

## Governance Leadership in the Public Service in South Africa: Reasons and Consequences

**Dr Solly Magalefa.**

Governance and Political Transformation

University of the Free State

[solmagalefa63469@gmail.com](mailto:solmagalefa63469@gmail.com)

**Dr Tania Coetzee**

Governance and Political Transformation,

University of the Free State

[coetzeet@ufs.ac.za](mailto:coetzeet@ufs.ac.za)

### **Abstract**

*At the core of South Africa's challenges lies political interference, coupled with ineffective and corrupt leadership within the public service. The article analyses the reasons for and the consequences of leadership of governance in the public service in South Africa. The challenges of leadership, poor service delivery, resultant protests and violent demonstrations, and corruption should be thoroughly investigated. This article, based on qualitative desktop research with a deductive approach, examines the nature and extent of political and administrative relationships in the public service. It establishes the extent to which political influence and the cadre deployment policy influence effective and efficient public services, and consequently, the delivery of quality services to the citizenry. The reasons for poor service delivery include poor governance, leadership, and performance issues stemming from incapacity, as well as an inadequate political and administrative interface, which have a negative impact and result in corruption and service delivery protests. The research suggests that for efficiency, the public service in South Africa should be professionalised. Appointments in the public service should be made on merit, not based on political beliefs or allegiances. The professionalisation of the public service is one of the key factors in resolving the status quo.*

**Keywords:** corruption, governance, leadership, public servants.

### **Introduction**

The impact of apartheid created a public service in South Africa that was not legitimate and representative. It lacked a democratic and developmental culture, as well as the capability to provide exceptional-quality services to the citizenry. The new administration was faced with the challenge of changing the mindset and culture of the public sector workforce to inculcate and firmly establish the principles of democracy enshrined in the 1996 Constitution. The said principles include integrity, accountability, transparency, accessibility and good governance. The challenge was also about instilling a culture in public servants to be professional and prudent in serving all South Africans, regardless of their diversity, without prejudice (Bekker, 2009).

Leadership and governance are rooted in the Constitution (1996). Leadership should ensure that appropriate strategies and policies are implemented to improve governance in the public service (Sindane, 2011). It would reduce maladministration and lead to a stable South African economy, resulting in improved livelihoods for the populace, especially those who were previously disadvantaged (Matshabaphala, 2015).

Political and administrative leadership in the South African government must comply with the provisions espoused in the Constitution. Therefore, adherence to the Constitution and other statutes is central to leadership and good governance, leading to equitable service delivery to the citizenry (Helao, 2015). However, South Africa faces a crisis of administrative woes because of incompetent leadership. This is evident in consecutive annual Auditor-General Reports, which consistently highlight the same weaknesses, including irregular, fruitless, and wasteful expenditure, as well as unauthorised expenditure. Nonetheless, leadership, because of a lack of political will or incompetence (in most instances), has failed to address these and other recurring challenges (PSC, 2009).

Government employees must abide by rules, regulations, and the Public Service Act, and conduct themselves in accordance with the statutes. Ramaite (2002, p.1) states that many government departments lack focus, which negatively impacts service delivery. Moreover, political and administrative leadership fail to communicate the government's vision to public servants, who lack the motivation to realise this vision.

Research has shown that there are public servants who are professional and committed to serving the citizenry with passion and excellence to better their lives (Matshabaphala, 2014, p. 202). Therefore, it is vital that political office bearers and the administrative leadership embody public service values and uphold the professional code of conduct, serving as role models for their subordinates (Matshabaphala, 2014, p. 202).

The principle of accountability stipulates that public servants are responsible to the citizenry in everything they do, including their decisions, actions, and omissions. In line with transparency, the decisions, actions, and omissions of public servants must be transparent, and the information related thereto must be available for scrutiny by the public they serve. Accountability and transparency are thus pivotal to the notion of good governance. Hence, democracy is impossible without the aforementioned (DPSA, 2011, p. 4).

The aim of this research was to critically examine the character and essence of governance leadership in the South African government service, with a focus on service delivery. In most of the Annual Reports by the Auditor-General, the oversight reports by the Public Service Commission (PSC), including other Chapter 9 institutions such as the Public Protector, leadership have been found wanting, and are deemed incapable, based on the outcomes of the unethical activities carried out by government officials under their watch (AGSA, 2018). The research thus sought to establish the essence of governance leadership in the public service.

The goal of this research was to investigate, critically examine, and assess governance leadership in the public sector in South Africa. Good governance requires capable political and administrative leadership, as well as improved systems. From the above, it can be said that the role of leadership and its fundamental nature in governance are crucial for delivering quality services and accomplishing the goals set by the government.

In accordance with the research problem, it was important to investigate the nature and extent of the relationship between the political and administrative wings in all three spheres of government. This included exploring the extent to which misconceptions or perceptions of the roles influenced capable governance leadership in the South African government service. The aim, therefore, was to analyse the plausible reasons causing the conflict or the lack of harmonious working relations in the sector, which added to the reasons for and consequences of ineffective governance leadership in the sector in South Africa.

The objectives of the research were:

- To provide a synopsis of governance leadership in the public service in South Africa, considering its effects on living standards, especially on the rank and file in South Africa.
- To explore the consequences of a lack of good governance in relation to South African society or its populace,
- To investigate and elucidate the results, as well as deduce governance leadership and its essence, dynamics and character in the public service (focusing on the reasons for and consequences of governance leadership in the sector in South Africa), and to present recommendations for the betterment and advancement of the lives of all South Africans in all levels of society.

## **Research Methodology**

The methodology adopted by the researcher was qualitative as the research sought to operationalise certain concepts to assess them. The qualitative approach is a rich and multifaceted phenomenon that involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Alexandre, 2007, p. 173). The researcher employed the interpretivist approach because human behaviour is complex; thus, it cannot be studied using probabilistic models, such as those employed by positivists.

In this research, the use of a descriptive approach enabled the researcher to describe leadership and its core in governance as a subject in the public service. Furthermore, the descriptive approach was employed to facilitate an in-depth analysis of the problem statement, aiming to develop new insights, with a specific emphasis on both political leadership and bureaucratic leadership (Siswana, 2007, p. 6). The research adopted an analytical-deductive approach, utilising general and established theories and concepts, including definitions, perspectives, and explanations, to describe the phenomenon of leadership and governance. The content analysis used documents related to governance leadership. Further information for this research was gathered through various secondary sources, including the Constitution (1996), Auditor-General Reports, PSC Reports, Public Protector Reports, and relevant academic literature. The literature included relevant books, published articles, journal articles, unpublished Master's dissertations and PhD theses, statutes and policy documents, as well as organisational reports and conference reports.

The following section of the article refers to a brief Conceptual and Theoretical Framework for Leadership and Governance. The section explores relevant theories of leadership and governance to provide an analysis and conceptual understanding of leadership theories and governance theories, the connections, and how leadership relates to governance. The section aims to demonstrate the importance of governance leadership in the public service and how it can lead to effective governance, ultimately enabling the public service to deliver high-quality services to the citizenry. It also outlines governance and good governance from a South African perspective, particularly in the context of the public service. The section further analyses the governance leadership factors that affect governance and their effects. Lastly, the findings, recommendations and value of the research are presented.

### ***Conceptualisation and theoretical background***

Leadership is one of the first concepts under scrutiny. It is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena globally. The quest for good leadership is therefore a sine qua non for governance and sustainable development (Afegbua & Adejuwon, 2012, p. 142). The Great Man Theory, popular in the 19th century, posits that leaders are outstanding individuals who possess innate or inborn abilities, predetermined to lead due to their evident qualities (Northouse, 2004). The Theory held the belief that a leader was different from ordinary people

in terms of aspirations, brainpower, and perseverance. Hence, the common saying that “Great men are born and not made”, as articulated by Daft (2008), Van Zyl and Dalglish (2009), and Rowe (2011, in Dube 2013, p.27).

Bass’ theory of leadership postulates that there are three basic ways to describe how people become leaders (Stogdill, 1989; Bass, 1990). The two basic ways explain the development of leadership for a few people, while the third one is the governing theory. The theories are as follows:

- 1) Trait Theory: It refers to when personality traits, conduct and behaviour lead people naturally into the roles of leadership.
- 2) Great Events Theory: It refers to when an important event or a crisis may cause an individual, who may be underrated, to take responsibility, thus bringing out the exceptional leadership expertise in the same person perceived as ordinary.
- 3) Transformational or Process Leadership Theory: This refers to when, at times, people decide to become leaders because they think they have the qualities of a leader. Others learn the mastery of leadership. The Transformational or Process Leadership Theory is currently the most widely accepted and popular theory in use.

The theories include the Trait Theory, Behavioural Theories, Contingency Theories, Transactional Leadership Theories, and Transformational Leadership Theories, along with their associated theories.

Leadership is defined as the ability to influence the will of the leader on those being led, thereby gaining compliance, respect, allegiance, and collaboration (Bass, 1990, p. 12). Thus, it is the unidirectional exerting of authority, and it is used as a device for modelling those led according to the will of the leader. It is also the course or process which directs the tasks of an organised group in its efforts, leading to goal setting and achieving such goals.

Zeitchik (2012) defines leadership as inspiring others in pursuit of the leader's vision within a set framework, until it becomes acceptable to all through mutual efforts, shared vision, and success towards the attainment of a common goal. Kruse (2013) refers to leadership as an undertaking of organised direction that maximises the energy of those led towards the attainment of a shared interest.

According to Matshabaphala (2015), leadership is defined as the conduct and behaviour that other people notice. This includes the behaviour in the handling of relationships with other people, in relation to ethics, which refers to the philosophical study of human behaviour. Northouse (2003:3) posits that leadership refers to a process whereby a person directs a group of individuals to achieve a common goal in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent.

Emanating from the various definitions of leadership, it can be concluded that leadership involves a process whereby one person exerts intentional influence over others who are followers, to direct, guide, structure, and facilitate the activities of an organisation or institution, as well as relationships within the said organisation. The above definitions share a common denominator in that the leader must have authority over those who must be led.

The next key concept to clarify is governance. Although the South African government has in place proper governance structures, government institutions in all three spheres of government lack vigorous policy implementation and accountability. Poor financial management and administration exacerbate this, while service delivery is also subpar.

While governance has various definitions, it is relevant for this research to use widely accepted definitions, some of which have been coined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In the context of this research, (good) governance practices denote the

best practices that are directed by accountability, transparency, the rule of law, and responsiveness from government agencies in all three spheres of government.

Schneider (2012, p.2) posits that governance is a complex concept. Different theories and approaches employ the concept in varying ways, and the term encompasses distinct concepts with distinct meanings. Governance is said to encompass many things, including a buzzword, a bridging concept, an umbrella concept, a descriptive concept, a theory, and a perspective (Schneider, 2012, p. 2). Theories of governance include the Network Management Theory, the Theories of Delegation, Social Interpretive Theories, the Policy Network Theory, which is based on mutual dependence, coordination, and pluralism, the Complexity Theory, and the Cultural Institutional Theory.

According to the UNDP (2006:78), any exposition of governance must demonstrate that the government is accountable to its own people regarding its standards and purpose. Governance encompasses the diverse practices, institutions, and activities that guide the application of power in government, the mechanisms by which citizens can voice their opinions and influence government decisions, and the processes by which public issues are addressed (Helao, 2015, p. 27).

Governance in government service refers to the coordinated administration and management of government institutions to deliver the services required by the citizenry (Helao, 2015, p. 32). This implies the effective governance of public goods and the prompt execution of government policies. Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012:145) view governance as the act and manner of managing public affairs. The Constitution (1996) and the country's laws provide the legal framework for governance.

As mentioned earlier, Levi-Faur (2013:151) states, "Governance is said to be many things", with no less than four meanings in the literature. These are a structure, a process, a mechanism, and a strategy. With respect to structure, governance denotes the framework of formal and informal institutions. Concerning a process, governance refers to the dynamics and guiding operations associated with the continuous activities of policymaking. Regarding a mechanism, governance refers to the organisational protocols for making decisions, adherence, and control. Concerning strategy, governance implies the work of all parties involved in the process to guide and influence the arrangement of organisations and systems, shaping choices and priorities.

Siswana (2007) posits that governance, lacking effective leadership, is futile because governance is a means to an end. That end is providing the populace with quality service delivery. This implies that leadership at all levels should have the responsibility of supporting governance to ensure that quality services are delivered. The leadership must further ensure that risks are managed effectively, while systems and internal controls are evaluated and monitored.

According to Botha (2005), governance and leadership are inextricably linked and function in an interrelated manner. Leadership drives governance to deliver the required results in accordance with established standards. As observed by Landis, Hill and Harvey (2014), governance is about leadership, on the one hand, while leadership is the key driving force behind governance, on the other hand. This means the strengths and weaknesses of leadership and governance complement each other mutually (Davila, 2012, p. 17). However, governance without visionary and accountable leadership can become ineffective and lack credibility (Othman & Rahman, 2014, p. 360).

According to Naidoo and Thani (2011:3), leadership challenges in the public sector in South Africa have immediate implications for the provision of services, which in turn have implications for governance. This led to service delivery protests and demonstrations, which escalated from one province to another (Sindane & Nambalirwa, 2012, pp. 695-696).

### **Evaluation and assessment of governance leadership in South Africa**

The research provided a general understanding of governance leadership in the public service in South Africa, considering its impact on living standards, particularly in grassroots communities across the country.

South African citizens have become increasingly aware of the malpractices in public service governance, which has resulted in distrust. The exposure of a series of scandals in the public service and in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the media and in official reports highlighted the need to address the discrepancies between the desired and actual levels of ethnic integrity, especially in public service leadership (Pillay, 2014, p. 29). This view is supported by Plaatjies (2013:218), who says that despite the professional conduct of senior management as leadership in the sector, their (leadership) adherence to line authority, mixed with them being politicised, implies that the public service is focused on serving upwards, instead of serving downwards towards the citizenry. This adverse situation prevalent in the sector displays leadership paralysis.

Accordingly, prominent positions in the public service are political, and the appointees serve the agenda of the governing party. Most such officials are incompetent and lack the requisite skills, qualifications, and experience. The incorrect application of preferential policies has also exacerbated the situation by creating imbalances while failing to uphold established standards. Public officials who perform poorly cannot be dismissed due to political considerations; thus, it compromises constitutional and legislative prescripts (Naidoo & Thani, 2011, p. 4).

In support of the above, Matshabaphala (2014:1010) posits that one of the fundamentals of good governance is ensuring that appointments are made in accordance with legislative prescripts. What happens with people being appointed to positions based on their political affiliation and connections, including the cadre deployment policy the governing party has adopted, and not on merit, is a violation of the fundamental principles of democracy and good governance, as well as the Constitution (1996).

The survival of a system relies and depends on leadership (Nnablif, 2010, pp. 25-41). All things rise and fall on leadership in governance because the leadership drives a nation, government, or any organisation to heights of development and productivity through good governance (Nnablif, 2010, pp. 25-41).

Leadership is important to the public service because complex decisions must be made and executed. To execute such, capable leadership is needed. Leadership in governance serves to foster collaboration, build resilience and the capacity to adapt, resolve ethical concerns through dialogue, and engage the citizenry (Bevir, 2011, pp. 420-422).

Visser (2013:21) argues that political and administrative leadership in the government sector must lead by example and motivate employees to perform to the best of their abilities, supporting the foregoing. Leadership must embrace and promote progressive principles such as integrity, fairness, and transparency. Leadership must further commit to being accountable for their actions or inactions and demonstrate an inclination to eliminate fraud and corruption (Visser, 2013, p. 21).

The status quo in the public service in South Africa can be attributed to poor and inefficient leadership, which has, in turn, weakened the public service as an institution. This view is supported by Singo (2018), who postulates that inefficient institutions are a consequence of the fanatical devotion of administrative leadership to the executive, succumbing to pressures from above. Another cause of inefficient institutions is a lack of regard by the leadership, due to the absence of accountability. This is evidenced by acting positions in the sector, attributable to a lack of ownership, which affects the incumbents' commitment to perform (Singo, 2018, pp. 90-91).

Mlambo (2019:) sums it up when he asserts that if those in power in the current administration have the political will, aptitude and vision, and they have zero tolerance for corruption, South Africa could rise from its political quagmire and dire economic situation (Mlambo, 2019). To transform the situation for the better and eliminate the negative reasons for and the consequences of poor governance leadership in the public service, it is key that people with the requisite and appropriate experience be appointed.

An incompetent government bureaucracy poses a challenge to the public sector in South Africa. Moreover, corruption in public procurement processes poses a substantial risk to business operations in South Africa (South African Corruption Report, May 2019).

Bribery has become systematic and the norm (Singo, 2018). The conduct and behaviour of disreputable leadership is often connected with poor governance in most developing economies, including in South Africa (Singo, 2018). Such leadership do not serve or represent the interests of the citizenry they purport to serve because they are self-serving, egocentric, manipulative, and uncooperative. The leadership is characterised by a disregard for constitutional and legislative imperatives, policy frameworks, and guidelines that regulate the procurement of goods and services for the citizenry, as well as ethical conduct. Unethical leadership is, therefore, one of the determining factors contributing to the reasons for and the consequences of poor leadership.

The South African government has developed mechanisms to rein in improper conduct in the public service. These include the formation of institutions such as the Public Service Commission, which serves to combat unprofessional and inefficient governance in the public service (Mbandlwa, Dorasamy and Fagbadebo, 2020:24987). The Zondo and Mokgoro Commissions revealed that public administration in South Africa is in a quandary due to unethical and corrupt acts that occur among administrative leadership and public representatives. Ineffective leadership leads to poor governance and instability.

Political interference and factional battles within the governing party have contributed to the reasons for and the consequences of poor leadership in the three spheres of the public sector in South Africa. The inappropriate political deployment of unqualified cadres and loyal members of the governing party has worsened the failure of leadership and governance in the system (Brand, 2018:2). Moila (2021:170-176) states that the lack of political will is one of the challenges that impede the performance of leadership in the public service in South Africa.

Phokontsi (2021:327) further posits that accountability has taken a back seat and remains a problem as the executive and the public seem reluctant to hold government accountable for its failures and malfeasance. Public officials also appear to be unprepared to fulfil their responsibilities and account for their actions or inactions. This is due to a lack of political education, as well as a limited understanding of the concept of 'democracy', which is often used without enthusiasm (Phokontsi, 2021, p. 327).

Good governance rests entirely on effective leadership as the driving force for its success. Stability in leadership further produces favourable conditions, resulting in trust, particularly among all the actors and participants. Governance must be advocated by proficient and experienced leadership to attain the set goals and standards (Phokontsi, 2021, p. 297). This will contribute to eliminating the reasons for and consequences of poor governance leadership in the public service in South Africa.

## **Discussion of findings**

The findings of this research provided useful insights into areas of governance leadership, focusing on the reasons for and consequences of poor leadership in the government sector in South Africa. The findings also identified areas of concern and contention in the sector that required prompt and crucial action to prevent further incapacitation of governance leadership in the public service in South Africa.

The current situation, stemming from political infighting and factionalism within the governing party, poses a serious threat to the stability of the public service. This is a further threat to the delivery of services to the citizenry, as espoused in the Constitution (1996). Consequently, poor and ineffective leadership, as well as a lack of political and administrative interface, contribute to and lead to poor governance. This leads to patronage networks which persist within the system due to the presence of bureaucrats who remain indebted to their principals in political leadership.

### ***Politicisation of the Public Service***

The public service is in crisis in terms of implementing the intended principles, which would lead to a much stronger public service. There are, however, several reasons why the politicisation of the public service and political interference can be deemed as the overarching and transversal contributory factors. It is reasonable to assume that the numerous consequences of poor leadership in the public service in South Africa are interlinked with political interference as an underlying factor.

Politicisation of the government service manifests itself in three ways, namely, the politicisation of public servants' involvement in making political decisions in the definition of and affecting government programmes; the politicisation of authority over the recruitment and appointment of government employees; and politicisation through the political participation of public officials (Cameron, 2010, p. 677).

The public service must reinvent itself to deliver its most important task, as mandated by Section 195 (1) of the Constitution (1996) (Maramura et al., 2019, p. 1). The public service requires state institutions that are effectively synchronised and work in synergy with capable and skilled public servants who are dedicated and committed to serving the public to the best of their abilities, without any discrimination.

### ***Political Administrative Interface***

The civil service in South Africa is characterised by the need for cooperation from two key role-players. On the one hand, elected public representatives determine the country's policies. They set the priorities in accordance with their convictions, and they must satisfy the electorate by ensuring that they address and actualise their needs and aspirations. On the other hand, the appointed officials, as practitioners and experts in their varied fields of occupation, should ensure that proper procedures are followed and that state expenditure, which is taxpayers' money, is accounted for. They should also ensure that the promised services are delivered effectively and efficiently in accordance with the set legislative

prescripts, norms and standards. The combination of the two wings results in the interface between politics and the administration. While the two functions may be considered complementary, they are, however, complicated. The interface becomes blurred with politicians interfering in administrative leadership matters by using their deployed members or cadres (who are appointed based on political affiliation and loyalty, and not on merit or competence, in most instances) (Thornhill, 2020, p. 1).

According to the National Development Plan, the main challenge in the public service has been a lack of balance in capacity, which breeds uneven performance across the local, provincial, and national government spheres. This is attributed to complex factors, which include tensions emanating from the political-administrative interface, the instability of the administrative leadership, a skills deficit, the erosion of accountability and authority, as well as low staff morale (Gomba, 2017, p. 82).

Political interference in all spheres of government affects capable leadership and administration and growth opportunities, as corroborated by Masuku and Jili (2019:1). Common examples of political interference, which are intertwined with corruption, include interference in the hiring of personnel, interference in the awarding of government tenders, and interference in who should be promoted or not (Ndlovu, 2016, p. 125).

### ***Cadre Deployment***

Cadre deployment refers to the deployment of party loyalists and supporters in the public service. This implies that cadres are deployed into positions in government departments at the national, provincial, and local government levels. Manny, an attorney, legal analyst, and author (City Press, 2022), states that cadre deployment refers to the appointment of trained individuals to accomplish the desired results and purpose of the governing party, thereby enforcing the party's official policies. The deployed cadres are loyal members of the party who are tasked with promoting obedience and loyalty to party rules among other public servants. As Manny (City Press, 2022) states, in the 50<sup>th</sup> Mafikeng Conference resolution, ANC members who were to be deployed were required to possess outstanding attributes, including loyalty, discipline, and dedication. The resolution further specified that deployment should be "according to speciality, aptitude, qualifications, and capability".

However, in the implementation of the policy, the ANC exploited the loopholes and the opposite was done. Loyal but ill-disciplined cadres, at times without any specialisation of any sort, without aptitude, and without the capacity or requisite qualifications, were deployed into the public service based on their patronage. This was detrimental for the country, which is now teetering on the precipice of municipal collapse due to poor and inefficient leadership. This is depicted in the numerous Auditor-General reports over the years, with no improvements noted.

According to Nengwe'khulu (2009:344), arguing against the deployment of cadres to senior leadership positions, using political party membership as a licence to climb the ladder to leadership positions, may compromise service delivery because those deployed into such high-profile leadership positions may be protected because of political patronage. However, Tshishonga (2014:1) argues that the deployment of incompetent, unskilled, and unqualified public servants not only exacerbates the dire need for service delivery but also cements the perception that South Africa lacks qualified and skilled human resources for jobs in the public service. Inappropriate cadre deployment has largely contributed to a multitude of problems, ranging from a lack of planning and poor leadership to the mismanagement of the government's financial resources.

One of the principles of the public service stipulates that exacting standards of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained. Thus, the public service must be broadly representative in accordance with the dynamics, demographics and diversity of the people of South Africa. Hence, employment and human resources management practices in the public service must be founded on ability, objectivity and fairness (The Constitution, 1996).

In support of the above argument, Makole (2022:1) states that while there is nothing idiosyncratic about the deployment of professionally knowledgeable cadres, who are guided by high ethical morals to drive levers of executive authority in public service institutions, the approach adopted in South Africa's public service leaves much to be desired. The approach has undermined the government's capacity to improve the quality of service delivery to the citizenry and thus requires a serious re-examination and review. The status quo denies qualified graduates of opportunities to be employed in the public service institutions that need to be professionalised and is skewed in favour of unqualified political appointees. The incompetence of leadership in the public service contributes directly to the reasons for and the consequences of poor leadership in the South African public service.

### *Poor Governance*

This paper indicated that governance has been proven to be a process, and not an event. It is a process whereby state institutions and government departments at all levels and structures, including at the local government level, coordinate administration and implement government programmes in accordance with the yardsticks and benchmarks set by the government.

To bolster governance, both political and administrative leadership (as custodians of good governance leadership) should always demonstrate a sense of guardianship to the populace. They must uphold the epitome of democracy as enshrined in the Constitution (1996), the Public Service Act, the Public Finance Management Act/Municipal Finance Management Act, and other legislative prescripts, including accountability, transparency, and public participation (Siswana, 2007, p. 180). Governance pursues multilevel collaboration in contrast with imposing decision-making; thus, it encompasses the interface and engagement of dynamic key players (Diseko, 2018, p. 167). Decision-making by the leadership appears to be a significant challenge in the South African government service.

### *Poor Service Delivery*

In the current political dispensation, the struggle has turned from bettering the lives of the masses of South Africans to the public service becoming a ball game in which the struggle is no longer about racial supremacy, but it is about power-grabbing through political appointments. This has led to most municipalities being unable to deliver on their mandates because in most instances they appoint unqualified and inexperienced people to key positions (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005:2). The public service needs to be capable in fulfilling its responsibilities and constitutional obligations so that it can address the needs, expectations, and aspirations of all stakeholders (Mihailo, Opreana and Cristeu, 2011:132).

Based on the above assertions, the researcher holds the opinion that certain provinces and municipalities have become dysfunctional and are unable to fulfil their constitutional obligations. Certain provinces were placed under administration in accordance with Section 100 of the Constitution (1996) for failing to fulfil their mandates. Other municipalities were also placed under administration in accordance with Section 139 due to poor governance, as they had collapsed because of ineffective leadership.

Based on the research findings, it is indisputable that the public sector in South Africa needs to introspect and re-examine its approaches to governance and leadership, including strategies to address the causes and consequences of poor leadership within the sector. In accordance with the Diagnostic Report (2011), strong leadership is necessary to promote the vision outlined in the Constitution (1996), which remains the supreme law of the Republic of South Africa.

The reasons for and the consequences of poor governance leadership emanate from the politicisation of the public service, the political administrative interface, the governing party versus the state, instability in the administrative leadership in the sector, cadre deployment, corruption, a lack of oversight and accountability, poor ethics and unethical leadership, poor leadership, poor governance, and poor service delivery.

The findings of the research agreed with most previous research. There was also little to no contradiction with previous research, which originated from patronage networks and the protection of cadres by political and administrative officials of the same affiliation and allegiance. It could, however, have contributed to a potential limitation of the research, as certain details were concealed. However, this did not affect the authenticity or compromise the findings. The evidence accumulated from the research was factual and scientifically proven.

It is recommended that further research be conducted to combat and counter the partisan and denial syndrome prevalent in the South African public service, as it has implications for the actualisation of good governance leadership in the sector. This will help eradicate the reasons for and the consequences of poor governance, as well as promote the accomplishment of good governance leadership in the public service in South Africa.

## **Discussion on the recommendations of the research**

One of the many challenges and concerns faced by the government service in South Africa is serious leadership and governance inefficiency, which includes weak responsiveness and poor accountability to the citizenry. The inefficiency of leadership, therefore, should be addressed urgently because it contributes to backlogs and consequent service delivery protests. There should be a well-thought-out succession plan for leadership in the public service so that young and upcoming public servants are taught the ropes of leadership by the current leadership.

Depoliticisation could be regarded as the avoidance of partisan control of administrative leadership. Depoliticisation as a process often leads to reforms where effectiveness and efficiency are pursued by all spheres of government. This implies that the South African public service must be depoliticised as an administrative reform to usher in a professional public service, where improvements in the delivery of services to the citizenry are achieved and the sustainability of service quality is maintained. Such reform is key, as it will create an environment conducive to growth, development, and prosperity for the citizenry and the country. Examining the current state of the public service in South Africa, depoliticisation of the sector will benefit the government, the political and administrative elite, and the citizens, leading to socio-economic growth and improved lives for the populace.

Public servants are government employees and, therefore, accountable to the public representatives. The nature of this accountability should, however, be managed in such a way that it does not blur the distinction between the mandates of the political party and the

professional, non-partisan, and unbiased obligations of the bureaucracy. It is pivotal for the public service to forge a collective professional identity and loyalty to the principles of the Constitution (1996), rather than to any particular political party.

The government should change its approach to the appointment of leadership or senior management, that is, from directors to directors-general. The selection criteria should be no different from those used for the top 40 Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed executive jobs, whereby the cream of the crop is appointed. There would be flexibility (regulated) regarding compensation, although it is more about creating an attractive environment for top leadership in the public service. Professional service delivery is required in South Africa to meet the demands of the citizenry for quality services, as mandated by the Constitution (1996).

Meritocracy, a system governed by people selected on merit, rather than cadre deployment, is the best solution to address the current leadership challenges and problems in the public service in South Africa. Meritocracy is the key to good governance, which is the ultimate strategic goal and objective of the public service. Meritocracy is vitally important to prevent the public service from being torn between party loyalty and the interests of the citizenry. Meritocracy is diametrically opposed to a nomenklatura system, which is a system of appointments and deployments based on loyalty to and membership in a particular party. The ANC cadre deployment policy has more in common with the nomenklatura system than with meritocracy.

Building on the previous aspects, it can be said that there must be qualified and skilled individuals in the administration and political leadership of the South African public service. Competence must be developed through studying and work experience. The results of various studies have shown that most people in administrative leadership have relevant and appropriate academic qualifications. However, the same cannot be said about political leadership, especially for most councillors in the local government sphere. This, despite them playing a predominant part in determining the policy direction of the municipalities.

Public servants in all three spheres of government need to be familiar with all aspects of governance and the provision of services through both conventional education and non-formal training. They need to be familiar with the rules and regulations that guide government institutions, including the public service, which leads and manages the public service and provides quality services to the citizenry.

Research has shown that corruption exists globally, as it is found in both developing countries and highly developed economic giants, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia. In the South African public service, bribery, a form of corruption, has become systematic and the norm. Bribery has become a significant challenge because it is prevalent in every domain of administrative activity, including recruitment, selection, appointments, promotions, tender allocations, and procurement.

Section 4.4.5 of the Public Service Charter stipulates that a public servant should not engage in any transactions or actions that conflict with or infringe on the execution of their official daily duties and responsibilities. Section 4.4.8 stipulates that a public service employee must be honest and accountable in dealing with public funds. Public servants must use public service property and other resources skillfully, based on the value-for-money principle. Such property and resources must be used for authorised official purposes only, and not for private and personal purposes. The employee must also oversee the property and resources in a responsible and honest manner.

As public officials, they have public accountability to the citizenry, which is one of the key principles and an integral element of good governance. Public accountability is also closely linked to efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, public participation, and democracy. Good governance is one of the factors that will help eradicate the reasons for and consequences of poor leadership in the South African public service.

A lack of ethics in leadership is the root cause of poor performance in municipalities, including certain provincial and national departments. The reason for that, as raised by the Auditor-General, is poor ethics by those in positions of authority. The government should introduce ethical legislative frameworks that are compatible with the diverse culture of South Africans. The Code of Conduct for the Public Service, promulgated in 1997, serves as a guide for improved ethical conduct among public servants, particularly government employees. According to the Constitution (1996), they are expected to serve the citizenry.

The findings of this research concluded that maladministration, financial mismanagement, and corruption were caused by various factors. These included political interference and patronage networks that were rife in the public service. This directly contradicts the provisions of Clause 4.2.7 of the Code of Conduct for Public Service, which stipulates that employees should not abuse their positions to promote or prejudice the interests of any political party or interest groups. Public servants must understand the distinction between their responsibilities to the government of the day, which they serve, and their direct involvement in party political issues (Code of Conduct Manual, 20021).

## **Conclusion**

The research contributed to the field of knowledge, policy, and strategy regarding governance leadership from a South African perspective. The contribution to knowledge pertains to the fields of governance, public administration, and leadership. The research investigated, assessed, and examined governance leadership and how it could be improved in terms of policy and strategy in relation to leadership to optimise its full potential in improving governance in the public sector.

The research contributed to efforts aimed at improving governance leadership in the public service in South Africa, with the goal of enhancing service delivery for social change and improving the lives of all South Africans, regardless of their diversity. This is by reinforcing transparency in all the spheres of government to display a state of democratic and accountable leadership and governance for the populace; contributing towards strengthening the ability of leadership as policy makers and implementers of the aforesaid policies in the public service, and promoting institutional development against the backdrop of service delivery in all three spheres of government in the quest for a “Better Life for All”.

From the many definitions and arguments provided above, the researcher has contributed to the body of knowledge by offering a definition of the concepts ‘leadership’ and ‘governance’ from a public service perspective in South Africa. Thus, leadership is a process centred on a person or individual whose approach is to influence, inspire, guide, direct, and support the followers or those being led, or subordinates. This is geared towards attaining the common, predetermined goals and objectives of the organisation, while fulfilling the aspirations of the citizenry, based on the ethical provisions outlined in the Constitution (1996) and the supporting legislative provisions. Moreover, leadership can be said to entail coordination and delegation. This means that leadership needs followers, the led or subordinates, to carry out the identified goals and objectives of the organisation in any environment. The conduct and behaviour of the leader in a given situation will determine the outcome of the leadership process, which is recurring.

The researcher concluded, adding to the body of knowledge, that governance refers to the organisational processes, systems and structures, which include decision-making and implementation mechanisms and measures, geared towards the responsive provision of government projects and programmes, which result in the effective and efficient delivery of quality services to the citizenry, in accordance with the Constitution (1996) and other supporting legislative prescripts.

## Declarations

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### Declaration of interest statement

The authors of this article declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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