

17th INTERNATIONAL WINELANDS CONFERENCE

16 - 18 October 2023



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Re-imagining Public Servant Leadership in a post-capture, post-pandemic governance landscape.

The School of Public Leadership of Stellenbosch University is proud to continue the International Winelands Conference series and tradition with its 17th edition. The main theme of the conference is focused on re-imagining public servant leadership. When Robert Greenleaf coined the term 'servant leadership' in the 1970s, he defined a servant leader as a servant first. It is a type of leadership that is based on the natural feeling that one wants to serve others first. Public leadership that takes and appreciates the above definition at face value generally strives to go above and beyond the call of duty to take care of others. The benefits of servant public leadership are increased employee loyalty, productivity, and an enhanced problem-solving culture in the organisation. Rebecca Herman, a Graduate Professor of Leadership at Purdue University Global and an organizational culture expert says that servant-led employees do not fear getting punished for taking risks when trying to do the right thing, rather they perform at a risk-taking level, based on the goals, the mission, and the core values of the organization.

More than a decade of state capture and the disconcerting revelations of the Zondo Inquiry into State Capture have not only undermined key governance institutions in South Africa, but also the legitimacy of government itself. This phenomenon is by no means confined to South Africa: disenchantment with government and public policy is a refrain which resonates around the globe, yet even in the midst of this institutional destruction and multiple governance failures in South Africa, key institutions (such as the judiciary) and individual public servants displayed true public leadership, sometime at huge personal costs.

Nowadays, servant leadership is required perhaps more than ever. The covid pandemic and other social, economic, environmental, and technological shifts have placed enormous challenges on public services, and public service leaders in particular. Public service leaders increasingly face immense scrutiny and multiple and often competing expectations, from inside and outside public service institutions and from within local communities. Public service leadership is increasingly being tested and challenged to be more responsive to the changing needs and interests of local

communities and to create conditions for quality and fit-for-purpose service provision. Alongside this, as custodians of public services, public service leaders are expected to be even more responsible and vigilant in safeguarding and supporting the needs of their followers/employees. For example, this has been a period when leaders' customary levers for engaging 'followers' have either been depleted, under-powered, or simply not a good fit, and so have left leaders searching for alternative ways of engaging 'willing' and 'able' followership. Leaders have been charged (even if not knowingly or willingly, and if only morally) to leave no one behind, be they a citizen or employee, and this has been a greater-than-usual responsibility requiring responsive leadership amid snowballing demands on services and institutions.

On the other hand, these shifts, especially in the domain of technology, have opened up new pathways and modalities of public services and democratic participation. The adoption of video-conferencing and remote working during the pandemic, for instance, illustrates one such innovation, accelerating the adoption of new methods of working. While digitization and the convergence of technologies, most certainly present risks, they also open up opportunities that require leadership to utilize them for the good of the public. The same can be said of the need to shift from carbon based technologies and other transitions towards a more sustainable social and economic system. Each require good servant-leadership to generate public value and preserve equity and opportunity for the public.

With all these rapid changes and growing demands, public servant leadership must change with the times to effectively address society's needs. It is not fixed concept, but a concept that is adaptive to what the times and the public require, within the abilities, resources and technologic abilities that are available. Therefore, servant leaders must continuously re-imagine public servant leadership and think primarily through the lens of complexity, plurality, relationality and ethics. Therefore, Servant leaders in the public sector must reframe their understanding of public servant leadership in terms of complexity, resilience, and adaptation to effectively address the current and future societal challenges. It is this complex and dynamic concept of servant leadership that we want to discuss in our conference. In order to deepen the discussion of this main theme for the conference, we have identified the following four subthemes.

Conference Tracks/subthemes:

Accountability

Although the importance of any leader cannot be denied, followers are equally important, after all, there is no leadership devoid of followers. Accountability in public servant leadership is not only about responsibility but also about the relationship with the public. Accountability is an important aspect in maintaining a confident and trusting relationship between public leaders and the public. As such, servant leaders must maintain a trusting relationship between the public sector and the public by being accountable as well as holding others accountable. Accountability in the context of public servant leadership is, therefore, both a 'virtue' and a 'mechanism'. As a 'virtue' it sets expectations such as taking care of what is given in trust, serving others, and looking after the interests of the public. As a 'mechanism' it helps achieve those expectations in a systematic manner as it touches on practical issues such as being held accountable for one's actions. The issue of accountability is therefore a critical one for public servant leaders, particularly in the face of ever-increasing complexity of governance. Public leaders are faced with the daunting task of navigating complex and emerging issues in today's rapidly changing world. From global pandemics to natural disasters, to social justice movements, servant leaders must be able to respond quickly and effectively to a range of challenges that often arise without warning. However, with this power, comes great responsibility and leaders must be held accountable for their actions and their decisions. As leaders in the public sector, it is crucial for servant leaders who are designing, adjusting, or struggling with mechanisms for accountable governance amidst complexity to find new mechanisms and incentives that may promote accountability and build (back) trust in the hearts and minds of citizens.

Performance

Since the turn of the century, there has been an increased emphasis on performance planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting, often supported by external auditing and oversight. Originating from the classic concept of New Public Management, performance management has become a dominant force in every public organization and organizational management system. Despite the increased focus on

performance, progress towards development outcomes and results on the ground seems to decline. Recent scandals in the public sector domain further accentuate the huge disjuncture between formally communicated performance aims and the actual results. The public sector is facing increased pressure to evolve and to offer more “customer-centric” services. As governments strive to balance priorities and novel approaches to doing things, it is important to review the complexity, quality and focus of institutionalised performance planning, measuring and reporting processes to optimally drive public sector results. Servant leaders in the public sector must find ways to effectively manage the organisation’s performance from individual to strategic level to successfully respond to complex challenges and crises to achieve sectoral and systemic changes. This entails not only a review of what is measured, but also “how” the objectives are achieved. Cognisance should also be taken of the complexity related to the vast differences in organisational and financial capacity across spheres of government and various sectors, and the capacity for effective oversight over performance by the relevant oversight bodies such as municipal councils, provincial legislatures, and national parliament.

Governance (Public Policy, Sustainable Development, and Environmental Management)

Good quality of governance is fundamental to creating a better society. Governance provides the framework for planning, implementation, and monitoring of performance in areas such as public policy, sustainable development, and environmental management. Governance, therefore, provides structures and processes for decision-making accountability, control, and behavior in these areas of society. Servant leaders in the public sector should ensure that the governance structures are strengthened to ensure better decision-making that will positively shape the future, especially amidst complexity, emerging issues, and transitions. Increasingly the challenges facing contemporary economies and societies are global in nature (such as the climate emergency), yet governance structures are still typically centred on the nation state. Here the political-administrative interface, the ability to balance the top-down centralizing dynamics with bottom up decentralization within the public sector, and the ability to think and act in nonlinear processes, the risks and opportunities of new technologies and the interface between the public sector, the private sector and civil society – both domestically and internationally in an increasingly global world – is critical.

The weaknesses inherent in government, however, became increasingly clear with the onset of larger-scale and more pervasive environmental problems in the 20th and 21st centuries. Governance, therefore, not only provides structures and processes for decision-making accountability, control, and behaviour at the level of government, but is ultimately focused on addressing the problem of economic and political coordination in social life. Servant leaders in the public sector should ensure that governance structures are strengthened to enhance decision-making and coordination with other institutions and actors, thereby enabling concrete actions in response to environmental limitations and its societal feedbacks.

Novel ideas in Public Administration and Governance

The world is changing with massive shifts in digital technology reshaping even the most minute aspect of life. Rapidly changing demographic, societal, economic, and technological trends are shaping the future. Citizens' changing needs and interests are also evolving, and governments globally must become more agile and innovate to keep pace with this rapidly changing world. As such, public leaders must be able to address novel challenges with new ideas. Not only should the public sector find novel ideas to effectively address society's needs, but the public sector must also take on the responsibility to create a good environment for novel ideas to thrive to help shape the future. As the OECD put it in 2017 "Novel ideas in government are about finding new ways to impact the lives of citizens, and novel approaches to activating them as partners to shape the future together." Yet opportunities for innovation are also fraught with risk e.g., increasing digitisation might exacerbate the digital divide, further marginalise the poor and benefits elites. The same could be said of the transition to renewable energy. Public leaders will have to reimagine the expression of the public good, democratic and economic inclusion under these circumstances. This theme will look to attract researchers that seek to contribute novel ideas and insights in the field of public administration and governance.

About the papers and the participants

The Conference tracks intend to invite papers and practice workshops that enable us to have a deeper understanding of the comparative ways in which leaders are responding to the challenges facing public services in the aforementioned context. They will help in better understanding the policies, systems, and practices that public services are putting into place to enable leaders to get the best out of the resources they have at their disposal and is specifically interested in insights into how public servant leaders have redefined their role and purpose in the aftermath of the pandemic, along with the additional demands of social and economic changes that their constituencies and areas face.

We are keen to bring together academic scholars, researchers, and practitioners to promote meaningful debate about future-facing strategies, mechanisms, and methods for harnessing the best of leadership capabilities and approaches that can equip public servant leaders to implement their vision, goals, and priorities, and that facilitate effective followership and effective public services delivery. We would like to use this debate to construct a new leadership paradigm that fits the times and the challenges public service faces and will face in the years ahead.

Important Dates:

Call for Papers and Abstract Submissions Open	- 13 March 2023
Second Announcement	- 14 April 2023
Registrations Open	- 14 April 2023
Abstract Submissions Close	- 30 June 2023
Third Announcement	- 14 August 2023
Early Bird Cut-off date	- 25 August 2023

How To Submit Your Abstract:

Closing date for the submission of abstracts is **30 June 2023**, please click on the below abstract submission box,

**Abstract
Submission - Link**

Conference Venue:

The Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS)
10 MARAIS RD, MOSTERTSDRIFT
STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA

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