

The Nexus between Public Service and Research, Development and Innovation in South Africa: A public reform strategy

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Abstract

The paper explores the interconnectedness between public service and research, development and innovation (R, D&I) from a conceptual point of view. The ideology of public administration as what government can properly and successfully do and how it can execute its responsibilities with the utmost possible efficiency and effectiveness in the era of the 4th Industrial Revolution is interrogated. Attention is drawn to prospects of government investing in research, development and innovation as a mechanism to firstly, take evidence based policy decisions; secondly, provide relevant goods and services informed by empirical evidence, thirdly accelerate efficiency in service provision and lastly improve on monitoring and evaluation as far as the provision of public goods and services is concerned as well as improving the delivery of services in the future. The article is anchored on the Public Management Reform Theory which advocates for an improved public sector's administrative structures and operations. This theory promotes a better and modernised public service that delivers basic services in an effective and efficient manner. The theory points out to a paradigm shift from how the public sector is traditionally perceived into a future of the sector as a modernised sector that is market friendly, lean, decentralized and customer friendly. The methodology adopted includes a desktop research and document analysis. The researchers used primary and secondary scholarly literature from the public domain to substantiate arguments advanced in this article. Based on the preliminary literature review on the phenomenon, studies have shown that investment in research, development and innovation (R, D&I) leads to growth and development; hence governments such as the United States and China have created knowledge-based-economies by increasing rate of academic and public research advances within governments business. The outcomes of the preliminary literature posit that linkages amongst research, development and innovation in the public sector space are worth exploring to better the mandate of governments; this is evidently a global trend which differs from country to country. Moreover, evidence suggests that governments that have advocated for and adopted investment in R, D&I are doing well on their governmental mandates. The article contributes to the body of knowledge, by demonstrating how R, D& I can be mechanisms for public sector reform. Arguably, governments should be innovative in their attempt to reform the public service sector by ensuring meaningful synergies between public service and knowledge generating institutions.

Keywords: Public service, Research, development and innovation, public reform, 4IR.

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