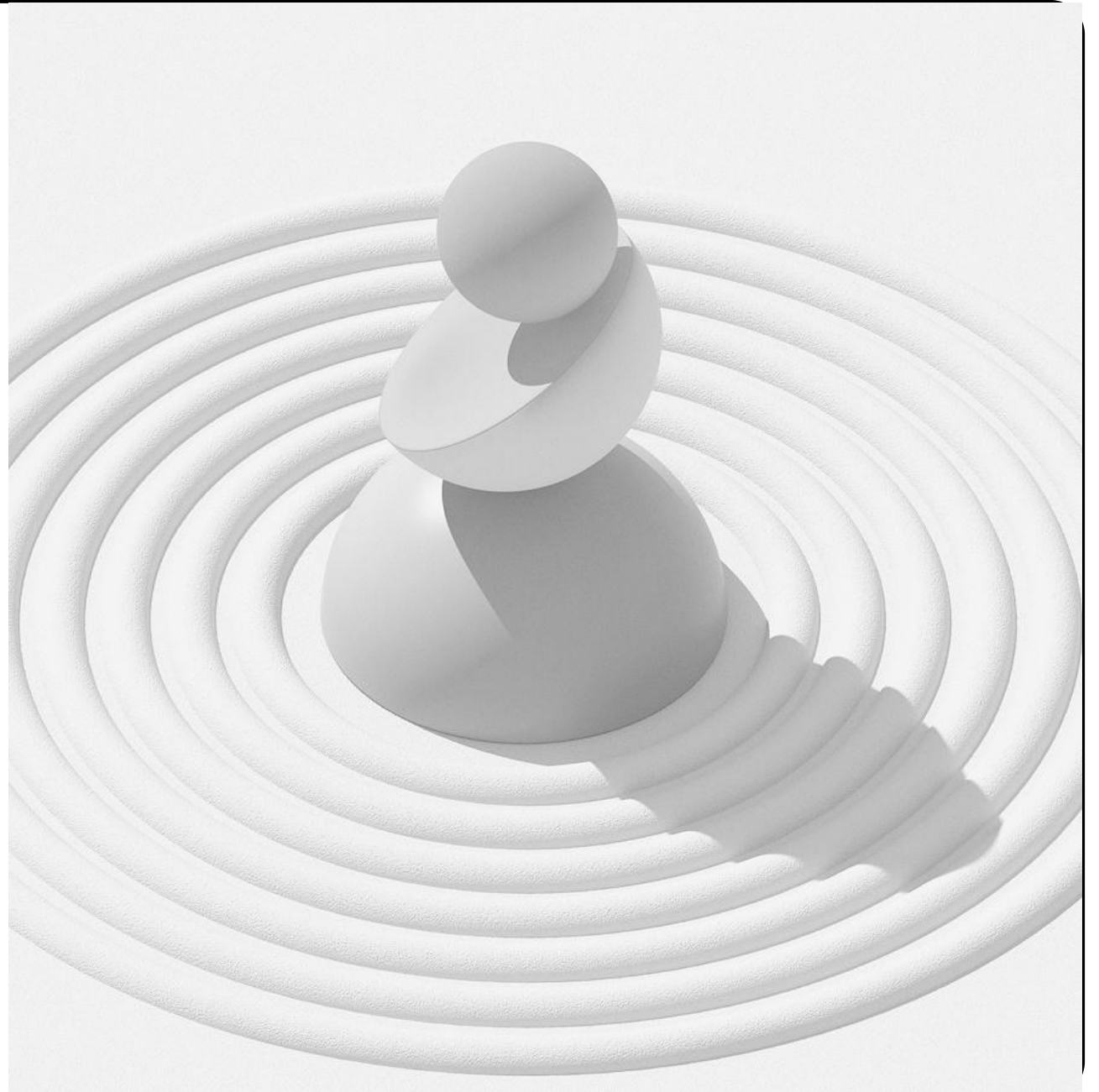


UP/NSI/KAF presentation

# SOUTH AFRICA'S 3<sup>RD</sup> TRANSITION: PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM IN PRACTICE

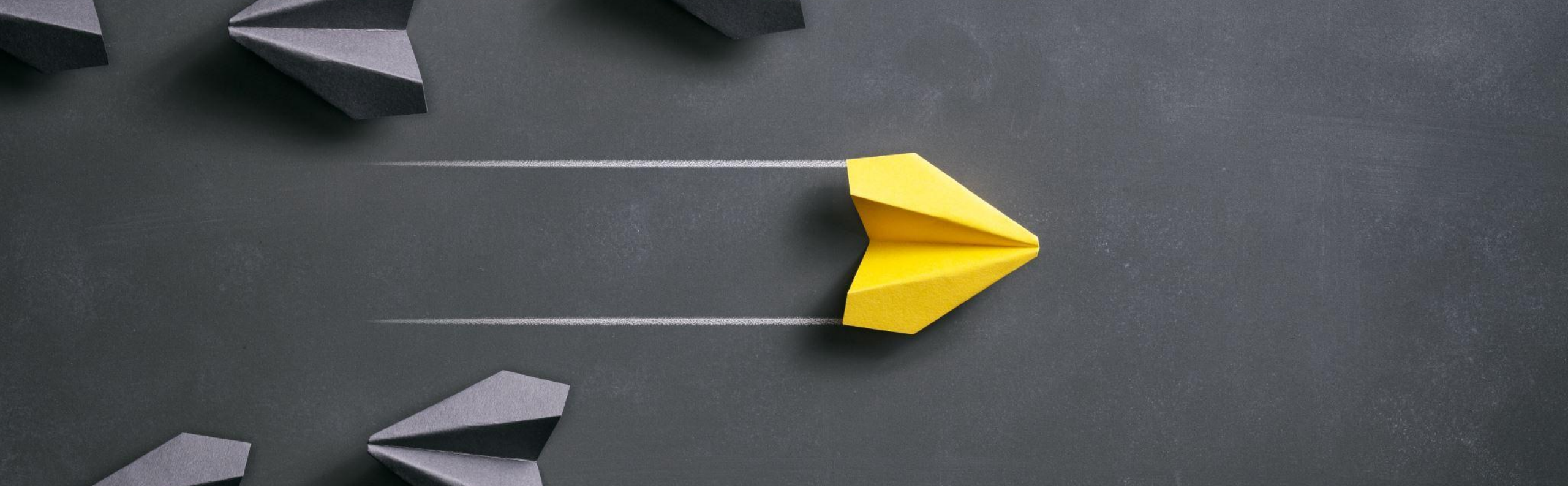
# DISCUSSANT: GERDA VAN DIJK

Reflections on public leadership,  
institutional reform and capacity  
in the Public Service



REPORT 1: TALENT MANAGEMENT  
IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC  
SERVICE

REPORT 2: RETIRING THE 1994  
GENERATION OF PUBLIC SERVANTS



A WARNING  
AND  
AN OPPORTUNITY

- Not merely HR analyses
- Fundamentally about the future of state capacity and institutional continuity



What the  
reports  
achieve...



# PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

- Force leadership to confront long-term institutional realities through evidence-based planning rather than short-term political management
- Value of using PERSAL data and demographic forecasting to understand workforce trends and institutional vulnerabilities.
- This strengthens strategic leadership because it enables leaders to anticipate crises before they become catastrophic.
- In this regard, the reports support a shift from reactive administration toward anticipatory governance

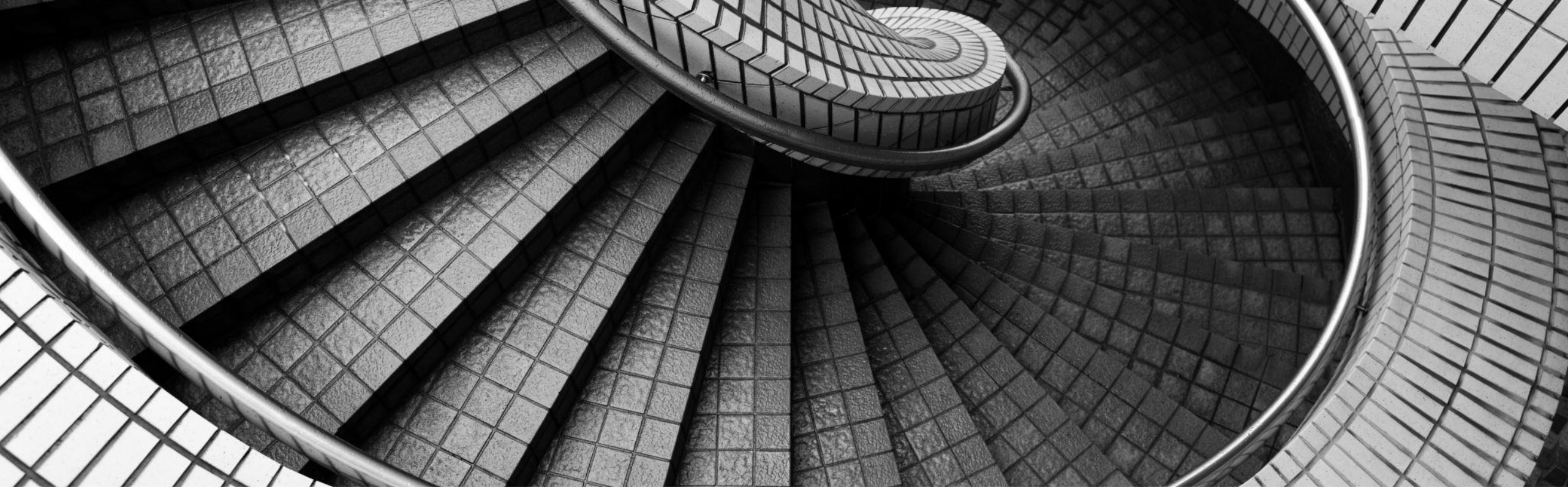
EMPHASIS ON  
PROFESSIONALISATION  
AND MERIT-BASED  
LEADERSHIP

# THRIVING IN UNCERTAINTY

The proposed reforms around merit-based recruitment, competency assessments, succession planning, and constitutional values could strengthen leadership legitimacy and rebuild public trust in state institutions.

The discussion around separating administrative authority from excessive political interference is particularly important in strengthening institutional integrity and ensuring continuity across electoral cycles





## INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

- The findings regarding ageing police officers, nurses, and senior managers reveal that South Africa is approaching a large-scale generational transition without an adequate replacement pipeline.
- This evidence creates urgency for reforming recruitment systems, succession planning, and workforce development strategies.

# EQUALLY IMPORTANT

1. Talent management systems rather than relying solely on traditional HR administration.
2. Public Service requires strategic talent pipelines, mentoring systems, and future-oriented workforce planning.
3. If implemented properly, these approaches could improve institutional memory, reduce disruption caused by retirements, and enhance organisational resilience

CHANGING  
GOVERNANCE  
ENVIRONMENTS

- Dominant party-state model towards competitive multi-party context
- Professional and politically neutral institutions become even more important.
- Institutional reform, therefore, is not simply administrative reform; it becomes democratic reform aimed at ensuring that the state serves citizens consistently regardless of political changes





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## CAPACITY

## DEVELOPMENT

- Younger cohorts are not entering or remaining in the public service at sufficient rates is deeply concerning.
- Yet this challenge also creates an opportunity to redesign public sector training systems.
- The emphasis on education, professional examinations, mentoring, and competency development provides a framework for building a new generation of technically capable and ethically grounded public servants.

# EQUALLY IMPORTANT

1. Professionalisation is described not only as possessing technical expertise, but also as embodying constitutional values and a commitment to public service ethics.
2. This is critical because state capacity ultimately depends not only on technical skills, but also on integrity, accountability, and public service orientation.

BUT THERE ARE ALSO TENSIONS



# TRADITIONAL VS HIGH-POTENTIAL

- Public leadership focused on talent creates tension with traditional public service values of fairness, representativity and equal opportunity
- Talent focuses on high-potential, critical skills, ability to identify critical positions and recruit strategically for those positions
- How does government balance excellence with inclusivity
  - Which is more important?
- Professionalism assumes a level of managerial and institutional capacity that does not currently exist
  - Weak HR professionalisation, bureaucratic compliance cultures, and limited organisational flexibility as significant barriers
  - Departments may struggle to implement sophisticated talent management systems while already facing operational crises, vacancies, and fiscal constraints.



# OBSTACLES

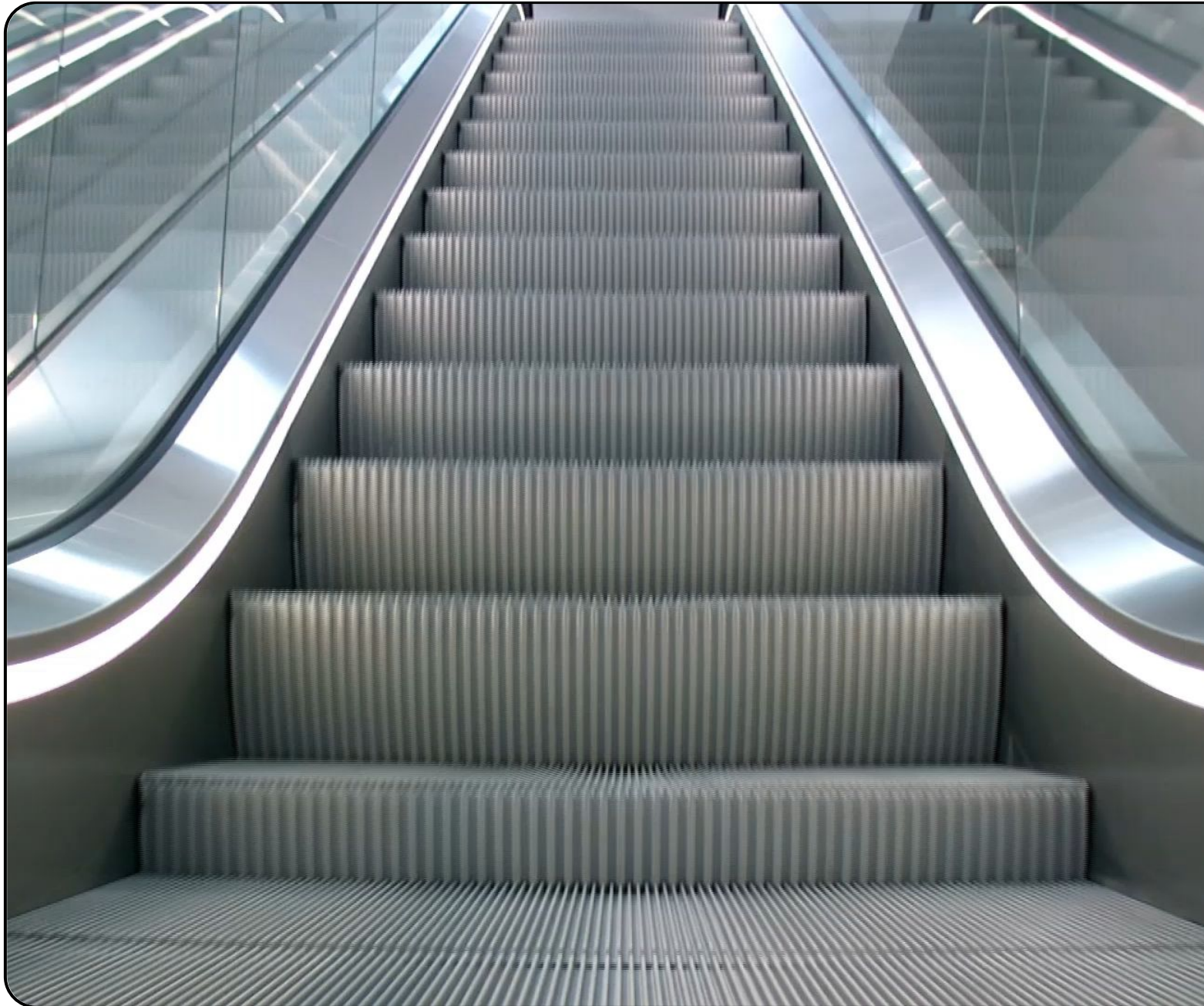
1. Fiscal austerity – frozen posts, budgetary controls, long approvals
2. HR concerns – no pipeline, no career management, high turnover, psychological consequence of stress
3. Political dimensions of reform – professionalism becomes unintentional technocracy



# MAIN CONCERNS

1. Threatens institutional continuity – retirement without succession planning
2. Loss of institutional memory – consultants are not public servants
3. Pressure of service delivery systems as frontline sectors face personnel shortages

Ageing is NOT demographic issue – it is a governance and state-capacity challenge



# SOLUTION?

Acknowledge  
professionalisation  
framework without  
fundamental HR reform is  
not possible

Cornerstone cannot be  
compliance – it needs to  
be ethics

Recruit those who can deal  
with fragility, uncertainty,  
ambiguity



**THANK YOU**

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