Leadership Constructions and Discourse Interfaces in the Public Service in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

For two decades, efforts have been intensifying to build a capable public service with strong leadership in order to realise South Africa’s national transformation goals. In addition to the legislative framework that gives the public service work environment its character, the Senior Management Service (SMS) is viewed as a significant layer of leadership in the public service. SMS members are expected to be development-oriented individuals who can make real government’s vision of a better life for all. This article borrows from the systemic constructionist approach to leadership by Barge and Fairhurst (2008) to address the questions: (a) how is leadership construed? (b) what is the nature of the context in which leadership is practiced? and (c) what are the consequences of particular leadership constructions? Taking into account the growing complexity and unpredictability of social challenges, the article argues for more deliberate connections among domains of influence and leadership practices.

Key words: leadership; public service; discourse; complexity
INTRODUCTION

As a human construct, leadership is given meanings which can be communicated, and can be attributed to people and experiences. It is broadly understood as a phenomenon that can be practiced, taught, developed, and modelled. It has taken a position of significance academically and professionally, and there is eagerness to make it a less obscure component of the discipline of Public Administration and the public service work context. Thus, the establishment of the Senior Management Service (SMS) in the South African public service was intended to attract and retain high calibre individuals who are prepared for innovation and collaboration, in order to lead the accomplishment of ambitious and urgent national programmes of social transformation and development (Department of Public Service and Administration 2000; 2003; 2008). Borrowing from the systemic constructionist approach to leadership by Barge and Fairhurst (2008), this article explores how worldviews about leadership in the public service find expression in the way leadership is constructed and practiced. Attention is given to the public service structural and discoursal (Fairclough 2001:24–25) conditions, and the way theoretical connections are made in the conceptualisation and contextualisation of leadership and leadership development. The analysis brings out examples of consequential tensions and intersections, and limitations of the competency frameworks. The article concludes by illustrating a way in which the paradox of a unified public service leadership and active collaboration with diverse social partners could be purposefully mediated.

PUBLIC SERVICE LIFEWORLD

Individuals who enter the public service workplace come from all fields of study. Along with their beliefs, values and general knowledge, they bring technical and professional capability. Their fields of specialisation are critical in the respective sectors and areas of service delivery, and also make the workplace a hub of interaction and production of context-specific social practices.

Socialisation and belonging

The acquisition and use of socio-cultural knowledge is embedded in social activity and language. Language and interaction facilitate communication, sense making, and the externalisation of internal systems of a life-world – the phenomena, people, relationships, attitudes, impacts, and everything to which we attribute meaning that is shared and elaborated upon by a community. Thus group identity, consensus, a sense of belonging, and culture are forged and communicated (Habermas 1987:127,131;

“By virtue of participation in culture, meaning is rendered public and shared. Our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation.”

At least two major areas of participation shape the character of public service membership: formal learning in disciplinary fields of study, and work-based learning and socialisation. Within each of these two contexts, there are forms of knowledge creation and distribution identified by Bernstein (1999:159; 2000:155–160) and further explicated by Moore and Muller (2002:3–5), and Maton (2007:90–92). Specialised domains of social practice produce systematically structured vertical discourse; and general domains of everyday informal activity produce localised, context dependent and segmented horizontal knowledge. These distinctions are not mutually exclusive. It is therefore expected that both the disciplinary grooming and occupational arrangements pertinent to a sector or cluster of departments play a role in generating and reinforcing certain ways of learning, working and seeing the world.

Day-to-day interactions, management committee meetings, strategic review and planning sessions, departmental documents and artefacts – all carry a blend of everyday and specialised knowledge, and prevailing discourses. There are statutes, mandates, vision and mission statements, policies, standard operating procedures, financial practice notes, templates for submissions, reports, minutes of meetings, miscellaneous forms, and more. Key national departments and institutions such as the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), National Treasury, office of the Public service Commission (PSC), and office of the Auditor General provide guidelines and prescripts, and monitor adherence to norms and standards for ways of doing things in the public service. There are also regular interactions with portfolio committees of the legislature for progress reporting and accountability. So, the public service overall is a highly structured system with localised practices that constitute and express the operationalised discourse (Fairclough 2013:180) of departmental and sectoral communities.

Social practices in the workplace also prompt the establishment of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002). These are participatory spaces and inter-subjective bases for co-creating and propagating particular worldviews and their related discourses – expressed as forms of knowledge, norms and values, approaches and procedures for determining ends and means around common
commitments (Christie & Maton 2011:4; Kotzee 2014:174). There are many dispersed and fluid communities moulded around common projects and interests, with a convener or facilitator. More formalised points of convergence usually take the form of professional associations. These collectives are basically communities of discourse held together by shared, though not necessarily unchanging, mental models and belief systems of members (Van Dijk 2001:16; 2006:120,128).

For the disciplinary field of Public Administration (PA) and its related context of public service, there are several continental and international networks and associations. Locally, the African Consortium of Public Administration (ACPA), the Association of Southern African Departments of Public Administration and Management (ASSADPAM) and the South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM) are among prominent networks that could be seen as communities of knowledge and practice for the public administration and service terrain. Alongside the two is the Public Sector Trainers’ Forum (PSTF) which is led from the public service and sustained by means of annual conferences. There is no obligation for public servants to affiliate with any association, with the exception of occupation specific dispensations, such as those for accountants, nurses, lawyers and psychologists, which require professional licencing of members. This cursorily means that public servants generally have no unifying body through which a common framework of knowledge and practice is established, communicated and defended. Therefore, there must be other legitimated sources of acculturation and professional grounding.

**Constitution and legislative frameworks**

The cornerstone and supreme law of the South African democratic state is the Constitution, and it spells out values and principles that should characterise a development-oriented public administration (s195(1)). These include a high standard of professional ethics; efficient, economic and effective use of resources; impartial, fair and equitable provision of services; active participation of citizens in policy making; accountability; transparency; representativeness; and good human resource management and development practices. The Code of Conduct, within Public Service Regulations (PSR 2016, regulation 11) sharpens the relationships between public service employment and the Constitution: All employees are required, among other things, to be faithful to the Republic and honour and abide by the Constitution and all other law in the execution of their official duties; put public interest first; and co-operate with lawfully established public institutions.

Predating and succeeding the proclamation of the Constitution, legislative work was undertaken in significant areas towards the construction of a public service that enables

- **White Paper on Reconstruction and Development (WPRD 1994):** The Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) was offered as a vehicle to meet the objectives of freedom and improved quality of life for all South Africans within a peaceful and stable society with equitable economic growth. Notably, the White Paper (WPRD 1994:42) pronounced: “The responsibility for the renewal and transformation of our nation is, however, not the responsibility only of the Government, nor of particular elected officials. It is a joint responsibility of all sections of our nation, and calls for all to put their energy and creativity into finding ways of doing things better and differently”.

- **White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (WPTPS 1995) and White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele) (WPTPSD 1997):** In support of the RDP, the purpose of the WPTPS was to guide the introduction and implementation of new policies and legislation for a transformed public service. With emphasis on putting citizens first, the concept *customer* was introduced as a useful term “because it embraces certain principles which are as fundamental to public service delivery as they are to the provision of services for commercial gain” (WPTPSD 1997:par1.3). Eight principles of Batho Pele must be observed by all public service officials, for internal and external customers: consultation; service standards; access; courtesy; information; openness and transparency; redress; and value for money. These principles are underpinned by the belief set: We belong. We care. We serve.

- **White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service (WPHRMPS 1997):** In breaking away from the pre-1994 conditions and practices, the WPHRMPS made an upfront move from personnel administration to human resource management. New HRM practices would value diversity, increase the delegation of managerial responsibility, and strive for efficiency and effectiveness.

- **White Paper on Public Service Training and Education (WPPSTE 1998):** Among the challenges that were identified in the public service were the inappropriateness of the training and education provided by numerous providers; and absence of strategic, outcomes- and competency-based public service training and education. Hence the WPPSTE (par4 & 6.7) advocated training and education that is directly related to the developmental needs of the public service, and linked to the principles of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Norms and standards would be set centrally to build a unified public service with a common culture and value system, but provision would be decentralised to other providers through a competitive framework.
Many policies and strategic frameworks have since been developed and revised to strengthen the public service for accelerated policy and programme implementation (PSC 2008:10). The overriding tenor of the discourse – probably ‘big D’ Discourse (Gee 2014:24) – is that of loyalty to the state, professional competence, procedural compliance, and structural uniformity, consistent with bureaucratic administration. The outward orientation is for the caring, effective and efficient provision of service to internal and external customers. There are apparent incongruities and tensions. For example, government remains at the centre of regulation whereas the project of development is a responsibility of all sectors of society. Collaboration among role players is critical yet the environment in which they operate is competitive. The values of service, creativity, equality and inclusivity are nested within a regulatory discourse with commercial overtones.

**Hierarchy**

Human interaction, especially in formal relationships and the domain of work is structured. People relate through orders of discourse and social orders which are structured by the institutional and societal systems present. Some knowledge sources and forms are valued over others, and spaces of engagement are organised by roles and positions. In the web of language and social activity are strands of power at different levels in the institution (Mayr 2008:4,5; Fairclough 2001:24,31; Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:62; Lassen 2016:415). In a bureaucracy, these practices typically follow vertical lines of authority and accounting. Apart from the cascade of power by legislation and regulation, hierarchy is an organising feature of the social structures of the public service.

Occupational hierarchy secures patterns of relating, including contact among people, degrees of influence, access to resources, and decision making powers. The positional role of a manager in a context of firmly defined levels of responsibility and ordered lines of authority invariably reinforces the same hierarchy. Career progression is encouraged along management levels – from junior to middle, middle to senior, and senior to executive management. Inevitably, it is the accountability process of government that makes hierarchy advantageous and indispensable mechanism to make the exercise of power possible and responsible. The legislative-executive relationship is structured in a way that assists political leaders “to reach down to all departments and agencies and determine who did what and why things went wrong” (Savoie 2011:25). Within the departments, the same chain of control, through internal policies, instructions and procedures, and reporting, is aided by vertical structures.

Social structures of hierarchy as the context in which leadership is construed, may well be a legitimation of leadership as both control and accountability. Such structures
would accordingly promote formalisation, rational and rule-based decision making and action, and standardisation of services (Fairclough 2003: 223; Yeboah-Assiamah, Asamoah & Kyeremeh 2015:10). Nonetheless, regulation, hierarchy, and bureaucracy do not have to be debilitating. As Fairclough (2001:24) puts it: “being socially constrained does not preclude being creative”.

**Being a senior manager**

The establishment of the SMS was in its intention a response to “the challenge of developing managers into leaders” and a quest to produce “a leadership cadre for the public service”. As a relatively small population of the public service, SMS members “must walk the talk” of government ideals, “serve with humility” and lead the delivery of “a globally competitive service to citizens” (DPSA 2008:1,3,4; DPSA 2015:5). They must espouse the Constitutional values and principles for service and be exemplary in the management functions they carry out. The latter incorporate strategic roles of shaping the vision, values and culture of their departments or institutions; creating enabling conditions for individuals and teams to thrive; supporting the expansion of individuals’ capabilities; and ensuring sustained implementation of policies and plans; avoiding any conflict of interest in their interaction with political office-bearers and the public; and declaring their financial and private interests in line with the financial disclosure framework. This is underscored in the PSR (2016, regulation 81): A SMS is created to promote a public service management culture of excellence based on Constitutional values and principles and the provisions of the Public Service Act; facilitate co-operation amongst management structures of departments; transfer organisational, managerial, professional and strategic expertise across the public service; and provide an organised network for the dissemination of policy, strategy and expertise.

The SMS is thus put forward as a means of homogenising the public service and instilling a common ethos, in a way analogous to a professional network. Accordingly, in the broad definition of the SMS there are also specific characteristics that are promoted, monitored and rewarded by level of responsibility. Table 1 below summarises the framework of competencies that are envisioned to create consistency in human resource management and development processes – recruitment, selection, performance management and professional development (DPSA 2008:57; 2011:5).

This framing of the SMS is guided by dominant worldviews about leadership and approaches to leadership development, which emanate mostly from business and economic management sciences. There are several contributing factors for this circumstance:
Prior to the democratic dispensation, leadership roles in the public service had not been explicitly assigned. The new delineation of SMS for leadership roles was an extraordinary adjustment from the previous minimisation of public service seniority as implementation and enforcement of policy, and assurance of compliance. There was no real point of reference for “actual leadership agency” within the public service (Latib (2014:32).

Even though notions of leadership are now not completely disregarded in the disciplinary discourse, PA generally leans toward public management and managerial concepts. In the absence of a strong voice about leadership from PA, public service managers tasked with developing strategies for leadership development looked to psychology and business management for cross-disciplinary exemplars. These are the same disciplines, besides political science, that swayed PA in its early days.

Under the invocation of the New Public Management (NPM) movement, the public service work environment has been receptive to private sector human resource management and development consultants and nifty solutions for a range of organisational, management and leadership issues. This inclination corresponded with the “modernisation and implementation (1999–2004)” phase of public service transformation (PSC 2008:9).

**Table 1: SMS responsibilities with associated competencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director</strong></td>
<td>Supervise operational staff at a Unit level and ensure adherence to policies, practices, procedures in order to achieve project/Directorate goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chief Director</strong></td>
<td>Manage functions of Directors and components, and oversee the achievement of project/Chief Directorate goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Director-General</strong></td>
<td>Manage a group of Chief Directorate functions and oversee the achievement of programme/Branch goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director-General</strong></td>
<td>Manage a Department, set the vision and strategic direction in order to achieve Departmental goals, and oversee programmes</td>
</tr>
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**Core Competencies** (thought processes that influence behaviours and the functional characteristics that represent what needs to be done by SMS members in demonstration of their leadership and managerial roles):
- Strategic capability and leadership
- People management and empowerment
- Programme and project management
- Financial management
- Change management

**Process Competencies** (the most useful, externally observed set of behaviours that determine how leaders make successful or poor decisions; the process competencies influence the success of the core competencies):
- Knowledge management
- Service delivery innovation
- Problem solving and analysis
- Client orientation and customer focus
- Communication
NOTIONS OF LEADERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In assessing the study of leadership, Yukl (1989:253) declared that it is in a state of turmoil and confusion owing to “the disparity of approaches, the narrow focus of most researchers, and the absence of broad theories that integrate findings from the different approaches”. Twenty-five years thereafter, Collinson (2014:39) and Dickson and Biermeier-Hanson (2015:3) amplify that observation, stating that the theory and practice of leadership is beset with persistent ambiguities and elusive dynamics, which render leadership “difficult to research as well as challenging to enact”. Still, work has been done on leadership theorising, however incomplete, from which insights can be gained for the public service context.

Theoretical advances and contributions

Some of the prominent studies that have influenced the conceptualisation and discourse of leadership are summarised below.

Great person, traits and behaviours: Early perspectives on leadership are commonly traced back to the ‘great person’ who was understood to be a born leader, naturally endowed with an impressive personality and traits, including bravery, persuasion, intelligence, power and even certain physical features (Carlyle 1841; Schenk 1928). It was soon realised that even ‘great’ personalities vary immensely and may be difficult or even undesirable to imitate. Focus shifted from traits, as something that a leader has, to leadership behaviours and leadership as a process. The general pursuit of behavioural studies of leadership was to find the best managerial behaviour, also seen as the most effective leadership style, which would be applied with success in all situations (Likert 1961; McGregor 1960; Blake & Mouton 1964). The inconclusive findings remained the main criticism of these theories.

Situational and contingency theories: The relevance of context on leadership and leader-follower interaction came under spotlight when Stogdill (1948:64–65) concluded that “an adequate analysis of leadership involves not only a study of leaders, but also of situations”. Attempts were made to determine relationships between situations and managerial behaviours that might be construed as effective leadership. These include Fiedler’s contingency theory (1964), Hersey and Blanchard’s situational leadership theory (1977), the path-goal theory (House 1971), and the multiple linkage model developed by Yukl (1989). The application of some of these theories proved to be too cumbersome sustain.

Relational and social exchange models: Following the surge of contingency and situational research, a relational movement emerged which focused on the equal value of
leader, follower, and their relationship. These theories, including the leader–member exchange theory (Dansereau, Graen & Haga 1975; Hollander & Offerman 1990) and transactional leadership (Bass 1990), foregrounded the importance, even power, of followers in influencing the nature and effectiveness of leadership relationships. The notion of emergence also cast light on leadership as a distributed phenomenon, not a preserve of a special person (Gronn 2000; 2011).

Transformational, transcendental and service perspectives: Extending Burns’ idea of “transforming leadership” (1978), Bass (1990:21) contrasted transactional leadership with what he referred to as transformational leadership, which “occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purpose and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group”. This orientation is associated with superior leadership performance, which has the effect of raising the level of moral agency and lifting people to being their better selves (Burns 1978:4). For Gardiner (2006:72), transcendental leadership goes beyond transformational ends as it seeks to attain optimal and selfless use of human talents and energies for the benefit of all humanity and the universe.

Akin to transformational and transcendental leadership, servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977) places emphasis on service itself and a holistic approach to work which integrates personal, professional and civic life; promoting a sense of community; encouraging greatness in others; and sharing of power in decision-making. Like the transcendental leader, the servant leader is impelled by a responsibility to people and the community, and feels an obligation and desire to develop people and help them flourish (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber 2009:436). Therefore, Stone, Russell & Patterson (2004:356) conclude that transformational leadership and servant leadership signify high-order advancements in leadership worldviews.

Contextual diversity and critique

The diverse contexts from which leadership understanding and problematisation are derived, give rise to multidimensional constructions and portrayals of leadership, all imbued with ideological interests, subjectivities and naturalised ways of making and giving meaning in a particular context (Fairclough 1995:27; 2001:27,76; Barge & Fairhurst 2008:231). This multiplicity of understandings could be seen as part of an inherent paradox. There is a need to restrict the sprouting of diversity in order for a common perspective to be possible; yet it is from the lushness and complexity of the leadership phenomenon that its nature and meanings can be explored (Alvesson 1996:458).
Broadly though, the conceptualising of leadership has drastically diminished the great person’s traits and abilities, recognised both leader and follower in influential and emergent interaction, and cast focus on normative expectations of leadership beyond immediate institutional settings. However, a number of overlaps and ambiguities remain, especially in distinguishing leader from leadership and leadership from management. Many of the behaviours, roles, and conditions attributed to leadership and leaders are described in managerial and management terms (McGregor 1960; Blake & Mouton 1964), while dichotomies between managers and leaders are accentuated (Kotter 1990:103; Zaleznik 1992:127–128; Fairholm 2004:379). Additionally, in the construction of leadership as different from management, and a leader as separate from but relating to followers, the latter are constituted as ‘the other’, against which leaders are defined. Therefore, as Marturano, Wood and Gosling (2005:7) poignantly observe, “Once the leader is no longer treated as a separate and cohesive thing-in-themselves, they cease to have a positive identity”. It is in a similar vein that Pfeffer (1977:210) strongly asserts that leadership is attributed by observers, and the privileging of leadership and leaders is reinforced through the social construction of meanings, in a particular relationship with the social space.

It may not be misplaced to say that some of the recent revisions in emphasis – from great person’s traits to authenticity and self-awareness, from planned goals and structured direction to visioning and influence, from economics oriented transactional leadership to altruistic oriented transcendental inspiration – may simply be a form of neo-traitism (Dickson & Biermeier-Hanson 2014:1). For example, although the conception of thought leadership is not that new (e.g. McCrimmon 2005; Ryde 2007), there is a growing slant toward ‘thought leaders’. These are persons considered to be authorities in their fields, whose ideas and opinions are trusted, and whose personalities enable them to have publicity and a ‘tribe’ of followers. As a result, there is a view that “the fervour of the cult of leadership” has sponsored the creation of catchy labels in order to promote some book or programme (Spicker 2012:37,43; Western 2008:173).

**Appropriation for the public service**

Given the character of government employment as service together with its agenda of social transformation, it is not difficult to find compatibility with the worldview and aspirations of transformational leadership and servant leadership. As Spears (1996:34–35) sees it, servant leadership is best suited for the public service sector, including nongovernmental and non-profit organisations. From the complementary steward leadership perspective (Block 1993), those who make service their primary concern are able to direct and assert themselves for the achievement of organisational goals without undue controls and prescripts. That does not mean that hierarchy no longer exists.
Fairholm's wish (2004:379) is that hierarchy is used to surrender control, rather than hoard financial, human, and informational resources. Servant leadership and stewardship call for, and stimulate in people, high levels of personal integrity, moral and ethical consciousness, and accountability. Increasing focus has, therefore, been directed to the ethical, authentic, and values dimensions of leadership (Brown, Treviño & Harrison 2005; Avolio et al. 2009; Sindane 2011; Busch & Murdock 2014). These ideals are in alignment with Constitutional principles and values that govern public service, and are as desirable and obligatory to institutionalise as they are delicate to nurture.

In embracing the values of competition and modernisation, along with the need to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources, the public service keeps on improving its systems and operations. As Bass (1990:30) had warned, transformational leadership is not a panacea. There will always be situations for which transactional processes are indicated. Here also lie opportunities for discretionary innovation and institutional excellence, which are intertwined with the goals of service delivery for social development. Notwithstanding sporadic and systemic blunders, administrative and operational efficiencies in large service departments are benefiting the public in areas such as tax filing and revenue services, social grants administration, and the issuing of identity documents (DPME 2012:2). The coexistence, if not conflation, of administrative efficiency with leadership becomes evident. Anderson and Mungal (2015:813) and Eacott (2013:92) observe that the rise of leaderism, and leadership as the label of choice over administration or management, is propelled by the managerialism worldview of the NPM. Ramaite (2002:17) offers a helpful explanation:

The shift from a procedural orientation has been marked by the utilisation of the leadership construct, as an element in the overall ‘managerialist’ arsenal for managing complex public service organisations. The shift embodied a sense that public servants were leaders within institutions and had to lead processes for transforming these institutions to better serve the policy direction provided by the political leaders. The focus in this context was on exercising some form of autonomy in institutional processes.

Moreover, the greater the delegated scope of managerial empowerment and discretion, the greater the need for accountability measures. The general state of affairs is well noted by Savoie (2011:25):

Nothing is left in government that is not up for measurement from the performance of senior civil servants to program activities in all sectors whether economic or social. The thinking is that establishing performance standards will provide for more
effective accountability and also enable both politicians and citizens to see how well civil servants and programs perform. [...] This squares with NPM’s emphasis on outputs, on good management, and on evaluating how well individual civil servants and programs perform.

Consequently, the competency mindset has found utility for making leadership seem reducible to numerable, observable and measurable items of knowledge, ability and behaviour. From a regulatory and functionalist point of view, competency frameworks provide a toolkit for the naming of standards for job profiling and definition, identification of specific qualities for recruitment and selection of candidates to managerial positions, management of performance and outputs at different managerial levels, clarifying areas for personal development, and determining training and development interventions. The competency approach provides structural value as a link between micro level language and practices, and macro level vision and strategy. The discursive use of competencies could then compensate for their weaknesses. It is possible to see competencies as offering “a vocabulary with which organizations can articulate and express their priorities and help make sense of the lived experience of people in leadership roles” (Bolden & Gosling 2006:154; Salaman 2004:61,70). The South African SMS Competency Framework found parallels with Australia, Canada, New Zealand the UK, and the USA (DPSA 2003; Rosenbaum 2003; Amyot 2007; Charih, Bourgault, Maltais & Rouillard 2007; Jarbandhan 2011).

Leadership development

Conventional management development endeavours tend to be structured around courses and formal learning programmes, with a combination of attendance and online learning, and workplace assignments. This is the case for the management and leadership development programmes available through the National School of Government (NSG). The model on which the Foundation Management Development Programme, Emerging Management Development Programme, Advanced Management Development Programme, and the Executive Development Programme (FMDP, EMDP, AMDP and EDP) are designed, is based on the leadership pipeline notion by Charan, Drotter and Noel (2011). The model also resonates with the ladder of responsibilities that differentiate junior, middle, senior and executive managers. The recontextualisation matches the public service structure, as shown in Table 1 earlier, and entrenches the managerialist register.

Having been conceived and developed in the South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI) era as the Presidential Strategic Leadership Development Programme (PSLDP), the Executive Development Programme (EDP) remains the main intervention
for supporting the capacity development of senior managers. It is decisively aligned to the SMS Competency Framework, and brings together theoretical understanding and contextualised application of the themes of the various competency areas. Project Khaedu, which involves a practical work-related team project and action learning at a site of service delivery, Mentoring for Public Service Managers, and Leading Innovation in the Public Service are credit bearing learning programmes mainly intended for SMS. Together with the EDP, the angle and content of these formal programmes serve to enhance managerial leadership in the sense used by Hambleton and Howard (2013:56) and Nkwana (2014:85), i.e. developing capabilities of public servants whose role is to plan and manage the delivery of services. In departments with a strong capacity development focus, on-the-job learning is continuously facilitated through experiential learning, mentorship and coaching, and other focused interactions. These kinds of arrangements highlight the role of the institution in creating enabling conditions for learning and for engendering desirable social practices, while also encouraging individuals to participate in relevant programmes for continuous professional development.

The EDP, Project Khaedu and Mentoring for Public Service Managers are also the trio that constitute the Accelerated Development Programme (ADP) to support the sustainable pool scheme. This initiative was introduced in 2006 after the development of the MMS Competency Framework, with a view to fast-tracking the development of middle managers in order to create a pool of well qualified managers that can compete for senior management positions. By targeting persons with a proven track record of high performance as managers, preferably women, at salary levels 11–12, and persons with disabilities at salary levels 9–12, the ADP sought to contribute to creating a more demographically representative and equitable SMS. The combination of the programme components and facilitation methodologies would prepare participants for the challenges of functioning in senior management (PSC 2008:77; PALAMA 2009).

The composite set of leadership development programmes on offer is heavily shaped by worldviews that seek to set leaders apart from managers, predetermine and promote desired leadership behaviours, and objectively assess and reward the demonstration of explicitly stated competencies. The importance of institutional conditions to promote collaborative, peer and social learning is still outweighed by individualistic vertical development endeavours. The competency approach runs the risk of creating unending lists of traits couched with knowledge, skills and values that cannot be completely inculcated through leadership development programmes. Already, the Public Service Commission reports that in comparison with competencies that are found to be “inherent in the seniority of positions and the loyalty and commitment of the appointed leaders” in developmental states, political and economic competencies are missing in the
SMS Competency Framework (PSC 2016:54). Endres and Weibler (2016:9) relevantly caution that uncritical use of competency frameworks for leadership development would frustrate the development of more inclusive and situated forms of leadership that are vital for complex environments.

CONCLUSION: OPENING UP TO COMPLEXITY AND INTER-CONNECTEDNESS

Many of the extant views and constructions of leadership are derived from positional leadership, in formal relationships, at individual or team level of analysis, under fairly stable and predictable conditions. However, the work of public service increasingly requires the blurring of us-them, control-creativity and stability-uncertainty dualities, and necessitates negotiation of relations among actors at different places and levels. Not only is leadership itself complex, the environment in which it is constructed, defined and enacted also is. As Anderson and Mungal (2015:809, 813) aptly remark, because leadership is basically a discourse practice, it “forms part of a larger arena in which power struggles over meaning take place”. In a social constructionist sense, social practices and constructions of leadership are embedded in interrelated contexts of people, relationships and institutions that are part of broader social systems or socio-ecologies (Uhl-bien 2006:664; Barge & Fairhurst 2008:246; Fairhurst 2009:1623; Müller 2014:57). Academic, policy and curriculum initiatives cannot legitimately persist outside the lived leadership experiences, languages and social practices of those involved in contexts about which leadership inferences are made. Neither can worthwhile study of leadership continue without inter- and trans-disciplinary dialogue, and formal and non-formal, endogenous and exogenous connections.

The realisation that the far-reaching goals of nation building entail the participation of all sectors of society was already highlighted in the deliberations of the White Paper on Reconstruction and Development Programme (WPRDP 1994). By calling “for all to put their energy and creativity into finding ways of doing things better and differently”, the WPRDP was evoking a kind of leadership required for complex adaptive system. This is where networks of interdependent agents, in changeable structures with multiple, overlapping hierarchies, take a post bureaucratic form as the engine of collaborative learning and adaptive agency (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey 2007:299; Raelin 2016:141,148). The construction of leadership for single institutional contexts and pre-defined practices is therefore limiting.

As illustrated in Figure 1, a unifying, hybrid discourse (H) can emerge seamlessly from previously dispersed points of knowing, doing, being and living together (Mbigi
Instead of hurrying to find yet another designation for the leadership that might be construed as distinctly for public service, it seems more beneficial to extend and connect domains of powerful discourse for strands of leadership to weave organically, deliberately and critically around issues of common concern. Such engagements, extending beyond the confines of separate institutions, have already taken form in some circles but will have to be made more visible, permeable, participial as living curricula and discourses.

REFERENCES


