

# What it takes to be a service provider to the public sector

Leadership. That's what Adv. Thuli Madonsela frames as the most necessary set of skills required by service providers – and this includes financial planners – in the public sector. Speaking at the Glacier Public Sector Summit 2022 recently, she unpacked the Epic model of leadership. This is one that she developed as the previous Public Protector, and that could be applied in any role that requires a person to drive change in thinking; introduce new processes; or implement innovative solutions, particularly in the public sector.

## It starts with the Constitution

This sector should be the easiest landscape to navigate with the Constitution as its foundation, underpinned by democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights that unlock opportunity for all, says Adv. Madonsela. However, the reality is that newcomers into the sector encounter what she refers to as a 'VUCA' world – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. While 'VUCA' has prevailed throughout history and in many cultural and socio-economic contexts, the environment in the public sector presents a more radical version of this idea.

The Constitution governs the public sector, with clear prescriptions about avoiding conflict of interest; preventing favouritism at all costs; and being committed to not bringing the government into disrepute. However, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world. Poverty is real and inequity, stark. Corruption and state capture have become part of the fabric of the public sector. As suppliers to the sector, how do we navigate this landscape?

## Epic leadership

Adv. Madonsela describes leadership as “the art of influencing and motivating yourself and others to think and act in a desired way to achieve determined outcomes”. Epic leadership goes beyond this to “channel personal and enterprise leadership to optimise agile responses for radical change and consequent adversity through the application of the Epic Leadership Code”.

Epic leadership has its roots in ethical leadership and encourages leaders to be purpose-driven,

impact conscious and committed to serve.

## Moral dilemmas are rife

Adv. Madonsela cautions that we will face ethical and moral dilemmas constantly in this sector. She encourages service providers to be guided by their answers to two key questions:

- What impact are you making?
- How committed are you to serve?
- What would you be prepared to sacrifice to do the right thing?

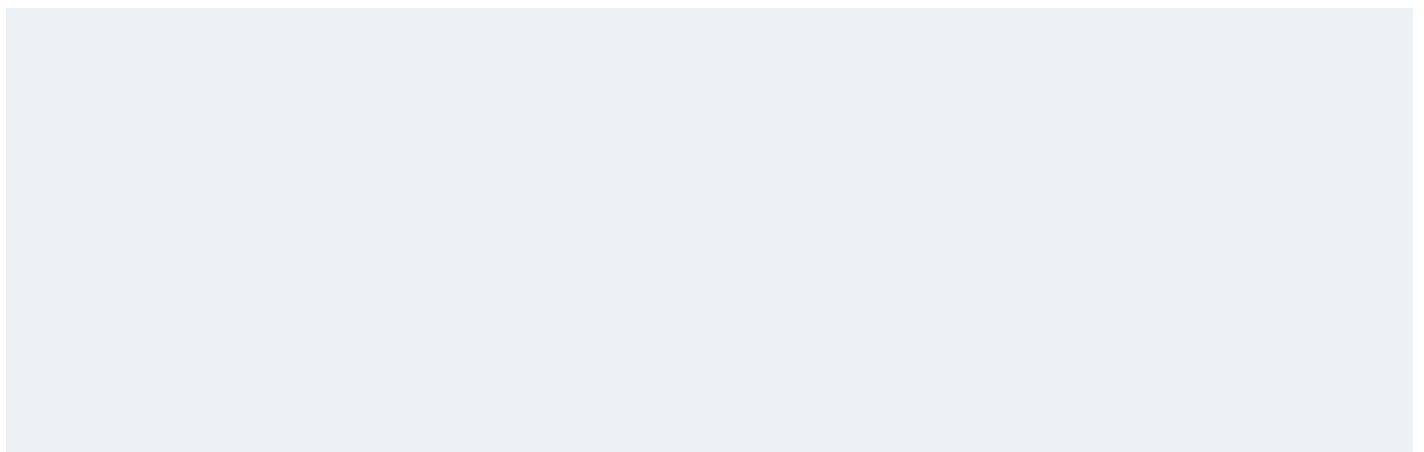
Epic leaders act to inspire; to be purposeful and to do so ethically. She lists four kinds of intelligence that leaders require to be moral and ethical agents:

1. Emotional. This is when you take action that is grounded in impact consciousness – the knowledge that your actions have a ripple effect and influence others – in good and bad ways.
2. Social. This means having broad cultural knowledge and understanding of diversity that does not impede your appreciation of a person's individuality and humanity.
3. Spiritual. Belief in a Higher Power and daily practice that acknowledges this.
4. Intellectual. This is not static and is like a muscle; it can be grown.

Pursuing business relationships in the public sector requires people who know who they are and what they stand for. Being a part of this sector means being willing to contribute to it in profoundly positive ways and being a moral and ethical agent of integrity that makes an indelible mark on the sector and the people employed in it.

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