

No legacy is so rich as honesty
- Shakespeare

The high cost of revolving DG syndrome

One-third of directors-general appointed since 2004 have left their positions under a cloud

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Most directors-general in South Africa's public service are not in it for the long term.

Almost a third of the 88 appointed since 2004 left their positions because they didn't get on with their ministers, or because they were implicated in wrongdoing – or were even fired outright.

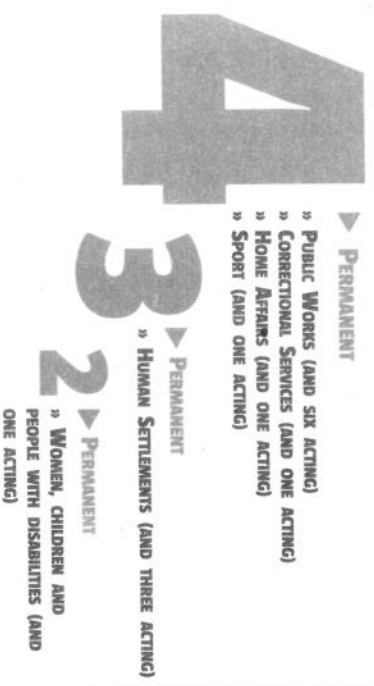
Following Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe's alarm earlier this month about the turnover of directors-general, City Press did a tally of the appointment of directors-general over the past nine years and gathered opinions on this:

Acting government spokesperson Phumla Williams denied the high turnover of directors-general affected service delivery, although Motlanthe earlier said it caused instability and institutional-memory loss.

Public Service Commission (PSC) chairperson Ben Mthembu said it caused productivity to dip and service delivery to suffer, and

The National Education,

DEPARTMENTS WITH HIGHEST TURNOVER



Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu) said, if directors-general left, it led to instability, uncertainty and power struggles.

Just more than a quarter – or 23 – directors-general left over differences with ministers, five were fired, three left amid allegations of wrongdoing, while one – former communications director-general Lyndall Shope-Matofe, who joined Cope in 2009 – left because of

DEPARTMENTS WITH LONG-SERVING DGs



differing political views.

Two department heads, Vernie Petersen (sport) and January Maslala (defence secretary), passed away on the job.

One of the worst departments, with 10 permanent and acting directors-general in the past nine years is public works, a department beset by fraud.

Stats SA was the best, having had only one director-general, Pali Lehohla, since 2000.

The high turnover of

directors-general has caused widespread concern.

Many served no longer than three years, but the PSC's Mthembu said this was too short. It takes a year or two for a director-general to adjust and develop a team, so the commission recommended five-year contracts.

Mthembu also said a professional head of the civil service should manage directors-general so that their

relationship with their ministers plays less of a role in their hiring and firing.

Former home affairs director-general Mavuso Msimang, who was in his job from May 2007 until his contract expired in April 2010, said tensions between directors-general and ministers existed primarily because ministers also employed deputy directors-general and chief directors.

"A DG sits with and gets

stuck with a non-performing guy because he is employed by the minister. This situation has a potential for serious conflict," he said.

A serving director-general said it was better if his contract coincided with a minister's term to minimise tensions.

"Almost invariably, a minister will want to appoint their own DG," he said.

Nehawu spokesperson Sizwe Pamla said when directors-

general left, it led to "a lot of shenanigans. If the centre is not holding, then people start to do as they please. Ambitions start to emerge. People who now aspire to be DGs start to mobilise, alienate and divide people. They start taking chances."

Pamla said the ANC resolved in Mangaung last year that cadre deployment was fine, as long as people were appropriately qualified.

Motlanthe earlier this month said the high turnover in directors-general led to institutional-memory loss and "hepitude during transition periods."

But Williams, who is also acting CEO of the Government Communication and Information System, which itself has been without a head from August 2012, told City Press service delivery didn't suffer.

"The number of DGs employed in the public service, their years of tenure and decisions for leaving the employment of government, have no bearing on continuity with regards to the implementation of (government's) programme of action. Every department is a collective of people who are qualified, experienced and committed to serve the public," she said, adding: "The collective continues to steer the ship."