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Creating organisational trust. A perspective of the South African public service

Working paper

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By

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ABSTRACT

Trust in governance is paramount for sustainable political stability and the legitimacy with which citizens experience and perceive the political system and bureaucracy. Trust in the public service as an extension of the political system is fundamental to the well-being and quality of life with which citizens are met. The paper explores the following questions: What is a trustworthy organisation? and; Why is trust in the public service important?

Trust in governance and the public service has been contentious and steadily on the decline. National as well as international surveys indicate a decline in citizen confidence and trust in governance. South African policy and statutory 'prescripts' placed emphasis on trust creation at the dawn of the democracy and has subsequently begun to place emphasis on trust restoring initiatives particularly within public service to meet national developmental objectives.

INTRODUCTION

The South African political realm and public service has seen significant transformation since the dawn of democracy in 1994. Political change from an oppressive apartheid system to a democracy has led to numerous and high expectations held by citizens that include political, social and economic transformation. The new government in the democratic dispensation set about developing a number of policy documents that strive for socio-economic and political change and that takes cognisance of the urban and rural dynamic within the country. The policy change process and accompanying amendments sought and continue to seek social justice, inclusivity and a more egalitarian society.

The landscape is characterised by urban affluence that coexists with urban poverty as well as rural areas that experience high level of socio-economic isolation, service neglect and poor governance. The rural areas have in recent time become hotbeds for political discontent indicative of the low levels of trust in the political realm and by the public service as a pivotal extension of the state. Trust in both the political sphere and public service is conditional and subjective; it ebbs and flows based on experience and perception. It is behavioural in that citizens assess the actions of political leaders and or the performance of public officials and cast judgement.

Governance expands the boundaries of government to be more inclusive. The paradigm expounds the notion that multiple interdependent stakeholders are critical to the process of effective service delivery. Essentially, the provision of public services is a shared responsibility of a multitude of stakeholders which include the government, the market and citizens. The government is, however, the key stakeholder that enables service delivery. Fundamentally, public governance refers to the institutional, structural and process approach of government that enables the delivery of public services. Trust is depended on a multi-foci.

The political system and bureaucracy jointly assume responsibility to co-create economic and social well-being. Macro strategies developed to facilitate economic and social transformation should set out to create as well as restore trust. The implication

is that a mutually-dependent relationship exists between public officials and citizen or client (Loffler 2009:219; Osborne 2010:9).

The bureaucracy as an extension of the political system is the change agent that enables the change via policy implementation aimed at a reduction at growth and development. Public officials are the enablers of service delivery and citizens, the initiators and recipients of the policy output and outcome. Public officials will demonstrate skill, discretion, accountability and responsive governance in the context of rules and procedures that equates to performance (Esau 2016:686). The hypothesis therefore is that overt performance by the public service in the socio-economic interest of citizens leads to a perception of legitimacy consequently, increased trust. The level of trust in government and the political system may be differential. The perception and experience of citizen trust in government as defined by the performance of government (Khan,2016:665).

This paper reflects on the crisis of trust in the South African political milieu. The discussion explores. The paper therefore explores the relationship between political and organisational trust. The primary focus is the level of trust held and aspired to in terms of policy initiatives and policy change in the public service. The conundrum in achieving sustained citizen trust is the influence and sustained impact of a number of political factors. This paper therefore explores the crisis of trust in South African governance. The discussion further reflects on the divergent interpretation of trust creation and restoring initiatives. Political and organisational trust in the public service hold a strong correlation in a system where Ministers of portfolio are political heads while public officials are careerist bureaucrats. In the South African public service, senior officials are often cadre appointments who hold party loyalties. Trust is furthermore compounded, the turnover of senior public officials is high. Furthermore, political interference in administrative matters are pronounced (Franks 2014:50).

The discussion reflects on the critical importance of nurturing trust in the public service to promote stable governance. Citizen, needs and ideals should therefore be placed at the core of the developmental agenda. The discussion explores the characteristics and fundamental principles that underpin a trust worthy organisation and management culture that nurtures and promotes trust. The discussion is framed in the context of the political system and culture which the South African public service is situated. The premise is therefore that the prevailing political climate and mood correlates with the perception and experience held by citizens of the public service. The discussion explores the prevailing levels of trust in governance. It further explores policy strategies and documents that purport trust creation and restoring initiatives. The discussion therefore questions whether there is mere compliance with the measures consequently rendering trust as illusive or whether trust restoring principles and strategies which take into account the multiple foci within society can be translate to measure able outcomes and consequently enhanced trust in the governance system.

What is a trustworthy organisation?

In its most rudimentary format, relational trust is the interaction by two or more parties who engage in behaviour aimed at achieving common good that will lead to a positive

output and outcome either in the interest of the individual or the collective (Fukuyama 1995:78). Trust ascribed to an organisation is therefore both individual as perceived by a singular client and collective in respect of the nature and scope the organisation in service delivery (Heitzmann and Marson, 2007: 550). Organisational trust is therefore both external and internal to the organisation. Organisational trust that is external to the organisation is informed by the experience and perception of the performance levels encountered by the client. Experience and perception of a trustworthy organisation is defined by the value judgement of citizens who expect and or are in receipt of service. The value-laden judgement is consequently contentious and subjective. It is informed by the perception of the integrity of systems, procedures and protocols which leads to effective and efficient services.

Organisational trust is also informed by the anticipation held by citizens that public officials will display benevolence and interactional justice during service encounters. This is the experienced and perceived fairness of interpersonal interaction that epitomises the display of empathy and commitment encountered during service. Interactional justice also places emphasis on the professionalism with which a service is met as defined by organisational value system, competence and knowledge displayed during service encounter. The display of competence in this instance is referred to as expert trust Sousa-Lima, Michel & Caetano 2013:419).

Organisational trust is also internal to the bureaucracy as defined by a number of factors which include procedures that informs the work context of and the interaction between and by officials. It is influenced by the managerial culture that fosters collegial cooperation and excellence but intolerant to corruption and maladministration (Franks 2014: 52). Internal organisational trust is defined by systems approaches adopted within the organisation as informed by communication protocols and practice as well as organisational transparency (Searle & Dietz 2012:33). Furthermore, organisational trust is nurtured by managerial insight that is not only defined by knowledge and skill but also by institutional memory that allows managerial benchmarking and development of a sense of self-awareness as well as foresight. A management culture that fosters trust leads to an understanding of the opportunities and risks in facilitating service delivery effectively and efficiently.

Relational and interactional trust within an organisation is characterised and informed by the inherent variations of trust that straddles spheres and divisions within organisations. This stratification of trust is defined by the organisational culture and the implementation of the vision and mission of the organisation. The implication is that trust within an organisation must exist between employees within the hierarchy at both vertical as well as lateral levels for the development and growth of collegial relations that is founded on fairness and reciprocity. Trust-fostered must lead to coherent teamwork and group dynamics to achieve the mission and vision of the organisation. The synergy within units and departments fostered in the best interest of the sustainability of the organisation (Starnes, Truhon, McCarthy 2010:4). Relational and interactional trust therefore informs and defines intra-organisational trust.

Furthermore, relational and interactional trust between employees is defined by the institutional policies and human resource systems implemented. The implementation of these policies and systems incorporates the development and maintenance of mutual trust between co-workers as well as between co-workers and managers. A trustworthy organisation is defined by a sense of predictability and reliability in service delivery. The implication is that the multiple level of trust that resonates within the organisation is extended to the client in a service encounter.

Trust creation strategies and platforms

The South African government, in terms of its statutory mandates, the Bill of Rights, of the Constitution of 1996, is required to enable a satisfactory quality of life for its citizens. South Africa has developed a number of macro strategies aimed at sustaining the ideals of the developmental state. Trust creating policies set out to deliver socio-economic as well as socio-political trust in a new political regime as well as transformation and restorative justice. The Reconstruction and Development Plan at the dawn of the new democracy set objectives for transformation including rationalisation and restructuring of the public service to be an inclusive and representative professional entity that delivers service. Furthermore, a public service that is citizen-centric and performance orientated that strives to meet basic needs and corrects the imbalances inherited from the former apartheid government. In addition, the reform programmes included the development of structures, systems and a public-service culture that were accountable and promoted managerial effectiveness and efficiency (RDP 1994: 125).

The citizen-centric approach was centred on an accountable professional public service. This led to the adoption of a Public service Code of conduct. Public officials are bound by the Public Service Code of Conduct states that public officials:

- will serve the public in an unbiased and impartial manner in order to create confidence in the Public Service;
- is polite, helpful and reasonably accessible in his or her dealings with the public, at all times treating members of the public as customers who are entitled to receive high standards of service;

In 2012, government. adopted the Public Service Charter, a social contract between itself and the citizens as a means to create a trust platform. The Public Service Charter is informed by principles that aim to put the needs of citizens first and improve service delivery. These principles are aimed at developing a citizen-centric public service (White Paper on the Transformation of the Public service of 1997).

Public servants are guided in their duties by the following citizen-centric principles:

- Consultation: Citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and, wherever possible, should be given a choice regarding the services offered;

- Citizens should be told what level and quality of public service they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect;
- Access: All citizens have equal access to the services to which they are entitled;
- Courtesy: Citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration;
- Information: Citizens should be given full, accurate information about the public services to which they are entitled;
- Openness and transparency: Citizens should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge;
- Redress: If the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy; and when complaints are made,
- Citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response; and

Value for money: Public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best value for money. The Public Service Charter states that particular service standards should be developed and met accordingly. The Department of Public services and Administration began a discussion in the productivity framework that recognises the key importance of service quality and the importance of measurability of thereof .The charter promotes a performance culture in service rendering, defined service standards and norms with which service delivery should take place. These service standards should be developed in order to ensure that:

- Citizens receive service promptly and courteously at all service delivery points;
- Departments provide friendly and helpful service;
- Officials help service users make the right choices in accessing services;
- Departments will provide appropriate signage and information desks;
- Public servants must wear name tags for easy identification;
- Answer calls promptly and ensure shorter queues at service delivery points as well as respond to queries and complaints promptly.

THE CRISES OF TRUST

The South Africa political and governance spectrum is characterised by a unitary state with a multi-party parliamentary system and a bureaucracy defined by three spheres of government which include the national, provincial and local spheres. The country is a multi-cultural society, characterised by high levels of social inequality. The diverse socio-economic and the differential socio-political character leads to differential levels

of trust held in the different spheres of government. It also compounds attempt at social justice consequently trust levels.

The political system and the bureaucracy is intertwined in the political manifesto of the ruling party that extends itself in macro and micro policies imperatives to meet transformation. The implication is that levels of trust in the political system has a correlation with trust held by citizens in the professional competence of the public service.

A number of factors have compounded the level of trust in the governance system. Levels of trust have been compounded by media reports on the nature and wide-spread levels and nature of corruption that includes financial irregularity, nepotism by political elites and public officials. Furthermore, political factionalism and political manoeuvring that includes repeated and unceremonious cabinet shuffles that that enables political pandering in the interest of the political elite which has widespread socio-economic consequence. These occurrences are not in keeping with ideals of the macro strategies of the developmental state adopted nor the citizens centric approach aspired to (State Capacity Report 2017). Trust in governance has therefore been on the decline because it is compounded by the level of trust held in the political system. Citizens do not view the political elite as accountable. Trust in local government has ebbed very low while trust in national government has ebbed low.

A number of surveys have shown low levels of citizen satisfaction based on experience and perception of service delivery. In 2012 only 43 percent of citizens surveyed in Social Attitudes survey held trust in the South African public service. Furthermore, the Reconciliation barometer indicates that trust held by citizens in local government has consistently been at its lowest between 2006 and 2013 (SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey Report 2014:18). While in 2013, The Edelman Trust Barometer indicated that trust in national government was at 52 percent while in local government at 40 percent. In 2017, the Edelman Trust barometer indicated that trust in government as a whole declined further from an already low 16 percent in 2016 to 15 percent in 2017. This was the lowest score out of 28 countries surveyed.

Low levels of trust and concomitant governance failure is as a direct consequent of level of client satisfaction and poor performance by the public service. The spheres of government have been unable to deliver on their constitutional mandate to fulfil the expectation held by citizens. Furthermore trust in national government has resonated in terms of low levels of client satisfaction, Kroukamp 2016:109). These surveys indicate that service delivery as projected in respect of service standards and norms does take place. In addition, recent reports have also shown an increase in corruption and extensive fraudulent activity particularly since 2009 (State capture report 2017: 45). The South African Risk institute has identified corruption as one of its top ten risk factors in the January 2017 national risk survey (IRMSA 2017:5). Furthermore

governance failure is indicated as a high risk areas as a direct consequence of the level of corruption (State Capacity report 2017:8).

Local government is the sphere of government which is the most accessible, to the citizens to respond to local needs within a defined geographical area and to nurture trust in local governance. This sphere of government is best situated to identify and implement programmes and projects, in partnership with various stakeholders, aimed at stimulating stable governance that instils trust among potential investors and it is best positioned to facilitate the development of local infrastructure in co-operation with national government in order to stimulate local and economic development (Koma 2012, 133).

Local government has in particular been unable fulfil its mandate to be accountable and responsive in meeting its constitutional mandate. This sphere of government has been reported to be largely dysfunctional and unable to meet the requirement for basic services to citizens to improve their quality of life. The level of dysfunction and dissatisfaction with the local sphere of government has resonated in widespread service delivery protests which is a sign of frustration by marginalised communities with poor service delivery. . Local government adopted the Local government turn-around strategy in 2009 which set out the challenges that local government faces and key performing areas were developed as well as timeframes for change in the commitment and operational expedience with which local government meets service delivery challenges and backlogs.

The government adopted the national outcomes approach from 2009 with key performance outcomes for each sphere of government and measurable competencies aligned to each department. The performance level of local government was referred to in the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of 2014-2019. The framework gives recognition to the advances made by local government in meeting service delivery challenges and stimulating local economies particularly where infrastructure programmes and projects have been implemented. However, these advances are overshadowed by the rapid pace of urbanization and migration experienced. Furthermore, the MTSF recognizes additional issues related to poor governance which includes a sense of disconnect and alienation experienced by communities in the decision-making processes of local governance. Local government in respect of outcome 9 is expected to assume a developmental approach by being responsive, accountable and effective in its engagement with citizen in respect of service delivery

The Auditor General report of 2014-2015 in the context of the theme accountability indicated in its audit outcomes that a number of financial irregularities at municipal level continue to occur and have increased. Furthermore, poor internal controls and continued vacancies and instability in key positions as well as inadequate

consequences for poor performance and transgressions (MFM AG Report 2017). The themes in terms of internal controls included some of the following areas

- Financial management
- Maintenance of the accounting records
- Follow-through on action plans
- Supporting documentation
- HR controls and management of consultants
- IT controls

The report recommends astute leadership accountable to rectify the problems that are encountered.

TRUST RESTORATION

Trust restoring policies are evaluative in nature where the governance structures aim to be proactive in its policy-learning therefore taking cognisance that trust is in decline. It allows all stakeholders to assess why trust in governance has declined. It allows for an assessment of multi foci as policy evidence .The implication is that trust restoration must be holistic in the socio-economic and governance system which includes the political system and bureaucracy. The evaluative assessment is implicit in the periodic monitoring and assessment of the implementation processes that is derived from such reports as trust and client satisfaction surveys. The requirement therefore is that measurable norms and standards accompany service delivery that must be communicated to citizens to facilitate policy learning by public officials as the implementing agents as well as citizen assessment (Brynard 2009:36) These initiatives are an extension of the citizen-centric approach that identifies citizens and officials as key role players in the co-production of improved organisational trust.

The National Development Plan 2030 (2012: 474) places emphasis on the development of a professional public service as well as the inclusion of an active citizenry in public service delivery. The plan states that all spheres of government:

'Can enhance citizen participation through a variety of two-way information gathering and sharing forums and platforms between citizens and government. While these platforms can enable government to inform, they also enable citizens to give feedback to government and monitor performance.'

An active and engaged citizenry should be able to hold trust in the public service, that it will it meet its mandate. However, critique of government argues that the low level of trust as a consequence of poor governance does not foster the professionalism purported in the National Development Plan

Government has introduced a number of strategies that enable co-planning and ultimately co-production of service quality that will lead to the development of trust at all spheres. The Frontline Service Delivery Improvement Programme was introduced

in 2011. It is a project which uses unannounced monitoring visits to assess the quality of service delivery in frontline services facilities, using structured questionnaires to guide interviews with citizens and staff, as well as observations by monitors.

In 2013, government adopted the Framework for Citizen-based Monitoring of services. The focus of this framework places emphasis on the necessity to include citizens in the services delivery process as well as to ensure that government is accountable and responsive in meeting citizen needs. The Framework states that it is critical that the public service takes cognisance of citizen experiences and opinions to strength public accountability and improve service delivery (DPME 2013: 7). The framework places emphasis on continuous monitoring and evaluation of service that extends to client satisfaction levels. The framework places emphasis on a citizen centric approach to improved performance. The framework includes a number of principles as follows:

- The voice of the citizen is integral to building a capable developmental state in South Africa.
- Government monitoring systems should include the view and experience of citizens.
- Government departments must encourage independent monitoring by civil society.
- Citizen based monitoring is an ongoing process of relationship building and performance improvement.
- Citizen participation in planning strengthens citizen participation in monitoring
- Citizen monitoring must form an integral part of service delivery plans and management decision-making.

Local government in particular introduced the Back to Basics approach which is strategy which continues to recognise the challenges that local government experiences. It reiterates the need for local government in respect of the objectives of the National Development plan to be functional and developmental in its approach. The Back to Basic approach is citizen-centric requiring citizen participation and reiterates a number of the principles found in other reports as well as reflects of the recommendations made by the Auditor General. This strategy lists four priority areas focuses on performance, eradication of corruption. Priority 3 in particular focuses on incentivising performing local governments.

CONCLUSION

Many reports have shown low levels of trust in the bureaucracy which hold a direct correlation with the trust level held in the political elite. These reports informed by experience and perception of the performance of public service show governance failure. The level of governance failure is as direct consequence of the complexity of service delivery in South Africa due to a number of challenges which has often placed organisational trust in question. The policy frameworks and initiatives implemented by

the South African government is aimed at improving relational and interactional trust between citizens and officials in the service delivery value chain.

However, rhetoric levelled at governance structures is that South African government is often excellent in the development of policies but an implementation deficit is experienced. Furthermore, the level of corruption and poor performance by the public service implies that transformation imperatives are not being met. Equally, the imperatives that were aimed at a citizen-centric public service that is seeking to be professional has been way-laid in the interest of self-serving agenda of the political elite and factionalism. Trust restoration is therefore implicit in a change in political system and improved commitment to national strategies as well as internal controls, management culture and procedures within government

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