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Beyond Compliance: Epistemological and Methodological Blind Spots in African Public Administration Reform

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Abstract

Despite decades of reform efforts across Africa, public service institutions remain entangled in symbolic compliance, emotional detachment, and reform fatigue. This paper interrogates the epistemological and methodological assumptions that underline these persistent failures, arguing that dominant approaches rooted in managerialism, rational choice theory, and technocratic metrics have systematically ignored the emotional and cultural foundations of institutional behavior. Using Tanzania as a case study, the paper critiques the prevailing discourse that treats public servants as administrative units rather than cultural beings shaped by memory, metaphor, and early-life imprinting. The paper introduces Clotaire Rapaille's Culture Code methodology as a disruptive alternative, capable of uncovering the unconscious emotional codes that govern public servant behavior. It calls for a rehumanized public administration, one that sees reform not as structural adjustment but as cultural translation. By challenging both what we study and how we study it, the paper aims to open new pathways for authentic, emotionally resonant institutional transformation in Africa.

Keywords: Public Administration Reform; Epistemological Gaps; Methodological Blind Spots; Symbolic Compliance; Emotional Infrastructure; Cultural Code; Institutional Behavior