

Traditional Leadership and a Simpler Way to Accountability in Local Government

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Abstract: Service delivery, more especially the delivery of public value, has for years on end traditionally been carried out by a multiplicity of partnerships as in elected leaders, public officials, leaders from organs of civil society and traditional leaders or authority. Partnerships in the delivery of services are in the main predicated on the impulses of enhancing the quality of the people's lives. Literature on public and development management studies alludes to the understanding that the people's quality of life can be enhanced through making them happy, and that one of the domains of a people's happiness is good governance that is defined by accountability. This paper focuses on the role of traditional leaders or authority in ensuring accountability and good governance in the delivery of services. Some traditional leaders or authority tend to lean towards closed systems of leadership as in practices of authoritarianism, traditionalism, centralism and other attendant closed systems approaches and styles of leadership. Such practices and behaviours tend to lead to the escalation of deficits and deficiencies on the accountability and good governance infrastructure. With the onset of the open systems and the attendant transformation of the public service landscape, a leadership style recalibration imperative is being visited on traditional authority. The open systems paradigm brings with it the knowledge society that is affirming its being and demanding accountability from those charged with the responsibility of providing leadership in the delivery of public value. This paper seeks to postulate a simpler way leadership paradigm for ensuring that traditional authority is in synchronicity with the realities of the new and evolving knowledge society. The fundamentals of traditional leadership, more especially in Africa, are found to be in resonance with the philosophies and principles of the open systems paradigm as also in the simpler way approach to leadership. The simpler way approach to leadership demands that there be more accountability from people charged with the responsibility of leadership. It demands that people or citizens be respected as human beings and meaning giving subjectivities.

Keywords: Accountability, Leadership paradigm, Traditional leadership, Public value, Service delivery

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of governments, the business of government has been prosecuted from the central or national government level, through provinces or regions right down to the local government level. It is at the different levels and forms of local government that we have different kinds or forms of partnerships in the delivery of services. Traditional leadership happens to be one of the partners that local government authority happens to partner with in the rural areas. In some countries the institution of traditional authority is still very strong and is working well with the elected government officials, agencies and institutions. We come across the traditional leadership institutions and or authority even in the developed world as in the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The developing world too has its own fair share of traditional leadership and or authority that has

outlived the modernity project. Traditional authority in South Africa existed and defined the pre-contact South Africa's body politic. With the onset of the colonial project came the advent of dual governance universes. This is with reference to the primordial public realm that is most pronounced in the rural areas of the country and the civic realm in the urban areas respectively (Gumede, 2016:1).

In the earlier years, the majority of South Africa's populace lived in the primordial public realm which is defined by traditional ways of life and led by traditional leadership. As the country's economy morphed from the subsistence to the commercial form, with the emergence of commercial farming, mining activities and industrialisation, people found themselves living in the civic realm dispensations in the then emerging urban centres. This development heralded the onset of modern forms of governance systems, from the national level

through the provincial right down to the local government as in municipalities or municipal systems. This development did not lead to the demise of the governance infrastructure in the primordial public realm. Traditional systems and institutions remain part of South Africa's socio-economic, political and development narrative.

The legacy of the migrant labour phenomenon is such that some people find themselves living in the two realms. Working and living in the urban areas largely for work purposes and at the same time keeping contact with the primordial universe where family, relatives and friends are and are subjects of traditional systems and leadership. This suggests that some people continue to live through a duality of governance systems wherein they find themselves as subjects of the civic realm and governance system and also of the primordial realm in which they are subjects of traditional leadership, systems and institutions. At local government level, more especially in the rural areas of South Africa, traditional leaders continue to play a role of ensuring that there is cohesion and also an enabling environment for the creation and delivery of public value to the public. In the process of the delivery of products and services to society, traditional leaders are expected to ensure that there is good governance and accountability in the delivery of public goods. As it were, traditional leaders are expected to complement the local government institutions in the delivery of services through the leadership that they provide. Some traditional leaders apply closed systems approaches of leadership in a world that is rapidly embracing the open systems ways of doing things (Basheka, 2015:471).

2. Development and Service Delivery

The concept of development means different things to different people. The major points of confluence for the multiple perspectives is in the understanding that it is all about improving the quality of a people's lives through quality services and provisioning of quality infrastructure. The government, with the involvement of traditional leadership in the rural areas, mobilises the natural capital such as the land, water, minerals and other resources to bring about improvements in the quality of the people's lives. It is in resource-endowed communities where we come across problems of accountability more especially by traditional leadership as evidenced in the disappearance of millions of rand in royalties due

to the Bapo ba Mogale community in the North-West. Members of the Bapo community are today engaged in running battles with their traditional leader, demanding accountability for the missing funds (Mphela, 2016:1). This has been the experience of numerous resource-rich communities in the primordial realm in the Republic of South Africa and also in the some of the neighbouring countries. Wherever millions of rands are involved, there is bound to be accountability deficiencies with some traditional leaders closing ranks.

Development also entails the delivery of public goods such as health, education, sports and recreation in the domain of mobilising human capabilities. The delivery of public goods requires leadership, management and good governance that are defined by accountability. The concept of leadership in broad terms refers to a commitment to making the world a better place for others. Embedded in this commitment, as in the theory of the anatomy of leadership are the attributes of the governance concept of accountability. Various players on the plains of service delivery have presented this attribute as they provided principled leadership in the course of service delivery (Armstrong, 2016:1). History is festooned with men and women who have given and dedicated their lives to contributing to the project of development and by so doing, earning themselves places in government to continue with the project of improving the quality of the lives of the people they lead. For others, providing leadership remains a chronic deficiency that needs to be dealt with for the professionalisation of the public service public institutions. Some traditional leaders are presenting a commitment to accountability in the handling of service delivery, whereas some of the traditional leaders on the other hand are of the view that by virtue of the offices they hold in society; they cannot be expected to be accountable to their subjects or the general public.

3. Partnerships in Development and Service Delivery

The business of delivering public value and goods has on most occasions been associated with government. But then again, it emerges that quality products and services in the course of the delivery of public goods is attributable to the partnerships that the government enters into with the other players. Some of the most pronounced partners are the business sector and the various organs of civil

society. The business community with its expertise and resources adds value to the development agenda and the quality of the services rendered to the public. The organs of civil society have also come to the party in ensuring that government agencies are accountable in their delivery of quality products and services to the public (Hayward, 2015:16).

Traditional leadership and or traditional authority comes across as another indispensable partner in the delivery of services more especially in the rural parts or areas of the country, where traditional authority and institutions continue to define the primordial socio-political realm. In areas where traditional authority works well with the elected leaders and public officials, the quality of services is found to be enhanced, whereas in areas where there is tensions and mistrust between traditional authority, elected leaders and government officials, the quality of services being delivered is prone to being compromised. The situation is often exacerbated by the traditional leaders who bring to bear closed systems ways of providing leadership.

4. Political Philosophy, Good Governance and Leadership in Local Government

Service delivery has in the main and in its history been carried out by public and government institutions and agencies. These institutions and agencies are found to be guided by political philosophies of the ruling parties, and these philosophies go as far back as the ancient realms of the polity right up to the contemporary era and forms. Ancient political philosophies present ancient systems like traditional leadership that have endured and outlived the modernity project. Traditional leadership and authority continues to be part of rural South Africa's body politic. Its influence in rural local government cannot be underestimated. In some instances, and situations traditional authority creates an enabling environment for the delivery of public goods and or public value. On the other hand, some traditional authority or leaders have made the conditions difficult for the delivery of services.

The South African government recognise traditional authority as an essential component for good governance in the delivery of services in the rural areas. The concept of good governance refers to an institution's responsiveness to the needs of the people and creation of an enabling environment

for the delivery of services through participation. It is further expected that, for good governance, there is a need for accountability in the delivery of services. This is inclusive of the traditional leaders as a component of the governance infrastructure in the rural areas.

The concept of accountability of traditional leadership is read in the context of its resonance with the theory of the anatomy of leadership which alludes to the imperative of character and competence (Bell, 2006:33). The dimension of character refers to the importance of humility, respect, passion, accountability, flexibility and several more complementary attributes suggestive of ethically desirable behaviours. The concepts of humility, accountability and flexibility are found to be in resonance with the basic principles of the open systems and the simpler way leadership paradigm.

Accountability can be consolidated with the competencies that issue out of the anatomy of leadership theory. It is expected of role players in the service delivery project to master competencies such as self-management as often articulated in the discourse on emotional intelligence. In broadening the frontiers of the concept of competence, emphasis is on organisational leadership which puts more premiums on the accountability imperative.

As alluded to earlier on in this article, some traditional leaders do present high levels of accountability in the delivery of services that is akin to, the simpler way, the open systems paradigm and good governance. One case in point is the Muxeye community outside Giyani in Limpopo in the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Development. Traditional authority in this community ensures that there is accountability in the handling of resources that are meant to bring about improvements in the quality of the people's lives. All stakeholders represented in the Stakeholders' Council periodically account to the community on the utilisation of resources. The other community is that of the Makuleke people just outside Malamulele. This community, through their Communal Property Association ensures that there is accountability through participatory engagements between their community and the traditional authority (Maake & Holtzhausen, 2015:250).

But then again, there are cases of communities that are periodically engaging in running battles with their traditional leadership or authority on

most cases on matters pertaining to accountability. It emerges that the attritions and demands for accountability are attributable to the closed systems styles of leadership on the part of some of the traditional leaders.

5. Closed Systems Approaches in Service Delivery in Local Government

In the course of the delivery of services in local government, there are cases of tendencies leaning towards closed systems approaches, more especially in the realm of traditional authority. The concept of the closed systems is traceable to the philosophies and principles that undergird this paradigm and go as far back as ancient times, through the medieval and into modernity. The ancient ontological and cosmological accounts are replete with mythological narratives on both the origins and the destinies of both the physical and the social realities. Traditional leadership and or authority draw its inspiration from the epistemologies and ethical doctrines issuing from the afore-mentioned narratives. These narratives are also used as justification for closed systems leadership practices. This is with reference to beliefs and practices such as continuity, centralism, inner-directedness and authoritarianism. This in more ways than one is a postulate for rigidity on the part of traditional leadership in the course of prosecuting the delivery of public value or public goods.

There are cases of traditional leaders who regard themselves as the ultimate receptacles of all virtue, values and authority in their communities. Even in the face of a rapidly democratising country like South Africa, some traditional leaders are of the view that their authority is by divine ordination and therefore cannot be challenged. This is a departure from the accountability imperative in the good governance narrative and discourse. Such leaders have proved to be wont to authoritarianism in their communities, more especially on matters pertaining to the handling of public affairs. They regard good governance notions such as transparency and participation as alien to the vernacular body politic. There also is an emerging narrative in traditional leadership circles that they be exempted from due processes in the justice system, as in the recent past case of the convicted King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo. Such an approach is bound to lead to resistance at some point given its authoritarian nature. It is a leadership paradigm that is defined by strategies and tactics

meant to keep power at all costs. Conventional literature on leadership alludes to the imperative of the creation of caring institutions, and yet the leaders championing this paradigm present extreme form of negative leadership (Makinana, 2016:10).

Instead of the requisite existential enlargement of the subjects, the closed systems traditional leadership approach is found to be an energy-sapping vacuum of the human spirit. This approach is defined by energy-wasting running battles between the communities, elected leaders, local government officials and traditional leaders. Leadership by its very nature is expected to be life-enhancing, inspiring and giving hope (Groenewald, 2015:1).

We have cases of traditional leaders who refuse to be accountable to the people that they are leading, more especially in resource-endowed communities. In some situations, the traditional leaders are exiled from their communities due to the attritions in the communities. The converse of this would be the traditional leader exiling those in the community who are demanding accountability and good governance from traditional authority. This is a kind of leadership that leads to much consternation in rural communities as it is challenged by various organs of civil society, demanding more accountability.

6. Open Systems Processes and Accountability in Local Government

Conversations in the human and social sciences are today presenting the emergence of an empowered society that is gradually altering the public service and service delivery landscapes respectively. The open systems processes are found to be in resonance with the philosophies that are suggestive of a changing world. The trailblazer philosophy of change in the contemporary period is that of phenomenology. As a departure from and a challenge to the positivistic sciences, phenomenology as another tool of epistemology, takes on the world in its totality as opposed to the reductionism of the exact sciences. Taking on humanity in its totality presents humanity in a constant state of flux and a rapidly changing world. It is from these ontological and cosmological takes that both the physical and the social realities are found to be changing. Traditional leadership, as it were, finds itself in some situations overtaken by events in a world that is changing and constantly redefined by numerous social, economic and political driving forces.

Closely related to this philosophy we have the philosophy of existentialism. The existential narrative presents a human movement, the movement of a people transcending their being reduced to the state of objectness to wrestling back their humanity. One of the pioneers of this movement, Jean-Paul Sartre postulates the cause of the search for freedom by humankind. This search is being articulated in a multiplicity of ways. For some people it is through activism while others do it through various art forms. Communities throughout the world and with the help of technology are mobilising towards a more meaningful existence that is devoid of control, authoritarianism and old ways of governance.

People are today able to add their signatures to the governance narrative and infrastructure through activism and also through the use of multiple social media platforms even in the most primordial of local government realms. Some traditional leaders find themselves overwhelmed by developments on a multiplicity of frontiers. Instead of confronting these developments as an affront and challenge on their authority, traditional leaders are actually challenged and presented with an opportunity to find a simpler way of providing leadership in a rapidly changing world. After all, the undiluted fundamentals, systems and procedures of traditional leadership and governance, by and large resonate with the principles of the open systems paradigm. As some traditional leaders have made peace with the reality of the rising tide of human consciousness as encapsulated in the open systems or next society narrative (Drucker, 2002:235), there are those traditional leaders who find themselves swimming against the proverbial waterfall. This comes across as a leadership approach that is out of kilter with the socio-political reality on course. People are today increasingly demanding accountability from traditional leaders and other related governance structures that engage in matters that affect their lives.

7. A Simpler Way and Good Governance in Traditional Leadership

Today the old ways and approaches of providing leadership as in the heroic theories of leadership are being consigned to the margins. The shared leadership narrative is being visited upon society, and the best way for the traditional leadership to survive this challenge, is to consider the simpler way leadership theory. Heroic theories of leadership like

great man theory, contingency theory and other related theories are receding into insignificance, as the vertical leadership models are giving way to horizontal ways. Leaders are no longer providing leadership to the people, as people are beginning to believe more in shared leadership. The simpler way is one of the approaches to shared leadership.

The simpler way theory is traceable to the work of Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers. The simpler way leadership narrative is a challenge to the veracity and reality value of the heroic theories of leadership, where some traditional leaders regarded themselves as the almighty heroic great men that are above reproach. The simpler way leadership paradigm is predicated on major themes such as play, organisation, self, emergence and coherence (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996:52). It is a paradigm that dovetails with the ontological and cosmological accounts that anchor the open systems paradigm as both an epistemological and metaphysical narrative. In keeping with the fundamental impulses of the simpler way and open systems paradigm, communities are today demanding leaders that connect easily with the people and no longer those comfortably ensconced in the ivory towers. Communities are demanding more accountability from people charged with the responsibility of husbanding resources for their development. People are today forming or belonging to new tribes that are formed around political party affiliations, civic movements, sports clubs, brands and even social media platforms (Dixon, 2015:16). Traditional leaders are faced with the challenge of having to plug in and go with the flow of the new sociology lest they be left behind by events. They have to be and stay ahead of the events and influence the direction that the events are taking.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper is of the view that the traditional leaders do play an important role in the processes and course of delivering services to the rural communities in the country. This article has made observations to the effect that some traditional leaders still subscribe to the idea of providing leadership in a closed systems way. Given the changing nature of the socio-political landscape in which they are providing leadership, it is hereby recommended that the traditional leaders, in consort with the spirituality of the open systems paradigm and the simpler way leadership model, adapt their

leadership styles and approaches to simpler ways of providing leadership to communities that are getting more empowered by the day. The open systems and simpler way reality is upon society and the traditional leaders are not exempted from this emerging reality. There generally is universal consensus on the need for accountability from all charged with the responsibility of handling public resources for the delivery of public value and goods to society.

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