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JOHANNESBURG



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Notes on the PSC report on public service reform

CONFERENCE: Public Service Reform Towards Professionalisation: A PSC Perspective

12 OCTOBER 2023 | PRETORIA

Introduction

Public Service Reform Towards Professionalisation: A PSC Perspective

- PARI welcomes this report, which provides valuable proposals to support the government's commitment to professionalising the public administration and clarifies the PSC's position on important aspects of this reform agenda.
- We also welcome the PSC's commitment to engaging with a wider community of practitioners, scholars and civil society organisations in the public administration and state accountability fields.



A problem statement

Why the Professionalisation agenda?

- What is it about the current moment that has made this agenda so pressing?
- Emerged out of significant concerns with the functioning of the public administration in relation to the pressing developmental needs of the country.
- Muted in the 2012 NDP and more recently given major impetus: concerns about the impacts of corruption and state capture on the functioning of the public administration as outlined in Zondo Commission reports and other research.
- And also to address long standing challenge of how to build an effective state in the context of our history of colonialism and apartheid.



What are we aiming for?

Professionalisation:

- A term that can mean different things to different people or institutions.
- Can cover so much: a public service orientation, a set of values, a mission, skills, competence to performance.
- But unhelpful term if it is simply reduced to, for example, public servants' qualifications, or simply equated for an anti-corruption agenda. Nor about creating a neutral state.
- States are never neutral – should be proactively orientated – redress, social justice etc.
- Achieving an impartial public administration as outlined in the Constitution = insulating the public administration from *inappropriate* political and private interference, whilst ensuring it is *more* and not less, responsive to democratic mandate.



What are we aiming for?

Professionalisation:

- Professionalisation agenda also about empowering and supporting civil servants – to experiment, to learn, to act.
- Addressing compliance culture?
- The role of consequence management?
- Likely that consequent management not a tool for enhancing public sector performance and integrity, but an outcome of this - if we get the other parts of the professionalisation agenda right.
 - If we better delineate the political and administrative interface.
 - If we improve our public service training – from outsourced decontextualised training to grounded long term capacitation.
 - If we can unburden our public servants from unnecessary compliance where possible.
 - If we can set clearer goals and missions around which public servants can orientate their work.



PSC proposals

PSC August 2023 report:

- Places the current reform moment in the context of long history of reform approaches
- And historical role of the PSC
- Some lessons! Apartheid PSC build on British model of apolitical administration – but reality of Afrikaner nationalism....



Relevant legislative reform underway

Including:

- Draft Public Service Commission Bill
- Amendments to the Municipal Systems Act
- The Public Service Amendment Bill of 2023:
 - Positive provisions for better delineating the powers and responsibilities of political leaders vis-a-vis senior administrators.
 - Makes HoD responsible for Human Resource Management and wider organisation and administration of departments. Would bring responsibilities of HODs under the Public Service Act in line with those under PFMA
 - Does the Bill do enough to support the professionalisation agenda?



PSC proposals

HOD appointments:

- Head of Public Service and support from the PSC.
- Structure in the PSC to assist the Chairperson on matters re career incidents of HODs, advice to the executive re recruitment, career management etc.
- Role of PSC in supporting selection committees for HoDs.
- Format / who constitutes selection committees.
- Moving appointment of HoDs from President/Premier to Ministers/MECs?
 - Implications for the role of the head of the public service?
 - How would this look under a possible future coalition government?



PSC proposals

Performance management systems:

- Head of Public Service and support from the PSC.
- Shift from evaluating compliance by departments to assessing the extent to which departments are meaningful engaging with the spirit and vision of relevant policies, regulations
- Important critiques of the current performance management system
- Enhance performance through substantial programme reviews, ongoing feedback with staff, collaborative vision setting with staff and so forth are supported.
- How to support this actually happening?



PSC proposals

Other focus areas:

- Open versus closed career systems...
- Other proposals

Thank you!



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