Beyond the popular discourse

Capacity constraints in the public sector

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Since South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, the public service—and the state in general—has been the object of numerous interventions to 'transform' it. The reasons were and remain compelling. In the first place the apartheid state operated a brutal system of racial segregation and domination. Expenditure on black South Africans was a fraction of what it was on whites. Government departments and state administrations were fragmented by race and even further divided across Bantustans and self-governing territories. The result was a plethora of parallel bureaucracies, responsible to multiple, political authorities. In addition, the South African bureaucracy was staffed—especially at management levels—exclusively by white South Africans, and amongst them, overwhelmingly by Afrikaans-speaking men.

Under these circumstances transformation has referred to four principle initiatives. It has included measures to (1) integrate the diverse governments and administrations of the apartheid period into a single public service. Much attention has been paid to (2) changing the direction of public spending to focus on, for the first time, the majority black population. There have also been important efforts to (3) change the demographic character of the public service, to make it more representative of the composition of South Africa's population. The last and (4) element of transformation has included measures to change the way the public service qua public service operates.

I want to focus on this last aspect of transformation for, as we shall see, it has proved the most difficult. On the whole, though, there are some important exceptions; efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government departments, especially in the way and the extent to which they provide public goods and services to the poor, have met with disappointing results. Why has this been the case?

There is lively, public debate in South Africa about why this is so. It ranges from complaints about the continued effects of racism in the public service (that

delays and even sabotages government initiatives), the effects of affirmative action (that sees inexperienced and unqualified individuals put in charge of state departments) and the consequences of the majority party's policy of 'deploying' party functionaries to senior positions in the public service (that blurs the distinction between party and state).

There is an aspect of this politics of transformation, however, that has not attracted the attention it deserves—the reorgansition of the public service on the basis of the New Public Management (NPM) from the mid-1990s. We will see that these measures have had important consequences for the way that the public service is structured and, in particular, on the way that its bureaucratic character has been intentionally eroded. The New Public Management has also created an organisational mould in which the ruling party has sought to 'embed' cadres in the public service. 'Cadre deployment' has, in effect, seen the movement of senior party officials into positions that make maximise the fluid and often contradictory relationship between state and party.

Development and the Public Service

What the new sociology of development increasingly suggests is that one of the key differences between those countries that have achieved high, sustained, economic growth with attendant social development and those that have not is the state of the public sector.

Peter Evans famously argued that in the contemporary world what matters for development is not 'how much' the state intervenes, but 'what kind' of intervention it makes (Evans, 1996, p.10). 'Some states,' Evans observed, 'extract such large amounts of otherwise investable surplus while providing so little in the way of 'collective goods' in return that they do indeed impede economic transformation. Those who control these states plunder without any regard for the welfare of the citizenry than a predator has for the welfare of its prey' (Evans, 1996, p.44). In contrast, 'other states foster long-term entrepreneurial perspectives among private elites by increasing incentives to engage in transformative investments and lowering the risks' (p.10). In his comparative study of the performances of the former Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo), Korea, Taiwan, Brazil and India, Evans attributed the key distinguishing factor between them to the internal structure of their states.

Korea and Taiwan had long, bureaucratic traditions that they were able to build on to achieve development and economic growth. In Evans typology, Brazil and India occupied intermediate positions. Zaire exemplified the predatory state because its overwhelmed bureaucracy had deteriorated into 'pools of patrimonialism' to the point of being the principle obstacle to economic growth and development.

Where does the South African state lie on this continuum? Is it in a position to foster a developmental path for the country?

The State as Machine

If we pause for a moment to consider what for Max Weber is the essential difference between the modern as opposed to the pre-modern state, we find that his distinction rests on the peculiarity of the machine vs. patriarchal power. 'The question,' says Weber in *Politics as a Vocation*, 'is whether or not the power-holder himself directs and organizes the administration while delegating executive power to personal servants, hired officials, or personal favourites and confidants, who are non-owners, i.e. who do not use the material means of administration in their own right but are directed by the lord' (Gerth and Wright, 1991, p.81). Do the personnel of the state themselves own the administrative means, or are they separated from these means of administration? Do they supply their own moneys for the administration of the areas under their jurisdiction and/or for the equipment and provisions of war? Why is this important? When the lord is dependent on associations that are able, independently, to deploy or not the means of administration, what binds the estate to him? 'Personal faith,' Weber tells us (Gerth and Wright, 1991, p.81). This is the form of patriarchal power, with all its apparent weaknesses. Yet the Prince also tries to take into his own charge the administration and, for this purpose, seeks the 'expropriation of the autonomous and "private" bearers of executive power' (Gerth and Wright, 1991, p.82). Under such conditions no single official personally owns the money he pays out, or the buildings, stores, tools and war machines he controls. In short, the modern state organises the total means of political organisation (Gerth and Wright, 1991, p.82). This is the condition of the emergence of bureaucracy properly speaking. In *Wirtshaft und Gesellshaft,* Weber discusses this phenomenon as the emergence of the 'bureaucratic machine' (Gerth and Wright, 1991, p.228). '[T]he professional

bureaucrat is chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence. In the great majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march' (Gerth and Wright, 1991, p.228).

Let us note that on these terms, the measure of the state is one of bureaucratisation and rationalisation. Bureaucracies are rationally organised. Their officials are ranked hierarchically and relate to each other and to things according to formal policies and impersonal rules. They have clearly defined duties corresponding to carefully demarcated jurisdictions. Officials are appointed on the basis of competencies rather than for ascriptive reasons. Indeed, a bureaucracy comes to resemble its ideal type to the extent that it 'depersonalizes itself'; that is, 'the more completely it succeeds in achieving the exclusion of love, hatred, and every purely personal, especially irrational and incalculable, feeling from the execution of official tasks' (cited in Coser, 2003, p. 230). 'In the place of the old-type ruler who is moved by sympathy, favor, grace, and gratitude, modern culture,' Weber continues, the state 'requires for sustaining its external apparatus the emotionally detached, and hence rigorously "professional" expert'. The example that Weber used was that of the modern judge: He or She 'is a vending machine into which the pleadings are inserted together with the fee and which then disgorges the judgment together with the reasons mechanically derived from the Code.' (cited in Coser, p. 232).

It has been important to describe, even schematically, the features of such a state because 'transformation' in South Africa has been associated with efforts to transcend this conception of bureaucracy. We might say that the post-apartheid state project has a double edge. In the first place, to change the racial profile of the public service, from one that was overwhelming white, to one more representative of the country's demography. Yet, 'transformation' has also been associated with efforts to move away from traditional notions of public administration.

Transforming the South African State

In 1991, at a hotel-conference venue outside Johannesburg, a group of public administration academics and practitioners adopted what they called the 'Mount Grace Resolution'. The participants were either anti-apartheid activists recently

returned from exile or those sympathetic to the democratic struggle in South Africa. With the African National Congress (ANC) and other organisations recently unbanned and the end of apartheid in sight, they asked, what would be the character of a post-apartheid, public service.

The resolution they endorsed was more like a manifesto. It called for a break with the public administration of the apartheid era and championed the New Public Administration associated with the American 'Minnowbrook' movement (Fitzgerald, 1995, p.512). At stake was a critique of the 'wholly outdated' principles and methods that made the apartheid public service a 'bureaucratic, law-driven, hierarchical, multi-layered, departmentally fragmented, inward-oriented, racial Oligarchy' (Fitzgerald, 1995, p.514). The starting point for a new paradigm was an adaptation to local circumstances of Osborne and Gaebler's *Reinventing Government*. Here, the emphasis was on cultivating an 'entrepreneurial spirit' to transform the public service. If the traditional public administration model was premised on the idea of a machine-like Weberian bureaucracy, Fitzgerald tells us, the corporate management approach recognised that public servants could not plausibly be conceived as obedient and neutral. It accepted, rather, that there would invariably be an important element of bureaucratic discretion in interpreting and implementing policy. What it proposed, as a result, was that 'discretion or influence [was] best safeguarded in the hands of suitably qualified personnel who posses both proven expertise and an appropriate code of professional ethics (p.517).[1]

One of the initiatives that came out of the Mount Grace meeting was the establishment of the Graduate School of Public and Development Management (P&DM) at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Its mandate was to train and form a new cadre of post-apartheid managers. The schools first director was Patrick Fitzgerald who had convened the weekend at Mount Grace and was keenly interested in the NPM. P&DM has played a crucial role in training senior managers in all parts of the bureaucracy. I shall return to the

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[1] Allied to this new emphasis on management was an interest in 'commercial contracting'. Profoundly suspicious of the quality, quantity and manner in which the public service allocated public goods, 'consumer power' and 'citizen control' were deemed best guaranteed when line departments and the administration was organised into competing delivery units. The idea was that divisions operate as stand-alone businesses that competed for market share both internally (with each other) and externally (with other private businesses) (Fitzgerald, 1995, p.518).

significance of this in a moment, but let us note that in the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), the former director-general, Robinson Ramaite, as well as Khaya Ngema, then director of Service Delivery and Innovation were former classmates from P&DM. So too was Salim Latib, a senior manager in the department, as well as Lawrence Tsipane, former manager of the Capacity Building division. The former head of Corporate Services, Colleen Robinson, too was a P&DM colleague. It was here that debates around the NPM made themselves felt on what were to be the senior managers of the public service.

In South Africa the partisans of the New Public Management sought to move away from what they considered 'polemical' debates about the appropriate role, size and operations of the 'state'. From their perspective it was unproductive to debate whether privatisation or public ownership were good (or bad) in and of themselves. More useful was an altogether different question: who was best placed to deliver services? Was it better achieved through a public body? If so, what should best be its role and size? Could a private, for-profit business provide the service more efficiently and effectively? What is important to note, though, is the shift, heavily touted by the NPM, to managerialism. The latter stressed visible, hands-on management instead of leadership according to policy and rules. The NPM championed giving managers greater discretionary power, reducing, in particular, procedural constraints on the handling of contracts, cash and staff.

In South Africa, one of the first signs that the NPM was gaining in influence was the introduction in 1999 of the Public Finance Management Act. In a break with the past, the Act removed responsibility for financial accounting from cabinet ministers and gave it, instead, to senior officials (director-generals and other delegated officials) in their departments. According to the Treasury the:

> Act assumes that the political head of a department (Cabinet Minister or a provincial MEC) is responsible for policy matters and outcomes; this includes seeking Parliamentary (or provincial legislature) approval and adoption of the department's budget vote. The head official (Director-General of a national department or provincial head of department) is responsible for outputs and implementation, and is accountable to

> Parliament or provincial legislature for the management of the implementation of that budget (National Treasury, 2006).

The idea was to bring the system of public finance in line with the approach of the new Public Service Regulations; accountability was to be secured by holding officials to measurable, performance indicators determined in a performance assessment. The effect was to give to senior members of the public service a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis their ministers. In the climate of fiscal constraint it is not difficult to see how such measures might affect relations between a minister and a director-general.

When I did interviews with officials from the DPSA in 2002, several referred to the strained relationship between then Director-General, Robinson Ramaite, and his minister, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. Some informants even suggested that the Act opened up the executive to a 'coup-type situation' (Interviewee known to the author, October 2002). Even if these accounts were exaggerated (and second-hand reports are hardly reliable), the point is that the new act gives officials unprecedented authority vis-à-vis elected politicians. Even worse, it potentially inverts relations of accountability between these arms of the state.

The effects of the NPM are reflected, most dramatically, in the change in the structure of the public service. There has been an increase in the number of senior posts in relation to the base, whereas prior to the introduction of the NPM the ratio of managers to staff was 1:700. Today the department has, on average, 40 managers per 200 staff (Interview with HJ van Dyk Robinson, October 2002). Affirmative Action has made itself felt most strongly at this level (manager, senior manager) of the public service.

Figure 1: Public servant managers at all levels, by race, as % of total managers
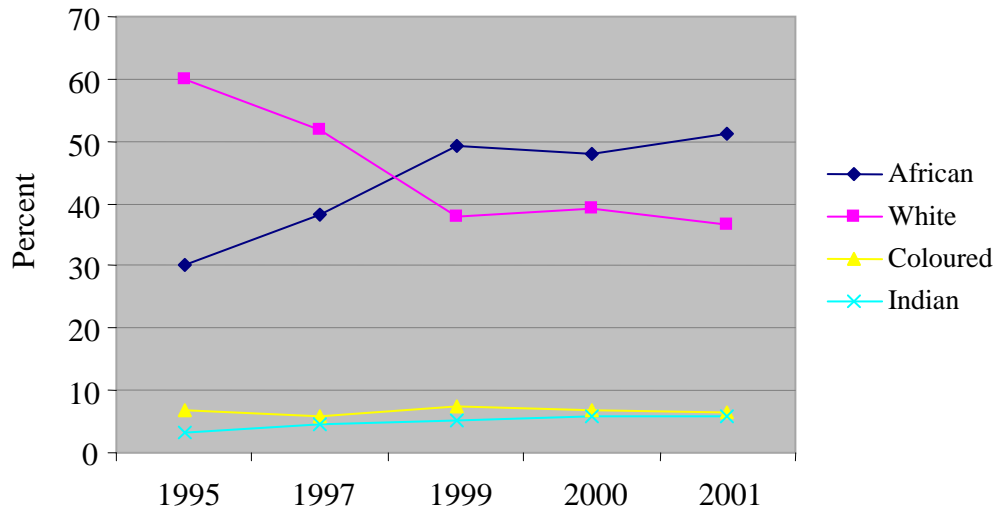
Source: Naidoo, 2008

As suggested by the graph in Figure 1, Thompson and Woolard found a rise in the aggregate number of black public servants at management level in the period under review. Yet the number of white managers also rose during this period. Taken together, the total number of public servants at management level increased substantially between 1995 and 2001; from around 24,000 to over 70,000 (Naidoo, 2008).

Figure 2: Racial breakdown of all Managers in the Public Service
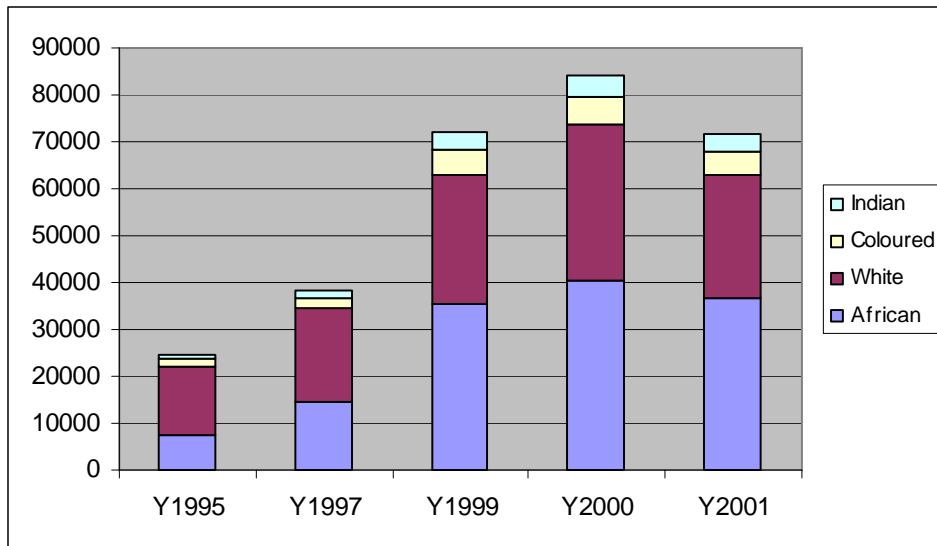
Source: Thompson and Woolard cited in Naidoo, 2008

We should be careful before concluding that the rise of managerialism and the influence of the New Public Management, especially after the introduction of the Gear strategy in 1996, are further evidence of South Africa's slippery slide towards 'neoliberalism'. We must be careful, that is, of not reading current practices retrospectively. When the NPM was first mooted, the model was not that of Margaret Thatcher's Britain or that of United States of America under Reagan. The paradigm example was likely that of France, and in particular, the thinking behind the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA). There are two aspects of the French experience that are especially important. In the first place, the ENA model, unlike the British one, privileges the state as the dominant agent of development. In the second place, it relies on the role of an elite-educated class of senior managers. It is not difficult to understand why, in the late 1990s, this model must have appealed to those in government and in policy circles sympathetic to the democratic project.

Bringing the State Back In

In the wake of the collapse of Soviet Communism and, more generally, the inauspicious fortunes of postcolonial African states, there was greater receptivity within the ANC and policy-circles sympathetic to its project, to rethink the role of the state in the development process. This was accentuated

by the New Right ascendancy in the USA and in Britain that spurned state intervention in the economy. The coincidence of these world, historical events with South Africa's transition from apartheid, however, presented certain dilemmas to the ANC and its allies. There was a strong instinct that in the democratic period, the task of development would fall primarily to the (national democratic) state. This was not simply testament to the hold of 'naïve' ideas on the movement. There were good reasons for this inclination. At least since the 1960s the ANC had argued correctly that apartheid (as a system of racial domination) and capitalism (as a system of class exploitation) worked hand-in-glove. There was, in other words, justifiable suspicion of the market. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)—at least in its initial formulations—was certainly informed by such misgivings.

Even if the idea of 'nationalisation' had disappeared from the ANC's discourse within the first year of its return from exile and even though formulations like 'growth through redistribution' had largely evaporated by 1993 (Habib, 2004, p.94), in policy terms we might characterise the period running up to the millennium as *searching for a role for the state*. In 2004, Adam Habib suggested that 'government is in reappraisal mode' (Habib, 2004, p.95). He argues that since 2003 there are compelling reasons to believe that government has a renewed appetite for state-intervention in the economy (p. 95).

The impasse may have been broken by a little-remarked on phenomenon: the rise in influence of the New Public Management. In South Africa, the NPM was interpreted somewhat differently to, say, in Great Britain or the USA. If the state behaved less bureaucratically and more like 'an entrepreneur', it seemed to be saying, one could avoid the inefficiencies and wastages of the welfare/socialist/soviet models while retaining a leading role for the state. This is where the French experience was especially informative. On its terms, what counted was the establishment of a highly qualified cadre of senior managers in the public service. It coincided with a growing interest in *regulation* as the primary function of the state.
Even though the French model is not mentioned, a key DPSA policy document, probably dating from 2001, outlines a public service vision drawing on vital elements of the French model. Titled a 'Policy Statement on the Establishment of a Senior Management Service in the Public Service', the document analysed shortfalls in service delivery as a consequence of the inability of government

departments to 'convert policy into practice and to utilise the resources allocated to them effectively' (DPSA, 2001).

Based on an analysis of the distribution of managers throughout the state, it argued that the public service was, essentially, 'under-managed' (DPSA, 2001). This was especially acute at provincial government level and, in particular, in the Northern Province, Northwest, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Free State. We might observe that there was no mention of local government in this regard.

For our purposes what is important to note is what the document proposed:

> Senior managers and high-level professionals must concretise government's vision of a better life for all through effective implementation strategies and the efficient utilisation of resources. In this demanding environment there can be no place for mediocrity or lack of commitment. Only the finest candidates, imbued with a spirit of selfless service to the community should be appointed. Their talents should be carefully nurtured, and once well developed, be utilised to the best advantage of the state (DPSA, 2001).

This reasoning was almost certainly behind the significant rise in managerial positions across the public service and across the state generally. In DPSA, in 2006, senior and middle managers account for more than 60% of all posts in the department. Of these positions, nearly 38% are filled by people designated 'African' (Naidoo, 2008).

Where do these new managers come from? The first thing to note is that they are not, in the main, new appointees to the public service. Vinothan Naidoo argues that between 1994 and 2001 total employment in the public service declined by 124,959 persons. More likely is that with the unification of the disparate, apartheid-era administrations there was a merging of managerial and non-managerial personnel (Naidoo, 2008). In other words, 'the significant rise in the total number of management-level public servants would strongly suggest that formerly administrative staff have been moved into managerial role. This saw significant gains for black, and in particular, African personnel (Naidoo, 2008, p.110).

We might nuance this argument by suggesting a periodisation: a post-RDP phase and a period of renewed faith in the state. From 1996 to approximately 2003 there was a moratorium on recruitment to government departments. This period coincided with an emphasis on the market as the 'engine' of development. Following renewed confidence in the ability of the state—at least, to regulate the market in favour of the 'national interest'—a new phase of recruitment has begun. In other words, in the current period new managers are likely the result of a combination of the re-grading of positions and new appointments.

Yet the increase in the proportion of managers across the state generally and in the DPSA, in particular, has been associated with another phenomenon: high vacancy rates. Naidoo reports: 'The twenty-two departments averaged a 22.3% vacancy rate at senior management level, rising to 25.3% in the 2005/6 reporting period' (Naidoo, 2008). 'The problem,' he continues, 'was more pronounced at middle management (level 9–12), which on aggregate contains more posts than senior management, and where the average vacancy rate was 32% and 31% for 2004/5 and 2005/6 respectively' (Naidoo, 2008). Let us note that the consistency of vacancy rates across the state suggests that this is symptomatic of more than simply reporting idiosyncrasies in any particular government or department.

Table 1: Vacancy Rates in Selected National Government Departments

National Departments	2004/2005 (%)	2005/2006 (%)
Agriculture	24.6	27.1
Communications	24.3	31.9
Correctional Services	11.7	9.6
Defence	0	1.1
Education	15.3	19.3
Environmental Affairs & Tourism	22	37.2
Foreign Affairs	11	18
Home Affairs	42	45.2

Justice & Constitutional Development	70	44
Labour	8.2	18.2
Land Affairs	12.6	13.7
Minerals & Energy	17	23.9
National Treasury	17	13
Presidency	27.6	27.5
Public Service & Administration	**24**	**22.6**
Provincial and Local Government	18.6	34.4
Public Works	20.4	21.7
Public Enterprises	16.3	24.1
Social Development	26.6	23.1
Trade & Industry	32.8	48.3
Transport	35	27
Water Affairs and Forestry	14	26.2
Average Vacancy Rate	**22.3**	**25.3**

Source: Naidoo, 2008

What is the relationship between these three variables: managerialism, affirmative action and vacancy rates? The most obvious explanation is the one that is frequently heard in the public domain. Given the legacy of apartheid education and the well-documented failures of the current school system, it is difficult to find suitably qualified candidates. This is frequently the lament of senior, government officials as well. Kenny Govender, the Acting Deputy Director General in the Department of Public Services and Administration, for example, recently observed that 'there are serious skills constraints in the public sector' (Govender, 2006). What vacancy rates indicate is that the situation is more complicated than that suggested by public opinion. Whereas it is usual to blame the non-performance of the state on un- or under-qualified personnel, more likely is that state failure is a consequence of the lack of personnel in key, senior positions. Ironically, this situation is compounded by the way that equity is currently measured. As long as racial redress is appraised using statistical or

numerical standards, when departments cannot find suitably qualified or skilled candidates, current legislation encourages them to leave the positions empty.

Table 2: Ratio of African Managers to other Staff in the DPSA (2006)

DPSA Staff Profile	N	%	Ratio African Managers to Rest of Staff
African Managers (9–16)*	143	37.8%	1.64
Other staff	235	62.2%	
TOTAL	**378**	**100%**	

*Note: Covers senior management and middle management (highly skilled supervision)
Source: Naidoo, 2008

According to the acting Director-General, white public servants are 'concentrated in skilled categories and are over-represented in senior management making up more than a third of it' (Govender, 2006). Table 2 gives the precise ratio of African senior managers relative to other staff. Imagine that a white manager resigns. Let us consider two scenarios. In the first scenario, the post is filled by an African senior manager. In the second, the post is left vacant because a suitable candidate could not be found. In scenario 1, the ratio of 'African' managers to all managers changes from 143:378 to 144:378. In other words, 'African' staff as a percentage of all the managers in the department increases from 37.8 percent to 38%. In scenario 2, the ratio changes from 143:378 to 143:377. In statistical terms, the effect is the same. 'African' managers as a percentage of all managers increases from 37,8% to 38%. Consider now the situation that there is a vacancy rate of 23% amongst senior managers in the DPSA. The situation changes dramatically depending on how you report it. We saw that currently, 'Africans' make-up 37.8% of all senior managers in the DPSA. Even if this is still below the 50% target stipulated by legislation, it, nonetheless, suggests some progress. Now consider if we factor vacancy rates into the equation. What this means is that the current 378 senior managers in the DPSA account for only 77% of all potential posts. In other words, African managers constitute 37.8 % of 77% of managerial positions. If the calculation is made on the basis of the total number of managerial positions available in the Department, then the African, senior percentage falls

dramatically to 30%, representing 143 out of 465 positions. Might this be a perverse effect of current practices—that government departments are using vacancies as a way of meeting their equity targets? The effects are doubly perverse if one thinks that this means weakening state capacity to achieve a statistical average.

There are other causes of the high number of vacancies throughout the state. Between 1998 and 2002 the Public Services Commission found, for example, that 62% of managers changed jobs within the public service, though this later stabilised at the very high rate of 32% (cited in Naidoo, 2008). In other words, the number of vacant posts at any one time suggests a highly dynamic situation. There is much volatility throughout the public service. A DPSA report on 'Managing Staff Retention' explained such instability as follows:

> Affirmative action is one of the major reasons why employees move from one organisation to another. Like in most developing countries, the South African labour force is becoming younger and more dynamic. Because both the private and public sectors have to comply with laws relating to affirmative action and employment equity, and because there are still skills shortages amongst historically disadvantaged groups, there is a lot of competition for (and poaching of) those who have acquired these skills (DPSA, 2006, p.15).

Given, however, that only a small fraction of staff turnover is accounted for by people leaving the public service altogether, volatility is not explained by movement to the private sector (DPSA, 2006, p.9). Between April 2001 and March 2002, the DPSA reported that the public service lost 50,919 staff members, that is, 8.5% of its staff. Yet, turnover was much higher in specific categories.

- Computer programmers: 33%.
- Health professionals (excluding nurses): 24.7%.
- Nursing professionals: 10.7%
- Computer systems designers and analysts: 17.7%.
- Physical, mathematical and engineering science professionals: 16.4%.

- Physical and engineering science associate professionals: 12.4% (DPSA, 2006, p.15).

Let us note that turnover amongst professionals and those with particular technical (IT) skills is especially high. Amongst those in senior (salary levels 13–16) and middle management (salary levels 11 and 12) the attrition rates were much lower, only 10% and 11.2%, respectively (DPSA, 2006, p.9). Taken together, it means that the high levels of attrition amongst managers in the public service are not a consequence of poaching by the private sector. This seems to suggest that only in a minority of cases are those in managerial positions leaving for better salaries outside the public sector. More likely is that state departments are competing with each other for managerial personnel. Government departments are meeting their equity targets, in other words, by poaching staff from each other.

We know that such volatility has debilitating effects on state performance, especially when the problem is as severe as it is in South Africa. The DPSA reports that there is:

> The loss of efficiency during the notice period; the cost of recruiting and selecting a new staff member; and the induction stage (when new staff members are not that efficient). The replacement cost can be even higher when the person has been in the service for some time. It effects morale and productivity, increases training costs and results in a substantial loss of organisational memory (DPSA, 2006, p.16).

It is likely that such volatility is the single greatest cause of the failures in state performance.

Let us conclude with the following question: why are managers in the public service so ready to change jobs? It is doubtful that these moves are driven, primarily, by salary concerns. It is likely that people shifting from job to job because they are un- or under-qualified to perform them satisfactorily cause some volatility—though it is equally possible that such a situation results in arrogance. More often, though, vacancies and high staff turnover are symptomatic of a seldom acknowledged factor: positions are often badly defined and require unlikely combinations of skills. Let us recall that a

managerial post is not a professional position. It is not, for example, engineering or a teaching post—tasks for which there are specialised, education programmes resulting in specific qualifications. The substance of a managerial position changes depending on the circumstances. Consider, for example, a typical managerial post at a senior level. In his address to the 4th Gauteng Management Development Programme in 2006, Paul Mashatile, the MEC for Finance in the Gauteng Provincial Government, outlined the follow competencies:

- Set, execute and monitor key development priorities for the country regarding the creation of work, fighting poverty and reinforcing national pride given the relative autonomy of provincial and local government in key areas of social delivery.
- Consult other spheres of government on policy and actions we must implement or that affect them before a decision is taken that gives due regard to their views and circumstances.
- Manage service delivery in ways that are efficient, accessible to beneficiaries, responsive to the needs of our communities, and that result in integrated and sustainable service provision despite jurisdictional boundaries and with due regard to unequal capacities.
- Forge strong, flexible, goal-directed partnerships that can unlock the creativity and energy of collaboration and partnership without weakening performance and accountability.
- Empower communities to participate in processes of governance whilst inspiring and supporting communities to become self-reliant.
- Plan and act within the framework of domestic and global conditions and within available budgetary constraints.
- Account for performance in terms of existing legislation and resolve disputes without recourse to court action (Mashatile, 2006; emphasis added).

More important than the substance of each challenge is the peculiar combination of skills required: develop, execute, monitor policy, consult (with other spheres of government, communities), manage staff, network with other government agencies and the private sector, administer processes and account for expenditure and in terms of key performance indicators. Whereas the

bureaucratic model delineated clearly between analytical, managerial, administrative and financial skills, the imprecise job descriptions associated with the New Public Management often require them to be found in one and the same person. In 1999, for example, as part of efforts to move away from public administration the DPSA dispensed with its former, highly codified system of policies and procedures. These covered everything from appointments, to rules on filing documents to the format of memoranda. Instead, these several volumes of regulations and codes were replaced by a single booklet that devolved responsibility for working rules to senior departmental managers. In short, there is no longer a single standard for basic administrative systems. At the same time there was a reworking of job descriptions in accordance with the new developmental paradigm. What has happened, in effect, is that middle and senior managers are expected to operate in a complex legal, policy and administrative environment usually without any clearly defined roles and tasks.

Is this not the substance of Kenny Govender's lament? At the same event as Paul Mashatile mentioned above the Acting Deputy-Director General in the DPSA worried that officials are often having to perform a host of demanding tasks—any one of which, taken on its own, would be enough to constitute a post on its own (Govender, 2006). Using the example of local government officials to make a more general argument, he reported on the findings of research commissioned by the DPSA.

> The study found that implementing integrated programmes places many demands on municipalities and that they are expected to implement new programmes and projects without the requisite funding. As a result they have to borrow, and the capacity to manage this also becomes an issue. Organisational structures do not reflect the additional work and in some cases a single official is managing contracts worth millions of rands. Policies were often seen as complicated and sometimes conflicting. Reporting requirements for cross cutting projects are bureaucratic and time consuming (Govender, 2006).

When viewed from the combination of skills expected of managers, is there any wonder that there are 'skills shortages'? More surprising is that there are rare individuals with such protean competencies. Listen to Edgar Pieterse, the

former advisor to the premier of the Western Cape, discussing staff volatility there. It is worth quoting him at length.

> Firstly, it's very difficult to get people with the right combination of skills. The administrative requirements of the managerial positions (executive director, assistant director) in government are quite frightening. Just in terms of not getting things wrong on the procurement stuff. And the administrative rules are complex and daunting. *Most of the black appointees who are bright, have the qualifications come in quite young and that's their downfall.* And that's the main lever of lower administrators and middle management to make black appointees fail. They basically just don't tell you what the rules are and they let you fail. And *people who are young, black and bright, they don't want to admit that they don't know this stuff, they don't ask either*. That's a huge issue which is under-explored. It's a very mundane thing but quite *fundamental to why a lot of people leave quickly or mess up quite badly* (Interview with Edgar Pieterse, July 2007).

Conclusion

There are two dominant projects related to the 'transformation' of the state in South Africa. The first concerns the desire to achieve representivity within the public service. The second concerns changing the way the public service functions—moving away from public administration to public management. Although the relationship between race and redress is frequently debated in public and academic forums, the effects of the New Public Management are barely raised. Yet I have argued in this paper that the weakening of the state in the current situation is an effect of the unwitting consequences of their simultaneous pursuit. The move away from public administration to the new managerialism has created the following untenable situation: leadership positions in government departments are frequently ill defined and/or require a combination of skills that are difficult to find in any single individual. This makes it difficult to find suitably qualified candidates. In turn, departments sometimes hire un- or under-qualified persons. We have to wonder, in this regard, if the current system of public management is not setting up young, black recruits for failure. The advantage of a public service modelled on a machine, is that each post is carefully crafted with a view to performing discrete

tasks. It means appointing people, and measuring their appropriateness, on the basis of specific, distinct competencies. Vague job descriptions, which expect unlikely combinations of skills, usually mean that even excellent candidates are deficient in some or other area. This is likely the chief cause of the high rate of staff turnover in government. More frequently, departments make no appointments at all. Hence, the high vacancy rates in middle and senior management in government departments. This situation is compounded by the incentives created by the current equity legislation to leave vacant posts empty.

What this analysis suggests is that affirmative action, in itself, is not the major obstacle to state performance. What is required is rethinking the form of the state. While there are undeniable advantages of a senior cadre of public service managers, experience from France to India to Mauritius shows the importance of strictly meritocratic recruitment for such public servants (Sandbrook, Edelman, Heller and Teichman, 2007). No such school currently exists in South Africa. In the meanwhile, there is much that can be done in returning to the state some of its machine-like qualities by better refining job descriptions and the skills required for them, and by distinguishing between administrative, managerial and analytical competencies.

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