


The labour alienation of civil servants in Zimbabwe: Towards an ubuntu spirituality of work

**Author:**Blazio M. Manobo^{1,2} **Affiliations:**

¹Department of Systematic Theology, Faculty of Theology, Ethics, Religion and Philosophy, Catholic University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

²Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

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Corresponding author:

Blazio Manobo,
bmanobo@uz.ac.zw

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The alienation of labour is both classical and contemporary. In its classical form, it speaks to the potential dehumanisation of workers in capitalist societies. In its contemporary form, it manifests itself in the disenfranchisement of the individual because of changes in organised global workplaces. Over the years, Africa's labour transition from traditional spirituality to contemporary organised global workplaces has fuelled new forms of public labour alienation. Civil servants, in some African countries, experience labour alienation reminiscent of work under capitalism. This is in contradiction to the pre-colonial and traditional view of work as a vocation. Zimbabwe is undergoing negative economic, social, and political growth that has resulted in the alienation of civil servants. The government reneges on its public role of providing space for individual growth and well-being in preference for 'public capitalism' and cultural alienation. The potential for an effective public service lies in changing the work culture.

Contribution: This article interrogates the impacts of the work culture within the public service in Zimbabwe in an attempt to proffer a return to the African traditional spirituality of work that was founded on the principles of ubuntu. It recognises the traditional symbiotic relationship between being and doing among the indigenous African communities as the panacea for the continent's human capital development.

Keywords: alienation of labour; African spirituality of work; African traditional work culture; African theology of work; ubuntu.

Introduction

Zimbabwe like other African countries has suffered the commercialisation of work since the colonial period. Traditional African forms of education were pragmatically focussing on life skills and education for life. Every adolescent boy or girl underwent some form of apprenticeship according to family specialisations (ed. Mtata 2011). Colonial capitalism introduced salaried employment which was a new form of enslavement for the African labour. The colonialists took advantage of indigenous cheap labour to extract African resources on behalf of their colonial countries of origin. They erected permanent supply-chain structures for draining African resources by geographically positioning beneficiation factories outside the continent. Upon independence, most African countries found themselves politically independent but economically dependent. Efforts to reverse the neo-colonial hegemony are frustrated by Western trade conditionalities and the debt trap. The economic Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1990s, championed by the Bretton Woods institutions ensured that developing countries reduce their civil service workforce and benefits. The strategy also included privatising all major sources of employment thereby crippling the government's role as the employer of first choice. With the introduction of salaried employment, a new work culture was created that focussed more on financial gains than commitment to the public good.

Realising the insincerity of the Western world with regard to the welfare of the Zimbabwean populace, de-colonial strategies were mooted albeit cautiously. In 1998, the then President of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, appointed a 12-member committee commonly referred to as the Nziramasanga Commission. The Commission was mandated to interrogate the education and training system in Zimbabwe and recommend reforms on a short-term, medium-term, and long-term basis (Government of Zimbabwe 1999). Among the recommendations from the Commission were the need to inculcate a philosophy of ubuntu in the education system of the country and the promotion of technical and vocational education. These elements are essential in bridging the gap between doing and being, which is the driving force of labour alienation.

Note: Special Collection: Zimbabwean Scholars in Dialogue, sub-edited by Conrad Chibango (Great Zimbabwe University).

Reforms of a de-colonial nature have had their own challenges. The bid by Robert Mugabe to reverse the colonial land imbalance through the Land Reform programme was met with fierce resistance by Western countries in the form of sanctions against the government (Masaka 2012). Today, Zimbabwe is in economic dire straits despite the concerted call by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional leaders for the Western countries to lift the sanctions imposed on the country (Ogbona 2017). Civil servants who used to enjoy the monopoly of standard labour conditions have become perennial casualties. A new work culture has developed which prioritises individual gains while undermining productivity. This contradicts the spirit of the Public Service Commission (PSC) whose vision is to create an 'empowered Public Service leading and propelling sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth and prosperity for all citizens of Zimbabwe' (Public Service Strategic Plan 2021).

Civil servants in Zimbabwe are persons appointed by the Government to perform its executive, administrative, and functional duties based on the provisions of the law. Unlike in Zimbabwe, civil servants in some Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries enjoy better labour benefits and decent work (OECD 2021). These benefits include job security, fair recruitment processes, access to career advancement opportunities, health, and pension insurance, and standardised performance management systems. In this way, an effective work culture is created and maintained. The government can provide human capital leadership by setting conditions of service unmatched by private organisations. This is in line with the vision of the aspiration of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 which affirms that poverty eradication is only possible where there is decent work.

To unpack the plight of civil servants and the birth of an egocentric work culture in Zimbabwe, this article borrows from Karl Marx's classic but controversial work on the alienation of labour that has dominated studies on the relationship between the employer and employee in capitalist economies during the past two centuries. While Marx's subjective experience of alienation was focussed on employment under capitalistic economies, the same alienation of labour has serious implications in contemporary public institutions when the poor conditions of service create an organisational culture. There is a resurgence of new theories to the understanding of alienation because of the rise in global mental health challenges, technological advancement, and environmental threats (Brown 2019; Oversveen 2021). This article contributes to this scholarship by applying the theory of alienation outside private capitalist economies and focussing on the public service sector which in Marx's perspective, should be immune (Adams 2013). Studies on Marx's alienation of labour have concentrated on his classical work, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, and limited literature exists on his later writings to assess whether Marx ever applied the concept outside the capitalist economics of his time.

Marx's observations were socio-psychological. He did not consider work as having a religious dimension. The Judeo-Christian religion suggests that work was given as part of man's ontological vocation to

[H]ave dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Gn 1:26–31 KJV)

In this regard, work has ontological dignity with the capacity to create a work culture full of creativity and innovation. The African Traditional Religion (ATR), on the other hand, also sees all things as having the quintessential essence within them including approaches to work, play, or rest (Marumo & Chakale 2018). Again, here, to work is to be human, and to be human is to work. Consequently, both the Judeo-Christian religion and the ATR have no room for a work environment that promotes alienation of labour as there is no distinction between the individual and the process or product of labour.

The focus of this study is on how Zimbabwean civil servants have been forced to create a work culture that alienates them from their work. There is a dearth of literature on how the ubuntu philosophy can inform the work ethics of public servants. The study seeks to demonstrate how the secular neo-colonial systems of economic emancipation have negatively impacted the lives of government employees in Zimbabwe leading to the alienation of the civil servants. It answers the question: How does an alienating culture of work occur in public service organisations whose focus is on social services and not the accumulation of capital? The article further seeks to find out what lessons can be drawn from pre-colonial African work culture. The article is organised as follows. The first part explores Marx's alienation of labour and its relations to the civil service. The second part looks at the conditions of labour among civil servants in Zimbabwe as a case study. The third part assesses the transformative potential of the traditional African spirituality of work followed by recommendations.

Theoretical framework

This article uses a two-pronged theoretical framework of Marx's alienation of labour and the ubuntu philosophy. Alienation of labour refers to the feeling of dissatisfaction, discontentment, and unhappiness when a person is dissociated from the process of their labour, the product of their labour, from themselves, and from others (Mukhopadhyay 2020). This happens in capitalism where the owners of production are the beneficiaries of the system and the workers are the means of production. Consequently, the worker is not able to nurture or cultivate his or her mental energy or physical abilities. This theory is chosen because of the nature of the conditions of service of the public servants in Zimbabwe whose income does not match their contributions to the economy. The ubuntu philosophy is an African worldview that upholds the value of collectivism over individualism. It asserts that society gives human beings their humanity (Gade 2012). According to this philosophy, product work is central to the dignity of the human person,

and hence, work that does not contribute to prosperous family and community life is slavery. Ubuntu philosophy challenges the work ethics of public servants within the Zimbabwean context.

Methodology

This study adopted a phenomenological research method. Through a phenomenological approach, the study sought to identify the meaning of the lived experience of individuals with regard to labour experiences as a phenomenon. According to Creswell, this approach describes the meaning for individuals of their shared experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell 2007). While phenomenological approaches can be either quantitative or qualitative, this study used a qualitative phenomenological approach using documentary analysis, literature review, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions among workers. Triangulation was achieved through the use of several sources, including both primary and secondary. Data were analysed using a thematic approach. This study is delimited to labour alienation as it relates to the dignity of work from an ubuntu perspective. It acknowledges the several internal factors militating against decent work in Zimbabwe. However, the study deliberately focusses on those that lie between cultural labour alienation and colonial influences.

Manifestations of alienation in Zimbabwe

The phenomenon of civil service alienation can best be analysed from the understanding of work either as a 'means' or an 'end'. The choice of which view to take shapes one's attitude to work and the level of meaning that work will bring to the person. As Frankl observed, the ontological concerns of human beings are not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in one's life (Frankl 1959). As a means, the work of civil servants can only be dignified when it points towards a meaningful end. Nevertheless, meaning is not synonymous with happiness because work can be meaningful even under sacrificial and painful circumstances. One can find the meaning of life after accomplishing a task worth a purpose (Nielsen 1964). Conversely, an activity that fails to accomplish a choice-worthy purpose may be considered undignified. This leads to what Marx calls the alienation of labour. This further begs the question: Is life's meaning found in benefits or values?

Marx looks at labour alienation in a capitalist economy as estranging the individual. This happens when the worker in a capitalist society does not own the means of production, but rather, he and/or she is taken as a factor of production or a means to an end. For Marx, this is not a subjective experience of the individual but a characteristic of capitalist society. In his theory, Marx presents alienation in a capitalistic society as synonymous with worker exploitation. Horowitz (2010:1) interpreted alienation to mean a surrender of control through separation from an essential attribute of the self, and, more specifically, separation of an actor or agent from the

conditions of meaningful agency. In Marxist theory, alienation occurs at four levels: alienation from the product of labour, alienation from the process of labour, alienation from the self, and alienation from others (Marx 1964).

Alienation from the product of labour occurs when the employee produces a product or service that ceases to belong to him or her but to the employer. Exploitation increases when the employee is given a token in the form of a miniature wage. To the employee, the wage becomes the only motivation for work engagement and not the product or service one is offering. In this way, the worker is not fulfilled in his work but denies himself and/or herself in the process (Marx 1884). This alienation increases as the wage decreases. Zimbabwe has experienced several moments of hyperinflation since the year 2000 when civil servants' wages which have always been fixed in local currency were often reduced to a minimum. This manifested itself in skills flight where it is currently estimated that more than four million Zimbabweans are working outside the country because of frustrations from the local labour market (Chikanda & Crush 2018). For Marx, work that produces products or services that one cannot associate with is alienating. Civil servants whose work no longer supports their welfare and family needs have become alienated from the products or services of their work.

The second level of alienation is the alienation from the process of production. The traditional craft industries that promoted socialisation have been replaced by wage, specialisation, and division of labour. The job routine created through the division of labour makes the process of production boring further alienating the worker from the very process (Manobo 2023). According to Marx (1884), the worker cannot be alienated from the product of labour unless the process of production itself is alienating. The alienation of products is just a consequence of a process that is alienating. To avoid alienation from the process of production, Marx advocated for ownership of the means of production. Ideally, all public servants are shareholders in government business. However, the heavily polarised Zimbabwean environment coupled with a high prevalence of corruption by the elite is relegating the civil servants to the level of consumers of government business. This has an alienating effect as the government employee cannot associate himself or herself with his or her profession.

Marx further speaks of alienation from the self. Marx uses the term alienation from one's species being. 'Species being' is used to denote human capacity for conscious labour (Cox 1998:2). Human beings depend on nature for their survival just like animals. What distinguishes human beings from animals is that human beings manipulate nature through conscious labour to produce their sustenance (Manobo 2023). For Marx, this conscious activity is the essence of being human and when labour is forced on them, it alienates humans from their very being. Forced labour among civil servants does not reside in external manipulation but in the lack of alternative occupation in a society where the civil service appears to be the only available public space for the

thousands of young people graduating from college. Alienation develops when the individual's space is constricted forcing one to take the only available option which, given a choice, one would not take.

The last level of alienation, according to Marx, is what he calls the alienation from others. This form of alienation is a logical outcome of alienation from self. As human beings become estranged from themselves, they become estranged from other human species. When one encounters the self, one encounters the other person (Marx 1993). Marx argues that a person cannot be alienated from the product of his labour, from the process of production, and from his species being in a capitalist system without being alienated from the capitalist who owns the product and the factors of production. By extension, the work culture of civil servants alienates them from the government that employs them through work stoppages and industrial actions.

Tied to Marx's theory of labour alienation, the Zimbabwean public servants have gone through a process of cultural alienation because of the absence of a satisfying work environment. Preetham (2020:1262) defines cultural alienation as 'the process of disrespecting and lack of interest towards the culture to which one belongs and aspiring to be part of or inculcate the practices of the dominant culture'. The introduction of organised or paid work has resulted in most Zimbabweans abandoning their spirituality of work in preference for paid jobs. Consequently, the values underpinning the dignity of work have been overtaken by the desire for monetary gains leading to hatred for one's occupation. Civil servants have been reduced to victims of ideological manipulation by politicians. Corruption, nepotism, and inefficacy are the outcomes of such cultural alienation.

Foundations of alienation for the Zimbabwean civil servants

The dire impacts of the Western-imposed SAPs through the institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund cannot be over-emphasised. Zimbabwe's economy like many other African countries stagnated after the introduction of the SAP policies that benefited the western countries to the detriment of the beneficiary nations (Kawewe & Dibie 2000). Governments were forced to privatise their public entities leading to recurrent socio-economic crises and a surge in unemployment. The once thriving public industries in Zimbabwe that used to absorb thousands of employees were privatised and subsequently closed because of the deteriorating economic situation of the country. Parastatals that survived privatisation have been reduced to shell images of their former pride. The privatisation and closure of several public institutions, and the low productivity of the surviving public corporations have significantly reduced the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and public incomes. Currently, the country's civil service wage bill has risen to more than two-thirds of Zimbabwe's public service annual budget.

It must be noted that Zimbabwe went through a protracted poor service delivery ever since the introduction of the SAPs of the 1990s. Low-level investments in public service resulted in poor service delivery and subsequently, poor conditions of service for the civil servants. To mitigate the treacherous slide, policy interventions in the form of the introduction of Integrated Result Based Management (IRBM) were introduced by the government in 2005 (Pazvakavambwa 2014). The IRBM was envisioned to be the panacea to poor service delivery and a strategic tool for improving accountability, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness among civil servants (Muguti et al. 2022). Borrowing from the Malaysian success of the framework, Zimbabwe assumed that an improvement in management for results would automatically translate into improved public service delivery and ultimately to a result-oriented work culture.

Central to the principles of IRBM, as adopted by the government of Zimbabwe, are the five components of: the Integrated Development Plan, the Result-based Budgeting System, the Result-based Personnel Performance System, the Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation framework, and the Results-based Management Information System in their chronological order (Dandira et al. 2020). Of significance in this study is the Results-based Personnel Performance System which called for a structured approach for attaining individual contributions to the overall priorities and performance targets of the organisation (Government of Zimbabwe 2004). According to this framework, employee benefits are linked to individual contribution towards the overall performance of the organisation in the attainment of outcomes and not just outputs or workload completion (Muguti et al. 2022).

The challenges of operationalising the IRBM in Zimbabwe are housed within the PSC with the assistance of the Office of the President and Cabinet, and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The PSC's mission is to facilitate the delivery of responsive services and promote economic growth and development through enhanced policy, institutional, and operational capacity of the public service (Public Service Commission 2021). The major functions of the PSC include: organisation design and management; remuneration reform; talent and reward management; capacity development, skills development, and management; risk management and governance; advocacy, communication, and change management; culture change; institutional restructuring; monitoring, evaluation and learning; and ICT and modernisation.

While the IRBM was initiated in Zimbabwe since 2005, it has not managed to create a culture where employee performance is linked with the overall goal of the public service. Studies in organisational behaviour demonstrate that employee motivation is a function of several factors. According to Ahmad et al. (2010), employee motivation increases when employees feel that their efforts, commitment, loyalty, trust, and enthusiasm are fairly and adequately rewarded by outputs such as financial and non-financial benefits or

incentives. Over the years, Zimbabwean civil servants have engaged the government through several forms of collective bargaining which at times resulted in threats, real and imagined of employee disengagement (Public Service Commission 2021). The antagonism has exacerbated the alienation of the civil servants.

Marx's theory of alienation suggests that in capitalist economies, employees do not work because they are motivated to do so. They work because they are forced by circumstances (need for remuneration) which forms the basis of worker alienation (Marx 1884). Civil servants in Zimbabwe have for a long time clashed with the government over salary increments and employment benefits. Since the fall of the Zimbabwean Dollar in 1997, Zimbabwe changed its currency several times as a means to stabilise inflation. In 2000, the country led a Fast-Track Land Report Program that witnessed the seizure of white-owned land resulting in the imposition of sanctions by the Western countries. Since then, the country entered into prolonged recession save for the years 2009–2013 when the Government of National Unity was formed. Zimbabwe's economic recession which was exacerbated by the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA) of 2001 and European Union sanctions has crippled the government's ability to access lines of credit on the international markets. Civil servants in turn have devised innovative ways to sustain themselves outside the official benefits from the public service against the demands for work culture as ordered by the PSC.

The civil servants bore the brunt of the Western-backed sanctions more as their salaries were reduced to an equivalent of less than US\$100.00 because of several waves of inflationary pressures. Workers' disposable income was drastically reduced since the 1980s and 1990s as inflation increased from 31.82% in 1987 to over 250 000 000% in 2008. Currently, the inflation rate for 2023 is estimated to be 172.17% down from the 2019 rate of 557.20% (Macrotrends 2023). Like in Marx's capitalist economy, work for civil servants has become a survival burden that forces many skilled persons to leave the public service for greener pastures outside the country. The protracted contemptible labour circumstances of the civil servants have created a corrosive work culture characterised by dysfunctional teams, corruption, and a lack of commitment to organisational values.

In 2018, the government introduced performance contracts under the IRBM framework for senior public officials. The performance contracts followed the implementation matrix of the National Development Strategy (NDS 1) which is the economic blueprint for the Second Republic. The strategy for performance contracts was to improve the work culture of senior management by tying their rewards to results. By 2022, the practice included performance contracts for Cabinet Ministers, Chief Directors, and Directors in government ministries, public entities, and local authorities. Several challenges have affected the effectiveness of the performance contracts, chief among them being the lack of resources to implement the set targets. Consequently, many public

officials frustrated by the current economic environment, resorted to initiating a new culture of setting soft targets.

Impacts of alienation on the civil servants in Zimbabwe

Alienation is a dehumanising experience. The dignity of the human person is best understood within the context of one's participation in activities that provide meaning. The intersection of means and 'ends' of work finds expression in civil servants' work orientations. The work orientation of Zimbabwean civil servants can be categorised under the headings: work as a job, work as a career, and work as a vocation (Bellah et al. 2012). Consequently, the civil servants' work orientation shapes the meaning they give to their work and influences the kind of jobs they seek when they leave public service, as well as the general values they endorse in life and work (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski 2010).

Because of the meagre benefits they receive for their work, most civil servants are forced to look at work as just a job. This orientation emphasises the economic and extrinsic benefits they received from the government in the form of low salaries, paltry allowances, and inadequate tools of trade at the workplace. The object of a work as job is not the work itself, but the benefits accruing from the work. Alienation develops when the work is not an end in itself, but instead is a means that allows individuals to acquire the resources needed to survive. While literature on productivity has dismissed financial rewards as key to employee motivation, low salaries for civil servants in Zimbabwe remain the key demotivating factor as they fail to provide meaning to the person's ontological existence, a challenging environment for the individual's mental growth, and individual autonomy. This culture of looking at one's work as a job is alienating for civil servants as it isolates them from meaningful existence.

For the young professional, public service provides an opportunity for stretching one's self beyond comfort zone while contributing to a greater end which is the common good. To the young professional, a public service career goes beyond personal satisfaction to include the humanising effect of one's activities and a contribution to society's general welfare (Schartz 2015). The dignity of work as a career for the civil servant emerges out of the relationship established between the individual and the work's product, processes, and society at large. The only hurdle comes when the very career fails to sustain one's cost of living. Several young professionals have left the country despite the joy they were getting in working for the common good.

Working for the common good should be considered a vocation. As a vocation, work goes beyond the relationship with the product, process, and community. It transcends the economic, social, and psychological benefits of the job and career into the essence of the human person. Very often Zimbabwean nurses, doctors, and teachers have been reminded of the essence of their work as constituting vital services and a contribution to the fulfilment of a higher

calling. From a religious perspective, persons whose work is a calling do not separate what they do from who they are. Unlike work as a career where one uses one's skills to accomplish a task, in a vocation, a person uses spiritual gifts that transcend mere mortal skills. A vocation is not like a task that a person 'can' do but one that a person 'must' do.

The above orientations seek to provide pathways that the Zimbabwean worker has traversed over the years. During the pre-colonial period, indigenous people considered their work to be a vocation. The individual and his or her work were inseparable, and all work was geared towards the common good. In the colonial period, the professionalisation of work led to the development of a new orientation of work as a career. It promoted the scramble for titles and competition for higher positions of authority at the detriment of the common good. In the post-independence era, the political and economic environment of the country has forced most civil servants to view their work as just mere jobs whose essence is to provide financial rewards. Work is no longer a vocation and the public good is no longer the object. Consequently, the worker is detached from his or her work leading to civil service alienation of labour.

Civil servants in Zimbabwe have not experienced the ontological significance of work during the past four decades despite the country's introduction of the quality of employment approaches. The quality of employment approach emerged in the 1970s as a challenge to the material prosperity of the Western countries which was not accompanied by improvements in the employees' quality of life (Burchell et al. 2013). The approach which was crystallised in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Decent Work Framework focussed on non-financial facets of jobs and individuals' experiences of their working environments including aspects like employment contracts, remuneration, working hours, social protection, and social dialogue (ILO 2018). The major achievements of quality of employment and decent work approaches were their challenge to the capitalist notion of productive efficiency under the belief that 'more is better'. However, because of the global economic recession, the sanctions debate, corruption, and other debilitating factors within the Zimbabwean PSC, civil servants have not experienced decent work principles.

Towards an ubuntu spirituality of work

Religions of the world have from time immemorial provided ontological essence to one's existence. Classical philosophers have always argued that there is no phenomenon that exerts a greater influence on the quality and conditions of human life than work (Cholbi 2022). Philosophers contend that work is 'necessary' for individuals and for 'societies as a whole' (Gheaus & Herzog 2016). More so, the value of work lies in the fact that it increases the objective value in the world. This is more relevant when considered in the context of civil servants who work for the government. Governments are created to regulate and serve the public. To create public value, the government employs workers (herein called civil servants).

Apart from creating employment for the citizenry, the government through work provides employees with space for social cohesion and interaction (Clark 2017). Within the religious realm, work has always been associated with the purpose of human existence. It is a pathway for expressing one's purpose in ways that can make the world better (Dik 2016). This justifies why the work culture within the civil service in Zimbabwe should not just represent opportunities for financial benefits but moments for the spiritual, social, and psychological development of the person.

In the ubuntu philosophy, work is not just an activity of the body and mind. It is a spiritual exercise, a ritual that is at the core of traditional African religion. According to Mtata, young people went through a ritual of apprenticeship that introduced them to the world of professionalism (ed. Mtata 2011). Ritualising work demonstrates the significance that the Africans held on one's profession. Excellent performance for individuals and even of the country is often credited to the benevolence of the spiritual world. In traditional Africa, professional hunters, fishermen, or even farmers performed a ritual or prayer asking for blessings from the spiritual world. Rituals are akin to the Zimbabwean public service. Most meetings of the public service gatherings are preceded by prayer. Bigger gatherings also start with the national anthem and are followed by prayer. These rituals demonstrate a sense of stewardship by acknowledging that their work is for the public good and access to the benefits of the creator is premised on the relationship between the owner of creation and the person seeking the benefits.

The traditional African work culture can further be deduced from the attitudes, knowledge, and skills transmitted through oral historiography. Every African child needed to learn and understand the environment that formed their immediate source of livelihood. Intermediate skills were needed to interact with rivers, mountains, hills, and forests, making them experts in resources management (Mosweunyane 2013). By incorporating rituals, the object of the traditional labour formation was to produce a worker who can comprehend and integrate the thought systems, philosophy, epistemology, and values of his or her society. Public service academies should be havens of cultural formation and work ethics. The current preoccupation with leadership and skills development should include moral formation. The prevalence of corruption in government departments is a testimony of the lack of a moral dimension to professionalism. According to Wiredu (eds. 2004), an educated African worker has mastered one's culture and not foreign values.

The formation of labour in traditional Africa was a life-long process that aimed at moulding a member of the society and not just a person with individual rights. The responsibility of forming an individual to become a worker rested with tribal elders (Mosweunyane 2013). The curriculum was systematic and emphasised values like hard work, respect for elders, the science of the environment, the virtue of endurance, the need for unity in decision-making, the virtue of participation, and respect for old people, among others. Today, the institutions of

higher learning which are the bedrock of public service employees, no longer provide values to learners, but just skills. Consequently, recruitment into the public service is now seen as an opportunity for access to public goods and services.

In the ubuntu philosophy, there was nothing called unemployment. Every person had a part to play in the life of the community. Every contribution was recognised, valued, and appreciated. The products of work were not meant for an individual but the whole family or community. The process of work involved hard work but had opportunities for collective labour *Nhimbe* or *humwe* (oneness) if one finds work overwhelming (Mtata 2011). There was no room for exploitation as the object of work was situated in the life of the whole community. Work forms the individual into a mature member of the community. The process of imparting knowledge was not just intellectual but practical too. However, the Europeanisation of Africa eroded this sacred heritage of work formation with the introduction of 'organised' education.

While it can be acknowledged that the current work environment of civil servants is alienating, a change in work culture can bring life to the lifeless organisation. Financial gains are not the primary object of work. Civil service must note that work has a social dimension of building relationships. The practice of *nhimbe* or *humwe* enabled the community to share not just labour but stories of life through song and dance. The social dimension of work prevents social estrangement. The identity of an individual was not obliterated in the social function of work. Individuals were identified with their tools of work. A tool that has absorbed the sweat of someone becomes a sacred tool for that individual. Hence, each person had his or her tools like a hoe. Once a tool is dedicated to someone, it cannot be exchanged without appropriate rituals performed (Mtata 2011). While such practices may not be possible in the public service, the provision of tools of trade can tremendously change the alienating nature of performance measurements. Often, civil servants are called upon to deliver without adequate provisions for their work.

Conclusion

Public service can still achieve its performance targets for national economic development despite limited financial resources. What is urgent is not the provision of salaries, but a change in work culture which will facilitate economic development. Increased budgetary allocation for the public service under the current work culture may be an exercise in futility. The rampant corruption within the society suggests that whatever resources are allocated for the public goods, will fall into the wrong hands. The current alienation of labour among civil servants will not end with decent work devoid of moral conduct built on the traditional philosophy of ubuntu. The greed and selfishness exuded by public officers will continue to perpetuate conduct reminiscent of Marx's alienating capitalist economies.

Despite the challenges encountered in working for the government as a civil servant, many find public service as

providing the best opportunity for a career path. Young people graduating from colleges find in the civil service opportunities for growth in their professional careers. They cherish the social and psychological achievements as well as the social standing brought by work. The public service increases their self-esteem motivating them to invest time and effort for greater productivity. In order to harness the motivation of the civil servants in Zimbabwe, there is a need for a deliberate promotion of an ubuntu culture of work where the public good takes precedence over material gains. The PSC should in turn develop supporting mechanisms that motivate the adoption of such a change.

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Author's contributions

B.M.M. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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