



## THE MISSING LINK IN PUBLIC SECTOR AUTOMATION: HUMAN CAPITAL INTELLIGENCE AND WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Nigeria's Federal Civil Service was ushered into 2026 as a formally paperless institution and this became a celebrated landmark in the country's decade long ambition to digitise Public Administration. Yet beneath this milestone lies a disquieting reality: the workforce that is expected to sustain and make meaningful this digital infrastructure remains largely unmapped, underqualified, and misaligned with the demands of a modern public service. This paper argues that technology-first reform in Nigeria has inadvertently displaced a more foundational imperative, which is the need of the auditing and systematic intelligence-gathering on human capital. Drawing on the Federal Government's own Personnel Audit and Skills Gap Analysis (PASGA) initiative launched in 2025, alongside international literature on digital governance and human resource reform in developing states, the paper contends that no meaningful public sector transformation can be anchored on a workforce whose composition, competencies, and gaps are not first rigorously understood. The concept of Human Capital Intelligence, which is the deliberate, data-driven mapping of workforce capacity as a prerequisite for reform, is advanced as the missing link in Nigeria's public sector modernisation agenda. The paper concludes that investing in knowing the workforce is not preparatory work; it is the work itself.



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### 1.1 Introduction

Within the global discourse on governance reform, developing countries often operate within a complex mix of institutional constraints and external pressures that shape how reform ideas are interpreted and applied. While many reforms draw on globally circulating models, their

outcomes frequently depend on how well they engage with local administrative realities and capacities. Recent scholarship consistently highlights that reforms in developing contexts often struggle not because of a lack of structural innovation, but because of gaps in implementation capacity, stakeholder engagement, and human resource development (Aliyu, Singaravelloo, and Mansor, 2021; Haque, Ramesh, Puppim de Oliveira, and Gomide, 2021). It is within this broader context that a recurring pattern becomes apparent: governments tend to prioritise visible, measurable outputs, such as new systems, digital platforms, and administrative architectures, while the human foundations that sustain these innovations receive comparatively less attention. Nigeria's ongoing civil service reform reflects this broader tendency. In December 2025, the Federal Government announced that all ministries and extra-ministerial departments had achieved full compliance with paperless operations, marking what the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs. Didi Esther Walson-Jack, described as "a decisive break from decades of paper-based bureaucracy" (Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation [OHCSF], 2025a). It was, by any standard, an administratively significant moment. But a question that the applause has largely drowned out is this: who exactly are the civil servants now expected to operate within this new digital architecture, and do they have what it takes to make it work?

That question is not merely rhetorical. Eom and Lee (2022), writing in *Government Information Quarterly*, observed that digital government transformation in many countries has tended to focus disproportionately on the technological dimensions of reform, which include platforms, automation, and service delivery infrastructure, while the workforce readiness dimension is treated as secondary or assumed. This gap, they argued, is one of the most consistent reasons why e-government initiatives fail to deliver on their promise, particularly in contexts where the existing civil service was built around paper-based processes and analogue administrative cultures (Dada, 2016). Nigeria fits this description with uncomfortable precision. The Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan 2021–2025 (FCSSIP25), which is the policy vehicle driving the current wave of reform, was built around six pillars, of which digitalisation was prominent. Yet even as ministries rushed to deploy Enterprise Content Management Systems and go paperless, the Commission responsible for managing the civil service was, as recently as July 2025, admitting a rather damning truth about its own workforce.

At the unveiling of the Federal Civil Service Commission's five-year strategic plan in Abuja, its Chairman, Professor Tunji Olaopa, stated plainly that Nigeria has a pool of civil servants whose skills are no longer required and are therefore redundant. He noted that the problem was not overstaffing, as is often assumed, but rather a large number of staff, most of whom lack the requisite skills to function, while the skills the system actually needs are scarce (as reported in *Punch Newspaper*, July 3, 2025). That a senior official of the reform establishment would make this admission in public is itself significant. It confirms what many scholars of Nigerian public administration have long argued, which is that the country's civil service suffers not primarily from a problem of numbers, but from a deep structural mismatch between the human capital it possesses and the work that a modern developmental state demands of it (Oigbochie, Ahonya and Nchedo, 2023; Oyelude and Unegbu, 2024).

This mismatch is not unique to Nigeria. Maheshwari, Mohan, and Mishra (2025), in a study on digital transformation in developing countries, identified workforce-related challenges, including digital illiteracy, skills deficits, and resistance to new working cultures, as among the most persistent obstacles to e-government success. Their findings are consistent with those of Mergel, Edelmann, and Haug (2019), who defined digital transformation in the public sector not merely as a technological shift but as a wholesale rethinking of how government institutions are organised, what competencies they require, and how they relate to the citizens they serve. When understood in these broader terms, it becomes clear that technology alone cannot transform a public service. The people within that service, with their knowledge, their disposition, as well as their readiness, are the actual medium through which transformation is or is not achieved.

It is within this context that the Nigerian government's decision to launch the Personnel Audit and Skills Gap Analysis, officially known as PASGA, and tagged Project Phoenix, in September 2025, deserves serious analytical attention. According to the OHCSF (2025b), PASGA was designed to go beyond mere staff counting to capture the full range of skills, competencies, and workforce distribution across the Federal Civil Service. The initiative was positioned as a data-driven foundation for evidence-based decisions on recruitment, training, deployment, and career progression. Crucially, it acknowledged, at the level of official policy, what this paper will argue at the level of principle: that you cannot effectively automate a workforce you have not first properly understood. PASGA, in other words, represents an implicit recognition that Human Capital Intelligence, which pertains to the systematic, data-backed mapping of who the workforce is and what it can do, must precede, and not follow, the automation of government processes.

The timing of PASGA is instructive. It arrived not before the digital reform drive began, but partway through it. By the time the audit was inaugurated, several ministries had already gone paperless, digital workflows had been mandated, and new performance management frameworks were being rolled out. This sequencing matters because it raises a practical question with significant governance consequences: what happens when institutions are restructured around systems and processes that the people within them are not yet equipped to use? Monteiro and Dias (2021), in their analysis of digital government's impacts on public sector human resources, found that when technology-led reforms outpace workforce development, the result is not efficiency but a new layer of dysfunction, in which digital tools coexist with analogue capacities, creating confusion rather than transformation.

This paper argued that the sequencing problem at the heart of Nigeria's civil service reform reflects a deeper conceptual gap in how reform is imagined by governments across Sub-Saharan Africa. The prevailing model privileges the visible, that is, new systems, new buildings, new policies, over the foundational, which is the deliberate investment in understanding and developing the human beings through whom all else must be delivered. The OECD's 2025 International Framework for Human Resource Management Indicators in Public Administration noted that effective workforce reform requires data on who the civil service actually is, viz, its age distribution, skills profile, time-to-hire metrics, and deployment patterns, as a baseline for strategic

decision-making (OECD, 2025). Nigeria, until PASGA, lacked this baseline. It was, in the most literal sense, building on sand.

The argument advanced in this paper is not that digitisation is wrong or premature. Digitisation is necessary, and the Nigerian government deserves credit for the political will it has shown in pushing through meaningful structural change within the civil service. Rather, the argument is that digitisation without Human Capital Intelligence is incomplete reform, which means it changes the tools of governance without ensuring that the people responsible for governance are known, understood, and prepared. This paper draws on recent government policy documents, peer-reviewed literature on digital governance and human resource management in developing states, and current data from Nigeria's reform ecosystem to argue that workforce auditing is not a preliminary exercise to be conducted before the real work begins. It is, in fact, among the most consequential works of reform itself.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The central problem this paper addresses is the conceptual and operational gap between digital infrastructure investment and human capital readiness in Nigeria's public sector reform. Since the launch of FCSSIP25 in 2021, the Nigerian Federal Government has invested heavily in technological systems, including Enterprise Content Management platforms, biometric staff verification, and performance management software. By the close of 2025, the government had declared the civil service fully paperless (OHCSF, 2025a). However, this technological progress has not been matched by a corresponding investment in understanding, auditing, or developing the workforce that must operate within these new systems.

The consequence of this gap is not merely administrative inefficiency, though that is real enough. A workforce equipped with digital tools it does not understand, or deployed to roles whose competencies do not match, will not deliver better governance; it will still deliver the same poor governance through a more expensive medium. As Professor Olaopa noted in July 2025, the Federal Civil Service suffers from a significant skills mismatch (Punch Newspaper, 2025). This mismatch operated in the background throughout the digitisation drive, yet received no formal, service-wide diagnostic until the PASGA exercise, which itself was launched several years into a reform agenda that had already fundamentally altered the civil service's technological environment.

What this reveals is that Nigeria's reform architecture, ambitious as it is, has been built without a reliable, verifiable picture of its own human resource base. According to the OHCSF (2025b), the Service had for years grappled with fragmented and outdated personnel records, leading to inefficiencies and misaligned skill sets. This is a foundational governance problem, because evidence-based human resource management, which scholars like Armstrong and Taylor (2020) identify as the bedrock of effective public sector reform, cannot proceed on the basis of fragmented data. The paper therefore argues that Human Capital Intelligence must be repositioned, not as a supplementary reform activity, but as the primary lens through which all other reform decisions, including digital investment, recruitment, training, and deployment, are made.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on two complementary bodies of theory to build its argument. The first is Human Capital Theory, originally propounded by Becker (1964) and later deepened by Schultz (1961) and others. This theory, which holds that workers' knowledge, skills, and capabilities constitute a form of capital, requires deliberate investment to yield productive returns. The second is New Public Management (NPM), a reform paradigm that emphasises performance, efficiency, and the application of private-sector management principles to public sector institutions (Hood, 1991). Together, these two frameworks illuminate both what is at stake in human capital development and how reform programmes in developing states have often fallen short of their ambitions.

Becker's (1964) central claim was straightforward but far-reaching: human beings are not simply labour inputs to be counted. They are repositories of skills and knowledge that must be cultivated through education, training, and experience in order to generate value. This perspective fundamentally altered how economists and policymakers thought about the workforce, shifting attention from headcount to quality. When applied to the public sector, Human Capital Theory offers a powerful critique of reform strategies that invest in systems while neglecting people. As the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2017) noted in its technical report on Human Capital Theory, the framework implies that investment in the workforce must be guided by a prior understanding of which skills exist, which are needed, and where the gaps lie. Without that knowledge, training programmes remain misdirected and reform aspirations hollow.

This is precisely the theoretical basis on which Human Capital Intelligence, which is the concept at the centre of this paper, rests. Human Capital Intelligence, as used here, refers to the systematic, data-driven process of mapping a workforce's composition, capabilities, and capacity gaps to enable evidence-based strategic decisions. It is, in essence, what Becker's theory demands as a prerequisite for meaningful human capital investment, and what Nigeria's PASGA initiative is attempting to establish, although belatedly. The concept draws additional support from Armstrong and Taylor (2020), who argued that modern strategic HRM must move beyond intuition and historical practice toward a model grounded in verified workforce data. In the public sector, where human capital decisions carry direct consequences for governance quality and citizen welfare, the stakes of getting this wrong are particularly high. And yes, they are high.

New Public Management provides the second theoretical lens. Since its emergence as a dominant reform paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s, and is associated originally with public sector reforms in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, NPM has argued for greater efficiency, measurable performance outcomes, and the introduction of market mechanisms into government service delivery (Hood, 1991). African countries, including Nigeria, adopted elements of NPM under pressure from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as part of structural adjustment programmes, often without adequate adaptation to local institutional realities (Larbi, 1999). Critics of NPM in the African context have consistently pointed out that the framework was designed for states with established bureaucratic capacity and strong institutional infrastructure, not for countries where basic data about the civil service itself remains incomplete or contested.

Magbadelo (2024), in an appraisal of FCSSIP25, observed that Nigeria's civil service reform efforts have tended to mirror NPM's emphasis on digitisation and performance management without adequately addressing the foundational human capacity issues that make those systems work in practice. This observation is consistent with a broader critique of NPM in Sub-Saharan Africa. As Kiggundu (1998, as cited in Batley and Larbi, 2004) noted, civil service reform in Africa has often been associated with being "too bloated in size in relation to output, suffering from dysfunctional rigidity, and lacking the capacity to solve the tough new problems of governance." This diagnosis, made over two decades ago, remains uncomfortably relevant to the Nigerian context today, even as the reform language has evolved considerably.

What links these two theoretical traditions, Human Capital Theory and New Public Management, is a shared emphasis on outcomes rather than processes. Both frameworks, in their most rigorous forms, demand that reform be evaluated by whether it produces measurable improvements in the quality of public service delivery, not merely by whether new systems have been implemented. And both, when applied thoughtfully, point to the same conclusion: that the quality of governance is ultimately a function of the quality, disposition, and alignment of the people delivering it. It is on this convergence that the argument for Human Capital Intelligence as a reform prerequisite is built.

### **3. Review of Related Literature**

#### **3.1 Digital Transformation and the Human Resource Challenge**

The scholarly conversation on digital transformation in government has grown considerably over the past decade, and one of its most consistent findings is that technology is rarely the binding constraint on reform success. Mergel et al. (2019), drawing on expert interviews across multiple jurisdictions, found that digital transformation in the public sector involves not just the implementation of new technologies but a fundamental rethinking of how government is organised, who does what, and what competencies the workforce needs to carry out its mandate. Their work highlights that the most common failure point in e-government initiatives is not the technology itself but the human and organisational layers surrounding it.

This finding has been corroborated across multiple settings. Maheshwari, Mohan and Mishra (2025) documented that governance deficiencies, particularly around workforce capacity, digital literacy, and institutional resistance, consistently hinder digital transformation in developing countries. They further argued that infrastructure gaps and human capital deficits are not separate problems but deeply intertwined ones. Similarly, the United Nations E-Government Survey (2024) noted that building a capable digital workforce is now one of the most critical dimensions of e-government development, with countries that have invested in human capital alongside digital infrastructure consistently outperforming those that treat the two as sequential rather than parallel investments. Nigeria, by this standard, has been pursuing a sequential model, digitalise first, develop capacity later, and the evidence from within its own reform ecosystem suggests this sequencing carries significant costs.

The specific challenge facing Nigeria's civil service is compounded by broader structural realities in the country's digital skills landscape. As UNICEF (2025) reported, approximately 78% of Nigerian youth lack essential digital skills, and roughly 85% of graduates fall below basic digital competence thresholds. While these figures refer to the general youth population rather than civil servants specifically, they are relevant because the civil service draws from this same human capital pool. The implication is that the challenge of building a digitally capable civil service cannot be addressed solely through system deployment. It requires targeted, sustained, and evidence-based investment in people, which is precisely the kind of investment that Human Capital Intelligence is designed to enable.

### **3.2 Evidence-Based HRM and the Case for Workforce Data**

Evidence-based human resource management, which is the systematic use of verified data to inform workforce decisions, has become an increasingly important concept in both academic and practitioner discussions of HRM. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) argued that an evidence-based approach to people management requires, as its foundation, reliable data on who the workforce is, what it can do, and what is needed. Without this foundation, decisions about training, deployment, promotion, and succession planning are not strategic; they are, at best, informed guesses. In the context of a large, complex public bureaucracy like Nigeria's Federal Civil Service, with hundreds of thousands of employees spread across dozens of ministries, departments, and agencies, the absence of verified workforce data is not a minor inconvenience. It is a governance crisis.

The OECD (2025) identified workforce data as a foundational requirement for strategic civil service management in its International Framework for Human Resource Management Indicators in Public Administration. The Framework calls for reliable metrics on recruitment timelines, workforce age distribution, skill profiles, and training outcomes to serve as a basis for identifying best practices, diagnosing bottlenecks, and making targeted investments. The fact that Nigeria lacked a verified personnel database until PASGA was launched in 2025, after years of implementing reforms built on FCSSIP25's six pillars, means that the country was, in practical terms, making major governance decisions without the information those decisions required.

Magbadelo (2024) offered an important observation in this regard, noting in his appraisal of FCSSIP25 that while the strategy has made measurable progress on digitalisation and training enrolment, the absence of reliable baseline workforce data has made it difficult to assess whether the reforms are reaching the right people or producing the right outcomes. This is not a small methodological concern. It is a signal that the reforms themselves may be addressing symptoms rather than causes, such as training people whose skills are already mismatched, deploying technology to processes the workforce does not understand, and setting performance targets against a workforce whose actual composition remains uncertain.

### **3.3 New Public Management Reform in Africa: Between Aspiration and Reality**

The literature on New Public Management in Sub-Saharan Africa offers a sobering backdrop against which Nigeria's current reforms must be read. Larbi (1999), in one of the foundational studies of NPM in Africa, found that reform programmes across the continent consistently struggled to be implemented because they were designed without adequate reference

to local institutional capacity. The prescriptions of NPM, which include performance targets, competitive recruitment, digital service delivery, amongst others, presuppose a baseline level of bureaucratic professionalism and data infrastructure that many African civil services simply do not possess. The result, as he documented, is reform fatigue: a cycle in which new initiatives are launched with much fanfare, implemented partially, and eventually absorbed into the same institutional culture that was supposed to be transformed.

This critique has not lost its relevance. Olabisi and Popoola (2019), examining the application of NPM principles to Nigerian public administration, found that while the country has adopted the language and policy frameworks of NPM, their core principles, particularly around merit, accountability, and performance, are applied unevenly and remain vulnerable to political interference. Their finding aligns with the World Bank's Government Effectiveness Indicator, which ranked Nigeria 151 out of 193 countries in 2023, with a score of  $-0.85$  on a scale from  $-2.5$  to  $+2.5$ , indicating that the gap between reform rhetoric and governance reality remains wide.

This body of literature suggests that Nigeria's predicament is neither unique nor inevitable. Countries that have succeeded in transforming their public services, Rwanda and Botswana in Africa, Estonia and Singapore globally, all share a common approach: they invested in understanding their existing human capital before restructuring the institutions and systems through which that capital operates. Rwanda's civil service transformation in the post-genocide period, for example, began with a comprehensive audit of public sector capacities, which then informed a targeted rebuilding of the workforce before major institutional reforms were implemented (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth, 2013). This sequencing, known as the workforce, then reforms around it, is what this paper argues Nigeria must more deliberately adopt as its guiding reform logic.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 The Problem with Reform Without a Mirror**

One of the most useful ways to understand the challenge confronting Nigeria's public sector reform is through what might be called the problem of reform without a mirror. A mirror, in this analogy, is the baseline data that tells a government what its workforce actually looks like: who is employed, where they are deployed, what they can do, and what the institution genuinely needs. Nigeria has been reforming its civil service without a reliable mirror. It has been making consequential decisions about technology investment, training programmes, and performance management without a verified, service-wide picture of the workforce those decisions are meant to transform.

The PASGA initiative, when understood in these terms, is not simply another reform programme. It is an attempt to give the Federal Civil Service the mirror it has long lacked. As OHCSF (2025b) articulated at the initiative's launch, the exercise is designed to go beyond mere headcounts and produce a verified personnel database that captures the full range of skills, competencies, and workforce distribution across all ministries, departments, and agencies. This is exactly what Human Capital Intelligence requires. The challenge now is ensuring that the data

generated by PASGA is not treated as a one-off administrative exercise but as the foundation of an ongoing, living workforce intelligence system that informs every major HRM decision going forward.

This paper holds the view that the most significant governance risk in Nigeria's current reform trajectory is not the pace of digitisation. It is the possibility that PASGA's findings will be produced, filed, and eventually set aside, albeit sad, as has happened with many earlier reform exercises, rather than translated into a fundamental restructuring of how the civil service understands and manages its human capital. The history of public sector reform in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa is littered with well-designed diagnostic exercises whose recommendations were acknowledged but never fully implemented (Larbi, 1999). The value of PASGA will ultimately be measured not by the comprehensiveness of its data but by what the government does with that data.

#### **4.2 Human Capital Intelligence as a Policy Framework**

The concept of Human Capital Intelligence, as advanced in this paper, offers something that neither Human Capital Theory nor New Public Management provides on its own: a practical framework for bridging the gap between knowing that people are a critical resource and actually knowing enough about those people to manage them strategically. Human Capital Theory tells governments to invest in people. New Public Management tells governments to manage performance and outcomes. Human Capital Intelligence tells governments how to begin: by building a verified, regularly updated, institutionally embedded knowledge base about the workforce itself.

In practical terms, this means moving beyond the episodic audits that have characterised Nigeria's HRM reform history toward a continuous intelligence architecture. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) described this kind of system, which they discuss under the broader heading of HR analytics, as a critical competency for modern people management. HR analytics, in their formulation, involves not just collecting data but using it to generate insights that drive strategic decisions. Applied to the Nigerian public sector, this would mean that decisions about where to invest in training are guided by verified data on the most severe skills gaps. Likewise, decisions about deployment are guided by verified data on where competencies exist and where they are needed. Furthermore, decisions about recruitment are guided by verified data on what the organisation actually lacks rather than what it has traditionally hired for.

The FCSSIP25, to its credit, does recognise the importance of some of these elements. Its pillar on capability building includes the Structured Mandatory Assessment-Based Training Programme (SMAT-P) and the Leadership Enhancement and Development Programme (LEAD-P), both of which attempt to align training with organisational needs (SeamlessHR, 2025). The HR professionalisation drive launched in October 2025, which mandates that officers deployed to HR positions hold professional certifications from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management from January 2026, is another step in the right direction (OHCSF, 2025c). However, these initiatives will only produce lasting transformation if they are anchored in reliable workforce data,

which is precisely what PASGA is designed to provide. The sequencing, in other words, needed to be reversed: intelligence should have preceded intervention.

### **4.3 Lessons from Elsewhere, and What Nigeria Can Still Learn**

The argument that workforce intelligence must precede major institutional reform is not purely theoretical. There are instructive precedents from across the developing world, and indeed from Nigeria's own neighbourhood, that demonstrate what becomes possible when governments invest in knowing their workforce before restructuring the systems around it.

Rwanda's post-1994 state reconstruction began with a systematic accounting of the human capital in the public sector, what had been lost, and the competencies most urgently needed. This deliberate audit informed a rebuilding of the civil service that prioritised targeted recruitment and training before ambitious structural reforms were attempted (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth, 2013). The result was a public sector that, while still far from perfect, ranked among the most effective in Sub-Saharan Africa by most governance indicators within two decades. Botswana offers a similar lesson: its relative success in translating natural resource wealth into public service quality was partly achieved through early and consistent investment in civil service workforce planning based on verified data on national human capital needs.

Beyond Africa, Estonia's celebrated digital government transformation, often cited as a model for countries like Nigeria, was not achieved by deploying technology onto an unprepared workforce. It was achieved through a long period of civil service capacity building, public digital literacy investment, and institutional reform that preceded the technological infrastructure for which the country is now known. As Eom and Lee (2022) noted, Estonia's success cannot be replicated by simply copying its platforms; it must be understood as the product of a sustained investment in the human and institutional capacity to use those platforms effectively.

For Nigeria, the lesson is both humbling and encouraging. Humbling because the country has, for the most part, followed the inverted sequencing: technology before people, systems before capacity, that other successful transformations avoided. Encouraging because PASGA, if implemented with genuine rigour and used as the foundation for sustained reform rather than a one-time compliance exercise, offers a genuine opportunity to correct the sequencing before it is too late. The Federal Government still has time to use the data PASGA generates to restructure its training priorities, rationalise its deployment practices, and build the evidence-based HRM culture that lasting public sector transformation requires.

### **5. Policy Implications**

The arguments developed in this paper have several concrete implications for how Nigeria should proceed with its public-sector reform agenda. They are offered not as a comprehensive policy blueprint but as directional recommendations grounded in the evidence and analysis presented above.

First, the Federal Government must treat the data generated by PASGA not as an administrative output but as a strategic asset. This means establishing a dedicated Human Capital

Intelligence unit within the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, charged with maintaining a living, regularly updated workforce database that feeds directly into HRM decision-making at every level of the federal bureaucracy. Such a unit would provide the reforms with a knowledge infrastructure, without which all other investments, including in training, technology, and performance management, remain poorly targeted.

Second, the sequencing of reform must be revisited. Future iterations of the Federal Civil Service Strategy (FCSSIP25's successor is already anticipated) should begin not with technology deployment or performance frameworks but with a thorough, data-driven understanding of the workforce as it currently is. This means that skills mapping exercises, workforce planning analyses, and capacity assessments should be the first deliverables of any new reform cycle, not activities inserted partway through after other reforms are already underway. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) are clear on this point: strategic HRM is not possible without strategic workforce intelligence.

Third, the HR professionalisation drive that began in October 2025 represents a promising development, but it will only be sustainable if the professionals being trained and certified are equipped to work with data. HR officers who cannot interpret workforce analytics, identify skills trends, or use evidence to make deployment decisions are professionalised in name but not in practice. Accreditation bodies like the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (CIPM) must therefore ensure that their curricula explicitly include workforce data literacy as a core competency, not an optional specialisation.

Fourth, Nigeria should look beyond its own experience to build partnerships with countries and institutions that have successfully implemented workforce intelligence systems in comparable contexts. The existing MOU between the Federal Government and UNDP, signed in 2025 and focused on institutional capacity and digital transformation (OHCSF, 2025d), provides a ready platform for seeking technical assistance on Human Capital Intelligence design and implementation. The World Bank's ongoing Human Capital Project framework in Africa also provides resources and technical expertise that Nigeria can draw on to design a world-class workforce intelligence architecture.

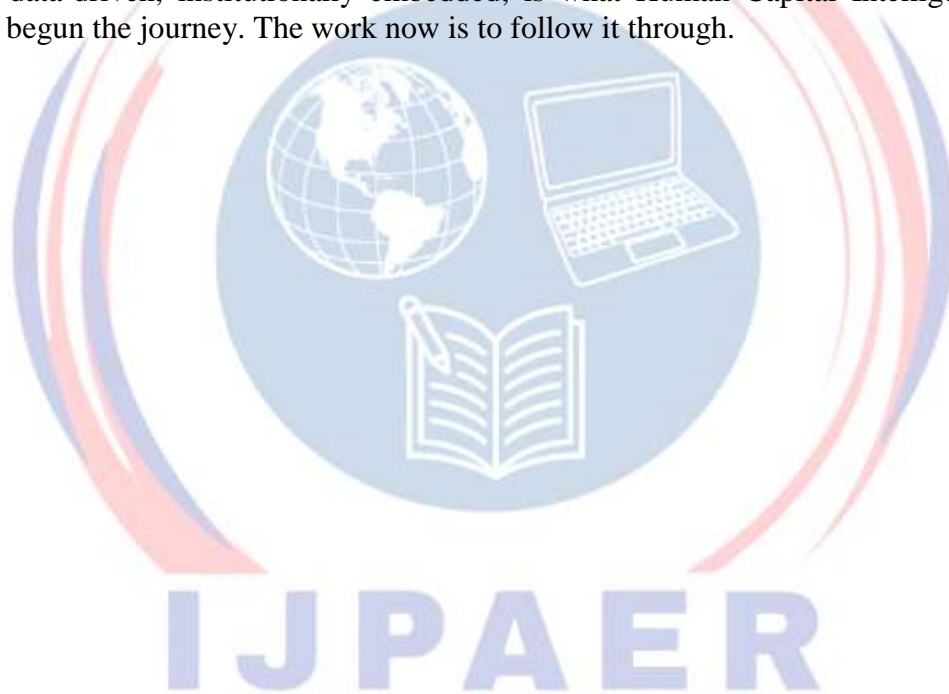
## **6. Conclusion**

This paper has argued that Nigeria's Federal Civil Service stands at an important crossroads in its reform trajectory. The country has made genuine and commendable progress in digitising its bureaucracy, standardising its personnel records, and beginning to professionalise its human resource management function. These are not trivial achievements, and they deserve to be acknowledged. But the central argument advanced here is that these achievements have been built on a shaky foundation, one that lacked a verified, data-driven understanding of the workforce itself.

Human Capital Intelligence, as this paper has framed it, is not a luxury or a technical add-on to the broader reform agenda. It is the prerequisite upon which every other reform aspiration depends. A civil service cannot be made performance-oriented if it does not know what performance currently looks like. It cannot be made digitally capable if it does not know who is

digitally capable and who is not. It cannot be merit-based if it lacks the data to distinguish merit from seniority, or competence from tenure. PASGA, if pursued with rigour and followed with genuine reform action, offers Nigeria the chance to build this intelligence foundation, not as a finishing touch on the current reform cycle but as the starting point for the next one.

The broader lesson for public administration scholars and practitioners in Sub-Saharan Africa is one of sequencing. The evidence from Nigeria, the comparative cases examined in this paper, and the international literature on digital governance and human resource reform converge on a single principle: know your workforce before you reform around it. Technology does not transform a public service. People do. And people can only be developed, deployed, and directed effectively when the institution responsible for them first takes the trouble to understand who they are, what they can do, and what the country genuinely needs from them. That understanding, systematic, data-driven, institutionally embedded, is what Human Capital Intelligence offers. Nigeria has begun the journey. The work now is to follow it through.



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