

Fighting Corruption in the Public Sector through good Governance

Angelo Nicolaides

Head of Department, Philosophy and Applied Ethics

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zululand, South Africa.

Corresponding author: nicolaidesa@unizulu.ac.za

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Abstract: The central argument of this article is that the problem of corruption in the Public Service in South Africa requires urgent attention if growth is to be achieved. Governance in the Public Service in South Africa relates to a range of structures and processes through which the service is guided, controlled, and held accountable for how it operates. Where there is apposite governance, this invariably delivers the means to help the public service reach its desired aims and objectives. Good governance is non-negotiable in the public service, including inter alia, various ministries, state departments such as Public Service and Administration, Trade and Industry, Defence, Foreign Affairs, Water and Forestry, Science and Technology, Mineral and Energy, Public Enterprises and Home Affairs. The national, provincial and local levels of Government all have legislative and executive authority in their own spheres, and are identified in the Constitution as being distinct, and yet they are interdependent and connected. Sadly, corruption exist at least to an extent in all. There is clearly an inability in the public sector to be more efficient in enhancing programme delivery for optimum results to be achieved. This conceptual study is the result of considering that corruption in any shape or from hugely undermines the development goals of South Africa while also negatively impacting the most on the most vulnerable millions of impoverished people inhabiting the country.

Numerous governmental programmes and services often also intersect and if they are to be delivered in a flawless manner, good governance is non-negotiable. Where there is corruption and abuse of official authority focused on personal reward, bribery, fraud and the misappropriation of state funds, this generally has hugely deleterious effects. This article argues that corruption has shocking consequences and that public servants need to be reflective and self-aware of how they serve the nation and not seek unfair privileges but focus on their ethical responsibilities and duty as servants of the state and where narcissism exists this must be relinquished for the common good. A range of ideas are offered which may assist in mitigating corrupt practices in the public sector.

Keywords: Corruption, ethics, public sector, governance, transparency, accountability.

Introduction

Corruption in the public sector is a global problem including South Africa and it has numerous destructive effects, especially damaging public trust in government, wasting tax-payers money and promoting wrong through advantaging a few people at the expense of the nation. All public officials that are appointed to serve in organs of the state need to serve the public interest and not themselves. The term 'corruption' then refers to the betrayal of public trust through dishonest conduct and practices such as the misuse of state resources by people who betray the public trust for personal gain [12, 13].

Good governance has basic principles that identify it. Where there is good governance there is always integrity, accountability, good leadership and transparency and public servants are ethical custodians of state resources that are used to benefit society. Good governance is in essence legitimate, responsible and efficient ways of acquiring and using public resources to achieve the desired social goals. Good governance is then for the most part usually related to carefully crafted economic, social and political goals that are considered to be essential for achieving desired national development. Thus, public institutions are required to always conduct public affairs and manage public resources effectively so that human rights and the rule of law are promoted to the fullest. Rothstein and Teorell assert that the basic characteristic of good governance is the impartiality of government institutions [10]. The World Bank

defines good governance as: 1) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced 2) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies 3) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them [14].

Governance then denotes all the process through which important decisions are made and implemented within the public service. Consequently, it must of necessity involve setting reasonable achievable goals, generate workable policies, and oversee the performance of departments on a regular basis. This is why good governance necessitates far more than merely having a checklist approach and the state of the structures and processes that support the public sector in realizing good governance need re-imagining. Corruption always tends to erode the trust of citizens in the public sector, and it is then seen as not striving to act in the best interests of the nation [5,9]. Good governance is indispensable to the success of all organizations, irrespective of whether they are in the public, private or not profit sectors.

There is a dire need to eradicate unethical practices in the public service where there are high levels of corruption. Ethical leadership which should role-model desired behaviours is critical in efforts to arrive at engaged ethical employee outcomes [5,6,7]. Where there is ethical leadership, the work engagement of employees is generally higher and they view their roles as being meaningful [8]. The values associated with the public service need to be ethically driven and self-interest must have no place [2]. South Africa is currently ranked 70th on Transparency International's latest Corruption Index. Fukuyama asserts that the ability of the state and the independent status of the bureaucracy are the two key factors that establish whether governance is excellent or dreadful [3]. The public needs to see positive outcomes that are based on deliverables which they demand. These relate to issues such as inter-alia water provision, electricity provision, health services, education, security, environmental protection, and fair wages in the public and private sectors. Governments are voted in to power and need to operate ethically as they carry out their electoral promises and provide needed services [4].

Public sector governance relates mainly to accountability tasks regarding specific objectives related to numerous aspects of governance including services and their delivery. It is imperative to have good governance principles and structures in place because this to an extent mitigates corrupt practices in the public service. There are sadly many allegations of unethical conduct in the public service in South Africa and these cover a wide range of issues such as inefficiency and ineffectiveness, public servants not responding to the needs of citizens, covering up public service incompetence, the unethical use of public resources, nepotism, fraud, theft and the misuse of state funds and also equipment.¹¹ Corruption has the effect of also thwarting good governance principles and structures from being implemented as transparency and accountability are blocked and this of course undermines the rule of law and inhibits needed economic development.

What causes corruption in the Public Service?

In all societies there is a dire need for quality ethically driven practices to exist in governmental institutions and thus the public sector, and this is vital for the well-being of citizens and the state. There are a range of factors at national level that impact on the manner in which the public service and their services function, and these tend to influence the reality and occurrence of public sector corruption. Some of the key factors, resources, conflict of interest, principled behaviour and the rule of law and the failure of governance, are briefly discussed below.

Resources

The public sector invariably has a monopoly over the supply and allocation of natural resources rights which then permits economic opportunities to be abused for corrupt intentions. For example, in the mining and oil industries there may well be private incentives that increase rent-seeking and institutional and even state capture. It is evident that many resource-rich countries languish from systemic corruption and very poor governance [15]. In 2016 during the Jacob Zuma presidency, state capture intensified and was considered to be due to systemic political corruption. State capture is based on corruption that influences resources, politically and also administratively [16]. In state capture the nature of the business entity-state relationship is unlawful, and this suggests that laws and regulations made or actions taken are products of corrupt acts or transactions. Subsequently, legitimacy becomes a function of illegality [17]. State capture is essentially ownership of elite corruption that impacts wealth politically and administratively. In the South African context, it tends to exhibit itself as a form of private politicisation and manipulation [18]. Where there is corruption or complicity in the private sector, and criminal activities, these must be fought meticulously and there must be an urgent resolve to promote ethical conduct for the benefit of the country. Corruption intensifies income inequality and poverty in especially rural areas in need, through lower economic growth and very poor targeting of social programmes and this prolongs rural inequality in asset ownership. Corruption perpetuates an unequal

distribution of assets that particularly impacts rural communities, and it stifles needed economic development. Corruption is this highly detrimental when it comes to growth opportunities and equity for especially rural South African communities.

In a nutshell, corruption and all forms of state capture must be eradicated through the effective prosecution of criminals involved therein. As the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC) should be to be at the vanguard of the fight against state capture and corruption and they should work with communities to deal decisively with acts of criminality that threaten to break communities up [19]. Where there is state capture this results in adverse economic impacts and this leads to negative growth so that less revenue is produced and less funding is available in the fiscus. All this results in less needed investments in the country and this thwarts growth and stability. Confidence in the country diminishes and social and economic stability decline.

Conflicts of interest

According to Corruption Watch, a conflict of interest is: "Any financial or other private interest or undertaking that could directly or indirectly compromise the performance of the public servant's duties or the reputation of a public servant's department in its relationship with its stakeholders" [20]. When a public official is in a position to be influenced by his/her private interests when doing his/her job this is a conflict of interest because he/she is engaging in activities that lead to personal advantage at the expense of the citizens of the country. In some cases public officials may have a private interest which greatly influences a public decision that is taken [21, 53]. Conflicts of interest are then any circumstances in which public officials have a conflict between their private or financial interests and their obligation to serve the public interest first and foremost. A conflict of interest is defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as: "a conflict between the public duty and private interest of public officials, in which public officials have private-capacity interests which could improperly influence the performance of their official duties and responsibilities" [22].

There are severe ethical lapses wherein public officials become trapped in conflicts of interest, both real, or alleged [53]. For example, there should be no nepotism and neither budgets nor occupations should ever be used to benefit a public official's private interests, such as when they award jobs to family members or their friends or even use financial resources and budgets to benefit them. Appointed as well as elected officials have a fiduciary responsibility to make certain that the budgets and positions are managed effectively and efficiently. Public service officials must of necessity have a disqualifying conflict of interest if a government decision is likely to have a financial impact on their personal, family, or business financial interests.

A few of the many other conflicts of interest that exist include one holding public office as well as private business interests, and then using their public position to benefit their private interests. Accepting bribes to reveal confidential information about the government department that one serves in is also a conflict of interest. One is also guilty of a conflict of interest when they influence a government tender process in order to award state contracts to family and friends or when they tender for a municipal contract when they are employees of the municipality. Generally, any abuse of one's position in the public service to make sure that one's friends and family members are appointed into the same department is a conflict of interest situation. A decision by government involving property in which a public official has ownership, investment, or leases in is also highly questionable and unethical conduct, as is accepting gifts from individuals or entities who have some or other business with the government. Public service policies that are carefully crafted, developed and implemented, must cover the desired ethical standards of conduct expected as well as articulate clear and consistent policies on what a conflict of interest actually is. Employees and elected officials may not distinguish a conflict of interest and avoid actions that are known or recognized as being incompatible with their official duties in serving the public interest.

Any unethical action by a public service employee is wrong, fraudulent, or a misuse of public authority and resources. In what is termed a "revolving door" situation, public officials may acquire rewarding posts in the private sector once they leave the public service. There is then an anticipation that they will use their public sector connections to benefit the private company they now serve [23]. Measures must be put in place to guide public service officials to be vigilant and avoid being placed in outcomes where an actual or potential conflict of interest leading to corruption may arise. In addition, all conflicts need to be disclosed and addressed in a way that will avoid corruption. This is where conflicts of interest must be addressed through financial and asset disclosure requirements, the use of effective codes of conduct and other regulations, as well as prohibiting public officials from engaging in any work in the private sector for at least a certain period of time after they leave the public service [24]. Disclosure requirements that are effective must be in place to mitigate potential conflicts of interest and should be filed semi-annually to enhance transparency of current transactions that may in some way constitute a conflict of interest.

Principled Behaviour and the lack of Rule of Law

A great contributor to corruption is the poor rule of law and a lack of principled behaviour which ultimately leads to lawlessness. Where legal systems are deficient and there are not enough measures in place to curtail it, corruption is rampant and there is a lack of proper management and transparency relating to public affairs as well as a lack of integrity and accountability [25]. employees in the public service need to be able to distinguish right from wrong and good from bad and be committed to do the right things in whatever situation they find themselves. They should act in a just and proper manner at all times as they carry out their important duties [2,11]. There should be specific measures in place that confirm adherence to important principles as articulated in workable codes of ethical conduct, including inter-alia, enhancing transparency, inhibiting conflicts of interest, ethical practice promotion and the adoption of merit-based systems for staffing and the promotion of civil servants [26]. Public *servants* need to be guided by available standards that represent commonly supported social values and ethical actions. Law and order must prevail in a fair justice system that is independent and highly effective. We need to distinguish between "rule of law" and "rule by law". The latter refers to the executive use of law as well as bureaucracy as an instrument of power. The former is when the executive is equally constrained by the same laws that apply to all other citizens [27]. In other words, there must be accountability for all people and entities under the rule of law, "...equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency" [28]. Public service is after all a public trust occupation, and it requires public servants to be place loyal to the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of South Africa. This means that ethical principles should prevail above any conceivable private gain. Corruption in public procurement commonly brings all the negative impacts of corruption. In fact, the negative economic and social costs of corrupt actions, in terms of the many wasted resources, ineptitude and missed prospects, are always far higher than the benefits that could accrue through such actions. This eventually reduces public trust in government and erodes the public integrity that is crucial for improving the public good [30].

No public service official should go beyond their authority in terms of the law, and they should only act if they have authority or power to do so in any given situation. They should always adhere to the highest possible standards of professional ethics and deal with all stakeholders impartially, and in a fair and equal manner respond to the needs of people in a transparent and accessible manner. Furthermore, there must be a justifiable reason for any decision that they make in good faith, rather than in bad faith [11]. The service meted out by public servants must be acceptable to the public and be of high quality. Most importantly, the fundamental rights of citizens must be upheld, and this means that civil servants must develop a greater political and human consciousness through ongoing training on especially ethics and accountability which are key aspects in public service delivery. "Service delivery may be impeded by confusing or contradictory guidance, too much control or unnecessary management strategies. Within the broad themes of guidance, control and co-ordination of management strategies, a balanced operational application of strategies is essential for effective service delivery" [29].

Public servants have an obligation to serve the public and all officials within a department have an obligation to discharge their responsibilities in striving to safeguard that needed services are provided to citizens in an efficient and effective manner. Hence, public servants serve the general public and are after all part and parcel of the government [32]. Public servants need to at all times pursue the public interest as opposed to their own personal interests. They must operate with a strong sense of integrity, loyalty, professionalism and in an environment that requires honesty. They need to uphold a positive public image and be accountable and responsible for their actions as they deliver top notch service quality and gain the respect and confidence of the public in general. It is also important that public service employees remain politically neutral and that they are appointed on merit. It is also critical that they make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind to a member of the public. They should always act impartially and not give any preferential treatment to any private individual person or organization. No public servant irrespective of rank must solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from either doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by the public service. There needs to be an honest effort in the performance of all public service employees' duties [30].

Deficiency in Governance

It is evident that public sector corruption emanates predominantly from poor governance which is linked to an inferior quality public sector management and poor leadership that does not role model the desired ethical operational behaviours. There is in addition a lack of accountability, poor relations between the government and citizens, a weak legal framework, a lack transparency regarding public sector procedures, and poor dissemination of information. A lack of required operational competence and capacity due to inadequate training also contributes to the failure of

governance [2]. Good governance is only possible if the leader or line manager is open to share their thoughts and encourage their underlings to effectively participate to build stronger cooperation and communication, as well as to find resolutions to difficulties that arise in the course of public service employment. What transpires in any organisation is a function of the organisation, but also its structure, its leadership, its procedures, its objectives, and is also a consequence of the operational environment and the specific contingencies and limitations stemming from the environment [31].

Managerial leadership need to possess important analytical and conceptual skills in order to tackle aspects such as risk management, expenditure management, and decision-making and public financial management [57]. All budgeting that is made must be based on careful strategic planning. The public service leaders and underlings need to understand the relationship between public service and their own environment [32]. Poor governance is very often the result of a glaring deficiency in effective monitoring and evaluation, and this of course is a very important manner through which important information can be gleaned relating to transparency and accountability in the public service. More especially monitoring and evaluation should be outcomes based and focus primarily on financial management and operational governance systems.³³ Public service managers need to ensure that resources are utilized legally and in an efficient manner and they therefore require precise information on what is transpiring in their various departments in terms of budgeting, reporting, and financial management linked to strategic plans, so that they can operate efficiently, effectively and economically in terms of their service quality provision.

The regulation of financial management in the national government and provincial governments is carried out in terms of the Public Finance Management Amendment Act, of 1999 (PFMA). This seeks to ensure that all revenue, expenditure, assets and liabilities of departments are managed efficiently and effectively. It also relates to the range of responsibilities of persons' entrusted with financial management public service departments. The PFMA is intended to promote good financial management by concentrating on maximising service delivery through the use of efficient, effective and economic means. It is however the case that from time to time, some public service departments conduct unauthorized and wasteful expenditure which is in effect financial misconduct in terms of the PFMA and has a dire impact on economic advancement [32]. When audit committees are not functioning effectively and internal audits are deficient, it is generally the case that accountability and transparency are undermined since internal controls and risks are not addressed as needed and ultimately departmental objectives are not achieved. It is the manager's responsibility to make certain that systems used are effective and that risks are managed quickly. Deficiencies in governance can only be tackled when the operational environment and culture are conducive to good governance [32, 54, 56]. While the PFMA is a step in the right direction, additional initiatives should be considered to suitably face governance challenges.

Perhaps a new public management approach should be devised that can adequately transform public sector operations. The current deficit of appropriate systems and mechanisms to effectively promote and enforce governance remains a threat to development. Poor governance always results in lost public resources, weak institutions, decreasing investment in the country and it limits growth towards national sustainability and entrenches corruption.³⁵ Governmental institutions that are relatively free from corruption have a strong positive impact on various outcomes related to human well-being [34]. Governance and leadership are conjoined and must not be viewed in isolation since governance is exercising of leadership by office bearers in the public service [36, 57].

The Principal - Agent theory - why corruption manifests

The 'principal-agent' theory is feasibly the main one as to why corruption arises in the public service. It supports the notion that corruption arises in the public sector because of a transfer of responsibility and inadequate monitoring. Corruption tends to manifest itself in a number of ways inter-alia materialism, bribery, patronage, nepotism, theft, bid-rigging, graft and kickbacks. The principal-agent theory in public administration denotes a framework that concentrates on the relationship between a principal (such as the government or shareholders) and an agent (such as a public servant) so as to ensure accountability and the appropriate exercise of administrative power. Corruption thus occurs in the public sector due to a transfer of responsibility and what is often imperfect monitoring. This produces a principal-agent relationship between the government department and its administration or between the citizens and the political elite. The principal agent problem is due to a distorted information problem which occurs because government frequently cannot accurately or easily observe the key day-to-day decisions of management in public service departments.

A principal-agent problem then arises when the interests of the public service (the principals i.e. government) are not aligned with those of its managers (the agents) who make and take decisions on their behalf [37]. This may lead to conflicts of interest, as managers may prioritize their own goals over the objectives of the government. The yearning

for personal gain is often identified as the principal cause of public sector corruption [38]. The principal-agent model accepts and assumes that agents (public officials) serve to protect the interests of the principal (parliament, managers, citizens) whereas on the ground the interests of the agents (public service managers and their underlings) may diverge from those interests.

At times, principal-agent problems may appear because government officials simply do not have the knowledge to act effectively as agents for the people they serve [57]. Such principal-agent problems in government can be decreased by modifying staff incentives in order to decrease conflicts of interest. To reduce the agency problem further, there is a need to monitor and have solid oversight over what transpires in public service workspaces and beyond where necessary, so as to curb the agent's possible abuses. Transparency can assist in mitigating information asymmetry so that there are regular reports and disclosures on public service operations. Only in this way can the government monitor the decisions made by public service managers and try to ensure that they are acting in the best interest of the public and the state at large.

One of the key reasons why corruption is threatening to good government is that in the public service, not all the agents are doing what they are supposed to be doing. This is where incremental positive change and an ethical mindset are needed. Fukuyama maintains that in bureaucracies there is a tendency to be far better than in most democratic states when it comes to anti-corruption initiatives due to the control measures in society [3]. We must also bear in mind that many corrupt acts in the public service come about because of an interface with the public sector. There is a need to fight the problem through legal prosecutions but more funds are required for the National Prosecuting Authority for this endeavour to materialise [40]. The OECD posits that one of the most corruption prone to government activities is public procurement because the volume of transactions that occur and the huge financial interests at stake. There is also the issue of close interaction between public officials and businesses, and a range of other stakeholders.⁴¹ In a number of countries the widespread abuse of the government-spending process is a doorway to huge fortunes that are amassed for corrupt public service managers and employees [42].

What can be done to curb Corruption?

The 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) displays that most nations are failing to halt corruption. It ranks 180 countries and territories globally by their apparent levels of public sector corruption, scoring on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The 2022 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index scored South Africa in position 43 on a scale from 0 ("highly corrupt") to 100 ("very clean"). South Africa ranked 72nd among the 180 countries in the Index, where the country ranked first is perceived to have the most honest public sector [58].

Training public servants in ethical consciousness is by all accounts the most important step to drive. To this end applied ethics workshops and training should be provided for all for all who serve in government in any shape or form. It is vital to instil in all public servants that importance of avoiding conflicts of interest and to guide them in understanding relevant policies that are in place and why they need to be adhered to as well as the consequences of non-adherence to them. It is also vital that all policies relating to ethical practices be clear and easy to understand as well as the laws on corrupt practices and penalties for misdemeanours. Leadership and ethics training and a culture committed to good public sector governance are sorely needed.

Codes of conduct and ethics training for all for public officials should be standard practices. This can be used to promote the desired personal standards which include integrity, responsibility and truthfulness. Ethics Codes can provide guidance on how public officials should conduct themselves in the workplace and how and why they may be held accountable for all their actions and decisions taken. In these codes, leaders, managers, supervisors and all employees must have clearly defined obligations and duties as well an understanding of the needed knowledge and skills, and available resources to effectively serve the public good. Stakeholder relationships must be sound with suitable structures and processes in place to gauge and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of service to citizens. First and foremost, there should be clear channels of communication with all stakeholders regarding each public service department's mission, its responsibilities, functions, purposes, and performance. Communication with stakeholders must be reasonable, logical, transparent and appropriate.

All management procedures must be well established and documented with a clear understanding that conflicts of interest may arise even when public servants try to avoid acting on a conflict-of-interest issue. Thus, the conditions under which a public official must not participate in a policy action must be carefully explained to them. Issues such as disqualification, recusal, and delegation need to be stressed as well. The desired standards of behaviour must be role-modelled by leaders for others in the service to emulate. There must be applicable structures and processes in

place to guarantee the public service is free of conflicts of interest or prejudice. The public service culture must be expressed as values and demonstrated in ethical behaviour at all times and in all places.

Desired ethical virtues and awareness must be vigorously promoted at every opportunity to do so, and these must of necessity include transparency and truthfulness. In this vein, disclosure forms and filings by public officials should be quickly accessible to the public. Public procurement must be subject to extensive legal and administrative regulations in order to protect public funds and manage taxpayers' money cautiously. There must be effective laws and legal prohibitions against corruption, and criminal activities in the public service, and strong penalties for corrupt actions must be directed at both the public (and private) sector.

Public procurement must undergo careful checks starting with well-planned pre-selection activities such as record keeping and auditing of all aspects and a needs assessment, solid project design, and a careful drafting of the call for bids. In this regards the technical specifications and selection criteria for tendering must be made abundantly clear. Good financial management is needed. Good governance has a strong positive effect on measures relating to public and possible investor trust and transparency is non-negotiable. All ethical considerations must always be at the vanguard of administrative practices. Good governance and service delivery are imperative and where there is minimal or no corruption there is generally and improvement in the efficiency of public and private enterprise and promising conditions for economic growth and sustainability bode well for a country.

Ethical Leadership in the Public Service

Ethical leadership plays a critical role in the Public Service. The leadership must be ethical role modellers that and deliver fair treatment of all stakeholders and actively manage ethics. They need to consider the moral implications of their actions when they make choices and must engender a conducive ethical environment. Their actions must be supportive and they must adhere to procedures that are fair, as this can create an organisational climate in which it is safe for public servants to address and reporting ethical problems that arise [5,7].

Risks must be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis and any risks should be mitigated. Reporting unethical behaviour has a positive impact and discourages the continuance of unethical behaviour due to the confidence employees have in the leadership of the organisation's ability to appropriately take corrective action as and when it is required. The success of an ethical environment and compliance of ethical standards or codes is dependent on the leaders of the organisation [5, 7, 52].

Codes of Ethics/Conduct

Good governance necessitates having an effective Code of Ethics/Conduct in place in the Public Service. It is arguable that such a need is the most important in any organisation and it should form an integral part of any ethics and compliance program [8]. The purpose of a Code of Ethics/Conduct must be to provide direction for public servants on what exactly is meant by ethical conduct in the workplace. A well-considered code signposts, what public servants should and should not do in terms of how they operate in the service.

By having a well-considered and relevant Code of Ethics/Conduct, the public sector can strengthen oversight and a promote a needed high integrity approach. Rules that prohibit all types of unethical conduct must be included. The ethics code adopted must invariably include aspects such as ethical conduct in all conceivable workplace situations. The code adopted should be workshopped at least biannually and public servants must be trained in their actual working environments on ethics and their dealings with all stakeholders. Continuous improvement procedures should be instituted [56].

The code should identify the standards adopted by leadership and expected of all public servants. It should inter alia include various ways to report misconduct in an anonymous manner, the disciplinary processes used applicable to unethical employee conduct and there must be a clear understanding of how to deal with both internal and external stakeholders, institutions and organization's relating to accountability and responsibilities to the public service. Of course, the organizational structures also need to be strong and robust, and processes must be in place to comply with and meet internal and external responsibilities. Controls should include both internal and external appraisals of ethical aspects of work at regular periods. In order to monitor public servant progress, there thus needs to be effective oversight and scrutiny involving regular checks and sound record-keeping systems [54, 56] on whether compliance to the Code of Ethics/Conduct has been achieved by public servants, and if not, further measures should be to adopted to promote compliance. Any Code of ethics/Conduct that is adopted should include appropriate mechanisms that must be implemented for public servants to be positioned to know what they ought to do should they observe any unethical behaviour happening.

Recommendations

While Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides regulating principles for public administration [46], in order for good governance to permeate the public service, further steps ought to be considered by the managers/supervisor. Firstly, there must be a spirit of teamwork and participation which pervades all work conducted. What is done must always be transparent and in line with the rule of law. Employees must be equitable, inclusive, fully responsive, consensus-oriented and fully accountable for their actions as they contribute to realizing defined public service strategic goals and objectives in an effective and efficient manner [43, 55].

It is imperative that information is shared among public servants and all other stakeholders while respecting the confidentiality of personal information in terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013. The notion of integrity must be vigorously promoted for ethical conduct to be a habit in order that all public agents become worthy of public trust, public confidence and above all respect [44].

If public servants report behaviour that is unethical, this will have a positive impact in the service and will tend to discourage the continuance of unethical behaviour due to the self-assurance employees have in the leadership of the organisation's ability to take corrective action when required. The success of an ethical environment and compliance of ethical standards or codes is dependent on the leaders in the public service. It is incumbent on them to promote ethical behaviour by all managers and supervisors in the public service and reduce unethical practices [2, 5] This can be realised by implementing guidelines and ethical standards that are set out in a clear fashion and are considered to be non-negotiable [45]. All public servants must have a clear understanding of the Public Service objectives and the service requires an effective governance structure which must be straightforward. Effective communication at all levels of operation in the public service from the very onset of their tenure will make it easier for all staff to operate effectively. Managers and supervisors must also ensure that staff voices are heard. The South African Constitution, *inter alia*, entrusts the Public Service Commission with the mission of monitoring and promoting a high standard of professional ethics at all times in the public service and it asserts that:

“Implementation of risk management strategies is currently limited to compliance with regulations and risk management is not institutionalised in the majority of provincial government departments. Risk management plans are not integrated into strategic planning processes. Risk management is, in the majority of instances, currently applied as a financial matter to comply with Treasury regulations. This is also true for fraud prevention plans. The extent to which fraud prevention plans were based on risk assessments conducted in departments, is questionable in most departments” [47].

There should be quality controls in place concerning all transactions and this ought to be reviewed regularly towards a needed continuous improvement process in service delivery. Risks such as fraud and corruption, must be monitored and assessed on an ongoing basis and procedures that work must be established to address risks. More effective anti-fraud and corruption strategies as well as policies and frameworks, should be crafted along with workable risk management tools. Public Service delivery can only be enhanced through a more efficient deployment of resources and appropriate contingency planning processes including whistle-blowing. Risk Management should be highlighted as a critically important day-to-day management consideration. It is evident based on levels of corruption that there exists a lack of effective risk management strategies, resources and also capacity to effectively ensure that public servants are not caught up in acts of corruption, either intentionally or unintentionally [51]. Perhaps there ought to be a national framework which directs the implementation of integrated Risk Management processes developed by all stakeholders collectively.⁴⁷ The public service needs to keep monitoring and reviewing because the level of risk faced is constantly fluctuating, with new risks emerging daily.⁴⁸ Risk Management must be boosted as a day-to-day tool to safeguard that there is good management and ethical use of resources in service delivery [49].

Public servants should be offered incentives. When possible, the service should try to provide their staff with something of value for engagement and participation. Incentives like stipends, travel funds, or release time can go a long way in building support and fostering participation. Staff should be offered training and development opportunities on public service issues [50], and this will hopefully go a long way in improving levels of ethical service provision.⁵¹ Effective internal control systems are absolutely vital to have in place in any organisation be it a public or a private entity [5, 7, 52, 56].

There must be training with all Public Service employees that clarifies the expectation of the service with new and existing employees and this should include a clear statement of the purpose of the public service which should be used as a foundation for all planning. In other words, public servants should have a road map that outlines the objectives of the service and how they ought to be accomplished with stakeholders both internally and externally. Thus, there should

be effective communication with stakeholders, including the procedures to follow for both internal and external enquiries and also criticisms [55 , 56]. The most important aspect to consider is that servants of the public are well versed in their respective functions, responsibilities and culpabilities and how those relate to the rest of the organization and they must therefore clearly defined. Clear policies must be workshopped and then implemented and all public servants must be held accountable to the government assuming that the latter has taken steps to provide the needed training on issues of inter alia governance and corruption. Performance of public servants must be monitored on an ongoing daily basis.

Conclusion

There is a need to eradicate unethical practices in the public service as a matter of urgency and to adequately responds to the inordinately high levels of corruption in the public service. Sorely needed socio-economic and developmental plans are scuppered by unethical practices. Ethical leadership is thus critical in order for engaged ethical employee outcomes to come to fruition. The values related to the public service need to be ethically driven and self-interest be put aside. Service delivery quality in South Africa is hampered by corruption in spite of a good legislative framework and strategies to combat corruption. It is the poor who ultimately bear the brunt of corrupt practices as resources are misused or stolen by corrupt individuals. There is an ostensibly weak application of legislation that in many ways promotes corruption and this is aggravated by a meritocratic mentality and an apparent lack of political will. A zero tolerance from the government towards corruption is imperative. Ethical conduct in the Public Service must be binding on all public servants as well as the stakeholders such as all service providers etc. who must be vetted before contracting is done with them.

The public sector urgently needs to lay stress on nurturing ethical leadership and motivate employees to act ethically through effective recruitment and selection, training, codes of ethics and a sense of significance in what they do at work. The oversight mechanisms also need to be carefully administered. A robust ethical stance will decrease corruption, improve the integrity of governance, enhance public values, and also most likely improve the general perception of the public service as it currently exists. Most importantly, a vigorous and dependable political will is required to combat corruption in all its forms.

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