

PROFESSIONALISING THE PUBLIC SERVICE



WINDS OF CHANGE

This newsletter focuses on government's plans to professionalise the Public Service through education and training. It reflects on some of the challenges experienced and the opportunities they present.

Since the beginning of our democracy public servants have played a crucial role in bringing services to all South Africans. In many cases this was done in difficult circumstances and with limited resources.

The Diagnostic Overview 2011 by the National Planning Commission however points to an uneven performance of the Public Service. It attributes this uneven performance to "deeply rooted systemic issues" and advocates the need for a strategic long-term approach to enhance the performance of the Public Service.

Research conducted by GCIS on behalf of the newly launched National School of Government in May 2013 assessed perceptions on available development, education and training initiatives in the public sector.

The research, entitled School of Government Research, suggests that there is a misalignment between the formal qualifications of public servants and the work they do. The public servant today has higher formal qualifications however the extent to which those qualifications are aligned to their daily work is debatable.

Moreover, the research indicates public sector managers believe that after training they could not effectively apply their newly acquired knowledge to their work. It also shows that slightly more than half (56 per cent) of all public sector managers trained believed that their training contributed to the performance of the organisation.

There are winds of change which are set to revolutionise the Public Service. The establishment of the National School of Government aims to educate and train competent public servants to ensure they are capable of consistently delivering high-quality services.

Already government, through the Department of Public Service and Administration, has launched a number of initiatives such as the Public Service Charter and National Batho Pele Excellence Awards to further enhance the Public Service.

These initiatives, together with the National School of Government, are in line with National Development Plan's (NDP) vision. It aims for government to have experienced staff at all levels of service, who are competent and receive the necessary support to carry out their jobs effectively in order to build a capable and developmental state. It calls for a cadre of public servants that are accountable, transparent, equitable, efficient, effective, corruption-free and responsive to the needs of all citizens is a constitutional imperative.

Our Constitution states that public administration must be governed by democratic values and principles such as the promotion and maintenance of high standards of professional ethics. It also advocates the promotion of an efficient, economic and effective use of resources and a public administration that is development-oriented and accountable.



UNDERSTANDING THE STATUS QUO

Understanding the status quo in the Public Service will offer insight into the skills that exist and the opportunities available to transform it. It further offers insight into the level at which we need to pitch our training initiatives, especially for government employees already in the employ of the Public Service.

The School of Government Research surveyed 1 572 public service managers via telephonic and on-line self-completion questionnaires.

The research highlights that public servants, as illustrated on right, have strong academic qualifications with more than a third (37 per cent) holding degrees or diplomas and close to half (49 per cent) of all public service managers have post-graduate degrees. It shows that 32 per cent of public servants have a matric qualification.

Demographics: Education level *n = 1 572*

All of the respondents working in the Public Sector have a minimum of Matric and most have obtained a Post Graduate degree.



More than a third of all public servants are aged between 35 and 44 years. This is also the age group of most managers in the Public Service.

Demographics: Age *n = 1 572*

The majority of respondents were between the ages of 36-45 years, while only 12% of the total sample representing ages of 25-35 years.



Most public service managers have more than 10 years of service with some even topping the 20 year mark. As management levels progress so does age, qualifications, experience and years of service.

Despite the wealth of experience and knowledge, the National Planning Commission's Diagnostic Overview 2011 highlighted that there is a scarcity of skilled professionals within the engine of the Public Service.

These include engineers, information technology professionals, forensic specialists, senior prosecutors, subject advisors in education, supply chain management specialists, financial managers and legal experts.



The Diagnostic Overview also notes that there was a lack of an effective staff development strategy. The critical shortage of technical skills means that government cannot function to its full potential in some areas.

"Without a professional civil service rewarded for their competence and commitment to the Constitution, we do not stand any chance of transforming South Africa."
Minister in The Presidency:
National Planning Commission, Trevor Manuel

CONTINUOUS LEARNING DILEMMA

Public servants are encouraged to attend regular training specific to their area of work. Just over half of these managers (56 per cent) noted that the training had improved the performance of their organisation. Fifty three per cent indicated that the training enabled their organisation to achieve policy objectives and serve public interest.

In the past five years more than 70 per cent of public service managers have attended training either through an accredited service provider, Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA) or a tertiary institution.

However, public service managers had reported that individuals returning from training could not effectively apply the learning in the context of their jobs.

RATING OF THE LAST PROGRAMME ATTENDED

It was recorded that 74 per cent of respondents felt that the programme achieved the learning outcomes required but only 56 per cent of the total sample said that this training improved the performance of the organisation.

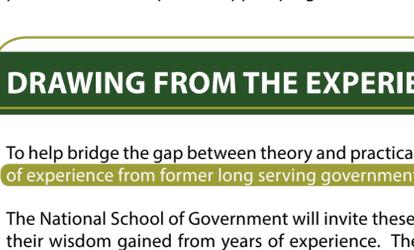
Learning outcomes	Overall (n = 1167)
... achieved the learning outcomes required	74%
... enabled you to apply what you learnt	71%
... improved the performance of your organisation	56%
... enabled your organisation to achieve policy objectives and serve public interest	53%
... effectively took account of the context in which the new learning would be applied	61%

PREFERRED METHOD OF TRAINING

The School of Government Research found that according to 44 per cent of public service managers, experiential learning is the preferred method of training. This type of learning takes through practical and applied problem solving with the guidance of an expert.

Respondents feel that team learning/learning forums in the department as well as online courses are not very effective methods of learning.

What methods of learning are most effective for you as an individual?



BACK TO SCHOOL

To create this "skilled" workforce government last year launched the National School of Government. The school will be responsible for educating, training, professionalising and developing of public servants.

The new school will ensure that government institutions are functioning with competent staff that are committed to the public good and are capable of consistently delivering high-quality services.

The National School of Government would operate under a learning and development framework. There would be an assessment centre, an induction ceremony, access to public service internships, and reorientation programmes for public servants to preserve institutional memory.

It will also focus on in-service training and professional development support programmes.

National School of Government programmes will 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
- Compulsory induction for new recruits at all levels.

DRAWING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF PAST MANAGERS

To help bridge the gap between theory and practical applications, government plans to tap into the wealth of experience from former long serving government employees and Ministers.

The National School of Government will invite these knowledgeable individuals as guest lecturers to share their wisdom gained from years of experience. They will bring relevant case studies into the classroom, which will directly speak to issues faced by the public servants.

Through hands-on training the National School of Government will facilitate practical application of what students would have learned at the school.

Training will be customised to the needs of the government which will enable individuals to improve their department's work. This will go a long way in reaching the NDP objectives of professionalising the Public Service and improving service delivery standards.

"It is only when everyone is professionalised that they will be able to offer good service."
Minister of Public Service and Administration
Lindiwe Sisulu

THE WAY FORWARD

When communicating externally: Communication should emphasise that government is committed to professionalising the Public Service and improve service standards by addressing the issues identified in the Diagnostic Overview 2011 to achieve Vision 2030 as set out in the National Development Plan.

When communicating internally: Government departments must ensure that public servants are familiar with the National School of Government courses and encourage staff to enrol into relevant classes. Managers in the Public Service must ensure that knowledge gained through education and training initiatives is adequately applied to the work environment.