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Public Service, Leadership and Innovation in South Africa

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Abstract. In South Africa public service institutions are the implementing arm of government. These include services such as education, electricity, health, housing, transport and water. Government services such as municipalities are also part of this and have always bore the brunt of citizens who protest about the non-delivery of services. Community members demanding service delivery from government departments have been initiating unending strikes which are frequently destructive. Yet, various South African government departments have experienced employees' non-commitment, corruption and wastage of government resources. The purpose of this article is to utilize literature review to examine the role of public service leaders in transforming public service for effective governance. Arguably, public service institutions with weak leadership and no vision will always falter. The discussion focuses on how conscientious leaders can employ values, ethics and ownership to strengthen the function of these public service institutions. Furthermore, the article examines how in a time of decolonization and transformation leaders could adapt strategies for revamped African public institutions. The conclusions show that it would not be enough for leaders to know the *Batho Pele* principles and the Constitution of the democratic South Africa of 1996, but it is being able to be a transformational and ethical leader that one can lead public service institutions.

Keywords. Attuned leadership, Batho Pele, Corruption, Ethical leaders, Transformational leader

1. Introduction

Miller [1] writes of how the South African democratic government in 1994 inherited a public service that was plagued with varied challenges. Amongst others, it was racist in structure, staff organization and procedures,... it was also compounded by problems of corruption, the interference from security personnel, poor service delivery to the broader population and the integration of former homelands and self-governing administrations [1]. The South African Government [2] points out that corruption is one of the huge obstacles to the country's growth and development. However, the government has been trying to find capable people to fill critical leadership positions especially when faced with widespread corruption entrenched in South African public service. Friedman [3] concurs by pointing out that corruption in South Africa is embedded in the past and the last days of apartheid were the most corrupt. Furthermore, [3] argues that by the attainment of majority rule in 1994 corruption was widespread in government. "This directly affected the way South Africa was governed after 1994, despite the efforts of President Nelson Mandela and his deputy, Thabo Mbeki" [3].

Mbandlwa, Dorasamy and Fagbadebo [4] link challenges associated to bad behaviours in government to poor leadership. These researchers add that unethical leadership is the main cause for non-delivery of services as well as the citizens' loss of trust in government. When the post-apartheid government came into power they introduced a SeSotho language phrase, *Batho Pele* literally meaning 'People First'. *Batho Pele* was based on principles that sought to transform public service delivery. All public service was expected to be committed by putting people first. The philosophy behind *Batho Pele* was to improve the overall functioning of government service. Crous [5] writing about *Batho Pele* and public service delivery points out that the South African public service will be judged by its effectiveness in delivering services that meet the needs of the people who constantly need excellent service. Leaders are key in inspiring their followers who will play a vital role in enacting service delivery. Crous [5] also adds that managers should always keep the following in mind as they endeavour to bring excellent service:

- Do not think of them as customers, think of them as people;
- Do not tell customers about institutional problems, resolve theirs;
- Give employees the motive and their skills, might be surprising;
- Managers cannot force employees to give customer care.

From the dawn of democracy in South Africa, people in various sectors have emphasized the need for a transformed public service. Furthermore, there are preconditions for the successful implementation of these *Batho Pele* principles. Good leadership practices include understanding transformation, changing attitudes and behaviour as well as cherishing educational opportunities. Furthermore, leadership and management preparation are critical. *Batho Pele* still has an immense role to play given the public service exposure to rampant corruption. The purpose of this article is to examine the leadership skills and strategies public service leaders need today to guide their institutions to success. In South Africa, communities constantly complain of lack of service delivery, weak leadership and corruption among others. The argument investigates how can responsible leaders steer the public institutions to obviate challenges that hinder progress towards the government's initiatives for better communities.

The discussion will capture the following subtopics:

- Values in public service
- Ethical leadership
- Leadership and the art of ownership
- Building public service for Africa
- Conclusion

2. Rethinking Leadership: Why Values Matter

Leaders today need to be conscious of the kind of leadership strategies they need to influence their followers. Leadership in the 21st century has become very complex and in most cases people would talk of the need to rethink leadership. Organizations and institutions have become so transformed hence these changes affect the purpose and meaning of leadership. Additionally, leaders need to be conscious of the kind of styles they need to guide their followers. There are various forms of leadership and these include, transformational leadership, participative leadership, democratic leadership, strategic leadership and authentic leadership. Petty [8] states that rethinking leadership should include a number of skills which include rewiring, relearning, retrying, recommitting, reorienting and rebranding. Akt [6] also add that leaders who want to improve the quality of leadership would explore new skills that would

prepare everyone for organizational transformation. Whilst [7] postulates that leadership is always critical and effective leaders would utilize collaborative governance which will impact on system management and responsiveness to socioeconomic factors within the organization. Barty [8] also postulates that rethinking leadership requires human centred approaches to management ethics. Moreover, [8] argues that human centred management is built on four dimensions and these are ethical, social, economic and institutional.

Leaders in all institutions need principled leadership accompanied by good values. Principled leaders' intent on transformation will find the right values as they rethink their practice. Glynn and Jamerson [9] posit that principled leadership starts with awareness; when a leader recognizes ethical decisions of leadership actions. The second one is self-reflection, which includes recognising and prioritising one's values and then aligning them with those of the organization. Finally, leaders 'breathe life' into the organization as they try to maintain consistency whilst injecting trust and acting according to morally justifiable value system. Glynn and Jamerson [9] opine that principled leadership also encompasses leading courageously with humanistic values, which comprise integrity, fairness, respect and humility. Being courageous, fair, humble and honest are also values linked to these humanistic values of principled leadership.

Boon [10] writes about the need for the interactive nature in *ubuntu* worldview but also emphasizes the need for the organization to create values. The *ubuntu* worldview is based on a philosophy from Africa whose main tenet is based on the mantra, "I am because you are" and this is a worldview that emphasizes qualities such as solidarity and dependability. Boon [10] declares that *ubuntu* principles "are fundamental world truths and do not change with time. The same things appear in every major philosophy and religion in the world. They are universal truths that reflect our humanity". Values cannot be created by leaders alone, hence leaders should build communities that ought to be shared and involve all the members. Broodryk [11] claims that values are related to norms and social rules. Leaders will know which values will enhance the effective operations in the organization. Broodryk [11] also affirms that there are core values in *ubuntu* worldview that form the basis of thriving organizations. Humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion are pivotal values for successful organizations. Msila [12] maintains that *ubuntu*-inspired workplaces focus on dependability, teamwork, interconnectedness, caring, collective vision, performance and loyalty. Mbigi [13] has also found that there are five key values for *ubuntu*, and these are survival, solidarity, spirit, compassion, respect and dignity. Mbigi [13] perceives these as origination from the African cultures. In using indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and *ubuntu*-inspired models, leaders need to self-reflect as they try to understand these values. Furthermore, *ubuntu* supports values-based leadership.

Several values as highlighted above, are pertinent in engendering leadership for social justice and fairness. Institutions all over the world are under pressure to promote innovation, enhance institutional cultures that would lead to institutional success. Leaders need effective strategies of leading successful schools. Harris and Johnston [14] state that values-based leadership is pivotal in sustaining school transformation and improvement. As leaders rethink their leadership strategies, they ought to find their rhythm and voice as they share their vision and goals with the followers. Leaders will only be successful when they lead with consciousness and conscience. Leaders also need to find their voices to be able to express their vision in their institutions. In finding their voices, transformed leaders will be able to:

Model the way - clarifying their personal values;

Inspire a shared vision - leader need to share their aspirations in a meaningful manner.

Challenge the process - as they seek new ways on innovation leader will have to challenge the status quo.

Enable others to act - Leaders promote cooperation and build trust among the followers.

Encourage the heart - Effective leaders will accept individual excellence as they create a spirit of community [14].

3. Ethical leadership

The values and principles of *Batho Pele* are supposed to influence the running of effective public institutions. The South African constitution underscores good values human dignity and democracy. When we think of good leadership we contemplate of the values enshrined in the Constitution to support all the citizens of the Republic. Under this section we examine ethics and values and how these are linked to *Batho Pele* principles as well as sensible public service. The concepts ethics and values need to be defined. All leaders need to be ethical and be firmly grounded on good values. Ethical leadership refers to individuals who follow a set of principles and values that are recognized by the majority for the common good. Leaders and followers who follow principles such as those of *Batho Pele* must be conscious. Integrity, respect, trust, fairness, transparency and honesty are among these necessary principles. Ethical leadership is based on these principles. Public values are those providing normative consensus about (a) the rights, benefits, and prerogatives to which citizens should and should not be entitled; (b) the obligations of citizens to society, the state and one another, and (c) the principles on which government and policies should be based.

Haq [15] argues that ethics cannot be learned but can be developed. Effective leaders and managers will promote cultures that develop ethics. There can be no innovation in any public organization if the public administrators are not ethical or live by certain values that uphold the office. Haq [15] point out:

Ethics is a must for public administrators. Public policies have a direct effect on the citizens. Therefore, ensuring ethics in the public service is a crucial matter. According to Rosenbloom (1989) ethics can be considered as a form of self-accountability or an “inner check” of the conduct of public administrators. Ethics are statements, written or oral, that prescribe or proscribe certain behaviours under qualified conditions (Nigro & Nigro, 1898, p.37). Public service ethics encompasses a broad and widening range of principles and values.

Meticulous leaders will be able to help followers distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviour. Public service whose employees are ethical have gone a step further towards responsible citizenry. Sindare [16] also states that a number of public scandals related to malfeasance can be avoided if public servants stick to ethical norms and values. Furthermore, Sindare [16] contends that public servants should internalize values, ethics and norms that would uphold accountability. Figure 1. below summarizes what public service leadership is about. The diagram also demonstrates what public service leaders should underscore as they fight corruption and other ills found in public organizations:

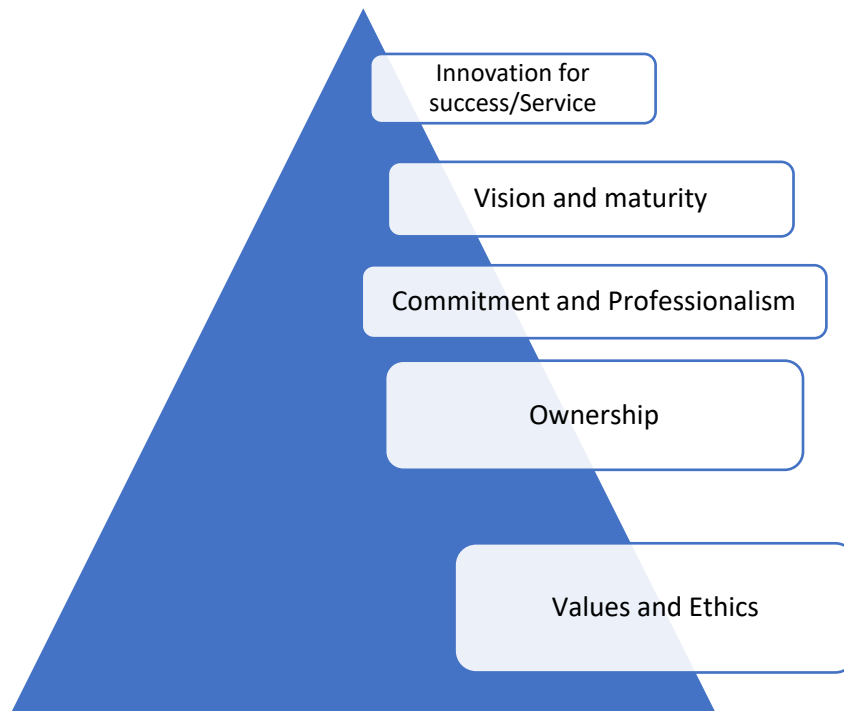


Figure 1. Responsible Public Service Leadership

The following briefly explicate the diagram above:

Innovation for success – effective and intent public service leaders will promote innovation that would improve success in delivery.

Vision and maturity – all good institutions start with the vision of great leaders. The vision always needs professional maturity of followers to always uphold that vision.

Commitment and professionalism – from vision and maturity employees need commitment. A leader whose vision does not instil commitment and professionalism leads in emptiness.

Ownership – leaders should ensure that followers buy their innovative behaviours to build the institution. Leaders should know every aspect of the institution and this should rub on employees.

Values and ethics – as highlighted above, values and ethics are the crux in fighting corruption in organizations.

As highlighted above, frequently, public service in South Africa is associated with corruption and lack of commitment. This is usually attributed to not only ethics but values as well. Values-based leadership is a plausible way to address the mishaps conducted by organizations that do not follow any ethics. Akt [6] contends that public officials will benefit more if they accommodate the role of values in administrative behaviour especially in face of disruptive tendencies. Marques, Leitao, Carvalho and Pereira [17] underscore the role of values in values-based management and in organizations the leaders' style determine the values.

Values are reflected in how things are done in organizations including transformation, promotion and performance. Marques et al. [17] aver:

In this context, value-based management is a process of rooting values continuously at the heart of organizations in order to form a true culture of values. Dolan and Garcia indicate that values-based management is a strategic management tool with the triple usefulness of simplifying, guiding and developing employees' behaviour. However, despite efforts to create value for these and other stakeholders, organizations have not managed to implement, fully and effectively, their sustainability policies.

De Rosia [18] argues that there are five critical values of public administration and for the success of any organization. The five values are pivotal in the daily running of any public organization in order to achieve success at a personal and organizational level and these are pivotal in the daily running of any public organization in order to achieve success at a personal and organizational level and these are transparency, accountability, ethics, professionalism and paper leadership. Transparency ensures that citizens receive public information. Accountability refers to the embracing of professionalism. Employees of public service are always reminded why they are at their workplace by accountability. Ethics as discussed above; all public servants need to have a high degree of ethical standards. Yet as [18] states "...the importance of ethics in government is usually shown when public officials violate laws or regulations. Because of these instances, we are constantly reminded of the importance of ethics in public administration. Professionalism needs to be underscored as one of major values in any occupation. When public administrations back professionalism they will lose their vision and be unsure about the direction of their organization. Professionals lead successful organizations. All these values need meaningful leadership for effective leaders will identify talent as they grow the organization.

4. Leadership and the art of ownership

To avoid corruption and bad service government departments need a culture that engenders ownership. In an environment where there is no ownership, employees are disempowered and do not feel obligated to follow the organization's vision. Ownership in the workplace means;

- Taking initiative to bring about positive results;
- Not waiting for others to act and caring about the outcome;
- Being accountable for the results of one's actions;
- Ownership means showing others that they can trust you to do the right thing [19].

Boon [10] highlights the importance of accountability. On the one hand is the accountability to self, whilst on the other it is accountability to each other. Both concepts are critical to ownership of any institution. In his or her vision a leader who instils ownership in the institution's vision cannot eschew accountability of both the self and to each other. The latter is the dependability that Msila [12] discusses in his book. Workplaces where there is this form of accountability, they will thrive even in times of crisis. Furthermore, effective leaders know how difficult it can be to hold teams together without the sense of ownership. Boon [10] writes of how a group would accept the vales for the group "but will look at them differently when told

that these need to reflect their personal views, for which they will be held accountable” [10]. The accountability to the self happens because of the latter because in interactive leadership people need to be accountable to themselves. If we want a public service where there is honesty, dependability, excellence and trust it needs to start with the individual. When people are accountable to themselves, they want to follow values that would elevate them. Arguably, many public service employees are not accountable to anyone hence public service is always bearing the brunt of criticism. Furthermore, Boon argues that it starts with concern for self before one can have concern for others. Public service needs this. Public service does not need spectators, these are people who only support the team when it is winning, institutions such as public service needs to appreciate potential leadership qualities in all employees and it is through this that a leader should encourage employees to show their leadership abilities. Boon [10] succinctly put the influence that a leader should have:

A leader’s power is derived from those whom he leads. The people whom one leads give that leadership power. Tis charisma and ability of the leader will encourage people to support and follow him, and their support will grow his power. as the power grows, so will his confidence and the ability to demonstrate his capabilities. This in turn will lead to greater support, and so, greater power. However, power in isolation corrupts, and a and a wise leader... will give overt recognition to the fact that people are the power and he is answerable to them.

A public service institution that embraces such values is likely to soar. Many public service mishaps occur because there is no recognition of the ability of all employees. The second critical aspect for institutions using interactive leadership is accountability to each other. Msila [12] also emphasizes this as well as [13]; [11]; [20]. Yet, a number of aspects make people not to be accountable to others. In many workplaces, especially public service institutions people may be scared to differ from their colleagues. In South Africa many whistle blowers and potential whistle blowers fear many a times for their lives if they unravel the truth linked to corruption. Yet, it is difficult for people to do wrong when they are accountable to one another. In many cases when there is no accountability to one another hence there may be competition to loot the resources of the institution. The principle of *ubuntu* is based on this accountability to one another, whose principle is “I am because you are”. When this is applied employees know their failures are the failures of the team. This is the reason why leaders need not only to build more leaders, but they should believe in working teams as well. Many institutions of government are destroyed when people are not accountable to one another.

When employees are accountable to each other, they establish a “we culture” and no one wants to break that culture. There is group solidarity where people believe the success of an institution is on their shoulders. Authentic and ethical leadership can hardly happen when people are not accountable to one another. Public service institutions without the necessary moral purpose will not progress to serve the public. The moral purpose is also about the performance of the team in service of the public in South Africa.

5. Building Public Service Leadership for Africa

In the discussions above we should be mindful that as we try to use various models to improve public service leadership we should always have the context in mind; that we are working with African institutions. Public sector leadership should be aware of their role in uplifting the communities. There would be less societal challenges if public employees enable quality life, innovation and the protection of citizens from various threats [21]. The OECD [20] adds that countries should ensure that the public service is fit for purpose; and three pillars are critical for a fit-for-purpose public service:

- Values-driven culture and leadership;
- Skilled and effective public servants; and
- Responsive and adaptive public employment systems.

With the challenges the South African government experiences it needs dependable public service. Service delivery protests, protests about electricity and shortage of housing for citizens are among these challenges. Leadership in public service is central to the decolonization and Africanising leadership in public service. There are many debates currently on how leadership in institutions can ensure that African institutions do not only use Western models. In fact, [22] argues that colonizers when they left they left behind bad management practices which include corruption and weak leadership – [21] referred to this as ‘blacknisation of colonialism’. Colonialism Conscientious public service leaders may want to try decolonial strategies as they use service institutions the best of Western models as well. Therefore, public service institutions should try transformative African leadership which together with current Western models can improve and strengthen it to meet the needs of the South African public [19]. In fact, in Africa leaders of various African institutions should understand and respect the context of their environments, it will always help to use strategies that would be congruent to the life of the Africans.

Above we mention *ubuntu* as one form of African leadership that can be utilized – we also see the nearness between *ubuntu* and servant leadership. To improve the South African communities we need two things on the one hand is quality leadership whilst on the other it is using the relevant leadership strategies, and these are transformative leadership and governance framework that [23] spells out. Msila [12] writes of critical qualities for organizations such as solidarity, respect, justice, dependability which are all part of alternative leadership strategies. These are also qualities that can enhance public service leadership. Masud and Hossain [23] in their study on lived experiences of public service leaders discovered that leadership practices are usually thwarted by dilemmas. These dilemmas include colonial legacy, power relationship, dilemma in the system of government as well as commitment versus service to multiple stakeholders [19].

Reuel Khoza [24] in his book *Attuned Leadership* explains that leaders are not just born to the role they are born then made and most importantly, a leader who is not attuned to his followers soon becomes irrelevant and will fail. Values such as connectedness, compassion, empathy, integrity, humility reasonableness and determination are key to attuned leadership [24]. Furthermore, according to [24] attuned leadership uses African humanism, which then becomes a yardstick of decolonized leadership models. Various leadership experts in both the Global North and Global South have emphasized the need to consciously embrace relevant values for meticulous leadership. Reuel Khoza [24] combines African humanism form of leadership with *ubuntu*. He points out that *Ubuntu* qualities; connectedness, compassion empathy, integrity, humility, reasonableness and determination as pivotal to attuned leadership. He also finds attuned leadership close to ethical leadership and *Ubuntu*. He points that African humanism or *ubuntu* form the basis of ethical leadership. The leader practising these will be able to embrace progressive thought and action that upholds caring leadership. Khoza [24] discusses five pillars critical on leadership:

1. Being self-attuned as a leader and emotionally intelligent;
2. Being attuned to the situation, knowledgeable, capable and astute;
3. Being attuned to the needs and aspirations of followers;

4. Being attuned to the moral imperatives of integrity, efficacy and humility and
5. Being attuned to history, the present and destiny.

For these pillars to be enacted they need development of leadership and followership based on reflection and human relationships. Courageous and conscious leaders would be able to uphold such values as they build trust, harmony and ethical leadership. *Ubuntu*-inspired leader will be committed to Khoza's pillars above for these are open to the idea of decolonized leadership that seeks to redress past anomalies in leadership in the former colonies. *Ubuntu*-inspired leader uphold these values as they underscore the African values thus decentring Western values. Leaders employ human approaches to leadership, and they understand that as individuals they have power only if they reflect the needs of the community they are in. as emphasized in various ways in the discussions above, Khoza [24] maintains that there is no leader when there is no reciprocal relationship between the leaders and their followers. Furthermore, [24] opines:

Leadership is about sense and sensing, about thought and feeling, about insight into harmony with the followership. „, The leader cannot stand-alone but must stand with the followers, interpret for them, strive to fulfil their hopes, and be their champion in the struggles of life. Leadership is achieved not given. The leader's moral authority is fashioned in the encounter with community.

These are strategies needed in public service especially ailing public service whose success is thwarted by ills such as lack of commitment and corruption. Our public institutions ought to search for leaders who will be able to guide others despite diversity and multiculturalism. Understanding people is critical for any successful leadership. Wai [25] highlights three critical aspects in Ali Mazrui's thought on leadership and legitimation and these are culture, leadership and legitimation. Wai [25] contends:

For Mazrui, the ideal leader, he who is capable of sustaining legitimate rule, is the self-aware synthesizer of these multifarious cultural influences: he who can take the best of both Western and Eastern cultural influences from outside Africa and blends them with the best from within Africa. His model in this respect is Leopold Senghor...a Roman Catholic, reigned for two decades in a predominantly Muslim country; this is the kind of peaceful mutual acceptance between cultures that is sine qua non of development.

Understanding culture is critical in understanding the dynamics of all organizations. Culture encompasses values and these would be both Western values and African values and an effective leader would be able to guide decolonising institutions as they embrace eclectic approaches that Mazruian thought encompasses. In a decolonising environment, I find four vital aspects or pillars of an organization: the engaged consciousness, the individual, society and the tribe (these are followers or colleagues). Of all these, the engagement of consciousness plays a critical role in understanding and learning to unlearn the traditional approaches that many colonial approaches have been internalized by many. All the ideals of decolonization would hardly work without a meaningful engagement of the consciousness. This concept refers to an in-depth understanding of the world and be able to identify the oppressive unjust practices. Progressive leaders who have been conscientized would follow values that are legitimated by liberated or politically conscious. In fact, Mazrui states that legitimation is pivotal in understanding African leadership [25]. Furthermore, Wai explains that legitimacy here refers to the authority bestowed upon rulers by section of the population who share power or political consciousness. Yet for development to happen African leaders constantly need development for

the failure of numerous institutions is due to a lack of professionals in “policy analysis and development management” [25].

The attempts to include indigenous knowledge systems in Africa is a response to a need to accommodate African worldviews relevant to effective organizations. The decolonial struggles should begin with the preparation of the people, enable them ready to discard exclusive colonialism and Eurocentrism. It is about embracing epistemic freedom and in preparing future African leaders, we all need to think about conscious or intentional transformative trajectories. There are several norms in society wherein some groups have been oppressed and these manifests themselves in leadership as well. Systemic injustice marginalizes many people as it metes out epistemic violence and colonial denigration. Oppressive institutions cannot be centres of social justice and just leadership. In an atmosphere of oppression, leadership cannot speak of effective leadership and worthy followership. Decolonized leadership is cognisant of ensuring the infusion of epistemic freedom and decolonial consciousness.

Conclusion

The discussion here demonstrates the value of leadership in public service institutions and here it shows that only intent leaders who use relevant skills will succeed in leading public institutions. Leaders in South Africa may not have to go further than Batho Pele principles which among others are a guide to ensure that public service leaders build trust, and commitment to service communities. Effective public service leaders will be an embodiment of qualities that build trust and hope on public service institutions. The paper also highlighted several competencies that effective public service leaders need, and these include, values-based leadership, ethics, ownership and transformational leadership based on African models. Few communities will recognize public service institutions that do not serve for public good. All leaders especially those who lead in public institutions needs self-knowledge to guide others and most importantly be able to solve the problems encountered by the public. In this paper we have also seen that public service leaders should work with others to promote a collection of qualities that would support resilience and caring. Finally, in Africa, all institutions realize the need to accommodate African values congruent with the calls for Africa’s renewal in culture, economy and management. Relevant African models such as ubuntu discussed here are very critical in serving the public. This is very much identical to Greenleaf’s servant leadership that profess for selfless leadership where a leader becomes the servant of the people rather than serve selfish interests. All public service institutions have to make impact on service delivery and every employee must be part of making changes in society hence leaders should let every employee lead. Leaders should move away from exclusive traditional approaches that are hierarchical and ensure that all employees are responsible as leaders. As discussed above we also need all employees to own decisions and responsibilities of an institution. It takes an intent organization to ensure that employees do not take bribes, do not engage in corrupt activities and everyone is concerned about making impact on communities the organization serves. All this needs not only courageous leaders but it needs authentic leaders who use effective transformational leadership models that would impact positively on services for the people.

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