

Unlocking the potential of the Public Sector



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Unlike many private sector business contracts, the public sector needs to continually demonstrate transparency in all financial matters. A plethora of rules and regulations exist to guide public officials when public monies are being paid on various goods and services. The obvious intention of these rules is to limit the abuse of public monies and – like most legislation – has good intent. But implementation and compliance to these rules is often problematic. While the public sector is under constant scrutiny and pressure to improve and enhance service delivery, these well-intended frameworks can inhibit performance. Whether it's a cumbersome system; unqualified or demotivated staff; internal politics; or even party politics tripping up the decision making process, the reality is that it's the citizens of the country who bear the brunt for the public sector being unable to rapidly respond to the needs of the country.

As an example, the laws that govern the public sector supply chain processes are driven from National Treasury and are operationalised within the provincial and local government spheres. Budgets are drawn up, openly debated, approved, and allocated across various programmes so the various strategic objectives of the government of the day can be met. So if the people, the rules, and the cash exist, how can capacity be the problem? The resident *capacity* within the public sector needs to be inspired, coordinated and streamlined in order to create an organisation that is able to execute the various developmental mandates bestowed upon it.

And there are ways to make this happen. It's all about doing things to unlock the capacity and potential of the public sector. There is no clear shortfall of staff within the government ranks – indeed, as an employer; the public sector in South Africa employs nearly 18 percent of the formally employed population. And make no mistake – the public sector has many experienced and well qualified personnel in the organisation. It could just be that they are uninspired to perform at a higher level (or even perform their current tasks properly) or that the wrong people have been appointed in specific posts. There is also inexperienced staff who, as a personal risk-avoidance strategy, would rather avoid making decisions with significant budgetary implications.

In essence, our public sector staff needs a shot of confidence in order to do their work properly. Confidence can increase capacity. Confidence can be facilitated through the creation of smart and streamlined systems with quick turnaround times, pushing accountability to the correct levels in the organisation. These systems will support the staff. Good leadership also inspires confidence. People who know that their seniors trust them and capacitate them will inevitably perform better. Rooting out corruption and promoting ethical behaviour demonstrates a willingness to

perform better. In spite of its unionised and perceived sheltered employment ethos, the South African public sector needs to install realistic and fair performance management practises. And this doesn't mean making the Accounting Officer the scapegoat for technical errors on the awarding of a contract, for example. *Everyone* in the public sector needs to be held accountable. But this responsibility must come with the correct training so that the public officials are confident and capacitated to execute their tasks. Simple systems; positive and visible leadership; visibly measured performance; renewed confidence – these are key ingredients towards unlocking the true potential of the public sector. If these enablers exist and a competent staff are correctly organised around this system, then surely our public sector can function optimally. PSP Icon is a small and dynamic management consultancy with over 11 years of private and public sector experience. We believe in South Africa and we want South Africa to succeed. We have assisted the public sector in various projects over the years and plan on doing many more in an effort to unlock the true potential of our country.

We are proud to be part of the prestigious *Impumelelo* publication, and we wish them every success for the future!

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