Effective governance in South Africa: reality or myth?

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Résumé

La République sud-africaine a été régulièrement confrontée à des défis de gouvernance dans tous les secteurs du gouvernement, ce qui a entrainé le mauvais rendement des services publics essentiels. Le gouvernement est considéré comme le principal acteur en ce qui concerne la gouvernance et la promotion des droits des citoyens. Le mauvais rendement du secteur public au niveau national, provincial et local a toujours été un problème et mis en lumière les questions de gouvernance en Afrique du Sud. Cet article propose une nouvelle approche de gestion publique qui vise à transformer les opérations du secteur public pour qu'elles ressemblent à celles du monde des affaires et deviennent plus efficientes. L'article soutient que le manque des systèmes et des mécanismes adéquats afin de promouvoir et de renforcer l'effectivité de la a gouvernance a un impact négatif sur le développement. Le résultat de la mauvaise gouvernance a été le gaspillage des ressources publiques, la faiblesse des institutions, la baisse des investissements et de la croissance ainsi que la corruption. L'article montre que la corruption est une conséquence du manque de transparence dans le système de gouvernance. Une gouvernance effective et une bonne qualité de l'administration publique mènent finalement à la croissance économique et au développement qui profitent à tous les citoyens. Une gouvernance effective est celle qui vise le bien commun en répondant aux besoins du peuple.

Abstract

The Republic of South Africa has continuously experienced challenges of poor governance from all spheres of government, which has resulted in the poor delivery of essential public services. Government is considered as the main actor as far as governance and promoting citizens' rights. The poor performance of the public sector, on national, provincial and local levels, has always been a cause for concern in South Africa and one which has cast the issues of governance in South Africa in a poor light. This article advocates a new public management approach that aims at transforming public sector operations, to be business-like and efficient. It reveals that the lack of appropriate systems and mechanisms that promote and enforce effective governance continues to impact development negatively. Poor governance has resulted in wasted public resources, weak institutions, decreasing investment and growth and it has entrenched corruption. The article shows that corruption is a consequence of the failure of accountability in the governance system. Effective governance and good quality of public administration ultimately results in economic growth and development that benefits all citizens. Effective governance should always think and act in the interest of the public by responding to the needs of the people.

Introduction

The public sector in South Africa has, since 1994, experienced many challenges, most especially in delivering essential public services. This has resulted in a situation where the majority of South Africans have lost their confidence in the government's ability to govern effectively and efficiently. For citizens of South Africa to reap the benefits of the Constitution and all the socially and economic progressive policies that are in existence, a well-functioning public sector is required.

In the South African context, the basic values of effective governance are determined by Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. A non-functioning public sector exposes and harms the marginalised and vulnerable members of society (Maseya et al., 2018; Eneanya, 2018). The performance of a number of South Africa's public organisations and state-owned enterprises has been nothing short of an embarrassment due to their failure to achieve their respective mandates (Gumede, 2019). A culture of impunity in the government has resulted in a serious lack of transparency and accountability in all spheres of government.

Irrespective of the socially progressive policies that are in existence in South Africa, performance as far as the public sector is concerned has been an issue of great distress. Governance is key in ensuring that the public sector delivers on its mandate. It should, however, be noted that governance on its own is not the solution; it needs to be effective governance that promotes fundamental development principles. A number of studies (Silima, 2016; Ndevu & Muller, 2017; Busieka, 2018; Malbon et al., 2019) have attested to the fact that the existence of effective governance is essential in ensuring appropriate public service delivery and administration.

Effective governance is crucial and ultimately results in the competent and effective functioning of South Africa's public sector organisations. It should be noted that the public sector, as well as state- owned entities, play a crucial role in enhancing economic growth and development of the country. It is for this reason that key instruments such as the Public Financial Management Act No 1 of 1999 (PFMA) and the King IV report of 2016 on corporate governance for South Africa should take centre stage in addressing issues of governance as far as the public sector is concerned. These instruments are not only applicable to state-owned entities, which are a great part of the government, but to public governance in general.

They share a number of common principles of effective governance. Integration and alignment of these principles in public governance is not only possible but a presents an opportunity for the government to achieve desirable results governed by the overarching governance principles of fairness, transparency, responsibility and accountability.

Effective governance promotes good organisational culture as it aids in shaping the attitudes of the organisational members (Ndevu & Muller, 2018). Such a culture encourages high standards of integrity, as well as ethical values. The paper draws on a range of studies to throw some light on the question of effective governance to foster the betterment of human lives. A wide range of documents were critically analysed to establish the concept of effective governance as the driving force for economic development. Moreover, this paper critically analyses hindrances that affect the functioning of effective governance.

Conceptualizing Governance in the South African Context
Governance is understood as the process of making decisions, and the process by which those decisions are implemented or not (Fukuyama 2013). The concept of governance can be utilised in different contexts, such as local governance, the corporate world, provincially, nationally, and globally.

In the context of the public sector, the government is regarded as the main role player or main actor as far as governance is concerned. Peters & Pierre (1998) maintain that governance is focused on conserving or sustaining the resources of the public sector against different forces such as political control.

Further focus on the development of strategies that are famed at sustaining the capacity of the government to act as far as effective and efficient service delivery is concerned. Leadership that is both effective and ethical is the foundation upon which effective governance is based; hence, good governance is described as wholesome leadership in practice (Naidoo, 2002). This means that governance and leadership are conjoined and should not be viewed in isolation, as governance can simply be described as the exercising of leadership by office bearers in the public sector. Those entrusted with governance are also responsible for providing the country with strategic direction and ensuring that the public sector delivers on its mandate.

Hartley et al. (2008) indicate that the provision of direction to the management of institutions is the objective of governance. Wunsch (2001) and Fischer (2019) maintain that governance systems have a responsibility to set strategies and ensure the effective and efficient use of institutions' resources. This can only be achieved by the development and employment of effective governance systems.

Motubatse et al. (2017) emphasise that the role of governance is to ensure the optimal utilisation of resources by means of appropriate internal control systems. The opposite may be applied to poor governance, which correlates with poor public service delivery, resulting from wasted or stolen public funds. This simply implies that governance itself depends on systems, and without systems governance ceases to exist. This is true in every sense, as systems ensure that resources in organisations are employed optimally to prevent organisational failures and enhance organisations' performance. On the other hand, Kettl (2000) uses governance as a concept with which to explore the internal processes and working of the New Public Management (NPM).

New Public Management Approach

The new public management approach emerged in the 1980s from ideas and management models borrowed from the private sector, as an attempt to transform the public sector (Haque, 2004). During its inception phase, NPM was aimed at transforming public sector operations to be business-like, as well as to improve the efficiency of the public sector.

Borrowing ideas and models from the private sector was deemed an appropriate strategy to enhance service delivery, to ensure that citizens are provided with quality services effectively and efficiently. Adopting private sector ideas and models required the public sector to adopt strategies that focused on effective and efficient service delivery, while prioritising customer satisfaction and income generation. NPM emphasises the centrality of citizens as they are the recipients of the services, or the customers of the public sector. This simply means that public sector recipients or customers are the focal point, similar to the private sector where client satisfaction is central to any business.

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The new public management approach advocates a more decentralised control of resources and the exploring of other service delivery models to achieve better results. This includes a quasi-market structure, where public and private service providers compete with each other in an attempt to provide better and faster services (Kähkönen, 2004). Therefore, NPM is a management culture that emphasises the centrality of the 'customer', promotes accountability, and is results- oriented (Hyndman & Lapsley, 2016). The centrality of the customer, which was previously rather deemed the management culture of the private sector, calls for the prioritisation of the customers' needs and satisfaction, which will ultimately result in better results and profits. NPM is more oriented towards outcomes and efficiency through better management of public budget. The private sector is renowned for its application of competition. Therefore, the NPM emphasises application of the same principles in the public sector, hopefully resulting in the accentuating of economic and leadership principles.

Denhardt and Denhardt (2001) argue that the old administration model, as far as the public sector is concerned, did not emphasise competition and economic profits, as the public sector was not deemed as an operational business, but rather as a service provider. Such an approach contributed immensely to the failure of the public sector to meet the needs of its citizens (Riccucci, 2001).

A paradigm shift advocated for a move in public administration to management, therefore emphasising effective management strategies to ensure an effective public sector that addresses the needs of its citizens as its "customers". New public management treats beneficiaries of public services much like customers and, conversely, citizens as shareholders. Different scholars, such as Hood (1995), Manning (2001), Hyndman & Lapsley (2016), and Campos-Alba et al. (2019) assert that NPM emphasises transparency and efficiency, and on a quality of service delivery that is responsive to the needs of society.

New public management is proportional to governance, which means that within governance there is a concerted prominence is given to new tools and techniques to direct and guide the public sector (Stoker, 1998). Governance is about process, while NPM is more focused on the outcomes of the interventions, such as programmes and projects (Hood & Peters, 2004).

Lynn et al. (2000) maintain that the logic of governance is incorporated in NPM practices and it encourages the performance of public programmes and mediates the consequences of a particular strategy for change and reform of government activities. This simply means that governance is focused on the 'how' part of service delivery, while NPM is results based and therefore focuses on the outcomes or results of policies and programmes. Osborne et al. (2013) are of the opinion that NPM centres on intra-organisational management, while governance focuses on inter-organisational governance and processes that are undertaken to achieve an outcome.

NPM denotes specific types of management tools, which operate within the propositions of governance. Effective governance places emphasis on improving public sector management systems to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, productivity and competitiveness in service delivery. Thus, effective governance and public management reform is a key aspect in the quest for market-based and private-domain-based paradigms of public sector management which incorporate NPM.

Gumede and Dipholo (2014) state that the key components of NPM may be put into two broad classes namely, those that stress managerial improvement and organisational restructuring, and those that lay emphasis on markets and competition. Improved efficiency, greater competitiveness and accountability have been the overriding aims of public sector reforms in South Africa since the end of the apartheid government in 1994.

Governance Challenges in South Africa

All organisations and institutions, including state- owned enterprises, which are organisations under the control of the government of the Republic of South Africa exist for the sole purpose of achieving their specific pre-determined goals and objectives.

In the context of government, the local, provincial and national government's ultimate goal to ensure that all citizens are provided with the effective and efficient delivery of basic (Ramutsheli et al., 2015). It is, therefore, the government's responsibility to ensure the availability of resources and the appropriate utilisation of such limited resources to achieve the public service delivery goals.

However, there is unease over the South African government's leadership and achievement of even a basic level of service delivery, which can be mainly attributed to local municipalities' failure to deliver on their mandate.

Evidence indicates that a growing number of South African citizens are dissatisfied with the government and leadership in the country (Obikili, 2019; Mattes, 2019). This can be seen through the increasing number of violent service delivery protests and demonstrations throughout South Africa (Paret, 2015; Van Rooyen, 2018; Breakfast, 2019; Biljohn & Lues, 2019), which means that government, more especially local government, is struggling to meet its objectives and achieve its goals.

In the context of this paper, the NMP Model advocates for a paradigm shift with regard to the traditional model as far as governance is concerned. Therefore, the PMFA and Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 (MFMA), which is particularly relevant in local government has outlined a number of principles and practices for good governance. Irrespective of these key instruments, a number of local municipalities have been reported to have deteriorated since the dawn of democracy.

This is an indication of government's failure to enforce adherence to key pieces of legislation and adoption of the King reports on corporate governance that advocate good and effective governance, particularly local municipalities and state-owned enterprises. Moreover, reports from the Auditor General South Africa have revealed a very troubling picture with regard to local governance (Nengwekhulu, 2009; Basheka & Mubangizi, 2012; Van Baalen, Schutte, & Von Leipzig, 2015; Van Rooyen, 2018).

Part 6 of the King IV report (2006) discusses outlines, principles, and practices for sector supplements such as state- owned enterprises which are a crucial part of government and supplements for municipalities. The dismal failure of state- owned enterprises in South Africa is a clear indication of government's inability to enforce and standardise good practices and governance in all spheres of government.

Such failure perpetuates the perception that the King report is an instrument that was designed for the private sector and as such cannot be used to promote good practice and governance in any sphere of government. South Africa is no stranger to challenges experienced because of a lack of effective governance.

The country's governance has been under scrutiny for a decade (2009-2019) and a number of challenges and issues have resulted from the lack of effective governance (Cosset et al., 2016). Irrespective of the country's state of democracy and perceived stable government, the government in charge has, for decade struggled to find solutions to most of the prevailing social and economic problems the country is facing.

This is a true reflection of the fact that governance without effective systems in place only results in negative outcomes. With all the progressive legislations and policies in place, the country is still unable to address the prevailing economic and social problems, as well as challenges of governance. This results from the fact that there are no effective systems in place to promote and encourage effective governance (Biljohn & Lues, 2019).

The mechanisms and systems which are in place are ineffective in addressing governance challenges, such as lack of ethical leadership and misallocation of resources in the public sector. Resulting from the lack of appropriate systems and mechanisms, South Africa has endured a number of struggles that have overshadowed the progress and positive strides achieved over the years (Leck and Simon, 2018).

Fourie (2018) and Budhram (2018) posit that South Africa is perceived as one of the African countries with a lack of effective governance, and that the public has lost its confidence in the public sector in general. Along with the loss of trust in the government, members of the public and other relevant stakeholders, including investors, have expressed profoundly critical of poor governance in the country.

Regardless, the government is still struggling to improve its performance in the public sector and there has been a further deterioration of transparency and accountability (Santiso, 2001; Johnsen et al., 2019). It is apparent that the issue is the lack of appropriate systems and effective mechanisms to facilitate the correct implementation of the progressive legislation and policies. Systems that safeguard the operations of the public sector institutions are required to facilitate and promote effective governance.

How Governance Impacts on Performance

Kurtz and Schrank (2007) indicate that poor governance and political interventions are the main obstructions to governments achieving social and economic development in developing countries.

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Effective governance, which relies on the quality of public administration, ultimately results in economic growth and development. A country's development is associated with a public sector that is competent, which is not the case in South Africa (Khambule & Mtapuri, 2018; Adeyemi, 2019). The performance of the public sector, at national, provincial and local levels, has been a cause for concern that has dealt a serious blow to the issue of governance in South Africa.

The public sector, including state- owned entities, has year after year been criticised for its failure to deliver effective and efficient service to the public. Irrespective of the policies and laws that have been developed, much is still lacking in terms of implementation, productivity, service outcomes and client satisfaction.

Hartley et al. (2008) wrote in great detail about poor governance and its ineffectiveness in enhancing a country's productivity in terms of economic and social growth, as well as ensuring that its citizens are content and satisfied with the level and quality of services rendered. Patanakul et al. (2016) emphasise that government projects and programmes are not performing satisfactorily, which limits the scale of economic and social development. This is due to the fact that projects and programmes contribute largely to the development of a country.

Scholars Bellantoni et al. (2018) Hay and Cordery (2018) Mergel (2018) and Mlambo et al. (2019) agree that the mechanisms employed by the South African government have failed to promote and encourage fundamental principles of openness, transparency and accountability. South Africa has been crippled by high levels of corruption which have damaged the stability and development of the country. The government's efforts to redress the inequalities and imbalances of the past caused by apartheid, as far as the previously marginalised population are concerned, created the development of progressive pieces of legislation, such as black economic empowerment and affirmative action.

Irrespective of the progressive nature of the policies, the goal of empowering marginalised people has not been achieved, due to a culture of corruption that has had adverse effects on the development of the country. Ironically, the country's development is threatened by the very same progressive laws meant to develop it, due to the fact that the systems and mechanisms aimed at safeguarding the implementation of such policies are not put in place.

Manala (2014) argues that in the absence of effective systems and mechanisms to safeguard implementation, the outcomes of progressive policies will still be negative. This simply means that government's transformation plans will continue to yield negative results as governance requires a great number of systems and mechanisms to ensure effective and efficient implementation of laws developed. Regarding these systems, the South African government has struggled to develop and implement mechanisms that enforces accountability. Sewpersadh and Mubangizi (2017), Masenya (2018), Budhram and Geldenhuys (2018) contend that, as a result of this lack of accountability, public office bearers still continue to utilise public funds and resources to enrich themselves and the political elites.

Ethics and Governance in the Public Sector

The lack of effective governance in any nation is the result of a lack of good governance and ethical conduct. Thebe (2017) argues that the models that a country adopts and the lack of appropriate systems perpetrates bad governance, which ultimately leads to the very problems South Africa is experiencing at this very point in time .

The point is that government institutions, like private ones, are part of larger systems that are constantly interacting. The internal and external environments are crucial in effective functioning and therefore those in charge of governance should have sound knowledge and an understanding of the internal and external environment as far as systems in the public sector are concerned.

Thebe (2017) further illustrates the interaction and relationship between factors such as organisational culture, organisational goals, organisational climate, stakeholders, individual values, and organisational values. The King Report IV (2006) emphasises that ethical and effective leadership should complement and reinforce each other.

This means that good governance requires ethical leaders that are effective in delivering the mandate of the government.

The overarching principles of the King Report IV, the PFMA and the MFMA all emphasise the fact that good governance is a direct result of effective and ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is exemplified by integrity, competence, fairness, responsibility, accountability and transparency.

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The South African public sector is renowned for an organisational culture that is ineffective in addressing the needs and expectations of the public or citizens of the country. A number of scholars (Brillantes & Perante-Calina, 2018; Halligan, 2018; Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; Neuroni, 2019) have agreed that a lack of ethical leadership in the public sector has created a culture of fraud and corruption, where transparency, honesty and accountability are not encouraged but, instead, frowned upon. This can be seen through the number of high ranking public officials who have been found to be in transgression of their oath of office.

Also evident is that 'whistle-blowers' (informants) of those officers who do transgress have been victimised or dismissed, which is an indication that the public sector organisational culture does not promote transparency and accountability. As far as the public sector in South Africa is concerned, the organisational goals are constantly in conflict with individual goals, such as gaining power and wealth. Moore (1994) and Franco-Santos & Otley (2018) describe the negative impact of self-serving individuals on how the public sector achieves its goals and objectives.

Masenya (2017) explains that a number of high ranking public officials have been implicated in cases of fraud and corruption and were found to have violated their oath of office. This is an indication that ethical leadership is something that is severely lacking as far as the public sector in South Africa is concerned (Thebe, 2017; Hlongwane, 2018; Budhram, 2018).

The organisational climate and stakeholders are also key factors in the ethics and corporate governance model for the South African public service (Wieland, 2001; Thebe, 2017; ElGammal et al. 2018). The South African public sector is perceived as a breeding ground for fraud and corruption. Masuku & Jili (2019) maintain that the political deployment by the ruling political party in government to high-rank positions has resulted in the public sector being led and managed by people who lack adequate knowledge and competency to facilitate the implementation of systems and mechanisms that promote effective governance.

Conclusion
The basic values of the South African Constitution provide guidance for the governance systems and mechanisms necessary to engender effective governance.

This paper concludes that South Africa has ineffective governance systems and mechanisms to facilitate the correct implementation of its progressive legislation and policies. Therefore, better systems to safeguard the operations of the public sector institutions are required to facilitate and promote effective governance.

The South African government has failed to create the conditions for effective governance due to poor management of public resources. The paper demonstrates that ineptitude of leadership has led to the failure to build a management culture that permits diversity in management which is a requirement for effective governance. This paper further concludes that what regulates effective and ethical governance is the model that is used, wherein appropriate policies are effectively and efficiently implemented, to provide quality services to the public.

Effective governance is a major global challenge, where the obligation to report, explain and be answerable (accountability) for the consequences of decisions in governance, made on behalf of communities, must be properly implemented. Citizens are unable to follow and understand decisions that have been made because there is no transparency and the rule of law is not followed. These conditions make it challenging to implement effective governance. Therefore, the South African public sector should have systems and mechanisms that enhance effective governance, which in turn facilitates sustainable development, which is responsive to the needs of the society. The new public management approach calls for government to adopt private business like strategies or ideologies that will ensure that the public sector is effective and efficient.

The principles in the King IV report on corporate governance in South Africa are aligned with the principles of pieces of legislation underpinning the effective and efficient utilisation of public resources, such as the PMFA. The King report contains principles and practices emphasised in the PMFA and such principles can be applied to all spheres of government regardless of the form and manner of entities or departments.

Adherence to instruments such as the King IV principles, the PMFA, and the MFMA, any entity or government department will have practised good governance. To be effective, governance should always think and act in the interest of the public: it should respond to the needs of the people, implement policies, and promote ethical governance.

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Hence, effective governance is about understanding systems, and acting ethically within the complex challenges of society to ensure delivery of services in an effective and efficient manner.

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