

Administrative leadership in developing countries

Why is administrative leadership critical for developing countries? The absence of strong and stable institutions makes these countries dependent on the bureaucracy for ensuring continuity of public services, along with a number of essential functions expected of governments. Diverse and complex problems and issues in the contemporary world require capable leadership, particularly in public sector organisations. While most decisions by governments are made with political and economic consequences in mind, their implementation are contingent on administrative organisations that are able to interact, cooperate, and collaborate with other agencies and stakeholders to achieve the objectives of governments. These can only be achieved with effective administrative leadership to guide and elicit desirable action and behaviour from members of the organisation. The importance of leadership in any organisation, and most importantly in the public sector, dwells on the notion that it profoundly influences employee behaviour and consequently, organisational productivity (Lundstedt, 1965).

Studies have sought to explain and analyse the trends and challenges of leadership in the public sector (Bennis, 2007; Bouckaert, 2010; Brookes, 2014; Christensen, 2001; Maddock, 2012; Raffel *et al.*, 2009; Van Wart, 2013; Vogel and Masal, 2015). Scholars have focussed on the role of administrative leadership in meeting the needs of society. At the same time, international organisations continue to advocate for effective leadership at all levels if poverty and other developmental problems are to be resolved. Based on the tradition and features of developing countries, it can be argued that administrative leadership in developing countries is of immense importance.

The resurgence of interest in leadership can be attributed to the changing nature of the public sector and the need to adapt to complex and dynamic challenges. These challenges are described as wicked problems as they defy solutions. In developing countries, wicked problems are reflected in the extent of poverty, corruption, and environmental degradation, although there are many more areas susceptible to this tendency. There is a critical need to address such problems, and this highlights the need to bring all segments of the society together in a collaborative manner to identify solutions reflecting diverse perspectives. A collaborative approach helps deal with wicked problems and assists public organisations in building bureaucratic capacity, if they are to effectively bring all sections of the society together. At the same time, the organisations need to provide leadership in the development and implementation of policies for resolving the problems. In order to build capacity, leaders are expected to identify and select capable administrators and develop strategies that make experimentation and risk-taking key components of an employee's job performance (Vogel, 2017) in the search for appropriate policies and solutions to societal problems. Leadership can meet the capability challenge by fostering a collaborative environment, as well as effective administrative and organisational culture, where employees are respected, valued, and managed to achieve organisational objectives.

The recognition of the importance of administrative leadership is obvious but most studies have, so far, focussed on the developed world, with little, if any, analyses of developing countries (see Jacobsen and Andersen, 2016; Ricard *et al.*, 2016). In order to address the gap in the literature, this issue focusses on the studies on administrative leadership in developing societies and strategies adopted by them in meeting the challenges confronting them.

The analyses presented in the articles represent different reflections about leadership in the public sector, the changing roles of leaders in national development, shaping public



policies and the delivery of public services, and future directions of research on the nature and quality of leadership. At the same time, they attempt to offer new ideas, creative solutions, and innovative commentary that point towards new directions in the study of administrative leadership based on the empirical richness of the various cases. The papers in this issue report and analyse leadership ideas and practices in different parts of the developing world. The four papers included in this issue focus on a different dimension of leadership. In spite of this, the continuous emphasis on the importance of leadership is a theme that runs through all of them. In the discussion of leadership, the authors identify what needs to be done to enhance the effectiveness of public sector organisations so as to be able to create value for citizens and to be able to address wicked problems.

Collins Oboh offers a critical examination of the role of leadership in government budgeting, expenditure processes, and public funds management in Nigeria. In particular, he looks at the extent to which the government has used the budgetary mechanism to manage the nation's economy and argue that the budget reflects a state of poor accountability and transparency in public funds management. This point is emphasised in view of the fact that the level of economic development in Nigeria is not commensurate with the size of government expenditure. The author argues that the problem can be traced to weaknesses in leadership and underlines the need for transparency in their dealings with the public, especially on the issues of accountability and fund management. He highlights the limitations of the traditional budgetary approach and recommends restructuring the budgetary system in Nigeria. The paper offers valuable lessons for developing countries, as the quest for effective utilisation of the limited resources for national development continue.

Harish Jagannath views leadership at the local level as an important vehicle for national development. It is not surprising that the idea of decentralisation and the need to build effective administrative leadership at local-level institutions continue to be at the heart of development programs, and features high on the list of donors and international organisations. There have been considerable investments of resources for building and enhancing leadership and bureaucratic capacity at the local level. The paper elaborates the role of district collectors in India as administrative entrepreneurs, and notes that while bureaucratic leaders aspire to be transformational, they are usually constrained by the environment in which they operate, and in particular, the bureaucratic structures in which they work. As a result, these leaders tend to exhibit the characteristics of transactional leadership in their endeavour to meet the developmental needs of their communities. The paper raises the interesting issue of the relationship between administrative entrepreneurship and bureaucratic (administrative) leadership in government bureaucracies. Jagannath stresses the need for local bureaucratic leaders who are constrained by the environment and the existing bureaucratic structure to try and find a niche with the duality inherent in their position. It is important for the bureaucracy to allow them to be both administratively entrepreneurial and rigid, and learn the art of navigating the complex structures. The paper's value lies in the construction of an analytical typology for use as a diagnostic tool to assess leadership styles.

In examining the adaptive leadership style, Abdulfattah Yagli considers the impact of organisational change on transformational leadership in the United Arab Emirates. He uses the popular multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) to explore leadership in a traditional country where organisational change dominates the public sector. He argues that the response of managers to organisational change leads to an adaptive leadership style, i.e., a mixture of dynamic and rigid practices during the change processes in the organisation. It is noted that organisational change creates peculiar circumstances that make it imperative for managers to mix transformational and transactional practices in order to, not only survive, but also excel and concludes that adaptive leadership is driven by cultural and organisational necessities. Hence, it is necessary to understand the role of culture in

leadership in developing countries, and the search for a standard that will be applicable to all cases will not be helpful for enhancing the capacity of bureaucratic organisations. Yagli notes that some of the findings are consistent with previous studies, but the MLQ is not an adequate tool for capturing the impact of organisational change leadership and emphasises strong influence of cultural features and organisational needs in this aspect.

Hoda Sanatigar's paper on identifying the organisational agility and leadership dimensions uses the Delphi technique and factor analysis to examine public sector pension funds in Iran. It identifies the aspect of leadership agility to lead the kind of organisation that can succeed in transforming the public sector. Over the years, there have been debates and discussions to move organisations away from the bureaucratic structure (see Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), to make way for new forms of organisations that can adapt to a rapidly changing environment. This agile organisation should have the ability to perform activities and respond to challenges in the quickest possible time and be flexible to adapt to detect changes and respond appropriately. They will take advantage of opportunities, and demonstrate competence and the ability to achieve the goals and objectives of the organisation. Sanatigar notes that such agility enhances organisational success in the competitive environment faced by public sector organisations. The paper attempts to provide a method for the analysis, measurement, and development of organisational agility construct in public service organisations in Iran. However, the paper identifies leadership as a key element in achieving agility, and moves on to identify the factors that can make organisations agile so that leaders are able to use it to the advantage of the government and society.

The papers review different aspects of the existing literature in leadership studies and demonstrate the limitations of the western literature in applying them to the developing world. They help to open up relevant debates to analyse leadership issues from the perspectives of developing countries and focus on their uniqueness with empirical analysis. The papers in this special issue draw attention to the need for enhancing leadership and contribute to the debate on the demands on leadership for developing countries to adequately address developmental issues.

Contributing authors discuss and explore cases for understanding leadership in developing countries, especially their role in resolving obdurate problems. They are also expected to generate a debate on theories that can be used to examine this phenomenon. They are expected to initiate a process for filling a prominent gap in the literature on leadership in general and administrative leadership in developing countries in particular. Second, the cases illustrate the situation on the ground and progress achieved in developing countries, and help chart courses for meeting the developmental needs of these countries. Third, the papers will contribute to the understanding of leadership by focussing on the experience of developing countries and help explain their uniqueness that is not captured by theories based on the western world that have been unable to explain leadership in developing countries (Iwowo, 2015).

Frank Ohemeng

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada, and

Ahmed Shafiquel Huque

McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada

References

- Bennis, W. (2007), "The challenges of leadership in the modern world", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 62 No. 1, pp. 2-5.
- Bouckaert, G. (2010), "New public leadership for public service reform", in Ingraham, P.W., Pierre, J. and Peters, G.B. (Eds), *Comparative Administrative Change and Reform: Lessons Learned*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal.

-
- Brookes, S. (2014), "Is selfless leadership an impossible ideal for public leaders?", *The International Journal of Leadership in Public Services*, Vol. 1 No. 4, pp. 216-220.
- Christensen, T. (2001), "Administrative reform: changing leadership roles?", *Governance*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 457-480.
- Iwowo, V. (2015), "Leadership in Africa: rethinking development", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 408-429.
- Jacobsen, C.B. and Andersen, L.B. (2016), "Leading public service organizations: how to obtain high employee self-efficacy and organizational performance", *Public Organization Review*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 252-273.
- Lundstedt, S. (1965), "Administrative leadership and use of social power", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 156-160.
- Maddock, S. (2012), "Public leadership: motivated by values not bonuses", *The International Journal of Leadership in Public Services*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 112-120.
- Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. (1992), *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Raffel, J.A., Leisink, P. and Middlebrooks, A.E. (Eds) (2009), *Public Sector Leadership: International Challenges and Perspectives*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Van Wart, M. (2013), "Public-sector leadership theory: a reassessment after 10 years", *Public Administration*, Vol. 91, pp. 521-543.
- Vogel, D.J. (2017), "Haas research on leadership: an introduction", *California Management Review*, Vol. 60 No. 1, pp. 5-7.
- Vogel, R. and Masal, D. (2015), "Public leadership: a review of the literature and framework for future research", *Public Management Review*, Vol. 17 No. 8, pp. 1165-1189.

Further reading

- Ricard, L.M., Klijn, E.H., Lewis, J.M. and Ysa, T. (2017), "Assessing public leadership styles for innovation: a comparison of Copenhagen, Rotterdam and Barcelona", *Public Management Review*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 134-156.