percentage of those who agreed that there were strategies for knowledge management is evident of the excellent policies in local authorities that support knowledge management albeit not put in to practice due to resource constraints. A Chief Executive Officer in one of the local authorities remarked that there were excellent strategies in councils but unfortunately councils could not implement them because of financial constraints. The politicians on the other hand, it was argued, were always telling employees that councils were corrupt and this, coupled with the removal of debts in local authorities prior to the July 2013 national elections, resulted in the citizens' unwillingness to pay rates. In other words, the employees were waiting for the government to order local authorities to cancel outstanding debts, like they had done previously in 2009, wherein any outstanding rates were cancelled before the next elections were to be held.

On the availability of strategies for setting standards of performance, attitude and behaviour in local authorities, 46.8% agreed that such strategies existed whilst 15.6% disagreed. The rest were neutral. The official documents accessed indicated that the issue of performance management had been embraced in local authorities especially for heads of department. Public pronouncements by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing suggested that things had changed as local authority managers were expected to enter into performance contracts. The lower-level staff, it was noted, had no incentive to deliver as they had no performance contracts tying them to perform.

For some, whether they delivered or not, it was immaterial as nothing could be done to them. One respondent aptly summed up the attitude by remarking that whether one delivered or not, they still got the end of year bonuses like everyone else. In addition, it was pointed out that one could not be dismissed on account of poor performance because there were no resources available for employees to carry out their work fully. Furthermore, the study found out that employees were of the view that if they got harassed owing to poor performance, they would approach politicians for redress.

The insinuation given was that strategies were there for setting standards of performance, attitude and behaviour but it was not followed through. Everyone was moonlighting instead of concentrating on their work. What this suggests is that standards for setting performance, behaviour and attitude were available in local authorities but partly for reasons mentioned were not being followed.

With respect to strategies for motivation of staff, the study found out that such strategies existed in local authorities but were again hampered by resource constraints. The survey responses indicated that 37.7% agreed that motivation strategies existed in their local authorities, 35.1% of the respondents disagreed whilst the rest were neutral. From the documents availed, it was found out that policies were available which if implemented would highly motivate staff in local authorities.

The strategies, it was found out, were not being implemented partly due to budgetary constraints among others. Another serious setback related to the implementation of employee resourcing strategies revolved on the politics of local government in Zimbabwe. The Government is reluctant to fully decentralize and hence intra-party politics is evident in local authorities. Agreed strategies were not being implemented as national strategies tended to take precedence over strategies adopted by the respective local authorities. Put differently, all local authorities in this study had strategic plans. National strategies however kept on changing and local authorities were forced to align with prevailing national agenda at the expense of strategies that at best address the needs of the respective local authorities. The net result was a complete abandonment of hitherto policies best suited to address the interests of the respective local authorities.

Overall, as has been seen from the foregoing, employee resourcing strategies exist in local authorities. Although these strategies were confirmed to be available, their application was being hampered due to a number of factors, the first one being financial resource constraints. Shrinkages in budgets imply that agreed strategies could not take off. Documents were available in local authorities authenticating availability of employee resourcing strategies. These strategies, if applied, effectively act as a *sine qua non* for effective service delivery.

Secondly, it was found out that the appointment of senior members of urban local authorities is done by the Local Government Board established in terms of section 116 of the Urban Councils Act, Chapter 29:15. The functions of the Local Government Board in terms of section 123 the Act was to:

provide guidance for the general organisation and control of employees in the service of councils; ensure the general well-being and good administration of council staff and the maintenance thereof in a high state of efficiency;

make model conditions of service for the purposes stated in paragraphs (a) and (b) for adoption by councils; make model regulations stipulating the qualifications and appointment procedures for senior officials of councils;

approve the appointment and discharge of senior officials;

- a) *conduct inquiries into the affairs and procedure of councils; and to exercise any other functions that may be imposed or conferred upon the Board in terms of the Act or any other enactment.*

As for senior officers of Rural District Councils, appointment is provided for in terms of section 66 of the Rural District Councils Act, Chapter 29:13 and also subject to scrutiny of the Local Government Board and approval by the Minister. This is, notwithstanding the fact that clause 274 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe empowers local authorities to run their own local affairs. They initiate the recruitment process and at the end make recommendations to the Local Government Board and then Minister. The Minister may accept or decline the recommendations. What this suggest is that local authorities are not fully empowered to exercise their judgement in terms of employee resourcing strategies since the Minister ultimately makes the final decision.

Moreover, a recommended candidate is subjected to security, political and character vetting by the President's Office. The local district administrator for the local authority would submit the names of shortlisted candidates to the President's Office for vetting. However, due to the partisan nature of the district administrator's office, a candidate sympathetic to the opposition is not recommended for appointment (Mutongoreni, 2015). What this means is that the Ministry's intervention in the human resourcing process impacts negatively on the calibre of persons who would finally be appointed to influential positions in local authorities. Strategies set aside for employee resourcing are thus put to futility. The merit principle which ordinarily must be treated as sacrosanct in employee resourcing in some instances is flouted when senior appointments in local authorities are undertaken in Zimbabwe (Mutongoreni, Thakhathi

& Mupindu, 2024). Such appointments tend to follow the rails of political considerations at the expense of the merit principle (Mutandwa & Hendriks, 2022). Consequently, those appointed may not have the requisite competencies and experience to drive local authorities into attaining sustainable competitive advantage. This explains why performance of local authorities in Zimbabwe is poor as compared to other jurisdictions (Mutongoreni, Thakhathi & Mupindu, 2024).

Aside from the above, it was also found out that there is a Local Authority Circular number 9 of 2006 that was issued by the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing which gives guidelines on the entry qualifications for senior officers of Councils, the Chief Executive Officers and Heads of Department. What this means is that even if a local authority intended to set its own standard as dictated by the market, such a strategy would not suffice as the ministry would have its own position on the issue. The said ministerial circular was addressed to all Provincial Administrators, District Administrators and Rural District Council Executive Officers/Council Chairpersons. The circular gave guidelines on the job specifications for senior positions such as Chief Executive Officer, Treasurer/Executive Officer Finance/Auditor, Executive Officer Human Resources and Administration, Executive Officer Social services, Executive Officer-Natural Resources/Agriculture and Engineer.

What this circular means is that local authorities cannot independently appoint qualified persons of their choice and the Ministry's intervention in this regard implies that even strategies adopted at council level cannot be followed if they are not favourable to the Ministry.

This problem arises partly due to the government's reluctance to fully decentralise functions to local authorities. Had the Government of Zimbabwe fully adopted the concept of decentralisation especially devolution, such interventions would not take place. The position of Zimbabwe in relation to decentralisation in employee resourcing is in contrast to the Ugandan scenario, where decentralisation is touted as a success story in terms of extent and impact (Johnson, 2023). In the case of Uganda, the transfer of staff hiring and firing decisions to the district governments through the District Service Commissions (DSCs) was considered to be one of the cornerstones of the Ugandan decentralisation reforms (Obonyo & Muhumuza, 2023) This if mimicked in Zimbabwe, would play a critical role in shaping the local government landscape.

Prior to this, civil service decentralisation in Uganda, local government officials were either seconded to local governments or placed in a unified personnel system for all local governments in the country (Olowu, 2009). This, however, is still the case in Zimbabwe, where in some cases senior government officials are seconded to local authorities. Employee resourcing strategies in Zimbabwe are not reaping desired results as persons appointed may not be suitable for their positions. The merit system, defined as appointment of the best person for any given job (McCourt, 2007), is therefore, not being followed in the strict sense because of central government intervention. Employing the right person in Zimbabwe's local authorities just like elsewhere is essential because it provides for the local authority to have the right employees in the right places, facilitates speedy and optimal filling of vacancies and delivery of what elected representatives undertake to do. It is, therefore, essential to recruit a candidate best suited to the professional job description of the position being filled. A good employment choice is all the more important because it has financial implications for the local authority, more or less long-lasting, depending on the type of employment contract (Vukonjanski et al., 2012).

Aside from the above, local authorities in Zimbabwe are the 'theatres' for political gamesmanship (Mutongoreni, 2015). What this implies is that whilst appointment of senior staff is done subject to the approval of the Minister, the lowest level staff are recruited at ward level through the local councillors. What this suggests is that patronage is rife in local authorities. Strategies for employee resourcing are available on paper but reality on the ground dictates that one is appointed in most cases on political affiliation especially the highest and lower-level staff. The appointment for Heads of Departments and Chief Executive Officers is purely political as noted from the study. A recommendation for appointment submitted by a local authority is submitted to the Local Government Board under the auspices of the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing and appointment is made after the incumbent is subject to vetting and this obscure vetting is conducted along political lines. A person who is sympathetic to the opposition parties will not be appointed. If by chance they are appointed, they will be ultimately be dismissed on one way or the other. This explained why local authorities such as Harare, Chitungwiza and Mutare, to mention a few, at one point ended up being run by the Commission appointed by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing following the dismissal of entire senior management.

In local government systems in Zimbabwe, party politics control a large portion of council business, thus casting doubt on the purportedly impartial and apolitical role of local government in meeting citizen demands (Chakunda, 2023). Although politicians (mayors and council members) and technocrats constitute local authorities by definition, the way they conduct business necessitates the adoption of a value-neutral perspective (Zhou, 2023). This is not the case in Zimbabwe where officials are divided on party lines culminating in service delivery to suffer and professionalism thrown to the dustbins. Because of the political nature of local authorities, employee resourcing strategies such as hiring based meritocracy is not honoured since this would work against the wishes of politicians. The politicians' 'birds of plumage' would by their nature favour a situation where policies, procedures and strategies are not followed so that they have an opportunity to reward their cronies before they vacate offices.

The legal framework governing local authorities were also found to militate against effective local government systems notwithstanding the presence of sound employee strategies. Jonga and Chirisa, (2009) on the level and extent of the Zimbabwe's central government interference into the urban councils' affairs noted the effects of the legal framework on effective local government systems. They found out that the constitution of Zimbabwe was not explicit on the definition of the powers to be exercised by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. This, therefore, resulted in a lot of 'tampering' in local government structures by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing (Jonga & Chirisa, (2009). In fact, both, the Urban Council's Act and the Rural District Councils Act gives the Minister unlimited power to meddle in the affairs of local authorities (GoZ, 1996).

Lastly, it was noted that the local government system in Zimbabwe prior to 2013, was not wholly entrenched in the Constitution as in other countries like South Africa (Jonga & Chirisa, 2009). The Minister was thus not held constitutionally accountable for his actions. This, it was argued, explained why, in a bid to alleviate urban problems in the country, there have been kick-backs in the form of conflicts and mistrusts in the councils' chambers (Mutongoreni,2015). This had the implication of affecting the implementation of employee resourcing strategies. It was anticipated that with the advent of the new Constitution, the Minister's powers with respect to local authority affairs will be clipped. This has however not been the case.

Conclusion

The study confirmed the presence of employee resourcing strategies in local authorities. These were, however, not contributing to positive performance because they were not being implemented effectively. The challenges to effective employee resourcing strategies related to budgetary constraints, political interference, presence of a multiplicity of players intervening in the affairs of local authorities, presence of other structures provided by the legislation that also has a bearing on employee resourcing strategies such as the Local Government Board established in terms of section 116 of the Urban Councils Act, Chapter 29:15 as well as section 66 of the Rural District Councils Act, Chapter 29:13. Lastly, partisan politics and reluctance by government for effective decentralization hampers full implementation of employee resourcing strategies.

Recommendations

Following from the foregoing, it is recommended that Central Government devote 5% of the national fiscus to local authorities. This will give local authorities a sound financial base to enable them to fund their strategies including employees resourcing strategies.

- Secondly, there is need for speed alignment of the existing local government legislation with the national Constitution. Such an alignment will go a long way in empowering local authorities to determine the course to follow in terms of employee resourcing strategies.
- Thirdly, it is recommended that local authorities be liberated from the whims of the Central Government. This is in line with the spirit of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which calls for decentralisation. Party politics should give way to professionalism and good governance which in turn fosters development and modernisation of society.

Lastly, employee resourcing strategies in local authorities should be premised solely on merit and not some obscure criteria. The entire employee resourcing process should be open and transparent and subject to public scrutiny. Public officers should be made to account for their actions and decisions especially on issues affecting the public.

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