

FOSTERING INNOVATION THROUGH INTRAPRENEURSHIP IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

The South African government's goal to achieve an effective and efficient public service that is development-orientated has led it towards a greater focus on innovation. In this context, public servants have been identified as one of the key sources of innovation and are called upon to generate innovative solutions to public service challenges – a practice referred to as intrapreneurship. However, studies on intrapreneurship in South Africa's public service have revealed the lack of an enabling environment for intrapreneurship. This brings into question the conditions that are necessary to foster intrapreneurship and its diffusion across the South African public service.

Thus, through qualitative research methods, this study investigated how the calls for public servants to become intrapreneurs are translated into practice, to better understand the context in which this practice must be fostered; and to explore some of the ways to mitigate identified barriers. The findings

reveal that institutional management support, political and policy support, positive perceptions of risk-taking and sufficient funding for innovation are some of the key enablers for intrapreneurship in the South African public service. This article, therefore, provides insight into issues related to the promotion of intrapreneurship in the public service.

Keywords: Innovation, intrapreneurship, public service, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's democratic dispensation is almost three decades old; however, the government still grapples with a myriad of socio-economic issues including high levels of unemployment, poverty, a decrease in tax revenues, crime, gender-based violence and an inequality level that is among the highest in the world (Bhorat, 2015; Canning, 2019; Dessus, Goddard & Hanusch, 2017:vii). The severity of these issues has been exacerbated by the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, leaving many of the world's economies in

disarray (South Africa included). In this context, the literature points to innovation as a means to address the socio-economic challenges encountered by governments, as innovation allows governments to find novel solutions to longstanding socio-economic challenges (Osborne & Brown, 2013:32; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2017:6-8; Edwards-Schachter, 2018:65-79).

Albury (2005:51) argues that the promotion of innovation in public services "is not an optional luxury but needs to be institutionalized as a deep value". This view is seemingly reiterated within South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, which outlines the country's long-term plan to address the aforementioned socio-economic issues faced by the country and considers innovation as central in this regard (National Planning Commission [NPC] 2011). Thus, within this broader context of innovation, public servants have been identified as a key source of innovation within public service due to their first-hand experience and intricate knowledge of public service systems, processes and challenges (Dlodlo, 2018:6; Arundel, Bloch & Ferguson, 2019:789; Bekkers & Tummers, 2018:209-213). This practice, of employees driving the process of innovation within their organisations in order to generate novel solutions for identified challenges, has come to be known in more contemporary literature as "intrapreneurship" (Westrup, 2013:99).

Studies on intrapreneurship in South African public service institutions draw similar conclusions regarding perceptions among public servants, namely, that there is a lack of an enabling environment for intrapreneurship to

take place in public institutions (Netshifefhe, 2008:99; Mabala, 2012:i; Letsie, 2013:242; Ntoyanto-Tyatyantsi, 2018:iii). Maseko (2016:31) bluntly states that the South African public service lacks an "intrapreneurial spirit" that is evidenced by public service organisations not presenting as conducive environments in which intrapreneurship can take place. However, because the aforementioned studies focus on specific institutional contexts, they do not provide significant insight into the overarching issues in the broader public service that may be the root cause of the barriers to intrapreneurship experienced by public servants at an institutional level. This is the gap in the existing, and notably limited, literature on innovation and intrapreneurship in the South African public service context that this article seeks to fill. This then raises the following questions central to this paper:

- What are the overarching issues in the broader public service that may be the root cause of the barriers to intrapreneurship experienced by public servants at an institutional level?
- Who are the key role players in driving the overall innovation mandate and in what way do they encourage and/or inhibit intrapreneurship in the public service?
- What conditions are necessary in order to foster intrapreneurship and its diffusion across the South African public service?

This article may, therefore, provide insight on issues of innovation and intrapreneurship in the broader African context, as much of the literature on public sector innovations

predominantly focuses on the American and European contexts. These current and limited contexts only provide an understanding of public sector innovation from the perspective of more developed economies; a perspective that is vastly different from African (and South African) contexts.

CONCEPTUALISING INNOVATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The topic of innovation in the public sector has garnered growing interest from researchers in the field of Public Administration and Management. The majority of the studies regard innovation in the public sector as the central answer to resolving the intricate socio-economic and political issues encountered by public organisations (Korac, Saliterer & Walker, 2017:566; Grant *et al.*, 2020:69). This may perhaps be a result of a predominant view of innovation as a catalyst to finding novel approaches to resolving long-standing issues in the public service, many of which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, innovation in the public sector context has been prioritised on the contemporary agendas of politicians, policy makers, public managers as well as the private sector and non-profit organisations (De Vries, Bekkers & Tummers, 2016:146; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017:141).

A review of a variety of studies on public sector innovation does not point to a conclusive definition of what the concept of innovation means and perhaps justifies Pollitt and Hupe's (2011:644) classification of the concept as a "magic concept". They characterise such concepts as those frequently used in public administration

research, yet do not have a universal conceptualisation. In the majority of the studies surveyed, innovation is commonly defined as the development of something 'new' (such as an idea, process, product or service) that should generally lead to a fundamental shift or change in the status quo within public organisations (Albury 2005:51; Rivera-León, 2012:6). However, some scholars argue that ideas, inventions and discoveries on their own do not constitute an innovation but rather the implementation of those inputs is what ultimately qualifies them as innovations (Sørensen & Torfing, 2012:1-2).

Potts and Kastle (2010:123) add that the retention of ideas is what ultimately turns an idea into an innovation. They argue that merely implementing an idea is not sufficient but the context in which it is implemented will likely need to change to ensure the successful implementation and eventual retention of the innovation. Thus, there is seemingly a greater consensus around why innovation is necessary, specifically in the broader public sector context, than there is around what the universal understanding of the concept is. This notably points to two things, namely, an existing subjectivity in defining and understanding what public sector innovation is and consequently the importance of context in understanding a concept such as innovation. It can be argued that the inconclusive definitions of the concept of innovation may indicate that to understand it, the concept needs to be engaged contextually. This may provide greater insight into how it is understood and applied within a given context and could furthermore provide insight, in the context of this article, into how the South African public service context understands and engages with this concept.

INTRAPRENEURSHIP: A PATHWAY TO INNOVATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Arnold and Magia (2013:1) state that the modern-day public service is engulfed by employees who are driven to find ways to resolve the challenges encountered within their organisations through innovation, despite the barriers presented by the bureaucratic nature of the public service. They refer to these creative and innovative employees as "intrapreneurs". Seshadri and Tripathy (2006:18) succinctly describe intrapreneurship as "a potent tool for delivering innovation". Gomes, Consoni & Lapolli (2015:707) explain that intrapreneurship is a concept that was coined in the 1980s by Gifford Pinchot to describe employees who portray "entrepreneurial" characteristics such as innovation, goal orientation and risk-taking in order to develop or introduce a product or service for the benefit of the organisation in which they are employed. Other scholars have similarly defined intrapreneurship as employee-driven innovation with the intent to pursue new opportunities and to improve identified issues within their organisation's internal processes, products or services (Ahmad, Nasuridin & Zainal, 2012:2; Park, Kim & Krishna, 2014:537; Baruah & Ward, 2015:811-812).

Public servants who engage in the practice of intrapreneurship are often referred to as "intrapreneurs" and are characterised as public servants who take initiative in pursuit of creative ideas to improve the public service. Morais *et al.* (2021:5) add that intrapreneurs differ from traditional employees within an organisation as traditional employees are committed to only performing the tasks that

fall within the scope of their job descriptions, while intrapreneurs, in the process of their work, are constantly searching for opportunities to reinvent how things are done; they find innovative solutions to challenges faced within the organisation and explore opportunities to achieve greater organisational outputs. Markopoulos and Vanharanta (2019:868-870) argue that through the course of their work in public institutions, public servants acquire and generate valuable knowledge that must be fully utilised to enhance the overall effectiveness and efficiency of public institutions. Intrapreneurship can thus serve as a means for public institutions to make optimal use of their human capital to transform the various aspects of the work of government.

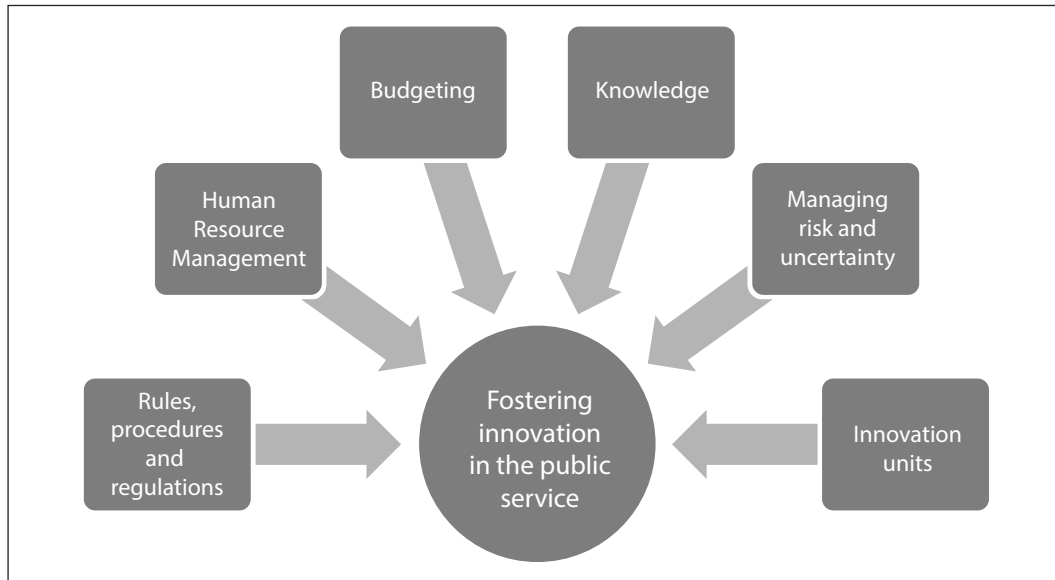
FOSTERING INNOVATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The literature on innovation and intrapreneurship in the public sector identifies several ways to foster innovation and intrapreneurship in the public sector. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) report on *Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector* (2017) succinctly captures much of the enablers for innovation highlighted in the literature, which has been summarised in Figure 1 on the next page. These enablers of innovation may provide insight into what may be required to establish an enabling environment for intrapreneurship in the public service, given the established understanding of intrapreneurship as a means to achieve innovation in the public service.

Rules, Procedures and Regulations

The OECD (2017:19) notes that public servants often perceive the bureaucratic nature

FIGURE 1: Fostering Innovation in the Public Service



Source: Adapted from OECD (2017)

of the public service, which they characterise as having stringent rules, procedures and regulations, as an inhibitor of their innovative efforts. This is noticeably a common view across some of the literature surveyed (Mabala, 2012:8; Association for Public Service Excellence, 2013:22; Green *et al.*, 2014:22). Similarly, section 5.1 of South Africa's White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (WTPSD) (1997) also describes how the plethora of rules, procedures and legislation in the public service are limiting intrapreneurial behaviour in public servants in the country's public service. The WTPSD therefore calls for the reform and simplification of bureaucratic processes in the South African public service as a means to encourage innovation among public servants.

It must be noted, however, that there is seemingly still a paucity of research that explores

the full extent to which rules, procedures and regulations present as a barrier to innovation in the public sector context (Cinar, Trott & Simms, 2019:282-284). This is arguably an important part of any effort to finding the most appropriate measures to mitigating this apparent problem. Nevertheless, some of the existing literature in this regard has pointed to a few remedial measures that governments can explore such as "targeted rule exemptions" through which government organisations can request exemptions from legislation that they perceive to be a barrier to innovation (Albury, 2005:53). Other measures are the inclusion of Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) as an integral part of the policy-making process to allow policy makers to consider the impact of proposed regulations on innovation (Blind, 2012). Another approach is through the encouragement of stakeholder engagement in the

innovation process to improve the support of key stakeholders for innovation efforts in the public service (OECD, 2017:32).

Regardless of the approach chosen, any attempts to remove or ease any rules, regulations and procedures in favour of innovation will arguably need to be preceded by a cost-benefit analysis to determine the value trade-offs therein.

Human Resource Management

Through its work with various innovation institutions, the OECD (2017:59) has found that innovations that make the most impact in the public sector are derived from public servants across all hierarchical levels of public sector organisations. Frontline staff and middle managers are said to be best positioned to provide the most innovative solutions, as they have the most engagements with clients and are directly responsible for implementing government policies. Likewise, Borins' (2001:314; 2002:468) studies on innovation in the public sector also reached the same conclusion, as they found that the most innovative initiatives originated from staff in middle management and at the frontlines. In this sense, the OECD recommends that human resource management (HRM) practices within organisations be designed to encourage innovation among all public servants (OECD, 2017:59).

In this context, Veronica *et al.* (2013:3-4) stress the importance of awards as a tool to stimulate, recognise and provide exposure to innovations in the public service, and the introduction of innovation networks to foster formal and informal interactions across organisations. Furthermore, Daglio, Gerson

and Kitchen (2014:19) add leadership as another key enabler of innovation, as leaders communicate the culture of and create an enabling environment for innovation within their respective public service organisations. Moreover, leaders can also ensure that the recruitment and selection practices of the organisation align with its innovation goals and objectives. A study conducted by Gomes, Consoni and Lapolli (2015:711) shares this view, indicating that to sustain the culture for innovation in the public service, government structures need to attract people with an intrapreneurial orientation. Simon (2018) adds that beyond recruitment, the promotion of intrapreneurship can be a great tool for staff retention, as employees often leave their jobs looking for opportunities to make a more meaningful contribution to their organisations, which their current jobs do not offer.

Foba and De Villiers (2007) further suggest that public organisations develop a performance management model that includes the assessment of an employee's intrapreneurial contributions. This will ensure that performance management practices in public sector organisations are used as tools to encourage and motivate innovation in it. Lastly, continuous learning also needs to be prioritised in order for public servants to remain aware of the challenges that require an innovative response, and how best to address the diverse needs of society. This learning can be structured, for example, formal courses, seminars, rotation programmes or online training; or it can be unstructured where public servants learn on the job (Markopoulos & Vanharanta, 2019:868-870).

Public organisations should, therefore, establish cultures and provide opportunities that

allow public servants to transform the knowledge gained through the course of their work into ideas and actions that will ultimately serve the interest of the public. This will ensure the optimal utilisation of the public service's human and intellectual capital.

Budgeting

The OECD (2017:19) notes that budgeting for innovation is an integral facet of the innovation process, and states that because innovation is such that it is a risky process by nature, and comes with uncertainty, departmental budgeting will need to be more flexible to be able to align with the innovation mandate of government. Countries will need to consider how they can best align their budget practices to encourage and not inhibit innovation. Ahmad *et al.* (2012:3-7) suggest allocating funding for the development, incentivising and implementation of innovative ideas by employees as a means to reinforce intrapreneurial behaviour. However, research consulted for this article also shows that the risky nature of investing in innovative initiatives tends to make public service leaders and managers less willing to spend the already limited public service resources on innovation, as they have to account for how taxpayer funds are spent, and serious consequences tend to follow those who are considered to have misused public funds (Morris & Jones, 1999:78; Borins, 2001:311; Osborne & Brown, 2013:32; Green *et al.*, 2014:19). However, Malatjie, Garg and Rankhumise (2017:208) argue that this highlights the need to support intrapreneurship even more, as the practice presents an opportunity for the generation of innovative ideas on how more can be done with the little available resources.

The OECD adds that partnerships are a key area for government departments to leverage funding for innovation by forming collaborations on innovative projects undertaken. However, this practice is often challenged by the public sector's systems of financial accountability, which focus more on how the individual department performs. This can make it difficult to account for collaborative works (OECD, 2017:20).

Knowledge

The access to, and free flow of information, knowledge and data is also identified as a key enabler of innovation in the public sector. Not only does it help develop the capacities of both employees and government departments to innovate but it is also said to be a key driver of the generation of innovative ideas that are key to resolving some of the most pressing challenges in public service. This entails governments creating access to Open Government Data (OGD) that can act as a mechanism for safeguarding the democratic values of transparency/accountability within the public sector (OECD, 2017:203). According to Ubaldi (2013), OGD refers to government's opening of access to its "raw" data to be freely used and distributed to those who need it. The South African Government is party to, and a founding member of, the OGP, which, among other factors, aims to establish more transparent governments.

Markopoulos and Vanharanta (2019:868-870), however, argue that although there is an acknowledgement of the importance of knowledge generation and sharing in order to foster public sector innovation, what remains missing in some governments are organisational cultures and institutional

processes that are able to transform knowledge into innovative solutions. Thus, it is not only important to have a clear vision of the benefits of creating open access to information for fostering public sector innovation, but to ensure that institutional arrangements are in alignment with that vision.

Managing Risk and Uncertainties

Considering the various challenges associated with public sector innovation, most governments are advised to develop a risk management approach to monitor risks and to minimise or prevent failure (OECD, 2017:22). The OECD (2017:171) clarifies that there is a fundamental difference between the concepts of risk and uncertainty, and although most questions around public sector innovation are associated with the concept of risk, they are actually questions of uncertainty. Risk is described as "measurable" as "the possibilities are known", whereas uncertainty cannot be measured as "the possibilities are unknown" (OECD, 2017:173). In addition, it is further explained that the public sector is structured in a way that enables it to effectively handle risk, but such is not the case with uncertainty, as the public sector is usually unable to endorse decisions with no clear indication of the possibility of a successful outcome.

Gomes *et al.* (2015:709) acknowledge the high risks and consequences that can ensue due to unsuccessful innovations as public funds are used to develop public sector innovations. In a study by Zegans (1992) entitled "Innovation in the well-functioning Public Agency", when a sample of public managers were asked how politicians usually react to innovative behaviour by bureaucrats, all the

managers were in agreement that politicians were not keen to support innovations that could cause reputational damage and therefore appeared inclined to support initiatives with the lowest risk profile or ones that serve their political interests (Zegans, 1992:147). Contemporary literature on public sector innovation reiterates this stance as it is indicated that because innovations are developed using public funds, any failures are often borne by both politicians and public managers to account for, which has resulted in both parties appearing risk-averse (Green *et al.*, 2014; Gomes *et al.*, 2015; Van Acker, 2018; Cinar *et al.*, 2019).

However, although much of the discussions around risk and uncertainty in public sector innovations centre around the risks incurred by organisations, intrapreneurial public servants are also said to ultimately be at risk of reputational damage or losing their jobs in the event of their innovations being unsuccessful (Green *et al.*, 2014:19). This can result in a culture of risk aversion among public servants, who may perceive innovation as a risk not worth taking. This consequently indicates the importance of political and managerial support for innovation, in order to encourage employees to take creative and calculated risks for the benefit of the organisations in which they serve.

The Role of Innovation Units

According to the OECD (2017:140), modern public services are increasingly developing dedicated units to drive the culture of innovation in their public services. This is a result of a growing realisation that meeting current innovation needs may require a more specialised focus than individual

institutions can provide. These units generally differ in their focus, as some focus upon developing solutions, while others act as facilities for experimentation, some are funding institutions, and others mainly aid in the areas of capacity building and networking (OECD, 2017:140-141). Kattel, Cepilovs, Kalvet, Lember, and Tõnurist (2015) explain that innovation units (also referred to as innovation labs) can either be developed as stand-alone government departments or they can be interdepartmental wherein two or more government departments collaborate in setting up the unit; or intradepartmental in which case the innovation unit is set up inside a specific government department. However, Timeus and Gascó (2018:992) highlight that more research that explores the role of innovation units in increasing the innovation outputs of the public sector is needed to assess their contribution to fostering innovation in the public sector.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE INTRAPRENEURSHIP IMPERATIVE FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE

According to the 2022 World Inequality Report, South Africa is among the most unequal societies in the world (Chancel, Piketty, Saez & Zucman, 2022). This, coupled with reports of high levels of unemployment and poverty, calls for novel solutions to what are longstanding issues in the country. As such, the Minister of Public Service and Administration, Ms Ayanda Dlodlo, regards innovation as imperative for the resolution of the socio-economic issues that embattle the country (Dlodlo, 2018:6), most of which have been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. The view of innovation as a catalyst for generating solutions to public problems is

supported by the NDP (2011), which reiterates the centrality of innovation in achieving the South African government's objective to become a capable and developmental state. The NDP (2011) envisions a public service that is, by the year 2030, managed and coordinated effectively and efficiently by public officials who are service oriented to ensure that high quality services are provided.

Karuri-Sebina (2020:10) notes that the achievement of the NDP's goals by 2030 is arguably challenged by the aforementioned "crippling context" the country finds itself. Additionally, South Africa seems to be performing more poorly in comparison to other African countries (such as Kenya and Rwanda), with regard to its innovation indices, as indicated by the drop in its Global Innovation Index rankings (Dutta, Lanvin, León & Wunsch-Vincent, 2021:151). This is despite a notably well-coordinated National System of Innovation and comprehensive plans and policies for fostering innovation, such as the White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation (2019) and the Foresight Exercise Report Science, Technology and Innovation 2030 (2019). There is evidently an opportunity for the practice of intrapreneurship to contribute to the innovation outputs of the public service.

For instance, there have been reports from various government stakeholders that the Covid-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity for public servants to lead innovative digital transformation in the public service and has heightened the need for creativity, problem solving and critical thinking in the public service (Hes, 2020; OECD, 2020:2). The world is also in the midst of a Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and there is

seemingly a consensus among researchers, in this context, that the critical skills that will set employees apart in the age of the 4IR will be their creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills – traits that cannot be mimicked by machines (World Economic Forum, 2016; Caetano & Charamba, 2017; Keywell, 2017). The 4IR therefore presents an opportunity for human capital reform in the South African public service, which is paramount as evidenced by the frequent service delivery protests the country experiences.

The above allusion to the importance of the South African government's human capital for the achievement of its innovation goals is further encapsulated in policy documents such as Public Service Regulations (2016), the Public Service Charter (2013) and the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (WTPSD) (1997). Moreover, in 2008, the South African Government established a Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI) as a component of government dedicated solely to entrenching a culture of innovation in the public service (Van Den Heever, 2015). Among its other functions, the CPSI further coordinates the uncovering, advancement and implementation of innovative ideas that are generated across the public service (Van Den Heever, 2015:17). Nevertheless, with the establishment of the CPSI since 2008 and an enabling policy and regulatory framework calling for intrapreneurship among public servants, clarity is needed with regard to the overarching causes for the identified lack of an enabling environment for intrapreneurship in the South African public service.

Given the current Covid-19 pandemic, the 4IR and the worsening socio-economic

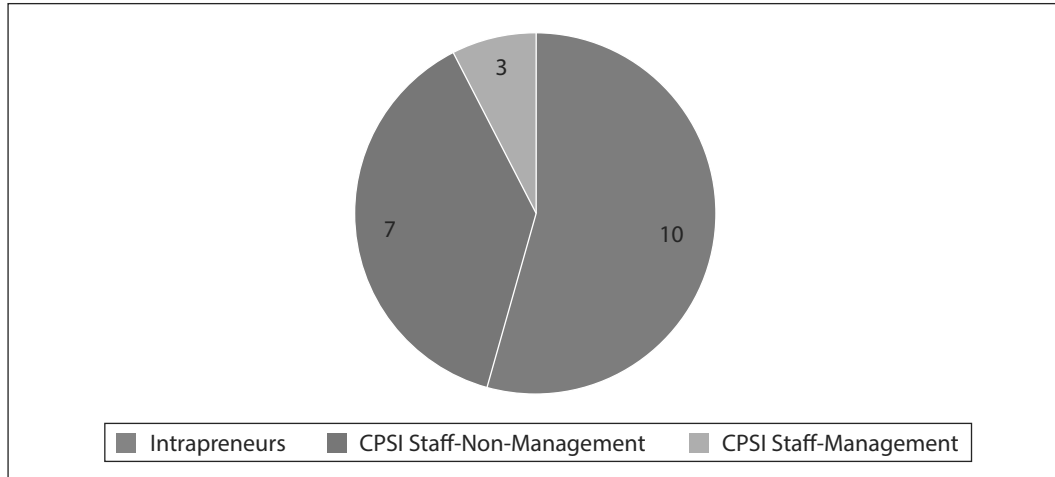
challenges experienced in the country, the imperative for a focus upon fostering intrapreneurship in the public service is seemingly finding more importance.

METHOD

To respond to the above-mentioned research questions (Section 1), this article employed a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological research design to explore the overarching issues in the broader public service that may be the root cause of the perceptions of a lack of an enabling environment for intrapreneurship in the public service to take place. The study's research population, summarised in Figure 2 on the following page, comprised staff members of South Africa's CPSI, as well as intrapreneurs across various public service institutions in the National and Provincial spheres of government.

Staff from the CPSI were included, as the research process revealed that the institution had been established specifically with the mandate to entrench a culture and practice of innovation in the South African public service. Therefore, engaging with the staff of this institution would provide insight into the overarching issues in the broader public service that may be the root cause of the barriers to intrapreneurship experienced by public servants at the institutional level. The CPSI's innovation programme is divided into the three workstreams (otherwise known as units), namely, the Enabling Environment workstream, the Research and Development workstream and the Solution Support and Incubation workstream. The mandate of each workstream is summarised by respondents in the findings section (Section 7 below).

FIGURE 2: Summary of the Research Population



Source: Authors

The sample from the CPSI therefore comprised the heads of three workstreams and the staff members serving under each work stream, as well as the institution's Executive Director. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the study's respondents. Purposive sampling, as a non-probability sampling technique, was deemed suitable for this study as it allowed for the purposeful selection of those respondents who were considered to be in a position to provide the most valuable information regarding the topic under study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:152). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the acting Executive Director (ED) of the CPSI, as well as the heads of each of the CPSI's three work streams. The interviews conducted with the CPSI's senior management were informed by a perception of their expert knowledge of each of the CPSI's three work streams and overall intricate knowledge of the public service innovation landscape. It must be noted that one of the senior managers interviewed

was at the time also the Acting ED, thus the respondent was interviewed in two capacities. As a result, a total of three interviews were conducted.

Open-ended questions were used to facilitate the interviews as research has shown their non-restrictive nature to be the most effective when conducting interviews with senior management officials (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002:674). In addition, self-administered (completed by respondents with no assistance from the researcher) semi-structured online questionnaires were distributed to all 12 of the staff members in the three workstreams; however, only seven responses were received. Fortunately, the received responses were from across the three workstreams. Furthermore, to gain an in-depth perspective of their lived experiences as intrapreneurs in the South African public service context, self-administered semi-structured online questionnaires were also sent to intrapreneurs in the public service. The selection of

the sample of intrapreneurs was informed by a list of intrapreneurs (sourced from the CPSI) that had received support from the CPSI in the development of their innovative ideas. Although the list provided consisted of 40 possible contacts, a large number of the email addresses returned an error message and some of the alternative means of contact provided yielded no response.

Ultimately, responses from a total of 10 intrapreneurs were received from various national and provincial government contexts in the South African public service. In total, the study comprised 20 respondents which, given the study's qualitative methods of inquiry, provided the substantive findings outlined in the next section. The responses from intrapreneurs were considered to provide insight into some of the common issues experienced by intrapreneurs. The questions for the interviews and questionnaires were adapted from an OECD report titled *Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector* (OECD 2017). The report was utilised as it was created to provide a conceptual framework for the fostering of innovation in the Public Sector context and therefore offered comprehensive insight on the subject matter. The collected data was subsequently analysed by way of thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006:79) describe as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". The findings from the inquiry are outlined in the following section.

FINDINGS

The key findings from the responses obtained from the intrapreneurs and the CPSI's senior management are outlined in the sections below.

Findings From Intrapreneurs

The set of questions given aimed at establishing the existence of an enabling environment for intrapreneurship in the respective organisational contexts. The following were the key findings in this regard:

- (a) The responses revealed that most of the public service institutions represented by the respondents did not have a formal policy or specific guidelines regarding intrapreneurship and how it would be facilitated within their institutions. Few respondents affirmed the existence of such a document in their organisations, while only one respondent indicated that their organisation had "somewhat" of an innovation policy.
- (b) Most of the respondents were of the view that their organisations did, in some way, encourage innovation and risk-taking among their staff. However, this view did not represent an overwhelming majority of the respondents, as just under half indicated that their organisations did not encourage a culture of innovation and risk-taking at all.

While just over half of the respondents indicated that they were generally able to approach their managers to discuss any new ideas they had, others stated that this was not always the case. The respondents also indicated varied experiences with regard to the resources that management made available to support the implementation of their ideas. There was an indication that the offered resources were very limited, and another group felt that they were not provided with any necessary resources to aid in the

implementation of their innovative projects. The main barriers to intrapreneurship identified by the respondents included bureaucracy, as many of the respondents reported that there is a lot of red tape in gaining access to the information they need from their organisations to develop their innovative ideas. In addition, too many stakeholders, poor change management, the large workload that comes with implementing innovation, and a lack of funds for the implementation of innovations were identified as additional issues. For example, one respondent stated "Lack of support! Also, no one in higher management seems to take these projects seriously, despite the evidence that they work". It was also indicated that there was a need to see quick results from the innovations, which was an unrealistic expectation as allowing the development of innovations over time, specifically a few years, was necessary to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of solutions. In this regard, another respondent added that:

Getting buy-in and approvals from the seniors requires a lot of hard work and convincing. Generally, the government environment does not support innovation. There is absolutely no incentive for innovation, only punishment for failures. The punishment can be quite harsh (i.e. risk of losing a job, losing your assets and the possibility of going to jail). This always keeps the project manager awake at night.

- (c) Despite the above challenges, when asked if they would continue to develop innovative solutions to challenges in the public service, all the respondents indicated that they would, as the outcome was personally rewarding and essential for the growth of public institutions.

Findings From the CPSI's Senior Management

The respondents reported that the overall mandate of the CPSI is to promote the culture and practice of innovation in public service. In addition, the mandate comprises three workstreams that actualise its mandate, namely, the Enabling Environment, Research and Development and the Solution Support and Incubation workstreams. The Enabling Environment workstream's role is to engage the members of the public service, to encourage them to innovatively contribute to resolving the prevalent issues in the public service. The Research and Development workstream focuses on establishing an understanding of what the root causes of some of the service delivery issues experienced in the public service are and investigating why existing solutions are not working. Lastly, the Solution Support and Incubation workstream serves as a project unit. In this context, ideas from public servants and other sources of innovation are tested and piloted in the real-life context for which they have been developed, to establish if they work and to identify any areas for improvement before the solution is handed over to the user department for implementation.

Through the workstreams, the CPSI produces a range of knowledge products and platforms to connect public servants and the rest of the public sector to its mandate. These include the CPSI's Innovation Journal, Annual Conference, Annual Awards Programme, the Multi-Media Innovation Centre, social media, workshops and their website. These platforms have been instrumental in the CPSI's intent to entrench a culture of innovation in the public service because it does not have the authority to

instruct government departments to adopt the innovative solutions that public servants produce through the assistance of the CPSI. The CPSI must often convince government departments that it is in their best interest and indicate how the project aligns with the priorities of the government. Other key findings with regard to the fostering of intrapreneurship in the public services include:

- (a) The CPSI's knowledge platforms keep public servants engaged with the current trends and discussions in public sector innovation.
- (b) Through their testing and piloting of innovative solutions, the CPSI helps ease the culture of risk aversion into the public service, as the Chief Financial Officers in government departments are generally risk-averse to innovation. This is because they will be held accountable for anything that may be considered fruitless and wasteful expenditure in the case of failed innovations.
- (c) Due to its limited human and financial resources, the CPSI can only work on a small number of projects from public servants per year. Therefore, if they come across a good idea but have no resources to support its development, they would have to "shelve" it until they can develop and implement the idea or advise the intrapreneur of other avenues to explore in order to implement their idea.
- (d) The CPSI assists public servants with idea generation. One of the senior managers commented, "even if the idea is shoddy, their heart and thinking are in the right place".

In the abovementioned instance, the CPSI would help prospective intrapreneurs arrive at the right idea; however, their lack of resources has limited their capacity to do this. In addition to this, the respondents also outlined several challenges related to the fostering of intrapreneurship in the South African public service. The key challenges identified were as follows:

- (a) The CPSI has no authority to instruct government departments to implement projects from public servants, even a much-needed idea.
- (b) The culture and bureaucratic structure of the public service: in this respect, the respondents indicated that leadership support, both from a political and administrative level, was lacking in some instances. One of the responses indicated that the problem was a lack of "openness to change and assistance". Another provided a personal view that political will seemed to be improving, although the unstable political environment has posed a challenge for the CPSI because of the constantly changing political leadership and Director Generals (or government departments) in the past years. This meant that the continuity of innovations was often disrupted by constantly changing priorities with each new leadership.
- (c) Government departments were seemingly not incentivising intrapreneurship much, even though there is a provision for this in the Public Sector Regulations.
- (d) The public service environment is risk-averse.

- (e) Line managers were also viewed as unsupportive in some instances, as indicated in one response stating that "most of the challenges in the departments are identified by middle management and they come to us seeking solutions. When it is time to engage their senior managers on the proposed projects, the reception is not always positive".
- (f) In general, South Africa does not have a dedicated policy or budget for public sector innovation. This then also impacts the buy-in from the service delivery departments because the system of government works on a twelve-month and three-year cycle. Therefore, when they approach top managers with solutions that they would like to test and pilot, they would already have their budget set for those periods.

Treasury regulations and legislation, such as the Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act 1 of 1999), were noted as being risk-averse and therefore constricting of the practice of innovation in the public service.

The respondents, however, also provided suggestions as to what could be done to improve the intrapreneurial output of the South African public service. One of the respondents suggested the development of a strategy on how quickly a solution can be infused into the public service system, without having to struggle for buy-in from top managers whose budgets are set. A system or strategy for procuring innovation was also identified as necessary to foster intrapreneurship in the public service. This should factor in how the procurement of non-technological innovations would take place, the high failure rate of innovation and

how risk can be managed. It was also suggested that the CPSI should work closely with the government to "ease" the over-regulated, highly bureaucratic public service environment – to make it more conducive for innovation.

To improve political buy-in for innovative solutions, it was recommended that innovative projects that have been successfully developed, tested and piloted be handed over by the Minister for Public Service and Administration, to the minister of the government department for which the solution is meant, who would then instruct administrative leadership in that department to implement the idea. This would ensure that line managers make provision for the implementation of innovative solutions. Lastly, the CPSI would also like to see government departments establishing their innovation units, which the CPSI could then work closely with. This will ensure the decentralisation of the CPSI's mandate and guarantee that each institution actively fosters intrapreneurship in their respective environments.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The discussion of the findings presented in the preceding section, as well as the implications of each, will be presented across five main themes. These themes were drawn from the responses gathered around the overarching barriers and enablers of intrapreneurship in the South African public service.

Theme 1: Bureaucratic Leadership Support

It is evident from the findings that managers in the public service play a defining

role in fostering intrapreneurship in the public service. Their behaviour, whether implicitly or explicitly stated, communicates whether intrapreneurship is an acceptable practice within their institutions. Although the literature review identified an existing policy and legislative framework that calls for intrapreneurship in the South African public service, the findings indicate that in practice, leadership support to put these calls into action is lacking. Managers are, at times, the barriers to intrapreneurship, as they may be reluctant to sign off on the implementation of innovations in fear of being punished for what could be considered fruitless expenditure if an innovation fails. This could thus lead to lower levels of intrapreneurship in public service institutions.

This possibly points to a validation of the assertions made in the findings, that public managers also risk losing their jobs as a result of failed innovations and therefore may discourage high-risk initiatives from their staff. This then brings into question how the role of public managers can be redefined so that their duty to account for their use of state resources does not clash with the execution of the country's innovation mandate, which requires managers who are actively engaged in the country's innovation mandate and are supportive of intrapreneurship. This is an issue that will need to be addressed at a policy level.

Theme 2: Policy and Political Support

To effectively manage the diffusion of intrapreneurship, the support of policy and politics is paramount. The findings indicate a likely risk-averse political sphere,

perhaps because administrative failures are often considered as political failures that could lead to a decline in voter support. The CPSI's leadership has recommended greater commitment from political leadership in the innovation process so that innovative thinking is not seen as exclusive to the bureaucratic level of government but is understood and practised at the political level as well. This article's literature review also indicated that the South African Government has several policies and legislation that call for the promotion of intrapreneurship in the public service. This policy and regulatory framework seemingly aligns with the noted acknowledgement by public service leaders of a need for intrapreneurship in the South African public service.

However, the findings revealed existing contradictions between the innovation policy mandate and regulatory framework and other legislation and regulations that govern public administration in South Africa. It was stated in the findings that regulations such as the Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act 1 of 1999) and Treasury Regulations are perceived as being risk-averse, which inadvertently limits the support for innovations. This indicates a clear misalignment between some of the government's policies and the innovation imperative of the country. Moreover, a suggestion made by one of the CPSI's senior officials of a need for a strategy to guide the adoption and procurement of innovation in the public service indicates existing gaps in the current policy framework with regard to fostering innovation, that will need to be addressed. There is, therefore, a need to review and adapt the current legislation to ensure an alignment with the country's innovation mandate.

Theme 3: Financial Support

Funding is an important aspect of innovation, as no idea can be developed, tested, piloted and implemented without the financial means to engage in such a process. Based on the responses provided in this regard, it seems that innovation in the South African public service is not well budgeted for. This problem indicates a poor understanding by public service leaders of how resource-intensive the process is. Therefore, if calls are made for greater innovation in the public service, funding will also need to be expanded to accommodate this shift in focus, especially in the era of the 4IR. Perhaps the challenge that innovation presents for budgetary processes in the public service is that public funds would then essentially be invested in projects that may or may not yield results. Thus, conversations around funding and budgeting in this context need to be centred around how traditional budgetary practices can be reformed or aligned with the modern reality that to effectively improve the plight of citizens, countries need to invest in innovation. This is an issue that requires high-level stakeholder engagement, not only to discuss why funding for innovation is essential, but to develop a more effective funding model for public service innovation.

Theme 4: Decentralisation of the Public Service Innovation Mandate

The results affirmed the role of the CPSI as a key driver and facilitator of intrapreneurship in the public service. However, it was stated in the findings that the CPSI has no power or authority to instruct government departments to implement the solutions

that they have assisted public servants in developing. This could discourage intrapreneurship if intrapreneurs perceive their efforts as pointless because their solutions are not being implemented. However, the CPSI's suggestion for the decentralisation of their mandate through the establishment of in-house innovation units working closely with the CPSI may help localise the calls for intrapreneurship in government departments. This may also ensure that every government department considers the promotion of intrapreneurship in their strategic and operational planning processes. This would then ensure that key aspects such as funding, incentives and information management are considered.

Including the planning for intrapreneurship in the organisational planning processes could also ensure that all staff members across the various demographic groups represented in the organisation are actively engaged in the public services' innovation mandate. Furthermore, an analysis of the demographic outline of the intrapreneurs surveyed indicated poor representation of women, employees below 26 and above 46 years of age and staff at the administrative level and lower. Although the sample size was relatively small to definitively conclude whether this is a true reflection of the intrapreneurship practices in the public service, this information does point to a key area of consideration when intrapreneurship is fostered in the public service. This is more important in the country context of South Africa, whose history is rooted in segregation practices. The past practices cannot be reinforced in new ways in what is now a country underpinned by democratic values that include the value of inclusion.

Theme 5: The Role of the Centre for Public Service Innovation

The CPSI plays a critical role in fostering intrapreneurship in the public service. Based on the findings, the role of the CPSI in the fostering of intrapreneurship in the public service can be summarised as encouraging the generation of ideas, testing, piloting, replicating and scaling innovative solutions, facilitating learning and knowledge sharing, and research and development. This support offered by the CPSI to innovators ensures that the majority of the risk of failure is borne by the CPSI, as the costs of developing, testing and piloting solutions are seemingly borne by the CPSI. However, as mentioned in the findings, the CPSI still lacks the authority to enforce the implementation of their unearthed solutions. This could discourage intrapreneurship if intrapreneurs perceive their efforts as pointless due to their solutions not being implemented. Therefore, greater support for the CPSI's mandate at a political and policy level is required to ensure that their efforts are not in vain.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This article argued that the fostering of intrapreneurship in the South African public service is of great importance to enhance public service effectiveness and efficiency in response to the myriad of socio-economic issues experienced in the country. In this context, it was revealed that the contemporary South African Government has drawn its focus towards innovation in the public service and has, in this instance, identified public servants as a key source of innovation, due to their first-hand experience and intricate knowledge of public service

systems and processes. However, previous studies on the promotion of intrapreneurship in the South African public service revealed challenges in the establishment of an enabling environment for this to take place. The nature of these challenges was clarified through the article's empirical study, in which engagement with the senior managers of the CPSI, a public service institution established to promote the culture and practice of innovation in the public service, was sought. Public servants who have produced and implemented innovations in the public service (intrapreneurs) were also engaged so as to review their experiences.

The findings from this engagement ultimately reveal several barriers to intrapreneurship in the public service, including poor management support, poor political and policy support and the lack of sufficient funding. It was also revealed that although the CPSI has been established to actualise the government's communicated innovation mandate, the institution itself lacks a sufficient enabling environment to effectively support innovations by public servants. To mitigate these challenges, it is recommended that a comprehensive framework for fostering intrapreneurship in the South African public service be developed collaboratively by the key role players and stakeholders of the South African public service's innovation agenda. This framework will enable the South African government to better plan and coordinate its overall approach to fostering intrapreneurship in the public service.

In addition, there is evidently a need for the redefinition of the norms and standards of the South African public service to ensure the establishment of an enabling

environment for intrapreneurship to take place at both the policy-making and bureaucratic management level. This will need to be driven by the Minister for Public Service and Administration, as the Public Service Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 30 of 2007) charges the minister with the responsibility to establish the norms and standards of the public service. Lastly, to enhance management support for intrapreneurship in the public service, it is recommended that public service leaders, at both bureaucratic and political levels, undergo mandatory training on innovation management in the public service in line with the government focus on promoting innovation. Further research that contextualises the practice of intrapreneurship into the Leadership Theory is necessary, as the results of this study indicate the centrality of leadership support in enabling intrapreneurship in the public service.

Given that this study employed a qualitative research approach, the research population consisted of a small number of respondents. Further research using a quantitative approach to survey a much larger pool of intrapreneurs to obtain a broader view of the country's intrapreneurial landscape may be beneficial in providing a more extensive exploration of the experiences of intrapreneurs. Further research is also required to explore the applicability of some of the approaches to fostering innovation mentioned by the OECD in the South African context, such as targeted rule exemptions, flexible budgetary processes and HRM reforms. It is, therefore, believed that this article's findings and recommendations will be useful to the efforts of public service leaders, especially in the African context, in fostering intrapreneurship in the public service.

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