AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (AAPAM)

ASSOCIATION AFRICAINE POUR L'ADMINISTRATION PUBLIQUE ET LE MANAGEMENT (AAAPM)

44TH ANNUAL AAPAM ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE

TOPIC: LEVERAGING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AND RESILIENCE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

VENUE: ESIBAYENI LODGE, MATSAPHA, KINGDOM OF ESWATINI
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Session Objectives

By the end of the session, delegates should be able to:

i. Explain the importance of resilience in public sector organizations.

ii. Describe strategies of developing resilient public organizations.

iii. Outline the role of young professionals in driving institutional resilience and redefining governance through social and digital transformation.

Introduction

- Building resilience in public organizations is crucial for maintaining function during disruptions, fostering adaptability, and ensuring long-term success.

- It allows these organizations to absorb shocks, recover from crises, and even find opportunities for growth amidst uncertainty, which strengthens public trust and improves service delivery.

- Young professionals possess the critical energy, creativity, and adaptability which make them uniquely equipped to address pressing global and organizational challenges of our time.

"Youth is the canvas upon which the masterpiece of tomorrow is painted"
 - a metaphor for how the current generation of young people, with their potential, energy, and dreams, will shape the future.

- **The canvas:** Represents the limitless potential of young people and the fresh, unshaped state of their future.

- **The "masterpiece":** Symbolizes the future society, which can be molded into something great through the actions and ideas of youth.

- **The act of painting:** Refers to the processes of education, mentorship, and empowerment that are applied to youth, shaping the future they will build.

Definition of Terms

- **Adaptability** - implies a sense of personal choice, of purposefully navigating - rather than being driven by - changing circumstances.

- **Organizational agility -** the ability to rapidly and effectively adapt to change, responding to customer demands, market shifts, and new opportunities while maintaining performance. As governments face ever-changing socio-political landscapes, agile leadership can enable a shift from rigidity to resilience.

- **Resilience** - the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. It gives you the ability to bounce forward with new insights and learning you can carry into the future.

- **Organizational resilience** is the capacity to thrive amid adversity, drawing strength from difficult experiences and emerging stronger.

Importance of Resilient Public Institutions

- **Continuity of essential services:** Public institutions must continue to provide vital services like healthcare, social protection, and infrastructure even under extreme stress.

- **Adaptation and innovation:** Resilience is the capacity for public sector organizations to learn from crises and adapt, using tools like digital government platforms to better serve citizens during events like the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Economic and social stability:** A resilient public sector is crucial for managing economic shocks, supporting the private sector, and protecting citizens' welfare, especially during crises that strain national budgets and debt.

- **Effective crisis response:** It enables a coordinated and effective response to crises by ensuring institutions have the necessary capabilities, such as data management and strong governance frameworks.

- **Sustainable development:** A resilient public sector is a foundation for sustainable development, ensuring that progress continues despite disruptions and that infrastructure remains functional and safe over the long term.

Key Strategies for Building Resilient Public Institutions

- **Leadership and Governance** - Building resilience within public institutions starts with strong leadership and effective governance.

- **Strategic Planning and Risk Assessment -** to proactively identify and address potential crises, develop contingency plans, and allocate resources effectively.

- **Building Institutional Capacity –** invest in training and professional development to strengthen their ability to effectively respond to crises.

- **Engaging Stakeholders -** fostering collaboration with other public institutions and organisations, engaging citizens and communities in decision-making.

- **Continual Learning and Adaptation -** Establishing mechanisms for post-crisis evaluation and learning, incorporating lessons learned into future strategies, and embracing innovation and change.

Role of Young Professionals in Building Resilience..1

- **Driving Innovation and Creativity**: Young professionals bring fresh perspectives and are often early adopters and creators of new technologies. Their "digital savviness" allows them to develop innovative solutions, improve efficiency, and enhance organizational adaptability to rapidly evolving environments.

- **Bridging Sectors and Knowledge**: Young professionals can effectively bridge the gap between global scientific knowledge and local wisdom, as well as between different sectors.

- **Fostering Inclusive and Supportive Cultures**: Young professionals are champions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, young professionals help create more robust and adaptable institutions. They advocate for supportive work environments where individuals feel valued, can learn from mistakes, and are encouraged to express themselves openly, which is essential for collective resilience.

Role of Young Professionals in Building Resilience..2

- **Enhancing Community Engagement**: Young professionals' involvement in community outreach and local projects, make them act as information channels, disseminating knowledge and fostering a culture of preparedness that extends beyond the institution's immediate boundaries. This multiplier effect bolsters overall community resilience.

- **Promoting Accountability and Trust**: Young people often express concerns about systemic issues like corruption and a lack of transparency. By demanding transparent and accountable governance, they push institutions to build public trust, which is a key pillar of long-term institutional resilience and effective crisis response.

Digital and Social Transformation

- Redefining governance through social and digital transformation involves leveraging advanced technologies to fundamentally change how organizations are directed, administered, and held accountable, focusing on efficiency, transparency, and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

- Digital transformation provides businesses with tools and platforms to operationalize their societal commitments more effectively, extending their reach and impact (Van Veldhoven and Vanthienen, 2022, Vaska et al., 2021).

- The intertwining of societal roles and digital transformation represents a nexus where businesses can harness technological tools to further societal objectives by co-creating value with diverse stakeholders.

Key Dimensions of Digital Transformation

Digital transformation in governance focuses on four key areas of innovation:

- **Internal Process Innovation:** Automating and optimizing bureaucratic workflows to reduce costs and increase speed and efficiency (e.g., e-tax filing, automated public services).

- **Service Innovation:** Using technologies like AI, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things (IoT) to create higher quality, more cost-effective, and personalized public services (e.g., smart city initiatives, telemedicine platforms).

- **Policy Innovation:** Utilizing real-time data and analytics to inform policy-making, from agenda setting to evaluation, leading to more responsive and effective governance.

- **Governance Innovation:** Introducing new digital tools, such as online voting and open data platforms, that empower citizens and other stakeholders to participate more directly in decision-making and enhance accountability.

Elevating the voice of young professionals

- Young professionals must be fully integrated into decision-making, policy development, and advocacy. We must move from tokenism to true representation, where young voices are heard, valued, and acted upon.

- Be included in the monitoring and implementation of policies that address risks and build resilience at all stages.

- Invest in education and skill development to enable them to effectively participate in nation-building and address complex challenges. Training in areas like problem-solving, goal-setting, and managing emotions is crucial for building resilient individuals who can contribute to resilient institutions.

- Technology, creativity, and innovation are the currencies of the young generation. Young professionals are digital natives, and their ability to develop and deploy solutions to complex problems is unparalleled and must be supported.

Conclusion

- The public sector needs institutional resilience to maintain its ability to deliver essential services and support societal well-being during and after crises like pandemics, natural disasters, or economic downturns.

- This involves building adaptable, learning institutions with strong governance, capable public servants, and robust digital and physical infrastructure to ensure continuity, innovate, and protect public welfare.

- Digital transformation in governance has revolutionized public administration by leveraging emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, big data, and cloud computing to improve efficiency, transparency, and service delivery.

- Young professionals drive institutional resilience through their **innovative ideas**, **digital skills**, and **proactive approach** to complex challenges. Their energy, creativity, ability to mobilise communities, and unparalleled motivation make them indispensable in tackling the challenges facing organizations and communities.