

DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE FOR ACCELERATED SERVICE DELIVERY

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ABSTRACT

The delivery of services is the primary function of the public service. All of the reform strategies of the post-apartheid dispensation have the goal of improving the delivery of services to all South Africans. The South African government recognizes that the needs of the poor and those that have been previously disadvantaged. However, the implementation of service delivery initiatives has not been without problems and challenges. The government has faced human resources, technical and process constraints. Senior management in the public service are also facing more demands in terms of their administrative role and the increasing politicisation of their policy role. Thus, current and future senior managers will face increasing challenges of fulfilling their administrative responsibilities vis-à-vis as required of legislation, and their role in an increasingly complex socio-economic and political environment. Senior management are required to be managers in their administrative capacity, but at the same time are required in their capacity to act as policy advisors. They are therefore over-extended to meet administrative and policy demands. Senior management are required to manage human and financial resources, and at the same time required to keep abreast of policy issues that affect their department and South Africa. The South African public service faces many developmental challenges. It therefore needs senior management who are also equipped with the necessary skills, to accelerate service delivery to the extent and pace that is needed in South Africa. Given the complex and demanding environment in which senior management function in the South Africa public service, it is important for them to build varied management and leadership skills in order to become more productive managers to meet the increasing demands of their position.

INTRODUCTION

Given the complex environment in which senior management function in the South Africa public service, it is important for them to be multi-skills in order to become more productive managers to meet the increasing demands of their position. There should be a concern for both people and for accomplishing organizational objectives. Thus, senior managers in the South African public service should be trained so that they incorporate both a participative and task oriented approach. However, this does not mean that senior management in the South African public service do not already possess these competencies, or that they could not develop these competencies themselves in other ways. It means that it could be that these competencies are not formally developed or strengthened.

This paper therefore proposes that senior management in the South Africa public service should build on both their management and leadership skills. This is critical to accelerate service delivery in South Africa. Management, leadership and training are therefore indispensable to each other. Management and leadership skills for the senior management need to be built upon with training and development to meet developmental challenges of the South African public service. The purpose of this paper is not to replace existing models developed by the South African public service but to build on them. This paper highlights the need to training, which provides an integrated approach to the development of the effectiveness of senior managers. Building on management and leadership skills is crucial, so that senior management can become better equipped to accelerate public service delivery in South Africa.

NEED FOR TRAINING OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (The Republic of South Africa, 1995:48-51) states that institution building and management are part of the creation of a strategic framework. In this respect, the White Paper indicates that it is necessary to empower, challenge and motivate managers at all levels to be leaders, visionaries, initiators and effective communicators and decision-makers, capable of responding pro-actively to the challenges of the change process, rather than acting as administrators of fixed rules and procedures. The challenge that the democratic

dispensation is faced with is the lack of skilled senior management (Naidoo 2004:291; Miller 1995:124). The training of public servants, including senior management is a necessity to equip public servants with the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to deliver quality services efficiently and effectively (White Paper on Public Service 1995:64). The training of public servants in the new public management paradigm would improve public service efficiency, effectiveness and capacity to deliver services. Training and development is therefore seen as a leverage for change and in this regard, the White Paper on Public Service (1995:64) envisaged that training would be strategic, based on need, linked to institutional transformation and building.

The importance of human resources development was also emphasized in the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education (WPSTE 1997). The objective of the WPSTE was to provide a policy framework for implementation of new procedures aimed at improving training and education in the public service. The purpose of the WPSTE is to enable departments to design and implement training programs according to their strategic goals and needs.

Miller (2005:77) criticized the lack of training, the duplication of training in some departments, the poor quality training, and the ad hoc or crisis training which takes place in the South African public service. Miller (2005:124) argued that a low priority is accorded to education and training of public servants. Furthermore, many national and provincial departments have failed to utilize their training budgets. Another problem is the lack of co-ordination, as training needs are addressed by a variety of providers from local and international public and private sectors.

Public service institutions are confronted with the challenge of a shortage of management capacity in the public service (Naidoo 2004:338). Most Directors General stated that human resources issues, such as lack of capacity, skills and experience, and personnel conflicts were and continue to present a problem. The management capacity is a challenge, with many senior managers lacking the ability to make effective decisions, delegate and innovatively solve problems (Miller 2005:104). Related to the problem of human resources is the lack of performance (Naidoo 2005:306). Non-performance by public servants either took the form of not

delivering services at all or lack of quality service delivery, or goal displacement by complying with rules and regulations rather than achieving departmental goals. Occasionally political sensitivities inhibited Director Generals' decision-making such as the reluctance to dismiss a non-performing public servant due to political considerations.

Furthermore, most senior managers are not familiar with the style of leadership needed in their departments (Naidoo 2005:307). Most Directors General in the South African public service described their managerial style as participative and orientated towards people (Miller 2005:104). Most senior managers in the South African public sector are therefore only managing rather than leading. Some senior management lead by example, but others are not visible and consistent in their communication. While others have limited themselves by time constraints, and are not exploring emerging paradigms and developing new service delivery initiatives. It is seldom that one finds a person in senior management level with both management and leadership abilities in the South African public service. In a study conducted by Miller (2005:104), most senior managers in the South African public sector stated that they have a participative style of management. However, the data suggests that there is a pre-occupation with the management of personnel and personnel issues. The pre-occupation obscures or displaces the objectives of delivering services. The management style of senior management in the South African public service ranged from task orientation to people orientation. However, the most effective manager is one who has a concern for both productivity and concern for people.

The slow pace of the implementation of policy by some departments, amongst other interrelated variables, in the South African public service can be attributed to the deficiency in effective senior management (Naidoo 2004:339). The South African public service needs demonstrated leadership competence, in all spheres and at all levels, including senior management level. Most Director Generals stated that they wanted to improve senior management capacity of their departments (Naidoo 2004:340). The challenge for the South African public service therefore is to develop appropriate profiles of leadership competencies and design the necessary interventions, to ensure appropriate leadership development.

There is relative agreement amongst Directors General is that senior management ought to have a number of qualities such as leadership skills, interpersonal skills, emphatic communication, creative cooperation, financial and human resource management skills. The ability to analyse policy has been identified by Cloete et al (2005:78) as critical for senior management in the South African public service. Sensitivity to the political environment and political leadership is another important quality. Senior management should become more cognizant of the political dynamics and environment in which they operate. According to Naidoo (2004:339) senior management should be both people orientated and task orientated. The South African public service ought to seek, train and develop senior management to become more effective. Managers ought to be trained in leadership skills, so that they can become more effective managers. (Naidoo 2005:104). According to Schwella and Rossouw (2005:762), senior managers now need specific competencies to enable them to manage and lead their organizations effectively into the future, while maintaining and even improving effectiveness and efficiency. It is therefore critical to determine the role of senior leadership in the public service.

ROLE OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Roos (1991:244) succinctly captures the different aspects of the senior leadership role; namely: executive, policy-maker and exemplar. Other authors such as Schacter (2000:11) added an important strand that focused on the achievement of goals in an institution. According to Smit and de J Cronje (2002:15) senior managers play about ten different roles. These can be classified into three overlapping groups, namely interpersonal role (figurehead, leader and relationship builder), an information role (monitor, analyzer and spokesperson), and a decision-making role (entrepreneur, problem solver, allocator of resources and negotiator).

In this regard, all senior managers within an institutional context ought to serve many functions to some degree towards the achievement of goals. In short, they constitute a process, which implies movement through a series of events (Naidoo 2004:108-109). They also include giving direction in the sense of guiding, steering, inspiring, and actuating people. They include managing and directing the efforts of others and they refer to the performance of tasks through people to achieve a specific goal. Roos

(1991: 245) and Naidoo (2004:108-109) maintain that the senior manager performs a number of functions. These are elaborated in the discussion below.

Executive: In his or her executive capacity, the senior manager does not perform the work alone: He or she assigns it to other persons. This, however, requires the manager to know how to delegate authority and maintain accountability. Should he or she be ignorant about the delegation of authority, he or she will create a bottleneck and an obstacle in the group's success.

Planner: The task of deciding how a group will achieve its objectives is part of a senior manager's functions. Planning in this respect entails the determination of intermediate steps, as well as the long-term planning of future steps to attain the final objective. The senior manager is often the sole custodian of the plan and the only one who knows the entire programme of action.

Policy-maker: The senior manager is the central determinator of the policies and goals of any group. It is as policy-maker, that the style of leadership employed by the senior manager becomes clear, since policies originate from three sources, namely, superimposed from above by authorities such as the Cabinet Minister using the senior manager (Director General) first as consultant and eventually as messenger; from below where the policy is dictated by the group, although the senior manager is still expected to guide the discussion; and from the senior manager itself in those cases where he or she has the autonomy to make independent policy decisions.

Expert and informational role: The senior manager acts as monitor, disseminator of information and spokesperson of the group or team. The senior manager is often required to act as a ready source of information and skills. Especially in informal groups, the senior manager is the person of whom the impossible is often expected.

External group representative: It is impossible for all members of a group to deal with other groups directly. The senior manager thus assumes the role of representative of the group and as such will deal with outgoing and incoming communications.

Controller of internal relations: The senior manager determines the detail of the group structure and thus functions as the controller of intra-group relations. Depending upon the leadership style, the senior manager will be central, remote or one of the team. The involvement of the senior manager with the group may vary over time; for example, a group may have started with a new task and it may be necessary for the senior manager to be one of the team members. Subsequently, as the task or

project develops, the senior manager may decide to be more remote to allow continuation of the project without further direct involvement.

Purveyor of rewards and punishments (motivator): Due to the senior manager's power to reward or punish, he or she can control group members. The senior manager has the power to decide on promotions, to award honours, to reduce status, and, in extreme cases, to dismiss group members.

Arbitrator, mediator and decision maker: The senior manager is entrepreneur, conflict handler, negotiator and resource allocator. In intra-group conflict, the senior manager is expected to act as the arbitrator and mediator. The senior manager has to act as judge and as conciliator, which does however put him or her in a position to encourage cooperation within the group, depending on the aims he or she seeks to achieve. The senior manager should be able to listen and be empathetic and sensitive to the needs of others (Schwella & Rossouw 2005:770). The competencies needed are team building, participative decision making, and conflict management.

Symbol of the group: A senior manager has to play a similar role as a badge, uniform, or name in providing a cognitive focus for group identity and unity.

Substitute for individual responsibility: The senior manager plays an important role for individual members by relieving them of responsibility for individual decisions and acts. The individual thus trusts the senior manager to make the final decision.

Scapegoat: As much as the leader constitutes an ideal object for positive emotions, he or she will also be the target for aggression and feelings of frustration, disappointment and disillusionment. This ambivalence is inherent in the leadership position. To the extent that the leader takes responsibility, he or she should be prepared to take the blame for failures.

The senior management role is not a freestanding activity that occurs in some management functions, but it occurs in all management functions. Leadership is one function of the senior manager among many. Effective leadership requires listening, involving and delegating, commitment and consistency. Exemplary leadership requires more than cajoling employees into activities, but involves creating a rewarding environment for employees (Naidoo 2004:104). Miller (2005:121) argues that senior management in the South African public service does not have this attribute of leadership. Most appear to be crisis managing, setting activities and

cajoling public servants rather than developing an environment where public servants feel rewarded, and will be committed to the leadership and mission of the department.

Nonetheless, senior managers within an organization fulfill different roles. Within the context of this paper, each role should represent the activities that senior managers in the public service undertake in pursuit of the ultimate aim of accelerated service delivery. Although it is necessary to identify the components of the senior manager's job to understand the different roles and activities of the senior manager, it is also important to remember that the real job of senior manager cannot be practiced as a set of independent parts. All the roles will interact in the management function. As Daft (1988:22) states, "the manager who only communicates or only conceives never gets anything done, while the manager who only 'does' ends up doing it all alone." Thus, diligently fulfilling each role will contribute to the effectiveness of the senior manager and ultimately to accelerated service delivery. The success of the above role distributions depends on whether or not senior management in the public service has the right skills and competencies. It is therefore important to outline the managerial skills and competencies that are required at senior management level.

MANAGERIAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES AT SENIOR MANAGEMENT LEVEL

Smit and de J Cronje (2003:17) indicate the skills that senior management needs in order to perform the functions of general management as efficiently as possible, can be divided into three main categories: (1) Conceptual skills-which refer to the mental ability to view the operation of the organization and its parts holistically. Conceptual skills involve the manager's thinking and planning abilities. They also include the manager's ability to think strategically. (2) Interpersonal skills-refer to the ability to work with people. A manager should therefore be able to communicate, understand people's behaviour, resolve conflict, and motivate the groups as well individuals. (3) Technical skills-refer to the ability to use the knowledge or techniques of a specific discipline to attain goals. Knowledge of accountancy or engineering is examples of technical skills that can be used to perform a task. A manager at a lower level in particular requires sound knowledge of the technical activities he or she must supervise. However, the time spent on technical activities decreases with the progress

up the managerial ladder. A recent approach to defining a senior managers job and the competencies to do the job focuses on what the manager have to be able to do in the workplace, rather than what they need to know or simply the skills that are required to do the job.

The South African public service has introduced a system whereby senior management should have demonstrated managerial and leadership competence by means of Core Management Competencies (CMCs). It focuses on eleven areas, which are outlined in Table 1 (The Republic of South Africa, 2002:7). According to Smit and de J Cronje a competency refers to “the relevant knowledge, skills and value orientation that is required to do the job of a manager.” A manager is considered competent if he or she can apply these in a work situation.

Table 1

Criteria	Description
Strategic capability and leadership	Provides a vision, sets the direction for the organization and inspires others to deliver the organizational mandate
Programme and project management	Plans, manages, monitors and evaluates specific activities in order to deliver the desired outputs and outcomes
Financial management	Compiles and manages budgets, controls cash flow, institutes risk management and administers tender procurement processes in accordance with generally recognized financial practices in order to ensure the achievement of strategic organizational objectives
Change management	Initiates, supports and champions organizational transformation and change in order to successfully implement new initiatives and deliver on service delivery commitments
Knowledge management	Obtains, analyses and promotes the generation and sharing of knowledge and learning in order to enhance the collective knowledge of the organization
Service delivery innovation	Champions new ways of delivering services that contribute to the improvement of organizational processes in order to achieve organizational goals
Problem solving and analysis	Systematically identifies, analyses and resolves existing and anticipated problems in order to reach optimum solutions in a timely manner
People management and empowerment	Manages and encourages people, optimizes their outputs and effectively manages relationships in order to achieve organizational goals
Client orientation and customer focus	Willing and able to deliver services effectively and efficiently in order to put the spirit of customer service (Batho Pele) into practice
Communication	Exchange information and ideas in a clear and concise manner appropriate for the audience in order to explain, persuade, convince and influence others to achieve the desired outcomes
Honesty and integrity	Displays and builds the highest standards of ethical and moral conduct in order to promote confidence and trust in the Public Service

(The Republic of South Africa, 2002:7) (In Schwella and Rossouw 2005: 767-768)

In light of the abovementioned, the South African public service set generic standards of competence for senior management levels, based on an analysis of senior management functions, and focusing on what effective senior managers should be able to do. For each area of competence there is a related set of specific standards that define effectiveness in that area. The senior manager is expected to be task-oriented, work focused and highly interested in the task at hand. The senior manager is expected to exhibit a high degree of motivation, energy and personal drive (Quinn *et al.*, 1990:54). The competencies needed are personal productivity and motivation,

motivating others, and time and stress management. The predominant focus is on control and maintaining stability and continuity within the institution. The external focus is on adapting to the continuous changes in the environment. People are a valuable asset only if they contribute greatly to goal attainment. In addition, interpersonal skills such as effective communication and honesty and integrity are emphasized. In addition, the senior manager should foster collective effort, build cohesion and morale, and manage interpersonal conflict. The senior manager is required to listen, be empathetic and sensitive to the needs of others. When the senior manager works in groups, the competencies needed are team building, participative decision-making, and conflict management (Schwella and Rossouw 2005:768).

The above discussion on the different skills and competencies that senior managers must have in the South African public service must be understood against the background of the specific environment in which the manager works. It is probably true to say that senior public managers' experience more pressure today than in the past, and therefore need supplementary skills to deal with the situation. For example, there is so much change in the South African public service in terms of new technologies, legislation, corruption and a shortage of skilled staff. Senior managers are therefore required to be kept up to date with the changes in the workplace. This calls for additional skills.

Training programmes should therefore train senior management in a variety of skills for improving performance. At the highest levels of the public service (Director General, Deputy Director General, and Chief Director) the professional skills required are qualitatively different from those required at lower levels. At the lower levels, skills and experience relate to the specific responsibilities of each line department. At the higher levels, technical skills and competencies, related in particular to the formulation of policy, the development and management of strategic vision and plans, the management of human and other resources, the coordination of policies across government, handling public relations and the media, are required. Along with the necessary technical skills and administrative skills, people skills are also essential. In examining the specific traits required of a senior manager, it is important for the South African public service to focus training on the understanding of the cultural, spiritual, social and personal dimensions of leadership. Another important practical

implication for the South African public service is to develop senior managers in these key competencies of *inter alia* personal productivity and motivation, motivating others, time and stress management, team building, participative decision making, and conflict management.

Leadership training should focus on building competencies in senior managers so that they have the ability to inspire, communicate and operationalize their visions (Naidoo 2004:332). The South African public service ought to have a sufficient grasp of information technology and to understand the importance of training and development opportunities for their senior managers for modernizing communications and increasing the involvement of staff and clients in the work of their institutions. The current demands on the South African public service indicate that senior managers should build their capacity and enhance their leadership skills to enable them to execute their tasks and responsibilities with care and authority. They ought to understand their tasks and prepare themselves well, to manage their departments effectively.

It is also essential for senior managers to develop their skills for policy implementation for accelerated service delivery (Naidoo 2005:111). They should be able to set directions, by guiding and facilitating different strategies and approaches. In accordance with the new public administration model, senior managers ought to move towards entrepreneurial government by emphasizing performance and moving towards collaboration and commitment towards service delivery. They also ought to also serve the public with respect, concern, courtesy and responsiveness, recognizing that service to the public goes beyond service to oneself. In addition, they ought to strive for personal professional excellence and encourage the professional development of those associated with and those seeking to enter into the public service, and to affirm the dignity and worth of the services rendered by government.

Senior management in the South African public service ought to be trained to cultivate their capacity for strategic thinking (Naidoo 2005:110). They ought to develop strategic perspectives for their departments about its direction and to share that foundational perspective with all employees within their department. In addition, senior managers ought to focus on a few vital issues at a time and devise strategic

initiatives to resolve them. Moreover, they ought to create an internal capacity to carry out initiatives, structure opportunities for broad participation in developing them, and seek external support for their implementation. They also ought trained to set up ways to exert strategic control over how the department performs on new initiatives to measure what goes on inside the department, to evaluate the impact on customers and stakeholders as strategic initiatives are implemented, and to let those signals guide them in learning how to deliver on effective services.

Training and development in the South African public service should be of a multicultural nature (Naidoo 1996:2). Management studies clearly show that cultural differences influence expectations and assumptions about management, and management philosophies typically revolve in harmony with the cultures within which they function (Naidoo 2005:103). Prior to 1994 the dominant management practice where Eurocentric but an increase in the diversity in the managerial and leadership ranks of the South African public service has given rise to an Afrocentric approach to management. This situation requires curricula that should be relevant to the South African public service environment. Research suggests that the direction management training and development should take, and greater emphasis should be on interpersonal and intercultural skills (Smit and de J Cronje 2003:21).

There is therefore a need to strengthen, develop and train senior leadership in the South African public service. It is necessary to strengthen the departmental human resources frameworks, and interventions to ensure the acquisition of the necessary skills and competencies for public servants, particularly for senior leadership in the South African public service. An increased investment in human resources is therefore necessary. A strong skills base for senior management should be evident across the South African public service. The incumbents of these posts have the responsibility to transfer these skills to the management cadre and public servants below them. Senior management development should therefore remain a priority for the public service.

DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE

A culture of service ethos in the South African public service requires competent senior public servants (Naidoo 2005:113). This is one of the enabling objectives for an efficient public administration model, set out in the Constitution (1996). The lack of senior management capacity within the public service needs to be addressed with training and development initiatives by the South African public service. Education and training programmes is thus critical to develop excellence in the public service. Although it is a long-term process, it is necessary for accelerated delivery and to reduce public service inefficiencies.

According to the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education (1997: section 5.5) the formulation, implementation and evaluation of training and education programmes should be conducted so that (1) all public servants will have access to ongoing and meaningful opportunities for education, training and personal development, (2) public service training and education will focus on outcomes and competencies rather than inputs, and (3) public service training and education will be promoted in a manner which will enable public servant institutions to become learning institutions capable of continuous development.

Senior management education and training is of major importance to the South African public service. The public service must accelerate service delivery to meet with the current needs and demands of the South African population. This will only be possible if there are enough skilled senior managers to drive the process. One place to acquire management skills is in an educational setting, such as universities as well as a through organization that provides in-house training and development, such as SAMDI. It is important that the management training and development offered by these or other institutions be aligned with the national qualifications framework (NQF). Formal management education is on the increase, including the M.Phil (University of Cape Town) and PhD in Public Affairs (University of Pretoria). These programmes are designed for senior managers in the public service. Non-formal management training and development, often called continuous learning, refers to non-degree programmes offered by different universities.

Miller (2005:123) suggests that regional schools of governance could be established to each province to train and educate senior public managers. Senior managers from various departments should be recruited for regional schools of governance where they are trained in the field of public administration, public management, leadership and public policy. The curriculum for the schools of governance should be developed with the South African Management and Development Institute (SAMDI) and according to South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) requirements. It should be noted that some schools of repute already exist in South Africa, such as the School of Public Administration and Management of the University of Pretoria and the School of Government at the University of Western Cape.

The system of fast-tracking will also improve the diversity at senior management level (Naidoo 2004:335). It is suggested that this system should first be conducted on a pilot basis, and continually monitored and evaluated by SAMDI. The suggested training, education and fast tracking model would hopefully improve the caliber of senior management in the public service. Training and education would improve the senior management capacity of the public service. Thus, the training and education of senior managers would also enable the Director General to become more of a leader than manager as senior managers would be more equipped to deal with delegated responsibilities.

Another source of managerial competence is practical experience. According to Smit and de J Cronje (2003:22) there is not doubt that a natural aptitude for management, self-motivation, and ambition play a decisive role in the development of managerial competence. Most senior managers in the public service have advanced to their present positions from other jobs. Through experience, and by facing and meeting a variety of managerial challenges, the individual develops insights that cannot be learnt from training alone. Efficient managers therefore learn their skills from a combination of training, development and experience. Becoming a successful manager therefore requires a blend of formal learning and practice.

CONCLUSION

The senior management in the South African public service ought to be developed so that they become multi-skilled, in order to maintain their departments and to improve their performance, adapting themselves to the complexities in the environment and the inherently more difficult task of governing and managing their respective departments. It is also important for senior managers to understand their roles, tasks, functions and responsibilities to enable them to position themselves strategically for the challenges that they face. Management and leadership training is therefore necessary to assist senior managers to cope with these challenges for accelerated delivery.

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