

Human Resource Management Problems and Public Sector Management



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Synonyms

Contingency approach; Employee management; Small island developing states; Strategic human resource management

Definitions

Human resource management It refers to the use of employee management practices to attract, retain, and develop employees in an organization (Naidu and Chand 2014).

Contingency approach

It is part of the SHRM as it involves aligning the HRM practices to achieve the business objectives of organizations (Naidu and Chand 2014).

Introduction

This entry is based on a study that illuminates the main underlying problems associated with the formulation and implementation of HRM policies in the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. To date, most of the HRM studies have been conducted within large-scale organizations in large developed countries and not much in small-scale organizations in the SIDSs. Therefore, there exist unique social, cultural, and economic variations in SIDSs that are currently not accounted for while theorizing the SHRM and International HRM (IHRM) research in the context of the SIDSs (Schuler et al. 1993). The SIDSs in the Pacific have unique geographical, economic, sociocultural, political, and technological factors that affect the HRM policies and practices adopted by the public sector organizations. For example, many SIDSs have a unique socio-cultural environment, and this creates barriers to the effective management of employees. Albeit, the HRM problems may be somewhat similar; however, the impact of these problems on the

performance of public sector organizations in developing countries is more significant as compared to the developed countries (Swales and Al Fahdi 2011). Similarly, the impact of HRM problems on the performance of public sector organizations in the SIDSs is expected to be unique, and it is this gap that this paper hopes to fill.

The public sector of the SIDSs has unique features as compared to the public sector of the large developed countries. There are four ways the SIDSs are different from the large developed and less developing countries. Firstly, the development problems faced by SIDSs are different from the large developed and less developed countries (UN-OHRLLS 2013). The SIDSs have a narrow resource base. As a result of this, these economies hardly benefit from economies of scale. Secondly, small island economies have small domestic markets, heavy dependence on foreign markets, very high costs of energy and infrastructure development, and less resilience on natural disasters. Thirdly, the economic growth rates of SIDSs are extremely volatile due to global economic shocks. For instance, global economic recessions, particularly in the neighboring countries, have a substantial impact on the performance of the national economies of the SIDSs in the Pacific region (UN-OHRLLS 2013). Fourthly, there is limited growth of the private sector, and the bulk of the government resources is deployed by the public sector (UN-OHRLLS 2013). For instance, the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa is one of the largest employer in their nation. The operations of the public sector consume bulk of the financial resources from the private sector that is collected via taxation.

This study is essential for two reasons. Firstly, in the recent decade, the capriciousness of the global external environment has given rise to many problems faced by the SIDSs, and the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are not an exception to this. As the external environment is becoming unpredictable, new HRM issues have started arising in the PICs. For example, due to unfavorable socioeconomic and political factors, trained workforce from the PICs have started seeking temporary employment in overseas countries (Naidu and Chand 2014). Additionally,

governments in the PICs, as part of the global reform effort, are reducing the size of the government by resizing the human resources in the public service (Barter and Russell 2013). Secondly, the HRM problems faced by the SIDSs have been largely ignored in the existing literature. Most of the existing studies have mainly investigated the HRM problems faced by the public sector of large developed and not SIDSs. Unlike large developed and less developed economies, the literature on the HRM problems faced by the public sector organizations in the SIDSs is lagging far behind. Hence, this study attempts to examine the HRM problems faced by the public sector organizations in the Solomon Islands and Samoa by using the Consistent approach to SHRM.

This entry is structured as follows. Section “[Literature Review on HRM, IHRM, SHRM, and SIHRM](#)” reviews the literature on HRM, IHRM, SHRM, and SIHRM. Section “[Socioeconomic Background and HRM in the Public Sector: The Solomon Islands and Samoa](#)” provides an overview of socioeconomic background and HRM in the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. Section “[Research Methodology](#)” outlines the research methodology. Section “[Theoretical Framework: Contingency Theory, Research Findings, and Discussions](#)” provides the theoretical framework based on the Contingency theory, research findings, and discussions. Section “[Theoretical, Organisational, and Practical Implications of This Paper](#)” provides the theoretical, organizational, and practical implications of this paper. Finally, section “[Conclusion and Limitations](#)” provides the conclusion and limitations of this study.

Literature Review on HRM, IHRM, SHRM, and SIHRM

The extant literature that theorizes the concept of Human Resource Management (HRM), International HRM (IHRM), Strategic HRM (SHRM), and Strategic International HRM (SIHRM) was developed after the 1980s that mainly emphasized on firms and businesses operating in the large developed countries (Dowling and Schuler 1990;

Pieper 1990; Poole 1990; Dowling and Schuler 1990; Schuler et al. 1993; Dowling et al. 1999). By the mid-1990s, authors (particularly, from the USA) began to conceptualize IHRM to account for HRM practices used to manage expatriate staff working in overseas countries and the role of local culture in influencing these IHRM practices (Dowling et al. 1999). Dowling et al. (1999) went on to identify three approaches used by authors to study IHRM. The first approach was used by Adler (1997), which emphasized on the “cross-cultural management” approach used an international perspective to examine employees’ behavior within organizations (Adler 1997). The second approach was developed by Brewster and Hegewisch (1994) and Poole (1999) from the “comparative industrial relations” and HRM literature that compared and analyzed HRM systems from various countries. The third approach was developed by Schuler et al. (1993) and Dowling et al. (1999) as they theorized the “integrative framework of SIHRM” and argued that both the exogenous (internal) and endogenous (external) factors influence the SIHRM.

Many studies have examined the HRM problems in large developed countries and identified three problems. These problems are (1) lack of financial resources (Van Gramberg et al. 2014; Vo and Bartram 2012), (2) difficulties in dealing with employee attitudes (Moynihan 2006; Fernandez and Rainey 2006; Shen et al. 2010; Bach and Bordogna 2011; D’Netto et al. 2014), and (3) aligning HRM practices within an institutional framework and policy (Psychogios and Wood 2010; Thirkell and Ashman 2014).

While scholars did an excellent job in theorizing HRM, IHRM, and SIHRM and problems faced in managing human resources in the context of large developed countries, there still exists a research lacuna in the theorizing of HRM, IHRM, and SIHRM in the context of SIDSs. The major limitations of the theorization of SHRM are in twofold. First, the theorizing of SHRM is based mainly on research findings in the context of large developed countries and not on the SIDSs. According to Poole (1999), this is not surprising, as the study of SHRM has been

dominated by Anglo-American authors (Poole 1999). This study argues that the research findings from SIDSs are equally essential to develop a more comprehensive theory of SHRM. Lane (1989) and Poole (1999) have rightly argued that:

The reality is the fact that there are different SHRM models between and within countries and that the ‘best’ universalistic HRM practices of the Anglo-American countries may not explain HRM globally. (Poole 1999)

Hence, this paper, by focusing on two SIDSs and looking through the lenses of the Contingency approach, further contributes to the theorization of SHRM.

Second, the majority of the literature is dominated by studies on SHRM in the context of private sector organizations and not on the public sector organizations (Daley 2012; Bach and Kessler 2007). Bach and Kessler (2007) has correctly mentioned:

As human resource management (HRM) has developed as a field of study, the attention paid to public sector employment relations has been relatively limited. (emphasis by authors)

Moreover, Pieper (1990) stressed that:

validation of an international model(s) would benefit from cross-national comparisons of a number of features identified in the internationalization process.

Pieper (1990) argued that theorizing of IHRM is important for two reasons. Firstly, there is an increasing internationalization of businesses, whereby Multinational Corporations (MNCs) have their head office in one country and subsidiaries in several countries around the world. In these situations, companies have to deal with diverse local cultures and national employment laws and regulations in different countries around the world. Secondly, economic and technological advancement makes it easier for businesses to expand their international operations.

This paper will focus on SHRM in the public sector of the SIDSs. The central argument of this paper is that there is a research gap in our understanding of SHRM from the perspective of SIDSs, and this paper attempts to fill this gap and add to the theorization of SHRM.

Socioeconomic Background and HRM in the Public Sector: The Solomon Islands and Samoa

The economic growth of the Solomon Islands and Samoa has been mainly driven by tourism, remittances, foreign aid, the export of agricultural commodities, forestry, and marine aquaculture (International Monetary Fund 2014; Asian Development Bank 2015). The Solomon Islands is an ethnically heterogeneous society with a total population of 515,870 (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office 2015). The ethnic tension in the Solomon Islands during the year 2000 resulted in the destruction of local infrastructure and private sector business in Honiara, the capital city. In order to rejuvenate the economy and reconstruct the local infrastructure, the donor agencies, mainly Australia, New Zealand, and PICs, provided development assistance to the Solomon Islands. This mission was called the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) (International Labour Organisation 2008).

Samoa is much smaller in land size and population as compared to the Solomon Islands. The recent census statistics of Samoa that was published in the year 2011 showed that Samoa's population stood at 187,820. Out of these, 36,735 (19.56%) comprised of the urban population, whereas 151,085 (80.44%) comprised of the rural population (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2015). Samoa is an ethnically homogenous society, and this is one of the reasons why Samoa has been enjoying political harmony (Reilly 2004).

Since the colonial days, the Solomon Islands and Samoa have adopted the British system of public sector administration. In the last 20 years, the Solomon Islands and Samoa have adopted public sector reforms as a recommendation by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The objective of these reforms was to reengineer public sector policies, practices, and processes.

Human Resource Management in the Public Sector of the Solomon Islands

According to the Australian Government (2013), there is an acute deficiency of educated and skilled

workforce in the Solomon Islands public administration. The policy framework and regulations that guide public administration in the Solomon Islands are outdated and need updating and proper implementation. The public administration system in most of the PICs is centralized, characterized by a lack of proper communication between local and national governments. As a result of this, there is no proper direction given to the allocation of financial resources and development programs and assistance. In order to counter these challenges at the local government level, many workshops and trainings have been organized on general public administration. These trainings have been largely funded by the donor agencies, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. High staff turnover and labor mobility to overseas countries are two of the main reasons why these training programs are not effective (Australian Government 2013). Some of the factors attributed to the failure of the public HRM system in the Solomon Islands are outdated policies and practices, lack of proper job descriptions, and poor implementation of the performance management system (Asante et al. 2011).

Human Resource Management in the Public Sector of Samoa

As compared to the Solomon Islands, Samoa is far ahead in adopting new and innovative methods of public sector administration to improve public service delivery. According to the World Bank (2015), Samoa is leading the PICs on ease of doing the business survey. The World Bank's ease of doing business report emphasizes that it is much easier and faster to do business in Samoa as compared to other PICs. One of the primary drivers of this achievement is that Samoa has been able to improve its public service delivery by improving the quality of its workforce. In the recent decade, the Samoan public service has been implementing plans to institutionalize reforms, reviewing existing HRM policies, and implementing HRM systems. For example, Samoa's strategic development plan focuses on improving the quality of the health sector workforce by implementing training and development programs (Ministry of Finance Samoa 2012).

Similar to the case of the Solomon Islands, the public sector of Samoa is also cramped with a low qualified and skillful workforce. In order to address this, Samoa's strategic plan for the year 2012 to 2015 focuses on human capacity building and improving the quality of education in Samoa (Ministry of Finance Samoa 2012).

Research Methodology

The main aim of this entry is to explore the problems of HRM in the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa and to examine the impact of contingency variables on the HRM practices adopted by the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. This study was conducted in the year 2013 and 2016 by using semi-structured interview schedules. The employee management officers working for the public service of the Solomon Islands and Samoa were contacted to obtain information on the problems of HRM faced by the public sector and how the contingency variables are affecting these problems. The main interview questions together with the summary of the interviews are provided in [Appendix 1](#). These questions were based on the changes in the public sector with particular emphasis on the contingency variables that were driving these changes and the impact of these changes on human resource delivery. The employee management officers were also asked questions on the HRM problems faced by the public service. The informants were also asked to recommend some changes for improving public service delivery. The length of each interview was approximately half an hour for each government official (Tables 1 and 2).

Sample Size

Since our target was to get information from senior managers of various ministries and government departments, it was easier to choose the sample. The main informants were managers who had good knowledge of HR policies, procedures, and how it is rolled out to employees. Refer to [Appendix 1](#) for further details.

Sample Size: Out of the 26 interviews conducted in Samoa, all the informants interviewed in Samoa had spent less than 24 years in public service. The age range of all the informants interviewed was between 24 and 55 years. Out of the 18 interviews conducted in the Solomon Islands, 16.7% were females, and 83.3% were males. Approximately 89% of the civil servants had spent less than 24 years in public service. The age range of all the civil servants interviewed was between 24 and 51 years old.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to collect and analyze data. It is a research technique that is used to make valid inferences from the themes of textual materials (Clarke and Braun 2013). The main themes from the interviews were identified, and these themes were used as subtopics for discussing the four research questions proposed in this study (see [Appendix 1](#)).

Theoretical Framework: Contingency Theory, Research Findings, and Discussions

This entry uses the Contingency approach to explore the HRM problems faced by the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. The originality of this entry is that it focuses on the SHRM in the public sector of the SIDSs as there is a gap in the existing literature and none of the existing studies have used the Contingency approach to SHRM theorizing to explore the problems of HRM in the public sector of the SIDSs (Brewster 1999).

Contingency Theory

This paper uses the Contingency approach as the main theoretical framework to explain SHRM in the SIDSs. The Contingency approach stresses the importance of contingency variables (both internal and external factors) that impact SHRM in organizations. The Contingency approach is part of the SHRM as it involves aligning the HRM practices to achieve the business objectives of organizations. Companies need to undertake internal and external environment analysis in

Human Resource Management Problems and Public Sector Management, Table 1 Solomon Islands: summary of semi-structured interviews

Ministry number	Summary of the interviews
1	Change in the title of positions has provided motivation, but there are still issues related to lack of capacity building
2	Public servants are leaving employment
3	Human resource coordination problems
4	Centralization of decision-making and empowerment issues
5	Lack of qualified personnel
6	No sound human resource policies
7	Absenteeism problems
8	Unattractive pay package
9	Issues related to employee compensation
10	Centralized decision-making issues are affecting the motivation of workers
11	Public service delivery needs to be restructured to motivate public servants
12	Financial constraints
13	Budget problems
14	Ineffective policies on finance and leadership are affecting human resources
15	Coordination problems
16	Budget issues related to the recruitment of public servants
17	Changes in employee disciplinary processes are needed
18	Poor leadership is affecting the performance of human resources
19	High turnover of employees

order to understand the changes in the business environment and how to undertake strategies to counter these challenges.

Figure 1 shows the contingency variables affecting HRM practices.

Studies have identified a number of factors that have an impact on HRM, SHRM, IHRM, and SIHRM. In summary, the first contingency variable is the “economic environment” that examines how the economic environment influences the HRM practices adopted by organizations (Schuler et al. 1993; Dowling 1999; Brewster 1999). The second variable is the “technological environment” that has an impact on human resource activities. The third variable is the “political environment” that affects employee’s morale, motivation, and job performance (Schuler et al. 1993; Dowling 1999; Brewster 1999; Boyne et al. 1999; Cheng 2015; Arlbjørn et al. 2015; Ababneh 2016). Another variable is the “socio-cultural environment” that includes societal values, norms, beliefs, customs, and work ethics that affect the management of human resources

(Schuler et al. 1993; Dowling 1999; Kalpazidou 2008; Cannaerts et al. 2016; Ohemeng 2010). The fifth variable is the public sector strategy, policies, and regulations adopted by the government departments (Pandey 2010; Overmans and Noordegraaf 2014). The sixth and final variable is the “internal environment” which affects the human resources of any organization (Jackson and Schuler 1995; Goldsmith and Eggers 2005; Dawes et al. 2009; Lodge and Hood 2012; Malatesta and Smith 2014). All these variables are fundamental in influencing the SHRM in organizations.

With regard to the public sector, the literature shows three groups of contingency variables that impact HRM, and these three groups of contingency variables are (1) public sector strategy (Butler et al. 1991; Cappelli and Singh 1992; Begin 1993); (2) internal environment variables, such as size and structure of public sector (Jones 1984; Jackson et al. 1989; Jackson and Schuler 1995); and (3) external environment factors such as technology, global economy, and sociocultural

Human Resource Management Problems and Public Sector Management, Table 2 Samoa Islands: summary of semi-structured interviews

Ministry number	Summary
M1	Lack of implementation of quality of work-life programs and labor-management participation teams
M2	Performance appraisal issues leads to unfairness in promotion
M3	Low level of financial incentives provided to staff
M4	Lack of financial incentives available for an excellent performance
M5	Inconsistent recruitment practices
M6	Lack of awareness of staff about the changes in the market condition and organizational performance
M7	Performance appraisal issues leads to unfairness in promotion
M8	Performance appraisal issues leads to unfairness in promotion
M9	Low level of cross-cultural job design
M10	Inflexible job design
M11	Performance appraisal issues leads to unfairness in promotion
M12	Performance appraisal issues leads to unfairness in promotion
M13	Lack of financial incentives on good performance
State-owned enterprises	
SOE	Performance appraisal issues lead to unfairness in promotion
SOE	Lack of financial incentives on good performance
SOE	Low levels of cross-cultural job design
SOE	Poor implementation of performance appraisal
SOE	Poor implementation of performance appraisal
SOE	Staff are only briefly communicated on the changes in the market condition and organization performance
SOE	Internal promotion and recruitment problems
SOE	Staff are only briefly communicated on the changes in the market condition and organization performance
SOE	Not all the staff participate in the quality of work life programs
SOE	Poor implementation of performance appraisal
SOE	Poor implementation of performance appraisal
Government bodies	
GB	Poor implementation of performance appraisal
GB	The use of the internal promotion criteria is limited in the department

and political factors (Schuler and Walker 1990; Schuler, 1995; Becker and Gerhart 1996; Boxall 1998; Dowling et al. 1999).

Link Between SHRM and Contingency Theory

The subject matter of SHRM can be explained via the lenses of the Contingency approach (Woodward 1965; Dewar and Werbel 1979; Schoonhoven 1981; Van de Ven and Drazin 1985; Venkatraman 1989). In the contemporary changing business environment, the relationship between HRM practices and firm performance is no longer linear but has a matrix relationship

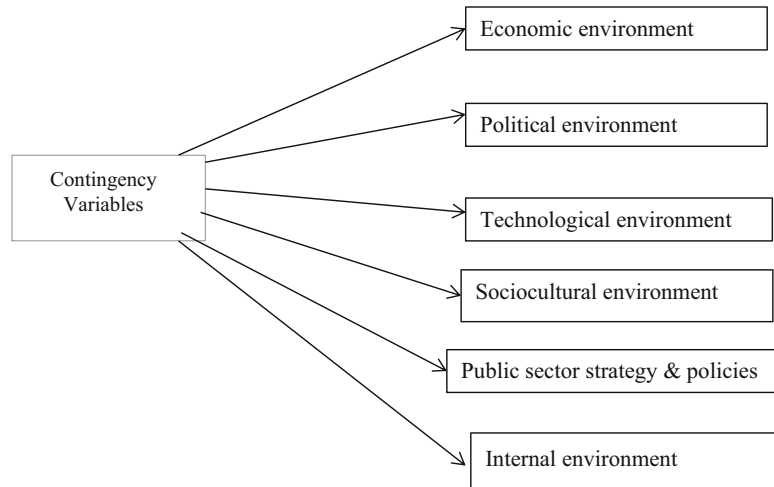
(Martín-Alcázar et al. 2005). This paper argues that researchers would be making incorrect assumptions if they are examining HRM problems without accounting for the impact of both internal and external environments on these HRM problems. The inexplicable behavior of the internal and external environment gives rise to a range of HRM problems faced by organizations.

Research Findings

The research findings from the two PICs reveal that both the internal and broader external environment factors have an impact on the HRM.

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Fig. 1 Contingency variables affecting HRM practices. (Source: Created by the authors of this paper (2019))



Source: Created by the authors of this paper (2019).

There are some similarities and variations of HRM problems faced by the public sector of Samoa and Solomon Islands. Some of the common HRM problems faced by the public sector are financial constraints, inability to recruit and retain a skilled workforce, lack of ongoing training, poor pay and working environment, lack of employee voice and consultation, lack of top management support, and poor employee work ethic and attitude.

Similarities in HRM Between Samoa and the Solomon Islands

This section explores some of the similarities in HRM problems faced by the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa.

Financial constraints: According to Vo and Bartram (2012) and Van Gramberg et al. (2014), implementing HRM practices that enhance employee productivity and motivation requires allocation of the national budget for recruitment, training, and retaining a skilled and talented workforce. There is a lack of availability of financial resources to improve HRM practices in the public sector of Samoa and Solomon Islands. The previous study by Van Gramberg et al. (2014) have found finance as a significant problem. If financial resources are not available, it will be difficult for the government ministries to hire enough skilled and qualified employees at the right place and at the right time. One of the government

officials from Samoa's Public Service Commission mentioned that:

The government does not have adequate funds to recruit the right number of employees and meet the training needs of each of the ministries. This has been one of the problems restricting the acquisition of efficient and highly motivated employees [...]

Similarly, the government of the Solomon Islands has to run a budget deficit in order to meet the HR requirements of the respective ministries. According to one of the government officials from the Solomon Islands:

The government of the Solomon Islands lacks the financial resources required to improve the public service functions. The donor agencies are providing the financial resources to implement HRM reforms, but this amount is not enough [...]

Both the Solomon Islands and Samoa rely more heavily on foreign aid from the donor agencies (such as Australia and New Zealand) to fund the government employee's salaries. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development database (2016), the net official development assistance received by the Solomon Islands increased from \$US 68,250,000 in the year 2000 to \$US 198,510,000 in the year 2014. Similarly, the development assistance received by Samoa has also increased from \$US 27,140,000 in the year 2000 to \$ US 92,740,000 in the year 2014.

The human resources in the public sector need to be financially sustainable in order to continuously deliver services that fulfill the people's demands (Wolfson et al. 2013). Furthermore, the benefits of spending on human resources must outweigh the cost. Accountants have always seen human resources as a cost factor and, as such, given low priority and importance to sustainable management and development of human resources. This paper adds to the debates on the cost and sustainability of human resources by Wolfson et al. (2013) and Barter and Russell (2013) published in the *Sustainability Accounting, Management, and Policy Journal*.

Inability to Recruit, Train, and Retain the Skilled Workforce

Essentially, the public sector needs to employ talented and efficient employees to improve public service delivery. Citizens and private sector businesses expect excellent service delivery from government departments. The public sector needs to recruit qualified employees, train, and develop them effectively and efficiently to ensure long-term sustainability of the HRM (Wolfson et al. 2013; Barter and Russell 2013). The inability to recruit, train, and retain skilled workforce is another HRM challenge faced by the Samoan and Solomon Islands governments. In Samoa and Solomon Islands, the general education level of the population is much lower than in developed countries. Both the Samoan and Solomon Islands government gives scholarships to students to study in Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand. However, once these students graduate, they usually migrate to developed countries for better life opportunities. According to one of the government officials from Samoa:

We lack skilled and qualified workforce, particularly in the areas of HRM and policymaking. The government is spending financial resources on educating the workforce at the University of the South Pacific and local institutions. Once these students graduate, they migrate to rich countries around the world because they can find better jobs in other countries [...]

The government officials made similar comments from the Solomon Islands:

We have many programs that help the government officials to get a better education. In addition to this, we have the RAMSI machinery that provides technical assistance in the areas of HRM, policy-making and customer service [...]

According to one of the government officials from Samoa:

It is challenging for the Samoan government to recruit and pay a higher wage rate to the civil servants and award them with promotions, increments and bonuses if they are performing above the required benchmark [...]

In the context of the Solomon Islands, the ethnic tension of the December 1998 has forced many civil servants to migrate to its neighboring countries. During periods of ethnic tension, it is difficult for the Solomon Islands government to retain skilled and qualified civil servants (Interviewees 30 and 36). Ethnic tensions negatively affect public sector employee motivation and job performance. This argument is parallel to the findings of the studies conducted by Cheng (2015), Arlbjørn et al. (2015), and Ababneh (2016). These studies also found that the political environment affects public sector motivation and job performance.

Lack of employee collaboration and consultation: Lack of employee collaboration and consultation leads to conflicts in the workplace, and this results in a hostile working environment. Many studies have found that a hostile working environment has a negative impact on employee morale and motivation at the workplace (Van Gramberg et al. 2014; D'Netto et al. 2014; Thirkell and Ashman 2014). If employees are not happy, employee turnover will be high, and this will be costly for the business in the long term. According to one of the public sector government officials from Samoa:

I believe there is a lack of employee involvement in the decision-making process of public service. Sometimes employees feel they are not part of the public service because their views are not accounted for by the public service. As a result of this, conflicts arise at the workplace [...]

Similar HRM problems are faced by the public sector of the Solomon Islands. According to one of the government officials from the Solomon Islands:

Around 70% of the decisions that are implemented in the respective ministries are made by the Ministry of Public Service Commission. Some of the decisions that are made by the Ministry of Public Service Commission that has a substantial impact on the operations of the different ministries are appointments, promotions, training and development and performance appraisal. Since the decisions are centralized at the Ministry of Public Service Commission, it is difficult for the ministries to involve its employees in the decision making process [...]

The public sector of the Solomon Islands emphasizes on centralizing significant decisions at the Ministry of Public Service Commission so that the costs associated with decision-making can be reduced. Some of the costs associated with decentralized decision-making are (1) increase in turnaround time of public sector decisions and (2) opportunity cost of employees' time. All of these costs have indirect financial implications on the operations of the public service. This finding is parallel to the findings of the studies conducted by Pandey (2010) and Overmans and Noordegraaf (2014). These two studies have confirmed that centralization in decision-making is an austerity measure used by the policymakers to reduce the size of the public service operations.

In the case of Samoa, due to lack of technological innovation, it is difficult to involve employees in the decision-making process. It would be easier to involve employees in the decision-making process if the government implements an advanced HRM information system. The employment law of the Solomon Islands and Samoa does have clauses on employee consultation and collaboration, but the degree to which it is implemented is questionable.

Both Samoa and the Solomon Islands have a collective sociocultural environment where group decision-making is given importance over the individual decision-making. According to one of the government officials from Samoa's public service:

At the community level, we make decisions in groups. I think it is difficult for employees to adjust when employees are not involved in the decision-making process [...]

The contextual factor of "lack of employee collaboration and consultation" links both to the strategic HRM framework proposed by Brewster and the Contingency perspective. Brewster proposed the strategic HRM framework by combining the "HRM literature" and the "comparative industrial relations" literature to analyze the HRM practices across countries. The contextual variable of "lack of employee collaboration and consultation" helps us to understand how the previous macro-level "industrial relations" environment (e.g., involvement of trade unions and employee voice) has changed in the public sector and being replaced by a new micro HRM system.

Poor performance appraisal: A good performance appraisal is one that can enhance employee productivity and motivation (Chiu et al. 2002; Pfeffer 2010; Albrecht et al. 2015). Several problems have been identified while developing and implementing the performance appraisal of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. The existing performance appraisal system of Samoa is poorly implemented. According to one of the government officials from Samoa:

The job classification structure that was implemented in the early 2000s is currently outdated. This needs to be reviewed in order to meet the current context of Samoa. The performance management system is not fully linked to the rewards, and training and development needs of employees [...]

Similarly, the performance management system of the Solomon Islands also has several problems. One of the problems identified by the government officials is that there is a lack of awareness and little uptake of the performance management system among the government employees. One of the government officials from the public sector of the Solomon Islands mentioned that:

Currently, there is a lack of awareness of the objectives of the performance appraisal system. The ministries do not want to take responsibility for completing the performance appraisals as they

believe that it is the responsibility of the public service commission [...]

Technological innovation has a substantial impact on managing the performance appraisal system in the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. Currently, there is limited use of HRM information systems in the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. The government of the Solomon Islands and Samoa will need a skilled workforce and financial resources to implement HRM information system in place. However, these resources are currently unavailable to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector. This finding is similar to the findings of the studies conducted by Singh et al. (2011), Farooqi (2016), and Jin et al. (2016). These studies also recognized that financial resources and a skilled workforce are needed to implement a quality-focused performance appraisal system. Furthermore, these studies also found that using innovative HRM information systems will enhance the transparency and accountability of public service delivery.

Lack of Top Management Support: Top management support is needed to implement HRM practices (Stanton et al. 2010; Thirkell and Ashman 2014). The goal of any national government is to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of the public service delivery. This goal can be achieved if top management supports HRM initiatives. Top management support would involve providing financial and nonfinancial resources to implement productivity-enhancing HRM practices. One of the government officials from the Solomon Islands mentioned that:

We need top management support to implement good HRM practices. Some of the issues that need immediate attention are improving the implementation of the performance appraisal system, redefining existing job descriptions and handling issues related to HRM [...]

The government officials made similar comments from Samoa. According to one of the government officials from Samoa:

The top management has always been supportive of implementing good HRM practices in the public sector of Samoa. However, due to a lack of financial

resources, sometimes they are not able to provide full support. [...]

The economic environment influences the type of top management support that is provided by public sector organizations to implement HRM practices. If the government has the financial budget to implement employee enhancing HRM practices, definitely they would allocate sufficient funds to implement these practices. However, if the government does not have sufficient funds to implement HRM practices, it would not provide financial support to each of the ministries to implement these practices. Similarly, the political environment should be supportive of encouraging top senior management public officials to implement HRM practices. This finding is similar to the evidence from the studies conducted by Psychogios and Wood (2010), Stanton et al. (2010), and Thirkell and Ashman (2014). These studies argued that HRM practices in public service should be aligned with the nation's human resource development strategies. This implies that top management support toward enhancing human resource practices is essential toward improving productivity levels of the civil servants.

Poor employee motivation: To implement employee enhancing HRM practices, we need employees who are receptive to changes at the workplace and who can adjust quickly to changes in the work environment (D'Netto et al. 2014; Van Gramberg et al. 2014). It has been noticed in Samoa and Solomon Islands that employees are slow in adapting to the changes at the workplace. According to one of the government officials from Samoa:

If we are implementing best practices in the public sector to improve public sector service delivery, employees should accept those changes and understand that it is suitable for them and the public sector as a whole. If some practices are not suitable for them, surely it would not be implemented because the government does not want to harm the employees [...]

The government officials made similar comments from the Solomon Islands. According to one of the government officials from the Solomon Islands:

It is difficult for employees to adapt to the new changes that we are trying to implement in the public service. We have noticed that employees feel insecure when they see that we are trying to bring in new practices in the public service. [...]

The sociocultural environment of the Solomon Islands and Samoa influences the employee attitude that they bring to the workplace. As compared to the culture of the Anglophone countries and its allies, employees in the Solomon Islands and Samoa are much slower in adopting changes in the work practices. According to one of the government officials from Samoa:

Employee's attitudes at the workplace affect how fast they can adapt to changes in technological innovation. If employees do not understand the objectives of implementing HRM information system, it would be difficult for them to accept innovative technology to instill transparency and accountability in the public service [...]

The findings from this study are similar to the findings from the studies conducted by Moynihan (2006) and Fernandez and Rainey (2006). These studies also argued that poor employee attitude leads to a lack of acceptance of organizational change in the public sector.

Differences in the HRM in Samoa and the Solomon Islands

The research findings show that there are some significant differences in the development of human resources in the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. The significant differences are in sociocultural, political, and economic features, and these differences have a bearing on the human resources in public sector development.

Cultural/societal difference: Samoa's public sector is influenced by the national cultural system of *fa'a Samoa* (*Fa'a Samoa* is the Samoan way of life.) and *fa'a matai* (traditional chiefly system – *Fa'a matai* are traditional chiefs as part of social stratification system of Samoa.). The ideology of *fa'a Samoa* requires people to be obedient, show respect to senior people, and not to question those in authority. *Fa'a matai* is a traditional social stratification system where the *matai* (chiefs) are the leaders and the people underneath them are

“commoners.” In Samoa, only people with *matai* titles (chiefs) are eligible to contest elections, and all ministers and members of parliament are chiefs. On the other hand, in the Solomon Islands, there are a few layers of social stratification, and they have a *wantok* system (*Wantok* in the Solomon Islands means people speaking the same language.) that has a bearing on HRM in the public sector.

Political difference: Samoa has been politically stable since it gained its independence in 1962, and this led to a steady development of its public sector and its human resources (Liloqula 2000). However, the Solomon Islands has had a troubled political environment (instability) as it underwent ethnic civil conflict between 1998 and 2003 that derailed the public sector development and, in particular, its human resource (Nanau 1998; Liloqula 2000). The most recent instability was in April 2019, whereby local people created a riot in the capital city of Honiara in the Solomon Islands.

Economic differences: The economic positions of the two countries are also different which has influenced the development of HRM in the public sector. Samoa was ranked at 104 in the year 2017 Human Development Index Report, while the Solomon Islands was in 152 places (United Nations Development Programme 2018). Likewise, the gross national income (GNI) for the Solomon Islands and Samoa in the year 2017 was 6390 and 2270 PPP dollars, respectively (World Bank 2018). From these statistics, it is fair to say that Samoa currently enjoys a higher standard of living than the Solomon Islands. With a higher GNI and HDI, the Samoan public servants get decently higher salaries than their counterparts in the Solomon Islands.

Overseas training opportunities: There is a slight difference in the types and forms of training opportunities provided to the public servants in the Solomon Islands and Samoa. For instance, the public servants from Samoa have several opportunities for training in New Zealand, whereas the public servants from the Solomon Islands may not be having these opportunities. This has a positive impact on the intellectual

capital of the Samoans as many of them are educated or trained overseas and can migrate to New Zealand under existing special immigration quota arrangements.

This paper has used the case studies from the Solomon Islands and Samoa's public sector to discuss the political, cultural, economic, and historical differences. Hence, it is argued from the above discussions that the "contingency factors" of HRM problems faced by the Solomon Islands and Samoa are also different.

Theoretical, Organizational, and Practical Implications of This Paper

Theoretically, one of the significant contributions of this study is that it adds to the theorization of SHRM from the perspective of the SIDSs. A close synthesis of the existing literature shows that the existing theorization of SHRM has mainly focused on the empirical data from the large developed Anglo-American countries (Poole 1999). One of the significant contributions of this study is that it does not take into account the unique social, cultural, economic, and political factors present in the SIDSs. Notably, after examining the context of the SIDSs in this paper, it is clear that variations in the use of SHRM practices exist in different geographical regions.

Moreover, this paper also stresses the importance of using contingency lenses in the theorization of SHRM. The Contingency approach stresses the importance of Contingency variables (both internal and external factors) that impact SHRM in organizations. The Contingency approach helps in the theorization of SHRM as it highlights the importance of internal and external environments in influencing the SHRM. The internal and external factors in SIDSs are different from those found in large developed countries.

This paper also bridges the gap between theory and practice by examining the concrete empirical data from the two SIDSs (Poole 1999). Similar studies in other SIDSs should be conducted, and research findings can be compared across geographical regions.

In terms of public policy management, senior government officials in developing countries can undertake a proactive strategy to address the difficulties related to managing internal and external environmental factors so that strategies can be designed to use human resources to improve public service delivery. Training is needed for senior civil servants to enhance their strategic thinking and policy analysis and design skills. The evidence reveals that the lower-level employees in the public sector of Samoa and the Solomon Islands have numerous problems, and these include lack of education and skills, inadequate and poor training, lack of employee consultation, and poor employee attitude and work ethic. For example, with the improvement in online technology and increased access to the internet, citizens are demanding improved public service delivery by using an online medium. Before innovative technology is used to deliver public services, employees have to be trained in the use of innovative technology.

At the organizational level, the implications of this paper are in threefold. First, top management support is needed to encourage employee voice, consultation, and participation. Employees need to be consulted during the decision-making process in order to encourage civil servants to think innovatively on improving public service delivery. Second, top and middle management should continuously train civil servants so that they are well versed with changing rules and regulations, public policies, procedures, processes, and adoption of new technology. Third, management needs to consider decent pay and working conditions in the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa so that civil servants are motivated, have high morale, and provide better service delivery. Poor employee attitude, morale, and work ethics will cause conflicts, and this affects the productivity of civil servants. Therefore, to increase productivity, human resource managers need to modernize HRM practices and encourage employees to think more flexibly.

At the societal level, this study can guide government policymakers to improve public service delivery by listening to public views and perceptions. The main aim of any public sector

organization is to provide efficient, effective, and high-quality public service to the citizens of a country. This will benefit and raise the quality of life of people, and continuous delivery of high-quality service will ensure that the benefits of public service are sustainably spread between current and future generations. Finally, this study can contribute to research and teaching of public sector courses in several tertiary institutions in the Pacific region. Case studies can be developed to enhance teaching materials.

Conclusion and Limitations

The main aim of this paper was to explore the HRM problems faced by the public sector organizations in the Solomon Islands and Samoa. This study used the Contingency approach to examine how the contingency variables (internal and external environmental factors) have an impact on the HRM problems faced by the public sector of the Solomon Islands and Samoa. The findings from this study showed that there were some similarities and variations in HRM problems faced by the public sector of Samoa and the Solomon Islands. Some of the common HRM problems faced by the public sector of Samoa and the Solomon Islands are financial constraints, inability to retain a skilled workforce, lack of skilled workforce, lack of ongoing training, poor working environment, lack of employee collaboration and consultation, lack of top management support, and poor employee attitude.

The employment law should support employee enhancing HRM practices in the public sector of the PICs. An employment law that balances the employee's and employer's interests will ensure that the senior public service government officials provide support to the HRM initiatives. This finding is similar to the findings from the studies conducted by Psychogios and Wood (2010), Stanton et al. (2010), and Thirkell and Ashman (2014). These studies argued that HRM practices in the public service should be aligned to the nation's employment law. This implies that top management support is crucial to solving the

numerous problems faced by the public sector of the SIDSs. It is essential to study the context of the SIDSs as it reveals the peculiarities of internal and external factors that are unique to the PICs but cannot be explained by the mainstream Anglo-American SHRM literature. As discussed above, the Anglo-American SHRM literature is based on the empirical studies conducted on large developing countries. The universalistic "best" HRM practices cannot explain HRM practices in the SIDSs. The contribution of the paper is that it adds to our understanding and theorization of strategic HRM. One of the limitations of this study is that generalizations from this study cannot be made for all the PICs because this study was only conducted on two PICs. Future researchers should conduct this type of study in other PICs so that generalizations can be made across geographical regions.

Cross-References

- [Public Sector](#)
- [Strategic Human Resource Management](#)

Appendix 1

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. What are the changes in the public sector that have happened in the last 20 years?
2. What are the human resource management problems faced?
3. What is the impact of human resource management problems on public service delivery?
4. What are the suggestions for improving the public sector service delivery?

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