Leadership, Service Delivery and Managing Human Capital in the Digital Age in the Public Sector

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Abstract

The public service environment, like other sectors of human endeavour, has, in more ways than one, been affected by the changes that are happening in the world. These changes have also redefined the concept of leadership, and service delivery content has been significantly impacted. Developments in the technological frontiers have significantly impacted the role of human capital. As new technologies continue to influence business operations, customers and employees, companies are experiencing an unprecedented period of evolution and adaptation as they navigate this digital transformation era. This paper seeks to review leadership redefined with an emphasis on human capital as leadership champions of employees. The article further explores the leadership challenge of leading change concerning organisational culture and climate in the digital age. This paper used desktop research methodology to explore the new roles that human capital can carry out as strategic partners in delivering public value and revisiting the new roles of personnel administration in public service organisations. The grey literature and surveys were used as information-rich sources to glean the underlying factors, human perceptions, and experiences for embracing digital leadership to enhance service delivery in public service organisations. Thus, this paper established that digital governance works better within democratic environments than in autocratic environments. In conclusion, the study recommended that fostering transformational and exemplary leadership in democratising the public sector makes the environment user-friendly for digital technologies to enhance service delivery performance.

Keywords: Leadership, Service delivery, Human capital management, Digital age, South Africa

Introduction

The evolution of the digital age has never been like a walk-in-the-park episode, and it was stranded with resistance and drama to this stage. The digital age is characterised and understood with different terminologies, including but not limited to e-commerce, e-government, digitalisation, information technology (IT) and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), to mention but a few. Premised in the names above, Longford (2002) regarded it as a slogan or buzzword seeking meaning and identity within different global political contexts. Ironically, Longford (2002:1) argues that "just as the dot-com craze of the late 1990s fizzles and e-commerce begins to lose its lustre, a new buzzword has begun circulating among high tech seers, politicians, bureaucrats, business leaders and a handful of academics in Canada: e-government". Longford (2002:1) sarcastically went on to say, "the concept of using new information and communications technologies- networked computers and the internet in particular-to improve government services, streamline internal administrative processes, and enhance opportunities for citizens to engage with government, has moved to centre stage in governments' efforts to restructure and reinvent themselves". Graham Longford's statements above show disbelief and a mockery of the change in leadership, governance and service delivery approaches that were imminently taking place through the coming of the digital age in Canada. Despite resistance and disbelief, the digital age is now the real world.

Notwithstanding the prospects packaged in digital technology in service delivery for the past four decades in the world, its impact requires a lot of changes in the leadership portfolios, the content of service delivery and the human capital in most developing countries. Wasserman (2020) argues that for the best outcome to be drawn out of digital technology, the changes that include but are not limited to; the redefinition of leadership portfolios, the content of the services delivery and the roles of the human capital within the public sector should be implemented. In the pre-digital era, the information flow within public institutions was prolonged due to the rigidity caused by the bureaucratic leadership philosophy in most developing countries (Carmel, 2014). According to Stocker (2006), the bureaucratic governance system is a traditional way of leadership that follows a set of rules, guidelines and a clear command of the chain, with a leader at the top giving instructions to the subordinates.

Whilst bureaucratic leadership scholars applauded it for efficiency, transparency and fostering accountability, recent studies have shown that it gives little room for innovation and creativity because every task to be completed follows the rigid stipulated guidelines and rules (Kapure, 2021). Gumede (2016) added that bureaucratic leadership leads the bureaucracy with absolute authority, with the subordinates assigned specific roles and responsibilities. Karippacheril (2014) and Roy (2017) assert that despite the commencement of the digital era, some public institutions, primarily in the global north,

have continued to espouse their traditional styles, which do not allow the flexible movement of information from one department to another. Put simply, such inaptness to the digital era has created severe challenges in leadership performance in service delivery.

Similarly, the content of service delivery to the public should be changed following the implementation of digital technology. Passenhein (2010) opined that the change in the range of service delivery is necessitated by the fact that in the pre-digital era, when facing a service delivery, one would meet service personnel ready to support a customer through the process. On the contrary, due to the emerging impact of technology, today, everywhere in the public sector, there should be more self-service and automation than physical engagements. In the premises of the preceding, due to digital technology, consumers can receive services at their premises, reducing the stress and wasting time travelling and waiting in long queues to receive some services. Following the change of service delivery content to allow the consumers to receive the services in the comfort of their homes, the roles of the human capital must also be changed. Karippacheril (2013) argues that the rigidity of the public sector or government to foster changes in the roles of human capital distorts the smooth service delivery process expected in the digital technology era.

Various case studies have concluded that using digital technology helps to accelerate information broadcasting, improve public service efficiency, and increase government administration's transparency and accountability (Giri, 2020; Moshologu, 2015; Lucas, 2016). The proponents above' conclusions also confirmed that digital technology reduces corruption and facilitates citizen participation in local governance. In the global South, where digital technology is advanced, Giri (2020) asserts that digital technology has enabled governments to receive regular feedback from service users, ultimately improving the service quality. Many investments in e-government fail to have any impact other than wasting limited financial resources. The new technologies have enhanced the capacity of governments for surveillance and control. The communication costs through digital platforms have been dramatically lowering; as a result, citizens have been able to connect at an unprecedented scale, fostering their voice and collective action. The impact of governance mechanisms on capability and empowerment depends on the strength of government institutions. Digital technologies, combined with the incentives of politicians, government officials, and service providers, can thus be highly effective in improving outcomes.

Digital technologies, particularly social media, have a different aspect of service delivery. Service delivery problems are more challenging to monitor and attributed to specific government officials. The dependence of digital technology on initial institutional conditions varies by service and activity. For services and activities based on more routine tasks that are easy to monitor, digital technologies can improve outcomes rapidly and

significantly. A capable government can implement policies and spend public resources for efficient service delivery. This paper seeks to address the following three objectives:

- To explore the new roles that human capital can carry out as strategic partners in delivering public value and revisiting the new roles of personnel administration.

- To revisit leadership redefined with emphasis on leadership as champions of employees' engagement and,

- To explore the leadership challenge of leading change in the digital age concerning organisational culture and climate.

To respond to the objectives mentioned above, this paper commences with the background of the evolution of digital governance, which was formerly regarded as a slogan seeking meaning within different contexts around the globe. The writing continued to present further a detailed problem statement situating it in the brief history of the evolution of public administration. Subsequently, the nature of contemporary leadership and service delivery in the digital age is studied. The researchers further presented the literature review methodological model used to glean the information to respond to the research objectives of the paper. The findings from the literature were concurrently presented with the pertinent concepts that underpin the question under review, which include; people as partners in the delivery of services; managing human capital; leadership, stakeholder and employee management; leading change, and ethics in performance management. Subsequently, the discussion of the implications of what the paper has established from the literature was presented as the foundation for the preceding conclusion and recommendations to the field of public administration.

Nature of Contemporary Leadership and Service Delivery in the Digital Age
The nature of contemporary leadership means different things to people. There is no universal consensus as to what leadership includes and means. An assessment of various definitions put forward by other scholars provides a collective structure on which the definition of leadership could be grounded. An effort is made to assess a handful of widely held definitions of leadership and link them to service delivery in the digital age. Table 1 below illustrates the different handful of widely held definitions of leadership and describes what the current researchers perceive and how that type of leadership implies organisational performance.

Table 1: Definitions and the Nature of Contemporary Leadership

Definitions of Leadership	Description of the nature of leadership from the definitions
Bass (1990:19-20) in Moila (2021:120) defines leadership as an interaction of two or more group members that often involves structuring or restructuring the members' situations, perceptions, and expectations. Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others. Any member of the group can exhibit some amount of leadership,	The description of leadership seems to be hierarchically rigid because of its emphasis on one member who can contribute to modifying other group members to acquire additional skills and inspiration. There is, however, an acknowledgement that other group members, depending on their capabilities, could also emerge as leaders if they influence group associates to alter their original perceptions of how they view what motivates or inspires them. What also stands out is a reformation of members expectations or situations. This means group members should meet and communicate what they need to accomplish. In their discussions, whoever exerts power or authority to change another group's members' capabilities so they start to see or understand things differently would emerge as a leader.
Finucane (1974:19) in Moila (2021:120) quotes Julius Nyerere as saying that: Leadership means talking and discussing with the people, explaining and persuading. It means making constructive suggestions and working with the people to show by actions what it is you are urging them to do. It means being one of the people and sign recognising your equality with them. But giving leadership does not mean usurping the role of the people. The people must make decisions about their future through democratic procedures. Leadership cannot replace democracy; it must be a part of Democracy.	From this definition, it is apparent that a leader promotes participatory leadership among the team members. This definition shows that decisions should result from people discussing issues as equals with a leader. It emphasises that leadership should be a democratic process where people decide on the course they want to follow. A leader paves the way for a democratic approach to unfold without assuming people's roles but persuading them through valuable proposals for people themselves to chart the course forward.
Hallinger and Heck (1998:173) explain that: Leadership enhances organisational performance and survival by affecting social structures, the regularised aspects of relationships existing among participants in an organisation.	This definition is purposeful rather than explanatory, focusing on what leadership does without elucidating how that can be achieved. If members share a similar vision within their group, it is possible to improve an organisation's performance and survival. This is so because leadership exists within the ambit of group members mingling together to change each other's perspectives informally. This view does not suggest that those in formal leadership positions should be rendered redundant but reinforces

	the idea of collaboration between individuals of their own volition.
Harris (2004:12) in Moila (2021:120) observes that: Leadership…resides in the human potential available to be released within an organisation.	The problem with this definition is that it assumes leadership to be innate to an individual, only waiting to be unleashed in the organisation. It fails to recognise that leadership can occur outside the formal organisation if a group works together to achieve a goal. This definition asserts that it is an organisation that could realise people's leadership attributes and not individuals themselves who may show such potential. It does not appreciate that the individual possesses these abilities to be a leader independent of the organisation. As Harris explains, leadership emerges within human potential but does not need an organisation to materialise.
Kapure (2021:10) defines digital leadership as a systemic process that requires the interdependence of three functional areas: strategic leadership, commercial entrepreneurship, and digital technology. The relationship between these three spheres must manifest an interdependent unity and lead to the synergistic behaviour of the leader who operates in a digital environment.	This definition demonstrates that leadership definition is dynamic due to the times, audience and environment. Kapure displays three interdependent functional areas in leadership: strategic leadership, commercial entrepreneurship and digital technology. Kapure's definition shows that each of the three functional areas is filled with certain basic knowledge and skills that determine the scale and capacity of digital leadership to service delivery and organisational performance. The most successful digital transformations begin with a change in the mentality of leaders, who need to develop for this challenge. Digital leadership contributes to businesses achieving optimal management and team collaboration, which is crucial to developing the global high-tech economy. Digital leadership is essential for leading companies towards digitalisation, organisational performance and service delivery.

Developed by the Authors from Moila (2021:120) & Kapure (2021:10)

The illustrated definitions and nature of leadership in Table 1 above show that leadership is dynamic and changes with time and the environment in which it is practised. Thus, these definitions of leadership point to the existence of different dimensions of leadership, which include autocratic, democratic, charismatic, transformational, exemplary, servanthood and digital leadership, to mention but a few. Authoritarian leadership refers to the concentration of power and authority in a leader who does not allow group members or local people from communities to participate in decision-making (Harms et al., 2018). Democratic leadership entails consensus-building by encouraging participation and a collegial environment among the group members (Matshabaphala & Ringson, 2022). According to Moila (2021), charismatic leadership refers to the interaction between leaders and people in which their self-confidence depends on the leaders' articulation of

vision and mission accompanied by a desire to achieve goals, leaving people voluntarily abandoning self-centeredness in favour of collective success.

Transformational leadership refers to a leader who leads utilizing changing people's attitudes to focus on the work at hand. This leadership style encourages knowledge distribution among the supporters of a transformational leader, which eventually cascades to the whole team (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). According to Kouzes & Posner (2002), the exemplary leader is a leader who inspires local people to work together to achieve common goals. An exemplary leader models the way by using creativity and innovation to change the situation of the local people for the better through effective and efficient service delivery. Kapure (2021:10) defines digital leadership as a systemic process that requires the interdependence of three functional areas: strategic leadership, commercial entrepreneurship, and digital technology. The relationship between these three spheres must manifest an interdependent unity and lead to the synergistic behaviour of the leader who operates in a digital environment. Based on the evaluated definitions and leadership styles, this study defines leadership as controlling, providing direction and guidance to the associates and community members by involving and not usurping their roles in decision-making and recognising equality with them when power and authority are exercised. This definition considers every member of a team and local people in a community to be equal without reducing the role that a leader plays in controlling an organisation's resources and directing and guiding team members and communities. It further acknowledges a position that a leader undertakes to involve and not take over the power of team associates in decision-making processes when control and authority are applied.

Notwithstanding the efficiency of authoritarian leadership in the history of leadership, it faces many challenges during this digital age. Transformational, exemplary, and democratic leadership entrenched in digital leadership is more suitable and can be more efficient in-service delivery in modern urbanized communities. Businesses and organisations use digital technologies to change their operational model to provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities for their companies. Kapure (2021) argues that the future of several industries depends on how well they will be able to handle this digital transformation that will be taking place in the coming years. To successfully transition into the digitalized world, public service organisations will need digital leaders who combine their digital leadership with transformational and democratic leadership for effective service delivery.

Transitional Challenge: Traditional Service Delivery to Digital Governance

The transition from the traditional service delivery approach to digital government has affected the public service environment in one way or another, like in any other sector of human endeavours. The evolution of the service dimension to digital government reflects

a set of organisational technological and cultural cross-currents within the public sector. Roy (2017) argues that these cross-currents stem from various layers of digital government reforms in recent years and the traditional foundations of public sector governance on the other. These cultural cross-currents emanate from the tensions between mobility and machinery, the latter referring to the hierarchical and bureaucratic-centric paradigm underpinning traditional public administration. Working from outside the confines of digital government, Stocker (2006) outlined the three co-existing typologies of public sector governance that incubate the aforementioned cultural cross-currents and their implications to service delivery, leadership and human capital: traditional public administration (TPA), new public administration (NPA) and the public value management (PVM). In the above analysis, the problem under investigation revolves around implementing the three typologies of public administration in the public sector today.

Traditional public administration is based upon a hierarchical structure and clear delineation of authority between democratically elected officials and public servants. In the TPA approach, the civil servants are there to implement the decisions of the elected officials. In this view, Roy (2017) avers that in such an environment, the public is a passive observer, indirectly partaking in governance via electoral mechanisms of representative democracy that enable elected officials to act. In the TPA, there is very little involvement of the citizens as government public determinations of the public interests are mainly made in a centralised manner within the confines of the executives. On the contrary, the NPA has instead emphasised competition as a lever to lessen this over-arching control of the TPA, which always led to bureaucratic bloating and stifled innovation and creativity (Roy, 2013; 2017). Thus, within the contours of the NPA, decentralised authority is preferred to enable responsiveness to customers to improve performance and efficiency in the public sector. By contrast, Stocker (2006) pointed out that seeking to involve beyond the bureaucratic rigidity of the NPM turned to the PVM as they found it better suited for more complexity, collaboration and consultation both within and outside the government. Unlike the TPA and the NPM, the PVM calls for the servants to play an active role in steering networks of deliberations and delivery and maintain the overall capacity of the public sector governance. Predicated on the tension of these three typologies of public sector management approaches, digital governance has accelerated the transition from the TPA to PVM at high speed, thereby causing some challenges in the human endeavours in the public sector due to resistance to embrace the digital age to its totality. Thus, this paper explores the leadership challenges of leading change in the digital age concerning organisational culture and the organisational climate.

Methodology

This article adopted a qualitative desktop approach with a literature review and documentary analysis. The grey literature and surveys were used as information-rich

sources to glean the people's underlying factors, perceptions, and experiences from embracing digital leadership in public service organisations. Typical examples of the survey and grey literature used as data for this study include the digital governance reports from the government and the surveys from various stakeholders and academics. The study used content and thematic analysis to analyse the data. This approach followed the subjectivism philosophy, which resonates with the subjective interpretation of the actors' views and experiences based on the existing literature (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). As depicted by the name Desktop Research, the research technique is mainly acquired by sitting at a desk (Saunders et al., 2009). Desk research involves collecting data from existing resources; hence, it is often considered a low-cost technique compared to field research, as the main cost consists of the executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Desk research is very effective, quick, and cheap, and most essential information can be easily fetched and used as a benchmark in the research process.

These two dominant desktop research techniques include internal and external desktop research. According to Maseko, Esampally, Mthethwa-Kunene, & Dlamini-Nxumalo (2020), internal desktop research involves collecting from the organisation's customers, and external desktop research involves research outside the organisational boundaries in collecting relevant data. This article, therefore, used the external desktop research methodology. External desktop research is used to collect secondary data through online desk research through the internet, government-published data and published articles.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study grey literature were presented and discussed premised on the following thematic areas: People as partners in service delivery, managing human capital, leadership, stakeholder & employee management, Leading change and Ethics in Performance Management. The implications of the study findings to leadership and service delivery in the digital age in public service organisations were subsequently discussed in this section.

People as Partners in the Delivery of Services
Despite elected officials and public managers' powers, they are increasingly expected to collaborate with various actors to tackle the complex public problems that beset modern society (Crosby, Hart and Torfing, 2017). Making the general populace or citizens partners in service delivery can be made possible based on technological innovation and empowerment. According to Wasserman (2020), the interconnectedness of people throughout the globe has empowered them to contribute positively to the efficient and effective service delivery of their countries. Wasserman further opined that South Africa's democracy in the last two and half decades had been sustained by the general populace, civil society and opposition parties through print and electronic media. The South African

media communications in the pre-social media era included but were not limited to the radio, television and newspapers. Further to those mentioned above, social media (Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook), which have dominated the communication networks in this digital age, have more prospects of sustaining democracy and holding the government accountable for in-service delivery.

Unlike in the pre-digital era or the print media, radio and television broadcasting media communication where the government would centrally control information, social media are uncensored or controllable. Thus, this poses a significant challenge to the current governments if they do not take the people as partners in service delivery. Runciman, Maruping and Moloto (2015); Lee (2018) convergently argue that violent protests and uprisings from the citizens are ignited when the government begins to treat its citizens as enemies when demanding their needs. From those mentioned above, it is clear that employees and clients are already connected to technology. Hayward (2014) argues that since the employees and the government have embraced technology, it is easier for the government to adapt to technology in partnership with the people in service delivery. Connecting with the people can assist in enhancing the quality of the service even though the government is becoming more exposed to criticism by the public. Marchant and Stremlau (2019) postulate that the connection between leadership and the people based on digital technologies motivates employees.

Managing Human Capital
Organisational scientists have long considered human capital a strategic asset contributing to organisational effectiveness. Whereas the strategic importance of human capital has been widely studied in the case of for-profit organisations, measurement difficulties and the role of human capital in the public sector have received little attention. Jacobson and Sowa (2015) argue that exploring the traditional or classic human capital approach as a point of departure is essential to understand the movement toward a more strategic approach to human capital in the public sector. In the traditional human capital approach, the governments promote employment practices that insulate employees from partisan political pressures and not focusing on competence and the quality of services rendered. In carrying out its objectives, Stocker (2006) avers that most of the government's human resources management emphasises employee adherence to routine and horizontal organisational structure as critical factors for service delivery.

In the traditional or classical civil service, the main focus was on matching people with the right jobs and having those people accomplish some responsibilities based on the instruction stipulated in their organisational bureaucracy. Jacobson and Sowa (2015); Carmel (2014) convergently established that the traditional human capital approach focused on creating knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours needed for particular positions rather than exploring individuals' specific competencies and capitalising on them.

It was more about fitting people to work versus harnessing the particular qualities of the individual. Standard procedures for managing people promote equity in how people are treated in the workforce, a value of great importance in government. In addition, the focus on regulating the personnel function helped governments promote political neutrality and insulate public employees from partisan political pressure, which is now difficult due to the digital era.

Although there are associated benefits from the traditional approach to managing people in government, the emphasis on conventional human resources policies and regulation of the personnel function prevents this system from comprehensively viewing and utilising public employees as valuable assets and strategic partners. Thus, predicated on those mentioned earlier, traditional human resources approaches have struggled to deliver quality services in the public sector optimistically. Therefore, based on the poor service delivery proffered by the traditional human resources approaches, the liberal digitally based human capital approach is considered the best foot forward for service delivery in the public sector (Kapure, 2021). Carmel (2014) confirmed that the strategic partnership of human capital is vital in fostering quality delivery in the public sector. Local government authorities possessing strategic human capital with technological innovation, specific competencies, and experience exhibit better service delivery performance. Thus, human capital plays a critical role as a strategic partner with the government to achieve optimum service delivery by the public sector. Gone are when employees were treated as mere service providers in organisations. During this digital era of innovation and creativity, human capital is considered as employees and strategic partners because when they come into the organisation, they bring new expertise that makes the organisation grow.

Leadership, Stakeholder and Employee Management
Leaderful practice constitutes a direct challenge to the traditional view of leadership as "being out in front" (Raelin, 2005:1). Raelin further argues that although the leaderful practice in management is not new, it has been fast-forwarded by the new public administration approach from the traditional, inflexible bureaucratic leadership philosophy that was predominantly centred on the top-down approach. Wolfred (2008) argues that in the 21st century, all community members need to contribute to the growth of that community, both independently and interdependently with others. Compared to empowerment models that have become popular in recent years, leaderful practice is not merely a consultative model wherein authority leaders allow "followers" to participate in their leadership. As a democratic approach, Lovegrove (2012) postulate that leaderful practice involves employees' and stakeholders' participation in the organisation's strategic planning and decision-making processes. Simply put, the leaderful practice dismantles the horizontal and hierarchical traditional leadership structure and pushes modern organisations to embrace the vertical system. Thus, the preceding exposition suggests that

leadership in the public sector is democratic, guided by fundamental humanistic principles and the collective buy-in of employees and stakeholders to the venture.

Predicated in the above observation, it can be safely said that digitalisation has exposed the service delivery under-performing public sector to the prey of its armchair critics, opposition pressures, stakeholders and employee uprisings. Steyn (2013) posits that technology has facilitated an easy way of the public sector transparency and accountability to its stakeholders. In this regard, the clarity and responsibility of the public sector to its employees and stakeholders have been accelerated by social media (WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook), which have interconnected people. As such, information dissemination is speedier than in the pre-digital era. For instance, it is now straightforward for the opposition parties and the external stakeholders to know the mistakes made by the public sector concisely. Compared to the pre-digital age, the general populace, employees and stakeholders have been empowered with technology in this digital era. The interconnectedness of the people through social media poses a significant challenge to the government (Matshabaphala & Ringson, 2022). Unlike in the pre-digital era, it forces it to be transparent and accountable to its citizens. Thus, for the public sector to be more efficient and effective in in-service delivery, current governments must treat their stakeholders, citizens and employees as partners, not enemies. Studies recently (Runciman, Maruping and Moloto, 2015; Lee, 2018) carried out within the South African context on the causes of uprisings and protests. They established that the most violent protest against the government happens when it treats its stakeholders, employees and opposition parties as enemies.

Leading Change
Leadership is nothing if not about change (Kotze, 2018). The change was defined by Passenheim (2010) as an alteration of a company strategy, organisation or culture as a result of changes in its environment, structure, technology or people. Passenheim (2010) further argues that leading change in public organisations follows internal and external factors. Given the above, the competence of public managers in service delivery is measured by their agility to lead change within their organisations. The external factors that influence change include; the marketplace, technology, government laws and economics. Parallel to the external aspects that influence change, the internal factors include but are not limited to; corporate strategy, workplace, technology and equipment, and employees' attitudes. Technology is central to external and internal factors to institute change in public organisations.

The new competitive realities in the market and demand are critical factors that the traditionally run governments must consider to embrace change through digitalisation swiftly. Customers nowadays rarely want to queue the whole day for services. Instead, they go for those approaches that allow them to access the service in the comfort of their

home. This change may not come from anywhere; it is fostered by improving public service employees' technological capabilities. Roy (2017) argues that decentralisation coupled with the horizontalisation of the leadership approaches may go a long way in enhancing the quality-of-service delivery in the public sector. Similarly, Cheteni and Shindika (2017) postulated that all the bureaucratic and verticalised governance and leadership systems face unsurmountable challenges posed by public uprisings in this digital age. Thus, leading change is becoming inevitable.

In the above analysis, it can be safely acknowledged that digitalisation has made it possible for the opposition parties to work as change agency whistleblowers in exposing the corrupt and unethical leadership practices within the incumbent government structures. In the new customised service delivery models of private digital firms such as Facebook, Amazon, and Google, citizens expect similar experiences with public services regarding usability, accessibility, friendliness, convenience and effectiveness. Citizens expect governments to offer public services designed with a user-driven perspective and adaptable to different user profiles. Digital tools should enable users to express their needs and public sector organisations to test ways to identify best and meet these needs. Digital technologies and data reuse should not be seen as ends to safeguard public trust and social well-being.

Ethics in Performance Management
Ethical leadership is essential for the government to ensure adequate public service delivery. Mbandlwa, Dorasamy and Fagbadebo (2020) posit that the South African government is facing a challenge of sound and ethical leaders in terms of the way they appear to the communities and lead their constituencies. According to Statistics South Africa (2017), cited in Mbandwala et al. (2020:5), indicated that corruption in South Africa have shown that 24% of South Africans agreed that corruption in South Africa is decreasing, while 14% felt that it had remained the same, and 62% said it had increased. The statistics show that the public regards the people in leadership as the perpetrators of corruption due to a lack of ethical leadership. Instead of the leaders enforcing the legislation against those who are found wanting corruption, they ignore or participate in the same crime. The corruption issue in South Africa manifested at its highest level ever during the Covid-19 allocations of tenders, where most public sector leaders were implicated in bribery of different magnitudes (Mathiba, 2020). Whilst the digital age was alleged to be a catalyst of several corruption engagements, it is also imperative to note that using it correctly can reduce corruption to a specific degree.

According to Haafst (2017), corruption and unethical approaches in the public sector reduce investors, customers and citizen confidence and thereby reduce economic growth prospects. In his recent study on the effects of digitalisation on corruption, Haafst (2017:10) established that digitalisation works vibrantly in reducing corruption in democratic countries than in autocratic countries. This has been typically experienced in

some countries like Zimbabwe when the citizens mobilised countrywide protests against corruption perpetrated by government officials and shut down the internet (Marchant and Stremlau, 2019 & 2020; Nare, 2020). Similarly, the abovementioned experience happened in Uganda, where the opposition party mobilised public support to vote against the corrupt government. The government reacted by shutting down the internet during and towards the elections.

On the contrary, in a democratic country like South Africa, where freedom of speech is allowed, digital governance can enhance performance and reduce corruption in the public sector. It is commonplace to see opposition parties and the general populace criticising government officials for poor service delivery. The parliamentary debates are also being publicly broadcasted through YouTube, Facebook and television, which works very well in deterring and exposing corrupt leadership to the public.

To further substantiate the previous claim, Ouedraogo and Sy (2020); Cheteni and Shindika (2017) indicated that most Sub-Saharan countries are now increasingly considering digitalisation as an essential prevention tool detection and prosecution of corruption. Worth mentioning is that these Sub-Saharan African countries have adopted new digital tools in tax administrations to reduce bureaucracy and combat the corruption of tax officials. Similarly, CCTVs have been planted in most public auditoriums and corridors, which has helped deter and reduce corruption and increase performance in some public sector departments. In some first-world countries, digitalisation has already reduced the physical employment of human capital, and if implemented correctly in Africa, prospects of enhancing performance in service delivery are high.

Implications of the Study to Leadership and Service Delivery in the Public Sector
In the analysis of the studies conducted between 2010 and 2021, there is a general convergence of ideas that the digital age has more prospects of enhancing leadership performance and service delivery in the public sector (Mathiba, 2020). However, it was argued by Steney (2013), Cheteni and Shindika (2017), and Roy (2017) that digital governance works better in democratic countries than in autocratic countries. Based on the preceding establishment, it is clear that for digital governance to produce in service delivery, it starts with the governance and leadership architecture. There is a great need for transformation from the traditional bureaucratic leadership philosophy embedded in a closed system approach to a liberal open system that allows citizen participation.

Digital governance has proven difficult in some Southern African countries still at their primitive stage of embracing democracy, such as Zimbabwe and Uganda (Marchant and Stremlau, 2019 & 2020; Nare, 2020). The preceding proponents established that autocratic governments are shooting themselves in the foot by shutting down the internet as a political weapon to deter public campaigns and protests against corruption and human rights violations. Runciman, Maruping and Moloto (2015); Lee (2018) postulated that

governments use those intimidatory tactics to silence their citizens only when they treat their people as enemies. Thus, such experiences in some African governments have rendered the digital age an enemy and a thorn in the flesh of bureaucratic systems. Such governments or organisations regard their employees and stakeholders as enemies of their progress and use punishments, intimidation, and authoritarianism to pacify dissent voices. In the circumstances mentioned earlier, the pragmatic efficaciousness of digitalisation in the human capital, leadership performance and delivery service in the public sector is strangled.

On the contrary, a large number of case studies (Ouedraogo and Sy, 2020; Cheteni and Shindika, 2017; Haafst, 2017) concluded that the use of digital technology helps to accelerate information broadcasting, improve the efficiency of public services, and increase the transparency and accountability of government administration. It also helps to reduce corruption and facilitate citizen participation in local governance. Governments have invested heavily in digital technology over the past four decades. Digital technologies have enabled governments to receive regular feedback from service users, ultimately improving service quality. The new technologies have enhanced the capacity of governments for surveillance and control. This has been necessitated by the dramatically lowering communication costs due to various service providers (Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Print Media and Tiktok), allowing the citizens to connect with reality and fostering their voices and collective action. In this case, we can consider South Africa, where the opposition parties are allowed in parliament and the public to criticise the incumbent government without fear and favour. In such circumstances, the prospects of digital technology to enhance service delivery are very high than in closed and autocratic regimes. Thus, the implications of the public organisations and the government structures to remain adamant and unwilling to accept change in leadership approach result in poor delivery service and mistrust from the general populace.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering the above, this paper explored the leadership challenge of leading change in the digital age concerning organisational culture and climate in the public sector. The article also examined human capital's new roles as strategic partners in delivering public value. Based on the analysis of different voices from different case studies, this paper concluded that digital governance systems work better and more effectively in service delivery within organisations that are democratic than autocratic. Within the democratic environment, leaders consider their stakeholders and employees partners, not rivals. Thus, the human capital approach in public service organisations needs a radical surgical that transforms it from the traditional bureaucratic approaches that stifle their voices and participation for the betterment of their organisation. The paper established and

recommended that this can be achieved by fostering organisational activities' decentralisation. Based on this conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- Digital leadership is becoming a must-have for companies as they work hard to find their place in the future market. But while understanding the importance and value of digital leadership should be a priority, human capital and public service organisations must work together to create the right ecosystem for developing a pipeline of future digital leaders. This means encouraging people to cross boundaries and embrace new challenges, and know how to recognise emerging talent.

- To succeed in the future, leaders and the human capital in public service organisations need the capacity to unlearn, relearn and continually adapt to ever-evolving tools and technologies to remain relevant.

- In a world of increased uncertainty, leaders in public service organisations will no longer be able to rely on traditional behaviours that led to past successes. Instead, they must innovate themselves and become innovators as leaders.

- Digital technologies have changed the competitive and organisational environment, and Leaders in public service organisations must develop new skills to guide their organisations into this uncertain future effectively.

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