



Administrative Reforms in the Ghanaian Public Services for Government Business Continuity During the COVID-19 Crisis

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to public service delivery but heightened citizens demand for services. We examined public sector reforms implemented in the Ghanaian public sector to ensure public service continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using content analysis and key informant interviews we found that reforms such as flexible working schedule, redesign of offices, directorates, and installations of equipment, online monitoring and assessment of targets, and conducting services online were instrumental in ensuring the continuity of government business. We recommend that public sector managers should allocate adequate resources to digital-based public sector reforms to better prepare for wicked transboundary human threats such as Covid-19.

Keywords Administrative reforms · Business continuity · Covid-19 · Ghana · Public services

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis is a compelling global ‘wicked problem’ that has disrupted political, social, economic, and organizational processes in epic proportions. Administrative and political leaders have been tested on how they have prepared, mitigated,

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and responded to the public health outbreak (Moon, 2020; Park & Fowler, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the extent to which society and the public sector may be undermined by unpredictable, inconsistent, and uncertain events (Ansell et al., 2020). The fragile nature of state institutions has been exposed by the pandemic, including the weakening of the public sector (Dunlop et al., 2020:366). Yet, the public sector has witnessed dramatic increase in service demands while striving to maintain the safety of employees. Analogous to this view, scholars have raised a legitimate question about how the public sector can continue to provide public services to citizens amidst significant disruptions during emergencies (Grossman et al., 2020; Schuster et al., 2020). Some have suggested that intense demand for services coupled with compounding disruptions, overstretched by the health crisis requires adaptation (Shi et al., 2020). The idea is that routine planning strategies may create inertial forces that hinder rapid adaptation when circumstances change and discontinuities occur (Weber & Tarba, 2014; Stivers, 2022). It may be difficult or impossible to plan for or sustain effective collaborations or respond to excessive service demands when existing routines, staffing and technologies are disrupted.

Rather, crisis conditions require robust administrative solutions to deal with the crises and reveal a need for public administration reforms that support governance during emergencies (Ansell et al., 2020). In fact, the public sector must meet turbulence with robust strategies where creative and agile public organizations adapt to the emerging new disruptive problems (Howlett et al., 2018). Consistent with this view, Roberts (2020) argues that new administrative capabilities are critical for governments to anticipate and manage crisis. For Boin et al. (2020), the contemporary governance amidst mega challenges requires sustained attention and effective interventions to overcome. Yet, how public administrations can transform and adapt themselves to turbulence and scale-up solutions is less explored in the literature (Ansell & Trondal, 2018). So far, scholars and practitioners alike are questioning what works and what does not work during the COVID-19 pandemic (Turrini et al., 2020). Pisano et al., (2020) also argued that the need for timely responses and revision of administrative norms is crucial for recovery. Moreover, research on the COVID-19 pandemic has largely focused on epidemiological issues (see Li et al., 2020), modelling economic consequences (see Vernengo et al., 2020), and assessing its social implications (Simonov et al., 2020). Yet, there is less emphasis on how the public administration systems are flexible enough to adapt and quickly to public emergencies. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore how public administration reforms are able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main questions are: what public sector reforms have been implemented to ensure the continuity of government business during the COVID-19 pandemic? How effective are such reforms to mitigate current and future emergencies? Are civil servants receptive to the new reforms? Given the bureaucratic nature of public organizations, the paper contributes to the emerging literature on how public administration can be agile and flexible enough to quickly respond to public emergencies. Moreover, the paper provides some pointers to public managers on the need to enhance administrative capacities and governance strategies that are resilient enough to deal with future public emergencies. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the literature is presented, the methodology is discussed, findings are presented and discussed, and conclusion and policy implications offered.

Literature Review

Linking Public Sector Reforms and Public Emergencies: Theoretical Perspective

Over the years, public bureaucracies have received flaks for their inability to handle public emergencies including wicked problems (Wegrich, 2019; Ansell et al., 2020). Given the advent of complex issues, including climate change, it is becoming evident that the public sector is ill-equipped to address such megatrends. However, Ansell et al., (2020: 956) state that “the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated a need to perceive of challenges to the public sector in a new way and is revealing the necessity, willingness, and capacity for changing the modus operandi of the public sector in pursuit of robust solutions to turbulent problems”. Yet, complex problems cannot be dealt with by only having well-trained staff and a battery of equipment ready for when unpredictable and uncertain problems hit the public sector. In fact, the theory of ‘sound governance and public administration’ argues that robust governance strategies and state capacity are crucial for tackling turbulent problems (Farazmand, 2004; Ansell & Trondal, 2018). In that regard, robust administrative reforms refer to “the ability of one or more decisionmakers to uphold or realize a public agenda, function, or evaluate in the face of the challenge and stress from turbulent events and processes through the flexible adaptation, agile modifications, and pragmatic redirection of governance solutions” (Ansell et al., 2020:952). Simonovic and Arunkumar (2016) contend that since adaptation is crucial in erecting a robust governance, the political and administrative institutions, regulatory processes, and policy instruments may fail to deal with new and emerging disruptions. Therefore, whereas a traditional public administration system may resist change due to its inertia, a robust administrative system aims to transform itself to achieve an agenda (Capano & Woo, 2017).

The literature suggests a model for linking public administration to crises: *first*, scalability - ability to flexibly mobilize and de-mobilize resources across organizations (Ansell & Torfing, 2018). Thus, some countries created platforms for trainees and retired health workers to sign up and voluntarily assist frontline health workers based on need. *Second*, prototype – aims to create new adaptive solutions through testing and revision based on prompt feedbacks. *Third*, modularization – shows the solutions that are divided into a series of modules that can be used flexibly to deal with the emergent situation. For example, the module of testing, tracking, quarantine, lockdowns, social distancing, stimulus packages, intensive care treatment and gradual opening of economies have been adopted during COVID-19. *Fourth*, bounded autonomy – allows for stakeholder or broad-based ownership and commitment to an overall strategy by engaging multilevel-governance networks – regional, local, and private sector. *Fifth*, bricolage – aims to flexibly use and combine available ideas, tools, and resources to fashion out workable solutions during crises (Chandra & Paras, 2020). And *sixth* strategic polyvalence – aims to deliberately design solutions that can be taken in new directions and serve new purposes depending on situational analysis of demands, barriers, and emerging opportunities.

Ensuring Continuity of Public Services Under Crisis Situation

Public emergencies of any kind amplify citizens' demand for public services, including, health, education, social welfare, transport, and security (Ansell & Trondal, 2018). Essentially, the response to public emergencies such as tornadoes, floods, fires, terrorist attacks, and even the COVID-19 crisis is driven by employees in the public service (Dunlop et al., 2020). It includes line ministries and street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) – working in many different roles from high-profile emergency and clinical services to low-profile refuse collection and social care services (Schuster et al., 2020). To ensure the continuity of public services, public servants are required to mobilize and utilize public resources (United Nations, 2020). In a case study conducted in the United States, Shi et al. (2020) led evidence to show that nonprofit organizations faced challenges in their quest to continue services to homeless people. In the midst of acute financial difficulties, increased service demands, and the implementation of lockdown measures, nonprofits provided hotels for quarantine services to enhance local government efforts aimed at delivering public services. Evidence from natural disasters suggests that administrative leadership capacity was crucial for crisis preparedness, responses, and recovery (Kapucu & Ustun, 2018). The work by Nolte et al. (2020) revealed that public administration reforms that decrease bureaucratic inertia enhanced responses to refugee crisis. Moreover, other scholars observed that collaboration with citizens and other important stakeholders has proven to be a useful public sector reform during crisis (Switzer et al., 2020; Steen & Brandsen, 2020). Given the strange and complex nature of the COVID-19 crisis, recent studies have focused on digital technology as a critical public sector reform. Though COVID-19 appears to be moving faster than public administration, technology has made it possible to continue public service provision despite significant disruptions. Digitization is the process of adopting and using digital technology within individual, organization, and social contexts (Legner et al., 2017). Reis et al., (2018) argue that digital transformation suggests that fundamentally, new capabilities are created in public administration and in people and society's life. Both public and private organizations are leveraging on the opportunities provided by digital technology to forge business continuity (Trischler & Westman Trischler, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has had the effect of forcing an abrupt shift from face-to-face towards the digital realm. To ensure continuity of public services, the immediate public administration reform is to ensure that activities are moved online - schools conduct teaching and learning, increased food delivery by restaurants and grocery shops, ordering goods from e-commerce platforms, and other technologically related platforms (Faraj et al., 2021). Due to the pandemic, public servants were forced to work in accordance with new procedures using new technologies. This means that government business processes were redesigned in an unplanned and revolutionary manner at an unprecedented speed (Gabryelczyk, 2020). Indeed, the pandemic has made the public sector more “accidentally agile” (OECD, 2020), and that crisis demonstrated that governments can be agile and adaptive (Janssen & Van Der Voort, 2020). For example, in Germany, Wegrich (2021) observed that innovation labs were set up to coordinate and respond to the pandemic. However, the author further observed the slow pace of the digitalization of public services and calls for a re-assessment of the

Table 1 Category and number of interviewees

Category of interviewees	Total number interviewed
Officers at the ministries of Health and Public Sector Reform Secretariat	3 interviews
CEOs of SOEs	2 Interviews
Officers at the Office of Head of Civil Service	2 Interviews
Officers at the Public Services Commission	3 Interviews
Total	10 interviews

Source: Field Data

prevailing image of public sectors reforms. In Singapore, Abdou (2021) observed that technology is effectively deployed to follow-up, diagnose cases of COVID-19, and enhance the delivery of essential services.

Data and Methods

A content analysis approach supported by key informant interviews was employed in this study to understand public service continuity during the COVID-19 crisis. The content analysis approach helped to analyze data collected from the websites of state agencies, official COVID-19 related reports, and news articles. With respect to the official reports, 2020 and 2021 Annual Performance reports of the civil service of Ghana were analyzed. The Annual Civil Service performance report is published by the Office of the Head of Civil Service. It should be noted that the COVID-19 crisis was first identified in Ghana on 12 March 2021 and continued through 2021 to April 2022 when all related restrictions and measures have completely been lifted. In that regard, 2020 and 2021 reports covered all emergency public sector reforms and public services implemented to prepare, mitigate and recover from the threatening health pandemic. Moreover, content analysis of websites of public agencies was also important source of data for the study since state agencies displayed COVID-19 related protocols and actions taken on their respective websites for easy access. Content analysis is an important source of information in qualitative research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). These sources of information facilitated the triangulation of information to ensure a verification of the realities on the ground (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). Additionally, ten key informant interviews were conducted with government officials at the ministries of Health and Public Sector Reforms, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of State-owned Enterprises, officials at the Office of the Head of Civil Service, and Public Services Commission to identify and assess the effectiveness of public sector reforms implemented during the COVID-19 crisis to ensure government business continuity (Table 1). Employing a purposive sampling technique, the interviewees were selected based on their knowledge or direct participation in the reforms undertaken to manage COVID-19 in Ghana.

Thematic analysis based on the suggestion by Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted. Therefore, systematic coding ensured that the fundamental concepts were carefully extracted, labelled and defined, and key patterns and relationships regarding public sector reforms and public service continuity were identified and assessed. The themes generated formed the basis for analyses and discussions.

The COVID-19 Situation in Ghana

Ghana recorded its first case of COVID-19 in March 2020. Soon thereafter, President Akufo-Addo announced nationwide travel and social restrictions effective from 16 March. Key amongst them were closure of all borders and three weeks' partial lockdown of cosmopolitan cities of Accra and Kumasi; a ban on public gatherings including conferences, workshops, political rallies, and religious activities; and closure of basic and tertiary educational institutions. However, businesses such as retail outlets, restaurants, hotels, transport operators, and local markets could continue to operate but had to adhere to social distancing and enhanced hygiene measures after the three-week partial lockdown. Five-pronged objectives underscored Ghana's response strategy: contain the spread; provide adequate care for the sick; limit the impact of the virus on social and economic life; and inspire the expansion of domestic capability and deepen Ghana's self-reliance. Conversely, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) had earlier conducted rapid assessment of the likely budgetary impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions on the economy. On the revenue side, government expected to lose GH¢ 5.68 billion in oil revenue due to the two-thirds decline in crude oil prices. Non-oil revenues were expected to fall by GH¢ 2.25 billion due to the slowdown in economic growth (MoF, 2020). Government also faced significant unforeseen costs associated with the COVID-19 response programmes, including the National Preparedness and Response Programme (GH¢ 572 million), and the Coronavirus Alleviation Programme (GH¢ 1.20 billion). The latter makes provision for various stimulus packages and support measures, including GH¢ 600 million in the form of soft loans to small and medium enterprises, to which private sector banks will contribute a further GH¢ 400 million; GH¢ 320 million to supplement healthcare workers' incomes; and GH¢ 280 million for household water supply subsidies, food packages, and public grain procurement from smallholder farmers (MoF 2020). In order to finance these costs and to cover losses in revenue, government obtained a loan facility of US\$ 1 billion (GH¢ 5.72 billion) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF loan, which came at a time when Ghana's debt stock is already GH¢ 200 billion or 60% of GDP (MoF, 2019), is expected to cover about half of the COVID-19 costs and revenue losses. Government further proposes to defer interest spending on existing loans from the Bank and to temporarily reduce or suspend payments to sovereign investments funds, such as the Stabilization Fund and the Heritage Fund. It also plans to reduce planned capital and current expenditure by GH¢ 1.25 billion in 2020 (MoF, 2020). Following the mixed reactions that greeted the lifting of three weeks partial lockdown, the government of Ghana later adopted a gradualist approach to easing restrictions. On June 5 2020, schools were asked to reopen for final year students, and conferences, weddings, private burials, non-contact sport, religions activities, and political activities, all with less than 100 participants were permitted to resume. Additionally, the Electoral Commission and National Identification Authority also resumed their activities. However, festivals, sporting events, nightclubs, cinemas, and political rallies remain banned, and the closure of Ghana's border had been extended indefinitely. As at May 2022, Ghana's total COVID-19 cases stood at 161,000 with 1,445 deaths.

Results and Discussion

Enablers of Public Service Continuity During the COVID-19 Crisis

Outbreaks of crisis intensify demands for public services in households, homes, and in public office buildings. Essentially, services range from healthcare, electricity supply, public security, education, health, water supply, social welfare, transport, food security, and financial services. While public demands for these wide-range of public services are amplified during global public health crisis, public agencies' service provision is affected due to the significant disruption of regular functioning of state institutions. Nevertheless, the public sector needs to secure uninterrupted delivery of these services through state entities and State-owned enterprises for effective response and recovery process. It emerged that the Public Sector Reform Secretariat together with the Public Services Commission (PSC) and the Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS) developed Business Continuity Plans (BCP) for all government ministries, departments and agencies to drive the whole process of government business continuity during the pandemic. Thus, critical areas of government's operations that were likely to be undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic were the focal point. Our analysis identified some reforms that constituted the entire architecture of BCP: political and administrative leadership commitment to reforms, reforms related to the digitization of public services, and business-related reforms. These were key public sector reforms that contributed to an effective COVID-19 response, mitigation and recovery in Ghana.

Political and Administrative Leadership Commitment to Reforms

Leadership is key for the success of human institutions. Essentially, leadership is crucial for the reform of public administration and the extent to which public administration would respond to crisis situation. In that regard, our findings revealed that the President of Ghana exhibited high level of political commitment in ensuring that essential services were readily available for the citizens. During the initial stages of the COVID-19 crises in 2020, the President in his bi-weekly COVID-19 addresses to the nation (popularly referred to as "fellow Ghanaians") maintained a consistent call on the utilities' providers such as the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) and Ghana Water Company limited (GWCL) to ensure that electricity and water were running without interruption. The President also announced free water and electricity for the lifeline consumers and a subsidy for those who consume more than 50 kWh per month from April to December, 2020 (Nkrumah et al., 2021). To implement the President's policy directives, the Ministries of Health and Finance provided leadership and facilitated the development of a National Strategic COVID-19 Response Plan and Ghana COVID-19 Alleviation and Revitalization of Enterprises Support (CARES) programme (GHS 100 billion) to reduce the incidence of and mortality from the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate its socio-economic impacts on citizens. The Ministry of Information in collaboration with Ministry of Health prepared a community engagement and a communication strategy to inform and educate the public to stay safe and stop community spread of the virus. Moreover, the Public Sec-

tor Reform Secretariat under the presidency provided the needed logistics to the PSC and the OHCS to initiate COVID-19 related reforms in state agencies for continued provision of services while dealing with restrictive measures for their staff. The call was necessary because with the COVID-19 restrictions, citizens were required to stay at home, meaning that water and electricity were on high demand both for domestic purposes and for dealing with the pandemic. The high level of political and administrative commitment from the executive President, PSC and OHSC put Ghana's public sector in a firm position to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be emphasized that the executive President has a wide range of powers under the 1992 Constitution (Gyimah-Boadi & Prempeh, 2012), and with that high level of commitment from the top during the COVID-19 crisis motivated and compelled all actors at central and sub-national levels to act.

Reforms on Digitization of Public Services Delivery

One major public sector reform during the COVID-19 crisis is the digitization of public services. It is crucial for the government to lead an effective response to the health pandemic through policy, institutional reforms, coordination, funding, and implementation in a manner that requires fast, and agile action. However, the government is constrained by its own mitigating measures including social distancing, which impair the work flow of public servants and requires new processes and technologies for continued essential business operations. The analysis shows that for an effective response to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the PSC and OHCS initiated the following digital-based reforms to mitigate its impacts and engendered continuity of government business.

Flexible Working Schedule and Annual Leave

It emerged that all state agencies, ministries, and departments were tasked to formulate Business Continuity Plans (BCP). Within the framework of the BCP, some staff worked in the office while others worked from home. Moreover, some non-essential employees who had outstanding leave were asked to take their leave. This COVID-19 related workplace measures enabled the decongestion of public offices to avoid overcrowding and subsequently facilitated strict adherence to the COVID-19 protocols. A duty roster was also created and facilitated the rotation of staff.

Redesign of Offices, Directorates and Installation of Equipment

As part of reforms during the COVID-19 crisis, some offices and directorates were carefully redesigned and restructured to alter the number of officers sharing offices, their work schedule and the number of hours allocation for a day, week, and month.

Moreover, to ensure that public servants are able to work effectively while off-site, the Public Sector Reform Secretariat through PSC and OHCS procured and ensured that right logistics including laptops, turbo net (for internet access) and other internet facilities for public service continuity were made accessible. The ICT centers in all departments and agencies were promptly renovated, equipped and linked to the

national digital center for reliable and stable internet connectivity. Also, Web Hosting Services were provided, which allowed staff to deliver and meet work schedule deadlines regardless of their location. In that regard, virtual conferences platform such as zoom, skype, Microsoft Teams, and other video conferencing platforms facilitated meetings, sharing of ideas, team work and ensured ultimate delivery of public services.

Reforms Related to Monitoring and Assessment of Targets

The findings demonstrate that daily deliverables and deadlines were agreed and set between Divisional Directors and Staff. Staff were required to be readily available to answer calls and respond to emails as well as offer their inputs for some required tasks. The assessment of performance was done with respect to the deadlines agreed upon for response to queries and the delivery of assigned tasks.

Conducting Services Online

It emerged from the analyses that the ability to conduct government business online was an important public sector reforms that ensured the continuity of public service delivery. For instance, electronic justice (e-justice) system was implemented, which allowed judges to sit on cases via Zoom, skype, or Microsoft Team. Schools were also moved online to ensure that the academic calendar was not unduly affected. Interviews with the official of PSC and OHCS revealed that an online electronic application system (e-application) was erected during COVID-19 through which staff were recruited. This was necessary because some staff were diagnosed to have gotten the COVID-19 virus and had to isolate for some weeks to recover. This brought pressure on the other staff members who were under extreme pressure to provide essential services. For instance, a good number of medical doctors, nurses, and civil servants in state agencies and departments who were diagnosed of COVID-19 had to isolate for further management. There was an urgent need to recruit new essential staff providers to optimize staff strength in public offices so that public service provision would not be interrupted. The analyses also show that virtual processes were used to promote officers who were due for promotion to their next levels. An officer at the OHCS stated that between 2020 and 2021 when face-to-face meeting was not possible due to the COVID-19 crisis, about 1, 707 officers, comprising 331 Assistant Director II, 643 Assistant Director I, and 733 sub professional grades participated in the novel virtual promotion interviews. It must be emphasized that Ghana operates unitary system where the decision-making resides in a centralized government. In that regard, the virtual promotion processes enabled candidates and panel members outside the capital city of Accra to take part in the process. The recruitment reform reduced the risk and traveling time to interview locations, minimized human interface, and further reduced the risk of spread of COVID-19 among Civil Service Staff. Most of the recruited staff were posted to the regional and district offices, which ensured optimum staff strength to meet an increased citizens' demand for public services during COVID-19 crisis.

Business-Related Reforms

Our analyses further revealed that the government was agile enough to implement some urgent public sector reforms to ensure that the supply chain of some essential commodities and groceries were not interrupted during the COVID-19 crisis. The business-related reforms were operationalized in two areas: reforms at the country's port and reforms to support local manufacturers.

Reforms at the Country's Ports

It came up that some reforms were put in place to ensure that the domestic supply of essential goods and services were not severely impacted as a result of the disruption in the global supply chain caused by the COVID-19 crisis. To achieve this, Customs officials at the various ports of entry were excluded from the COVID-19 restrictions, and the officials were only required to show their identity cards for safe movement during the lockdown periods. Moreover, the Public Sector Reform Secretariat and the Ministry Finance scaled-up the implementation of Integrated Customs Management System (ICUMS) that allows importers and exporters to process their request online from any location. The ICUMS did not only prevent overcrowding and adherence to COVID-19 measures but also enabled the business community to clear their goods with much convenience.

Moreover, special permits were granted to port operators and shipping agencies that are required to ensure continuity of services during COVID-19 crisis. The permits granted the essential service operators a safe passage through the police and military barriers that were to ensure compliance with the COVID-19 protocols. The cumulative effect of these measures is that goods and services were exported and imported without significant disruptions.

NPM-Style Contract-Based Reforms to Provide Essential Services

At the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the public administration in Ghana activated the New Public Management (NPM) style of reforms that was informed by the contract-based approach to the delivery of public services. Thus, some local garment and textile manufacturing companies contracted and supported to enhance their production capacity, which enabled them to deliver essentially large-scale government procured orders of personal protection equipment (PPEs). Moreover, the Zipline company was contracted where drones were used to deliver medical consumables to hard-to-reach rural communities. Also, contracts were entered with pharmaceutical companies to manufacture and supply some medical supplies. The contract-based approach adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic ensured that essential commodities that were critical for combating the virus were readily available in the domestic market despite the disruption of global supply chain. An analysis of the official reports revealed that as at December 2020, a total of 18.6 million face masks, 90,000 headcovers, and 60,000 medical scrubs were produced and supplied to the government. It must be emphasized that at the end of March 2020 when Ghana went into lockdown, the demand for hand sanitizers, facemasks, and PPEs had inten-

sified and the industry players took the undue advantage to astronomically increase prices thereby making it impossible for citizens to buy for the purposes of complying with the COVID-19 protocols. Therefore, the government's decision to contract the private sector to provide and ensure continuity of such essential services contributed to effective response and recovery process.

Business Regulatory Reform Programme

The government through the Public Sector Reform Secretariat came up with Business Regulatory Reform (BRR) programme. The BRR is an interactive web-based programme which was used and still being used to facilitate consultations between public institutions and the private sector on government's policies and regulations during the COVID-19 crisis. The BRR project was used as a platform to disburse soft loans to businesses through the Ghana Enterprises Agency (formerly National Board for Small Scale Industries). The medium and small-scale businesses (SMEs) were required to apply online and upload their particulars for subsequent disbursement of funds.

Challenges to the Implementation of Reforms to Ensure Public Service Continuity During the COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the need for flexible and responsive public sector that can adapt to changing circumstances and coordinate complex and trans-boundary issues. Despite the effective business continuity plans and measures that were put in place to ensure the continuity of government business during the COVID-19 crisis, some ostensible challenges were recorded.

Unavailability of Reliable Internet Connectivity for Remote Working

Ghana is a lower middle-income country with less robust information technology coverage. This limitation posed serious challenge to a major digital reform implemented to ensure continuity of public service delivery in the midst of the pandemic. The internet connectivity was not reliable for officers and even in some places the connectivity was completely not available for service to be delivered online. The use of platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to facilitate on-site and off-site interactions and communication among the staff in the form of meetings, interviews, and training were severely undermined. This impacted adversely on the smooth flow of work, productivity of workers, and the general quality of service delivery were conversely undermined. Coupled with the erratic nature of the internet connectivity, analyses revealed that high cost of internet services and data packages hindered the productivity of workers.

Inadequate Logistics to Facilitate Remote Working

The flexible work reform was not only undermined by internet connectivity but also other critical logistics were not adequate. This became critical because during the pre-COVID era, employees shared working tools such as computers and other accessories. But since COVID-19 restrictions require that a majority of staff should work from home, the emergency logistics procured were woefully inadequate. Consequently, some staff did not have personal computers at home and other necessary logistics thereby making it extremely difficult to share information to meet deadlines and other assigned responsibilities.

Inadequate Capacity and Rigidity of some Staff

Some public and civil servants lack the required skills in the use of technology. Some were unable to log into Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and skype platforms for video conferencing, meetings, workshops, and for team-based tasks, which posed significant challenges. Coupled with that, some other staff could not adjust to the new working mode since they are used to their old system which is deemed to be ineffective in responding to turbulent times. Some staff did not have conducive workspaces at home and with children not in school, home became not so suitable for work.

Discussion

There is consensus in the literature that a crisis situation requires flexible and innovative public sector reforms to ensure the continuity of the government business (Legner et al., 2017; Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; Reis et al., 2018). This is underpinned by the view that a typical public administration with its bureaucratic structures tends to hinder rapid response and adaptation to complex issues (Janssen & Van der Voort, 2020; Christensen & Lægread, 2020). In fact, public bureaucracy is often seen as an antithetical to adaptation during crisis. Consistent with this view, Shava and Hofisi (2017) have argued that crisis situation opens a window of opportunity for public sector innovation and reforms. Therefore, this paper led evidence to show that Ghana's public sector was agile to implement reforms that ensured the continuity of public service provision during the COVID-19 crisis. Scholars of public administration have long identified political and administrative leadership commitment as critical for the success of public sector reforms (McCourt, 2003; Batley et al., 2012). Our review established that the commitment from political and administrative leadership in the Ghanaian public sector played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the uncertainty that surrounded the pandemic at its initial stages, the executive President issued a number of executive instruments during his COVID-19 addresses to the nation to the Public Sector Reform Secretariat, PSC and OHCS to initiate administrative and institutional reforms to help respond, mitigate, and ultimately ensure the continuity of government business. Scholars have led evidence to demonstrate how political and administrative commitment from the top ensured continuity of public service delivery during national response to natural disasters and

calamities (Kapucu & Ustun, 2018). In response to the President's directives, a Business Continuity Plan was agilely erected at the initial stage of the pandemic within which several agile reforms were activated. These include ensuring flexible working schedule and granting annual leave, redesign of offices, directorates and installation of equipment, online monitoring and assessment of results, and moving service provision online. The activation of these digital reforms is due to the strange and complex nature of the COVID-19 pandemic which requires draconian measures such as social distancing and restrictions on movements of people. Moreover, since the pandemic was moving faster than the public administration (Trischler & Westman Trischler, 2021), the only reform that could allow the continuity of public service delivery is the deployment of technology. The implementation of these digital initiatives created new capabilities for the public administration to forge business continuity. The shift to the digital realm did not only allow the delivery of government's services to be moved online, but also, it revolutionized service delivery in the private business sector. Thus, digital payments, restaurants, electronic commerce platforms were adopted to continue the delivery of services (Bai et al., 2021; Faraj et al., 2021). The other public innovations that were implemented during the pandemic include reforms at the country's port of entry, contracting out service delivery, and regulatory reforms. The Ministry of Health, for instance, used the services of Zipline Drone Company to transport medical consumables to hard-to-reach rural communities (Lampety & Serwaa, 2020). These public sector reforms decreased the bureaucratic nature of the public administration and enhanced the continuity of government business. However, some challenges were recorded with respect to the flexible reforms that were implemented to respond to the COVID-19 as well as ensure the continuity of government business. Chiefly among them are; unavailability of reliable internet connectivity for remote working, inadequate logistics to facilitate remote working, inadequate capacity and rigidity of some staff.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to public service delivery. Yet, it has also heightened citizens demands for services. In that regard, public sector organizations are required to find innovative ways to ensure the continuity of government business. This paper examined public sector reforms implemented in the Ghanaian public sector to ensure public service continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper observed that digital reforms such as flexible working schedule, redesign of offices, directorates, and installations of equipment, online monitoring and assessment of targets, and conducting services online were instrumental in ensuring the continuity of government business during the pandemic. Other initiatives include reforms at the country's ports of entry, contracting out of service delivery to private organizations, and regulatory reforms. Specialized service such as using drone technology to transport medical consumables to hard-to-reach rural communities was also part of the business continue plan of Ghana's public sector. However, many challenges were encountered with respect to the desperate reforms that were initiated, including, unavailability of reliable internet connectivity for remote

working, inadequate logistics to facilitate remote working, inadequate capacity and rigidity of some staff, financial constraints, and cyber security issues. Though the COVID-19 crisis posed significant threats and disruptions, it has conversely presented a unique opportunity for public administration to generate new solutions to respond to emerging global wicked problems. Therefore, it is critical for the public sectors to embrace these agile reform initiatives powered by the technology to eliminate obsolete and rudimentary processes. Governments and policy makers should pay adequate attention and ensure that much resources are allocated to digital-based public sector reforms since the COVID-19 crisis and other wicked transboundary human threats are likely to stay with us for a very long time.

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Declarations

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