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# Enhancing an ethical culture through purpose -directed leadership for improved public service delivery: A case for South Africa

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The fundamental purpose of government departments is to provide services to satisfy public needs. Public leaders have to take on organisational roles to decide how to best achieve the organisation's purpose of meeting human needs and enhancing human life. An ethical culture underpinning purpose-driven leadership is viewed as an effective approach that will promote the broader interests of society in respect of public service delivery. This article focuses on the possible contribution of a purpose-directed leadership approach within the South African public service toward enhancing ethical behaviour which can ultimately translate into improved public service delivery. Attention is devoted to the capacity of such an approach in creating a milieu of commitment toward service excellence, this article argues that unethical behaviour in the public service has impacted on the quality of service delivery in many government departments in South Africa. A review of reports by the Public Service Commission and the media suggest that quality public service delivery has been affected by the lack of an ethical culture within purpose directed leadership. Through a detailed review of literature and documents relating to poor public service delivery in South Africa, it has become imperative to explore the effect of ethical and purpose-directed leadership on public service delivery. This article further argues that through ethical and purpose driven leadership, the mission statement of the public service is not only communicated to all concerned, but it is also clarified and understood and becomes the driving force in delivering what is to be achieved, without compromising the quality of public services. Performance in support of the purpose can be the building blocks upon which an ethical culture is developed throughout all government departments. Public leaders must therefore use the organisational purpose as a frame of reference for the execution of all functions within the organisation so that public satisfaction can be best achieved, without compromising ethical behaviour. The public service needs to accord greater importance and focus to leadership based on purpose-driven activities to address some of the ethical issues affecting quality service delivery. Some of the ethical issues include conflict of interest, mismatch post appointments and lack of commitment to quality service delivery. By adhering to the purpose, the principles of public service delivery beyond personal aspirations and ambitions are prioritised. The study is contextualized through a general overview of the role of leadership, within an ethical and purpose-directed framework, in promoting quality services in the public sector.

**Key words:** Ethics, leadership, public service

## INTRODUCTION

The public service, in a democratic state, is expected to be responsive to the needs of the people. The realisation of such an expectation is often dependant on leadership's commitment to maintaining acceptable standards of service delivery. Since the public service is the primary delivery arm of a democratic state, it should provide effective and efficient public services. Such a commit-

ment can be traced to recognising the basic purpose of government departments, which should be the driving force underlying the behaviour of all public leaders. Leaders adopting such an approach can influence others to direct their actions toward the attainment of a clearly understood and well communicated purpose. A shared vision therefore, results in ethical behaviour guided by

purpose- directed leadership. The absence of delivery oriented leadership affects public service credibility, as evident in many government departments in South Africa. In such cases, the absence of delivery oriented leadership is often underpinned by a lack of ethical behaviour. Unethical behaviour has a negative impact on effective and efficient service delivery.

The article discusses the role of leadership in public service delivery, highlights the impact of egoism and altruism on leadership and considers the rationale for purpose- driven leadership in perpetuating an ethical culture for improved service delivery. The article focuses on the possible contribution of a purpose- directed leadership approach within the South African public sector toward enhancing an ethical culture which ultimately can translate into improved public service delivery. Attention is devoted to the capacity of such an approach in creating a milieu of commitment toward service excellence.

### **Unethical behaviour and the South African public service**

Public leaders are expected to serve public needs and not to promote personal interests. Despite this being widely accepted, the South African public service is characterized by allegations on unethical behaviour. Unethical behaviour in the South African public service includes the following (Mafunisa, 2008:5):

- Lack of responsiveness to the needs of clients.
- Tardiness in the discharge of duties.
- Manifestations of inefficiency and ineffectiveness.
- Corruption.

Mafunisa (2008:9) argues that unethical behaviour often starts at the top of public service leadership, where public service values are not personified and promoted. He attributes this largely to the lack of accountability for promoting quality public services. It can be suggested that by placing greater accountability for adhering to rules and procedures instead of similar focus on quality public services, effectiveness and efficiency in the South African public service has been affected.

### **Altruism and leadership**

Leaders in the public service are obliged to pursue the goals of their institutions through efficient and effective behaviour. Public leaders must prioritise the needs and expectations of the public, without contradicting the principles of ethical behaviour.

It is the duty of every public leader to protect and promote public interest. In so doing, they must ensure that there are no impediments, like unethical behaviour, to achieving a culture of quality service delivery. It becomes

imperative for such leaders to set aside personal interests in favour of a leadership approach that prioritises the welfare of the wider society. In the realm of ethics, the utilitarian approach of doing the greatest good for the greatest number, reigns. In this regard, Melrose (1995) mentions the leader as a servant who gives up personal power to benefit everyone. The leader as a servant can be considered an altruist, since his mission is to enrich lives and to promote opportunities for institutional success.

Altruistic leaders expect laws to satisfy public needs. They accept responsibility and accountability in servicing the broader interests of the public. Satisfying public needs are guided by Ubuntu, integrity and work ethics within the South African public service. It can be argued that leaders who espouse such principles can create an organisational culture committed to achieving its purpose. Such leaders can be associated with a "passion of vision" characterized by a principle based approach which clarifies purpose, gives direction and empowers them to perform beyond their resources (Covey, 1999:105). This is exemplified by leadership within the South African Revenue Service.

Altruistic leadership can have a transformational influence on the entire organisation by creating a sense of common direction where self centred interests are not pursued to the detriment of public interests. By giving priority to public interest, the altruistic leader creates conditions for effectiveness and competence for public service delivery. Shared values can make employees feel good about working, and this tends to lead to a feeling of commitment that makes individuals want to achieve (Shaw, 1997:31).

The communication of a clear vision and clarification of purpose to address public sector needs contributes to aligning behaviour with goals. It should be stressed that communication should include words and deeds. Public leaders must be living embodiments of the service delivery culture they desire. The practices they want infused in their organisation must be displayed in their consistent behaviour. Such behaviour motivates subordinates toward purposeful behaviour (Kotter and Heskett, 1992:98). The Public Service Code of Conduct requires public servants to put public interest first and promote the well-being of society. By promoting these basic values of public administration, an environment conducive to ethical behaviour can be fostered. Both leaders and their subordinates can achieve a greater sense of organisational achievement through their commitment to the organisation's purpose (Covey,1996:69).

### **Egoism and leadership**

Leaders who are loyal to themselves and merely interested in personal gains, adopt an egoistic position (Malan and Smit, 2001:61).Such positioning perpetuates an organisational culture of poor governance and perfor-

mance. Often a culture of unethical behaviour reigns, to the detriment of a competent public service.

By focusing on their personal interests, poor prioritisation develops, often resulting in a drop in the standards of service delivery. Such leaders frequently justify incompetence and low standards in an endeavour to mask unethical behaviour. The Department of Home Affairs is manifest with widespread corruption. The subordination of public interest has negated the requirement for accountability and responsibility in this department. The influence of personal advantage over the general desire to do what is right or what is in the best interest of the public has resulted in people's rights being violated, leading to a loss of credibility for this department.

Egoistic leadership is founded on aspiration and ambition. Such leaders are not agents for worthy purposes. There are many departments in the public service that have failed to be associated with appropriate principles or purposes. Instead, they have taken personal ownership to advance wealth, position and power. Aspiring leaders do not focus on public needs first, but rather are strongly concerned with their own agendas. Failure to dedicate themselves to the selfless service of the public has often led to unacceptable standards of service delivery.

If the inner positioning of public leaders is one of egoism, then the public service merely becomes an arena for them to realise and satisfy their greed for self gratification. The Travelgate scandal is an example of public officials abusing public funds for personal travel. Personal needs dominated their behaviour at the expense of proper service to the public.

In South Africa, redress and reconstruction of a racially imbalanced polity and economy are the major imperatives driving democracy. In many departments, like the Department of Public Enterprises, empowerment strategies through the use of the state to redirect accumulation processes have been compromised by conflicting interests of personal enrichment and patronage. Conflict of interest is fairly rampant in the public sector (Public Service Commission, 2008:21). There are numerous cases of public servants who are councillors or who have companies that do business within the government. Dual employment creates scope for pursuing self interest in the absence of clear regulatory policy governing conflict of interest.

Many of the concerns regarding service delivery can be attributed to the performance of public officials (Public Service Commission, 2007:7). Sustained efforts to improve standards while expanding service has failed in many of the government departments because of persons-to-post mismatch, lack of skills and a lack of performance standards. These contributory factors can be linked to egoistic leaders who have assumed positions without giving consideration to performance based on accountability and responsibility.

### **Purpose of public institutions**

The existence of any institution is directly linked to its purpose (Du Toit and Van der Walt, 1999: 299). Public institutions, with different resources, deliver specific and general services which members of the public cannot provide in an individual capacity. In providing such services, public institutions aim to improve the general welfare of society. The delivery of services is therefore, the overall responsibility of government departments.

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997) introduced the Batho Pele Principles to transform public service delivery. Any endeavour to meet the basic needs of the public must be driven by the 'people first' approach. In providing public services, public institutions are obligated in the following ways according to the Batho Pele principles (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997:7):

- Provision of equal services to all citizen.
- Consulting with citizens about the services they are entitled to receive.
- Information sharing on the quality of services to be provided.
- Considerate and courteous treatment of the public.
- Transparency on how government departments are managed.
- Accountability for quality service provision.
- Responsibility for providing efficient, effective and economic services.

The Public Service Report (2007:23) stated that service delivery was affected by a lack of commitment to go beyond the call of duty as there was a general indifference to the customer-centric principles embodied in Batho Pele. Ubuntu, meaning "I am because we are", is central to public leadership as it focuses on collective commitment, caring and respect. The philosophy of Ubuntu is closely tied to purpose driven public institutions striving to achieve their mission and full potential. It places much importance on concern for people as well as striving for common goals which is essentially the underlying purpose of public institutions.

Employees of public institutions are obliged to treat people with respect, dignity and care. Further, the public has a legitimate right according to the tenets of democracy to receive quality services. Therefore, while government departments are not only responsible for the purpose of their existence, they are also accountable to the public in executing their responsibilities.

### **Leadership and service delivery**

Public service delivery has to be characterised by efficiency, effectiveness and economy which underpins ethical principles. It is fair to say that government depart-

ments are established to satisfy public needs. Some of the needs include social security, education, health and rural development. It is the foundation upon which all activities of public institutions are based. Any activity associated with the delivery of public services starts with the development of purpose and strategies, underpinned by ethics in public administration and management. If ethics is not part of the overall strategy and purpose of the institution, then it will not influence purpose-driven leadership. Given that the public is dependant on public institutions for services like protection, health and education, the state has an inescapable duty to provide sound public administration within the democratic structures of public institutions.

Section 195 (1) of the Constitution, 1996 states that public administration must:

- respond to peoples needs,
- promote effective economic and efficient use of resources, and
- maintain a high standard of professional ethics.

Public accountability and responsibility are integral characteristics of public administration. The realisation of a Better Life for All as mentioned in the Peoples' Contract largely depends on a public service that is responsive to the needs of the people (Public Service Commission Report, 2007:7). Leaders have an indispensable role to play in exacting these principles. By doing so, ethical behaviour in the public sector is not undermined and quality of service delivery is not compromised. In South Africa, the gradual degeneration of many public sector institutions can also be traced to the decrease in commitment or incompetence of leaders to execute their public responsibilities.

The absence of public minded leaders whose energies are not harnessed to organisational purposes affects quality public service delivery (Jack, 1998 in Hunt and O' Toole, 1998:71). Leadership has to create an organisational culture that directs a public service institution to achieve its purpose. This requires the leader to have a holistic awareness of the organisation's priorities so that right decisions can be made to avoid inefficiency and maladministration. Leadership must proactively develop a culture that guides decisions and actions for quality service from public service institutions. Trevino and Nelson (2004:226) maintain that organisational systems must be aligned so that the entire organisation is committed to a culture of efficiency and effectiveness. This article maintains that leadership must send a consistent message through its actions so that a leadership culture positively impacts on the delivery of services.

Citizen surveys conducted by the Public Service Commission to generate information on public satisfaction with services provided by government departments

revealed that on average, satisfaction with public service delivery was 67%, with the lowest being Correctional Services with 58%, followed by Home Affairs with 61% and Housing with 62% (Public Service Commission, 2008:57). Such compelling findings suggest that service delivery is not meeting public expectations. It can be suggested that the absence of a strong leadership and an adherence to strict standards has eroded the credibility of these institutions. Despite many years of democracy and promises of improved public services, evidence still exists of inadequate or poor quality public services. Leaders need skills in decision making, communication, problem solving and team work to successfully meet organisational goals. These skills create circumstances for personal growth, development and the scope needed to improve service delivery (Malan et al., 2001:37). By "walking the talk", leaders deliberately spell out what they stand for and enforce standards for improved public service delivery (Trevino et al., 2004:154). This is supported by Roth (2005:50) who claims that standards help to differentiate between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, as well as between behaviour that is ethical and behavior that is unethical. In the public sector, the satisfaction of public needs can be used as the primary standard against which to measure quality service delivery.

Poor performance in the public sector is frequently attributed to poor prioritisation. Poor prioritisation may be a matter of not having a strong purpose aligned to the basic principles of public administration. If leaders are unwilling to drive public institutions to deliver public services of acceptable standards, then the ability to transform to a more effective and efficient public service culture is inhibited.

### Challenges facing ethical practices

Fox and Meyer (1995:45) define ethics as rules and principles that determine right and wrong conduct. Leadership in public administration has to maintain an ethics based environment which encompasses such rules and principles.

In South Africa, the ethical framework includes the following laws and regulations:

- Public Service Act 1994 (Act 103 of 1994)
- Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004 (Act 12 of 2004)
- Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000)
- Protected Disclosures Act, 2000 (Act 26 of 2000)
- Public Financial Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003)
- Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000 (Act 3 of 2000)

Other initiatives by government include:

- The National Anti-Corruption Forum
- Directorate of Special Operations: Public Prosecutions
- Moral Regeneration Movement
- Anti Corruption Capacity Requirements
- Public Service Code of Conduct
- National Anti Corruption Hotline

The Public Service Commission, Independent Complaints Directorate, Auditor General, Public Protector and National Prosecuting Authority are associated with addressing manifestations of unethical behaviour.

While all departments are obliged to establish an ethics infrastructure as per government requirements, ethical practice is still a major challenge facing the South African government. The Public Service Commission Survey Report (2001:109) revealed the following:

- Ineffective and very basic ethics infrastructures.
- Inadequate ethics responsibilities for ethics programmes.
- Ineffective ethics training.
- neglect of ethics criteria in performance management.
- Inadequate integration of ethics management practices with all processes.
- Financial risks supersede reputational risks when determining ethical priorities.
- Reluctance to enforce ethic codes.

More specifically, the State of the Public Service Report highlighted the following findings associated with leadership (Public Service Commission, 2008:20):

- The level of compliance with the Financial Disclosure Framework was below 100%, of this figure five national departments had a compliance rate of 0%. This suggests a lack of will to encourage a culture of ethical leadership
- the absence of clear regulations on the conflict of interests system has impacted on the neutrality of public servants who hold dual employment and have business interests with government. This affects the sustainability of high standards of public ethics.
- The lack of a national integrity system with which leaders from different sectors can identify.

The above findings reveal an inadequate commitment to ethical practice which impacts on the effectiveness of regulations and frameworks guiding ethical practice. Although government introduced the Public Service Integrated Anticorruption Strategy, the prevalence of unethical behaviour still persists. The inference is that unless a high level priority status is accorded to ethics within the institution's strategic thrust, very little will change (Van Rooyen, 2008:400). Merely paying lip service to the ethical framework guiding the public sector is unacceptable.

There has to be greater emphasis on communicating how a higher level of ethical commitment can be achieved.

It is argued that this can be achieved by leadership directing all behaviour, actions and strategies toward purpose driven public service delivery.

### **Ethics and purpose directed leadership**

The effective and efficient delivery of public services can be identified as the underlying purpose of any public institution. Leadership through action must contribute to this goal or purpose so that all employees in the organisation can competently and ethically pursue service delivery excellence. Bennis (1997:154) views this as the essential difference between leadership and management. Leadership focuses on doing the right things while management refers to merely doing things right. There is a general perception that institutions are often under-led and over-managed.

Leadership needs to direct the behaviour of others toward the accomplishment of the organisation's purpose. Embodying and empowering every individual in the organisation to implement and execute the purpose in everything they do, makes the purpose a "living purpose" (Bennis, 1997: 155). If leadership cannot infuse energy into the organisation to translate purpose into reality, then organisational performance may be jeopardized. This article argues that an empowering purpose has a significant impact on the ability to see beyond the present reality, the invention of what does not yet exist, and the creation of quality of life results (Covey, 1999:104). An empowering purpose can fuel and nurture a requisite purpose in all employees within public sector institutions.

There is a growing trend toward leadership based on ethics of excellence associated with truthfulness, accountability and objectivity (Keen, 2001:13). It is leadership based on character and competence rather than position. Such an adherence is a critical building block of organisational productivity. Instead of obsessively being directed by personal ambition and wealth, leaders should be driven by providing quality service to the public. Such an approach enables government to respond to citizens needs and utilize scarce resources in priority areas like health and education in the most efficient and effective manner. This is important as reports suggest that public confidence in government institutions and leaders has dropped (Public Service Commission, 2008:14). While government has shown commitment in promoting an ethical public service, the public feels that standards in ethical practice are dropping. The need therefore exists for leadership to be driven by a purpose so that it can become a powerful force that is ingrained and integrated into every aspect of public service and so that it becomes the compelling impetus behind every decision (Covey, 1999:105).

Blanchard and Peale (1998 in Malan et al., 2007:84) argue that a clear purpose is the foundation upon which sound ethical behaviour is built. Since public services and

goods are provided to satisfy clearly identified needs, purpose directed leadership embraces the greater needs of society. By defining a shared purpose which promotes the interest of all concerned, leadership focuses attention away from the self to public interest. A shared purpose must serve as a reliable guide for decisions. One can claim that decisions are altruistic when the decision is in alignment with the mission. Some government departments are guilty of poor service delivery because of the inconsistency between organizational purpose and leadership. When leadership decisions are not aligned to the purpose, then such decisions lack integrity since it does not fit with the department's purpose. There has to be consistency between what leaders strive for and what they do (Brown, 2005:114).

Malan et al. (2001:83) identified the following advantages of a purpose directed approach:

- Purpose is clear and needs directed
- Subjective distortion of the purpose is minimized
- the leader and his subordinates are disciplined to perform ethically
- The purpose is aligned with the needs and expectations of everyone affected
- The purpose encourages excellent performance by all concerned

Such an approach in the public sector reunites with the basic principles of public service delivery. However, the purpose must be continually reinforced to guide, inspire and promote ethical conduct. When public leaders align themselves with the purpose of the organisation, subordinates are more likely to show commitment toward improved performance. In the South African public sector which is plagued by unethical leadership, the purpose directed approach can influence organisations to sustain credibility, honesty and integrity. Without demonstrating commitment to the purpose of the organisation, public leaders cannot expect subordinates to identify with the organisation and to behave congruently with organisational goals. The purpose directed leader, by putting on the harness of service and thinking of others, creates a climate that is high performance in nature (Covey, 1996:34). Public servants need to be optimistic and enthusiastic. Creating a climate for these traits to develop is to a large extent dependant on a leader who has a sense of responsibility, service and the energy field to inspire and motivate beyond personal interest.

### **Pre-conditions for purpose directed leadership**

Pursuing the purpose of meeting basic human needs and respecting human rights entails the consideration of key elements necessary for effective purpose directed leadership. These elements must not only be communi-

cated, but must also serve as guiding principles. The key elements include the following (Covey, 1996:165 - 172):

- A shared vision that is clearly understood at all levels of the organisation. A vision can be considered a shared vision if it has meaning for employees. All public institutions have mission statements, but many employees are not committed to it because it is not part of the organisational culture and as such, has no significance for them. Further, constant changes in leadership often result in new strategy and direction which affects commitment, standards and achievement of goals (Public Service Commission, 2007:21).
- A well developed strategy which effectively expresses the mission statement and meets the needs of all stakeholders. Public departments cannot accomplish their strategic plans if leaders do not know where they want to be after a period of time or what kind of organisation they want to create. A strategic plan which does not reflect environmental realities like inadequate resources or the vision of the institution cannot pro-actively respond to public needs. Further, the lack of will by public leaders to implement strategies has contributed to poor service delivery. A case in point is the numerous cases of corruption in the tendering process by various government departments.
- Structures and systems must reinforce the vision of the organisation. Many departments have rigid structures and systems with little flexibility to adapt to environmental realities. This distorts the alignment between structures and a shared vision.
- Management style must be congruent and consistent with the mission statement. Public leaders under the new dispensation are obliged to think in terms of principle-centered leadership because environmental realities like corruption and fraud necessitate adapting management style to organisational style.
- Trust based on competence opens communication which is vital for organisational excellence. Incompetent public leaders will not be trusted by their subordinates and this will invariably contribute to a culture of poor teamwork in driving the mission of the institution.
- Integrity is vital to win the confidence of employees in the organisation and the external environment. Leaders who lack integrity, fail to live by the mission statement and therefore find it difficult to influence their employees to execute their duties effectively and efficiently in delivering public services.

The aforementioned pre-conditions have to be complemented by leaders who are role models of consistent ethical behaviour. This requires leaders to translate guidelines and processes into action and gives contextual significance through leading by example. Mafunisa (2008:85) argues that if unethical practices exist at the top of the hierarchy, it is likely to permeate the entire public service. Therefore, modelling through purpose driven leadership can have a powerful influence on

public servants personifying the values of the public service (Mafunisa, 2008:85). This view is further supported by Malan et al. (2007:105) who view the behaviour of leadership as the basis upon which trust, credibility and communication is designed. It can be suggested that leaders who do not benchmark their actions against purpose, values and standards, cannot expect to impart purpose and higher expectations to others (Melrose, 1995:129).

While policy and regulatory frameworks set the guidelines for ethical behaviour, it is imperative that leaders structure and implement strategies to ensure that decisions relating to service delivery are made within an ethical milieu of policy and regulatory frameworks. Covey (1999:140) views such a conscious decision as a principle based focus which directs time and energy toward a purpose which can produce acceptable results. It can be suggested that the impetus is created to do the right thing for the right reasons.

### **Personal ethics and public service ethics**

Apart from the Constitution of South Africa and other legislation guiding public administration and management, the personal value system of the public leader has an influence on performance in public life. The efficient and fair management of any government department is to a large extent attributable to the personal ethics of leaders. Clapper (1999 in Wessels and Pauw, 1999:138) states that public officials apply ethical principles when executing their functions. What they do and how they do it, is influenced by personal ethics. It is argued that no public leader enters the public administration arena without pre-determined ethical influences from different sectors. It can be stated that the possession of a personal sense of ethical behaviour is an imperative for the implementation of service delivery excellence.

South Africa is faced with problems relating to personal ethics. There is a general perception that democracy has been accompanied by a decreasing concern for the collective good in exchange for pre-occupation with personal advancement and enrichment. Structures like the Moral Regeneration Movement and the Anti-Corruption Co-ordinating Committee within the Department of Public Service and Administration have been established to address ethical issues. However, the lack of a co-ordinated approach for meaningful and sustainable implementation appears to be a major challenge affecting the effectiveness of such structures.

Personal ethics is vital since its application is necessary when policy, procedures and codes of conduct are not specific at all times under different circumstances (Clapper and Wessels, 1999:139). Furthermore, a clear sense of personal ethics can help to establish congruency with public service ethics. It is the personal ethics that increases the quality of service delivery in the

broader interest of the public. Mafunisa (2008:86) argues that the public service needs to align its code of conduct with the behaviour exemplified by those in authority. He views it as being similar to translating a mission statement into a vision and then into measurable goals. Such an alignment reduces uncertainty as to what is considered ethical and what is considered unethical.

Government departments, like the Department of Social Development, have been affected by over-spending and poor management. The lack of experience or incompetence of political appointees reflects a weak domain of personal ethics and does not serve as a barrier against unethical behaviour. It can be viewed as an abuse of power.

The public administration environment is dynamic and complex. Rules and guidelines do not change all the time, but leadership has to adapt with informed discretion to contextual change and challenges. It is therefore important for leaders to be purpose-driven in an ever changing environment. By ensuring the well-being of society as a rationale for their behaviour, responsiveness to public needs is prioritised.

Personal ethics can only be of value if it is moulded with the purpose of the public service. It is therefore incumbent on public leaders to steer their personal value systems toward an ethical public service direction so that the rendering of services is of the greatest benefit to the public. Section 195 (1) of the Constitution, 1996 requires public leaders to promote and maintain high standards of professional ethics. Legally and ethically, public leaders are invariably bound by the Constitution to advance the identified rights of the public. Understanding and implementing the guiding principles for public administration as reflected in the Constitution, is an imperative for any public leader concerned with the interests and protection of the public. In this regard, Fraser Moleketi, former Minister of Public Service and Administration (2008:2) stated that the public service needs to get better at doing whatever it does by renewing its focus on effectiveness across the entire public sector. This necessitates leadership demonstrating a commitment to a value system based on the fundamentals of integrity and honesty in the interest of better service delivery. It can be argued that such a commitment should be integrated with the purpose of the institution so that everyone literally lives by it through their actions (Covey, 1997:44). It is therefore essential for the personal ethics of public leaders to be compatible with the principles necessary for ethical public administration. In the absence of this, accountability and responsibility cannot be apportioned in performing duties on behalf of the public (Clapper, 1991 in Wessels et al., 1991:150).

### **Conclusion**

An effective and efficient public service has to be driven

by leadership which prioritises the needs of the public. An utilitarian approach of showing concern for the broader welfare of the public should not be compromised for the imperatives of personal enrichment and self interest. Such egoistic imperatives lead to ethical degeneration. Public leaders must buy into the purpose of government departments, align their personal values with institutional values and guide decision making with integrity. When leaders show commitment and consistency in their behaviour, subordinates are influenced to do likewise. All of this is embodied in an ethics based culture founded upon purpose-driven leadership.

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