

CHAPTER 2

The battle of ethical leadership and political power in South Africa

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Introduction

The efficacy of statecraft and good service delivery heavily relies on the basic principles of ethical leadership. The basic principles of ethical leadership are outlined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), Section 195 under the basic principles governing public administration. These principles are the foundation for a well-functioning and capable developmental state (Gloppen, 2019; Zondi, 2021). However, it currently appears that the public office bearers are obsessed with satisfying their personal needs using state coffers. Consequently, ethical leadership principles are undermined, compromising the ability to deliver public services. This is due to the ill-use of political power amongst the officialdom to manage public administration.

The most draining predicament with political power is that it causes service delivery backlogs because political office-bearers are often obsessed with their egos and would do anything to nurture them. On the contrary, ethical leadership is about servant hood, ultimately related to good service delivery and governance (Nooteboom & Termeer, 2013). However, this chapter discusses the issues of ethical leadership and political power, respectively, to fulfill its objectives. This comes against poor service delivery and weak governance, exacerbated by the perpetuation of poor accountability within government departments and agencies (Modipa & Motseki, 2022). Hence, the argument of this study is that political

power currently supersedes ethical leadership in the current state of public administration. The chapter brings to the attention of the reader that the challenges of governance and service delivery are closely linked to poor ethical leadership in public administration.

At the current juncture, it appears that public administration is currently politicised with the infiltration of political interference. Politicised public administration is susceptible to corruption and weak governance (Selelo & Masenya, 2021). This essentially occurs because individuals prioritise the hegemony of power and the infiltration of politics into the administration of government affairs when they assume public office (Von Holdt, 2013). Nevertheless, ordinary citizens still face a quandary of poor socio-economic service delivery due to the conflicting interests of public servants regarding power and leadership. The government is unable to meet its target of eliminating or not curtailing the proliferation of socio-economic hardships that the proletariat is enduring (Selelo & Masenya, 2021).

This chapter was motivated by the unchanging milieu of marginalised and poor people, the continuous issues of political power, and how these challenges have intruded on the legitimate functioning of the government. The people on the ground still reside in devastating living conditions after the democratic breakthrough in 1994. They are in a state of confusion, anarchy, poverty, unemployment, and inequality. While observing these revolting living conditions, those who are in positions of leadership in public offices continue to squander public resources for self-benefit as opposed to ethical leadership and service to their electorates. This chapter begins with a literature review by providing definitions of key terms and an analysis of ethical leadership and power. It also presents an overview of the legacy of corruption.

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to assess and discuss the challenges of ethical leadership and political power in the

South African public administration sector. This section elucidates and discusses different themes of the study and provides detailed analyses and arguments from different scholars. The literature review is the backbone of the study because it seeks to fulfill the purpose of the chapter. It commences by defining the key terms used throughout the chapter.

Definition of Key Concepts

The key concepts used throughout the chapter are defined below:

Political Power

Sullivan and Chapel (2021) define political power as “the ability to control the behaviour of people through the passage, approval, and implementation of laws and regulations” . It relates to the power to influence and change the outcomes of events. Meanwhile, Woerner and Troolin (2022) define political power as “a group of people or individuals who have a control and influence over a nation’s beliefs, actions, and behaviours” . The authors further indicate that with political power, individuals or groups of people can do evil or good.

Politicised Public Administration

It relates to the political administration dichotomy principle, wherein the politicians give orders, direction, and shape policies, while the bureaucrats must execute the orders of their political masters (Fry & Nigro, 1998). Mafunisa (2003: 85), cited in Sebola (2014), indicates that politicisation of public administration “results from a threat and a political sabotage by the previous administration.” Sebola (2014) reiterates that the debate on the politicisation of government administration has been critiqued in length over the past decades. Thus, the demarcation between politics and administration is difficult in modern-day public administration. Perhaps the politicisation of government administration is a result of cadre deployment by the governing party of the day.

Ethical Leadership

Villirilli (2021) views ethical leadership as “a means of behaving according to a set of principles, morals and values which are recognized by the majority as sound basis for the common good.” The author indicates that ethical leadership is aligned with principles such as integrity, trust, respect, honesty, fairness, and transparency. According to the Western Government University (WGU) (2020), ethical leadership is about demonstrating and promoting normatively appropriate conduct that is the key to being a great leader. The following section discusses the conceptual analysis of ethical leadership and political power in government.

The Conceptual Analysis of Ethical Leadership and Political Power in Government

Ethics, leadership, governance, service delivery, and power are concepts that are often used in lecture halls, academia, and boardrooms. At times, it might also be placed at the top of the government’s agenda (Doh & Stumpf, 2005). The terms are used timely and strategically in the political sphere to lure electorates and enhance confidence in public servants. Despite the government’s interventions and earnest efforts to enforce ethical leadership and good governance, the prevailing reality suggests that much attention and eagerness to implement such concepts appear to be nothing more than a symbolic gesture or a distant pipedream. This is evidenced by the persistent occurrence of rapid and rampant unethical behaviour, corruption, poor governance, inadequate service delivery, and a notable lack of accountability.

The aforementioned discussion provides the impetus for delving into and presenting the content of this chapter. Consequently, it is recognised that there is a battle between ethical leadership and the interference of political power in government, which undermines good governance and service delivery. This is because the officials who are obsessed with political power behave maliciously, corruptly, and illegally and violate laws and principles governing public administration.

Nonetheless, Woerner and Troolin (2022) argue that political power, contrary to common belief, is not inherently negative; instead, they contend that it is inherently beneficial and essential for the welfare of society. According to them, political power is a prerequisite for legislation, and without it, societal cohesion would disintegrate (Sullivan & Chapel, 2021). Conversely, Woerner and Troolin (2022) assert that when authority falls into the wrong hands, political power has the potential to be harnessed for malevolent purposes.

Political anarchy and weak bureaucratic processes managed to find their way into government processes to halt or curtail the levels of service delivery and instill the principles of political power, corruption, and pursuing self-interest (Von Holdt, 2013). These principles are detrimental to government processes of service delivery and good governance. Moreover, Jessop (2017:11) defines power as “the capacity of a given force to produce an event that would not otherwise occur”. A government is currently using the idea of power, which is primarily associated with politics, with unethical intentions. Specifically within South African politics, the term ‘political power’ has evolved into a means of securing and perpetuating leadership positions within the government. Consequently, this chapter undertakes a conceptual analysis of the ethical leadership and power dynamics within public service, examining their impact on good governance and service delivery. The examination delves into the foundational principles of political power and ethical leadership.

Regarding ethical leadership, public officials must promote and provide resources to a wider audience in their areas of jurisdiction (Nooteboom & Termeer, 2013). Leaders in government offices are given time, space, and latitude to render services in their own areas of jurisdiction. However, the emphasis should be placed on being fair and providing unbiased delivery of services to all the electorates to achieve good governance. Nooteboom and Termeer (2013) opine that this could be achieved if ethical leaders’ distance themselves from backdoor deals, cartels, and conspiracies. The authors expand on the latter stance, stating that to avoid such illegal

activities and malicious accusations by ethical leaders, the principles of transparency should be instilled and practised. Inevitably, the government has experienced the serious dilemmas of ethical breaches, poor management, and political mutineers who are at times glorified and deployed by fellow political camaraderie to occupy government offices.

Stogdill (1948), cited in Doh and Stumpf (2005), indicates that ethical leadership is associated with achievement, capacity, participation, responsibility, and accountability. Although other scholars have argued that leadership is situational, which means the environment is a determinant factor for a leader to triumph. However, leaders must follow some basic principles highlighted by Stogdill above. Interestingly, Ravin and Rubin (1976:37), cited in Doh and Stumpf (2005), define a leader as “someone who occupies a position in a group, influences others in accordance with the role expectation of the position and co-ordinates, and directs the group in maintaining itself and reaching its goal”. Doh and Stumpf (2005) imply that to achieve such a goal, it would require a sense of ethics, responsibility, and morals in those who occupy government offices and serve people well. Hogan and Kaiser (2005) highlight the perception that the concept of leadership has generated intense debates in the history of human science. However, it is inadequately understood and implemented in different organisations. The authors maintain that leadership exists for two main purposes: firstly, to solve problems, and secondly, to generate moral values and perspectives for unethical leaders.

Silva (2016) notes that people have long viewed leadership as a measure of personal quality. The author made an assertion that a Chinese philosopher and thinker who lived more than 2,500 years ago did not make a universal definition of leadership but proposed that a leader should be someone who is virtuous and takes care of the people. Takala (1998) echoes a facet of knowledge, akin to the sentiment expressed by Plato, often regarded as the father of philosophy, emphasising that a leader should possess wisdom. Plato concurred and maintained that “the possession of a wisdom,

the one truth of an intellectual vision, providing the pathway to effective government as it assists in the appropriate conduct of human affairs, distinguishes leaders from followers” (Bryman, 2011). Meanwhile, Stogdil (1950) described leadership as “the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement”. However, Zaleznik (1977) emphasised that leadership is about using “power to influence the thoughts and actions of other people”. Zaleznik’s interesting definition encapsulates the core essence of the paper, as the term ‘power’ in this context is frequently associated with politics and government.

The term ‘power’ is often associated with the concept of ‘politics’, which negates the basic principles of ethical leadership. Most recently, Dawn (2020) describes leadership as looking for new ideas and supporting them pragmatically to ameliorate certain predicaments. Clearly, there is no consensus on the definition of leadership because leadership is ubiquitous and depends on the time, space, and context in which it is used. Most importantly, the definition of leadership revolves around the servanthood of the people for the benefit of the people and to enhance their living conditions. Leadership in government would mean that the officialdoms are able to carry out their tasks with a sense of direction and purpose to achieve the developmental mandate of the government. It would also mean that public servants provide basic services to their constituencies without any bias or malicious acts.

Bell (2016) points to leaders such as Hitler or Saddam Hussain to indicate that they have used their political power to do evil deeds. The author compares them to Martin Luther King and Winston Churchill, who used their leadership styles to motivate and provide a sense of direction to the countries they managed. Nevertheless, political power in South Africa has permeated and infiltrated government administration. The malevolent sin of political power lies in its intrusion and violation of fundamental principles within government and ethical leadership. Most significantly, the victims of power and

politics are the electorate, which continues to experience poor living conditions. The next section focuses on political power and governance in South Africa.

Political Power and Governance

Public administration in South Africa endures pervasive corruption and the abuse of power by public servants. The culture of impunity among public office-bearers exasperates the weakening of public administration. This means that political office-bearers think that they could do anything, even violate legal principles, and get away with it by using their political power. This behaviour ultimately leads to unstable and poor governance and service delivery. Seteolu (2004) provides a rationale for this phenomenon, attributing it to the concentration of power and political recruitment within the central government, which erodes ethical leadership principles and processes. Therefore, the emergence of unethical political power and corruption in government provides contradictions that lead to the collapse and weakening of the government's ability to achieve its developmental mandate. Political power and corruption cannot be discussed independently, as the prevailing discourse and on-the-ground reality suggest an inherent correlation between possessing political power and engaging in corrupt practices.

Mlambo, Mubecua, Mpanza, and Mlambo (2019) aver that the individuals who are corrupt are also the ones who use their political power for self-glorification at the expense of the people. The authors further suggest that since the post-colonial epoch, the rise of corruption has been at the top of the agenda for most African countries. While Selelo and Masenya (2021) describe corruption as the looting of services and resources meant for citizens by public servants, Myint (2000) indicates that corruption is the use and abuse of status for personal accumulation. Although there are different definitions of corruption, the essence is that corruption is immoral. To this day, South Africa's condition remains aggravated by political anarchy, escalating levels of

unemployment, poverty, and inequality, as well as weakened legislation and poor economic growth stemming from the influence of politics, power, and corruption (Mlambo et al., 2019). The political adage in one of South Africa's native languages, "bakone ba tsweri maatla," translated as "comrades have power," undermines the principles of good governance and leadership.

As a yea-sayer may put it, politics and power are "the crocodiles of the same river," which appears to be valid and true because the offspring of such concepts is corruption. Political power and corruption are closely associated with poor governance (Khan, 2006; Mlambo et al., 2019). On the contrary, good governance is concerned with virtuous leadership and service delivery. Because corruption is not a fair process and is done with bad intentions, it poses a threat to democracy and good governance. A lack of morals, ethics, and greed that results in the underperformance of state institutions worsens political power and corruption. Khan and Pillay (2019) argue that corruption is an enemy of good governance because it violates policies and legislation, terminates public trust and dishonesty, worsens poverty levels, and enriches the few.

Although good governance is essential for developmental prosperity (Weiss, 2000), it is marred with politics and corruption. Echoing the words of McKittrick (1957: 508) cited in Marquette and Peiffer (2018), "... it may be assumed that a reform of government which offers nothing as a substitute for functions performed by the political machine, will find itself very shortly in a state of paralysis". Perhaps these words simply suggest that political interference in government, due to unethical power and corruption, makes it highly unlikely to achieve good governance and government reform. Ernest Ben writes that "politics is the art of looking for a trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedy" (Goodreads, n.d). In that quote, Ben attempts to show that politics are evil and often associated with malicious intentions. The quandary of politics is that it tends to be self-centred and makes the corrupt wealthy and holier-than-thou under false pretences and impressions.

The next section discusses state power and politics in public administration.

State Power and Politics in Public Administration

With the apparent departure of colonial power from state institutions, a new paradigm emerged, namely 'state power.' The introduction of this concept was met with extreme optimism, envisioning its role in fostering extensive economic and social initiatives for the people (Sekeris, 2015). The intended purpose of the state's power also included offering political resolutions to politicians. Essentially, state power constitutes a crucial component of the political machinery, striving to influence the political landscape in both the realm of politics and government (Sabine, 1920). This new regime of governance (state power) emphasises that radical politicians should spearhead state institutions such as State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), micropolitics, macroeconomic policies, and broadly, the issues of land reform (Bellemare & Moser, 2012). It is concerned with the control of the army and the entire security cluster, backed by the intelligence services (Bellemare & Moser, 2012; Sekeris, 2015).

Sekeris (2015) designates state power as the state capacity, serving as the conduit for the socio-economic development of national governments globally. However, both internal and external forces in the public and private sectors are capable of capturing or controlling state power. The capture of 'state' power is due to political connections. Thus, the act of corruption in government becomes inevitable in the end. Martin and Solomon (2016) find evidence to support their claims that foreign private individuals, such as the Gupta brothers, have taken control of the South African government and its agencies. The brothers managed to control the internal affairs of the government and were even-tempered with its security when they landed at Waterkloof Air Force Base (Martin & Solomon, 2016). They were in charge of the government cabinet, with the prerogative to appoint and fire cabinet ministers. This is shocking and a disgrace to the country's

sovereignty because of the weak leadership. The enabler of this state capture was political leadership from public servants who lacked the zest and patriotic principles to serve the nation. The chapter brings to the attention of the reader that, when political or power leadership supersedes ethical leadership, the outcomes are always unpalatable. The repercussions hurt the economy, taxpayers, and innocent people.

Ethical Leadership and Political Power: The Legacy of Corruption

Apartheid was seen as a scheme of prejudice and segregation on ethnic bases. It overshadowed the philosophy and political system in South Africa from 1948 to 1994 (Gloppen, 2019). When the African National Congress (ANC), under Nelson Mandela's leadership at the time, negotiated with the South African government, this deliberate policy that forbade non-Africans from entering public service, government positions, and politics altogether, came to an end in 1994. Prior to the elimination of Apartheid, public service was a persistent medium for rent-seeking and the favouritism of Afrikaners (Von Holdt, 2013). Policies favouring Afrikaner cultural and educational systems, the shifting of authority contracts to Afrikaner firms, and the financing of para-statal Afrikaner organisations were popular occurrences throughout the era of Apartheid (Gloppen, 2019). In the 1980s, the development of rural native land territories culminated in ambitious projects geared towards rent-seeking, as numerous homeland leaders oversaw vast investment associations (Beresford, 2015).

Simultaneously, the ANC was garnering financial support from international donors to establish a formidable opposition political party, positioning itself to campaign against South Africa's National Party and Apartheid (Gloppen, 2019). The directors of the ANC were provided with substantial sums of money without adequate bookkeeping. The ANC's commitment to societal loyalty was forged during the Apartheid era, resulting in distinct repercussions in contemporary ANC politics. In the mid-years of Jacob Zuma's

leadership, which political analysts characterised as nine wasted years, corruption grew to be rife in mainly government divisions, news organisations, the police force, and the armed forces.

There is an ongoing and robust debate regarding the origins of corruption and its definition in South Africa. The congenial government and political culture that began in the Apartheid era have made corruption problems hard to locate and confront (Flames, 2007; Melber, 2022). The administration under Jacob Zuma, post-2009, created an environment in which corruption has flourished under the current leadership (Dweba & Rashe, 2021). Both the recent and former political order established their own forms of corruption, profiting those in their internal spheres.

While instances of widespread corruption have persisted under the recent regime since 1994, novel forms of corruption have emerged, contributing to the proliferation of new layers of criminal syndicates draining the state's purse (Kgatle, 2018).

According to De Kadt and Larreguy (2018), post-apartheid South Africa is a captivating case study of the ways in which economic inequality can be replicated and maintained within a country's societal structure, permitting it to remain, penetrate its economy, and control its structures. The escalating disputes over injustice, commercial disparities, and societal rights deficiencies in South Africa bear witness to the enduring legacy of apartheid, the legally mandated system of racialised exclusion and discrimination that came to an end 30 years ago (Tivaringe & Kirshner, 2021). Despite the democratic agenda of 1994, which clearly encouraged the development of commercial and societal rights and an all-encompassing culture, the pleasure of these rights is still elusive for millions of South Africans. Leonard (2021) contends that the latest voting outcomes verify that increasing economic disparity, unemployment, and corruption have corroded popular faith in the governing ANC political party and its policies.

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The chapter brings to the attention of the reader that when political power leadership surpasses ethical leadership, corruption finds a way to evolve. Clearly, the legacy of corruption and poor governance led to the downfall of the economy, exacerbating poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Hence, it is unavoidable to acknowledge that the escalating levels of corruption in the country are directly attributable to the national governing party, as it is the political entity deploying its members to occupy public offices. The cadre deployment policy of the governing party may indeed be the catalyst for political interference in government administration, leading to chaos in government offices and the delivery of public services. This chapter further explored and adopted relevant methodologies, which are elaborated upon below, to achieve its objectives.

Methodology

This conceptual study relies on the use of a literature-based methodology to analyse the battle of leadership and political power in South African public administration. The methodology is characterised by the nature of a broad and horizontal review of secondary data (Selelo, 2021). Therefore, Mamokhere, Mabeba, and Kgobe (2020) indicate that this type of research is also seen as qualitative research. Philosophers frequently use the literature-based, conceptual methodology, which implies the synthesis of earlier studies carried out and explains the current occurrence of specific circumstances (Mamokhere et al., 2022). Through this methodology, the researchers conceptualised, evaluated, and examined the two concepts, namely, ethical leadership and political power in the governance of South Africa. This chapter selectively provided a context, focusing specifically on the South African context and thereby framing discussions around the concepts of ethical leadership and political power.

Data Collection

Data collection involves gathering information to achieve research objectives. In the context of this chapter, secondary data, sourced from books, journal articles, government publications, and reports, were gathered due to the nature of the study.

Data Analysis

Wong (2008) describes data analysis in qualitative research as “a process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, observation notes, and other non-textual materials that a researcher accumulates to increase an understanding of a certain phenomenon”. Analysing a literature-based methodology (qualitative data) involves the ability to develop themes and categories to reduce the volume of information to fit in a specific context (Mamokhere et al., 2022). Therefore, content analysis was selected for the examination of qualitative data in the literature review. Content analysis shares considerable similarities with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as employed by Mamokhere et al. (2022) in their article titled “The contemporary challenges municipalities face in effectively implementing municipal service partnerships.” In the context of this chapter’s application, content analysis facilitated the identification of themes and the comprehensive portrayal of these themes, aligning with the study’s objectives. The analysis extensively investigated matters of leadership and political power within public administration.

Results and Discussion

South Africa continues to witness massive corruption and maladministration in the public sector because of the factions of leadership and power. Due to this, there has been an economic downturn with a 34% unemployment rate, increased levels of poverty, and increased inequality. Government administration in South Africa endures pervasive corruption and the abuse of power by public servants. This

has led to unstable and poor governance and service delivery. This chapter overtly suggests that ethical leadership is not centred on acquiring status and displaying arrogance. Instead, it emphasises the importance of discipline, service, and a commitment to serving the people. On the contrary, power and politics are about arrogance, being self-centred, full of ego, and often associated with corruption. The battle of ethical leadership and power is far from over because of the different intentions of individuals who occupy public offices. As long as the governing party's cadre deployment policy dictates the selection and removal of individuals in public offices, the realisation of ethical leadership may continue to be an elusive aspiration.

Conclusion

Through the aforementioned analysis and a comprehensive discussion, it becomes evident that adhering to the fundamental principles of ethical leadership is imperative for ensuring stable government administration. However, political interference is capable of polluting and hindering good governance and administration. In recent years, the government has experienced weak and poor governance due to the ill-discipline of the officialdom, characterised by massive corruption. This has led to service delivery conundrums in most of the rural vicinities. Hence, the recent protests and uprisings around the country were to be expected. These protests are expected to increase if politics and power continue to be the order of the day in running public offices. The chapter concludes that, in the current political landscape and government, political power is gaining prominence at the expense of ethical leadership. Consequently, the recommendations are made to instill the fundamental principles of ethical leadership within the officialdom and foster encouragement in government offices, aiming to enhance good governance and service delivery.

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Chapter 2

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