VITAL COMPETENCE PROFILE FOR LEADERS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE TO BUILD CAPABLE AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

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ABSTRACT

The leaders (top executives and senior managers) in the South African public service need to understand its environment that demands greater responsiveness and creativity than any other time in the history. With growing unemployment rate, which increased to 26.7% in the three months to March of 2016 from 24.5% in the previous quarter; as well as increasing service delivery protests, which reported to have reached 70 between January and April 2016; and harsh complex global processes; leaders in the South African public service are required to be able to counter-act these challenges diligently in order to achieve the country's developmental goals and objectives. To theoretically and empirically position the contestations of this article, the literature study method was adopted. The article seeks to highlight some competencies that should be given attention for today's and tomorrow's leaders in the public service in order to steer the South African society to achieve the aspirations of the developmental state and National Development Plan (NDP) vision 2030. The paper acknowledges the central interventions that have been introduced to improve public service operations, and it further suggests that it could be of assistance if a competence profile of leaders is clearly defined based on the current challenges faced by the country, and at the same time emphasising the values and principles enshrined in the South African Constitution (1996). When considering general trends of leadership development from countries such as United Kingdom and the United States, one finds that the first step taken to develop future leaders was to define their competence profile. Therefore, the purpose of the article is simply to add to the interventions in the South African public service, considering the shifting contexts that require today's and tomorrow's leaders to possess certain skills and competencies that would be instrumental for them to navigate and guide the country through a complex and ever-evolving environment with confidence and success. To this end, the competence profile framework is proposed.

INTRODUCTION

The leaders (top executives and senior managers) in the South African public service would need to understand its environment that demands greater responsiveness and creativity than any other time in the history. With growing unemployment rate, which increased to 26.7% in the three months to March of 2016 from 24.5% in the previous quarter (Trading Economics, 2016:1); as well as increasing service delivery protests, which reported to have reached 70 between January and April 2016 (Municipal IQ, cited in Mapumulo, 2016:8); and harsh complex global processes (Tsheola, 2012:163), leaders in the South African public service need to be able to counter-act these challenges diligently in order for the country to achieve the developmental goals and objectives. Thus, an efficient and effective public service becomes critical, as is the most important tool available to government to achieve the said goals and objectives (Adegbenga & Femi, 2016:149).

In order to shape leaders of today and tomorrow in the public service, the South African government, through the Department of Public Service and Administration, introduced a number of initiatives such as the Public Service Charter, National Batho Pele Excellence Awards, and the National School of Government (Insight, undated: on-line). These initiatives, are in line with the National Development Plan's (NDP) vision 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011), which aims for government to have experienced staff at all levels of service, who are also competent to carry out their jobs effectively in order to build a capable and developmental state (Insight, undated: on-line).

To position the contestations of this article, secondary sources were deployed, seeking to add to the above-mentioned initiatives by highlighting some competencies that should be given attention for today's and tomorrow's leaders in the public service in order to steer the South African society to the aspirations of the NDP vision 2030. This is in view of the fact that to build a capable and developmental state, the public sector in South Africa should be strong, and public managers' leadership is critical for achieving that.

The former Minister of the Department of Public Service and Administration in South Africa, Fraizer-Moleketi, (2007), cited in Naidoo (2009:6), emphasises the above notion by indicating that "it is their responsibility to direct and lead the operational and the programmatic aspects of implementing the political mandate. The responsibility rests with this leadership to give policy advice, based on factual context that enables political leadership to take policy decisions, and identify the appropriate outcomes in order that programmes can be developed and implemented to produce these required outcomes".

Considering the above discussions, this article focuses narrowly on leadership competencies required at the top management level in the South African public service in order to meet the needs of the developmental state.

BACKGROUND AND THE NATURE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Literature provides a plethora of definitions regarding the concept of developmental state. To this fact, Stubbs (2009), cited in Dassah (2011:591) argues that little agreement exists about definition and features of the developmental state, especially that there is a lack of clarity as to which states fit the description and the possibility of a state outgrowing such description.

However, according to Dassah (2011:530), the concept of developmental state was firstly introduced by Jonson (1982) in *MITI and the Japanese miracle* in which an account of Japan's developmental scenario and industrial processes were presented. Jonson used the concept to refer to the state that is serving as the main promoter of economic development as developmental state. To this end, the role of market forces was minimal in Japan's economic development (Dassah, 2011:590; Burger, 2014:2).

In South Africa, Mphaisha (2014:77) reveals that developmental state has two implications for service delivery. Firstly, signifies the state of being free from poverty. Secondly, refers to the process of creating and establishing opportunities for the poor in order to progress to the state of development. Furthermore, the governing party in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), is "oriented towards benefiting the masses" by means of "collective and state-led actions, rather than depending on existing economic structures and relying solely on market forces" (Tsheola, 2012:163).

In this way, the South African approach to developmental state, is contrast to the traditional practice of the concept. To this effect, some commentators argue that the practice of developmental state in South Africa is not clear, especially when the concept is usually associated with high economic growth (Burger, 2014:1). Given these deliberations, Public Service Commission (2008), cited in Mofolo, Mkuyana and Skade (2014:13) expressed its views around this issue in the following manner:

South Africa's efforts to promote growth and development are being pursued within the context of building a developmental state. Without going into a detailed discussion on the different conceptions of a developmental state, it suffices to say that such a state seeks to capably intervene and shepherd societal resources to achieve national developmental objectives; rather than simply rely on the forces of the market…What then is the specific context within which to locate a South African developmental state? The PSC believes that the Constitution provides the basis on

which to understand developmentalism in South Africa given how it captures the collective will and determination of her people to create a better life for themselves.

Taking the above into consideration, Chapter two of the *Constitution* (1996) provides a number of social rights that need to be realised progressively by the state within its available resources. Furthermore, through the NDP, the intention of the state is to fight unemployment, poverty, and inequality. It is then become evident that available resources within the state cannot exclusively be dedicated to pursuing economic growth (Burger, 2014:5), more so a neo-liberal market agenda alone would not be sufficient to satisfy the needs of the people, particularly in a deeply unequal society found in South Africa (Jahed & Kimathi, 2007, cited in Tsheola, 2012:163).

This assertion then attests to the fact that, *inter alia*, government in South Africa must be able to meet the basic needs of the people and, in so doing, provide the guarantee to redress the past socio-economic imbalances. The focus of government should be on the production of goods and services, which should be supported by a strong administrative state that pushes the developmental objectives through various regulations meant to benefit the poor and marginalised sections of the society (Mphaisha, 2014:77).

In order to realise these objectives, the National Planning Commission (2011:365) postulates that South Africa needs to uncompromisingly focus on building professional public service and a state capable of playing a transformative and developmental role. Among other centralised interventions, as shown in the introduction of this article, the National School of Government was introduced, which aims to educate and train competent public servants to ensure that they are capable of consistently delivering high-quality services for all South Africans (Insight, undated: on-line).

The initiative of establishing a school for public servants is not a unique practice to the South African government. For instance, Canada has a school called Canada School of Public Service which is providing common learning and development needs of the public servants and, it also helps to ensure that all public service employees throughout of the country acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed to properly deliver services to the Canadians (United Nations, 2006:12).

Similarly, Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Member countries have high level central intervention in which future leaders are identified and nurtured from early years of their careers through a centralised selection, training and career management process. In some countries, such as Sweden and the United States, governments have established institutions for identifying and developing future leaders in the public service. For example, in Sweden, the National Council for Quality and Development was established with the sole intention of identifying potential leaders (OECD, 2001:1, 2).

This article acknowledges such initiatives, and it further suggests that the leaders of today and tomorrow in the South African public service would be required to understand the democratic values and principles enshrined in the *Constitution* (1996), and thus be equipped with competencies that emphasise those values and principles. Rightfully, the NDP vision 2030 is focusing on professionalising the public service in South Africa, however, it is the view of this article that over and above that, there is a need to identify a wide-ranging or comprehensive competence profile required for the public service leaders.

It is the view of this article that if the competence profile of leaders is clearly identified and defined, it would assist even other training organisations, such as universities to produce leaders of the future that would possess the required capabilities in order to be responsive to the challenges that the country is confronted with, and then be able to promote institutional changes that satisfy the expectations of the public.

Leadership is a crucial aspect that enhances management capacity and organisational performance. It is also instrumental in determining "… the returns that organisations realise from their human capital, or human resources" (OECD, 2001:1; Charlton, 1993, cited in Hayward, Amos & Baxter, 2008:15). Hence, Fraizer-Moleketi (2007), cited in Naidoo (2009:5) is emphasising the need of training managers in the appropriate leadership skills to improve organisational performance.

THE NATIONAL SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES

In order to educate, train, professionalise, and develop public servants, who would be competent and committed to the public good, as well as capable of consistently delivering high-quality services, the National School of Government has come up with programmes, which include the following:

- Public administration systems and operations,
- Public administration governance, leadership and management ethos,
- Building a culture of public service,
- Context-based public service training and development,
- Targeting and customising in-service professional training and development especially for middle to accounting officer levels,
- Research and benchmarking to give it a world-class outlook, and
- Compulsory induction for new recruits at all levels (Insight, undated: on-line).

Furthermore, it is the intention of the National School of Government to have assessment centre, an induction ceremony, access to public service internships, and reorientation programmes for public servants with the aim of preserving institutional memory (Insight, undated: on-line).

When analysing the aforesaid programmes, it becomes evident that not much is inducing forward-thinking. This then suggests that not adequate capacity is built to understand and successfully deal with the shifting contexts of the South African public sector.

When considering general trends of leadership development from countries such as United Kingdom and the United States, one finds that the first step taken to develop future leaders was to define their competence profile. The rational of this exercise was to highlight the fact that competencies required for the future leaders could be different as compared to the present leaders given responsibility, capability and the role that would be required in the future (OECD, 2001:2).

Therefore, it is the view of these discussions that today's and tomorrow's leaders in the South African public service would need to acquire and possess the right skills and competencies which would be instrumental to navigate and guide the country through complex and ever-evolving environment (fraught with public service protests) with confidence and success.

THE NATURE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE PROTESTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since 2004, the country has been faced with the scourge of public service protests. While, the service delivery protests could be seen as critical for the public service in South Africa, the only sad part of them is that, they turn to be violent in nature and result in damaging the state property, like the experience of Vuwani in Limpopo, where over 20 schools were burned. In 2014, about 80% of the 218 recorded public protests in the country were marred with violence (Powell, O' Donovan & De Visser, 2015:1).

While some observers advance a number of reasons for the service delivery protests that took place in South Africa since 2004, Letsoalo and Molele (2011), cited in Tsheola (2012:173) reveal that the Cabinet memorandum affirmed that they were legitimate. The right to protest is a constitutional right, and thus, citizens could use protests as an evaluation mechanism of government's actions or inactions. African Development Bank Group (AfDB), OECD, and UNDP (2016:118) maintain that public protests are the democratic ways of voicing demands.

Irvin and Stansbury (2004), cited by Lubinga and du Plessis (2016:99) are in agreement with the foregoing statement. When citizens exercise democratic rights peacefully, they help government to learn which policies are likely to be explosive or unpopular, in this way, be able to avoid such policy choices. This then, needs public service which is open and receptive of public criticisms, and willing to act swiftly to address the citizens needs and demands. This idea is also supported by the protests analysis made in Vuwani, where it is recommended that government's interventions should not wait for the violent protests to occur (HSRC, undated: on-line).

Tsheola (2012:164) rightfully asks this question; if public participation was upheld to promote democracy, citizenship, empowerment and normative dialogue on service delivery issues, why

would the impoverished citizens choose to embark on violent service protests, denying politicians and officials a space for deliberations?

Draai (2010:131) is also of an opinion that citizens' criticisms turn to be beneficial to government only when they are considered. This author further argues that the service delivery protests that have engulfed the country are as a result of perceived failure of government to meet the needs and demands of the people. The failure of government to satisfy the needs of the people could be seen as an act of undermining the basic values and principles governing public administration in South Africa.

THE BASIC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES GOVERNING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Section 195 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) provides that public administration must be governed according to the democratic values and principles found in it. Of particular relevance are the following principles articulated in Section 195:

- "A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
- Efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted.
- Public administration must be development-oriented.
- People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making.
- Public administration must be accountable.
- Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.
- Good human-resource management and career-development practices, to maximise human potential, must be cultivated".

Section 195(2) of the *Constitution* (1996), postulates that these principles apply to the administration in every sphere of government; organs of state; and public enterprises. These constitutional principles place an onus on leadership to promote good governance, for example, legal compliance, probity and accountability. As part of good governance, leadership is required to ensure that the above-mentioned values and principles are implemented to realise developmental goals and socio-economic transformation envisaged by the *Constitution* (Kuye & Ajam, 2012:49).

Governance can be defined as the way in which the underlying values of the nation as expressed in the *Constitution* are "institutionalised" and used to guide the actions of functionaries throughout the public service system. In this regard, leadership is the flesh on the bones of the *Constitution*; and is at the heart of good governance as well (OECD, 2001:1).

RECOMMENDED COMPETENCE PROFILE FOR LEADERS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE

A number of scholars (Cloete, *et al*, 2000; Schwella & Rossouw, 2005; Rowe, 2005, all cited in Naidoo, 2009:7) have recommend leadership competencies required in the South African public service, which include the skill to analyse policy and strategic leadership. Adding to these, this article also recommends that the decision makers in government need to look at the following competence profile:

- Astute strategist,
- Pragmatic technophile,
- Catalysing agent, and
- Prudent manager.

It is the view of this article that building on the commitment to the democratic values and principles enshrined in the *Constitution* (1996), as well as the NDP vision 2030, the above shown competencies could assist to put leaders of today and tomorrow in the South African public service in a good stead to be successful, if such competencies become part of their arsenal. In the next sub-sections, these competencies are discussed in order to increase the understanding.

Astute strategist

As shown in the introduction of this article, the South African public service operates within the volatile environment. For the public service to circumvent or counter-act such conditions, it requires leaders who should be able to manage complex situations. Furthermore, South Africa is part of the "global village", which engenders interdependence relationship among the countries of the world. Covey (2004:3) claims that "interdependence is a higher value than independence". Therefore, in time of greater interdependency, leaders in the public service need to be generalists instead of being specialists (Canada's Public Policy Forum, 2014:9).

The above, simply implies that leaders should be aware of their organisational environment that involves political, economic and social factors. They need to comprehend the connections between global and domestic trends (Canada' Public Policy Forum, 2014:9). Leaders who possess a wide base of knowledge and experience stand a good chance of being effective in analysing and arriving at the desired solutions in time.

For example, when considering the pressure of public service delivery protests that have been currently experienced in South Africa, leaders in the public service are required to determine the best solutions within a short space of time. This then requires leaders who are able to quickly analyse and assess the situation, and determine what is mostly needed to be done. They should be able to take a 'big picture' view of a situation, weigh it up quickly, make a logical, sound

decision confidently, and influence others to agree with them in order to have a positive impact towards achieving the objectives of the organisation (Elgood, 2012:4).

When looking at the chronicles of the protest actions in Vuwani, one finds that they date back to the 19th July 2015, and violent protests only took place on the 1st May 2016 (HSRC, 2016: on-line) after attempts of peaceful engagement. Given these accounts, it is the contention of this article that, had leaders of the Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) and South African Police Services (SAPS) conducted the prediction analysis based on previous violent protests in Vuwani (HSRC, 2016: on-line), as well as in other areas in the country, like Kgutsong in Carletonville, where in 2006 violent protests included burning of ANC candidates houses, blocking of roads and damage to municipal property (wikipedia.org), the chances of burning schools probably could have been prevented by proactively intensifying the presence of the police in the area (HSRC, 2016: on-line).

The HSRC's (2016:on-line) analysis shows that the previous violent protests in Vuwani targeted government buildings, blocked major roads, and attacked the police. In the nearby town, Malamulela (a town MDB is merging with Vuwani), previously instances of burning of schools involved criminal elements. The lap-tops and computers were stolen before the school administration blocks were gutted.

In 2015 government adopted an apt approach to tackle protest actions (albeit, to a certain extent they became destructive) during "Hashtag Fees Must Fall" movement in the South African universities by responding quickly to the fees increases. The lesson from this response could be, when faced with increasing democratic assertiveness, public service has no choice, but to innovate and change (AfDB, OECD & UNDP, 2016: 122).

Pragmatic technophile

The vast innovation in technology requires the South African public service to take advantage and position itself to new ways of solving social challenges and sharing information to citizens. In order to strengthen and support responsive government, public service leaders need to embrace technological innovation and build organisational capacity, because employees with technical knowledge and technical skills would be required (Canada's Public Policy Forum, 2014:9; Markos & Sridevi, 2010:89).

Information and communication technology (ICT) can be critical in improving policy making and bringing about difference in people's lives. For example, Tanzania has a programme that assists parents to register their children's births through mobile phones. This is in direct response to the challenge of 80% of Tanzanians who do not have birth certificates (Reuters, 2015a, cited in AfDB, OECD & UNDP, 2016:126). The use of mobile phones is a wide-spread phenomenon in Africa, with availability varying from 70% to 100% in 2015 (Leo, *et al*., 2015, cited in AfDB, OECD & UNDP, 2016:126). Equally, even in South Africa, the opportunity of the spread use of

the mobile phones is an opportunity that cannot be missed to ensure greater efficiency and transparency of the public service.

The rise of the web technology, like social media (Canada's Public Policy Forum, 2014:10) presents a huge opportunity for the South African public service. Social media could be used as a communication tool that informs and elicits the views of the citizens on the continuous basis when decisions are made to address the public needs. Case in point, social media played a fundamental role during the campaigns of the political parties towards 3rd August 2016 Local Government Elections in South Africa. In the same way, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of South Africa took advantage of the power of social media to educate voters during the run-up towards those elections. This demonstrates the strength and worth of social media as a communication strategy that could promote efficient and effective government in South Africa.

Catalysing agent

The instability of the public service environment is an indication that the world is not static, but is moving in a fast pace. Among other factors, globalisation, the widespread usage of ICT, and the emerging of the knowledge society, are increasingly changing the world's order (Melchor, 2008:7).

Therefore, in order to keep pace with the fast-paced world, change management is fundamental to the public service's success. Managing change can be defined as the response to changes which are happening outside the organisation, of which the organisation exercises little or no control over; for example, economic crisis and political unrests (Melchor, 2008:14).

Then, the leaders in the South African public service should be mindful of the fact that, for the country to be able to meet the demands of its agenda as a developmental state, and at the same time the objectives of the NDP vision 2030, the traditional practices of public service are no more relevant to the new context and its priorities.

Today public servants of the South African public service are expected to uphold high standard of professional ethics, and foster transparency by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information (*Constitution*, 1996), which are issues that were not priorities in many years ago (Melchor, 2008:7). It "is the job of leaders" (Iacobucci, 2006, cited in Canada's Public Policy Forum, 2007:15) to ensure that the employees in the public service understand these democratic values and principles.

Service delivery protests constitute a trigger for change in the public service. To that effect, to manage change effectively requires public service leaders to quickly respond and adapt to it. In order to adapt to change, leaders should be flexible enterprising thinkers, and be committed to achieve results, regardless of the constraints ahead. They should constantly search for new avenues for innovation by asking the right questions and exploring new possibilities (Canada's Public Policy Forum, 2014:10, 11).

Osborne and Gaebler, cited in Callahan (2007:10), argue that any government can be transformed in the same manner as private sector corporations' experience, by being, *inter alia* more adapted to "public needs, more flexible, more innovative, more entrepreneurial, and more results-oriented".

Prudent manager

Given the need to promote efficient, economic and effective use of resources in the South African public service (*Constitution*, 1996), it is worthwhile that leaders should possess business acumen. In other words, they should have "knowledge about key business issues, the skill to apply that knowledge, and the confidence to take action informed by past experiences" (Elgood, 2012:1).

Thus, leaders' acquisition of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is critical, given the interventionist nature of South Africa, as a developmental state working towards rolling back the legacy of apartheid (Ile, 2014:180). The entrenchment of such knowledge is central in the public service, especially in the current economic climate that needs austerity measures and innovation to maximise financial resources (Canada's Public Policy Forum, 2014:10).

The leaders in the public service should be able to collect data through monitoring process to ensure that government activities are on track and there is progress towards the achievement of the desired outcomes (Ile, 2014:179). Similarly, information gathered through evaluation process should assist them to conduct cost-benefit analysis of policies, programmes and projects (Robinson, 2014, cited in Mofolo, 2016:21), and thereby be able to manage risk and optimise social benefits (Canada's Public Policy Forum, 2014:10).

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this article was to add to the central interventions that the South African government have introduced to engender efficiency and effectiveness in the public service. The article highlighted some competencies that should be given attention for today's and tomorrow's leaders in the public service in order to steer the South African society to the aspirations of the National Development Plan (NDP) vision 2030. This was in view of the fact that to build a capable and developmental state, the public sector in South Africa should be strong, and public managers' leadership is critical for achieving that.

The analysis of the School of Government's programmes, indicated that not much is inducing forward-thinking. This then suggests that not adequate capacity is built to understand and successfully deal with the shifting contexts of the South African public sector. It is the view of this article that if the competence profile of leaders was clearly identified and defined, it could assist even other training organisations, such as universities to produce leaders of the future that would possess the required capabilities in order to be responsive to the challenges that the

country is confronted with, and then be able to promote institutional changes that satisfy the expectations of the public.

The recommendation derived from this article is that the decision makers in government should consider leaders' competence profile that is forward-thinking and fitting the constant shifting contexts in the public sector. In this regard, it is recommended that the following competence profile should be looked at, namely; astute strategist, pragmatic technophile, catalysing agent, and prudent manager.

Building on the commitment to the democratic values and principles enshrined in the *Constitution* (1996), as well as the NDP vision 2030, the above shown competencies could assist to put leaders of today and tomorrow in the South African public service in a good stead to be successful, if such competencies become part of their arsenal.

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