
PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE IN BOTSWANA PUBLIC SERVICE (BPS)

Keratilwe Bodilenyane

ABSTRACT

While Botswana has received accolades as one of well-governed countries in Africa, the actual public service is degenerating into a negative interface. The prevailing situation in the work place has been that of poor service delivery, exacerbated by an extremely apathetic work attitude. As opposed to relying heavily on enforcing written rules and regulations, the paper seeks to emphasize the importance of hybrid approach that has space for morality and spirituality to guide public service. The paper recommends that Botswana Public Service (BPS) should take a leaf from religious groups where followers have exhorted the principle or virtue of service to others, purely on moral and religious grounds without any expectation of worldly gains. Those in public service should regard service to the citizenry as a virtuous, noble and morally desirable calling. It should invariably translate into the existence of a pervasive patriotism based upon benevolence.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of service to the public can be seen from various perspectives, including legal, ethical, moral and even from religious and secular dimensions. As opposed to relying heavily on enforcing written rules and regulations, the paper seeks to move from theoretical frameworks to practical strategies of improving public service delivery. The paper emphasizes the importance of a hybrid approach that has space for morality and spirituality to guide behaviour and practices in the public service. Laid down rules and regulations have played and continue to play their role, but on their own they seem not to always yield desired results. Even though the public service cannot do away with rules and regulations as advocated for by Max Weber, there is need to find other ways to reinforce rules and regulations.

Among others things Botswana Public Service (BPS) should appreciate the role of morality and spirituality amidst the potential to sacrifice the known effects of secularism on objectivity and neutrality, as central virtues of professionalism in public services (Dwivedi, 2002). It should be possible for public service to take a leaf from religious groups where followers have exhorted the principle or virtue of service to others, purely on moral and religious grounds without any expectation of worldly gains. This doctrine of service to others is evident in almost all major religions of the world such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, the only difference being the application of details of operation and maybe the mode of faith entrenchment. Service to others is considered the noblest duty and the ultimate concern for all human beings (Dwivedi, 2002). Those in public service should know that service to the citizenry is a virtuous, noble and often morally desirable calling. It should invariably translate into the existence of a pervasive patriotism based upon benevolence. Public service is about those who are willing and able to conform to the doctrine of service to others, mostly expressed as the ultimate need for the public good.

It is essential to define key terms such as ethics and morality. Ethics involve standards or codes of behaviour that have been established within a group of which a person is a member; typically in the business world, the medical profession or the justice system (Amundsen et al., 2009). Ethics are a part of philosophy concerned with leading a good life. They are principles or standards of right conduct. Morals on the other hand, involve an individual's personal conformance to a body of rules established within a society based on right versus wrong behaviour (Amundsen et al., 2009). Ethics and morals both relate to good versus bad or right versus wrong. Said in a slightly different way, morals define personal character, while ethics stress a social system in which those morals are applied (Amundsen et al., 2009)

According to Dwivedi (2002:39), 'there is a general misconception in public policy and public administration that the development of public policy and its application is a purely secular endeavour in which moral and spiritual factors have no specific role to play'. Values and morality are not limited only to personal matters. The high governance rankings of Botswana demonstrate that decision-making and policy formulation appear to be an easier job, because it is based on secular endeavor. But moving from policy making to policy execution

seems to be a tougher task sending signals that service delivery, morality and spirituality should be intricately related. Botswana public service needs to restore the hope, dedication, zeal and enthusiasm that characterized public service in the 1960's. A democratic society is founded on the principle of the dignity and worth of all people. Societal moral principles emanate from the most basic religious value that human life is both sacred and social (in some religious traditions, all life forms are considered sacred), this is in spite of all the religious wars that may have been a direct result of intolerance and outward hatred (Dwivedi, 2002). Protection and development of human life with dignity is enshrined in many constitutions. As such constitution in itself is the embodiment of moral values that guarantee us fundamental freedoms, justice and rule of law. These are the legal and ethical dimensions on which any public policy and its management ought to be based, including the call for service to the public. Globalization has necessitated a level of interdependence within which both morality and secularism share and balance each other in the protection and development of human values (Dwivedi, 2002). In the absence of this balancing act, 'the moral outlook that has shaped and guided humanity thus far will be eclipsed by immorality, expediency and corruption' (Dwivedi 2002:39).

PUBLIC SERVICE

The Public Service is the principal actor in macro socio-economic policy making infrastructure and an architect of an enabling environment for national development (Nkhwa, 2005). The BPS constitutes both central and local government and other decentralized institutions financed from public coffers. In terms of Public Service Act of 2008 (Cap 26:01), the public service performs its duties under the general direction of the President. The BPS objectives to provide efficient and effective service is well encapsulated in both its mission and vision enshrined in the Public Service Charter. Government workers play an essential responsibility that is indispensable to the life and welfare of the people. They hold public institutions in trust for the greater good of society. They administer government policy and to a larger extent determine the success of government administration and programmes. Public servants as the implementation machinery are provided with enormous discretionary powers in the management of society's resources and the handling of significant aspects of citizen's lives. A fundamental obligation is that discretionary power bestowed upon public servants in the management of society's resources should not be abused. 'Efficiency, effectiveness, consistency, competence, fairness, responsiveness and accessibility have long been recognized as key administrative values which flow from a society's commitment to the liberal democratic model' (Kernaghan, 1986:116). Without a responsible public service with moral virtues and spirituality these key administrative values are empty and worthless in meeting the needs of society. A public servant has a duty not 'only to identify the widest public interest in the exercise of discretionary power, but also to exercise that power in a manner which reflects their responsibility to the affected individuals as citizens and fellow human beings' (Kernaghan, 1986:116).

RATIONALE OF THE PAPER

While Botswana has received accolades on most governance measures, the actual public service is degenerating into a negative interface. Reputation for a decent, reliable, and neutral public service has been eroded. The government of Botswana has been concerned about the quality of public service and inability to compete effectively in the global market. The former President of the country, Sir Ketumile Masire, complained about 'the culture of laxity' that prevailed in the public service. He argued that the performance in public service was deteriorating because there is no dedication and enthusiasm that characterised public service in the 1960's. Despite Botswana's reputation for generally sound and efficient public service management, some public service institutions were performing poorly. Indeed, according to one view expressed by Festus Mogae, he argued that, The years following our attainment of independence [in 1966] were characterized by a general dedication, zeal, and enthusiasm by public officers in the execution of their duties. However, by the mid-1980s, complacency, laziness and, at times, outright neglect of duties and responsibilities began to permeate the public service (Mogae in Hope, 2003).

The findings from a survey conducted in Botswana by De Chazal (2013) demonstrate a declining customer satisfaction on services provided by government workers. The survey demonstrates deteriorating satisfaction by customers on public service delivery. Overall customer satisfaction with the service provided by the public sector in Botswana was measured on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor). The survey revealed that 23% of surveyed customers rate overall service as excellent / very good while slightly more than half perceive it as good. Just under a fifth of respondents are dissatisfied. Compared to the 2009 survey results, there is a small decrease in the proportion of excellent/very good scores from 27% to 23%, and a marginal increase in the proportion of poor/very poor from 17% to 19%. The survey further demonstrates that public service performs under the 50% mark on most aspects of staff interaction with customers. De Chazal (2013) argued that, these aspects must be improved with higher priority given to the following: speed of servicing clients, keeping clients regularly informed on the progress of their requests with the Ministry/Department, and accuracy of information that they give to the customers. Staff being seen as approachable and courteous when dealing with customers is also an area where there can be further improvement, albeit in a lesser priority relative to the above.

Another customer satisfaction survey conducted in 2005 indicates that the overall customer satisfaction level was at 25%, implying that service delivery in Botswana was unsatisfactory. The Government of Botswana, therefore, found it necessary to continue to improve the quality, effectiveness, timeliness and efficiency in public service delivery (Commonwealth, 2009). In addition, the World Bank Report of 2003 cited poor work performance as one of the factors that contribute to a decline in Botswana's economic growth from an average GDP of 8% to 7.1% between 1990 and 2003. In another study conducted in Botswana, there has been frequent demonstration of discontent at the level of service delivery in the public service (Hope, 1999; Forche and Fako, 2007). This situation remains a threat to the competitiveness and development of the economy.

On a positive note, the survey by De Chazal (2013) demonstrates that performance is above 50% on treating customers with respect and professional appearance. The consultants pointed out that in the 2009 survey, respecting customers and professional grooming of staff were both under-performing the 50% benchmark line and they were highlighted as areas for improvement, while the aspect of treating customers with respect was a top priority for improvement. Since there has been a positive shift in the performance of these two attributes, the efforts/initiatives that the government has put in place to improve these since 2009 have been fruitful. However, the survey demonstrates that the speed of service and informing clients of progress were highlighted high priority areas for improvement in the 2009 survey report and these have remained so in 2013, indicating that government has not been very successful in improving its performance on these two aspects.

The results from the surveys conducted in Botswana demonstrate that today's narcissistic society, underplays the virtue and values entailed in public services as the core of service delivery for all governments. This includes disregard or ignorance of known basic traits of a functional and ethically- bounded civil service, such as humility, altruism and trust. The public servants seem to either not know their role and position in society, or simply ignore and neglect their duties and responsibilities. The state and society at large have 'become the victim of those holding public office who are unable to put public interests above their own selfish desires' (Dwivedi, 2002:41). Many members of the public are not served with a smile and treated with due reverence, when they have to deal with public servants who are grumpy and grouchy. Most policy makers seem to have put the orthodox of servanthood by Greenleaf under attack and declared it as irrelevant to public service practices. There is no longer widely- shared consensus on the principal role and value of public service.

A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE

Public servants should have exceptional qualities, beyond their professional expertise gained from formal training and experience over the years, because they serve the needs of divergent and diverse customers from the cradle to the grave (Hassan, 2009). As noted earlier, in the absence of moral and ethical approaches, no number of laws and codes of conduct can force civil servants to behave ethically and morally. The persona of a civil servant is key in the delivery of service to others. Hassan (2009) argued that it is not enough to have the 'best talent', in terms of skills and knowledge. Public servants must have combinations of personal qualities, the strength of character, operating in a well-enabled environment. The qualities of a public servant can be connected to the essay of acclaimed forefather of servant leadership Robert Greenleaf (1970) titled 'The Servant as Leader'. He argued that if service to the populace is taken seriously, conception on servant leadership can make a difference and lasting impression in society. According to Greenleaf, a servant-leader is the one who is a servant first. It is the consciousness that one aspires or has natural feelings that they want to serve. Public servants emerge from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others. Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community and sharing power in decision making.

Public service by its nature has many hurdles and challenges. Public servants provide service to people from different background. They meet diverse needs of clients, customers, suppliers and the average citizen, all of whom may differ from them. Public servants need spiritual ability to survive the challenges ever so present in the terrain of serving the public and often capable of throwing them off course. This is crucial because to ignore the obligation to confront challenges and dilemma is to ignore the essence of an accountable public servant. There must be sustained effort by public servants to listen to the people they serve, learn from their anger and anxieties, respect their frustrations and from there provide service that caters for their needs (Waddell, 2006). Providing service in this manner may not always be easy. It takes an individual who espouses the doctrine of service to others, who has the heart to improve human condition. As such, to serve with humility and altruism one ought to be socially, morally and sometimes even religiously well grounded.

MORALITY

Greenleaf (1996:41) describes responsibility as the requirement that 'a person think, speak, and act as if personally accountable to all who may be affected by his or her thoughts, words, and deeds'. 'Public servants in this mold believe that administrative responsibility is primarily a moral question' (Bernard in Dwivedi, 2002:45). According to Dwivedi, public servants are moved by a higher cause, believing they have been entrusted with the stewardship of the state and therefore owe special obligation, have specific expectations, and reside in fiduciary world. It is here where the spiritual approach..... acquires a holistic tone; ultimately, our public servants exist for the public they are employed to serve. This approach needs to be revitalized in our public service. The commitment to a collective vision to sustain the common good is one of the cardinal virtues of public servants and is derived from the concept of public service as vocation. For, if the profession of public service is not a calling, then it is merely a job, and in that case, loyalty to that job will depend largely on the material benefits and satisfaction the job provides. Under these circumstances, no one can expect public servants to exhibit the virtues of service to society, prudence in the use of taxpayers money, and commitment to the common good and collective welfare of the people (2002:45).

Public servants with good morals will deliver service diligently, and the impulses such as greed, abuse of power will be no more. Morality can lead to mastery over our basic impulses such as greed, exploitation, abuse of power, and mistreatment of people. Morality requires self-discipline, humility and above all, 'the absence of arrogance in holding public office' (Dwivedi, 2002:47). Public servants should strive to

make public institutions and the nation, not only a good place of service, but a place known for its justice, righteousness and fairness. In the absence of moral approaches, laws and codes of conduct are less likely to re-enforce critical traits expected of public servants. 'All those nations that are most corrupt, according to Transparency International, do have in their books various laws and mechanisms' (Dwivedi, 2002:46) to control misconduct, corruption and other sorts of offensive behaviour, and yet somehow unethical practices, malfeasance and other undesired practices continue to occur. Public servants should have a sense of calling anchored on putting a high value on justice, righteousness, honesty and service. Dwivedi further argue that 'unless public officials are also guided by a sense of vocation, service to others and accountability, we cannot expect moral governments' (2002:45).

HUMILITY

Murray (1982:91) describes humility as 'the blossom of which death to self is the perfect fruit'. He says the highest glory of man is in being only a vessel, to receive and enjoy and be nothing. Humility allows public servants to realize they are only a vessel to serve the public interest. It calls for public servants to be focused on the needs of the nation as opposed to the motive of advancing their self-interests. Humble public servants are proficient to make difficult procedures user friendly to the clientele. In this manner, they provide healing unto the frustrations that may emanate from complex government programmes, policies and procedures. Society requires public servants who can lead when necessary, empower and encourage the leadership of others to achieve results beyond reach of any one actor acting alone. Public servants have an obligation to show humanness, and provide warmth to the people they serve as they are at the forefront in terms of service delivery. With such personnel in public service, we are likely to see an admirable public service, which advances for common good. Waddell (2006) argued that any things in life are taken care of, if we nurture and enrich our relationships both personal and professional.

ALTRUISM

Altruism is about placing others before oneself. Kaplan (2000) argued that altruism is helping others selflessly, just for the sake of helping, which involves personal sacrifice, although there is no personal gain to the person performing the act of service. Monroe (1948:62) defines altruism 'as behaviour intended to benefit another, even when doing so may risk or entail some sacrifice to the welfare of the actor'. Altruism can be distinguished from a feeling of loyalty and duty because altruism focuses on a moral obligation toward all humanity while duty focuses on a moral obligation toward a specific individual or organization, or an abstract concept (Spears, 2004). Public servants should understand that it is not about 'what is in for them' but about sacrifice to the welfare of the nation. Public servants should treat the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the educated and the uneducated with dignity and fairness. Monroe (1948) adds that there are four critical components of altruism, which entail action, must further the welfare of another, does not diminish if well-intentioned efforts result in negative consequences for the recipient of the action, and must carry some possibility of diminution to the welfare of the person committing the sacrificial act. Thus public institutions are designed to further the interests of large number and benefit citizens even when that sacrificial act does not benefit those who provide it. Altruism as advocated for by Greenleaf, revitalizes the spirit of service to the people. It calls for public service that pays attention and gives precedence to duties or obligations which are present but often less significant in private morality. This is essential because 'making use of one's possessions only for oneself is to live in the plane of animals, for the beasts share nothing with others'.

INTEGRITY AND FORTITUDE

The admonition to provide the public with fair and impartial service is rooted in the rule of law and the theory of natural justice. Unfortunately these theories do not provide clear enough directions about how principles are to be interpreted in specific situations. The natural law theorists discovered the obligations

to be honest, tell the truth, preserve human life, act just and keep promises through reason, revelation, or empirical observation. We follow such precepts regardless of their consequences but because they represent a divine or natural standard of right human behavior. Sztompka (1999:25) defines trust as: The expectation that other people, or groups or institutions with whom we get into contact – interact, cooperate – will act in ways conducive to our well-being. Because in most cases we cannot be sure of that, as others are free agents, trust is a sort of gamble involving some risk. It is a bet on the future, contingent actions of others.

Public service should be trusted to uphold fair administrative practices, transparent in its operations and accountable to the citizens and their representatives. Effective public servants are humble, not servile, self-possessed, and not selfish on the resources allocated to their respective ministries (Gomba, 2012). Other factors that promote trustworthiness in an organisation include characteristics such as the ‘employee’s competence, integrity, reliability, openness and honesty, concern for employees and identification’ (Claybrook, 2004:4). Public servants should be honest and devoted to serving the population in an unbiased and impartial manner. Treat the public in a manner in which procedures and processes deliver equitable practices and solution. Public servants should preserve human life such that the rights of the less privileged are not trampled over. According to Emmanuel Kant, the only thing that is good in itself is goodwill. Goodwill for a public servant will be a thought in the faculty of their mind for choosing a good action. They should have that natural instinct that another person’s agenda comes before their own and commitment to service comes first.

Public service is faced with conflicting issues; such that some of the deliberations should be kept secretive that is ‘inscrutability or mystery of the state’. Secrecy is essential to make and implement plans, to negotiate, and protect citizens from enemies. The clash between the duty of confidentiality and the duty of disclosure or whistle blowing extends not only to obvious question of whether or not to provide certain government information to individual citizens or groups. The duty of confidentiality also extends to the acceptability of the practices of deception, disinformation, propaganda and censorship. Public servants are not supposed to use or disclose confidential information for private purposes. This could even be serious if the information is used for economic benefit of the public servants. Kernaghan (1940), argue that public servants are to speak to the media only ‘on the record and for attribution by name’. Kernaghan further argue that ‘off-the record’ background briefings would only be permitted ‘in exceptional circumstances and must have prior Ministerial approval’ (1940:86). The civil servant is under no obligation to bring the existence of specific information to the attention of inquiring members of the public. But they can provide information that describes or explains government policies and programmes. They have an obligation not only to the public they serve, but to the government they serve not to disclose ‘mystery of the state’.

It is clear that public service has an obligation towards the state to keep its deliberations secretive and at the same time earn public trust. However, this should not be taken to mean that public servants should close their eyes to the wrongdoing by government. Public servants should not take confidentiality and secrecy to hide the inefficiency of the government, such as waste of resources, negligence in health or safety of the public, conflict of interest and misuse of funds. Public servants should be vigilant enough to evaluate whether the secrecy that the government professes, hides the fact that the objectives influencing the decision represent the personal interests of officials or a small group of people or class in a society. This is even more worrisome if it costs tax payers a fortune (Kernaghan, 1940). Public servants must be committed to scrutinize the government on behalf of the public. They are the ‘eyes’ of the public and as argued by Karl Marx that public servants should be aware and alert that government is nothing but the executive committee of the bourgeoisie (the economically ruling elite; the propertied classes).

Public servants exist to protect the public they serve and where there is wrongdoing they should be pushed to release some confidential information in situations where clear and a serious danger to the public exists. This requires public servants with virtue of fortitude. This virtue allows them to overcome fear and remain steady in their will to expose wrongdoing by the government. However, in doing so, a morally sensitive public servant who longs to improve human condition, must have the goodwill, motives, and intentions. Key conditions must be met when disclosing confidential information to make it a morally justifiable option. Whatever they do should always be reasoned and reasonable, they should not seek danger for danger's sake. According to the Golden rule, a goodwill chooses an act for good reason(s) and because it is one's duty. Accusation of serious harm must be supported by unequivocal evidence. The whistle blower must be certain that it is possible to demonstrate to the satisfaction of a disinterested observer that his or her assessment of the situation is accurate. A public servant must have a good will because it is roughly equivalent to having good intentions. Therefore whistle blowing can be worthless without goodwill.

However this is not to dispute the fact that whistle blowing tests the boundaries of trust and loyalty by raising the spectre of powerful competing loyalties to the Constitution, the law or even the public servant's perception of the public interest. Public servants take an oath of secrecy when they join government service. They take an oath not to disclose or make known, without authorization, any matter or thing that comes to his or her knowledge by reason of employment. However, if public service is about improving human conditions, then actions that pose serious harm to the public cannot be covered for the sake of trust and loyalty. This is based on the assumption that a moral public service will arrive at rational decisions. It is only applicable to public service that has natural aspiration to serve and upholds the doctrine of service to others. Public service that believes administrative responsibility is primarily a moral question.

CONCLUSION

Public service institutions have values and norms that must guide behaviour and actions of public servants for a moral cause. Hence those within public service should embody an obligation to serve others. Public servants exist to satisfy the public they are employed to serve. It is an obligation that needs someone who can go beyond the laid down rules and regulations and serve their fellow citizens genuinely and provide extensive love and the zeal to make a difference. For this reason, the strength of servant-leadership can be used in BPS to mould an admirable public service. Servant-leadership offers hope and guidance for a new era in public service, and for the creation of better, more caring institutions. It encourages individuals to actively seek opportunities to serve others, thereby setting up the potential for raising the quality of life throughout society. This approach needs to be re-energized in the public service.

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Keratilwe Bodilenyane is a Lecturer in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Botswana. She holds a degree in Political and Administrative Sciences, and Masters Degree in Public Administration. She has published a number of papers. Her research involves Ethics and accountability, Governance and Public Policy, Democratic Governance and Public Sector reforms.