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Agency Governance for African Development:
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in the Public Service**

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Performance Management and Agency Governance for African Development: The Search for Common Cause on Excellence in the Public Service

M. J. Balogun *

Abstract

Performance management is based on the premise that the clarification of corporate objectives, the institution of measures in pursuit of the objectives, and the empowerment of managers are all it takes to energize organizations and orient them towards incremental productivity, cost reduction and “customer” satisfaction. However, regardless of the attention given to performance management in formal bureaucratic and in latter-day matrix organization structures, diversity in the stakeholders’ world-view constitutes a major stumbling block to productivity gains. With particular reference to the African public service, whatever new performance management initiatives are contemplated should not only capitalize on the continent’s diversity but also deflect the threats that this diversity poses to organizational momentum and to the attainment of the goals of good governance and development. This requires revisiting the assumptions underlying New Public Management, and focusing on the impact of agency governance on conflict and on performance.

Introduction

The essence of performance management lies in its professed ability to focus the attention of organization members on a common objective and galvanize them towards the attainment of this objective. This presupposes that the internal and the external stakeholders, at the minimum, share a vision of the greatest good that demands the energies and commitment of all. It is this assumption of harmony of vision that underpins the New Public Management’s faith in leadership and the school’s favourable inclination towards managerial “empowerment”.

This romantic view of performance management needs to be critically examined for at least three reasons. First, the term, performance

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management, is yet to be precisely defined, and there is no consensus on an appropriate strategy for initiating and sustaining it. Second, the high degree of heterogeneity prevailing in Africa frequently militates against the unity of purpose required to make performance management programmes work in the public service. Third, the unpredictable nature of human character calls into question an agency governance strategy that trusts leadership with near absolute power.

In assessing the prospects for the successful inauguration of performance management initiatives in the African public service, this paper begins by raising a number of conceptual issues. The second section examines the challenges facing the African continent and identifies areas in which performance management – howsoever defined – could prove most beneficial to the African public service. The impact of Africa’s diversity on performance management is another subject discussed in the section. The third section recalls past efforts at ‘turbo-charging’ the African public service, and wonders whether these efforts qualified as “performance management” or succeeded in repositioning the service for the governance and development challenges highlighted in the previous section. The fourth and the concluding sections look into the future and suggest measures aimed at plugging performance deficits in the African public service while at the same time reckoning with the miscellaneous obstacles.

I. Agency Governance and Performance Improvement: the model and the context

In pursuit of the goal of performance improvement, the New Public Management (NPM) not only insists on the adoption of private sector practices in public institutions, but also advocates the “empowerment” of managers. By “empowerment” is meant vesting the public manager with the power and authority s/he needs to serve the citizen, and to strengthen the links between government and its diverse clientele in civil society (CAPAM, 1994). Underlying the empowerment premise is the assumption that the power or authority that is “delegated” to the average manager would not only be shared with the subordinates, but would also be exercised for public good (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Hope, 2001; Armacost, 2000).

The argument advanced in this paper is that, at least in the African context, the performance improvement claim of NPM rests on a tenuous foundation. When examined against the context within which public institutions operate in Africa, NPM proves thoroughly inadequate. Like the previous management fads, it fails to come to grips with the mammoth challenge – the challenge of social transformation – facing the public service. Worse still, by sneaking in hierarchy through the backdoor, NPM reinforces oligarchic control in public agencies, thereby frustrating public choice and defeating the purpose of performance improvement. The model advocated in this paper is one focusing on agency governance. As presented in the paper, agency governance rests on four pillars, i.e., the role of civil society in holding public agencies to account, the pattern in the exercise of political power, the professional and ethical basis of managerial authority, and the credibility of the prevailing rules regime. Before discussing the strengths of the model, it is essential that the key terms be defined.

Performance management and productivity gains: exploring the links

Performance management cannot escape the consequences of the identity crisis confronting the field of which it is a part - that is the field loosely referred to as “administration” or “management”. Whereas engineers, accountants, statisticians, surgeons, and astronomers have little difficulty delineating the boundaries of their disciplines, administration (alias management) has been struggling since the dawn of history to define itself. While ‘to administer’ is sometimes equated with to ‘govern’, ‘rule’, ‘control’, or ‘direct’, it should not come as a surprise if the same term surfaces in another time and place as ‘operate’, ‘make something/someone work’, ‘relate means to ends’, ‘dispense’ (drugs) or ‘resort to trickery and deceitful contrivance’.

A definition that promises to get us quickly out of the quagmire and move us close to ‘performance management’ is that provided by John Vieg. According to him (Vieg, 1946), administration is “the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources aimed at making those things happen which we want to happen and simultaneously preventing the developments that fail to square with our intentions”. This would appear to approximate the goal and essence of performance

management. As a concept, performance management takes 'management' to a higher plane by anticipating everything that could possibly go wrong with corporate strategies, decision rules, institutions, processes, and people. Performance management is not a mere routine activity, but a dynamic, momentum-gear, trouble-shooting, and impact-oriented process. In essence, therefore, performance management has to do with focusing the attention of an organisation and its constituent parts on the attainment of specified objectives (corporate strategy) and on the application of constantly changing processes, techniques and technologies (tactics).

Where an organization is faced with competing demands and shrinking resources, productivity is most likely to be what it "wants to see happen". In any case, the dominant concern of performance management in recent years is productivity improvement, or "the production of more and/or better services for each tax dollar and staff hour invested" (Halachmi and Holzer, 1986; and Greiner, 1986). Hence, the attention accorded to factors such as top management support (or what is often termed 'political will' and commitment), application of performance standards and indicators, installation of a performance measurement system, supervision and motivation of staff, staff training, performance budgeting and accounting, and community involvement. As Lee observes (Lee 2000: 423), productivity management is an open system made up of three domains, i.e., the environmental domain (public/private partnership, marketing of public service delivery), the organizational domain (structural changes, labour-management relations, information and communications technology), and the individual domain (performance incentives, professionalism, and staff development and training).

If focusing on "what we want to see happen" is the defining attribute of performance management, we are still far from reaching a consensus on the concept's real meaning. For one thing, the "we" in an organization stands for different entities and individuals whose world-views are rarely in harmony. First, where the stress of performance management is on the measurement of achievements, the monitors will be hard put to find an indicator that is valid for all times and places. What passes for excellent performance one day may in fact belong to the mediocre category at a latter date when a new, and more rigorous performance

standard is applied. However, managers, being adept at what van Thiel and Leeuw term "positive learning" (van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002; 268-9), will always stick to the old, easily achievable standard so as to look good each time their performance is evaluated. Where managers submit themselves to a new standard, they are not unknown to resort to another trick. Specifically, knowing that their performance is under observation and their jobs are on the line, they are wont to shift resources to 'high profile' projects and activities – those that are of interest to performance auditors. The name given to this trick is negative learning (van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002:268-9).

Positive and negative learning are measures of differences in managerial perspectives. Both, at best, reflect the managers' conflicting notions of their role, and at worst, stand for cynical interpretations of "management" and "performance". Inconsistent as they both are with the real essence of performance management, the managers' positive and negative learning inclinations have a less devastating impact on performance and productivity than another type of conflict in perspective. This is the diversity triggered by the multiple and competing identities in the work place. In the classical scientific management literature, the conflict that receives a lot of attention is that between 'management' and the workers. In today's world of work, diversity or discord knows no hierarchical or socio-economic boundaries. It intervenes between or among races, ethnic nationalities, regions, cultures, religious beliefs, and, increasingly, sexes.

The individuals and the groups operating in, or benefiting from the services rendered by, organizations bring to the three (environmental, organizational and individual) domains mentioned earlier prejudices, fears, insecurities and other attitudes that are capable of taking performance in unintended directions. As far as performance and its management is concerned, it is not the difference in the range of probable 'identities' an individual brings to the work place that matters, but the *interpretation* given to, and the *values* placed on, the primordial loyalties vis-à-vis identification with formal organisations. Equally important is the 'price' the individual is prepared to pay to retain the cherished identities (Balogun, 2001, and 2002).

Diversity triggers conflict and tension, both of which may, in fact, help rather than hinder the cause of performance management. As noted by Lewin (1935) human beings do not live in a tensionless world. In fact, a minimum degree of tension is what human beings need to excel in their chosen fields and to find creative solutions to contemporary problems. At times, however, conflict becomes so mismanaged that the tension accompanying it ceases to be edifying and, instead, generates a lot of animus between or among individuals and groups. Rather than promote healthy competition, conflicts mismanaged divert the attention of actors away from corporate objectives and productivity, engender hate and distrust, and expose productive forces in the organization to “friendly fires”. Evasion of responsibility, desertion of posts, offer and/or acceptance of bribes – these and other performance-inhibiting attitudes - are all symptoms of mismanaged conflict, and they pose momentous agency governance challenges.

Successful management of performance hinges on the extent to which the formulators and the implementers of corporate strategies both *in word and in deed* align these strategies with the needs and aspirations of all the stakeholders. Specifically, whether or not conflict (and, in the final analysis, performance) will be properly managed is a function of the prevailing agency governance ethos. To the extent that the internal governance culture promotes, among all the stakeholders, a sense of shared values to that would the conflicting forces be harnessed for performance and productivity. This requires, at the very least, focusing on behaviour at four levels – i.e., the civil society, the political choice and empowerment, the formal and discretionary authority, and the rules interpretation and application levels.

Civil society and agency governance

Focusing narrowly on internal “management” processes to the exclusion of the momentum challenges taking place in the external environment will not take us very far – if the goal is to enhance the capacity of the public service to respond to growing and insistent demands from civil society. The role of civil society has undoubtedly received a lot attention in recent years. The DPMF has organised a series of workshops focusing on the role of non-state actors in extending the democratic space and promoting sound governance practices and development (Bujra and

Adejumobi, 2002; Bujra and Buthelezi, 2002). To-date, however, this *democratisation* role has not extended to the sphere of the management – nay, the governance – of public institutions. It is true that the flowering of civil society has compelled many a government agency to review its internal management mechanisms with a view to meeting “customer demands” (Balogun, 2001a; Kyarimpa, 1996). However, until the interface between civil society participation and agency governance is strengthened, the performance of the agencies would continue to fall below public expectations.

Politics, Power, and Performance Management

The political class has a major role to play in articulating as well as aggregating civil society “demands” and in fulfilling public expectations. This underscores the importance attached to the quest for the people’s mandate or for political power. Power, after all, is a factor that is frequently equated with the ability to choose from a range of goals. It is a weapon that its custodian deploys to make those things happen which s/he wants to see happen regardless of what the powerless may feel on the subject. In much the same way as energy propels objects into action and sustains momentum in the physical world, power in the political arena enables those entrusted with it to translate their dreams into concrete achievements. It enables taxes to be collected, dams and bridges to be constructed, factories and residential units to be connected to the national grid, law and order to be maintained, and national airlines to fly to distant destinations laden with passengers and cargo.

If this is all there is to power – making *good* things happen – many of those struggling to acquire it would be glad to leave it in other hands. However, power serves objectives other than the noble ones. With it, dissidents is kept in preventive detention, the mint is placed on overtime saturating the economy with valueless currencies, weapons of mass destruction are produced, favours are sold or purchased under the counter, and grand corruption is permitted to thrive along with its petty associate. It is this potential of power to make for the good as well as the bad that turns the struggle for it into a do-or-die affair for politicians in different parts of the world, sub-Saharan Africa included. The powerless is unlikely to submit meekly to the abuse and the humiliation that come with his/her underclass status, and will, over time, begin to give serious

thought to power transfer options. The fierce and intense competition for power has been known to degenerate into bloody confrontations, and into full-scale civil or military conflict – particularly, in societies where the “rules of engagement” are blurred.

Where political differences assume an ethnic, racial, regional, or religious character, the key actors are likely to be more interested in bringing the crown to the “homeland” than in deploying power to promote qualitative change in governance, stem economic decline, alleviate poverty, improve public service performance, or secure productivity gains. Indeed, instead of seeking common cause on national development, ethnic advocacy groups may not be averse to throwing spanners in the opponents’ works. Ake (1994) puts all this down to “political anxiety”, i.e., the fear of the consequences of power gravitating towards, and remaining with, “outsiders” and “enemies”. Elsewhere, the author also wonders whether the clamour for “power shift” or “rotational presidency” in Nigeria would not lead to the “rotation” of clientelism and corruption (Balogun, 1997).

If the aim is to improve the lot of the ordinary citizen, politics would have to show increasing interest in *policy* – specifically, in the cost, benefits, and long-term developmental implications, of intended courses of action. This is where it (politics) sorely needs analytic inputs and research support – resources that are only available in institutions of higher learning, within think-tanks, and in the career civil service. However, because of the unstructured nature of political competitions, serious intellectuals are more likely to stick to what they know best than show the slightest interest in “mundane” matters like politics. For their own part, career civil servants generally find the political terrain too rough and too hazardous, and would in all probability perish the thought of “dirtying” their hands working with political cadres.

If career officials do not think highly of partisan politics, the feeling among the politicians tends to be mutual. The latter cannot understand how anyone could be trusted with power (or even authority) who has taken no risk seeking grass root support, and who, for that very reason, is out of touch with the “reality” on the ground (Soneye and Balogun, 1981, Wamalwa, 1986:66-68). From the point of view of performance management, the two sides need each other more than they realize.

Authority, Institutional Governance and Performance Improvement

Whereas power is most often associated with the ‘lawless’ world of politics, authority would, at least, on the surface, appear to be meant for the cultured and the rule-abiding public service environment. Legal-rational authority, after all, prides itself on the interposition of order in the place of chaos, and of reason where whims, caprices, and emotions might have once reigned unchallenged. While “power” may be conscripted into the service of the good or the bad – depending on the prevailing circumstances – authority is, at least, in theory, meant to serve only worthy causes. It is this abiding faith in the “rationality” of formal bureaucratic authority that accounts for the double-talk and the conceptual muddle now associated with NPM. On the one hand, adherents of the school view management as a rational process (making happen what policy says should happen). On the other, NPM confuses, or lumps, this process with the exercise of raw political power (that is, with the “mandate” that electors confer on their accredited “representatives” to govern and to determine policy choices). Hope (2001), for instance, sees no difference between the “delegation” of formal authority to career officials and the “devolution” of (political) power to elected bodies. According to him (Hope 2001:125),

“Devolution is the granting of decision-making powers to lower (elected) authorities or (professional) managers and allowing them to take *full responsibility without reference back to the authorizing government*...Devolution is the strongest form of decentralization. Its essence is discretionary authority ...”

There are legitimate reasons for trusting the professional manager with authority and power simultaneously. If the politician does not care about performance improvement, productivity is supposed to be the *raison d’etre* of the manager’s interventions within the “legal-rational” bureaucracy. In place of the shocks, surprises and upsets encountered in the political arena established rules and procedures intervene to render behaviour predictable in the manager’s world. The formal authority of the career bureaucracy thus makes those things happen which every *reasonable* and rules-guided person would like to see happen – notwithstanding the interference of a major “stumbling block”, politics.

In theory, therefore, career managers not only find “politics” distasteful but also operate in a setting that frowns on capricious and arbitrary behaviour. In practice, the line separating “politics” from administration or management is so fine to be invisible (Lungu, 1998:3; and Mainzer, 1973). While their oath of office forbids them to participate in *partisan* politics or to canvass for votes, career managers participate in another – the bureaucratic - kind of politics, with the passion, energy, and belligerence normally associated with the real thing. Within their own space and in their own time, civil servants can be as political as, if not more so than, the politicians that they barely tolerate and seek so much to keep at a distance (Ciroma, 1981).

The *political* inclination of career managers takes different forms. First, career officials are not beyond passing on to their political masters a few rule-bending tricks, if only to gain the latter’s confidence. Secondly, the “authority” that the career officials exercise in their own right – but which springs from the power or “mandate” of the government of the day – offers the career officials a wide “political” latitude. The authority (say, that of a police commissioner, a customs officer, factory and trade premises inspector, personnel officer, or executive assistant to the boss), is, after all, not only of the formal and statutorily defined type, but can also take the *discretionary* form. Executive or administrative discretion may be all that is needed to move staff from one office to another, to promote (presumably loyal and dedicated) staff, to award contracts to one firm rather than another, to demolish “illegal” structures, and to apprehend and detain a suspect. Indeed, as far as the developing countries of Africa are concerned, the average senior civil servant was long “empowered” before NPM came up with the idea.

Like power, the formal and the discretionary authority exercised by the public manager may serve good or evil ends. It is under the cover of discretionary darkness that the official most frequently unleashes his/her frustrations on real and imaginary enemies, and bestows favours on clients and trusted lieutenants. Naturally, those in the official’s favour would always band together to retain their privileges, and the “outsiders” will gravitate towards “opposition” or adversarial roles. How performance could, under such an environment – one characterised by mutual suspicion and distrust - be “managed” to achieve enhanced productivity, and guarantee “customer” satisfaction, is any one’s guess.

The rules regime

Depending on the degree of consistency and transparency with which they are applied, the rules may serve as an arbiter in conflict situations. As a trust-engendering mechanism, the rules enable all parties to a compact to fulfil their obligations confident that no party would exit without paying a price (Rowthorn, 1999:661-691).

It may be argued that by “tying the hands” of officials, the rules only make the organization lose the momentum needed to manage performance and to record productivity increases. As argued by the NPM adherents, the manager knows what s/he wants, and the rules merely intervene to slow him down and to prevent him from taking precisely the action that is necessary to beat the competition. Where nothing gets done until the rules are consulted, so the argument goes, authority will reside, not in the producers of goods and services but in rules interpreters and enforcers – who are probably minor officials hitting back at hierarchy from below. These guardians of the rules will not be interested in performance or productivity, but in making internal and external “customers” to bow and cringe to have their problems solved. Rather than confine themselves to substantive legislation, the new *de facto* bosses will elevate every inconsequential procedure or work flow arrangement into “rules” so as to justify their own existence, inflate their importance, and expand their scope of influence – most often, beyond the statutory limits.

Some of NPM’s conclusions on the performance-inhibiting effects of rules are valid. As a matter of fact, unless decisive action is taken, the rules may offer precisely the excuse the indolent official needs to refrain from tackling a problem, or a pretext for arbitrary action. Officials looking for absolution from moral responsibility always hide behind hierarchy and “the rules” when implementing abhorrent decisions. It is this excessive deference to hierarchical rules that explains the decision of Zambia’s chief of intelligence to, on his own admission, act on a presidential order to divert state and external donor funds to the coffers of a leading political party. If this claim is subsequently confirmed, the intelligence chief’s blind obedience would have constituted serious interference with the electoral process – an act that is capable of

inhibiting Zambia's democratic advance -
(<http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/africa/01/30/zambia.graft.reut/index.html>).

Even then, to argue that the cause of performance management dictates total dismantling of the rules may be pushing the argument to extreme limits. To begin with, the assumption of an all-knowing manager will not stand close scrutiny. Modern organizations are too complex to be successfully run as personal fiefdoms. They require a whole range of knowledge, skills and aptitudes that are clearly beyond the reach of a single individual or a narrow circle of officials. Needless to add that a system whose fate hangs on personalities rather than on institutions and rules is bound to disintegrate on the exit of its "strong man" (Balogun, 2003). In any case, it is not unlikely that the authority given to a manager to override the rules may in fact be applied towards unwholesome ends. The Zambian case cited earlier is of "empowerment" gone out of control. To allow individuals the freedom to decide when to comply with the rules is to confer unlimited licence on buccaneers without a prior guarantee of successful or beneficial innovation (Balogun and Mutahaba, 1999). Besides, the conflict that a despotic, rules-defying exercise of power frequently triggers cannot be successfully contained no matter what performance miracle cures are tried.

Indeed, one challenge that NPM is yet to fully address is how to hold the empowered manager accountable – to the internal and external stakeholders, and to the rules (Kernaghan, 1992; Haque, 2000; Argyriades, 2002). Until the issue of accountability is fully and satisfactorily addressed, empowerment can only spark intra-agency conflict and turf wars, and divert attention from issues of concern to the public (Balogun, 2002a: 537).

Managing Performance and Conflict

The upshot of the preceding analysis is that performance management must go hand in hand with conflict anticipation and management. While focusing on pure managerial variables (i.e., the environmental, organizational and individual variables), particular attention should be given to the analysis of the impact of intra-agency politics and governance, and of the prevailing rules regime on conflict, and therefore,

on performance. Unfortunately, as indicated later, previous attempts at reforming the public service and making it performance-oriented have under-rated the significance of politics in the process. Instead of applying a holistic and organic approach to public service reform, governments have settled for partial and mechanistic solutions – solutions that are less than adequate to the challenges discussed in the next section.

II. The African Public Service and the Challenges of Governance and Development

Despite the risks attendant on performance management, it constitutes one single most important item on the public sector management reform agenda today. The momentous changes taking place in recent years in Africa and in other parts of the globe dictate the need to revitalize public service institutions and enhance their capacities to collaborate with civil society and the private sector on value-adding ventures. No matter under what label the revitalization process is launched, the accent will have to be on performance improvement and on the elimination of barriers to productivity.

The challenges facing the Africa region on the socio-economic and political fronts clearly point to the need for a sustained effort in the area of performance management. In subsequent paragraphs, attention will focus on the efforts made in recent years to reform *state* and *civil society* institutions. The conclusion emerging from the analysis of these efforts is that while much has been achieved to promote the cause of democracy and representative government, Africa cannot afford to relent on the democratisation efforts, or to ignore the socio-economic consequences of the change for the governance of public service institutions.

Governance reform: a balance sheet

Since the 1990s, a number of countries have implemented far-reaching governance reform programmes. The core elements of these programmes are:

- (a) the legalisation of multi-party competition in place of the erstwhile one-party or military rule (as a result, 42 out of 48 Sub-Saharan African countries organized multi-party elections since the early 1990s);
- (b) the gradual expansion of the political space to accommodate civil society participation in the governance and development process;
- (c) the apportionment of power among the three state institutions - i.e., the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary – and strengthening of checks and balances;
- (d) substantive devolution of power (and resources?) by the central government to provinces, districts, and local communities;
- (e) creation of an enabling environment for private sector participation in the economy and protection of individual property rights;
- (f) enhancement of the capacity of the judiciary to act independently of the executive, and to promote the rule of law;
- (g) enactment of anti-corruption laws, establishment of watch-dog bodies, and enforcement of ethical and accountability codes;
- (h) reactivation of the civil service's professional values, and inculcation of the ethos of responsiveness, transparency, and accountability in service-delivery agents.

Overall, therefore, a lot of progress has been recorded in efforts at reactivating the institutions that had earlier succumbed to decades of one-party rule and/or military dictatorship. In fact, it is safe to conclude that things are beginning to work again in Africa. A few years ago, only Botswana and Mauritius were frequently touted as success cases. Today,

an increasing number of African countries are leaving relics of bad governance behind and bracing themselves for the challenges of development and technological transformation.

However, the governance reform task is far from completed. While the conduct of elections is a plus for representative government, much more needs to be done to ensure that the emerging civic culture takes root. Besides, as efforts are made to sustain the on-going reform momentum and to consolidate the gains, due attention should be paid to diversity and its impact on peace and security.

It is gratifying to note that countries emerging from conflict (among them, Somalia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone) are taking the measures necessary to rebuild their economies, rehabilitate the damaged infrastructures, and reconcile the erstwhile warring parties. Developments in a few other countries need to be kept under observation to ensure that threats to peace and stability are contained. Above all, and as the subsequent paragraphs on the economy indicate, the capacity of the revitalised governance institutions to respond meaningfully to the growing clamour for “democracy dividends” is a topic that cannot be put off indefinitely. This entails according the governance (as different from the “management”) of public (and private) institutions greater attention than has been the case up to now.

Turning the economy around: a major priority

The effectiveness of the on-going governance reform will be judged largely by its impact on the socio-economic deficits accumulated over the past decades. Mazrui’s observation captures the gravity of the situation. In his view (Mazrui, 1986),

“Things are not working in Africa. From Dakar to Dar-es-Salaam, from Marrakech to Maputo, institutions are decaying, structures are rusting away.”

While the decaying structures and institutions are gradually being rehabilitated, the challenge ahead remains daunting. In terms of total income, the 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are at about the same level as a single European economy, Belgium. The region’s median

income of approximately \$2 billion puts a whole country's output at par with that of a rich north American town of 60,000 inhabitants. Between 1960 and 1990, whatever was left of the minuscule output shrank by as much as 50 per cent (World Bank, 2000:7).

Despite the modest gains recorded between 1990 and 2000, SSA's economy has not bounced from stagnation to accelerated growth (See Table 1).

Table 1: Africa: Macroeconomic indicators, 1990-2000
(Except where indicated, amounts in millions of UA)

Indicators	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Real GDP							
Growth rate (%)	1.9	3.1	5.3	3.2	3.2	2.7	3.2
GDP per capita (US\$)	760	717	689	693	664	657	646
Inflation (%)	16.7	31.5	27.0	14.1	1.2	12.0	12.7
Fiscal balance (% of GDP)	-4.4	-3.5	-2.6	-2.7	-3.6	-3.4	-1.0
Gross Domestic Investment (% of GDP)	20.1	19.1	18.1	18.2	20.2	20.4	19.9
Gross National Savings (% GDP)	18.9	16.8	16.9	16.3	16.0	16.9	18.7
Real Export Growth (%)	17.4	5.7	4.7	3.6	0.0	0.6	7.3
Trade Balance (% GDP)	1.8	-0.8	0.9	0.4	-3.2	-1.9	2.0
Current Account (% of GDP)	-1.3	-2.9	-1.0	-1.2	-4.5	-3.4	-0.3
Terms of Trade	5.0	3.0	4.8	0.6	-11.3	8.6	15.7
Total External Debt (% GDP)	63.1	68.5	63.4	60.0	61.3	61.4	58.0
Debt Service (% of Exports)	13.7	24.6	22.9	19.2	20.4	19.3	16.2

Source: African Development Bank/African Development Fund, *Annual Report 2000*, Abidjan, March 2001, p. 97.

Africa's share of world trade accounts for less than 2 percent. The region has over the past forty years lost opportunities for industrial expansion, and now risks being totally excluded from the global information revolution. It is still highly dependent on the export of primary products. With a few exceptions, the SSA economies are "aid dependent and deeply indebted" (World Bank, 2000:9). By the end of 1997, foreign debt stood at \$315.2 billion and represented a burden of over 80 percent of GDP in net present value terms. Africa has the lowest savings rate in the world. Rapid population growth and environmental degradation have further depressed the savings rate.

The SSA economy's free fall has brought in its wake untold human suffering and triggered a large-scale social crisis. While the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) provides a fair measure of human welfare across countries, one should, for reasons stated elsewhere, be wary of reading too much into it (Balogun, 2002a). Still, and in the absence of a more reliable cross-cultural comparison of human welfare, the scores provide a rough indication of the gravity of Africa's social situation. Poverty, for instance, appears to be the region's lot – after more than four decades of independence and the implementation of countless development plans and projects. More than 40 percent of the continent's 600 million people live below the internationally recognised poverty line of \$1 a day, with incomes averaging just \$0.65 a day in purchasing power parity terms. The number of poor people has risen rapidly, causing Africa's share of the world's absolute poor to jump from 25 to 30 percent in the 1990s. In the 25 years between 1975 and 1999, 22 countries have suffered setbacks in the human development index. Of this number, 13 (i.e., 59 per cent) are in Africa (See Table 2).

Table 2: Countries suffering setbacks in the human development index, 1999

HDI lower than in 1975	HDI lower than in 1980	HDI lower than in 1985	HDI lower than in 1990	HDI lower than in 1995
Zambia* Nigeria*	Romania Russian Fed. Zimbabwe*	Botswana* Bulgaria Burundi* Congo* Latvia Lesotho*	Belarus Cameroon* Kenya* Lithuania Moldova Rep. of South Africa* Swaziland* Ukraine	Malawi* Namibia*

NB: * = Sub-Saharan African countries

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report 2001 (Making New Technologies Work for Human Development)*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 10 (and author's own calculations).

In the past 30 years, all the world's regions (with the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) have made progress in "human development" (measured in terms of access to material resources). South Asia and SSA lag far behind other regions "with human and income poverty still high" (UNDP, 2001:10). The adult literacy rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is 60 percent, well below the developing country average of 73 percent. Life expectancy at birth in SSA is pegged at 48.8 years, compared to over 60 in all other regions. The share of people living on less than \$1 a day is as high as 46 percent in SSA, compared with a mere 15 percent in East Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America. Access to electric power supply, internal telephone and external telecommunications services, potable water, and basic sanitation remains highly restricted.

At a time when the health sector has not been adequately funded, the Africa region is confronted with the AIDS pandemic. Of the approximately 36 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide at

the end of 2000, 95 percent were in developing countries, and 70 percent in SSA. In six countries – Botswana, Burundi, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia and Zimbabwe – HIV/AIDS accounted for significant drops (up to 7 years) in life expectancy (UNDP, 2001:13).

With widespread poverty have come disparities in income distribution. In 16 of the 22 SSA countries with data for the 1990s, the poorest 10 percent of the population had less than 10 percent of the income of the richest 10 percent, and in 9, less than 5 percent. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to leave poverty behind and move on to affluence. Let us take for instance South Africa. Up to 63 percent of households in poverty in the country in 1993 were still there five years later (i.e., 1998), while 60 percent of households in the highest income category in 1993 were still there in 1998, indicating limited income mobility (UNDP, 2001:18). The majority of households in other African countries have given up hope of moving out of poverty having been trapped there for generations.

A “development” that is threatening the social fabric of SSA countries is unemployment. With the rate of unemployment standing at between 30 and 55 percent, and within the global environment of “downsizing”, the region cannot escape the pathologies frequently associated with this socio-economic malaise – high divorce rates, high suicide rates, and high incidence of alcoholism (Stiglitz, 2001). The increasing crime wave in many SSA countries is itself a symptom of a deeper malaise, i.e., loss of hope on the part of many able-bodied men and women with plenty of time on their hands but without the slightest clue as to what to do with it. Still, if the formal or informal sector of the economy appears too saturated with skills, school graduates are not unwilling to take their skills elsewhere – mostly to under-world “recruiting agencies”. Among the potential “recruiters” are masterminds of ethnic and religious riots, drug barons, leaders of armed robbery gangs, con-artists and go-betweens in bureaucratic scams. Even in countries not at war, crime and violence can be a serious drain on the economy. In South Africa, the cost of both (crime and violence) equals an estimated 6 per cent of GDP. In other countries, crime and violence stand as clear obstacles to domestic and foreign investment.

Economic depression and social distress have stirred pent-up grievances and threatened peace and stability in a number of countries. In the first quarter of 1996, 50 percent of SSA countries enjoyed stable political conditions and good governance, while the remaining 50 percent were embroiled in prolonged political crises or armed conflict. By the end of 1998, the situation had taken a turn for the worse, with only 39 percent (i.e., 19 countries) enjoying stable political conditions, 23 percent (11 countries) facing political crises and turbulence, and 38 percent (18 countries) engaging in armed conflict (Adedeji, 2000:3). Armed conflict has impacted negatively on human capital development in different parts of the continent, claiming over 2 million lives between 1992 and 1997. Africa's refugee population is currently estimated at more than 12 million people – putting it at well over 40 percent of the world total. The continent further holds the dubious record of recruiting a disproportionately high number of child-soldiers – children who have been abducted by military gangs, and under the influence of drugs and *voodoo*, assigned direct combat roles or posted as sentries and spies. The child-soldiers are not only exposed to unspeakable traumas, but also deprived of opportunities to grow under normal conditions.

We have so far focused on the challenges facing the African public service. As noted in the next section, the reform strategies adopted in the past were far from being equal to the challenges.

III. Performance Management and the Development Challenge: the Search for Excellence, Impact and Results

Ever since the 1960s when many African countries attained independence, the preoccupation of governments has been the reform and revitalisation of the public service. While performance improvement was the underlying objectives of the various reform programmes undertaken from the earliest period to date, there is no concrete evidence that the efforts had any significant impact on performance or yielded substantive productivity gains.

At least three broad reform tendencies are discernible. The first is represented by the comprehensive review undertaken between the 60s and 70s of organisation structures, management practices, and incentive systems. The second wave of reform began in the late 1970s up to the

80s with the implementation of belt-tightening structural adjustment measures. The disappointing performance of structural adjustment reforms led in the 1990s to the adoption of a variety of “home-grown” institutional reform strategies.

First-generation reforms and performance management

Let us start with the administrative reform measures instituted in the early post-independence period. The declared objective of the first-generation reform was to equip the public service institutions inherited from the colonial administration for the post-independence challenges of nation building and economic modernisation. The real aim was to refocus the loyalty of the civil service and ensure that the service fully acknowledged the leadership of the elected representatives of the people. As noted by Wamalwa and Balogun (1992:29-30)

“For many years, (the) bureaucracy had served as the main instrument which the colonial authorities utilized to coerce and regulate the society, and in a few cases, to victimize the nationalist leaders. The new rulers were not about to forget their experience under colonial rule, and were highly unlikely to acquiesce in the continued hegemony of the civil service.”

To be sure, the various review bodies (the Ndegwa, the Udoji, the Mills-Odoi, and Wamalwa Commissions in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Swaziland respectively) were given broad mandates to examine the organisation and structure of, as well as management processes in, the entire public service. Job evaluation and grading, salaries and conditions of service, staff training, accounting and budgeting systems, plan formulation and implementation machinery – these and other issues were part of the terms of reference of the public service review commissions.

All the review commissions without exception found the civil service organisation wanting in terms of performance and productivity. The Ndegwa Commission for instance noted that the structure of the Kenya civil service constituted a serious barrier to efficient performance (Republic of Kenya, 1971). By failing to focus on objectives and results,

the structure encouraged the following negative tendencies, among others:

- (a) Defective utilization of human resources;
- (b) Little or no delegation of operational responsibilities;
- (c) Misunderstanding by some junior officers of their job purpose;
- (d) Poor communication and lack of coordination; and
- (e) Over-centralization of authority at the Ministry headquarters in Nairobi.

All these pathologies were discovered over thirty years ago - in 1971. The chances are that they are still very much around today.

Whether or not it was pure coincidence, the Udoji Commission too spotted weaknesses in the structure of the Nigerian civil service and in performance management practices. There is nothing to suggest that any substantial change has taken place since the Commission submitted its report in 1972.

According to the (Udoji) Review Commission, the ‘sterile’ debate on the relative importance of generalists and specialists

“illustrates the fact that the (civil) Service is at present organized to suit an outdated concept of class and educational qualifications, whereas it should be organized around the achievement of objectives.”

To focus the attention of all cadres on objectives and performance, the Commission proposed the introduction of a “unified” grading and salary system in place of the multiple grades. It further advocated the adoption of a “business model” of departmental organisation - meaning, the abolition of the post of ‘permanent secretary’ and its replacement with that of ‘director-general’ or ‘general manager’. Above all, the Commission recommended the installation of the following management programmes:

- Programme and Performance Budgeting (PPB);
- Management-by-Objectives;
- Management Survey;

- Organisation Development (OD);
- Matrix/Project Management; and
- Planned and Preventive Management (PPM).

It goes without saying that all the “latest and best” management practices proposed by Udoji in 1972 have since joined their ancestors in the graveyard of imported techniques. The administrative reform experience of Nigeria (and that of other African countries) suggests a clear correlation between, on the one hand, the restricted income mobility as well as the socio-economic imbalances reported in the previous section, and, on the other, public sector management’s aversion to change. It is difficult to see how the widening socio-economic crisis could be successfully contained by the public service whose only weapon is a philosophy of management frozen and belonging in the past. In general, the abortion of the Udoji Commission’s (and similar) reform plans could be attributed to the following factors, among others:

- (a) dependence of reform initiatives on external push and inspiration;
- (b) the disconnect between the reform programmes’ performance, productivity, and efficiency thrusts, on the one hand, and the indigenous leaders’ preoccupation with the capture and retention of power and authority, on the other;
- (c) failure to construct a performance and productivity management infrastructure to support and sustain reform efforts.

According to Adedeji, the decision by a number of African countries to institute administrative reform measures in the 1970s was not locally inspired but was very much a reflection of the “international demonstration effect” of the Fulton Report (Adedeji, 1972). Great Britain, having embarked on a comprehensive reform of its civil service, was in effect sending signals to its erstwhile colonies that the administrative systems that the latter inherited was not perfect, after all. While the African leaders might have felt an independent urge to shake up their public services and prepare these services for the post-colonial challenge, it was the wish to be seen as copying the “best practices”

from the former metropolitan powers that drove the administrative reform efforts of the 1970s.

If this assumption is valid, it should not come as a surprise that regardless of pronouncements to the contrary, the hearts and minds of the domestic sponsors of the first generation of civil service reform programmes were not in these programmes. At best, the commitment to change was half-hearted, at worst, non-existent. In any case, the reform programmes' dominant concerns (for organisational tidiness, mission objectives, performance and productivity) rarely squared with the conflict management, damage control, and survival preoccupations of the indigenous political and administrative leaders. Needless to add that until the mainstream political parties are sufficiently convinced about the importance of public service productivity to incorporate it in their manifestos and to engage one another in a serious debate on the subject, the effort invested on "turbo-charging" the civil service will not be fully rewarded.

The reform measures might still have a chance of succeeding if a performance infrastructure had been in place to sustain the momentum and provide a platform for latter-day incremental gains. An observer of the reform scene could not but marvel at the amount of attention given to issues of "restructuring" relative to the utter neglect of substantive issues of performance or productivity, target setting, ethics and accountability, "customer satisfaction" and the underlying *agency governance* issues. In theory, there is nothing wrong with "organisation engineering". The danger is reading too much into organigrams, procedure manuals and formal behavioural guidelines when politics, administrative discretion, and mischievous rules interpretation could, in their own ways, substantially change the nature and direction of organisational performance. As the Ndegwa Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1971) noted,

"Reshuffling of boxes and lines on charts, or transferring functions from one part of the organization to another can be mere exercises in paper work, and too often politics."

An auditor that sets out to evaluate the costs and benefits of politically oriented reforms is likely to be misled by glossy performance reports

into assuming that all is well with the “reformed” and “re-energised” organisation. The plain fact is that these reports serve no purpose except to put the best spin on an otherwise troubled and non-performing agency. By masking internal organisation deficiencies and playing up little achievements, the reports are no more than an elaborate exercise in public relations. The seekers after the truth would have to await the reports of *ad hoc* commissions of inquiry, and, in the case of institutions of higher learning, reports of visitation panels. It took the establishment of such bodies to expose the devastating internal governance crises that a combination of hierarchy, secrecy, and rules manipulation concealed in public agencies. Examples abound of organisations that were presented as models of excellence, but whose internal governance arrangements could not stand close scrutiny (Report of the Coker Commission, 1962; Report of the (Ife) Visitation Panel, 1974; Report of Durlong Committee on the NNDC, 1967; and Report of the Joda Committee on the Northern Nigeria Marketing Board, 1967, and reports of commissions of inquiry established by military regimes in the 1960s in Ghana and Sierra Leone).

SAP and public service performance

With the generally unsatisfactory returns on “investment” in the first-generation public service reform, the stage was set for the introduction of sterner measures. The structural adjustment programmes (SAP) undertaken in the 1960s and 70s at the instance of the World Bank and the IMF were strictly speaking – and at least, at the initial stages - not geared towards performance improvement in the civil service. As a matter of fact, the structural adjustment reforms would seem to have given up on the hope of the civil service taking, or supporting, any initiative in the direction of performance and productivity improvement. The civil service was, in the view of the SAP advocates, far more interested in expanding its empire than providing quality, cost-effective service. Rather than respond to citizen demands, the civil service was, according to SAP advocates, busy acquiring and wasting productive assets – assets that the private sector could have put to good use. This would not have been too much of a disaster if resources were inexhaustible and the economy could absorb the effects of extravagance. Unfortunately, the resources were in limited supply, and the economy needed every bit of these resources to get out of the quicksand into

which it had been dumped by productivity losses, profligacy, and executive indiscretion.

What choice did Africa have? None, argue the SAP advocates. The external and the internal accounts were in the red, external debt was growing and the debt overhang had dire consequences for short-term economic recovery and long-term growth. Therefore, bitter as the pill might have tasted, the continent had to swallow it. With immediate effect, the civil service had to be “downsized” – with many agencies being shut down, unproductive personnel being retrenched, and needless expenses being slashed. That was not all. State-owned enterprises were to be privatised, price subsidies and controls were to be eliminated, the “over-valued” currencies had to be devalued, and the money market had to be deregulated.

This (SAP era) was clearly not a good time to be a civil servant. For one thing, the take-home pay did not take the average civil servant home. Still, one who retained his/her job must count him/herself among the fortunate. An increasing number of government officials were either retrenched or sent into premature retirement. The private sector that could have provided alternative sources of employment was itself reeling from SAP-related ailments – notably, capacity under-utilisation, production cutbacks and plant shutdowns.

SAP did accomplish something - it shook the public service to its foundation. It, at the very least, moved the latter from the secure fortress of government monopoly to the competitive setting of the market (Wamalwa, 1989). Of course, it also had a devastating (some will argue, negative) impact on public service performance. First, by starving public agencies (particularly, those responsible for health, education, employment generation, law enforcement and justice administration) of resources, SAP made it difficult to maintain tolerable standards in the delivery of the services. Secondly, besides destroying the incentives and motivation structure, the cost-cutting aspects of SAP aggravated the ethics and accountability crisis confronting the African public service. It was at the height of SAP reform that the service witnessed increasing cases of moonlighting, inflation of contract prices, bribery and corruption (Nti, 1989; Mulokozi, *et al*, 1989). SAP has also been

accused of dismantling public service institutions without leaving behind any viable alternatives (Adedeji, 1992a).

Internally driven reform programmes

It was as a reaction to what was perceived as SAP's inadequacies that a number of African countries (e.g., Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia, and Zambia) embarked as from the 1990s on inward-oriented strategies of public service reform (Dodoo, 1996; Ntukamazina, 1996; Kyarimpa, 1996). The core elements of the third wave of reform are:

- resuscitation of the basic ethos of professionalism, loyalty, dedication, accountability, and transparency;
- restructuring and streamlining of central government agencies (to ensure that they are well-focused, customer-oriented, as well as cost- and time-conscious);
- review of personnel policy and practices (with emphasis on the introduction of new performance appraisal systems, review of personnel rules and regulations, application of ICT to personnel management functions, and in the case of Zambia and a few other countries, appointment of permanent secretaries on fixed-term contracts);
- rationalisation of pay and grading structures, and the introduction of performance- and productivity-related pay (including the conduct of organisation and efficiency reviews);
- labour redeployment and redundancy management;
- improvement of records and information management systems;
- launching of comprehensive decentralisation and devolution programmes.

In effect, therefore, signs are beginning to appear that performance management is becoming an issue of interest in the African public service. The question is whether the momentum can be sustained, and if the prevailing political atmosphere in some countries will help or hinder the cause of excellence in public sector management.

The Diversity Factor in Performance Management

Africa's diversity in particular poses a tremendous challenge to the unity of purpose required in embarking on, and sustaining, a comprehensive and impact-oriented programme of reform. As noted elsewhere, the problem is not with diversity as such, but with what the various actors make of it in the public realm (Balogun, 2002). Individuals with their own private agendas have capitalised on ethnic, religious, linguistic, cadre, and other differences (as well as differences in professional exposure) to promote intra-organisation tension.

Arbitrary behaviour on the part of political functionaries and senior managers has not helped matters; it has instead aggravated the tension brought on by diversity. Consequently, in place of the co-operative action frequently associated with getting things done, there is inter-personal and inter-group resistance and resentment. It does not matter whether it is termed "friendly fire" or "own goal", but the reality remains the same: public officials can do with a stronger will to work in harmony. Until the political and the administrative leadership group begins to apply a combination of power, authority and enacted rules to advance *common* causes, troops that should be out there fighting poverty, ignorance and disease, will probably refuse to advance - for fear of being fired on from the rear and/or on the flanks by one of their own. At any rate, meeting the challenges discussed in the next section requires that the past preoccupations with bureaucratic restructuring and "re-engineering" be supplemented (or even replaced) with critical review of internal governance processes and constraints.

IV. Governance and economic restructuring: performance management implications

A carefully articulated performance management strategy is indispensable to the success of efforts not only at sustaining the on-going democratisation process but also at turning the economy around. If the performance of the economy has remained lack-lustre, it is because the governance of the public (and private) institutions has not adapted rapidly enough to the on-going challenges. The power entrusted to political executives, the Higher Civil Service, the board and management of state-owned enterprises, as well as presidents and rectors of universities and the like would of necessity have to be tied to some specific obligations. While systematic empirical studies are needed to identify the corporate governance constraints facing the public service, the evidence available suggests that a combination of centralised decision making, ineffective management of diversity and dissent, and occasional manipulation of the rules has produced consequences other than those anticipated in official mission statements. Instances have been reported of diversion of budget funds to private accounts, skimming off of statutory allocations by heads of national, provincial and municipal authorities, abandonment of projects partly or wholly paid for, harassment of internal “dissidents”, discrimination against “opposition” constituencies, and, naturally, intra-organisation tension and conflict (CDD, 2003). Even academic institutions have not escaped the devastating effects of despotism, in-discipline, and arbitrary behaviour at the senior executive levels.

Still, whatever evidence there is in support of conclusions on agency governance failures belongs under the heading of the *anecdotal*, and needs to be interrogated by rigorous empirical research. In other words, we know very little about agency governance practices in the African public service. To plug this knowledge deficit, it is recommended that DPMF, AAPAM, CAFRAD and other interested institutions sponsor an inter-African research study aimed at directing the searchlight on the governance of public institutions and proposing ways of rectifying the main weaknesses. The study will be expected to go beyond the narrow confines of “administration” and “management” and set its sight on the wider field of agency governance. It will, at the very least, look into the issue of “democracy in the work place” against the background of the

momentous changes taking place in civil society at large. The study will also focus on the strategic planning framework currently in place, and on how the conduct of agency leaders as well as their subordinates impacts on the attainment of corporate objectives.

Investment in research on agency governance will not yield tangible dividends unless and until there is a consensus on the operational indicators. This paper has suggested at least four parameters within which the indicators could be developed. These are the parameters depicting patterns in, and consequences of:

- (a) influence exerted by civil society on agency governance;
- (b) deployment of political power;
- (c) exercise of formal and discretionary authority; and
- (d) rules interpretation and application.

Among the indicators suggested by the first parameter (civil society influence on agency governance) are:

- * civil society actors' knowledge of internal agency governance practices;
- * public perception of the competence, integrity, and effectiveness of agencies;
- * channels of civil society-agency communications;
- * leadership and organisational capacity of civic bodies.

The indicators that need to be formulated around the second parameter (deployment of political power) include:

- * Diversity and representativeness of the policy-making group (by gender, ethnicity, region, world-view, etc.);
- * Degree of importance accorded to data collection and analysis in the policy formation and implementation process;
- * Extent to which relations between the *political* and the *career* wings of policy is characterised by mutual trust and confidence;

- * Significance attached to policy inputs by external stakeholders (the private sector, professional associations, trade unions, civic bodies, etc.);
- * Respect for the rule of law at the policymaking level;
- * Placement of the policy-making group on the “rectitude scale” (i.e., the importance that members of the group to public integrity, ethical choices, and accountability to internal and external oversight bodies).

With regard to the exercise of formal and discretionary authority by career officials, attention would need to be given to the following indicators, among others:

- * Diversity and representativeness of the senior management group (by gender, ethnicity, region, world-view, etc);
- * Degree of importance accorded by career officials to data collection, archiving, retrieval, analysis and *application* to key management decisions (finance, personnel, procurement and inventory, work scheduling, work flow planning, transportation, routing, and warehousing, and productivity management etc.)
- * Responsiveness of decisions to internal and external “demands”;
- * Respect for the rule of law at the senior management level;
- * Observance of human and civic rights in the implementation of policies and programmes;
- * Placement of the senior management group on the “rectitude scale”;
- * Capacity for the management of change, diversity, and dissent; and
- * Implications of the prevailing “management culture” for morale, motivation, and *esprit de corps*;
- * Scope for rank and file participation in decisions, and for internal, within-agency democracy.

The indicators normally association with rules interpretation and application include:

- * Transparency;
- * Consistency;

- * Fairness and impartiality;
- * Cost-consciousness and effectiveness;
- * Responsiveness to “customer” demands for equity, equal treatment, courtesy, prompt delivery of services, etc.

V. Managing Performance for Good Governance and Development: a Summation and a Proposal

The way forward lies in promoting a broad measure of consensus on national strategic directions, and reconstituting public service agencies into ‘learning organisations’ - organisations with the capacities and the motivation to distil the strategic objectives into programmes of action and serve the “citizen-customer” (Gavin, 1993; Balogun and Mutahaba, 1999). Unlike the regular bureaucracy, a learning organization not only stores but, as a matter of practice, pulls together, and acts on, information on all the key aspects of performance (personnel, budgeting, accounts and finance, inventory systems, work flow arrangements, performance standards and data, etc.). The learning organisation also monitors developments responsible for performance variations over time, be these political, managerial, financial, technological, attitudinal, or ethical.

As a step towards reconfiguring the African public service into a learning organisation, it is essential that attention of researchers shift from “management” to internal agency *governance*. Useful as it is, the current predominant emphasis on management is too narrow to capture the dynamics of inter-personal and inter-group relations in public agencies.

The new focus on *agency governance* is not necessarily synonymous with “corporate governance”, although attributes of the latter are subsumed under the former. As conceived in this paper, agency governance goes beyond corporate governance. It entails, at the very least, focusing on the interplay between the learning organisation’s quest for excellence, and the spoiler’s role of internal bureaucratic “politics”. Research in agency governance will, on the basis of some pre-determined indicators, focus essentially on *how* public agencies are internally governed – instead of how they are “managed.” An agency

governance approach will tend to be organic, in contrast to the mechanistic focus of management.

At practical policy level, the adoption of the agency governance approach entails involving other stakeholders (besides the executive branch of government) in the inauguration and monitoring of a comprehensive performance management programme. Public administration training institutions should accordingly find ways of disseminating best practices in performance and productivity management, focusing on target groups such as the African legislative assemblies, political parties, civic bodies, private sector umbrella organisations, as well as professional associations with interest in public sector management and governance. Sensitisation workshops on performance management and agency governance would prove particularly useful in promoting a dialogue among the interested parties on the way forward.

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