

A NEXT-GENERATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE FOR SOUTH AFRICA: POINTS OF FOCUS FOR A QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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The reform of the public service in South Africa is underway and promises to end corruption, state capture and low levels of productivity and performance. This next-generation public service needs to have true social impact and world-class operational efficiency and effectiveness. We need a public service that helps South Africa overcome its challenges and supports moves toward a better future for all.

One of the points of Focus for a Quality Public Service in South Africa is organizational Design for Impact. If the public service is to have a deep and lasting impact, making the lives of citizens and communities better, then public service departments need to be designed for impact. The Government of South Africa needs to see itself as an “impact investor” – funds allocated to a department are intended to have real measurable impact. Our public service needs to be more flexible and less bureaucratic. It needs to become much more agile, responsive, and innovative. Key to becoming more impactful are these five features of an organizational design for impact:

- **Clear purpose and mission:** The organization should have a clear and compelling purpose and mission that aligns with the broader social and economic goals of the country. This can help to guide decision-making, inspire staff, and provide a clear sense of direction. Purpose should drive and shape behavior.
- **Collaborative culture:** Collaboration is critical for achieving social and economic impact, and the organization should foster a culture of collaboration both within the organization and with external stakeholders. This can include building partnerships with other organizations, involving community members in decision making, and working closely with other government agencies. Courage to act comes from collaboration.
- **Flexible structure:** A flexible organizational structure can help the organization adapt to changing social and economic conditions and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. This can include using agile project management methodologies, implementing cross-functional teams, and creating an environment that encourages innovation and experimentation. We cannot get to where we want to be by doing what we have always done.
- **Skilled and motivated staff:** The organization should have skilled and motivated staff with the necessary expertise to achieve social and economic impact. This can include investing in staff training and

development through micro-learning and micro-credentials, creating a supportive work environment that encourages employee engagement, and offering competitive compensation and benefits packages.

- **Robust performance management system:** A robust performance management system can help to ensure that the organization is achieving its social and economic impact goals. This can include setting clear performance targets that are outcome-not process-focused, regularly monitoring and evaluating performance, and using data and analytics to inform decision-making and improve outcomes. Digital tools can support this requirement.

This looks like a straightforward list, but change management (especially in a bureaucratized public service) is challenging. Courage at all levels – Ministerial, Executive Manager, and Senior Manager – is needed to enable the shift from “activities” management to impact management.

As a proposed action to achieve organizational design for impact, the Public Service Commission should identify 3-5 major initiatives which will be used as demonstration projects for impact-based evaluation. The intention of this work should be to showcase how changed organizational design and behavior focused on embracing outcomes and impact can make a difference to performance. (ii) In undertaking this work, the Commission should leverage the expertise and knowledge of those already engaged in impact based initiatives in the non-profit sector and those who work on impact evaluation. (iii) The Commission should engage appropriate facilitator with expertise in design thinking, agile leadership, and effective public services for social, environmental, and economic impact to enable these prototype projects.

The work should become a model for how South Africa's public service will evolve.

