

# **Strengthening Leadership and Ethics in Public Institutions**

# Being Keynote Lecture

by

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# Preface



- Permit me to express my deep personal respect for Engr. (Dr.) Ernest Ndukwe, OFR, founding EVC of the NCC, and evidently one of the brains behind the CPSG. I pay tribute to his celebrated knack for excellence as a professional par excellence who earned my deep respect the few times that we encountered during his tenure in NCC. I also like to attest to the legacy of good governance principles with dotted the NCC during its formative years
- I can then get the depth of reflection that must have gone into the conceptualization of the CPSG. Having worked assiduously to build up a similar institution, the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy – ISGPP – to impact on the governance landscape in Nigeria, I get the sense of the vision and mission undergirding the CPSG

# Preface



- I therefore take the launch of the CPSG to be a spirited patriotic effort by tested high-end professionals, who having bestrode the public sector governance space, and having a deep sense of the significant binding capacity and capability constraints that have been circumscribing Nigeria's development journey and her potentials, do not want to resign to the 'siddon-look' option, but have chosen to give back through strategic interventions as a generational think tank investment
- CPSG therefore constitutes, in my reckoning, a significant addition to institutional, structural, and managerial architecture, floated to offer services targeted at unlocking Nigeria's potentials in its journey to recover the lost years and therefore fulfil destiny

# Focus of this Keynote

▶ In this keynote, I will attempt to offer a mix of the theoretical and practical/experiential foundational insights for our understanding of the two variables in this conversation namely, leadership and the ethical frameworks of public institution as they play out in a democratic context

▶ Especially with the sense of how public institutions serve as institutional mechanism for:

- I. Providing well-run services to the public;
- II. Offering expert advice to government; and
- III. implementing regulatory controls that are enabling for economic growth in manner that protect not just the public, but the nation's best interest at all times

▶ I am therefore hoping that the launch this new Centre, with such fundamental conceptual and critical reflection, will translate into key awareness in its running and deliverance as an imperative in a clime in dire need of fresh new ideas, models and acumen capable of contending with



# Focus of this Keynote

I like to take on a number of issues that connect with the central concern of my reflections in this keynote. I mean, I like to:

1. Put in perspective the idea of the public service and what it means to work for the government as an official in Nigeria:
  - This has to be the starting point because the idea of working for the government especially in Nigeria has become so bastardized. And we all are familiar with how the public service is taken in Nigeria. To say you are working in a public institution is to mean a lot of things.
  - One, it translates to doing whatever you like—arriving at work anytime, utilizing workplace environment for personal business, loafing during work-hour, or being essentially unproductive.
  - Indeed, given this perception of the public service, it is no wonder that the Nigerian government has lost its position as the employer of choice.
  - The new generation of workers find the bureaucratic workplace too constraining and old-fashioned to generate the required performance and productivity profile that undergird a developmental state.

## Whereas the Public Service was conceived as a Noble Calling

- With the idea of public service operated within a framework that sees it more like a special calling as service to country, a calling similar to the Levitical order of priesthood in the Old Testament.
- In Max Weber's timeless conception, it is a vocation ennobled by the notion of legal-rational authority; an authority which employees recognize as legitimate. That framework of the legal-rational authority privileges written rules and procedures.
- Each position in the bureaucracy has its duties and rights, which are clearly defined; rules and procedures are laid down to determine how the given authority is to be exercised.
- Bureaucracy therefore promises a stable organization, despite the fact that its incumbents come and go. Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy emerged as neutral, hierarchically organized, efficient and inevitable in contemporary society.

# The Public Service being tied to the Idea of Honour in Service

- The idea of the public service was also conceived to be apolitical and separated from the mandate of the politicians, just as the vocation of the public service is tied to the idea of honour.
- According to Weber, honour is what defines the calling and vocation of the public servant. “...we have the development of modern officialdom, through many years of special training, into an expert and highly qualified intellectual workforce with a sense of honor reflecting their status that has been highly developed in the interests of integrity” (2008: 165).
- It is this ethical sense of honour that strengthens the effective technical performance of the state, and hence prevents the bureaucracy from collapsing upon the weight of its own activities.
- An honourable public official is the one who sees to the execution of a policy to the best of his ability, even if he disagrees with the policy choice. This is an honourable act because it demonstrates that the bureaucrat’s sense of duty and service overrides his personal willfulness.
- Honour is best conceived in terms of the willingness of the public servant to serve the public without any expectation of personal aggrandizement or instant gratification outside of a commensurate and competitive wage structure sufficient to sustain it as a prestigious job. Consequently, the public service is conceived around the concept of public-spiritedness.



# The Public Service being tied to the Idea of Honour in Service

- This is an administrative virtue that demands that service to the public must be taken as a spiritual calling to dedicate and commit oneself to the public—a body of citizens that benefits from the conscientious implementation of the policies of government.
- Public spiritedness is what makes the public service a vocation rather than a career which has an instrumental connotation in that it serves the self-motivated desires of the person.
- No one blames a career professional for the pursuit of self-interested desires that enhance one's livelihood. Indeed, a career is chosen for its capacity to advance the life prospect of the careerist.
- On the contrary, a professional is held up to an even higher code of ethics that demands that if one must serve the public then one must do so according to specific and rigorous laid-down rules that puts the public above any personal pursuits.
- Deferred gratification in this case must overcome instant gratification. Public-spiritedness therefore places the responsibility of the professional within the context of a personal and public accountability that motivates the professional to personally hold him/herself responsible for the discharge of his/her duties to the public.

# The Envisioned New Public Service

The developmental state is an inevitable imperative that must be achieved to focus Nigeria's transformation journey. And one critical condition for the emergence of the developmental state is the establishment of a modern, technology-enabled, efficient, effective and capable public service that is capability ready to deliver on the policy promises of the government. Such a public service must then be:

- Fast moving, intelligent, professional, information-rich, flexible, adaptable and entrepreneurial;
- Less employee-focused and rule-driven, deliver quality service;
- Performance-focused, accountable and inspired to uphold the vision of a transformed Nigeria;
- Capable of creating the policy climate that will unlock the energy of the private sector and other sectors and to install a new productivity paradigm in the national economy;
- Operated by multidisciplinary team of new generation public managers and project teams

# This takes us to the leadership conversation:

- Since such an institutionally reformed system needs a transformational manager rather than a mere administrator, such a public manager requires twenty-first century professional acumen that enables him or her to get things done in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, performance and productivity.
- The public service system needs a well-trained workforce as well as a commitment to the value of neutral competence rather than a concern with survival and managerial control. Professional attributes would include:
  - o Foresight and provision (strategic, pro-active orientation);
  - o Entrepreneurship (risk-taking, innovativeness);
  - o Excellence/merit (constant search for perfection);
  - o Impact or result-orientation (focus on performance and productivity);
  - o Moral rectitude (responsibility, political neutrality, public spirit, accountability, equity, transparency, subordination of private/personal interest to public good) (UN, 1998: 19).

# The first charge of the transformational administrative leader:

- The transformational administrative leader is first saddled with the challenge of overseeing the establishment of a value-based public service institution that moderate the persona and personality of its workforce which will require the implementation of a change management framework,
- Initiating a cultural adjustment programme would aim to establish a new administrative ethos. This ethos is founded on the idea of excellence in service, meritocracy and spirituality that facilitate personal and public accountability.

# The Transformational Leader being a Change Agents has Compelling Responsibility to create a Change Space

- I am not so naïve as to imagine that the institutional rebuilding and transformation of the public service even as it is not rocket science, will be a simple change process.
- On the contrary, the new generation transformational administrative leader will have to face the contingencies attached to the VUCA—volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous—environment that influences administrative and institutional matters.
- This VUCA complicated change process will be further complicated by the new normal arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and by a new phenomenon that is now called polycrisis—the dynamics of interconnectedness of the problems and crises of the world in ways that heightens the virulence of each crisis and them even more complex to resolve.



# Some of these pressures and tensions that the leadership in the public sector will have to contend with will derive from the following sources:

- The pressure of doing more with less that is undermined by funding constraints;
- The service delivery challenge that has been aggravated by the COVID-19 new normal;
- The twists and turns of government shifts especially in terms of policies and performances;
- The challenge of managing and retaining the flexible and capable workforce;
- The need to combat silos mentality that prevent the system from stepping out of its myopic system thinking; and
- Managing volatile and changing citizens' needs and expectations (UK Government, 2022)

# Managing this Emergent Reality in Governance will Demands some New Skills

- As we are confronted with a leadership issue that must situate the public service and its workforce in contemporary knowledge and administrative dynamics that is necessary for inserting a developmental state in Nigeria within the fourth and the emerging fifth industrial revolutions.
- Impactful leadership will demand a change management intelligence that with ingrained capacity to withstand the polycrisis that has complicated the administrative environment in Nigeria.
- This change management needs a leader/change agent that can combine both the traditional and new skills and competences to both engage with and anticipate any new forms that the polycrisis could take which could be damaging to the public service system or undermine its efficiency.
- At the traditional administrative level, the change manager is expected to still maneuver through the following roles:

- (a) an expert—advising the government on policy decisions,
- (b) a regulator—oversight over outsourced and externalized functions of government,
- (c) an engager—shaping the larger issue of the public good and how it affects the community, and
- (d) a reticulist—identifying new skills and expertise and bringing them together to achieve good results and outcomes.

# However, added to these roles are newer competences:

interpersonal skills: facilitation, empathy, political skills;

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synthesising skills: sorting evidence, analysis, making judgements, offering critique and being creative;

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Organising skills: group work, collaboration and peer review

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communication skills: better use of new media and multi-media resources

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# Twenty-first century public service skills set

**Technical:** ability to use methods, procedures, processes, tools, techniques, and specialized knowledge to perform specific tasks

<i>Skills Group</i>	<b>Skill Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Technical:</b>	ANALYTIC	Ability to identify key variables, see how they are interrelated, and decide which ones should receive the most attention.
	DECISION MAKING	Ability to choose effective solutions from among alternatives whilst balancing a range of competing values.
	ADMINISTRATIVE	Ability to follow policies and procedures, process paper work in an orderly manner, and manage expenditure within limits set by budgets.
	PROFESSIONAL	Ability to apply specialized knowledge and exercise judgement to perform specific tasks
	COMMERCIAL	Ability to understand markets and how to create, manage and support them in the context of public service delivery

# Twenty-first century public service skills set

**Human:** ability to work cooperatively with others, to communicate effectively, to motivate and train others, to resolve conflicts, and to be a team player

<i>Skills Group</i>	<b>Skill Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Human:</b>	COMMUNICATION	Ability to send and receive information, thoughts, and feelings, which create common understanding and meaning. Ability to construct narratives and communicate this through an array of different media.
	INTERPERSONAL	Ability to send and receive information, thoughts, and feelings, which create common understanding and meaning. Ability to construct narratives and communicate this through an array of different media.
	PEOPLE MANAGEMENT	Ability to motivate and manage staff resources in alignment with organisational goals
	INTERNATIONAL LITERACY	Ability to situate self in global context and develop knowledge, attitude and relationships to function effectively
	COLLABORATION	Ability to understand markets and how to create, manage and support them in the context of public service delivery
	CO-PRODUCTION	Ability to engage with a variety of different communities in order to design and deliver public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship.



# Twenty-first century public service skills set

**Conceptual:** ability to see the organisation as a whole and solve problems from a systematic point of view. An important part of this skill involves not simply reacting to issues that are important now but working proactively to anticipate the kinds of issues that will be important in the future.

<i>Skills Group</i>	<b>Skill Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Conceptual:</b>	DIAGNOSTIC	Ability to determine the probable cause of a problem from examining a set of symptoms. This involved the ability to think about complex issues and situations and to pick out the kinds of factors that might alleviate this.
	FLEXIBLE	Ability to deal with ambiguous and complex situations and rapidly changing demands. Ability to manage change and respond to shifts in a range of factors including the political executive.
	DESIGN	Ability to develop complex systems and processes to deliver public services. This will be done by employing a range of different techniques from engagement of a range of different stakeholder groups to harnessing digital technologies and principles of design.

# Unpacking the VUCA Conversation

- So, the idea is that as the VUCA environment gets increasingly unpredictable, the change manager must also get increasingly more competent and capable in anticipating the rapid administrative and managerial changes, ...
- ... and confront them with innovative, creative and entrepreneurial acumen. In a country like Nigeria, change agents and managers will be expected to confront many problems and dilemmas with no known solutions and improbable scenarios
- And this is exactly the real reason for needing change managers: those who have the foresight and mindset to read the environment and manage the change in ways that turn the VUCA problematics into opportunities for progress and institutional transformation.

# Ten Set of Skills for New Generation Leaders and Public Sector Change Managers:

Bob Johansen spells out a set of ten skills that he insists the new leaders and change managers must possess to be able to clearly see the future well enough to meet its challenges and overcome them. These new skills are:

o **Maker instinct:** This is the ability to convert one's natural impulse or hobbies into skills for transforming the workplace.

o **Clarity:** As the ability to penetrate through present and future contradictions to see what others cannot yet see, and to be flexible on how to arrive at that future.

o **Dilemma flipping:** This is the capacity a change manager possesses or learns to turn dilemmas—which cannot be resolved like problems, into opportunities and advantages.

o **Immersive learning ability:** This is the ability a leader learns to immerse himself or herself in unfamiliar situation and circumstance in order to be able to learn from them in a first-person, close-up engagements.

o **Bio-empathy:** The ability required seeing the big picture

o **Constructive depolarizing:** The managerial ability to calm or douse institutional or organizational tensions by bringing together workers and employees from different and diverse cultures and backgrounds into constructive engagements.

o **Quiet transparency:** This is the capacity to be open and be authentic about what matters

o **Rapid prototyping:** Different from pilot studies or demonstration projects, is ability to demonstrate anticipated possible successes through quick cycles of innovation and refinement.

o **Smart mob organizing:** This is the skill that enables the change manager to create, nurture and engage with purposeful social change networks leveraging digital devices and the social media.

o **Commons creating:** Ability to create shared assets and spaces—that allows for institutional teams and partners to engage in competitive team work

# Conclusion: Recommendations, Going Forward

- All we have said so far sums up to a compelling need for public service for in one breath, a paradigm rethinking of the old Weberian 'I am directed' rules compliance bureaucratic managerial tradition. And in another, it suggests the urgency of reprofessionalisation ...
- ... of the public service to reinvent it as a value-based civil service and as the substructure for building a new generation of public managers in Nigeria, will entail a mix of action steps involving the following:
  1. Undertaking value audit and a mapping of work culture (as-is) as basis for the launch of a cultural adjustment programme designed to institute the right values (should-be) as mental remodelling that enables public servants to focus on new enabling values and ethos as well as helping them to think outside the box
  2. The culture change programme would require activation through networks of change ambassadors and champions that are carefully cultivated into a community of practice within framework of a change management strategy



# Conclusion: Recommendations, Going Forward

3. Recognising that ‘the fish gets rotten from the head’ (Bob Garratt), which suggests that the public service implementation capability readiness depends significantly on the level of strategic intelligence and managerial acumen of top-level leaders. ...

... Nigeria is overdue to establish a multidisciplinary elite cadre, or what in global good practice is called the senior executive service (SES). One that is capacitated as platform to enlist the very best talents and high-end professionals that society can offer; from research institutes, consultancy industry, universities, the diaspora, etc., to rewire the intelligence quotient (IQ) and intellectual bases of skills for running the business of government

4. Reengineering for enhanced bureaucratic efficiency which entails implementing deep-seated systems and structural changes to de-bureaucratise the civil service outdated administrative practices, while at once deepening project and programme management, decision making and problem-solving will be essential to create the enabling environment for policy innovation and performance management in government

5. Getting new generation of leaders to lead transformation and change will entail looking within, through mind-resetting and cognitive redefinition, in a measure that will increase their capacity to stay centred on leading the change sustainably



# Conclusion: Recommendations, Going Forward

6. Leadership mental remodelling will require a range of transactional solutions that involve adjusting incentive structure, system of motivation, and the strengthening of internal control mechanisms to build appropriate corporate values and code of ethics. ...

... Inspiring leaders this way, within a larger vision that brings out the best in them, is the best way to institutionalise a change space model with multi-layered leadership frame that self-adjustment capability enabled

7. This whole dynamic will then require internal seminal climate learning infrastructure platforms, for continuous learning and knowledge formation, especially given the reality of a VUCA-rized knowledge age. This implies that there can never be a complete skills and competency set ...

... that is adequate for all times and purpose. Leaders must therefore keep building on their acumen to enable them to be ever-ready to meet the demands of the ever-changing realities of policy and development management

8. Deepening action and policy research function in government as well as deepening of talent cum knowledge management as basis for mainstreaming new practices and innovations that work, will be critical for institutional capacity effectiveness. ...

... In this regard, the whole dependency on one-size-fits-all service-wide standards will need to be revised to enable required latitudes for public managers to better manage politically-induced behaviours and the Nigerian factor, which has historically limited overall performance in the context of public administration

**THANK YOU**