

Batho Pele: Improving government service

What is in this guide?

Public servants are at the forefront of implementation management. The success of government's programmes and policies depends on the Public Service. Batho Pele is a belief set that is used to improve service delivery in the public service.

- Why Batho Pele?
 - Improving Service Delivery
 - The 8 Batho Pele Principles
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1. Why Batho Pele?

Batho Pele, a Sesotho word, which means "People First", is an initiative that was launched in 1997 to transform the Public Service at all levels. Batho Pele was launched because democratic South Africa inherited a Public Service that was not people-friendly and lacked the skills and attitudes to meet the developmental challenges facing the country.

In the struggle to transform the Public Service, the old culture has to be changed to ensure that our people are served properly, that all staff work to their full capacity and treat state resources with respect.

2. Improving Service Delivery

Batho Pele is an approach to get public servants committed to serving people and to find ways to improve service delivery. This approach also requires the involvement of the public in holding the Public Service accountable for the quality of service provided. Batho Pele is also about moving the Public Service from a rules-bound approach that hinders the delivery of services to an approach that encourages innovation and is results driven. In other words instead of looking for reasons why government cannot do something, they have to find better ways to deliver what people need.

Managers in public service have a key role to play in creating an environment for their staff to become effective in the way they interact with customers. This requires that they focus on motivating staff, ensure that they have the right tools to do their work and provide ongoing support especially at times when staff are under pressure and stress.

The Batho Pele belief set has been summarised by this slogan: "We belong, we care, we serve." Batho Pele aims to ensure that all public servants put people first, and adhere to the following overarching framework:

- We belong: we are part of the Public Service and should work together and respect fellow colleagues
- We care: caring for the public we serve – our customers
- We serve: all citizens will get good service from public servants.

Batho Pele is based on the following eight principles:

- Consultation: citizens should be consulted about their needs
- Standards: all citizens should know what service to expect
- Redress: all citizens should be offered an apology and solution when standards are not met
- Access: all citizens should have equal access to services

- Courtesy: all citizens should be treated courteously
- Information: all citizens are entitled to full, accurate information
- Openness and transparency: all citizens should know how decisions are made and departments are run
- Value for money: all services provided should offer value for money

3. The 8 Batho Pele Principles

Consultation

Consultation simply means - interact with, listen to and learn from the people you serve. Public servants should make sure that they stay in touch with the people they serve, by finding out what services they need, how they would like their services to be delivered and what they are dissatisfied about. Consultation is meaningless, unless it is fed back to the management so that they can change the system, or take the steps needed to improve the service given to the customers.

Service standards

Every department has to set service standards that guide exactly what they deliver and to what quality or standard. Service standards should clearly state how long it will take and exactly what people can expect from the public service. For example, if you apply for an ID book from Home Affairs, and you have all the necessary documents, it should only take about 6 weeks, to get the ID book. If this standard is not kept, the department owes the customer an explanation and probably an apology.

Redress

When people do not get what they are entitled to from the Public Service, they have a right to redress. This means that the public servant should immediately apologise to them and also tell them what solution they are offering to their problem. If the public servant has none, they should speak to their manager or supervisor and make sure that the problem is sorted out. The Public Service's success and image is built on its ability to deliver what people expect from them. When complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic and a positive response. The Promotion of Administrative Justice Act allows for citizens to ask for reasons for any decision taken by government that affects them. The Act ensures that citizens have a right to administrative decisions that are lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair. Where citizens are dissatisfied with the reasons given, the Act allows people to appeal the decision or ask for the review of the administrative action by a court or, where appropriate, an independent and impartial tribunal.

Access

All citizens have the right to equal access to the services to which they are entitled. This especially applies to disabled people, illiterate people and rural people who may have difficulty accessing government services. Public servants have a special role to play, to make sure that those who need extra assistance get it. Managers should ensure that these services are accessible to disabled people and that people who use wheelchairs and walking aids can get into public buildings. Special arrangements should be made to assist people with hearing or visual disabilities.

Courtesy

Public servants have to remember that they are employed to help the people and to give them access to the services that are their rights. They are not there to stop people or to be obstacles. This means that in their contact with the public, public servants should always be courteous and helpful.

Information

All citizens should be given full information about the services that they have a right to get. If a public servant does not have information, they should try to find out and help the person. When referring

them somewhere else, they need to be very clear about what they will get there, what they need to take with them and which person they must go and see. The better informed people are, the easier it will be for the public service to do its job and the fewer people there will be in the queues. Public servants are encouraged to spend some extra time with people who need a better explanation or special assistance because they cannot understand or cannot access the services themselves.

Transparency

It is very important for the Public Service and administration to be run as an open book. The Public Service is there to serve the people and they have a right to the services it offers. Many people, especially poor people, do not yet have access to things like free basic services, or social grants, simply because they do not have the information to access it. The people also have the right to know how decisions are made, how a department works, who is in charge and what its plans and budgets are.

Value for money

It is very important that public servants do not waste the scarce resources of government and that they deliver a service that is as cost-effective and efficient as possible. It is their duty to inform management of any wastage of resources and to look for ways of saving money and time, without compromising the quality of the service delivered to people.