

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY  
PROF EJ FERREIRA  
OCTOBER 23, 2013**

**PERSPECTIVES OF ADMINISTRATIVE  
EMPLOYEES ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN  
THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

## **PERSPECTIVES OF ADMINISTRATIVE EMPLOYEES ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The measurable success of any institution relies primarily on a competent, well-trained and accountable workforce and we need to remember that the employees at the lowest level of the hierarchical structure form a crucial foundation in any organisation. In South Africa the Government is recognised as one of the largest employers. The ability of the state to act on pressing challenges such as poverty and service delivery, is largely defined by the capability and commitment of both the public service and its employees. Poor service delivery by local government is crippling South African businesses and impeding growth.

### **Background to the study**

Speaking during the African National Congress (ANC) manifesto launch in Rustenburg on 27 February 2011, President Jacob Zuma said that the national and provincial government will intervene at local level to remedy weaknesses in terms of service delivery. In his speech, he referred to (1) municipalities lacking capacity in management and service delivery, and (2) ANC councillors being required to tell their communities about their plans and targets to improve service delivery. This surely shows that government is aware of the negative situation.

Looking at productivity in the country as a whole, we see that since 1967, output per worker per unit of capital in South Africa has fallen from R7 297 to R4 924 a year – a decline of 32.5%. From the peak in 1993, this measure of labour productivity has fallen by 41.2%, bringing it down to the lowest level in 46 years in this country. South Africa today is less efficient than many of its emerging market competitors, our labour force is uncompetitive and our labour productivity is much lower than that of the rest of the developing world.

## **Research problem and objectives**

The problem examined pertains to the employees in the public sector in Gauteng not performing to their optimum level. The employees included administrative support staff members working as administrative or filing clerks, receptionists, typists or data capturers, secretaries, office managers, executive secretaries, personal assistants and telephone operators.

Although there are many factors that influence productivity, the level of job satisfaction, the motivation of the employees, and the skills levels of the employees were investigated. These factors were analysed to determine whether the support given by government was acceptable and to determine the level of satisfaction experienced by the employees. A computer skills test was also administered to determine whether the employees were actually capable of performing their jobs productively as was described in job descriptions. Some major problems were identified which points at pervasive poor service delivery in the Gauteng government.

If the source of the problem cannot be identified, poor service delivery will remain a headache not only for consumers but also for government. The objectives of the research were to:

- determine the nature and amount of job-related support local government offers their administrative employees;
- determine the level of job satisfaction experienced by administrative employees;
- evaluate the general knowledge regarding office issues;
- test the computer literacy skills levels of administrative employees;
- determine the reasons for poor service delivery in the public sector; and
- to compare the local results with other countries worldwide.

## **TRENDS FROM THE LITERATURE**

Although much is published on service delivery in the public sector in South Africa, a very limited amount of literature focussing specifically on administrative staff is available.

The literature review aims to address the following aspects:

- job satisfaction

- job involvement
- commitment and motivation
- skills and knowledge
- productivity

### **Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is essential for both employers and employees in an organisation, since it is likely to influence the performance of the employees and that of the organisation as a whole. Employees have to be happy at work as they spend most of their day in their work environment. The question that needs to be asked is what makes administrative employees satisfied or dissatisfied in their workplace to an extent that ultimately determines whether they find the working environment either fulfilling or disappointing.

Job satisfaction can be defined as “the individual’s opinion about how well personal expectations at work correspond to outcomes, or as an employee’s generally positive attitude towards the job”. It can be affected by factors such as working conditions, pay and benefits, the employee’s attitudes towards the organisation and supervision, towards the work itself, and the employee’s health and age. Job satisfaction is a general attitude that results from specific attitudes and factors.

The belief that satisfied employees tend to be more productive than dissatisfied employees has been a basic principle among managers for years, but it is only now that research has begun to support this theory after decades of questions about the satisfaction-performance relationship. When people refer to employee attitudes, they usually mean job satisfaction or the lack of it. An employee with a high level of job satisfaction invariably has positive attitudes towards his or her job, while a dissatisfied person has negative attitudes about his or her job. Management committed to improving employee satisfaction has a humanitarian value and is also financially good for any organisation. Organisations manage satisfaction as a way of increasing work quality, commitment, productivity or retention.

### **Job involvement**

Job involvement is an individual's psychological identification with or commitment to the job. It reflects the degree to which they are cognitively preoccupied with, engaged in and concerned with their present profession. Employees who experience a high level of job involvement strongly identify with and really care about the kind of work they perform. Increased levels of job involvement are positively related to job performance. High job involvement has been found to be related to a reduced number of absences and lower resignation rates. Fostering job involvement is a crucial organisational objective, as many researchers regard it as a primary determinant of organisational effectiveness and individual motivation.

### **Commitment and motivation**

Commitment to the organisation is directly related to job satisfaction in that both deal with the nature of employees' emotional reactions to work. There is a psychological link between an employee and the organisation that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily resign from the organisation.

Committed employees are usually motivated employees and motivated employees try their utmost to succeed. Motivation is not something that the supervisor does to an employee. Rather, it is something that is intrinsic, coming from within the employee. The supervisor or manager can create an environment that encourages motivation on the part of employees. Motivational models, such as Herzberg's two-factor theory, for example, indicates that addressing issues related to motivators (such as achievement and empowerment), while desirable, would not necessarily result in increased levels of job satisfaction if the hygiene factors (for example, salary, working conditions, employee benefits, job security and interpersonal relationships) related to job dissatisfaction were not also properly addressed.

### **Skills and knowledge**

The umbrella term of 'skills' elaborates on what management expect from their employees. This includes basic skills, generic skills and trade-specific skills. The term 'skill' may imply a hiring criterion, an element of a job used in the determination of compensation, a national population characteristic of interest to the labour market managers, an intended result of training, or (if lacking) a reason for the inability of employees to perform productively or the unemployed to find a position. Skill is variously inserted into action as a conceptualisation

through which management can be accomplished. A study conducted in the USA showed that human resource managers chose literacy and numeracy skills as the most important skills for job performance, followed by leadership and work ethic skills.

Governments globally want a skilled and adaptable workforce to maintain or improve national prosperity and the delivery of social services, and for employees to be positioned to resist unemployment. Organisations are interested in a workforce capable of responding to the changing work requirements in ways pertinent to their workplace needs, in order to sustain the effective provision of their goods and services.

For our research we focused only on those skills applicable to administrative employees and their direct working environment. These skills include: technical, writing, knowledge of procedures, financial management, negotiation, supervision, analytical management and communication.

### **Productivity**

Productivity is seen as a key factor in the success of many organisations and can be defined as the amount of output (products and services) generated per unit of input (including time, money, labour and other sources). A pleasant physical environment in terms of offices and office space will boost employee morale and ultimately improve their level of productivity and is central to getting the most out of employees.

According to a survey of more than 100 London office staff conducted by Metro Design Consultants, almost half (49%) of the respondents indicated that an office makeover would increase their productivity, and more than half (64%) thought a better working environment would make them more organised and enable greater job satisfaction.

Another research project on the US workplace environment focused on the relationship between workplace design, work satisfaction and productivity. Almost 90% of senior officials claimed that effective workplace design was crucial to increase employees' productivity level. The outcome of the survey suggested that businesses can enhance their productivity by improving their workplace design. Many organisations still do not give much attention to

workplace design. As many as 40% of the employees believed that their companies wanted to keep costs low, which was why their workplaces had poor designs; 46% of employees thought that the priority list of their companies did not rate workplace design very highly.

Although skills development by itself does not necessarily lead to improved productivity, it creates the possibility and capacity for improvement when applied in the workplace.

### *Productivity in the South African government sector*

During 2011 South Africa's labour productivity plummeted to the lowest level in 40 years, and that this situation is a constraint to South Africa's competitiveness. As low productivity can decrease the competitiveness of a company or country, it can be seen as one of South Africa's greatest challenges. Public sector services are often contracted out to private sector companies. These private sector companies offer the same services, but deliver them more efficiently than the public sector. Insufficient service delivery may be seen as a symptom of low productivity.

A satisfied workforce is beneficial to firms as well as the wider society. There is also a link between work satisfaction and productivity which are positively aligned. This implies that the greater the job satisfaction, the greater the productivity of employees. The most significant factors in work dissatisfaction, and hence a decrease in productivity, within South Africa are salaries earned, the age of the employee, as well as the race of the employee. The more employees earn, the more likely they are to be satisfied (contrary to Herzberg's two-factor theory) with their work situation. Regarding age, the younger employees are, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their work. Race also plays a significant role in South Africa. Studies have shown that previously disadvantaged South Africans expect more from work opportunities and feel they are entitled to more due to the disenfranchisements suffered during apartheid.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Measuring instruments

Two separate surveys were conducted; the first one by means of a structured questionnaire and the second by means of another structured questionnaire, as well as a practical skills (computer literacy) test.

Once the results of the first questionnaire became available, we realised that more information was needed to get to the real problem. The results of the first questionnaire indicated that the respondents ( $n=158$ ) were generally happy with their working environment. However, given their poor service delivery, a second questionnaire was designed to meet the third objective, which was to evaluate their skills levels. This questionnaire consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions aimed at attempting to determine the knowledge level of the respondents ( $n=32$  from the same population) on the following topics: the business and office environment, information management, communication in the office, and office finance. These were topics identified by industry as needed by office professional office workers. Participants were given 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

In addition to answering the second questionnaire, the participants were also required to do a practical computer literacy skills test. The objective of this test was to measure the level of computer literacy skills possessed by administrative employees. It was decided to use only MS Word and MS Excel as application packages, because these two packages are those mainly used in the daily execution of administrative tasks. A speed and accuracy assessment was also completed, measuring the number of words per minute and the number of accuracy errors.

## RESULTS

### Characteristics of the public service employees

A majority of 73.42% of respondents in the Gauteng province were females, confirming that the administrative environment is still a female-dominated field. The majority of the respondents (40.51%) were white, followed closely by black/African (39.24%), coloured



9.49%, Indian 7.59%, Asian 2.53% and other 0.63% participants. The largest number of appointments was made after 1994. The reason why the majority of appointments were made after the first democratic elections emphasises the fact that the government was fully implementing policies to minimise racial imbalances as well as promoting job creation. The ages of the respondents reflect a relatively young workforce, with 75.32% being younger than 45. It follows that this segment of the population can make a very positive contribution to improve the productivity levels of their institutions, as they are young enough to be well skilled and trained with the latest technology and working methods. The majority of respondents (57.60%) had a post-school qualification, although 39.87% had only a Grade 12 or matriculation certificate. The fact that only 2.53% of the respondents had failed the high school exit-level examinations indicates that, during their employment, they had not improved their qualifications from Grade 11 or lower to meet the above-mentioned exit level for high schools locally. A total of 42.40% of the respondents did not have any post-school qualifications, which might have a negative effect on general productivity in the Gauteng public sector. Regarding the distribution of administrative positions held by the respondents in the public sector, a majority of respondents (66.46%) were employed in responsible administrative positions (secretary, office manager, executive secretary and personal assistant) where adequate qualifications are a requirement in order to function optimally as an administrative professional. The majority of 97.50% of respondents were employed in permanent positions. There was an even spread of respondents regarding their years of service, varying from 4 to more than 25 years of service with 8.86% of the respondents having been in service for less than 4 years.

### **Job-related factors and job support in the public sector**

- ***Training***

Training offered by the public sector to their employees included skills improvement courses (125 responses), internal workshops (98 responses), conferences/seminars (71 responses), and mentoring (42 responses). Only 11 respondents indicated that they had no training opportunities. As administrative employees seem to have ample opportunity to improve their skills, this should have a positive impact on their general productivity level (percentages were not used as the respondents could select more than one option).

- ***Provision of adequate equipment to perform administrative duties***

The respondents indicated that they were supplied with all the necessary equipment and technology to perform their duties without any hindrance and that they were extremely satisfied.

- ***Computer software***

A list of 11 different types of computer software programs used in industry were provided, and the respondents were requested to mark all the appropriate options from the list that they used in their working environment to perform their duties. Most of the respondents used word processing, e-mail, intranet spreadsheet and presentation software in order to execute their daily tasks. Voice recognition, web design and desktop publishing were the software programs least used in the public sector. Where programs were infrequently used, individuals could attend short courses to meet specific demands.

- ***ITC service support***

Solving technology-related problems as soon as possible ensures that administrative employees who rely on technology to perform their duties can be more productive because valuable time is not wasted. The majority of respondents (39.24%) indicated that their ICT-related problems were solved within 24 hours after reporting the fault. A matter of concern is that 25.32% of the respondents pointed out that they had to wait for week or more to receive assistance after reporting a fault. Such a situation is not only untenable but causes frustration and impacts negatively on staff morale and productivity.

- ***Standard of IT equipment***

Just over half of the respondents (50.63%) were of the opinion that their IT equipment was outdated, but that they still managed to perform their duties without experiencing any levels of frustration. A total of 8.88% of the respondents stated that their IT equipment was so old that they hardly managed to perform their daily duties and that it impeded their overall performance and probably had a negative effect on general productivity levels.

- ***Additional technology to increase productivity and efficiency***

Respondents were requested to select from 9 options the technology-related components that were not available to them. These were items that might improve their general productivity and efficiency. They ranked faster and more powerful computers as their first need to be fulfilled; secondly, they felt that there was a need for additional or upgraded software; and, thirdly, they felt that a laptop would increase their productivity rate and efficiency.

### **Motivation to work in the public sector**

The respondents could indicate from a list of fringe benefits (including variables such as overtime, bonus (annual), flexi working hours, merit (performance) bonuses, career advancement opportunities and improving qualifications) for which they are eligible. When the top three scorers were considered, it was evident that the South African public service provides annual bonuses to employees (140 responses), that it provides career advancement opportunities (78 responses) as well as opportunities for employees to improve their qualifications (76 responses). Only 42 of the respondents received overtime and 50 were authorised to work flexi-hours.

### **Satisfaction levels with physical workspace environmental factors**

In order to determine how administrative employees viewed their physical workspace, to what extent it fulfilled their requirements and what the impact was on their general level of satisfaction, they were questioned about the following workspace factors: lighting, comfort level in general, office furniture, task space, noise level, privacy, storage space, colour scheme, ventilation, ablution, general security, child care facilities and recreational facilities. The responses were generally positive. However, the factors that were viewed negatively included storage space, child care facilities and recreational facilities, presumably because of a lack of these facilities, which should be of some concern. Although dissatisfaction with these factors did not affect their work directly, it probably influenced their well-being negatively.

The respondents mostly agreed that they had a good working relationship with their superiors and peers, that the work/business hours suited their personal needs, and that there were a variety of duties and challenges in the work they were doing. On the negative side, they thought that they had a dead-end job and that they did not get praised for doing a good job. It is a matter of concern that many respondents experienced these factors negatively. These matters surely need to be addressed in order to increase job satisfaction, boost morale and increase productivity.

More than 80% of the respondents were very or extremely committed and loyal towards the organisation. The reason for their loyalty could possibly be ascribed to the high level of job security which they enjoyed.

### **Computer literacy skills and general office knowledge**

More than two-thirds (69.23%) of the respondents indicated that their practical skills were never tested when they were appointed in their positions. Although the most commonly used method of testing appointees' skills in the public sector appears to be through a typing test, the contents of these tests are random. Language skills, spelling and other types of testing methods were mentioned by very few of the respondents.

The performance of each participant was tested in the skills audit for MS Word, MS Excel, speed and accuracy. Only seven candidates were able to make five or fewer than five accuracy errors in the MS Word assessment. Of the 32 participants, only 14 managed to execute 23 (50%) and more of the outcomes. None of the candidates was able to deliver a text document in MS Word that met the minimum criteria, which stipulated the production of a well-prepared and executed document without grammatical and spelling errors. Two candidates were not able to create and type an MS Excel spreadsheet. Only seven candidates could complete the MS Excel assessment and deliver an end product with more than 23 outcomes reached. The majority of participants were not able to perform basic calculations in MS Excel such as calculating the total of a range and to apply formulas to determine the average, minimum and maximum data in a specific range. Only two candidates were able to create a basic chart from the data in the spreadsheet. Basic features such as

inserting rows, merging and centring text, deleting rows and columns, inserting headers and footers, changing the paper orientation, manipulating borders, shading cells and rows, and aligning text were not executed by the majority of the participants.

Participants were timed for a duration of 10 minutes to determine if a reasonable speed (minimum of 25 words per minute) could be reached. The second purpose of a speed and accuracy test was to reflect a candidate's ability to be productive and efficient; that is, to be able to produce a product that is error-free. Only 12 candidates (37.50%) managed to type a document that contained fewer than five accuracy errors. Two candidates could not reach 15 w.p.m, 10 candidates typed 15 and 20 w.p.m. (that is a relatively low production speed), and the remainder of candidates (20) managed to type a speed of 25 w.p.m. and higher. From the candidates that typed more than 20 w.p.m. there were 12 that scored a mark of 5 out of 10 and more. The results reflect that only 11 of the 32 candidates (34.38%) were able to deliver a positive outcome in the skills assessments. From the results reflected above, only six participants were efficient in the MS Word and MS Excel assessments. Only five participants were able to type the ten-minute speed and accuracy assessment with fewer than three accuracy errors. The majority of the participants (21 candidates resulting to 65.63%) were not equipped to perform tasks where end-user skills and knowledge play an important part in the productivity level of an employee.

The different topics covered in the multiple choice questionnaire on office-related issues were the business and office environment, communication in the office, information management and office finance. Only six candidates scored less than 50% and 12 candidates scored 75% and higher. The average scores for the different subject topics were: business environment (69.53%), communication in the office (79.02%), information management (58.13%) and office finance (50%). Although participants performed better in the theoretical component than in the practical component, they seemed to be less knowledgeable in information management and office finance.

Administrative employees' productivity is measured by means of their performance (practical skills) and efficacy when delivering a service, to either their superiors or their clients. ICT-related skills and knowledge forms a significant part of the execution of an employee's tasks

and responsibilities. The results provide evidence that the practical skills in the South African public sector do not fulfil the expectations of the public.

## SOUTH AFRICA VS INTERNATIONAL SCENARIO

You might have wondered how South Africa compares with other countries. We did attempt to find out and we got some responses from: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Dubai, United Kingdom, France, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Italy, India, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Portugal, Pakistan, Russia, Scotland, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States of America, the United Arab Emirates and Tanzania. Table 1 compares the South African results with some of the results obtained from other countries.

TABLE 1: LOCAL VS INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

	<b>South Africa</b>	<b>International</b>
<b>Gender</b>	75% Female	66-80% Female
<b>Age</b>	64% from 25-45 years old	62.47% from 35-55 years old
<b>Qualifications</b>	64.84% post-school qualification	73.2% % post-school qualification
<b>Permanent position</b>	97.25%	90.51%
<b>&gt;10 years' service</b>	59.19%	64.97%

When comparing South Africa with the other countries one finds that the South African public sector workforce is a little younger, that there are less qualified employees, that more employees are appointed in permanent positions and that there are less employees with more than 10 years' service experience.

### *Job factors affecting productivity and wellbeing*

Table 2 is a summary of the responses from the local and the international public sector employees regarding identified job factors that could possible influence their productivity and wellbeing.

TABLE 2: JOB FACTORS: LOCAL VS INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

<b>Job factors</b>	<b>South Africa</b>	<b>International</b>
<b>Fringe benefits provided by the public sector (most responses)</b>	Bonus Improving qualifications	Improving qualifications Flexi working hours
<b>Training</b>	Skills improvement courses Internal workshops	Skills improvement courses Internal workshops
<b>Adequate equipment to perform their tasks</b>	82% have adequate equipment	95% have adequate equipment
<b>ICT problems taken care of within 24 hours**</b>	56.34% of problems	92.66% of problems
<b>Standard of ICT equipment**</b>	44.13% have latest technology 9.39% too old to do the job	59.33% have latest technology 0% too old to do the job
<b>Satisfaction with physical workspace</b>	Positive view generally	Less positive view generally
<b>Challenging jobs</b>	47.69%	41.22%
<b>Main reason for employment in the public sector</b>	Secure working environment/less risk for retrenchment	Secure working environment/less risk for retrenchment
<b>Praised by superiors**</b>	57.4%	70.10%
<b>Dead-end profession</b>	33.8%	30.40%
<b>Exchange public for private sector</b>	40%	42.55%

\*\* Biggest differences between local and international results.

It is clear that the local and international scenarios do not differ that much. The job factors that do show quite a difference are the fact that ICT problems are taken care of much quicker internationally and the standard of ICT equipment is much more up to date than in South Africa.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of the research was to identify the reasons why employees working in the public sector in Gauteng often did not perform to their optimum level. In order to achieve this, the researchers looked at the job-related support the administrative employees received, the level of job satisfaction they experienced, the level of their work-related knowledge regarding office matters, as well as the level of their computer literacy skills.

The literature study revealed that certain job factors need to be in place and that employees need to be properly trained before they can be expected to function productively. Generally, the employees took a positive view of their physical workspace environment and were mostly satisfied with job-related factors such as their equipment and technology, the ICT support they received and the level of comfort of their offices. Factors of dissatisfaction included the absence or limited child-care and recreational facilities. The majority also enjoyed the secure working environment, with relatively little risk of being retrenched, as well as good salaries and benefits. As regards motivation, the majority experienced their professions as challenging and the variety of duties and tasks contributed to higher levels of job satisfaction. Recognition for tasks well performed can still improve as it boosts morale and improves employee engagement and productivity, which in turn have a positive influence on the organisation. Most of the respondents indicated their loyalty and were satisfied with the sector they were employed in at the time.

The administrative environment of the public sector of Gauteng is still a female-dominated field, with a relatively young working corps of which many do not have any post-school qualification. Although internal workshops were offered, many of the respondents indicated that their practical skills had never been tested and that they had not had the opportunity to attend courses to improve their skills. The MS Word practical skills tests revealed a very low level of competency in general. The results indicated a low level of accuracy, with most employees not managing even half of the outcomes and none of the candidates being able to deliver a text document in MS Word that met the minimum criteria. The MS Excel tests revealed similar results, with the majority not being able to perform basic calculations or execute basic features of the package. The respondents lacked the requisite typing and



correct keyboard skills to be productive. They generally performed better in the theoretical component than in the practical component; however, very low scores were recorded in the Information Management and Office Finance sections. Although these findings cannot be generalised, they probably do not differ from the situation in the other provinces in South Africa. Further research would be beneficial for the entire country.

The skills audit was conducted in Gauteng province only because of practical implications as the field workers had to make appointments for a minimum of two hours per participant to administer the tests and to ensure that the same standards are maintained throughout the procedure. The process was tedious and it was a challenge to obtain permission from section heads to release their employees for a minimum duration of two hours per session.

Administrative employees' productivity is measured by means of their performance and efficacy when delivering a service. The results provide evidence that the practical skills in the South African public sector do not fulfil the expectations of the public. The following **recommendations** are suggested:

- The public service should procure modern and updated technological office equipment to ensure that productivity levels do not drop as a result of outdated equipment.
- The public sector should put measures in place to create a culture of productivity and accountability through the creation, implementation and sustainability of performance measures.
- Administrative employees should attend relevant on-going training sessions to ensure that a high standard of efficiency and productivity is maintained.
- The public service should invest in offering in-house or offsite skills training courses instead of conferences or seminars, where skills are not improved and employees do not participate actively.
- Administrative employees should be screened on a regular basis to ensure that their performance meet the standards set by the public service.
- Administrative employees should possess the necessary key competencies (i.e. verbal and written communication skills, interpersonal skills, reliability, stress tolerance,

attention to detail, prioritising skills, problem assessment and problem solving, flexibility and adaptability) stipulated by the relevant department.

- Candidates that have applied for a position in the South African public sector must only be appointed if the minimum criteria with regard to practical and theoretical skills are met.
- Human resources should empower the administrative employee through continuous skills development and job expansion to improve job satisfaction and support retention.

Job satisfaction is vital to all employees, since it is likely to influence their performance and that of the organisation positively as a whole. Furthermore, job involvement relates directly to job satisfaction. Employees who experience a high level of job involvement strongly identify with and care about the kind of work they perform. A pleasant physical environment regarding offices and office space will boost employee morale and ultimately improve their level of productivity. Finally, improving productivity in the workplace means improving skills. Higher skills levels should enable employees to achieve more with the available resources and technology, such as improving service delivery in this case. Training must be specific and focused on the needs of the public sector. Indeed, if the skill levels of the employees are improved, it will influence Gauteng businesses positively, facilitating growth, bringing South Africa up to standard with its market competitors and increasing labour productivity to be in line with the rest of the developing world. Human resources are the most critical asset in any country or organisation as the practitioners are the active agents that can either create or destroy value.

#### *Difficulties in transforming the public service*

The South African public service is still in a process of transformation, pressured by high expectations from management as well as from the nation, its client. Expectations set are high, and the temptation must be resisted to borrow existing ideas and experience from other countries, which might not be appropriate for our situation. Even prior to the first democratic election in 1994, structural and administrative culture adjustments to the public service were urgently needed. Although a number of measures have been taken to improve service delivery, the outcomes are varied. A systematic service culture is perhaps still absent.

Poor performance may be due to factors such as the continuing pace of externally imposed change, chronic uncertainties and anxieties about amalgamation of different public sectors, and externally imposed contradictions and constraints, such as the balancing of budgets against the pressure not to dismiss any employees. Lack of leadership experience in handling the political–administrative interface is a further negative factor.

A productive administrative workforce benefits the employer and ultimately portrays a positive image of the particular organisation (in this case the South African public sector) to its clients. The workplace is rapidly changing and the South African public service should keep up abreast of such changes (e.g. the use of technology) to ensure that its administrative workforce is suitably equipped to meet the demands of the South African public.

### **References**

If required, a list of references can be obtained from Prof EJ Ferreira.