Global Centre for Public Service Excellence

GCPSE

UNDP

*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Work in the Public Service of the Future

©BY-NC-ND Randy Montoya, Sandia Labs / *The winning team, from the Albuquerque Academy at the Future City New Mexico Competition.*

INTRODUCTION

What will work in the public service of the future be like? How much will public administration differ from today? What skills and attitudes will be required of the public servant of the future? How will her motives and aspirations shape the quality, delivery and experience of public services? Will the future of work in the public service be the same for developed and developing nations, or will there be divergent, equally valid 'futures'? Could approaches like New Public Passion hold the key to producing engaged and motivated public officials of the future? These questions underscore the urgent need for a rethink of assumptions and new approaches to how policy should be designed and public servants can be motivated to deliver more efficient, effective and sustainable public services.

Global advances in the economic, social and technological spheres are not only creating emerging industries and new occupations, but also correspondingly shaping the expectations of new generations of citizens and transforming the way they work and think about their careers. The public service is not immune to these trends; indeed, as the largest employer in most countries[1], the public sector can be expected to feel the impact of these changes as fast as others, making it imperative that governments prepare to respond to these revolutionary developments. After all, an efficient and effective public service is a key enabler of development for its ability to provide opportunity and hope for the future by meeting fundamental human needs like personal safety, decent housing, dignified employment, and access to healthcare services and a good education.

While these needs are immutable regardless of a country's state of development, distinct expectations of the future role of government and the delivery of these public services will depend on some trends that are already being observed:

Changing citizenry

As societies experience significant demographic shifts, what are the different demands that different segments of the population place on public services and how they are delivered? What will be the impact of relentless urbanisation on work in national, urban and local governments? How will an increasingly networked and digitally-organised citizenry relate to governments, public services and public servants? As more countries transition into different levels of the "Middle Income Countries" group and more basic needs are met, populations will become better educated, aspirations will evolve, and the expectations of citizens will rise faster than the government's capacity to deliver.[2] In many countries, citizens are demanding greater and more meaningful participation in the policy-making process[3], pushing administration and politics to open up and collaborate.

Complex operating environment

The increasing complexity of societal and developmental challenges is forcing public services and public servants to work beyond the confines of traditional structures and try out new approaches. When agency lines are crossed, the factors involved in decision-making, policy response and implementation multiply significantly. Complexity also breeds uncertainty and disruption, demanding flexible approaches to policy planning and service implementation[4], and the application of adaptive systems thinking, foresight and agile 'swarming' techniques. The crucial but complicated relationship between the political and administrative parts of government adds an additional, more political layer of complexity, which requires careful alignment.[5]

Technology

First generation technological applications (such as virtual one-stop portals) have helped to improve citizens' access to multiple public services, and the potential for digital social innovation to expand into broad participation in the design and delivery of various public services is growing. Rapid technological innovation and adoption by citizens and the private sector puts pressure on the public service to go much further in integrating new digital applications in policy analysis and design to enhance the public service experience.[6]

UNDP's Global Centre for Public Service Excellence, in collaboration with the Public Service Division of the Prime Minister's Office of Singapore convened a two-day workshop around the theme of the 2015 Human Development Report, *Rethinking Work for Human Development* in May 2015 in Singapore.

Day One considered "Work in the Public Service of the Future" covering the evolving roles and responsibilities of the public service and public servant of the future, and some of the opportunities and challenges that may arise in the context of citizen engagement, co-design, risk management, complexity and public sector ethos.*

Day Two contextualised the discussions from Day One by "Integrating Future Public Service Work and Present Public Service Reforms". Using El Salvador's public service reforms as a case study, the impact of contextual factors on current priorities and future directions were discussed in depth. Together with an emphasis on functioning processes over formal structural arrangements, the need to identify key economic drivers to inform public service priorities and opportunities was brought to the fore, against the backdrop of a state still struggling to meet the most basic needs of the population (security and personal safety, sanitation and access to clean water, etc).

Kippin, Henry, "Five Shifts in Public Service." Paper presented at the UNDP workshop on "Work in the Public Service of the Future", Singapore, May 5, 2015.

Further penetration of SMACs (social, mobile, analytic and cloud technologies), artificial intelligence, 3D-printing, robotics, the Internet of Things, etc., will all have an as yet unknown impact on how the public space will be organised and equipped in the future. How can the public service harness technology to maintain an effective, credible and trusted presence in the Brave New Digital World, where concepts such as 'open democracy' and 'collaborative economy' emerge and evolve quickly?

Human capital constraints

Tight budgets have already led to manpower shortages and austere working environments, putting public servants under intense pressure to do more with fewer resources. Faced with such realities, how can the public service professionalise and streamline many of its functions to build new and strategic capabilities to cope with more complex challenges in the future[7]? How can it compete with the private sector and attract staff with the necessary expertise to keep up with change, and engage in continuous innovation? Under these circumstances, how can the public service remain the employer of choice for those dedicating their life to creating public value? How should we restore public service ethos for the 21st century to reinvigorate public servants and instil in them a renewed sense of purpose?

This paper suggests that the most important response to the challenges raised by these trends will rest on a single factor: people. Human motivation and aspiration lie at the heart of progress. The public service of the future will need to be guided by a philosophy of participation and collaboration in the change narrative, which will involve trust between politicians, public sector leaders, public servants, citizens and other stakeholders in society. The political economy of reform, the complex nature of trust and its link to public service reform are not always well understood.

[1] Martin N. Baily et al, "The Public Sector Productivity Imperative." McKinsey & Company (2011): 1
[2] Andrew Tan, "Public Sector Transformation – Six Small Ways to Make Big Changes." Ethos 13 (2014): 48.
[3] Cerelia Lim, "Growing With Our Citizenry." Challenge (May/June 2014): 8-9.
[4] Hilton Root et al, "Managing complexity and uncertainty in development policy and practice." ODI Report (2015)
[5] James H. Svara, "Complexity in Political-Administrative Relations and the Limits of the Dichotomy Concept." Administrative Theory & Praxis 28 (1) (2006): 123.
[6] S. Bhatnagar, "Public service delivery: Role of information and communication technology in improving governance and development impact." Asian Development Bank Economics Working Paper Series 391 (2014): 4

7 'Gus O'Donnell, "Successful Governance: A Conversation," Ethos 12 (2013): 15

Changing realities will have a significant yet unpredictable impact on social relations, and it will require a special effort to bring 'people' to the fore in public service transformation. The following section will set out some parameters around which this renewed emphasis on people-centred and people-based public services will be shaped in the foreseeable future, and its implications for the future of work in the public sector.

FROM GOVERNMENT FOCUSED ON SERVICE DELIVERY, TO GOVERNMENT AS A PLATFORM

In the effort to deliver public services in cost-effective ways, governments are challenged to revisit the "make vs. buy" decision, thereby redefining the role of the state.[8] Do public services always have to be delivered directly and only by governments? Many would argue for this, to ensure service delivery to the poor and disadvantaged, to safeguard public goods and to establish clear lines of accountability. Moreover, citizens' main interaction with the state is ideally through public service delivery. Trust and legitimacy in governments, the political system and the state is built, strengthened, sustained *and* lost at this frontline.

Poor service delivery by government is often the result of inadequate resources, low motivation and a lack of capacity. Moreover, structures which put the needs of the bureaucracy rather than the citizen at the centre often undermine public sector capability, by being inflexible, prescriptive and process-driven in the design and delivery of policies and programmes.[9] Citizens either vote with their feet and look for alternatives in the private sector (for-profit and non-profit) or clamour for a more active role in public policy design and implementation. In some countries and sectors, citizens join forces to crowdsource and co-design solutions to public challenges.

ⓒBY Patrick Moes / USACE / *Public officials and Army engineers plan flood defences for US cities at risk from rising rivers.*

Can government effectively shift to 'leading from behind' and act as an efficient platform to enhance delivery in a 'mixed public economy' that best serves citizens' needs? There are certainly advantages in leveraging public-private partnerships (PPP), but implementation has thus far shown mixed results. In the area of PPPs, the profit-making character of private firms has adversely affected market competition, marginalised the disadvantaged, lower-income groups and cut corners to maximise profit at the expense of public interest. In addition, clear lines of accountability are often absent in such partnerships, as is public participation in the design of delivery mechanisms.[10]

When the public service shifts from direct delivery of public services to providing the platforms that will enable co-creation and implementation, the cost and risk of design and implementation can be shared through different forms of partnerships[11] to reflect the kind of society that the parties involved want to create and sustain.

THE FUTURE PUBLIC OFFICIAL: A PASSIONATE ENTREPRENEUR?

The future of public service delivery may take place within a mixed public economy where some government functions are commissioned. If so, what does that mean for the majority of public servants employed in those functions? Some commentators have argued that the size of the future public service would shrink significantly, such that a new group of 'public entrepreneurs' would emerge to work outside of the public service 'core' as brokers of services. At the core, the 'public servant', would continue to perform policy functions, mainly "managing the political interface [and] effectively administering programs and regulations."[12]

> *…the realisation that public officials are also citizens… must form the foundation for policy design…*

To move towards a more relational and responsive public service, the role of public officials will be more important than ever. They will need to build trust and legitimacy in a new relationship between the state and citizens. They will also need to learn how to leverage new resources and partnerships within the community. The skill sets needed by such 'public entrepreneurs' would be a combination of technical and generic 'portable' skills, in particular, soft skills to carry out what Dickinson and Sullivan (2014) call "emotion work". The depth and breadth of the future of work in the public service will only increase as a new relationship is forged based on co-creation, greater complexity and new technologies.

In such a demanding environment, keeping public officials engaged and motivated will be critical. There is an increasing need for New Public Management (NPM) to evolve into a New Public Passion (NPP)[13], where intrinsic motivation to make the biggest contribution to society under challenging circumstances is not only restored but also enhanced in public officials. Igniting passion to drive up the value of working in public service can be done in three major ways. Firstly, the realisation that public officials are also citizens and their expectations of public services as well as their empathy with recipients of the services must

[8] KPMG, "Rethinking public service delivery: A guide to new frameworks" (2015): 3
[9] John Alford and Janine O'Flynn. Rethinking Public Service Delivery: Managing With External Providers. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012
[10] D. L Poole, "The future of public-private sector partnerships for the provision of human services: Problems and possibilities." Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 21(4) (1985): 400.

[11] Peter Shergold, "Commissioning Public Value: The Role of Civil Servants," Ethos 12 (2013): 67.
[12] Helen Dickinson and Helen Sullivan, "Imagining the 21st Century Public Service Workforce," Melbourne School of Government (2014): 16.
[13] New Public Passion is the UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence's new approach to examining the issue of motivation of public service officials. See: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/capacity-development/English/Singapore%20Centre/NotesPSE1_PublicPassion.pdf

form the foundation for policy design. Secondly, they should be encouraged to revisit old assumptions and empowered to bring about positive change, from the top leadership down to the front-line officer (who most often feels powerless to improve the way a service is delivered). Thirdly, both formal and informal platforms should be created for officers to develop a collective vision and shared sense of purpose, and discuss the challenges presented by the *status quo*.

This new typology of public officials raises important questions about their education, recruitment and development. Will educational requirements need to change? Where will the future public official be recruited from?[14] Will the public and private sectors increasingly recruit from the same pool of talent? How far should the public entrepreneurship model be aligned with either or both public and private sector incentives? Can the same methods and criteria for selection of the public sector core be used for recruiting public entrepreneurs? How rigorously will concepts like 'professionalism' and 'merit' be applied in the hunt and retention of future public talent? Former British civil servant and economist, Sir Gus O'Donnell has warned against falling into the trap of continuing to "hire people like ourselves – not surprisingly, because we've defined ourselves as the best"[15]. The resulting social homogeneity in the public service is unlikely to enjoy fresh perspectives gained from diverse experiences and may remain insensitive to real world challenges.

> *Foresight enables public servants to identify possible and probable challenges, opportunities and 'black swans'…*

RISK AVERSION vs. COLLABORATIVE RISK MANAGEMENT

Traditional approaches to risk management in the public service are rapidly becoming untenable. Public service delivery is more exposed to political risk than ever. Exposure of its shortcomings has been facilitated by the information age through 24/7 news coverage, social media activity and non-traditional news producers. Public-private partnership arrangements, new regulations and delivery arrangements provide the motive and opportunity for the public sector to outsource risk along with delivery. The complex public policy and service delivery environment makes for a high degree of uncertainty in outcomes. All this implies moving from a traditional risk-averse approach to a collaborative risk management framework to connect better with changing realities.

In the shift towards collaborative models and systematic approaches to risk management, better decisions will come from the ability to identify, analyse, assess, understand, act upon and monitor risks. Risk might even be embraced as an opportunity to build trust and confidence, and as an incentive to open a dialogue with citizens to obtain a better sense of expectations.[16] Governments will need to forge consensus on its and the citizens' roles in this partnership. This would involve a shift to 'sharing' rather than 'shedding' responsibility, by removing barriers to the formation of networks or structures and enabling the shift.

How can performance incentives be designed to foster calibrated risk-taking? As a first step, management will need to invest in a risk-smart culture that supports ideas test-bedding, collaboration and calibrated risk-taking to connect risk management frameworks to actual realities.

ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE AMIDST COMPLEXITY

Risk-management is just one of the implications of the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment in which the public service is expected to perform. Complexity and interdependency, on a national and international level, combine to diminish the direct control that public services have on the output and outcomes of their traditional planning. Governments all over the world are challenged by the consequences of an increasingly intertwined global economy and financial system, cross-border network flows, environmental fallout of climate change, mobility and migration, thereby seriously limiting their ability to control the course of their nations. The relative diminishing power of national governments and public services to steer economic, social, cultural and environmental development is causing a gradual erosion of trust with their citizens. In order to regain a sense of agency and influence over national development, governments, including the public service, need to employ foresight, the systematic application of futures thinking. Foresight enables public servants to identify possible and probable challenges, opportunities and 'black swans'[17], test policies and services on their resilience in and compatibility with alternative future environments, and stimulate adaptability.

Public officials will need to equip themselves with the appropriate capabilities in futures thinking.[18] These capabilities can only grow if they are given the space to innovate and fail. In the complex interdependence that will dominate the public service of the future, learning from failure can increase responsiveness to changing realities. The aim is to foster an environment where failure is 'safe', and trust is paramount. Public servants who do not trust that the system will allow them to fail without a detrimental effect on their careers will not be incentivised to innovate. In fact, they may do all they can to maintain the status quo, however irrelevant to and ineffective in the prevailing context, so as not to attract the displeasure of their superiors.

FROM 'PUBLIC SECTOR' ETHOS TO 'SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC' ETHOS

Historically, government has formulated policy around the needs of the bureaucracy to function effectively. A government that wants to be adaptive and more responsive must design policies around the needs of the citizens and build a long-term relationship based on engagement and trust. PPPs, formal engagement channels with citizens and a shift to co-design and co-implementation signal higher levels of trust of government in citizens. Governments can likewise gain the trust of citizens

[14] Helen Dickinson and Helen Sullivan, "Imagining the 21st Century Public Service Workforce," 44-51.
[15] Gus O'Donnell, "Successful Governance: A Conversation," Ethos 12 (2013): 14.

[16] Eckerd, A. "Risk Management and Risk Avoidance in Agency Decision Making." Public Administration Review 74 (2014): 620.
[17] As defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Economics and Naseem Nicholas Taleb's Black Swan Theory, the 'black swan' is a metaphoric name for a rare, unexpected event that has a major impact.
[18] Helen Dickinson and Helen Sullivan, "Imagining the 21st Century Public Service Workforce," 32.

through performance management scorecards and delivery units etc. to increase accountability and signal a commitment to the effective delivery of public services.

In a Collaborate CIC (UK) study conducted in 2014, an overwhelming majority of respondents "at least tended to agree" that public services treating people with dignity and respect is as important as giving people the final outcome they need. As the post-2015 era approaches along with the move to adopt a shared new vision in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will the fundamental nature of the Millennium Development Goals be elevated from public service delivery to emphasise delivery with dignity and respect? Any future public sector ethos needs to reflect these human values.

© Organizacion Internacional Para Las Migraciones / *Lack of livelihoods in El Salvador forces people into illegal and perilous journeys into Mexico in search of work.*

Challenges for Developing Countries

Is NPP a luxury only developed countries can afford, or can it apply, perhaps in different degrees, variations and manifestations, to developing countries as well? A vast majority of citizens in developing countries are stuck in the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs[19], which has a direct impact on their perceptions, and expectations of what governments need to prioritise. Grand public sector reform schemes, with their heavily delayed impact downstream, might not figure prominently in their expectations. In El Salvador for example, surveys show that citizens are well aware of rampant public sector corruption and the long-term negative impact on public trust and the ability of the public service to function efficiently and effectively. Yet they do not consider it a priority for the government to tackle when basic needs like healthcare, employment, security and personal safety are so inadequately met.[20] In developing countries, NPP would therefore need to emerge and be shaped at the frontline of the delivery of these services.

In The Gambia, the civil service suffers from fundamental capacity weaknesses, including a fragmented government, poor service delivery, and unmotivated and low-paid staff. With no history or culture of dialogue between government and citizen in the modern post-colonial era, there is a significant lack of shared narrative and trust. In these circumstances, any attempt to adopt a more collaborative and risk-sharing approach or start a conversation or policy of multi-stakeholder engagement would be both a challenge and an opportunity to reset the relationship between the state and its citizens. A powerful change coalition consisting of political and administrative leaders will be required[21] if these ideas are to be advanced. Poor implementation rather than bad policy remains a significant problem in South Africa. A complex environment and competing priorities have stalled efforts to tackle complex and cross-sectoral challenges posed by youth unemployment, poverty, and urban slums. Disagreements within government over resource allocation have also meant that a range of public services like education and public safety suffer from poor delivery. Commentators have attributed this failure to a lack of relevant skills within government to respond to the challenges, as well as government that is not joined-up or networked.[22] NPP, with its emphasis on new skill sets for public entrepreneurs, collaboration, foresight-driven understanding and implementation etc., provides an opportunity to deal with these issues.

Operational Implications

In a desire to correct decades of public mismanagement and improve governance and service delivery as quickly as possible, developing countries are often tempted to accelerate public sector reform by adopting the most advanced innovations and practices of developed countries. In some cases, conditions set by donors may also obligate these countries to do so. These attempts are rarely successful. Indeed, in some cases, these types of reform efforts have contributed to negative outcomes. For example, NPM's prescription for lower levels of supervision and greater freedom to public managers has been found to foster a fertile climate for corruption.[23]

While fundamental deficiencies in the civil service machinery and the absence of mechanisms to strengthen structures and capacity may pose significant challenges for service delivery, there are still opportunities for transformation within the public service to improve delivery. These centre on the future of work in the public sector. Public service motivation emerges as the best starting point from which to launch and drive change in the public service. Tight financial resources leading to an inability to provide financial incentives is often cited as a roadblock to motivation. However, a number of studies, including a 2009 global survey conducted by McKinsey & Company[24] have shown that key motivators across the public and private sector included praise and recognition for good work, face-time with senior management and the opportunity to lead and work on major projects.

© BY-ND Red Hand Records / *More schools in Banjul help provide better educational and employment opportunities for Gambians of the future.*

[19] Maslow, A.H. (1943). "A Theory of Human Motivation," Psychological Review. 50(4): 370-96
[20] Mentioned in discussions with UNDP GCPSE by Ms Laura Rivera, Programme Officer at UNDP El Salvador, 6 May 2015.
[21] Mentioned in discussions with UNDP GCPSE by Ms. Awa Touray, former civil servant in The Gambia, 11 May 2015.

[22] Vani Tripathi et al, "Context, Connection and Continuity: Governance in the Next Decade," Ethos 12 (2013): 87.
[23] Kulachet Mongkol, "The Critical Review of New Public Management Model and its Criticisms," Research Journal of Business Management 5 (2011): 37
[24] Dewhurst, M., Guthridge, M. and Mohr, E., "Motivating People: Getting Beyond Money," McKinsey Quarterly November (2009)

©BY Andre Gustavo Stumf / *Firefighting Corps of the Brasilia Federal District, Brazil.*

In the design of development opportunities for public officials, there is also an entry point for effective commissioning of public services, which, given the role of private investment in infrastructure and public services, is an increasingly important skill. Deploying public officials to work with contractors involved in publicly-funded projects is a valuable opportunity for the public sector to maintain government oversight of such projects and ensure that they deliver services in the public interest. Developing countries can shape incentives around these concepts and regularly reinforce in public officials the strong link between public service work and the public good.

If implemented well, higher levels of motivation and an enabling environment which supports and encourages cross-agency collaboration and experimentation may put the public service on the path to creating a virtuous cycle of sustainable national development. As efforts for government to become more adaptive to changing realities and more responsive to citizen's needs pay off and positive results begin to show with a newly-adopted citizen-centric ethos, a sense of purpose can be reinvigorated in a flagging public service to bring about transformational public service reform.

Ways forward

Regardless of development status and context, the following shared issues will dominate the future of work in the public service in most countries:

▶ 'Doing-more-with-less'

▶ Catching up with the speed and spread of technological innovation

▶ Dealing with complex development challenges

▶ Accepting diminished agency, uncertain outcomes and alternative futures

▶ Embracing a citizen-centred approach

▶ Catching up with the (for-profit and non-profit) private sector or global innovations to improve delivery

▶ Moving from reactive to insight-driven delivery

▶ Dealing with disruptions through adaptive policies and service delivery

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Bertucucci, G, and Y. Yemiai. "Public Sector Reform Revisited in the Context of Globalisation." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. New York (2000).

Bouckaert, Geert. "Trust and public administration." *Administration* 60.1 (2012): 91-115.

Bozeman, Barry, and Gordon *Kingsley*. "Red Tape and Public Managers' Decision Making." *The American Review of Public Administration* 35 (2005): 363-379.

Chittoo, Hemant B., Needesh Ramphul and Bhissum Nowbutsing. "Globalization and Public Sector Reforms in a Developing Country." *Culture Mandala: Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural & Economic Studies* 8(2) (2009): 30-51.

Hodge, G. A., and C. Greve. "Public-private partnerships: An international performance review." *Public Administration Review* 67(3) (2007): 545-558.

Lindquist, E., S. Vincent, and J. Wanna. *Putting Citizens First.* Canberra: The Australian National University 2013.

Maslow, A.H. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50(4): 370-96

Needham, C. and C. Mangan. "The 21st Century Public Servant." *University of Birmingham* (2014): Accessed May 20, 2015 http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/public-service-academy/21-century-report-28-10-14.pdf

Pillay, S. "A Culture Ecology of New Public Management" *International Review of Administrative Science* 74 (2008): 373-394.

Ritzer, George. *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Pine Forge Press, 2004.

Sarker, A. 'New Public Management in Developing Countries: An Analysis of Success and Failure with Particular Reference to Singapore and Bangladesh.' *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 19(2) (2006): 180-203.

Schick, Allen. "Why most developing countries should not try New Zealand's reforms." *The World Bank Research Observer* 13(1) (1998): 123-131.

Tan, Andrew. "Public Sector Transformation – Six Small Ways to Make Big Changes". Ethos 13 (2014): 48-52.

United Nations. "World public sector report 2003: E-government at the crossroads." (2003): 75-76.

ⒸBY-NC-ND H4+ Partnership / *A maternal and newborn health project officer visits a primary health unit in Pujehn, Bo District, Sierra Leone*

GCPSE

Global Centre
for Public Service
Excellence

**UNDP Global Centre for
Public Service Excellence**

#08-01, Block A
29 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119620
T: +65 6908 1063
F: +65 6774 4571
E: registry.sg@undp.org

www.undp.org/publicservice
twitter.com/UNDPpublicserv
www.fb.com/GCPSE
unteamworks.org/publicservice