



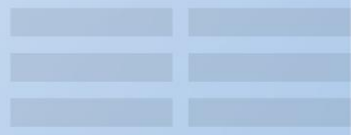

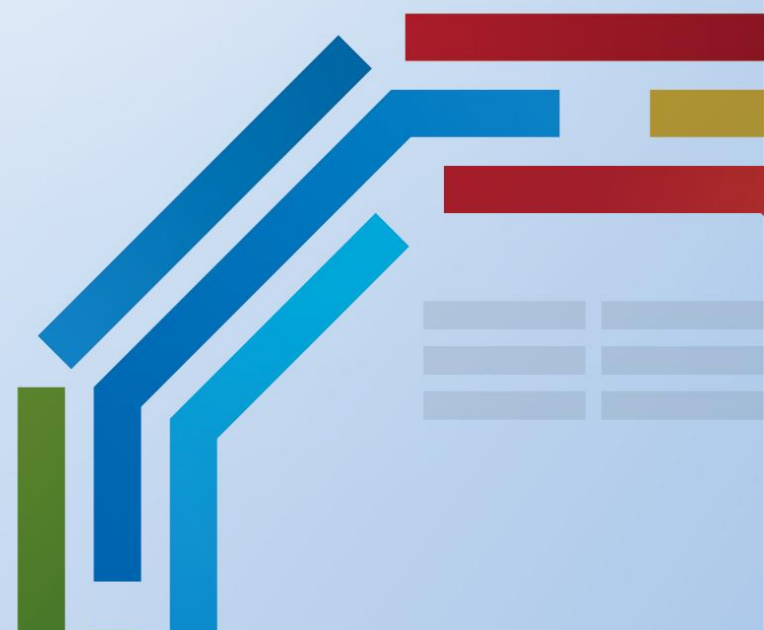
2024 UN PUBLIC SERVICE FORUM AND AWARDS CEREMONY

WORKSHOP 3

Changing Mindsets: Cultivating Systems Thinking,
Foresight and Innovation in Public Sector Leadership

CONCEPT NOTE

Organiser: Programme Management and Capacity Development Unit (PMCDU) /
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) / United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)



Introduction

The 2024 United Nations Public Service Forum will take place in Incheon, the Republic of Korea from 24-26 June 2024 under the theme 'Fostering Innovation amid Global Challenges: A Public Sector Perspective'.

The Forum will be comprised of a series of workshops where various elements related to the overall theme will be explored in more detail. Workshop 3 will explore fostering a mindset shift towards systems thinking, foresight, and innovation among public sector leaders, emphasising capacity development and examining strategies for implementation across individual, organisational, and institutional levels.

Objective

The workshop aims to foster a change in mindsets towards systems thinking, foresight, and innovation. It will provide a platform for public sector leaders to develop the capacities required for agile, foresight, and experimental/innovation mindsets. Additionally, the workshop will examine strategies and roadmaps to promote these mindsets through changes in the public sector at the individual, organisational, and institutional levels.

Focus

The workshop will equip leaders with enhanced skills in systems thinking and foresight methodologies for more effective decision-making. It will strengthen public sector leaders' capacities to become responsive agents of change in the face of evolving challenges, by meeting current needs while also anticipating and adapting to an evolving landscape, contributing to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Additionally, the workshop is expected to strengthen public sector leaders' innovation mindsets, fostering a culture of experimentation and creativity within the public sector. As a result of the workshop, public sector leaders will be better positioned to become more adaptive and forward-thinking, better equipped to navigate challenges and ready to drive positive change in the public sector to accelerate the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

The workshop is aligned with UN DESA's capacity development strategy and mandates. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) encouraged Member States to continue to strengthen their capacities to better utilise the various aid modalities and to disseminate understanding and implementation of capacity-building as a judicious combination of institution-building and human resource development¹. It also emphasised

¹ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/326/42/PDF/N0832642.pdf?OpenElement>, Report on the seventh session of the [UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration](#)

that capacity building is essential and needed in administrative restructuring, civil service reform, human resource development and public administration training².

The report on the twenty-second session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration³ (UN CEPA) noted that “a holistic approach to change the mindsets of public servants and political leaders to align them with the principles and values of the 2030 Agenda and the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development should be made a priority”⁴.

“Mindsets affect the way we think, see (frame reality) and act. Mindsets are important because they shape the way people behave, i.e. how they act or conduct themselves, especially towards others. In other words, mindsets comprise the attitudes and beliefs, worldview, and self-perception that matter for individuals as psychological factors governing how choices are made and habits are formed.”⁵

New mindsets and competencies in the public sector should be built upon the key principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including leaving no one behind, and the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development drafted by UN CEPA and endorsed by the ECOSOC in July 2018. One of the key mindsets needed to anticipate complex issues is a strategic foresight mindset. Strategic foresight is one of the strategies to implement sound policymaking - one of the 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development.

The Members of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration have stressed the importance of forecasting and planning. They highlighted the necessity for new skill sets that foster collaborative, more citizen-centred mindsets among public servants. They also emphasised the importance of promoting public sector innovation through digital technology.

Coherent strategic planning and foresight can be defined as “the capacity to think systematically about the future to inform decision making today”⁶. Strategic foresight can also be defined as “a systematic, participatory, future-intelligence gathering, and medium-to-long term vision building aimed at enabling present-day decisions and mobilising joint action”⁷. It involves a methodical and organised approach to exploring beyond the predictable engaging with uncertainty and complexity. It plays a crucial role in enabling effective emergent strategic planning in dynamic and rapidly changing environments surpassing traditional linear problem-solving approaches. It requires systems thinking.

² <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N96/771/79/PDF/N9677179.pdf?OpenElement>, 50th Sessions of General Assembly Resolution, Agenda Item 12 (A/RES/50/225)

³ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/326/42/PDF/N0832642.pdf?OpenElement>, Report on the seventh session of the [UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration](#)

⁴ [E/2023/44-E/C.16/2023/9](#), Report of the 22nd Session of the [UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration](#)

⁵ <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2023/Changing%20mindsets%20report%20-%201%20October.pdf>, Report on Changing Mindsets to Realise the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, New York, 2021

⁶ https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2023/Strategy%20note%20strategic%20oforesight%20Mar%202021_1.pdf, CEPA strategy guidance note on Strategic planning and foresight, February 2021

⁷ European Union for Learn Project.

UN DESA's World Public Sector Report 2023⁸ underscores the importance of enhancing public administration capabilities to leverage data, tools, and science-based methods for SDG implementation, including systems thinking, strategic foresight, and interdependency analyses. Capacity-building and knowledge-sharing are key to supporting policymakers in adopting and utilising these tools.

UN DESA, in collaboration with schools of public administration, has developed a competency framework outlined in the publication *Changing Mindsets to Realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.⁹ This framework identifies key mindsets and associated competencies crucial for advancing the achievement of all 17 SDGs. The competencies focus on forward-looking attributes to build a new organisational culture, emphasising practical behaviours aligned with the principles of effective governance and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to drive mindset change and address complex challenges.

Structure

This workshop will be composed of two sessions. At the closing of each session, the rapporteur will present key messages.

Session 1: Building Foundations

This session will introduce participants to the essential concepts of systems thinking, foresight, and innovation. The session will engage in discussions exploring the significance of these approaches within the public sector context. Case studies will also be highlighted to showcase how to apply these methodologies in real-world scenarios within the public sector.

Guiding questions:

- 1. Why is changing mindsets in the public sector critical for SDG implementation?*
- 2. What are systems thinking and strategic foresight, and how can they contribute to more effective decision-making in the public sector for SDG implementation?*
- 3. Why does foresight matter for transformational change in a world of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA world)?*
- 4. What is a foresight and agile mindset and how can it be nurtured?*
- 5. Practical applications of strategic foresight and innovation in government.*

Session 2: Implementing Change

This session will concentrate on developing strategies and roadmaps aimed at fostering strategic foresight and innovation mindsets in the public sector. Through interactive sessions, participants will explore practical applications of these strategies at different levels – individual, organisational, and institutional. The session will incorporate group discussions

⁸ <https://desapublications.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2023-10/World%20Public%20Sector%20Report%202023.pdf>, UN DESA's World Public Sector Report 2023, New York, 2023

⁹ <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2023/Changing%20mindsets%20report%20-%201%20October.pdf>, Report on Changing Mindsets to Realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, New York, 2021

and action planning, providing participants with a collaborative platform to exchange insights and formulate actionable plans for implementing change within their respective contexts.

Guiding questions:

1. *What is an Innovation Mindset and why is it critical for transformational leadership?*
2. *How can foresight and innovation be implemented in public administration to address complex present and future challenges?*

Conclusion and Recommendations

The final half-hour of the workshop will draw on conclusions and outcomes as well as key messages and recommendations from all the sessions of the workshop. The workshop rapporteur will lead a discussion, among participants, to identify key messages that will feed into the Forum's Rapporteur's Report on the last day of the UNPS Forum.

Organisational Details

- This workshop is organised by the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG) / Programme Management and Capacity Development Unit (PMCDU).
- Participants are expected to include public sector leaders, central and local government officials, policymakers, practitioners, public governance experts, civil society leaders and academics.
- The workshop will be conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation available in Korean.

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