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AGILITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The landscape of human and social services delivery has undergone significant transformation in recent years, driven by governments worldwide striving for improved outcomes amidst growing caseloads and constrained resources. This evolution is characterised by a shift towards integrated service delivery, leveraging innovative case practices and advanced information technology. Governments are adopting diverse strategies to enhance effectiveness and efficiency, including modernising information systems, redefining program boundaries and sector responsibilities, restructuring workforces, and introducing new casework tools and practices. Additionally, there is a push for enhanced commissioning, transparency, and accountability structures, reflecting a holistic approach to service delivery optimisation. Despite these global creative demands compounded with technology and the ever-changing global environment, the third-world public sector leadership is making a lackadaisical turn towards embracing the new leadership imperative of agility in delivering public value in public sector organisations. This qualitative desktop research seeks to unravel the challenges and prospects of leadership and the imperative of agility in the delivery of public value in the public service in South Africa. This article argues that whilst the public sector in South Africa has vehemently advocated and mobilised for strategic innovation in service delivery, the leadership is not proactive in the ever-changing environment. Consequently, this article recommends that the public sector leadership be responsive, flexible, and agile to the ever-changing environment due to global technological forces for effective service delivery in South Africa.

Keywords: Agility, Leadership, Public Value, Public Sector, Service Delivery, South Africa

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership has become the catchphrase and tune for public service managers who must continue to provide ever-improving, high-quality and reliable services (Nzimakwe, 2011,51). As leaders and public managers perform a variety of services in the public sector, they should be transparent, accountable, and ethical to foster confidence, trust, and support from the country's gener-

al citizenry. On the contrary, the public sector leadership in most developing countries has fallen short of the abovementioned qualities due to the lack of strategic innovation in its operation and the extrication of the colonial government leadership legacy. The recent studies by (Pooe & Munyanyi, 2022; Nyathi, 2022 and Ringson & Matshabaphala, 2023) demonstrate that there is relentless pressure in most of the global south post-independence governments to deliver public goods and services of value to their citizens. Several African governments are under pressure and are failing to fulfil their liberation struggle promises to their citizens, such as ameliorating inequalities, poverty, and unemployment (triple challenge) caused by the colonial governments (Mosala, 2022).

The gap between the rich and poor in most African countries is still prevalent, and one of the unfulfilled promises manifests through different departments of public sector management. In most African governments, the failure to fulfil these liberation struggle promises is allegedly caused by poor leadership, which manifests through undemocratic and unethical governance approaches. Opalo (2014) argues that most African post-independence leadership's survival strategies against dissenting voices of the citizens and stakeholders on the public sector's incompetence due to the preponderance of incumbency. The superiority of incumbency manifests through the capture of the governments' critical institutions to support the incumbent government's corrupt and undemocratic tendencies. While the preponderance of incumbency grossly manifests through undemocratic tendencies in most African countries, the South African public sector manifests through the poor implementation of constitutional democracy in enhancing the delivery of public value. Paradoxically, despite the advancement of constitutional democracy in South Africa compared to other African countries, Mosala (2022:3) argues that the Gini coefficient of expenditures was 0.56, making South Africa one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Mosala (2022) further argues that the Apartheid government in South Africa was officially dismantled in April 1994 when a new era of democracy came into being and, in its wake, left a population with massive inequalities across racial groups. Using a poverty line of R322 (in 2000 prices), at least 58% of all South Africans and 68% of the African population were in poverty in 1995, while poverty was practically not evident in the colonial population. In the preceding premises, the World Bank Group (2018) reported that South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world and suggested that the country should prioritise policies that create jobs and reduce poverty and inequality. Poverty, inequality, and unemployment are some of the most pressing challenges South Africa has faced since the advent of the new democratic dispensation. These challenges have been dubbed the "triple challenge" and have remained the country's key focus area of policy development over the past 27 years of democracy (Sikwela et al., 2018). According to Francis, Valodia,& Webster (2020) and Ringson (2023a), despite the vibrant policies that undergird the South Afri-

can government's public sector leadership, such as Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1994 to the current National Development Plan and its Vision 2030 (NDP), the crisis of the delivery of public value continues to manifest through the triple challenge, lack of education, poor health, corruption, load-shedding and skyrocketing of crimes in the country. The NDP principle states, "No political democracy can survive and flourish if our people remain in poverty, without land, without tangible prospects for a better life. Attacking poverty and deprivation must be the priority of a democratic government" will not be realised within the projected period in South Africa. This article argues that the lack of responsiveness and agility in the public sector leadership in South Africa incubates these challenges of the poor service delivery of public value. Against this backdrop, this desktop research seeks to unravel the leadership and the imperative of agile in delivering public value in the public service in South Africa.

Structurally, this article commences with a detailed contextual background of the leadership challenges and the delivery of public value in developing countries and South Africa. The study further reviewed the pertinent literature that informs the study to demonstrate the yawning gaps in the challenges of leadership and the imperative of agile in delivering public value in the public service in South Africa. The literature that includes public value theory, connected leadership, agile leadership and responsive public value leadership are pertinent to this article. Subsequently, the methodology and a critical discussion of the findings unfolded into the conclusion and the study's recommendations for strategic leadership and delivery of public value in South Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pertinent literature was reviewed to demonstrate gaps in the existing literature about leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa. The critical concepts and theories associated with the current state of public sector leadership and service delivery include but are not limited to public value, Connected Leadership, Agile Leadership and Agile and Responsive Public Service Leadership.

2.1 Public Value Theory in Public Administration

Public value is a concept and theory that originated in the mid-1990s from the book "*Creating Public Value*" by a Harvard Kennedy School of Government professor, Mark Moore (OECD, 2019). Moore (1995) described public value as an alternative logic to private value, which dominated the debate on public sector reform since the Reagan and Thatcher eras and was seen to be commoditising every corner of the public sector. This suggested public value can be defined as something valued by the public or an excellent suitable for the public as assessed against various public value criteria such as transparen-

cy, accountability, and fairness (Bryson et al. 2014). However, it is essential to note that 'public value' goes beyond the understanding of public good defined by economists, as was recently argued in detail by Mazzucato (2018). It is not only the individual's self-interest but the aspirations of society that are the collective purpose of humanity (Moore, 1995). Moore further indicates that the public value theory was introduced as an alternative to New Public Management (NPM) after discovering the latter's shortcomings and misgivings. The focus of the NPM was to ensure the government's effectiveness and resourcefulness. At the same time, public value management underscores the value public managers must create for citizens through their work. Public value is a recent approach to public administration introduced two decades ago to improve the livelihoods of citizens. Naidoo and Holtzhausen (2020) posit that the core of public value includes the needs of citizens and ensuring that the goods and services they receive from the government are of value to them as individuals and as a community. According to Pooe et al. (2022), public value theory holds that government bodies and citizens form an accountable, inclusive, open stakeholder network, advancing networked governance practices and relationship building. Naidoo and Holtzhausen (2020) argue that public value theory puts forward a public administration theory that is democratic and cooperative and underscores governance. Simply put, the public value places the onus on the public sector to broaden its focus and create values that stakeholders and the public require rather than merely ensuring efficiency. At the heart of public value management is the aspiration to attain public value and determine what it constitutes as a process that requires collaboration from public managers and eminent stakeholders.

Tthe public value theory fosters the public sector's contribution to the needs of society and the stakeholders. At the heart of the public value's contribution to the community's needs, the public sector entails the values sets, which include the common good, public interest, social cohesion, and human dignity, to mention a few. Secondly, public value encourages the public sector leadership to foster the transformation of the citizens' interests into decisions. In this category, the public sector follows public values, which include democracy, the will of the people, citizen involvement, protection of individual rights and the safety of minorities. Thirdly, public value encourages public sector leadership to entail the relations between public administration and politicians. The OECD (2019) argues that the relations between the public administration and the politicians are sustainable by observing the public values, which include political loyalty, accountability, and responsiveness. The fourth category of public value is relations between public administration and its environment. The feasibility of the preceding segment is sustainable through implementing public values, which include openness-secrecy, responsiveness, listening to public opinion, advocacy-neutrality, compromise, balance, and competitiveness of the public sector organisations. The sixth category of public value is the inter-organisational aspects of public

administration, which is fostered through observing the principles of public values such as robustness, adaptability, stability, reliability, timeliness, and innovation. According to the OECD in the Table above, the seventh category of public value is the behaviour of public sector employees, which must follow the public value principles, including accountability, professionalism, honesty, and moral standards. Lastly, the eighth category of public value is the relationship between public administration and citizens. The relationship between public administration and citizens' sustainability in the public sector leadership is enhanced by the principles of public value, which include legality, protection of rights of the individual, citizen's self-development, user orientation, Equal treatment, the rule of law, ethical consciousness of the public sector leadership. In theory and practice, this article argues that the deficiencies in public sector leadership, which culminate in bad governance and incompetence in delivering public value in South South Africa, are due to its failure to embrace the imperative of agility in providing public service. Studies conducted by Cameron & Milne (2011) and Smit (2008) resonate with the OECD (2019) in that the public sector's incompetence is due to its adherence to the hierarchical traditional leadership approaches, which are not proactive, responsive, and agile adaptive to the global environmental changes.

Table 1: Table illustration of Public Value Sets and Categories

VALUE CATEGORY	PUBLIC SECTOR CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	TRANSFORMATION OF INTERESTS TO DECISIONS	RELATIONS BETWEEN PA AND POLITICIANS	RELATIONS BETWEEN PA AND ITS ENVIRONMENT	INTER-ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS OF PA	BEHAVIOUR OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES	RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PA AND CITIZENS
VALUE SET	Common good - public interest - social cohesion Altruism - human dignity Sustainability - voice of the future Regime dignity - regime stability	Majority rule - democracy - will of the people - collective choice User democracy - local governance - citizen involvement Protection of minorities - protection of individual rights	Political loyalty - accountability - responsiveness	Openness-secrecy - responsiveness - listening to the public opinion Advocacy-neutrality - compromise - balance of interests Competitiveness-cooperativeness - stakeholder or shareholder value	Robustness - adaptability - stability - reliability - timeliness Innovation - enthusiasm - risk readiness Productivity - effectiveness - parsimony - business-like approach Self-development of employees - good working environment	Accountability - professionalism - honesty - moral standards - ethical consciousness - integrity	Legality - protection of rights of the individual - equal treatment - rule of law - justice Equity - reasonableness - fairness - professionalism Dialogue - responsiveness - user democracy - citizen involvement - citizen's self-development User orientation - timeliness - fairness

2.2 Connected and Agile Leadership in Public Service

Public value, the new public administration theory, requires embracing connected and agile leadership to enhance the delivery of public value. According to Hayward (2015), connected leadership marks a pronounced shift from the old hierarchical command and control to the new model of leading through influence. McDonald (2023) further asserts that connected leadership is a management style that emphasises forging solid relationships, fostering collaboration, and creating a sense of community among stakeholders, partners, and team members. Unlike the command-and-control mindset that relies on a strict hierarchy and a top-down management approach, connected leadership embraces inclusivity, values authenticity, and prioritises shared decision-making. The critical advantages for connected leadership in public service organisations from Hayward (2015) and McDaniel (2023) include but are not limited to empathy, active listening, effective communication, and trust building. Premised in the abovementioned imperatives, connected leadership focuses on nurturing a cohesive and sustainable ecosystem where diverse individuals work together to identify shared values, progress toward common goals, and prepare an organisation to thrive as new challenges and opportunities emerge.

According to Matshabaphala and Ringson (2022), responsiveness and organisational agility are critical to maintaining public service leadership in good shape and sustainability. The imperative of nexus between connected and agile leadership manifests in different organisations in response to the socio-economic and political challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the imperative of connected and agile leadership, McDanald (2013) further argues that recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic and social upheaval, dramatically accelerated the shift to a more agile and flexible leadership paradigm. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most organisations have pronounced drastic changes in their employer-employee relationship. Experiences that include the subversion of physical supervision and meetings in the workplace started as temporal measures to respond to the pandemic and subsequently got normalised due to the productivity demonstrated by the new work ethic. In addition to precipitating a hyper-competitive hiring environment, the pandemic changed the thinking of many employers about where, how, and when work gets done. Forming an inclusive organisational culture through connected leadership can have far-reaching benefits in enhancing service delivery in public service organisations.

By prioritising inclusion, public service organisations stand to leverage the collective intelligence and expertise of a diverse group of individuals, leading to heightened creativity, problem-solving capabilities, and adaptability (Daniel, 2021). McDonald (2023:10) further asserts that Connected leaders understand that inclusivity gives their organisations competitive advantages, in-

cluding improved performance and productivity. An inclusive organisational culture makes it easier for public service organisations to attract, grow, and retain top talent and ensure they tap into staff's full potential. The basic tenets of connected leadership can help foster high-performing, resilient, and future-ready public service equipped to carry out their missions effectively and efficiently. Table 2 below illustrates the principles and the results of connected and agile in enhancing service delivery in public service organisations.

Table 2: Tenets and Results of connected and agile leadership to public service

Tenets	Description	Results	Description
Empower people	Titles no longer drive power. It comes from relationships and connections in today's organisations. Leadership is no longer just about setting expectations and directing others to meet them. Today's leaders seek to empower employees to make decisions and to contribute their unique perspectives.	Invite everyone	Connecting leaders can help convene diverse stakeholders to work toward common goals and drive innovation by making engagement the cornerstone of all economic development efforts. An inclusive effort will unite different sectors, industries and voices that are multigenerational and ethnically, racially, socioeconomically, geographically, and gender diverse.

Be transparent	Along with autonomy and empowerment, connected leadership promotes an inclusive organisational culture through transparency. Leadership must involve employees in decision-making processes and recognise staff contributions, which will help generate the buy-in needed to execute initiatives and programs successfully	Build trust	Connected leaders can also work to engender a sense of community between team members and stakeholders, which builds trust and increases the likelihood of better outcomes. Public service organisations will foster credibility and support for their initiatives by opening the lines of communication and providing a better understanding of stakeholder needs and expectations.
Stay agile	In today's rapidly changing world, agility is crucial to organisational resiliency. Connected leadership enables public service organisations to respond quickly and effectively to shifting market dynamics.	Create consensus	Leaders who emphasise shared values and goals can best facilitate the alignment of stakeholders around a shared vision for economic development. A collaborative strategic framework and clearly defined priorities ensure that efforts are focused and coordinated.

Create balance	Connected leaders understand the importance of promoting balance and leading with compassion. They are replacing fear-based leadership styles with approaches prioritising empathy and purpose.	Responsiveness	Help generate ideas that will streamline your whole organisation and save money simultaneously. This helps create a culture of continuous improvement. Responsive leaders see and manage the behaviours that aren't helpful and model those that are helpful.

Sources: Developed by the Authors from McDonald (2023) &Daniels (2021)

As illustrated in Table 2 above, it is evident that connected and agile leadership, if implemented adequately within modern public service organisations, can bring employee and stakeholder morale that will generate effectiveness in service delivery. McDonald (2023) argues that the tenets of connected and agile leadership include but are not limited to empowering people, transparency, agility and creating a balance of power. Daniels (221) and McDonald (2023) further argue that if the public service organisation embraces the abovementioned tenets, it is guaranteed to invite everyone to work towards the common goals and objectives of the organisation, it builds trust among the employees, stakeholders, and employers, it creates consensus of the key players in the organisation. Lastly, It makes the organisation's leaders responsive and agile to the ever-changing environment. This article argues that the public values set by the OECD (2019:12) in Table 1 are not achievable in an environment that espouses traditional leadership styles void of connected and agile leadership style in its operativeness.

As such, this continues to argue that the public value theory and the open-liberal leadership theory cultivate the tenets of leadership, which subsequently give birth to effective and productive service delivery in public organisations. It is evident that most of the African post-colonial independence government's endeavours to do away with the colonial caused them to drift back into the pre-colonial leadership approaches that are not democratic. As a result, this might have caused them to lack adequate leadership development to foster the most demanded connected and agile in public service.

2.3 Open and the Closed System Paradigms in Public Administration

The open and closed system paradigms are the main underlying theoretical components of leadership steeped in the systems thinking of organisational leadership that emerged during the 1960s. In analysing the leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa, the researchers found this theory critical in analysing the deficiencies of public service organisations' endeavours to foster public value that satisfies its citizens. Wallace, Sweatt and Acker-Hocevar (1999) assert that Systems theory builds upon the premise that everything in our universe is interdependent and that the only way to understand a system is holistically, not by its discrete parts. This theory resonates with the Public Value Theory, which advocates for an interdependent engagement of employers, stakeholders, and citizens in a transparent, inclusive, and democratic manner for the organization to be productive. From their further analysis, Wallace et al. (1999) argue that the parts, in isolation from one another and the larger context, do not represent new open systems theory. According to Sanders (2008), the original systems theory contributed to understanding how organizations formed a gestalt with their environment. In this context, the preceding statement means that the organisation's interaction with its environment defines its nature and characteristics. Katz and Kahn (2015) pointed out that they are academic scholars who first pioneered the extension of Bertalalanty's work by defining systems theory as being concerned with relationships, structure, and interdependence. In their view, systems thinking is a way of ordering thoughts and actions so that the organisation is influenced, not influenced by, its environment. This systems approach to organizational theory suggests that an organization must move from the traditional closed systems paradigm and embrace a transformational open system paradigm's set of interrelated and interdependent parts that make the organization democratic and flexible.

The open systems paradigm is in direct contrast to the closed machine paradigm that has dominated our understanding of leadership since the advent of the industrial age. Wallace et al. (1999:12) assert that open systems thinking, on the one hand, rooted in the principles of the new sciences, is built upon a set of paradoxical concepts that matter is immaterial, disequilibrium fosters growth and creates global equilibrium, and out of chaos, order can emerge. Instead of assuming that there is only "one possible form" or structure to adopt, the new sciences see structure as a choice to respond to emergence or adaptation by creating a language of possibilities, breakthroughs, and innovations. Wallace et al. (1999) argues that, in contrast, a closed system perspective attempts to break everything into small indivisible pieces; open systems thinking asserts that before seeking to understand the parts that constitute the whole organization, one must understand the organisation. Given the above analysis, the authoritarian government centres its leadership approaches on the closed systems paradigm, which does not promote connected and agile leadership within its organisations.

Open systems thinking replaces the cause-effect relationship of elements with a producer-product relationship. This implies that an individual is a necessary but insufficient determinant of an outcome (Ringson, 2023b & 2020). The preceding analysis shows that a leader does not cause outcomes. Instead, leaders should involve the interdependence of the participants in the whole organisational system and support coordinated action and communication. The preceding statement of the open system paradigm complements the connected and agile leadership model and the Public Value Theory that advocates for inclusivity and democratic engagement of public organisations' stakeholders, employees, and employers (McDonald, 2023). Causes of problems are thus located in patterns of activity rather than in isolated elements.

Additionally, according to Wallace et al. (1999), teleology replaces the determinism characterising closed systems in open systems. The focus shifts from isolating causes to acknowledging purpose and meaning. In open systems thinking, the process replaces structure, and synthesis replaces analysis. Whereas closed systems are static, open systems are organic and flexible and constantly influence and interact with their internal and external environments. Open systems are self-renewing because they import energy from the world around them. Systems thinking is holistic, long-range, and team-oriented. In addition to systems thinking, the concept of learning and organisations helps understand the open systems dynamics schools of thought.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative desktop research employs interpretive subjectivism as its epistemological framework to investigate leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value within the public service. This study adopts a phenomenological desktop method, drawing on grey literature to explore participants' lived experiences, perceptions, feelings, and views. Predicated in the preceding, the study recognises the significance of addressing citizens' grievances stemming from prolonged poor service delivery nationwide. Informed by Husserl's phenomenological philosophy, which centres on understanding subjective experiences, this research consults various sources, including published articles, government reports, and ministerial policy documents (Husserl,1970). Through document and database reviews spanning private, federal, provincial, regional, and local sources, the study aims to uncover insights into leadership dynamics and agility in public service delivery in South Africa. The decision to conduct qualitative desktop research stems from the prevalence of subjective accounts highlighting dissatisfaction with traditional leadership approaches among practitioners, policymakers, academics, and politicians. Grounded in subjectivism philosophy, which emphasises subjective interpretation based on existing literature, this approach comprehensively explores relevant themes and perspectives. By leveraging existing resources, desk research offers a cost-effective, efficient, and accessible means

of data collection, facilitating a thorough examination of the research topic.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of this article's main findings centres on the thematic issues informed by the literature review, as well as theoretical and conceptual underpinnings reviewed in the preceding sections of the article. Cooper, Fleischer and Cotton (2012) argued that the qualitative phenomenological desktop method using interpretive subjectivism as an epistemological is appropriate to this study because it depends on the grey literature on the participants' lived experiences, perceptions, feelings, and views. Thus, after thoroughly reading the published and unpublished literature on leadership and the imperative of agile in delivering public value in the public service in South Africa, various ideas, arguments, and insightful thoughts emerged, and the discussion of this emanates from those scholarly thoughts and ideas.

4.1 The Imperative of Agile for Ethical Leadership and Human Development

The involvement of the community and stakeholders in public service organisation affairs is one of the outstanding benefits established from the literature on the examination of leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa. The literature, as informed by Sikwela, Tshuma and Tshabalala (2018), lamented that the poverty, inequality, and unemployment in South Africa are skyrocketing despite attaining independence for 30 years.

The citizens are still grappling with the colonial repressive government systems of apartheid government. There was a sentimental affirmation of the preceding view by Francis, Valodia and Webster (2020), who said that the development policies formulated by the incumbent government of the African National Congress failed to meet the promises of the liberation struggle. Ringson (2023b) reveals that in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) for the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate was 63.9% for those aged 15-24 and 42.1% for those aged 25-34 years, while the official national rate stood at 34.5%. Mosala (2022:3) argues that the Gini coefficient of expenditures was 0.56, making South Africa one of the most unequal countries in the world. Suppose the abovementioned proponents' revelations are anything to go in regarding the leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa. In that case, it shows that there is precarity in the attainment of public value for public organisations. Whilst the National Development Plan and its Vision 2030 (NDP) advocated for the reduction of the triple challenge to zero by 2023, the public service crisis continues to manifest through the triple challenge, lack of education, poor health, corruption, load-shedding and skyrocketing of crimes in the country. The skyrocketing triple challenges that caused the citizens to be even more

vulnerable to other socio-economic and political issues in South Africa got worse due to the COVID-19 pandemic that exposed government deficiencies in service delivery. During COVID-19, corruption became commonplace, and some politically advantaged accolades could even embezzle the donations meant for people experiencing poverty for their aggrandisement. At the time of the writing of this article, South African citizens are still grappling with homelessness and humanitarian security issues due to crime and hunger. The literature informs us that the main problem that incubates the abovementioned socio-economic challenges is that the public sector is still battling to embrace and understand the imperatives of agile and connected leadership. While the public sector embraced connected and agile leadership during COVID-19, it was reactionary. Therefore, it did not do much to prevent the government from nosediving into the dark pool of the socio-economic crisis. Remedially, studies conducted by OECD (2019), Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg (2014) and Moore (1995) demonstrate that the Public Value Theory sets and categories (see Table 1) can go a long way to help the government realise its goals in delivering public value to the citizens. Predominantly, the Public Value Theory sets and categories demonstrate the need for public organisations to refrain from using the rigid traditional bureaucratic leadership system that does not promote democracy in the workplace. Similarly, the tenets and results of connected & agile leadership in public service by McDonald (2023) and Daniels (2021) (See Table 2) demonstrate that the imperative of connected and agile leadership creates a favourable environment for economic growth and public value to the general populace. Furthermore, the open systems paradigm steeped in the systems thinking theory by Wallace, Sweatt & Acker-Hocevar (1999), and Katz and Kahn (2015) assert that the challenges of poor delivery of public value by many governments are in their vindictive espousing of the closed systems leadership paradigm instead of the open systems and the liberal paradigm that is inclusive and participatory.

4.2 The Imperative Agile Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic Public Value Delivery

This article also extracted essential lessons about leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa. Ringson & Raniga (2022:307) and Ringson (2023a) reveal that COVID-19 and consequent changes in mobility have altered informal trading as a significant livelihood activity for many unemployed people in South Africa. Emerging evidence shows that informal traders were severely affected by this health and economic crisis, especially youths and women. As highlighted in the previous section, COVID-19 exposed most post-independence African governments' inability to create a conducive environment for citizens in crisis. Notwithstanding the challenges brought and aggravated by COVID-19, public service organisations embraced digital technology and refrained from physical interactions in the workplace. This preceding lesson resonates with OECD (2019), Bryson, Crosby & Bloomberg (2014), and Moore's

(1995) Public Value Theory categories and sets of public values that advocate for flexibility and refrain from rigid traditional leadership. The COVID-19 challenges forced public service organisations and the general populace to be innovative and accept the reality of doing business by embracing digital technology.

The process of embracing the new reality demonstrated the leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa, which could not have happened without the COVID-19 lockdown challenges. People continued to learn in the university through the introduction of online education systems, and businesses continued to occur through online transactions and door-to-door delivery of food and parcels. COVID-19 lockdowns saw reduced transport costs and congestion on the road while people adjusted to the new reality of working from home fostered by COVID-19. According to Janssen & Van der Voort (2020), the public service and public populace learned something meaningful and valuable for governments in the future from the COVID-19 pandemic. First, there is no single best response strategy. Responses will vary per domain; even within one government, there will be no singular best approach. Agility can be drawn on immediately as regards tools, but this has drawbacks, too, as demonstrated by the failure of the agile app development process in some of the organisations that failed to see the light of day. However, according to the Tenets and Results of Connected and Agile Leadership to Public Service by McDonald (2023) and Daniels (2021), agility works better in organisations that are proactive than reactionary. Such governments operate using the open systems paradigm rather than the closed systems paradigm, which is rigid and not adaptive to environmental changes.

4.3 The Imperative of Agile in Security, Rule of Law, and Managing Diversity

The imperative of agile in security and the rule of law are other aspects that this article extracts from the literature, which demonstrates the leadership and the imperative of agile in delivering public value in the public service in South Africa. According to Marchant & Gutierrez (2022), Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being developed and applied at an accelerating pace across every industry sector and societal activity. AI has the potential to provide untold benefits. Still, it is also already creating concerns about privacy, security, safety, bias, unfairness, liability, political interference, democratic control, technological unemployment, and National Security. The optimal deployment of AI will require addressing these concerns to satisfy the public and policymakers. Wallach & Marchant (2019) further argue that traditional and rigid governmental regulatory frameworks are ill-equipped to manage rapidly emerging technologies because of the fast pace of change, the broad diversity of applications and concerns, and the limited jurisdiction and expertise of regulatory agencies. At the same time, government "*hard law*" regulation should and will undoubtedly

play an essential and growing role in the oversight of AI, *"soft law"* will also provide a fundamental and critical set of tools for managing these technologies.

This article argues that if the government is not adaptive and agile in this technological era, it will always lag behind some technological advancement, which may affect its political sovereignty and development. Take, for example, this technology where different governments use drones to spy on and take other government's information. The government must have counter devices the terrorists invade, its security, and the rule of law. Cameras are essential for the security sector, and they help law enforcement agencies establish 24-hour surveillance on the roads for lawbreakers, in the shops and pavements for security purposes. According to Gong, Loy and Xiang (2011:1), there has been an accelerated expansion of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance in recent years, mainly in response to rising anxieties about crime and its threat to security and safety. Substantial numbers of surveillance cameras have been deployed in public spaces ranging from transport infrastructures (e.g. airports, underground stations), shopping centres, sports arenas to residential streets, serving as a tool for crime reduction and risk management. It is pathetic in South Africa that load shedding goes for more than 4 hours a day, rendering the security system that uses electricity useless. Gong et al. (2011) further argue that security has been the dominant driver for developing and deploying video analytics solutions. There are no investors who want to invest in a country where humanitarian security is under threat due to uncontrolled crimes, and the tourism industry suffers more from issues of crime rates in South Africa. From the tenets and results of connected and agile leadership to public service by McDonald (2023) and Daniels (2021), OECD (2019), Bryson, Crosby & Bloomberg (2014), and Moore's (1995) Public Value Theory categories and sets of public values and systems thinking theory by Wallace, Sweatt & Acker-Hocevar (1999) convergently assert that participatory leadership and democracy enhances agility within the public services organisations. Furthermore, because of their inclusivity, the abovementioned theories also advocate for managing adversity by valuing the voices of the citizens and employees within the organisation.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this article, underpinned by the Public Value Leadership Theory, Connected and Agile Leadership Model and the open and closed systems leadership paradigms steeped in system thinking theory, established three critical aspects where leadership and the imperative of agile in the delivery of public value in the public service in South Africa is either in deficit or exhibited. Firstly, this article established that if the public service organisation embraces connected and agile leadership, it can achieve its public value through the imperative of ethical leadership and human development. This preceding aspect of moral leadership and human development is achievable through democratic leadership that

manifests through citizen participation, inclusivity, and surveillance technology to detect corruption and lawbreakers in government systems. Secondly, the study established that the leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa manifested themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic. The process of embracing the new reality demonstrated the leadership and the imperative of agility in delivering public value in public service in South Africa, which could not have happened without the COVID-19 lockdown challenges. People continued to learn in the university through the introduction of online education systems, and businesses continued to occur through online transactions and door-to-door delivery of food and parcels. COVID-19 lockdowns saw reduced transport costs and congestion on the road while people adjusted to the new reality of working from home fostered by COVID-19.

Third and Last, the article established the importance of leadership agility in security, the rule of law, and managing diversity. There has been an accelerated expansion of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance in recent years, mainly in response to rising anxieties about crime and its threat to security and safety. Substantial numbers of surveillance cameras have been deployed in public spaces ranging from transport infrastructures (e.g. airports, underground stations), shopping centres, sports arenas to residential streets, serving as a tool for crime reduction and risk management. It is pathetic in South Africa that load shedding goes for more than 4 hours a day, rendering the security system that uses electricity useless. The article also concludes that no investors want to invest in a country where uncontrolled crimes threaten humanitarian security. The tourism industry suffers more from issues of crime rates in South Africa. Furthermore, the article establishes that participatory leadership and democracy enhance agility within public service organisations. Furthermore, because of their inclusivity, the abovementioned theories also advocate for managing adversity by valuing the voices of the citizens and employees within the organisation. Considering the preceding findings, this study recommends that public service organisations in South Africa embrace democratic principles and enforce the tenets of the connected and agile leadership model within organisations. Public Value theory sets categories of public values, and the open systems leadership paradigm is steeped in system thinking theory to enhance the effectiveness of public value in South Africa.

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