Innovative Management in the Public Service: Towards Service Delivery Imperatives

ML Shipalana
Department of Health, South Africa

Abstract: It is broadly conceded that management function as an element of innovative management, is viewed as playing a vital role in the management of systems and processes while, leadership focuses on strategic direction for service delivery imperatives in public service institution, particularly in the public health institutions for the provision of quality health care services. For modern and highly technological results-driven public management, innovation remains a critical element of management functions and needs to be taken seriously in order to be responsive to household needs in the 21st century and beyond. Innovative management development in respect of the public sector would be seen as contributory factor to address the underlying challenges regarding service delivery, specifically developing countries in Africa. However, it is observed that public service institutions are usually branded by ineffective innovative management strategies and approaches that affect the provision of quality goods and services. The innovative management challenges are seen as impediments towards effective and efficient application of innovation initiatives, particularly on aspects such as policies, procedures and systems that aim at service delivery improvement. This paper sought to analyse innovative management challenges and highlights strategies as well as approaches to enhance delivery of service in public service institutions. Qualitative approach with data collection methods was used, which included semi-structured and focus group interviews as well as analysis of official documents. In the course of analysing data, the findings revealed that public service institutions are characterised with ineffective innovative management due to poor diffusion of innovations, rigid rules and regulations and a culture of resistance to change. This article further suggests collaborative innovation and techniques on management of innovations as mechanisms to address innovative management challenges for service delivery enhancement in the public service.

Keywords: Innovation, Innovative management, Public service, Public health institutions, Service delivery imperatives

1. Introduction

The inception of South African democracy in 1994, steered an era of transformation, which included changes in the public service. It became apparent that service delivery imperatives such as quality healthcare, clean water and housing should meet basic needs for all citizens. In this regard, public institutions are required to take into consideration that there is effective and efficient delivery of service to benefit all citizens. The integrated approach and accelerated delivery of basic goods and services became a necessity. Hence, there is a need for creative ways of transforming the provision of service delivery, which include effective innovative management in the public service. Although, government has shown a progress regarding delivery of services in the past twenty-six years (1994-2020), the on-going public protests on service delivery and undesirable findings by Auditor-General of South

Africa, indicate that much more needs to be done. Tsatsire, Taylor and Raga (2008) concede that the recent wide-spread protests against poor provision of public goods and services are seen as an indication that the government's efforts at promoting service delivery have almost collapsed. Morudu and Halsall (2017) support this notion that proliferation of protests on the delivery of services in South Africa, which are often reported in the media is mainly caused by a lack of delivery of quality services to meet citizen's basic needs. It is further argued that an ineffective innovative management on systems, processes and practices in the public service is mainly considered as the contributory factor to poor service delivery (Morudu & Halsall, 2017). Lekhi (2007) argues that innovative management challenges are mostly influenced by factors such as social conditions, technology, and political and legal mandates in the public service. Smith (2006) points out that most forms of innovation

are organised and directed by individuals who are trusted with managerial expertise in the areas of their operation. In this regard, the failure of innovation to yield an intended outcome may be as a result of ineffective innovative management in the public service (Smith, 2006). It is also observed that public service is usually characterised with social system, goals and values that are unclear and more complex to quantify (Lewis & Hartley, 2001; Denis, Hebert, Langley, Lozeau & Trottier, 2002; Marsh & Olsen, 1989).

Swan and Scarbrough (2005) posit that there are a limited number of studies that have considered potential challenges of innovative management and strategies to enhance service delivery in the public service. According to Mulgan and Albury (2003), innovative management in public service institutions often not encouraged and is considered an optional extra responsibility, which is an added burden. Lekhi (2007) concurs that taking into account societal problems and challenges regarding delivery of services to the citizens, it is necessary that more studies be conducted. Bernie, Hafsi and Deschamps (2011) support this notion by indicating that innovation has long been regarded as non-existent or aberrant in the public service. Following this background, it is necessary that studies on innovative management in the public service institutions be undertaken. In this regard, this article seeks to highlight innovative management challenges and strategies to enhance delivery of services in public service institutions, particularly for public health sector's significance in the 21st century and beyond regarding the provision of quality health care services.

2. Methods and Materials

The research paradigm for this article has undertaken a qualitative approach, which included exploratory research design. The data collection methods comprised of semi-structured and focus group interviews as well as document analysis. The semi-structured interviews included participants selected through purposive sampling from various categories of management, clinical managers and community liaison officers within the Limpopo Department of Health. In case of the focus group interviews, a session with from district health councils was held. This paper is also underpinned on Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation and Mulgan and Albury's Framework of Innovation Management.

3. Hindering Factors for Effective Innovative Management

It is broadly accepted that innovation's success is essential for the organisations to remain competent and facilitate the development of a product or service, particularly in the 21st century and beyond. For instance, Freeman and Soete (1997) postulate that ineffective innovative management has detrimental effect on service delivery imperatives. Hamel (2000) argues that embracing potential of new initiatives is considered as the foundation of organisation's competitive success. However, Francis (2005) points out that not all innovation initiatives provide a desirable outcome. Francis (2005) further indicates that undertaking to innovate remains an organisation's opportunity for a success, taking into account innovative management challenges that are experienced in the public service. Bernie, Hafsi and Deschamps (2011) and Van der Waldt (2007) have identified critical hindering factors for innovative management in the public service. These factors include a bureaucratic set up system and poor communication and coordination.

3.1 Bureaucratic Set-Up System

A bureaucratic set-up system has been introduced way back in the mid-18th century as a form of creating discipline and stability in the organisations. According to Max Webber's bureaucratic theory of management, bureaucracy was regarded as the major aspect for effective and efficient administration's operations (Mommsen, 1989). This system has maintained its popularity in most organisations including public sector. However, its relevancy in the 21st century continues to be questioned by various scholars (Borins, 2002; Lekhi, 2007). In this regard, bureaucratic set-up system is seen as major challenge to cope with high demand of services or products and the rapid global changes in the area of technology. For instance, the World Economic Forum report for 2016, classified inefficient government bureaucracy, among others, as one of the challenges that developing countries should take into consideration to survive in the 21st century and beyond. It is evident that large structures often serve as barriers to effective innovative management process in the public service (Wilson, 1989; Borins, 2002). Lekhi (2007) concurs by indicating that large structures within the public service tend to create a long reporting line and therefore effective innovative management is often

not encouraged. Thenint (2010) agrees with Lekhi (2007) by asserting that public service is largely characterised with unclear and large structures with numerous tasks. As a result of this complex open system, decision-making is seen to be slower due to long reporting lines. Bekkers (2005) assents that some of the major drawbacks of bureaucracy renders public service institutions unable to provide quality service delivery and often are characterised by rigid rules and inflexible organisational structures. In this regard, robust innovative approaches and strategies are essential to ensure that effective innovative management in the public service is realised for service delivery improvement. Van der Waldt (2007) affirms that around the globe, a concept of government renewal involves rethinking the government's overall strategic goals with the main aim of improving service delivery to achieve government objectives. However, there is a general trend that public service has been largely characterised by bureaucracy, and delay in responding to critical challenges, and inefficient and ineffective to service delivery imperatives. Van der Waldt (2007) further highlights that reduction of bureaucratic structures, state budget, and a welfare state can improve effective innovative management in the public service. As noted in Morris and Jones (1999), as well as in Bernie, Hafsi and Deschamps (2011), a public service branded with an intense and aggressive environment, tends to generate rigid behaviour that eliminate opportunities for effective innovative management. This environment mostly entails characteristics of bureaucratic set-up system such as strict rules, procedures, policies, restrictions in the area of human resources management such as recruitment and dismissals, worthless rewards and internal conflict or labour disputes; and lack of managerial autonomy. It is generally acknowledged that these unfavourable conditions often negatively affect innovative management in the public service (Morris & Jones, 1999; Bernie, Hafsi & Deschamps, 2011). For modern and technological driven organisations such as public health sector, it is important to adapt creative ways for the provision of quality services to the citizens.

3.2 Poor Communication and Coordination

As noted in Lekhi (2007), Greenhalgh, Robert, Bate, Kyriakidou, Macfarlane and Peacock (2004) argued by indicating that success or failure of innovative management in the public service depends mainly on the level of engagement with various stakeholders. These scholars further indicate that lack of a well-coordinated communication strategy remains a major challenge that affects involvement of role players in the innovative management process. Bland, Bruk, Kim and Lee (2010) agree with the argument in Greenhalgh *et al*. (2004), by highlighting that a growing access to advanced knowledge, information, as well as expertise, resultant from globalisation, represents both an advantage and a challenge for innovative management in the public service. Bland *et al*. (2010) further state that most significant problems related to public service are mainly societal and skill variation that can create gap for effective communication and networks. Beer and Eistenstat (2002) identify what is called "the silent killers of creative initiatives". These aspects include ineffective senior management, poor vertical communication and unclear innovative management strategies. A network's nature of authority as an element of communication and coordination in the public service is largely based on seniority (Keast, Mandell, Brown & Woolcock, 2004; O'Toole & Meier, 2004). In network's nature of authority, command and control procedures typically are not considered. In this regard, networks require coordinated efforts among different levels of public institutions, non-profit organisations, as well as the private sector. Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) argue that a network's nature of authority is often characterised by high complexity and a line of responsibility that is not clear. These scholars further indicate that this may eventually undermine an effective innovative management process for quality services in public service institutions. It is worth noting that a lack of competition could be attributed to an increased poor communication and coordination (Petkovsek & Canker, 2013). Bland *et al*. (2010), in their empirical study, agree by identifying three main potential challenges of innovation management in the public service. These are diversity of inputs, which leads to poor communication, incongruent goals and lack of coordination.

3.3 Shortage of Expertise Related to Technology

Shortage of solutions and expertise in the area of technology has often been seen as a major problem hence overreliance on the private sector. Thenint (2010) asserts that the spread of technology on social networking may contribute to the creation of effective and sound relationship of citizens and public service institutions. Worth noting that

government is expected not merely adopting technological solutions, but also as an idea and ethos to reflect society's fundamental way of interrelating. However, a major challenge is that the cost in the implementation processes is often not accurately determined. For instance, required equipment for a particular technological solution is often not informed by a policy as well as decision-making process. Therefore, costing and quality are usually underestimated (Thenint, 2010). It is acknowledged that public service, especially in the health sector is struggling to attract and retain skilled personnel due to poor incentives and working conditions (Shipalana, 2014).

4. Innovative Management Strategies and Approaches

It is important to note that, despite various forms of challenges in the innovation management process, there is common understanding among scholars that the rate of innovation has increased taking into account such factors as globalisation, advancement of technology and societal issues, which are considered key drivers for innovative management (Francis, 2005). Mayer (2012) postulates that what researchers and public managers have to bear in mind is that new ideas can only be considered innovative once they are successfully implemented and add value to service delivery. Scholars such as Nambisan (2008), Harris and Albury (2009), and Eggers and Kumar-Singh (2009) are of the firm view that the public service needs to find radical innovative management approaches and strategies to address challenges that are affecting service delivery. Radebe (2013) assents that success in tackling recurring challenges in the public service requires the adoption of flexible, and yet ruthless, innovative management approaches and strategies towards service delivery imperatives in the 21st century.

4.1 Collaborative Innovation

Nambisan (2008) describes the concept of collaborative innovation as interactive approach for creative ideas to resolve problems within organisation, taking into consideration availability of resources and creativity from various stakeholders. Bommert (2010) in addition, explains collaborative innovation as one of the strategies that can promote effective innovative management in the public service. Nambisan (2008) further highlights that these communities are including role players such as citizens, non-profit

organisations as well as private organisations to strengthen the desirable outcomes of innovations. Bommert (2010) maintains that the central aim collaborative innovation may be seen as more suitable strategy to address the underlying challenges, is due to the fact that it allows innovation rotation to role players such as private organisations, citizens and non-profit organisations. Collaborative innovation also focuses mainly on resources, cultural restrictions and socio-political to support successful implementation of innovations. In this regard, collaborative innovation carries an ability to promote generation of ideas, choice of alternatives, implementation and transmission of innovations to all role players. Dukakis and Portz (2012) highlight that fostering collaboration and support in the public service may enhance the realisation of institutional goals for service delivery improvement.

4.2 Innovative Management Techniques

Innovative management techniques are also seen as solutions to strengthen innovative management in public institutions. Golden (1990, in Cohen & Eimick, 1996) arrives at the conclusion that it is often difficult to predict the desirable outcomes of innovations due to their complex situation. These authors further indicate that the innovative ideas that are disintegrated from an ideal situation may be heading to a failure. It is on this note that such ideas require necessary action and learn from experience. This may influence the need to adjust implementation strategies focusing to the ideal situation. Cohen and Eimick (1996) further observe that innovative management is rarely characterised by revolutionary innovations. This analysis triggered the development of various techniques of innovative management that are relevant in the public service. Cohen and Eimick (1996:4) identify the innovation management techniques that can enhance innovation management in the public service. These techniques are identified as total quality management, business re-engineering, organisational strategic planning, management of teams, benchmarking and privatisation.

4.2.1 Total Quality Management
Total Quality Management (TQM) is described in Djerdjour and Patel (2000) as a comprehensive innovation management approach that should be properly implemented in order to ensure that the provision of service delivery meets both the needs and expectations of citizens. According to Vinnin

(2007), TQM is evaluated on four main criteria: quality, value, conformance to the set standards and meeting or exceeding client's expectations. Vinnin (2007) further states that in the application of these criteria, quality on excellence and meeting or exceeding client's expectations are mostly subjective while criteria on saving costs and alignment to requirements of the set standards are critically important. However, criteria on value for money are easier to manage and apply than the delivery of service. Masejane (2012) argues that on the one hand, TQM is seen as a top down approach whereby the top management initiates and manages the strategy as well as its activities, while on the other hand, the development of a high employee participation culture is being considered. The implementation of TQM in public service institutions is often linked with the emergent of New Public Management (NPM). It is worth noting that both NPM and TQM have been confronted with various criticisms. The main argument has been that NPM and TQM are not taking into consideration the public sector's ethos due to the fact that they support entrepreneurial approaches as in the context of the private sector. TQM has been singled out as a management approach that creates systematic solutions and promotes bureaucracy in the organisations. Despite, these criticisms, TQM has been found as a solution to the challenges that are faced by the public service in respect of innovative management (Hill & Wilkinson, 1995; Vinnin, 2007).

4.2.2 Team Management

Cohen and Eimick (1996) describe a team in the context of public service institutions to be a group of individuals who are brought together on the basis of various skills, talents and knowledge jointly with an effort to accomplish certain task, assignment, goal and problem solving. These authors further define a team as a group of individuals who are identified based on their disciplines, working together to perform an important organisation's responsibilities. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) agree with Cohen and Eimick (1996) by defining the concept of team as a few individuals with harmonised skills who are dedicated to a mutual purpose, goals and accountability. Cohen and Eimick (1996) are emphatic that in modern organisations including public service institutions, project teams are swiftly becoming key strategies for innovative management and change. These authors further indicate that team management may have thoughtful effect on the employee's roles and responsibilities in the public

service institutions. These include where issues of public healthcare are concerned in health-related functions often require team work for quality health care services. Worth noting that team's focus has potential to divert a focus of an organisations like public service institutions not to be reactive, but to be proactive when addressing critical issues. It is also observed that a team management as an innovative management effort has an ability of promoting collective organisational achievement of goals and evaluating coaching of employee as well facilitating cooperation.

5. Fostering Innovation in the Public Service

Fostering of new ideas is considered as most significant strategy to ensure effective innovative management in the public service. Robernik (2007) highlights critical areas of fostering innovation such as the culture and behaviour of adopters. This author indicates that in overcoming perpetual elusiveness of tacit knowledge, a framework that may help to evaluate and observe organisational culture and behaviour is suggested for effective fostering of innovation in public institution. Robernik (2007) suggests an innovative management framework that is intended to contribute to the successful sharing as well as mutual learning. This scholar further indicates that the framework has potential to identify areas of knowledge that hinder innovation and how such behaviour can be unlearned. This framework supports approaches and strategies to implement new ideas in the organisations such as public sector.

Mulgan and Albury (2003), in their framework of innovative management, present approaches and strategies on how innovation management can be encouraged or fostered in the public service. These outline complex, non-linear relationships and processes of innovative management that are considered of importance in the public service. These approaches are identified as generating of possibilities, incubating and prototyping, replication and scaling up and analysing and learning.

5.1 Generating Possibilities

Generating of possibilities is an innovative approach that is realised when new ideas or initiatives for innovations are brought forward or suggested with clear motivation. Worth noting that generating of possibilities is the stage where various

stakeholders within public service institutions are engaged in order to gain their support and stimulate their minds. For the public health care sector, generating possibilities could consider involving various stakeholders in the health system, including communities, to understand their needs. The advantages and disadvantages of new ideas for innovation are outlined to explore various options and to select a suitable option.

5.2 Incubating and Prototyping

Once various options for new ideas are being considered, strategies also known as mechanisms of implementing those options should be developed. At this stage a well-defined plan that includes activities, responsible persons, time frames and a budget is drawn up. A risk management plan should also be put in place to assess and analyse anticipated risks.

5.3 Replicating and Scaling Up

At this stage an effective communication strategy as innovative management effort is developed in order to promote effective diffusion of innovations. Transparency for all role players is necessary in the event where obstacles or challenges are realised in order to jointly develop contingency strategies to address such obstacles or challenges.

5.4 Analysing and Learning

An evaluation tool at this stage of fostering innovation is necessary to evaluate the outcomes in the implementation process. This process may also assist in tracking progress and identifying barriers that may be seen as an opportunity for continuous learning and improvement. In addition to the innovation management approaches that are outlined in Mulgan and Albury (2003, in De Vries, 2013), it provides innovative management approaches that may be applied in the public service institutions. These include motivation of employees in public institutions, goal and result oriented organisation. De Vries (2013) further points out that the "professionalism of the public service is seen as important and integral to the social, political, economic and cultural life of every country". In this regard, first preference must be provided to enhance knowledge, skills, ethics, attitudes and networks of public servants. De Vries (2013) concludes that effective innovative management strategies and approaches can provide a model for participation, inclusive

decision-making, reconciliation, social cohesion, and proactive problem solving.

6. Results

The findings in this paper reveal that public service institutions are largely characterised with ineffective innovative management which affects service delivery improvement, particularly provision of quality goods and services to the citizens. The findings also indicate that ineffective innovative management is attributed to challenges such as rigid rules and highly regulated working environment as well as a lack of innovative management strategies and approaches for consistent implementation of innovation initiatives. The finding further reveals that poor performance is due to a lack of integrated management functional areas such as strategic management and leadership, innovative management structures, diffusion of innovations and implementation strategy.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is worth noting that effective implementation innovative management approaches and strategies in public service institutions requires an integration of various approaches and taking other enabling factors into account. Goffin and Mitchell (2005) observe that although innovative management is seen as a management function, managers are not the only actors in the implementation process of innovative management approaches and strategies. Storey and Salaman (2005) highlight some of management's roles and responsibilities as setting priorities and strategies, control resources and having an ability to generate ideas, interpretation of data, models, academic research findings and consultants. Lekhi (2007) adds that the ability of the organisation to maintain innovative management strategies, systems and processes may attain the desirable outcomes. In this regard, it is imperative that organisations including the health sector should embrace innovative management approaches and strategies for improvement of healthcare services.

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