

ENHANCING *BATHO-PELE* PRINCIPLES IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION CLERKS: THE QUEST FOR PUBLIC SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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Abstract

The operational image of the Public Service is received and noted with a compromised image. It is still plagued with negative attitudes in terms of service standards, particularly customer service and ‘*Batho-Pele*’ principles as displayed by School Administration Clerks. There are further notable challenges underpinned on a quest for a coherent transformed, transparent, efficient and accurate responsible service delivery to the necessities of all citizens. The latter ideals are pertinently elucidated by Public Service Vision thus saying: “A better life for all South African citizens by putting people first”. The “White Paper in the context of the Public Service, articulates the following eight essential pillars, namely: Consultation on service rendered; specification of service standards in respect of quality to be rendered; unrestricted access to service delivery; courteous treatment of clients with integrity; Openness and transparency of Departmental operations and redress on failed quality standard rendered as well as assurance on the value for money within the constraints of financial budgets

‘*Batho-Pele*’ is a Sesotho adage meaning “people first.” This is the ideal since 1997, a government initiative to transform public service delivery to citizens enshrined on the eight basic principles alluded. The study engages the qualitative research Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) dynamics to gather data on the need for an inviting collaborative service delivery; the key points in delivering quality service; the challenges in respect of service delivery; the environment conducive to a progressive quality service delivery as well success indicators to arm inviting service couched in the eight *Batho-Pele* public service principles. The study composed of administration clerks at both primary and secondary schools who are male or female in gender. The base for the discussion in this study is informed by the Critical Theory as a theoretical Framework adopted. To fortify our service excellence through *Batho-Pele*, critical elements on both Nigeria and Botswana service chatters have formed reference base to this research argument on matters of positive human treatment for service distinction. The study concludes with the fact attentive customer listening; show of human respect; personal integrity; quality service standards and swift response to customer grievances enhance the quest for *Batho-Pele* service excellence. The recommendation is that clerks in new public entrance ought to be inducted in this service ideal with further research undertaken for both relevance and sustainability.

Keywords: *Batho-Pele* principles, constitutional bill of rights, critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical theory (CT), free attitude interviews (FAI).

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to place *Batho-Pele* as a pivotal service practice for organizational competitive service delivery and excellence at schools in particular. The study is located in the Free State (FS) School administrative and management space, with School Administrative Clerks. This study is further under-taken in order to identify the challenges and the factors that lead to the School Administration Clerks in the Free State Department of Education. This is particularly concerned with the non-implementation of the principles of ‘*Batho-Pele*’ and also provide guide to manage this deficiency in their service offer (ETU, n.d.).

‘*Batho-Pele*’ is a Sesotho adage meaning “people first” (Fox et al., 2006). It has been, since 1997, a government initiative to transform public service delivery to citizens and is based on basic principles contained in The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (herein after referred to as The Constitution). During 2003 and later, the government once again launched concerted efforts to reaffirm its

commitment to this service ideal in the Public Service space. The formation of *Batho-Pele* unfolds with the following eight principles: Consultation of the needed service with the client; Service standards expected in the offer exchange; Access improved possibility to service offering; Courtesy unveil as a human virtue; Information giving to available services; Openness and transparency with nothing to hide in the service delivery; Redress whatever problems encountered in the service offer space as well as Value for money commensurate with the service rendered with prudent economical repercussion (NWDC, n.d.).

The eight '*Batho-Pele*' principles were published as a policy document called The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery of 1997 and made specifically applicable to all central and provincial government departments. It is emphasized that the whole process should be a continual one of improving service delivery, and then setting ever-higher quality standards in order to reach global benchmark. In the current circumstance, the respective principles are enshrined in the South African Constitution under the Bill of Rights. This Bill is a cornerstone of democratic virtues enshrined in the SA Constitutional framework. This is about human dignity, social justice, equality and freedom to shared information and knowledge through communication (DoJ, 2017). Fundamental to the Bill of Rights, is the imperative mandate for people to operate and be served in an environment conducive to treatment with dignity and equality to access information in service as the *Batho-Pele* Principles Philosophy advocates.

2. The research aim and objectives

The study aims at highlighting the challenges behind the implementation of *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy by the School Administrative Clerks at Schools in the Free State. This aim is underscores the following ensuing objectives: Espouse the need and importance for the implementation of *Batho-Pele* Principles in respect of the School Administration Clerks in the Free State; Highlight the key aspects behind the implementation of *Batho-Pele* Service Principles in respect of the School Administration Clerks in the Free State; Locate the challenges in the implementation of *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy in respect of the School Administration Clerks in the Free State; Classify the environment conducive for the implementation of *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy in respect of the School Administration Clerks in the Free State; Exhibit the success indicators behind the implementation of *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy in respect of the School Administration Clerks in the Free State.

3. Theoretical framework: Critical Theory (CT)

This paper adopts the Critical Theory (CT) as a theoretical framework to guide the narratives herein contained. The theory seeks to reconstruct practices that are rather not progressive for human advancement, like the case of poor service application in the context of *Batho-Pele*. The ideal contains elements democratization of ideologies for service with openness and transparency for social justice discourse.

The nature and scope of CT campaigns for deeper philosophical ramifications. CT advocates for the universal principle of co-responsibility, which here is about the service provider and the client with the eagerness to eradicate possibilities of injustice in our community spaces communicative dialogue and shared empowerment. The theory is about democratic liberty to offer the best in opportunity through human service and foundations of ethical philosophies. The inherent principle of social justice quest negates practices of discrimination based on gender, race and societal standing. Being imbued by the context of CT, one becomes motivated to serve and be the agent of justice and fairness in all circumstances of life and transcend all facets of marginalization. The theory is an armament for human rationality for the capacity to transparency and passion to give and support. Human service enhances virtues of solidarity and collective identity with noble spirit of *us* not *me* critical for institutional transformation for social justice quest (de Vita, 2014).

CT is apt to be engaged *Batho-Pele* Principles in order to propagate issues of fairness, democratic collaboration and progressive participation, equity as well as equality in a space that originally was racially inclined and intransigent for change for the better in-service delivery in the public arena. CT interrogates the current situation in service offering with the agenda for change and upgrading the status quo. This calls for standards of quality and excellence in the culture of service in education and schools in particular.

4. Theoretical lens: Critical Theory (CT)

The theory has social grounding as a theoretical to address and critique social ills and troubling discursive inequalities in society through transformation and change. This philosophical engagement unmask illusions propelled as reality for a just peaceful society free of dominance and exploitation CT as a theoretical lens is deemed prudent in this study in order to debate and critique the inadequacies around

Batho-Pele Service Philosophy that informs this research undertaking. The philosophy offers space for reflective assessment on societal discourses for free spirited service offering and empowerment in the case of *Batho-Pele* Philosophical undertaking. The philosophy objects domination and exploitation in society with a critical Marxist opinionated views on freedom and social justice (Crossman, 2019). *Batho-Pele* has a strong agitation against service inequalities in Public Service that necessitated transformation and change to unmask alienation of people base on class, gender and race.

5. *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy: The evaluation and monitoring (M&E) framework guide

This aspect talks to the current alluded process on the challenges of implementation of *Batho-Pele* service Philosophy. The process is two pronged: Monitoring: This address the process of data generation and analysis in respect of application and implementation, the second aspect of the process is: Evaluation: This zooms into the programs’ effectiveness with regard to implementation and achievement of set goals or objectives (Sopact, 2021).

The purpose of M&E is to give and assist good guidance on developing operational tactics, data generation, operational strategies and accessing the extent to which plans, and goals have been realized (USAID, 2014). The M&E process encapsulates the following steps: Communicate the shared monitoring and evaluation plan; Identify requirement to essential to execute the plan; guide selection of data generation plan and offer sustained plan analysis (TechSolve, 2021). In addition, the purpose behind M&E is to fill the gaps identified in both execution and application of the process; track implementation challenges, measure effectiveness of the planned strategy and address the changes to be adopted (UN Women, 2010).

M&E as a process guides the strategy based on the following approaches: Self-assessment plan to see if one really is compliant to expectations and goals envisioned by the enterprise or institution; sustained feedback on peers implementing the plan so as to guide and encourage good work or challenges arising; selecting a focus group to get information on aspects needed to generate policy as well; on job observation to identify gaps and challenges as well as evaluating personnel based on the set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Verma, 2021).

The following rubric could assist in the M&E process on the *Batho-Pele* Service Principles:

Table 1. *Batho-Pele* Framework.

<p>A. PRINCIPLES AND EXPECTATIONS</p> <p>CONSULTATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Good service offers in advancing the institution image ✓ Give better options to client that the institution is capable to offer <p>SERVICE STANDARD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communicate service quality for choice that the institution may offer ✓ Key service factors to expect at the institution <p>COURTESY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm inviting attitude to better brand the institution ✓ Show of respect at all times with politeness at the institution <p>ACCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Allow people to available services the institution offers ✓ Enhance service ownership to clients at the institution <p>INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Information accuracy with clarity about the institution ✓ Communication with sustenance in the institutional context ✓ Fairness and social justice quest as a brand to identify the institutional values

6. Recommendations

The challenges the study highlights are so critical that it is of utmost importance that Free State Department of Education ensures that School Administration Clerks are capacitated in terms of ‘*Batho-Pele*’ principles, and that a monitoring tool is in place. This ideal holds true to new appointees to the public service; they should be exposed to training in the principles of ‘*Batho-Pele*’ as part of a mandatory orientation programme. The *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy ought to be integral to the PDMS performance evaluation process; Sustainable feedback on the Front-Line Service personnel in critical for improvement and self-reflection on personal deficiencies, School Clerks need to be awarded incentives for better delivery in service excellence trough *Batho-Pele* Philosophy (Ngidi & Dorasamy, 2013). The Education Department and broader Public Service organs need to: Communicate the goals and purpose of

M&E, provide training programs about the process and communicate what is expected of front-line personnel in the delivery of M&E process as well as what are the key area deemed essential in the delivery of the process. Lastly, further research about how ‘*Batho-Pele*’ Principles should be implemented is recommended.

7. Conclusion

This study encapsulates the fact that School Administration Clerks (participants) know the principles, but the majority have not been trained by the Department of Education about the principles of ‘*Batho-Pele*’ Service Philosophy. The result is such that there is discrepancy between School Clerks and customers they serve with evident poor monitoring strategy. *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy is a legislative policy advancing the ideals behind the Bill of Rights the SA Constitution espouse; regrettably, School Clerks seem not to be articulate on this fundamental clause.

The notion of accountability is pivotal in enhancing the dynamics of service delivery in institutions underpinned on *Batho-Pele* Service Philosophy. The essence of accountability ought to be practiced as a school mantra for service excellence, *Batho-Pele* is best defined by School Clerks who are: Committed to the service at school, supportive and loving to the school community, considerate and caring with charisma. School Clerks are the face of the school and as such should portray a positive mental attitude to create a warm school ambiance to attract clients and service excellence. This ideal is about personal comfort and a sense of belonging to the school community with the agenda to magnify the goal behind the vision and mission the school espouses. The school service in *Batho-Pele* also leads the imperatives that defines the school culture, values and ethos

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