

A DECADE OF TRANSFORMATION: AN OVERVIEW

C. Thornhill
School of Public Management and Administration
University of Pretoria

ABSTRACT

South Africa entered a totally new era with the advent of the democratic elections of April 1994. The effects were visible in the composition of the state, the departments as well as the diversification of service delivery to all inhabitants irrespective of race, colour or creed. The invisible effects happened and are still happening inside the public institutions on all three spheres of government. These effects relate to the administrative and managerial practices that were devised to cope with the increased demand for quality services, but acknowledging the limited resources available. This review of the transformation after a decade of democratic government attempts to highlight and evaluate the successes and the challenges faced by public institutions within a new constitutional dispensation.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the interim *Republic of South Africa Constitution Act, 1993* (Act 200 of 1993), superseded by the current *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*, placed the South African public service before its biggest challenges since unification in 1910. This is not only due to the fact that the first fully democratically elected Parliament has been established, but also as a result of the complex nature of the contemporary state that had to reconsider its new purpose and role in society. This has to be undertaken within the guidelines provided in the Constitution and the policy directives supplied by the Government of National Unity.

The rhetorical question on whether public service reform is a probability has to be considered within the framework of two ostensibly opposing forces. On the one hand any newly established government wishes to reform the public service in an effort to provide the most effective and efficient service to the society it serves. On the other hand an existing public service wishes to ensure that every action could be accounted for according to the time tested principles and practices of public administration and management.

The aspirations of government and the requirements to realize it, are quite clear from the following quote of ES Savas

The word government is derived from the Greek word meaning steer. Government should steer the boat. Its task is not to row the boat. Delivering services is rowing and Government is not very good at rowing (Quoted by Osborne and Gaebler, 1992: 25)

The public service will be required to make a paradigm shift to meet the demands of a society clamouring for visible change in their quality of life. Failure to demonstrate that constitutional reform has resulted in the improvement of services, could have a devastating effect on the economic, political and social future of South Africa. Therefore, it is imperative to consider what is required to attain public service reform and also to investigate what factors could inhibit reform. These issues will be discussed by considering the experiences of various African countries and relating them to the South Africa to indicate the continent's interrelatedness.

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

For decades South Africa considered itself to be part of the so-called first world with strong European connections. This may be partly due to historical links with the colonial powers and the Westminster system of government adopted by the former colonies, which later formed the Union of South Africa. It slowly dawned that Cecil John Rhodes' dictum "Your hinterland lies yonder" i.e. the rest of Africa, may have been more appropriate than originally acknowledged by South African statesmen.

Considering South Africa's geographical location, human resource composition, climate and even political and social characteristics, it is indeed part of Africa. This is acknowledged in the Reconstruction and Development Programme stating that South Africa's neighbours have to be taken into consideration in its development of the economy (RDP, 1994:11). The transition to a fully democratized state should, therefore, be considered within an African context, although a number of peculiar characteristics, which distinguishes the present Republic of South Africa from many of its African neighbours, have to be taken into consideration.

Many African countries gained their independence from Great Britain while a smaller number were under e.g. French, Dutch, German and Belgian rule. After independence each country had to develop its own custom-made political and administrative structures to meet the demands of their respective communities. However, it should be emphasized that many countries suffered from internecine civil war, interrupted public services after independence and a partial(or total) collapse of structured governmental institutions. It is, therefore, justified to determine whether other African countries developed distinctive administrative structures after independence (Jones, 1988:481). Should it be found that the reform did not result in efficient and effective administrative structures, the reasons would have to be carefully considered in order to learn from their respective transitional experiences.

The unique characteristics of each African state may make it impossible to identify an African approach to public administration in general. This possibility is borne out by Ahiazu's argument that "(i)t's becoming increasingly widely accepted among social scientists, especially managerial and organization theorists, that patterns of management and employee behavior at the workplace are largely culture bound" (quoted in Jones, 1988:482). This issue is highlighted in the Commission for Africa's Report entitled: *Our Common Interest* with the statement that culture is more than religion, literature and music, but is about shared patterns of identity, symbolic meaning, aspiration and about the relationships between individuals and groups within that society (Commission for Africa, 2005. 114). The Report also contends that the clash in contemporary Africa is not between tradition and modernity, but between different paths and conceptions of modernity. (*Ibid.*, 117). Therefore, it could be argued that culture could be critical of what it had inherited and could result in internal conflict within a community. Thus not all aspects of culture are necessarily positive (*loc. cit.*). In Africa, the traditional systems that existed prior to colonialism were not static. It evolved over long periods of time and ultimately may even have revealed some characteristics of more contemporary systems such as land ownership and legal systems. This is to be expected if it is borne in mind that Africa is home to 700 to 800 million people in 50 states. The importance of culture has also been acknowledged by the African Union and in the NEPAD initiative. Therefore, in considering the transformation of the South African public service and the administrative and managerial systems culture should be taken into account as the current practices have historical, political and cultural antecedents.

Most African countries had to contend with the problem of deeply divided communities, which had to be united after independence. Most African leaders, therefore, embarked on nation building as a first priority, which resulted in less emphasis on democratic ideals (Jones and Blunt, 1993:1753). A second characteristic of African countries, identified by Jones and Blunt, is that control is usually emphasized rather than output or performance (1993:1753). A third characteristic of African countries after independence is the tendency to overstaffing, but with a distrust of professionals in the public service (Jones & Blunt, 1993:1753). These issues have to be borne in mind to determine to what extent these experiences could have an impact on the South African public service. Particular attention will be paid to the different issues that could have an influence on the reform of the existing South African public service on all three spheres of government. This is indeed obvious in municipalities where lack of service delivery is often attributed to lack of professional personnel to develop and maintain infrastructure.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

African countries rely heavily on agriculture, but is prone to the whims of nature and the occurrence of lengthy droughts. The continent is experiencing environmental degradation such as deforestation, desertification, declining soil productivity, loss of biodiversity and the depletion of fresh water. (Commission for Africa, 2005.104). These characteristics have a decisive influence on the development of African countries and

their policies. Irrespective of the geographical location of the Republic of South Africa in Africa, it also reveals the characteristics of any contemporary state. Thus it has to perform a variety of complex functions while operating in rapidly changing environments. Their responsibility to transform and to improve the quantity and quality of public services determined by the customers who want high quality and a choice of services (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992:16).

Efforts regarding reform should be aimed at ensuring that complex services are rendered more efficiently, but without neglecting the need to honour democratic principles. However, the apparent inability to transform is often not due to an unwillingness to change but rather due to the very nature of government. Even John Maynard Keynes noted that the difficulty does not lie so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones (quoted in Osborne and Gaebler, 1992:23).

The Republic of South Africa has been struggling with the dilemma of breaking the bonds with the past through a new Constitution and a new Government. Simultaneously it has to meet the demands of contemporary society as is the case with any stable and well-established democratic state with well developed infrastructure and a diversified economy.

TRANSFORM OR REFORM

Transform means a change in form, in outward appearance, in character and in disposition (Concise Oxford Dictionary). Briefly stated, *reform* refers to the process or procedure of becoming better by removing or abandoning imperfections, faults or errors. Should this be related to constitutional and public service in South Africa after the democratic elections of 1994, it could be argued that the total system of government and administration had been transformed, not merely reformed. Firstly the composition of the state has been transformed into one sovereign state (Section 1, *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* 1996). This significant transformation from a fragmented apartheid based state consisting of four so-called independent states and six self-governing areas into the current unitary type of state requires that particular attention be devoted to *inter alia* policy making processes, organizational structures, human resource matters as well as managerial issues. Perhaps one of the most important matters to be considered, is the need for an ethical change towards governmental, administrative and managerial matters to ensure that all services are provided to promote the welfare of all communities in the South African society.

It could be argued that institutional and procedural changes could be developed and implemented with relative ease as a basic administrative infrastructure existed prior to 1994. However, the former system was fraught with inconsistencies. The result was that the policies contained in *inter alia* labour legislation and other policy statements could, in many cases, not be used as reference points of new policies and practices. At the root of reform and transformation are the requirements for acknowledgement of the rights as contained in the constitutional *Bill of Rights*. To achieve this major change, was particularly difficult for some officials from the previous dispensation as a new value system had

to be developed and adhered to. The new entrants had to learn that the public service exists for the benefit of society and not for the sake of family members and friends. Thus, transformation was not only required in the composition of public institutions, but also in the values underlying the administrative and managerial practices.

No magic formula is available to obtain effective transformation from one system to another. No simple technological advancement would guarantee success. Jones and Blunt argue that "(m)any organizational efforts fail because their effect on the human subsystem are not properly managed" (Jones & Blunt, 1993:1742). This may be one of the reasons why Mutahaba *et al.* came to the conclusion, after investigating various African countries, that they still revealed the same problems they inherited at independence (1993:8). In some cases the public services were even weaker than the colonial structures that existed prior to independence.

South Africa was not required to change from a pure colonial system to a post-independent state. It was, however, required to change from a fragmented, apartheid based, system to a fully democratized and re-integrated state. No less than eleven public services have to be re-integrated meaning that individuals and public services, which had developed their own public sector values, had to be reformed.

One of the dangers of reform is that it is often undertaken as a matter of great urgency. This could imply that insufficient research is done on goals, resources and organizational structures. Furthermore, Mutahaba *et al.* also found that few African countries reorientated their administrative systems after independence to accommodate their cultural proclivities. It was simply accepted that the cultural proclivities would adjust to meet the demands of the reformed administration (1993:13). Clearly this approach will not necessarily result in effective and sustainable administrative and managerial reform. A new system does occur in a once-for-all change to achieve a predefined model. It is a continuous developmental process of building new capacities to meet new challenges (Metcalf: Opening address, 1991:19).

Transformation could be considered as a once-off phenomenon, whereas reform should be a continuous process, the latter also has a starting point but continues as long as a need for change continues. One such starting point could be to establish whether the locus or the focus of the public administration should receive attention (Henry, 1975:7). This for example could imply determining in this particular case what the focus of public administration and management should be. This becomes increasingly important as society is demanding a wider range of public services and more access to decision making processes. Les Metcalf argues in this regard that as the dividing lines between the private and the public sectors have become rather blurred, the locus of the public sector or in particular public administration as a starting point for reform may be ineffective (1991:20). However, using the focus as the point of departure for reform, makes it possible to diagnose administrative and managerial deficiencies and to develop alternative solutions to deal with the various matters in a restructured constitutional dispensation.

It is obvious that an effective and efficient administrative system for the Republic of South Africa should have commenced with a transformation of the previous system, rather than only reforming administrative and managerial practices. (*cf.* Metcalf, 1991:24). This

approach followed by the democratic government that assumed power in April 1994 was aimed at increasing the capacity of the public service to deal with the increased demand for non-discriminatory service rendering to all members of society. It actually implied entering a learning curve enabling the public sector to adapt to continuous changing circumstances. Burns argues in this regard that administrative reform has a logic of its own (Burns, 1994:251). This logic may not always be administratively arguable, political considerations and societal values may be the decisive factors.

Considering the abovementioned arguments it could be stated that the South African system of public administration and management were indeed required to transform. The newly established public sector on all three spheres of government had to adopt a new form, accept new responsibilities and had to adhere to a new democratic dispensation (based on equality and accountability).

ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES

The public sector reflects a particular aspect of society's cultural characteristics. Whorton and Worthley (1981:358) however, maintain that the public sector reveals a paradox, requiring on the one hand structures to be responsive to the high ideals and aspirations required of the public sector through innovative actions. On the other hand, representing a more negative force, is the usual requirement of accountability, reporting and limited powers of the executive institutions. The Public Service Commission, in its *State of the Public Service Report, 2005* (30) clearly highlights this latter requirement by stating that "The key challenge for the public service posed by the pursuit of this principle (that public administration must be accountable) is ensuring clear knowledge of who is responsible for what at any stage of policy formulation, implementation and execution and where the buck stops".

In organizational settings, the positive force emanates from the political office bearers. In the case of South Africa these would be mainly political office bearers of the Government on all three spheres of government. The administrative and managerial actions have to be aimed at achieving the goals as contained in all policy documents such as legislation, white papers and ministerial speeches through a public service "capable of and committed to the implementation of the policies of the government and the delivery of basic goods and services" (RDP, 1994:126). The actions required, should be implemented as without delay to illustrate that the Government can indeed satisfy the needs of society by eradicating backlogs in services and improving the quality of life of historically disadvantaged communities. This possible delay in proving implementation of policies could be one of the major reasons for the unrest in many municipalities during the last quarter of 2005. It appears as though frustration may be fuelling some civic associations to take to the streets to voice their interpretation of the the reasons for the lack of progress in the provision of basic services.

Simultaneously the public service has to comply with the spirit of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* by *inter alia* ensuring that

- maladministration, abuse or unjustifiable exercise of power or unfair, capricious, discourteous or other improper conduct do not occurs

- no undue delay by a person performing a public function or improper or dishonest act, or omission or corruption with respect to public money could be identified
- fundamental rights are honoured in all public sector policies and actions
- public accountability is maintained in all decisions and actions by political office bearers and appointed officials

The public sector's organizational units have to perform satisfactorily during a period of rapid and intensive transformation. Inability to meet the demands of the reformed South Africa, would probably damage the image of the public sector as the provider of services. This in turn would put Government in an invidious position. The ANC alliance government has been elected to change South Africa in the political, economic and social areas. However, it has to rely on a public service operating in a transparent manner and able to justify each decision, process, action and result. This required the introduction and the maintenance of an administrative system that is responsive to societal needs. This requirement in turn demands the public service to be developmental oriented as is considered to be one of the challenges facing the public service after a decade of democratic government (Public Service Commission, 2005. 19)

Efforts to transform organizational structures to meet the demands of a reformed constitutional dispensation, had to heed the complexities of the public sector. Western styled structures developed under Western cultures have different roots than those acceptable in African countries. In this regard the remark by Schein (quoted in Jones & Blunt, 1993:1736) that "cultures, once in place, is an inherently conservative force" strengthens the view that organizational cultures are difficult to change. This argument is borne out by the Commission for Africa in their report entitled *Our Common Interest* (2005. 123) with the statement that a real danger could develop if there is a lack of attention to culture in policy-making alongside other cultural shocks such as HIV and AIDS This situation clearly indicates the need to infuse new approaches into organizational structures to facilitate the development of a new public sector culture that accommodates the diverse cultures within South Africa.. Organizational change involves, therefore, more complicated processes than a mere restructuring of posts and renaming of government departments.

An organizational structure is a particular form of life. If it is to change, its genes have to be rearranged to reveal different characteristics. This truly is, as is the case in the biological sciences, an extremely complex process. In the case of the social sciences, such as Public Administration, the involvement of human beings exacerbates the complexities.

Too rapid change of organizational structures could result in culture shock. This would result in structures not able to accommodate the new demands. It must be emphasized that individuals within organizations are often subject to societal pressures, traditions and outlook on life in general. This appears to apply particularly to African countries. Montgomery (quoted in Jones & Blunt, 1993:1751) even remarks that African administrations are the most difficult setting to be found and are "very resistant to change". South Africa is no exception to the rule. Even after ten years of democratic government it still appears as though some public institutions still act in a bureaucratic manner. This may even be a reason for the non delivery of essential services.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Every government, on assuming office, usually states that it would strive towards a smaller more effective public service. This, however, seldom happens as Mascarenhas argues that any nation's public service reflects its historical evolution (1993:321). Namibia as a case in point, is plagued by a proliferation of activities, overlapping, duplication of activities as well as poor co-ordination. (Commonwealth Fund, 1992:9). In a similar manner, Mutahaba *et al.* found that many African countries experienced an increase in their public services after independence, the annual growth rate of 5 % exceeded the growth in the GDP and GDP per capita. In the period 1975 to 1983 the Ghanaian and Nigerian public services increased by 15 % per annum while the Malawian public service increased by 7,9 % during the same period. Namibia's public service increased from 46 000 in 1988 to 54 000 in 1991 (United Nations, 1991:3). The size of the Public Service in South Africa after democratization is difficult to compare to the size before 1994 due to the development of agencies which operate in the public sector and whose employees are not identified as public servants. The development of public-private partnerships has also contributed to the decrease in the number of public servants, but still involves services rendered indirectly by the public sector and which implies remuneration for which the public sector partly accepts responsibility.

Researchers offer various possible explanations for this increase in the public service. The Rationalisation Review Committee, appointed to investigate the Namibian public service after independence, related the increase to inefficiency and dysfunctional performance, which is directly related to fruitless expenditure (1992:1). In some countries committees investigating the public service, found it impossible to establish the exact number of public servants employed in the public sector. In the case of Namibia the Office of the Prime Minister spent 18 months to complete this exercise, but even then proposed a physical head count in an effort to eradicate so-called ghosts from the payroll (Rationalisation Review Committee, 1992:21). In South Africa the inability to provide public services is often attributed to lack of capacity and the high incidence of vacant posts that cannot be filled in especially the professional careers. The Commission for Africa reiterates this phenomenon as typical of African countries (2005. 130)

During an investigation into developments in various Western African countries after independence, Harris (1965:312) found that the newly elected governments were assisted by managerial staff who were not only insufficient to deal with public sector matters, but were also ill-prepared for the new demands facing the public sector. As a result governments were not able to effectively manage the reform process, or its resources or to obtain well-researched and scientifically based policy advice.

One of the crucial requirements in any state during a period of transformation is adaptability. Its public servants in the managerial echelons should be particularly adaptive to manage during a period of uncertainty. The managers should, therefore, be innovative and able to meet the increasing demands of the liberated society. Public servants, especially in the managerial echelons, should thus combine the need for visionary actions with the

principles underlying public administration Even in the case of South Africa ten years into democracy does not imply that uncertainty has abated. Ten years in the life of a public sector is relatively short and new demands are continuously encountered e.g. the demands by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) for the provision of antiretroviral drugs for HIV/AIDS patients in spite of the high financial implications for the state or the demand for improved municipal service delivery in spite of the continued practice non-payment of municipal accounts by some ratepayers.

Harris found that in the case of five English speaking African countries and nine French speaking African countries, the public servants tended to expand their roles considerably after independence (Harris, 1965: 308). In one party states however, the policy advice of public servants decreased dramatically. Thus politicians acted without the support of the officials. The situation even led to clashes between politicians and officials in the managerial echelons which, were detrimental to effectiveness and efficiency (Harris, 1965:309). The apparent reluctance of the politicians to obtain advice from the appointed public servants is partly ascribed to underdeveloped capacities for policy formulation (Mutahaba, *et al.* 1991:25). However, it appears to be the case that politicians and their senior policy advisors- the heads of department – sometimes clash on policy issues due to political differences as happened in the Department of Home Affairs under a former Minister and his Director-General .The situation is often aggravated by an increase in activities undertaken by new governments, thus spreading the policy advice capacities even thinner (Mutahaba, *et al.* (1991:32).

Considering the limited examples quoted, it should be obvious that careful attention should be paid not only to the size of the public service required to manage and give effect to governmental policy directives. It is equally important to ensure that the managerial echelon retains or develops the capacity required to advise government on all the administrative and managerial implications of its policy proposals. The need for properly trained and experienced public managers cannot be overemphasized in this regard.

PERFORMANCE

Bearing in mind the nature and characteristics of the organizational structures, capacities of the public service and the need for transformed service rendering, the quality of the performance of the public sector in African countries require attention. A disturbing note was sounded by Adamolekun who found that in many African countries the standard of the public services declined so significantly that it hampered development, especially as developmental policies were inadequately articulated or half-heartedly implemented, or both (1983:174). Even in the Commission for Africa's report the need for the improvement of service delivery has been highlighted as a primary requirement for Africa's development (2005. 175)

It is a well-known fact that the public service is the vehicle to implement policy directives. African countries as well as other developing countries indicate that the capacity to bring policies to fruition is often lacking. The inability to improve its performance prevents such countries from realizing their goals. It is clear that the performance of the public sec-

tor should receive urgent attention in any state after obtaining independence or aiming at achieving other democratic goals as was the case in South Africa after 1994.

Inability to perform satisfactorily can be ascribed to a number of reasons. Mutahaba *et al.* (1991:16) are of the opinion that the declining level of resources considerably contributes to this state of affairs. He puts forward the following arguments to explain the decline.

- Financial resources tend to decline as a result of escalating expenditure following Government's commitment to development. This depresses the scale of economic activity, which in turn has an adverse effect on the tax base. Poorly managed tax administration, poor systems of tax collection and inadequate information lead to tax evasion compounding the problem.
- Human resources may appear to be adequate or even in oversupply in most African countries. Most countries, however, were unsuccessful in obtaining the skilled human resources required for development. In many cases the level of productivity decreased and a "brain drain" to other sectors contributed to insufficient human resources available in the crucial transformation process.
- Inadequate or inappropriate administrative technological resources, partly due to out-moded technology inherited by newly independent states also inhibited the efforts to improve the performance.
- Declining productivity resulted from the abovementioned negative factors.

The experience in South Africa after 1994 cannot be related directly to all the examples quoted above. In the first place there had indeed been a large increase in the revenue collected internally by the South African Revenue Services. The amount collected annually in fact regularly exceeds the anticipated amount. The budget of expenditure annually shows a marginal shortfall. Thus, as far as state finance is concerned, South Africa did not follow the route of most of the other African countries. The human resource issue is definitely a matter of concern. Although there is no indication of a shortage of human resources, the indications are clear that there is a lack of capacity. This implies that the appointed officials may lack the administrative and managerial skills to implement government policies. This matter becomes of real importance if it is borne in mind that the South African Parliament passed some 700 pieces of legislation in the period 1994 to 2004. As these acts usually represent new policies it is obvious that highly qualified and skilled senior officials are required to manage the implementation of these policies. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case as various cases are cited where lack of capacity (implying managerial capacity) are mentioned as the primary causes for lack of service delivery and mismanagement. South African technology is of world class, but in some rural areas public officials do not have access to the Internet or even to ordinary computer facilities. In the latter case, technology needs to be improved. However, in relation to many African countries South Africa succeeds in keeping in pace with the Western world as far as technology is concerned. Productivity is an area of concern in South Africa. Government is currently devoting specific attention to the matter and Ministers and the President are engaging themselves in *izimbizos* (discussions with interest groups/ communities) on issues con-

cerning the quality of service delivery. The possibility of low productivity as a reason for the lack of service delivery also receives attention. Thus, it seems as though Government is intent on improving the quality of public service delivery.

Performance is directly related to competence. In most countries the low level of competence has been ascribed to (Mutahaba, *et al.* 1991:2)

- insufficient preparation of the public service to cope with the new demands of a newly elected government; and
- an increase in the role government wishes to play with a concomitant increased demand for competency.

It is often argued that the standard of measuring performance in the private and the public sectors should be similar. Osborne and Gaebler (1992:20) argue that performance in the public sector is mainly based on whether results please the politicians. The politicians in turn act or react to public opinion. Thus interest group opinion forms part of every equation that compares input to output.

Democracy is at the heart of most contemporary states. This however, does not automatically foster high performance. Decisions may take long to become apparent. Similarly, all executive actions have to be publicly justifiable which may require more explicit processes and procedures. This does not justify inordinate delays in decision-making or project implementation, but it sounds a warning that in spite of democracy, and the requirement for transparency and accountability, government should demand the highest possible level of performance. In this regard it should be mentioned that public accountability is one of the most important cornerstones of democracy. South Africa has number of constitutional institutions focusing on public accountability (Chapter 9, *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*), e.g. the Public Protector, Human Rights Commission, Commission for Gender Equality, Auditor- General and the Independent Authority to Regulate Broadcasting. The experience concerning these institutions as well as those of other regulating bodies that have been established, suggest that they tend to guard their independence and that their rulings are mostly objective and without fear or favour.

TRAINING

An extensive description was provided to illustrate the nature and characteristics of the public services in various countries after independence. The question now to be considered is: What has been done in South Africa? Is it possible for South Africa to escape the problems many other African countries experienced after independence?

To find an answer to these questions, attention could be devoted to the role of training of public servants in particular. However, it should be stated emphatically that training is not a panacea. It cannot solve all the problems experienced in South Africa and other formerly colonised African states, but it could undoubtedly make a significant contribution towards satisfying the human resource requirements of a democratized government aiming its policies at improving the living conditions of all members of society in a non-discriminatory manner.

If it is accepted that training is an important component required to obtain an efficient and effective public service, capable of meeting the demands of society, attention has to be given to the contents, methods of and approaches to training programmes.

Various possibilities regarding the training needs of a non-discriminatory established public service should be considered. One approach would be to emphasize the skills required by all public servants to deal with the new demands of the public service. This approach would ensure that all employees would be able to perform all the administrative and managerial as well as functional activities to effect policy directives efficiently and effectively.

A second approach to the general training requirements of the public sector could be to emphasize the principles and ethos underlying the public administration, which is one of the crucial building blocks of the public sector. This approach would ensure that all public servants would honour the values of the public service and satisfy the general expectations of society regarding public service operations.

The deduction should immediately be made that no singular approach would guarantee an efficient and effective public service. A combination of the abovementioned approaches would perhaps be more appropriate. However, the weight attached to each of the components should be carefully considered. Arguing from a public administrative point of view, it could be stated that the managerial echelon of the public service provides the guidelines to employees responsible for the functional activities and has to relate these to governmental philosophies and policies.

If the managerial echelon of the public service is equipped with the knowledge and the principles of Public Administration it could succeed in ensuring that the other conditions are met. Jones and Blunt (1993 :756) correctly argue that although a number of issues regarding training are important, the most significant is the ability to learn. This statement implies that skills may become outdated, but the ability should be instilled in the public service to learn from experience and to adapt. This however, can only be done if the leaders in the public service, i.e. the managerial echelon are fully conversant with the principles underlying the public sector. The dictum: "You must have the ability to make something to be able to maintain it" has never been more relevant than in the case of the system of public administration.

The South African government has adopted various policies to improve the quality of the public service as well as the skills required by employees in the so-called private sector, e.g. the *Skills Development Act, 1998* (Act 97 of 1998) that makes provision for *inter alia* a National Skills Authority, Sector Education and Training Authorities learnerships and skills programmes. The *Skills Development Levies Act, 1999* (Act 9 of 1999) was passed to provide for a mechanism to finance the training programmes. This latter Act requires of employers to contribute a specific percentage of their salary budgets to the Training Fund (Section 3 of Act 9 of 1999). Incentives are also provided to encourage employers to release their personnel to participate in training programmes.

As far as the training system is concerned, South Africa seems to be on the right track. However, a serious shortcoming in the current practices is the lack of evaluating the results of the various training facilities. Gerda van Dijk conclude in a recent doctoral thesis on training in the public sector that "(E)valuation seems to be the missing link in training

and development of human resources---“ G van Dijk, 2003. 225). She also indicated that “(D)ue to lack of evaluation, employees are sent on training courses that do not satisfy their own individual needs but might satisfy departmental training priorities”(Loc. cit). Thus it could be argued that in spite of the extensive provisions for training the results may be partly ineffective if the training programmes are not evaluated. This may even be one of the primary reasons for the criticism against public institutions that lack of capacity is the reason for non delivery of services. Thus, although various programmes are undertaken, the specific training needs of the respective employees are not addressed. It is obvious that particular attention should be devoted, not only to select suitable candidates for training, but also to evaluate the effects of training on the performance of the particular trainees.

CONCLUSION

It may appear as though the arguments forwarded do not address the question posed at the outset, viz: Has the South African public service reform initiatives been successful? The examples quoted from African countries, seem to indicate that the public administration in all countries deteriorated significantly after independence. The number of officials increased disproportionately to economic growth, services deteriorated and performance declined. As South Africa is part of Africa, what makes it different and more susceptible to benefit from the learning curve in a democratized country?

The results of the transition from an apartheid state to a democratically constituted state seem to be positive, if measured against African states. The public services are being delivered. There are no major obstacles and to a large extent the inequalities of the past are addressed or have already been eradicated. However, if South Africa is to be compared to contemporary industrialized Western countries, much still has to be achieved. The occurrence of unethical conduct by politicians and officials are relatively high; the quality of service delivery are questioned by various communities who ordinarily supports government and the objectivity of discretionary decisions by senior officials are often questioned.

It could be argued that South Africa indeed did transform itself, but that particular matters related to ethical issues still need attention and should remain an the agenda. One of the most encouraging characteristics of contemporary South Africa is the high value South Africans attach to the Constitution, which is the supreme law of the country. As long as society and government adhere to the lofty principles contained in this document South Africa will maintain its democratic system of government and society will reap the benefits it is entitled to.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- African National Congress. *The Reconstruction and Development Programme*. ANC, Johannesburg, 1994.
- Bourgault, J., Dion, S. & Lemay, M. Creating a corporate culture. *The Canadian Federal Government Public Administration Review*, 53(1) January/February, 1993.

- Burns, J.P. Administrative reform in a changing political environment: the case of Hong Kong. *Public Administration and Development*, 14:3, August 1994.
- Commission for Africa. 2005. *Our common vision*. Report of the Commission for Africa. The commission.
- Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation: Public Service Reorganisation and Rationalisation Project, Final Report (Republic of Namibia, July, 1992).
- Harris, R.L. The role of the civil servant in West Africa. *Public Administration Review*, XXV:4, December 1965.
- Henry, N. *Public administration and public affairs*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1975, 1980.
- Jones, M. Managerial thinking: an African perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25:5, September 1988.
- Jones, M. & Blunt, P. Organizational development and change in Africa. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 16: 11, 1993.
- Lloyd, S. Etheredge. Thinking about government learning. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25:5, September 1988.
- Mascarenhas, R.C. Building an entire culture in the public sector: reform of the public sector in Australia, Britain and New Zealand. *Public Administration Review*, 58:4, July/August 1993.
- Metcalf, L. Public Management: from Imitation to innovation. International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration, 1991, Brussels (Edited by Joan Corkerey).
- Mutahaba, G., Balgoni, R. & Halfani, M. *Vitalizing African Public Administration for Recovery and Development*. United Nations, Connecticut, 1993.
- Adamolekun, L. *Public Administration: a Nigerian and comparative perspective*. Longman, London, 1983.
- Osborne, D. & Gaebler, T. *Reinventing government: how the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector*. Penguin Books, New York, 1992.
- Republic of Namibia. *Public Service Commission*. Annual Report, 21 March 1 990 to 31 December 1991.
- Republic of Namibia. *Rationalisation of the Public Service*, Part 1. Main Report, 30 November 1992.
- Republic of South Africa. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* 1996.
- Republic of South Africa. *Employment Equity Act*, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998).
- Republic of South Africa. *Skills Development Act*, 1998 (Act 97 of 1998).
- Republic of South Africa. *Skills Development Levies Act*, 1999 (Act 9 of 1999).
- Republic of South Africa, Public Service Commission. 2005. *State of the Public Service Report*. Pretoria. The Commission.
- Steel, B.S., Davenport, S. & Warner, R.L. Are civil servants really public servants? A study of bureaucratic attitudes in the US, Brazil and Korea. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 16 (3), 1993.
- Strauss, B.W. Malawi's path as an emerging nation. *Public Administration Review*, XXIV: 3, September 1964.

- United Nations Development Programme. Project of the Republic of Namibia: Project Revision, 13 September 1991.
- Van Dijk, H. G. 2003. *Critical issues impacting on skills development in the Department of Public Service and Administration: trends and options*. Unpublished D. Phil thesis. Pretoria. University of Pretoria.
- Whorton, & Morthley, J.A. A perspective on the challenge of public management: environmental paradox and organizational culture. *Academy of Management Review*, 6:3, 1981.