

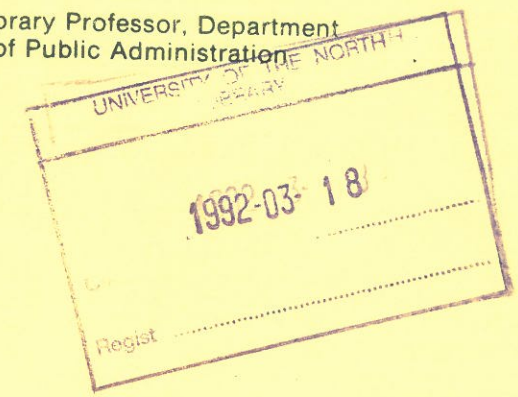
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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
REQUIREMENTS OF  
TODAY AND TOMORROW

Inaugural Lecture  
of  
Prof J J N Cloete

Honorary Professor, Department  
of Public Administration



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University of the North  
delivered on  
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Mr Chancellor, Mr Vice Chancellor, honourable guests, colleagues and students, I appreciate the privilege to address you on "Public Administration requirements of today and tomorrow"

### **1. Introduction**

In every state essential goods and services have to be provided by public institutions. The spectrum, quantities and qualities of these goods and services can change from time to time. The social, economic, political and physical conditions prevailing in a state determine the spectrum as well as the quantities and qualities of the goods and services. However, because states are dynamic entities it can be accepted that the spectrum, quantities and qualities of goods and services provided by public institutions in each state will always be in a state of flux. Therefore there will always be factors which complicate the provision of goods and services by public officials. Governments consisting of executive political office-bearers and officials who constitute the public service are nowadays faced by a number of obstacles which must be overcome to ensure that essential goods and services are rendered effectively and economically. However, it is possible to suggest steps which present-day public officials can take to meet existing and future challenges.

### **2. Present-day and future environment: Increasing demand for public goods and services, but limited resources**

The environment in which political office-bearers and public officials function has in recent years undergone sweeping and rapid change. In particular, scientific and technological innovations are propelling people rapidly from one stage of development to the next. The populations of all states are fast becoming better educated and better informed. Modern communication media such as the transistor radio, television, newspaper and a flood of publications are giving the people knowledge of other and better ways of life. The result is a better educated and better informed public which expects and demands a high quality of life and thus also a high standard in the goods and services provided by public institutions.

Although the people may make increasing demands and expectations about goods and services, a number of factors are making it difficult and sometimes even impossible to satisfy those demands and expectations. Firstly, the resources available to produce goods and services are limited: e.g. natural resources, materials, and skilled labour. Some of these resources cannot be increased: e.g. natural resources such as fertile soil, or regions with adequate rainfall for producing agricultural products needed for industrial purposes and food, fresh water, and minerals. It is possible that some resources could be created: e.g. skilled labour and fresh water. However, the creation of resources such as skilled labour and fresh water is usually a time-consuming and expensive matter.

Secondly, the expectations and demands for additional and better goods and services needed for an improved quality of life, compete with each other for the limited resources. For example, if more water is needed for agriculture it means that less water is available for industrial purposes. If more land is needed for roads and towns, there will be less land available for the production of agricultural products needed for industrial purposes and food.

Thirdly, the population growth increases the pressure on the limited natural and other resources. If there is a rapid population growth there will be slow growth or even no growth in the provision of the goods and services needed for a high quality of life. For example: a rapid population growth will make it impossible to train sufficient teachers and build sufficient class-rooms to provide proper education for rapidly increasing numbers of school children. Furthermore, higher expenditure on schools will reduce the resources available to meet other needs: e.g. health and transport needs.

Fourthly, if the rapidly increasing numbers of children cannot be educated and trained to enable them to find jobs, they will become liabilities instead of assets. Jobless people too often display undesirable doncuts: e.g. criminal conduct. The State has to make provision for the unemployed and for this purpose it has to use resources which could otherwise have been used to improve the production of goods and services for a higher quality of life.

Fifthly, the production cost and thus also consumer prices of goods and services provided by public institutions are rising fast; e.g. the rapidly increasing prices of electricity, water, transport, postal and telecommunication services, hospital services and university education. Even if the public institutions are able to provide more of these goods and services, the increasing cost and prices make it well-nigh impossible for the people to purchase more of these essential goods and services.

Sixthly, the world has, relatively speaking, tended to become smaller because of improved transport and communication technology and services. Nowadays people travel more, read literature published outside their own country, see films and buy goods produced in other countries. The result is that states can no longer live in isolation because their social, economic and political activities are becoming increasingly integrated with those of even distant states. More and more international institutions are being created and all of them are expanding their activities.

The aforementioned developments have made society so complex that it differs completely from what it was a mere ten years ago. There are also indications that the tendencies referred to above will continue and that change will even accelerate rather than slow down in the foreseeable future. This state of affairs will demand still further increases in the quantity and quality of the goods and services provided by public institutions. The officials who man these institutions will need new knowledge and skills to improve their productivity in order that they can meet the demands which will be made on them. The officials will also have to display new attitudes in the performance of their duties to make their conduct acceptable to their political masters and a more sophisticated public.

The improvement of administrative capabilities is particularly urgent in the case of developing countries. Experience has shown that the development of a country cannot be achieved merely by transferring to it knowledge and capital from developed countries. What is required of a country for sustained development, is self-reliance; i.e. the ability to clarify its own development goals and to undertake the administrative activities to achieve those goals.

### **3. Factors which complicate the task of the public officials who have to provide and services**

It is noteworthy that now that people are expecting more and improved goods and services from the public institutions, they are also becoming increasingly critical about public servants and their job performance. The press and other public media are subjecting every aspect of the activities of public institutions and public officials to relentless scrutiny. Political office-bearers and public officials are becoming concerned because they and their institutions are no longer being accorded the traditional respect and unqualified acceptance which they had previously taken for granted.

The increasing prices of public goods and services are unacceptable to the people. In fact the authorities are also gravely concerned about the rapid increases in the prices of the public goods and services, as evidenced by the fact that enquiries have been instituted into the functioning of some public institutions; e.g. the Electricity Supply Commission. All public institutions and officials can expect that greater stress will in future be placed on their having to give account of their activities in public.

A more disturbing aspect of the rapid increasing prices of public goods and services is that public institutions are becoming so expensive that the people cannot afford them. Southern Africa is a developing region and large sections of its population cannot afford expensive public goods and services. Moreover, it is undesirable that the people should devote so much of their income to public goods and services that they cannot create capital for development purposes.

Poverty amongst the people compels the State to provide some goods and services which should indeed be provided by the people themselves or by private enterprises, e.g. housing. The State must then make resources available for this purpose. These resources could otherwise have been used to improve the quantity and quality of other goods and services, e.g. education. The distribution of scarce resources becomes an exceedingly difficult matter under these circumstances. The State could, because of a lack of funds, be forced to relinquish to the private sector the provision of some goods and services, e.g. housing. However, the poor could then have to go without essential goods and services since these could become too expensive.

A factor which is increasing the burden of the public official is the diminishing role of legislatures, e.g. Parliament and the provincial or regional and municipal councils. Nowadays legislatures consisting of representatives of the people exercise little influence over the administration of a country. The initiative in determining what quality and quantity of existing and new public goods and services should be provided, comes from the executive institutions which consists of executive political office-bearers supported by officials serving under them. The executive political office-bearers and the officials cannot wait for or depend on the legislatures to take the lead. Therefore the executive political office-bearers must provide leadership in the legislatures as well as in the administration of the country, either directly by themselves or otherwise indirectly by way of their officials. The complicating factor here is that the representatives of the people constituting the legislatures are elected on the grounds of their ability to draw votes and not on the grounds of their ability to contribute to the deliberations of the legislatures or the effectiveness and efficiency of

the administration of the country. Too often representatives elected by the voters attempt to justify themselves in the meetings of the legislatures by indulging in frivolous politicking rather than in serious debate on policies and other administrative issues. In this event the officials are not only forced to undertake the innovative and other creative functions of the elected representatives, but also to cover up the shortcomings of the legislatures.

In the light of the aforementioned factors the public and, in particular, interest groups are insisting that they should be given some part in decision-making. However, it is questionable whether the public at large is qualified to make constructive contributions under any scheme which is devised for public participation in decision-making. Therefore steps will have to be taken to establish links between the administrative institutions and the public. The officials will also have to be made aware of their duty to remain sensitive and responsive to the needs and expectations of the people. Indeed, the officials will have to be trained to keep in contact and to communicate with the public. This matter will be dealt with further when measures to meet the challenges facing officials are discussed.

#### 4. Challenges facing the public officials

The major phenomena that are playing Southern Africa at present are as follows:

**Inflation:** Inflation prevents the public institutions from providing more and better public goods and services. Furthermore it is self-evident that the authorities have fanned inflation by granting public officials regular salary increases for no reason other than to protect their incomes against the inroads of inflation, or to compete with private enterprise for scarce and even unobtainable skilled labour.

In all countries steps have been taken to stop or at least slow down inflation. However, all too often the public sector does not have knowledgeable and skilled officials to undertake policy analysis and the other functions required for combating inflation. The result is that wrong decisions on policy and its implementation are made and that inflation then increases instead of being stopped or at least reduced.

**Unsatisfactory productivity:** Improved productivity is essential to combat inflation. Especially in a developing country one of the principal goals of the government should be to increase productivity in the private as well as the public sector. Improved productivity in the public sector is particularly significant, because if the productivity of public officials is unsatisfactory it means that too great a part of the resources of the country is allocated to current expenditure instead of to investments for development purposes.

To increase productivity particular attention should be given to personnel administration. Every one of the numerous functions constituting personnel administration should be performed effectively and efficiently to ensure that the work force functions at its highest capacity. If the work force is to function at full capacity it means that every personnel member must deliver the amount of work expected of him by members of the public who could have to work exceedingly hard to make a bare living.

Poor productivity is brought about by all sorts of unsatisfactory behaviour of individual officials. For example: officials who stay away from work for unspecified or trivial reasons, or who eat or drink too much, who have domestic troubles which interfere with their work, or

who do not maintain the performance standards set for them. These things are particularly difficult to combat, but can damage productivity markedly.

It should be stressed that productivity is largely a personnel matter. It is true that productivity can be affected adversely by unsatisfactory environmental factors such as offices or workshops which are badly ventilated or lighted, or have unsuitable furniture and equipment. However, experience has shown that these inanimate factors do not harm productivity as much as low morale which could result in a lack of the will to work effectively and efficiently.

**Economic, social and political changes:** The whole world is suffering from economic, social and political unrest. Many countries are experiencing strained relations with neighbouring states. In addition some countries are experiencing unrest among their own populations which are burdened with unsatisfactory economic, social and political conditions. Large sections of the populations of all countries - developed as well as developing - do not have enough to eat and are poorly housed. No country can yet educate all the citizens to their full capacities; or provide all citizens with sufficient medical and dental services. In all countries governments have to take steps to protect themselves against political enemies or criminals who rebel against the legitimate authorities. All these factors harm the ability of a country to meet the demands made upon it and to satisfy the expectations of its people.

**Adherence to the past:** Every political office-bearer and every public official nowadays has much to say about the fact that societies have undergone fundamental social, economic, political, scientific and technological changes during recent decades. Indeed these changes are to be seen everywhere; e.g. new roads, increasing numbers of motor vehicles and airplanes, impressive school and university buildings, large factories, more and more industrial areas, television sets in even the modest houses, new hospital buildings, new towns and a growing number of capital cities for a growing number of independent and self-governing states.

These obvious and much discussed changes have brought about completely new governmental and administrative needs in all societies. Yet it is strange that the very same political office-bearers and public officials who have so much to say about the new situation, are unwilling to change the governmental and administrative systems and practices which were developed many years ago for complete different situations.

Couples with this is the tendency of political office-bearers and public officials to take foreign laws, regulations and practices and apply them in their countries, regions or local areas, even though the social, economic, political and physical conditions prevailing at home may be completely different. Indeed, the foreign laws, regulations and practices could even be out of date or inappropriate to their home countries. Yet they are then adopted for application in the new surroundings with minimum adaptations; consider for example the provincial ordinances on local government which have been adopted for application in national states or Black urban areas.

Adherence to the past is a particularly dangerous phenomenon. Because it develops so unobstructively, it is ignored until it reaches the stage where the inevitable stresses and strains threaten to, or in fact do,

disrupt the social, economic or political order. Even then the tendency on the part of political office-bearers and public officials is to defend the outmoded measures rather than discard them or improve them to meet existing or expected needs and expectations. However, it should be pointed out that change merely for the sake of change, or for the sake of window-dressing, should be guarded against. Nowadays there are individuals and institutions which preach change as a cure for all governmental and administrative ailments and for development. Therefore it has to be stressed that change in governmental and administrative arrangements should be introduced only after accurate identification of shortcomings in the present order. Thereafter it should be established that the proposed new arrangements will indeed fit in with the prevailing social, economic and political environments. Once change has passed a point of no return it can be stopped and reversed only through great effort even where disastrous results are being obtained.

**Development:** The governments of all countries in Southern Africa have accepted "development" as a common goal. However, it is obvious that the government of each country will have to decide about its own national, sectoral, regional and other development goals on the basis of the peculiar needs and expectations of the population and resources of the country. As a result of this requirement the governments and officials of each country are confronted with complicated policy-making, planning and programming tasks. After these three initial groups of functions have been mastered, progress will have to be made with the no less demanding performance of the other generic administrative functions and eventually the functional activities which have to be undertaken to reach the development goals.

As indicated above, experience has already shown that there can be sustained development in a country only if it is self-reliant; i.e. if it has the ability to identify its own development needs, and to implement the administrative functions to bring about development. In practice this means that a country should possess institutions, political office-bearers and officials able to make development policies and then prepare plans and programmes to implement these policies. Thus a country can develop only as far and so fast as its own administrative capability allows. Administrative capability revolves largely around the capability of the political office-bearers and the public officials. A country will be self-reliant for development purposes only when its political office-bearers and public officials have been educated, trained and developed adequately.

Self-reliance does not mean that a country should shut itself off from its neighbours or the rest of the world. Indeed self-reliance means that a country knows how to benefit from the rest of the world. For self-reliance a public service should be able to use foreign institutions for its own enrichment. However, in this regard it is necessary to point out that there could be attempts by politicians and even officials to do something spectacular by the importation of institutions which have been seen in other countries. Therefore it is essential that politicians and officials should bear in mind that governmental and administrative institutions and practices taken over from other countries should be adapted to the needs, expectations and resources of their new environment.

Reference should also be made to attempts which have been made to establish "development administration" as a special brand of

administration for development purposes. In this regard it is merely necessary to stress that there is no alternative for the regular public administration of a country as a vehicle for development.

##### 5. Meeting the challenges

**Adapt theories and practices of public administration:** From the foregoing it should be clear that societies are changing so much and so rapidly that new societies are indeed being created day by day. Therefore the theories and practices of public administration should be adapted day by day to ensure that new demands and expectations for public goods and services are met effectively and efficiently so that the optimum benefit can be derived from the limited resources.

The adaptation of the theories and practices of public administration demands that academics and politicians, as well as officials who must make the adaptations, should keep on adapting and improving their knowledge, skills and conduct to remain in pace with changes in society. Academics, politicians, and officials should be on the forefront of the changes and should *take the initiative* in meeting the demands and expectations of the people. They cannot wait for new situations and outside forces to propel them into action. They should be on the forefront to foresee and then prevent undesirable developments which could disrupt community life or cause losses; e.g. increasing crime and road accidents, shortages of water and electricity caused by droughts, scarcities of skilled labour and unemployment of poorly educated workseekers and shortages of classrooms and teachers.

**Improve university education in public administration:** To meet the new requirements it is essential that university education in public administration should receive particular attention. Firstly, it should be recognised that Public Administration is an independent science with its own theory and philosophy. Let me stress that Public Administration is by no means dependent upon Political Science or any other discipline for its theory and philosophy. Secondly, it should be accepted that Public Administration is also an applied science which should be developed through empirical research. To ensure that this essential requirement is met, anyone who has not had practical experience of public administration should not be appointed as a lecturer in Public Administration. Where the appointment of inexperienced individuals as lecturers is unavoidable they should be required to obtain the essential practical knowledge and skills. The ideal arrangement would be for practicing public administrators to be employed as lecturers in Public Administration. The lecturers should then be required to devote some of their working hours to the practice of public administration; for example, by working on contract for specified public institutions. A precedent for such an arrangement is the joint appointments in medical faculties whereby lecturers are required to practice in hospitals or other designated health institutions. The crux of the matter is that there should be co-operation between the universities and the public institutions for education in public administration.

If the aforementioned approach to education in Public Administration is adopted it would further the movement towards more "scientific" public administration; i.e. to rational public administration based on theories and practice discovered and validated by applied research.

Established close relationship between officials and citizens:

The changing demands and expectations about public administration require that there should be a close relationship between officials and citizens. As public institutions increase in size the executive political office-bearers and the officials may drift further and further away from the citizens. The high-ranking officials who have to decide about the quantity and quality of public goods and services to be rendered to the citizens may become so far removed from the people that they are hardly aware of the real needs and justified expectations of the people. Thus there is always a tendency for laws and regulations which make known what goods and services will be provided to the people, to become ends in themselves.

Consequently administration can become dehumanised, abstract and impersonal. The end result could be stresses and strains which would make the distance between officials and citizens increasingly greater until the citizens eventually revolt and disrupt law and order. To prevent such a state of affairs from arising, formal and informal opportunities should be created to foster contact between citizens and officials. Advisory bodies attached to State departments and other executive institutions could create formal opportunities for officials to deliberate with the representatives of interest groups and citizen associations. The number of advisory bodies should be increased at every opportunity. However, an essential requirement should be that these advisory bodies should be incorporated in the State departments and other executive institutions whose officials should undertake the secretarial work of these bodies. The advisory bodies should not be given opportunities to build own empires.

**Obtain co-operation of citizens:** Public institutions should wherever possible obtain the assistance of the citizens to achieve goals which have been agreed upon by the authorities and which are supported by the citizens. Sometimes the co-operation of the citizens could be obtained through appeals; e.g. appeals to conserve water and to prevent fires. However, the co-operation of the citizens will usually be forthcoming only after time-consuming enlightenment and education; e.g. the pollution of the environment and smoking are so wide-spread that the co-operation of the people in stopping these will be obtained only through educational programmes for adults as well as children. Indeed, every public institution requires the co-operation of the people to enable it to achieve its goals effectively and efficiently.

**Co-operation with other states:** To enable a state to improve the quality of life of its citizens it is essential for it to co-operate with the other states and particularly its neighbour states. As mentioned above, the traffic between states is increasing because of scientific and technological developments which have greatly improved transport and communication facilities and services. No state is completely self-sufficient and every state can derive benefits from co-operation with its neighbour states and the rest of the world. To obtain benefits, politicians and officials of every state should know what they can give to other states and what they can obtain from other states. To obtain these benefits the officials should have the required knowledge and skills and they should be able to display the conduct essential for international co-operation regardless of whether it is bilateral or multilateral.

**Give officials greater powers but keep them accountable:** To enable the increasing numbers of public officials to meet the demands made upon them, they are being given more and more power by the legislatures. The power given to public officials will increase rather than decrease in the foreseeable future. The result is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the political institutions and office-bearers to provide leadership for the officials and to control their activities. Thus the officials are taking the initiative and playing an increasing role in setting policy goals for public institutions and in the execution of policy. There is nothing wrong with this inevitable development, provided measures are established to keep the officials accountable. The control measures should ensure that the responsiveness and responsibility essential to the observance of the doctrines of democracy are maintained without obstructing the will to innovate and achieve.

## 6. Conclusion

Public administration is a field of activity which will in future feature as a dominant phenomenon to shape the well being of individuals and of mankind. Public Administration as an academic discipline is no longer an appendage of Political Science, but has its roots also in business management, history, economics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and even the physical sciences. As a field of activity and as a subject for academic study, public administration holds great promise for the most able young men and women from all population groups. The material rewards for practitioners and academics in the field of public administration may not be spectacular, but the social and personal rewards of self-fulfilment which they will reap will be unsurpassable.

Mr Vice Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen you will no doubt have gathered from what I have said that I have the highest regard for the practitioners and academics in the field of public administration. My many years of service as a practitioner and as an academic have time and again convinced me that public administration is a most difficult field of work as well as study. There are no easy answers to the questions posed by the theory and practice of public administration. But like all nuts that are hard to crack, public administration also brings rich and sweet rewards for those who persevere and penetrate to the kernel of the nut.

Mr Chancellor, Mr Vice Chancellor, I thank your University for having given me this opportunity to address you on the subject which I have made my first love and life task. As Honorary Professor I will do my utmost to promote the well-being of the University of the North through further contributions in the field of Public Administration.

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