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## Table of Content

<b>Pockets of effectiveness in Ghana’s public sector: The driver and vehicle licensing authority in perspective</b>	<b>1</b>
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Akpeko Agbevade

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Pockets of effectiveness in Ghana's public sector: The driver and vehicle licensing authority in perspective**

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**The transformation of the public sector from a moribund to a result-oriented institution has been a subject of academic discourse. This article based on empirical study contributes to this discourse by examining the pockets of effectiveness, the push factors and the challenges to the sustenance of the pockets of productivity using the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority in Ghana as a case study. The article found that decentralization, service diversification, innovation and best practices, and contracting out were the successes attained. Effective leadership, technology, management vision, mission, and a sense of urgency among employees accounted for the excellence. However, the "political chess" during political power transitions and resistance to change were the greatest threats to the maintenance of the islands of excellence. The Ghanaian experience reinvigorates the assertion that in the midst of non-performing state institutions, there exist well-functioning ones known as pockets of effectiveness.**

**Key words:** Pockets of effectiveness, public sector reforms, driver and vehicle licensing authority, innovation, best practices, service delivery, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Public sector reforms (PSRs) were implemented globally as a panacea to the moribund public sector organisations. However, the reforms did not transform the public sector into functional ones. This failure led to despair and despondency among scholars, politicians, development partners and citizens and created a feeling and perception of fatalism with regard to how PSRs can be made to succeed (World Bank, 2012; Vis and van Kersbergen, 2007). For instance, in Ghana, the failure of reform initiatives has compelled Ayee (2019:173) to describe the state of Ghana's public sector as unsatisfactory and unhealthy. Similarly, Agbevade and Tweneboa-Kodua (2020) asserted that the search for a resulted oriented public sector in Ghana is a myth not a

reality. This notwithstanding, there is a ray of hope because some countries with poor governance and weak public sectors have exceptional, well-functioning public sector organisations (Leonard, 2008:3). In addition, studies have shown that there are public sector organisations performing well, and are referred to as 'pockets of efficiency' (PoE) (Daland, 1981; Leonard, 2010), 'islands of excellence', 'islands of effectiveness' (Bebbington and McCourt, 2007) or 'positive deviants' (Andrews, 2013). These organisations are characterized with features such as effective leadership, management vision, capacity development and insulation from political influence. Other factors identified are the political will to reform, stakeholder engagement, good political "rapport"

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between leadership of the public sector and the political elite (Wil, 2013a, b; Kuwajima, 2016, Roll, 2014; Owusu, 2006; Leonard, 1991; Tendler, 1997; Grindle, 1997; Israel, 1987).

This paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on pockets of productivity in Ghana, as it does not only examine the pockets of productivity at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) but also the push factors for the success and the challenges that threatened the sustenance of the excellence. In addition, the pockets of excellence are discussed vis-a-vis the four criteria identified by Roll (2014) in categorizing public sector organisations as “PoEs”. The criteria are:

- (i) Relative effectiveness in providing the public goods and/or services the organization is officially mandated to provide;
- (ii) Capacity to provide these public goods or services throughout the country;
- (iii) Mode of public good or service delivery that is in line with human rights principles and laws of the country concerned; and
- (iv) Period of persistence of at least 5 years.

The topic is timely for Ghana and Africa in general because of the renewed commitment to a robust and resilient public sector aimed to enhance service delivery and value for money. In Ghana, PSRs have also become a high priority for successive governments since independence. For instance, the government of Ghana on 8th August, 2018 launched a US\$ 35 million credit facility by the World Bank called the National Public Sector Reform Strategy (NPSRS)/Public Sector Reforms for Results Project, 2018-2023. The reform is themed: “Delivering for Citizens and the Private Sector,” which strongly emphasized the catalytic role of the public sector in private sector growth and development. The reform has four components namely: (i) strengthening organisational performance, (ii) improving efficiency, accountability and citizen engagement in the delivery of selected services, (iii) monitoring and evaluation and (iv) project management, coordination and public reporting. The reform aims to help sixteen (16) selected agencies to improve efficiency and accountability in the delivery of key public services to citizens and firms. The DVLA is one of the 16 Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) ([www.gov.gh/osm.gh](http://www.gov.gh/osm.gh)).

### “Pockets of effectiveness”

Scholars working in Brazil initially coined the concept “PoE”, which was later applied to actors and processes in the African, Caribbean and Middle Eastern context.

Daland (1981) was the first to call public sector organisations “pockets of productivity”. In his view, “PoEs” can be formed and continue to prosper in environments that were generally hostile to administrative

reform and effectiveness.

Others have used this term since, sometimes using a variant phrase such as ‘pockets of excellence’ (Leonard, 1991) and others, simply by noting high performance organisations in a setting where most were weak (Leonard, 2010:8; Bebbington and McCourt, 2007; Grindle, 1997, Tendler, 1997).

Historically, there were some pockets of excellence. Britain had a highly professional navy for well over a century before it reformed its patronage-ridden and incompetent army and waited for another 50 years before reforming its civil service (Fisher and Lundgren, 1975). White (1954, 1958) observed that even in the most corrupt periods of nineteenth century America, there were selected agencies that retained high professional standards. Daland (1981) opined that during Brazil’s military dictatorship, agencies promoting industrialization were models of productivity, even while social service agencies were a morass. Grosh (1991) reported that in Kenya between the 1970s and early 1980s, while the general picture about the public sector was poor, there were models of good performers.

“Pockets of productivity” have been defined variously. Roll (2014:24) defined it as public organisations that have been relatively successful in providing their official mandate of public goods and services in spite of operating in an environment where effectiveness in public service delivery is not the norm, and this differentiates them from other public organisations. Similarly, Daland (1981) said they are public organisations that are reasonably effective in carrying out their functions and in serving some conception of the public good, despite operating in an environment where most agencies are ineffective and subject to serious predation by corruption and patronage. Leonard (2010, 2008) defined the term as exceptionally well-functioning government or government-supported agencies in countries that have otherwise poor governance and weak public sectors (Leonard, 2008, 2010).

Both Daland (1981) and Leonard (2010, 2008) highlighted the nature of the environment in which “PoE” organisations operate. While Daland (1981) identified the environment to be characterized with corruption and patronage, Leonard (2010; 2008) argued that such environments have poor governance and weak public sector. From the above definitions, the following features can be gleaned for organisations called “PoE”:

- (a) They operate and succeed in an unusual environment where failure is the norm,
- (b) The environment is characterized by weak state institutions and poor governance, which allowed corruption and patronage to fester.

According to the Economic Commission for Africa (2010:81), studies on “PoE” must address three fundamental questions. (i) How and why did the public

organizations become “PoE”; (ii) How did these organisations manage to persist in a context of weak statehood and poor governance; and (iii) Do these organisations have the potential to trigger or inspire positive transformations of other public organisations or even the environment in the near future?

Both Leonard (2008) and Roll (2014) generated two mega hypotheses of “PoE”. Whilst Leonard expanded these hypotheses to be five, Roll condensed it to three. These are internal factors such as leadership and management; prevalence of external/political economy factors that shape the benefit and legitimacy of the organisation and function.

The internal factors are derived from the public administration and organisation theory literature and are the counters to the political context mega-hypothesis. This factor consists of two elements, namely; managerial and the organisational attributes. According to Leonard (2008:14), the managerial component concerns the administrative strategies adopted in running the organisation and deals with organisational leadership. For “PoE” to occur, the management must have a performance-based personnel system, adequate resource mobilisation, which depends on competent and honest resource management, a set of goals that give strong legitimacy to all stakeholders and flexibility in formulating and implementing goals.

The second element is organisational attributes. This concentrates on how the agency performs its functions to attain “PoE” status. Leonard (2008:18) espoused two consolidated attributes under this element. These are (i), autonomous organisational leadership devoid of political direction but highly responsive to political pressures, and (ii), the benefits created as outcomes by the organisation. These benefits have effects that are intense, immediate, and identifiable without difficulty and focused on a self-conscious group and politically consequential group.

The second broad factor of “pockets of productivity are the external factors. Pockets of productivity’ usually depends on political reform for their creation and regeneration. The contextual variables under the external factors are grouped into three elements. These are; those concerned with process, political institutions and direction of the underlying political economy. The ability of a public organisation to achieve and sustain productivity depends on the mix and timing of benefits and costs it generates for the politically powerful groups in its environment (Leonard, 2008: 20-21).

Productivity is more likely if administrative leadership is depoliticized but responsive to political leadership. Initiation of an organisation, reform and political support for its consolidation is inhibited if it does not ‘fit’ with the society’s dominant organisational patterns or if the political organisation of the social actors who benefitted most from its services have a poor ‘fit’ with the formal structure of state organisations (Leonard, 2008: 23). Productivity is more likely to be achieved if the groups

that the agency benefits are organised by their interests and not into patron-client networks. There exist in society interest groups (rather than patronage ones) that have a conception of the state as a public good, rather than simply as a target of predation or a tool for gaining advantage over others (Leonard, 2008: 25).

To explain the processes and mechanisms of the emergence of “pockets of effectiveness,” Roll (2014) identified nine interactive factors that are categorized into three: organisational strength, organisational culture, and organisational proactivity. Organisational strength is “infrastructure and procedural components” of effectiveness, which include focused powers, staff deployment and standardization of operations and procedures. Organisational culture refers to the driving forces of success, which consist of inclusive leadership, performance orientation and organisational identity. Organisational proactivity encompasses facilitating factors such as the political management of leaders to obtain political support and protection, organisational autonomy based on political relations, bargaining, outreach, cooperation with clients and other organisations to build trust and cooperation. Roll (2014) cautiously warned that these factors are not sufficient to produce exceptional organisations but are necessary because without their existence and interactions, “PoE” might not occur.

On conditions for sustaining “PoE”, Roll (2014) enumerated legal framework, management team, organisational reputation, incorruptibility, effectiveness and insulation from political interference.

There are a handful of empirical studies on “pockets of effectiveness”. For instance, Wil (2013a); Wil (2013b) and Kuwajima (2016) all highlighted factors that made organisations to be “PoE”. They identified elements such as leadership, management vision, ideological commitment, autonomy from political influence, political clientelism, power balance between professionals and political office holders, stakeholder involvement, appropriate rapport with political authorities.

In Ghana, Owusu (2006) found that two significant factors: remuneration and hiring differentiated between good and poor performing public organisations. Whilst Ayee (2019) in anecdotal evidence adduced that, the DVLA is a “positive deviant”.

### **Profile of the driver and vehicle licensing authority**

The DVLA is an agency under the Ministry of Transport. An Act of Parliament (Act 569), 1999, established it in 1999. DVLA replaced the Vehicle Examination and Licensing Division (VELD). By the Act, DVLA is to provide a regulated framework for enhanced and more effective administration of drivers and vehicles. DVLA was weaned off government subvention in March 2016.

In terms of mission, the DVLA exists to ensure best



practices for licensing drivers and vehicles to promote road safety and environmental sustainability, while pursuing integrity, excellence, professionalism and reliability in service delivery. The vision of the Authority is to be a reputable organization with internationally accepted standards for driver and vehicle licensing.

The key stakeholders are the Motor Transport and Traffic Department (MTTD) of the Ghana Police Service; Transport Associations; National Road Safety Commission; Ghana National Insurance Commission; Ghana Automobile Distribution Association; Government Technical Training Centre; National Drivers Academy, the Judiciary and the Motoring Public. The DVLA as a legal entity has the power to sue and can be sued.

According to the DVLA Act 569, 1999, the Authority is responsible for ensuring that only qualified people are in possession of drivers' license and only fit motor vehicles should be on the roads. In addition, it also ensures that institutions with the requisite human resource and logistics provide services in building the capacity of prospective drivers and keeping proper records on all its clients. The Authority also provides policy advisory services to the Minister responsible for transport (Republic of Ghana, 1999).

#### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The paper was guided by the qualitative method of research. It adopted a mixture of case study approach, elite and face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions in data gathering. The study is a case study because of the focus on the DVLA. The case study research method is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin 1984:23 cited in Zaidah: 2007:2). Case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. In case studies, the emphasis tends to be on extensive examination of the setting. Case study research is associated with qualitative research because it helps to generate intensive, detailed examination of the case (Bryman, 2012:68). With a case study, the case is an object of interest in its own right, and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it (Bryman, 2012:69). The distinguishing element of a case study is that the researcher is usually concerned with unearthing the unique features of the case. This is known as idiographic approach (Bryman, 2012:69).

The respondents for the study were the principal officers at the DVLA and the customers (clients) of the DVLA. The customers consisted of both private and commercial drivers and operators of driving schools. Data were collected from 250 respondents via interview based on the research objectives. The elite and face-to-face interviews were chosen to gather information to assist in reconstructing some event or discerning a pattern in specific occurrences at the DVLA. A five year audited financial report was also sourced from the Ghana Audit Service to comparatively analyze the financial performance of the Authority. The data were recorded and transcribed by the author. Content analysis was used in the data analysis by categorizing the responses of the respondents under themes based on the research objectives and questions. Data collection for the study was done in two segments; between July and November 2021 and May to July 2022. To establish the validity of the data, member checking was done by

crosschecking the data collected from the clients of the DVLA with the DVLA and vice versa.

#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the article discusses the findings of the study within the theoretical, comparative and empirical literature. The paper deployed the Roll (2014:25) four criteria for identifying "pockets of productivity" in the public sector vis-a-vis the research objectives.

##### What are the pockets of effectiveness at the DVLA?

The first "PoE" was the decentralisation of the Authority's operations. Decentralisation is the transfer of power, authority, and resources from the centre to the periphery. The Authority in pursuance of Regulation 10 of the Road Traffic Regulation 2012, Legislative Instrument 2180 of Ghana decentralised its services by establishing thirty-three (33) stations at the regional and district levels to serve the citizenry effectively (Table 1).

In addition, Satellite Stations and Mobile Van Services were also established with the latter launched in August 2016. The Satellite Stations operated between three and four days in a week depending on the market day of the locality. The Mobile Van Services on the other hand were deployed during funerals, festivals and other social events. In the big cities of Ghana (Accra, Kumasi, Koforidua and Takoradi), it emerged that the Mobile Van Service was used during international conferences (Fieldwork, November 2021). Furthermore, in the Authority's bid to make its services accessible, corporate entities arranged for the renewal of Driver's License and Roadworthy Certificates for staff within their premises once the clients were in the minimum of nine (9). Some notable institutions that benefitted from this service include the University of Ghana, Legon and Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. According to respondents, *"this made it easier in accessing the services of the authority because they do not have to leave their offices to travel to the DVLA offices to renew their Roadworthy Certificates and licenses"* (Fieldwork, November 2021). In advancing the decentralisation agenda, the Authority introduced the Tertiary Students' Drive (TertSDrive) programme. This was aimed to ensure that qualified students acquired driver's license before completing school. In the Authority's estimation, driving was a necessity and basic requirement for some jobs hence the policy.

To make its product accessible, the Authority outsourced and in some cases went into public-private partnerships (PPPs) with private entities for vehicle inspection and testing (Table 2).

The decentralisation and the PPP initiatives culminated into the citizenry having easy access to the Authority's

**Table 1.** DVLA Stations and the region of location.

S/N	Stations	Region
1	RLM-Accra	Greater Accra Region
2	RLM-Kumasi	Ashanti Region
3	RLM-Tema	Greater Accra Region
4	RLM-Wa	Upper West Region
5	RLM-Takoradi	Western Region
6	RLM-Koforidua	Eastern Region
7	RLM-Tamale	Northern Region
8	RLM-Cape Coast	Central Region
9	RLM-Sunyani	Bono Region
10	RLM-Bolga	Upper East Region
11	RLM-Ho	Volta Region
12	DLM-Tarkwa	Western Region
13	DLM-Obuasi	Ashanti Region
14	DLM-Mampong Ashanti	Ashanti Region
15	DLM-Agona Ashanti	Ashanti Region
16	DLM-Nkawkaw	Eastern Region
17	DLM-Akim-Oda	Eastern Region
18	DLM-Weija	Greater Accra Region
19	DLM-Winneba	Central Region
20	DLM-Denu	Volta Region
21	DLM-Hohoe	Volta Region
22	DLM-Techiman	Bono East Region
23	DLM-Dunkwa	Central Region
24	DLM-Bekwai	Ashanti Region
25	DLM-Goaso	Ahafo Region
26	DLM-Sefwi-Wiaso	Western North Region
27	DLM-Kintampo	Bono East Region
28	DLM-Offinso	Ashanti Region
29	DLM-Wenchi	Bono Region
30	DLM-Axim	Western Region
31	DLM-Effiduaso	Ashanti Region
32	DLM-Kumawu	Ashanti Region
33	DLM-Akatsi	Volta Region

Source: DVLA, National Headquarters (2022).

services. The finding confirms the position of Ahwoi (2010) that administrative decentralisation decongests the centre and makes services available to the citizenry. In addition, it also fits into three of Roll's (2014) criteria of measuring "PoE" namely relative effectiveness in providing the public goods and/or services the organization is officially mandated to provide, capacity to provide public goods or services throughout the country and service delivery is in line with human rights principles and laws of the country concerned. This is because the decentralisation of services enhanced the Authority's ability to provide its services nationwide and services rendered effectively. In addition, it was also in line with the laws of the country and the principles of human rights. According to Article 35(3) of the 1992 Constitution

(Republic of Ghana, 1992:35) "The State shall promote just and reasonable access for all citizens to public facilities and services in accordance with law" (Republic of Ghana, 1992:35). Similarly, Article 35(6d) stipulates that the State shall "make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts" (Republic of Ghana, 1992:36).

However, following a successful referendum on 27th December 2018, additional six regions were created in Ghana making the administrative regions sixteen (16). Tables 1 and 2 revealed that the offices of the DVLA and the PVTs were limited to only thirteen (13) regions leaving out the Oti, Savannah and North-East Regions. This is at variance with Roll (2014) criterion of

**Table 2.** Private Vehicle Test Stations (PVTs) in Ghana.

SN	Name of garage	Place of location	Region of location
1	Joseco Inspection Centre	Tuba-Kokrobite	Greater Accra
2	BIVAC International	Kuntunse	Greater Accra
3	Ben Sam Services Centre	Oyibi	Greater Accra
4	Ben Sam Services Centre	Tema Community 22	Greater Accra
5	Ben Sam Services Centre	Effia near Takoradi	Western
6	VITO S-Class Services	Dome	Greater Accra
7	SPC Servicing Centre	Tema	Greater Accra
8	Plaspack Auto Vehicle Inspection	La	Greater Accra
9	Awompi DVLA Inspection Centre	Accra	Greater Accra
10	Centre 1 Complex	Somanya	Eastern
11	S-Class Service	Kumasi	Ashanti
12	S-Class Service	Sunyani	Bono
13	Elie Company Limited (PPP with DVLA)	Community 25-Tema	Accra
14	Kimcart Company Limited	Trede	Ashanti
15	City Centre Vehicle Inspection	Taifa, Accra	Greater Accra

Source: Author's compilation.

accessibility in judging an entity as a "PoE". Nevertheless, the non-existence of DVLA and PVTs outlets in these three regions is pardonable because these regions were presented with their Constitutional Instruments (CIs) between February 12 and 15, 2019.

In ensuring value for money, service responsiveness, effective and judicious use of resources, the Authority was guided by three (3) key factors in decentralising services. These were human population of the locality to ascertain need, vehicular population of localities and economic and social factors. This finding is in tandem with views opined by Ayee (2019; 2017), Ohemeng and Ayee (2016) that the central aims of PSRs were to ensure value for money and service responsiveness.

The second "pocket of excellence" was the prediction and reliability in the receipt of service from the Authority because of the drastic reduction in the number of months clients wait to access the Authority's services. In the not too distant past, it took a client a minimum of six months to get a driver's license. This longevity in accessing the services was reduced following key interventions. The interventions were the reduction in duplication of processes and the introduction of diverse means of acquiring the driver's license such as the Prestige Service which allowed a client to receive the license within 30 min after meeting all requirements, the Premium Service which takes two weeks and regular which lasts one month. This feat was attained because of effective monitoring and supervision, responsiveness of the Authority and the urgency attached to customer satisfaction. Another factor was the in-house printing of Driver's License, unlike previously where the printing was contracted out. These dynamics brought about predictability in service provision. In the words of an

employee "we are always admonished not to have a backlog of work, we always thrive to meet deadlines to satisfy the clients" (Fieldwork, July 2021). This is in consonance with the literature on good governance, which saw predictability and reliability in the delivery and receipt of public services as a major hallmark (Rao, 2013). This finding also confirms the effectiveness criteria of "pocket of productivity" by Roll (2014).

The third "island of excellence" was the adoption of innovation and best practices. The public sector is noted for its conservative approach to doing things. It is always reluctant to try new things; however, the DVLA implemented innovative and best practice measures such as the adoption of electronic governance (e-governance). E-governance is the deployment of ICT and the internet in the provision of services. This mechanism allowed clients to transact business such as filling of forms and payments to the Authority online. This brought about reduction in the number of hours client spent in accessing services as well as decline in congestion at the various Stations. Technology was also utilized. This culminated into the upgrading of equipment and services. To attain this, the Authority developed new methods, processes and mechanisms following series of tracer studies and customer satisfaction surveys to ascertain the actual needs and challenges encountered by clients in accessing products. Some of the challenges identified were duplication of roles such as the request for bio-data of clients at all stages, red-tape in vehicle registration, congestion at stations and human factors such as poor work attitudes, poor human relations towards clients and co-workers etc. This finding contradicts the assertion held by Caiden (1999) that public sector organisations were conservative and reluctant to try new methods, processes

**Table 3.** Five years' comparative analysis of the actual financial performance of the DVLA (2016-2020), All transactions are in the Ghana Cedi (GH¢).

Years	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
<b>Revenue mobilized</b>					
Government of Ghana non-taxed revenue	64,820,604.89	51,169,648.28	47,458,495.26	41,579,022.84	34,114,208.05
Road use fees	69,265,435.05	52,798,218.00	48,932,889.50	44,088,382.81	33,866,259.99
Cost recovery	85,987,337.58	69,048,436.74	56,193,671.34	42,260,515.33	30,424,123.54
Total	220,073,377.52	173,016,303.03	152,585,056.10	127,927,920.99	98,404,591.58
<b>Revenue due DVLA</b>					
IGF retention	107,960,152.89	97,781,317.84	92,008,701.92	73,821,186.46	56,150,945.62
Other income	180,716.83	190,002.30	132,445.05	825,823.73	947,515.88
GoG Subventions	-	-	-	-	4,977,182.14
<b>Expenditure</b>					
Compensations	39,685,271.21	31,394,970.07	25,690,709.23	21,470,215.76	11,694,454.35
Goods and services	66,771,264.26	72,179,245.58	63,876,213.49	44,368,359.46	41,770,197.60
Capital expenditure	12,789,302.67	20,256,648.19	33,481,228.53	44,151,811.68	49,206,402.03
<b>Assets</b>					
Current Assets	60,565,258.00	29,176,558.88	69,994,108.13	78,787,138.77	70,833,847.00
Non-current Assets	130,392,055.73	131,638,292.26	124,369,214.31	110,960,543.28	76,820,616.00
<b>Liabilities</b>					
Current liabilities	86,561,610.77	72,389,409.90	93,976,903.07	95,744,034.03	100,333,735.00
Medium term liabilities	54,274,979.38	39,989,048.53	46,347,129.13	38,591,500.06	717,015.00
Accumulated fund	50,120,725.93	45,127,822.36	54,039,290.24	55,412,147.97	46,603,713.00

Source: Compiled by Author from 2016-2020 audit reports of the Ghana Audit Service.

and procedures. Financially, the introduction of the state of the art technology and innovation resulted in the generation of GH¢6 million in January, 2020 (equivalent of US\$1,052,632) for introducing improved security features into the administration of the Defective Vehicle (DV) number plates. This amount far exceeded the GH¢4 million (equivalent of US\$ 701,754) generated the whole of 2019 (Daily Graphic, 13/2/2020:1, 3). Table 3 presents a five-year comparative analysis of the actual financial performance of the Authority.

From Table 3, comparatively, total actual revenue the Authority mobilized in 2017 appreciated by 30% over that of 2016 from GH¢98,404,591.58 to GH¢127,927,920.99. In the same vein, 2018 witnessed a 16% increase from 2017 as the total revenue garnered increased from GH¢127,927,920.99 to GH¢152,585,056.10. The year 2019 increased by 13% from GH¢152,585,056.10 in 2018 to GH¢173,016,303.03. Similarly, 2020 witnessed a 27% increase in total actual revenue over that of 2019. Thus from GH¢173,016,303.03 in 2019 to GH¢220,073,377.52 in 2020. A detailed analysis of the various components making the actual revenue mobilized all indicated percentage increments. For instance,

Government of Ghana non-tax revenue had 21.88% increases in 2017 compared to 2016. That of 2018 improved by 12% over the amount recorded in 2017. There was a jump of 8% from 2018 to 2019 while 2020 recorded 27% increase compared to 2019.

In terms of the road use fees, the amount recorded in 2017 surpassed that of 2016 by 30.18%. Likewise 2018 being higher than 2017 by 9.9%. There was 8% increase in 2019 over 2018 and 2020 had 31% increase over 2019. Cost recovery activities also increased by 38.90% in 2017 over 2016. The cost recovered in 2018 appreciated by 24.79% over that of 2017. The 2019 fiscal year saw a 23% leap over the 2018 fiscal year and 25% in 2020 over the amount recovered in 2019. Concerning revenue due the Authority, there were consistent percentage increment of 23.92, 19.77, 6% and 10% between 2016 and 2020 fiscal years respectively. Overall, the Authority consistently had increases across its actual revenue under the various components. The increments recorded in 2020 over 2019 are instructive. This is because; the year 2020 witnessed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with government policy of lock-down for two weeks and restrictions for the rest of the

year. The years 2017 to 2020 had no Government of Ghana subventions because the Authority was weaned of it at the end of the 2016 financial year.

On the expenditure, the accumulated expenditure of the Authority in 2017 increased by 7.13% over the figure of 2016, while 10.6% increase was recorded in 2018 over 2017. However, expenditure of 2019 over 2018 appreciated by a paltry 2% margin. Thus, from GH¢123,055,151.25 expended in 2018 to GH¢103,574,215.65 in 2019. In the 2019 financial year, 14.82% of the total expenditure was incurred on capital expenditure while 27.21% was incurred in 2018. Again, the total expenditure for 2020 dropped by 4% from the 2019 expenditure. Thus, from GH¢123,055,151.25 expended in 2019 to GH¢119,245,841.14 in 2020. In 2020 financial year, 10.71% of the total expenditure was incurred on capital expenditure, while 14.82% was incurred in 2019.

In terms of Assets, the net book value of the total assets held by the Authority as at December 31, 2017 stood at GH¢189,747,682.06, exceeding that of 2016 (GH¢147,654,463.00) by 28.51%. Similarly, that of 2018 compared to 2017 saw a marginal hike of 2.4%. The net book value of the total assets held by the Authority as at December 31, 2019 stood at GH¢160,814,851.14, falling short of 2018 (GH¢194,363,322.44) by 17.26%. However, the net book value of the total assets held by the Authority as at December 31, 2020 stood at GH¢190,957,313.72, increasing above that of 2019 (GH¢160,814,851.14) by 19%. The asset value of the Authority saw the increase in 2020 because the Authority embarked on massive decentralization drive which led to the opening of nine (9) new branches as indicated in Table 2.

About the liabilities, total liabilities increased by 32.93% from GH¢101,050,749.27 at the end of 2016 to GH¢134,335,534.09 at the end of December 31, 2017. This exponential appreciation is because of the increase in medium term liability resulting from commitments to projects such as records digitization, enhancement of security, communication and roadworthy stickers, as well as procurement of secured seal for driver license. The 2018 financial year saw a meagre 4.3% appreciation over that of 2017 because of the reduction in the medium term liabilities. Total liabilities decreased by 19.92% from GH¢140,324,032.20 at the end of 2018 to GH¢112,378,456.43 at the end of December 31, 2019. This was because of higher settlement of medium-term liability than loans accessed during the period. Total liabilities increased by 25.32% from GH¢112,378,456.43 at the end of 2019 to GH¢140,836,590.15 as at the end of December 31, 2020. This was because of higher loans accessed than debt settled during the period. These loans were used to embark on infrastructure development as part of the decentralization and technological innovation agenda.

The accumulated fund of the Authority between 2016

and 2020 is checked in that it experienced an increase of 18.9% in 2017 over 2016 thus from GH¢46,603,713.00 in 2016 to GH¢55,412,147.97 in 2017. While 2018 and 2019 witnessed a nosedive of 2.47 and 16.49% respectively. Thus from GH¢55,412,147.97 in 2017 to GH¢54,039,290.24 in 2018 and a further deep of GH¢45,127,822.36 in 2019. However, the fund increased by 3% from GH¢45,127,822.36 in 2019 to GH¢50,120,725.93 in 2020.

The above measures and financial performance resulted in the Authority receiving series of awards including Excellence in Public Procurement (Silver), Innovative use of Technology in Public Procurement and Supply (Bronze) and Dr. Robert Tay, Deputy Director, Procurement and Stores, emerged as the leader in the top 20 procurement and supply chain industry. The Authority also came second as the most innovative public sector at the Inspirational Public Sector Leadership Awards ceremony. During the Fourth Edition of the African Human Resources Innovation Awards, 2022, the Authority won three awards, namely: the HR transformation in public sector organisation of the year 2021, the CEO won the Most People Focused Award; the head of human resource was also adjudged Woman HR Professional of the year 2021. At the customer service front, the Authority was declared the best in customer service delivery in the public sector at the Fourth Ghana Customer Service Index Awards ([www.dvla.gov.gh](http://www.dvla.gov.gh)).

The Authority was rated as the second most corrupt public institution in 2016/2017 by the Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII) but at the maiden integrity award of the GII on Monday 18th December, 2019, the DVLA was adjudged the policy and administrative reforms organisation (Ghanaian Times, 19/12/2019). It is worthy of note that, in 2014, the Tiger Eye PI (Investigative Company) through undercover investigation exposed the corrupt and dubious activities such as issuing of driver's license to unqualified people, foreigners acquiring driver's license without going through the due process etc at the DVLA. However, these incidences are not being reported presently as it used to be in the past. In the nutshell, since 2016, the Authority has won forty-two (42) awards. In the words of the CEO, "The success story of DVLA has been attributed to efficiency, effectiveness and delivery of service on time". Furthermore, the Authority "developed strategic vision which encompasses people, process and technology which is contributing to the transformation and innovations at the Authority" ([www.dvla.gov.gh](http://www.dvla.gov.gh)). This consistent recognition and progress meets Roll's postulation that for any organisation to be called PoE, it must record success for five consecutive years.

### The drivers of success

"Pockets of excellence" do not occur in a vacuum, they are always triggered by some factors. Leadership,

capable human resource with the right professional mindset, responsive internal institutional mechanisms, and collective organisational vision were some factors that catapulted the DVLA to a “positive deviant” in Ghana’s public sector.

In this paper, leadership is conceived as both an individual and group of people with legitimate authority who marshal available resources for the attainment of stated objectives within a public entity. This definition was adopted because the individual leader in charge of the day-to-day administration of the authority is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and in addition, a Board of Directors gives the policy direction to the Authority. The CEO had a vision of making the Authority autonomous, efficient and sustainable. This vision was translated into a two-year business plan underpinned by the purpose of each unit, department and station to double its current productivity within two years (2017-2019). The plan had six pillars: image uplift, service optimization, financial autonomy and sustainability, customer focus, human capital development and research, business development and innovation. Technology, process and people drove these pillars. Two outstanding features characterized the leadership and business plan, (i) adoption of the bottom-up approach, which afforded every station manager and employee to make inputs into the business plan, and (ii) the plans were based on prevailing situations at each station and stations were to move away from the status quo to enhance customer satisfaction. This made the plans to be unique to every station and permitted employee ownership. The modus operandi by the CEO satisfied constitutional provision in Article 36(11) which states, “The State shall encourage the participation of workers in the decision-making process at the workplace (Republic of Ghana, 1992:38).

One key characteristic of the CEO was that he was determined, knew what he wanted and how to get it. These attributes influenced his relationship with the Board and the political elite (the Minister of Transport and the other members of government). In addition, the CEO had a smooth relationship with the political elites due to his maneuvering and negotiating skills. This he demonstrated by convincingly presenting his proposals. He was also proactive in that he submitted reports to the appropriate authorities before requests were made. As a result, he had the needed political support for his work. The relationship and cooperation from the political elites was deepened due to regular and periodic Board and Management meetings, which ensured transparency. Further, the CEO and the Board always involved key stakeholders in decision-making. These were done to ensure open door system of administration and continuity of plans and programmes initiated in case they exit the Authority. This finding attests to that of Wil (2013:19b) that Lukoil in post-soviet Russia was successful because of leadership adjustment to the external political economic reality and the understanding of how to deal

with the country’s political power holders and find a working relationship with the incumbent regime. The finding also corroborates the view postulated by Leonard (1991) that successful managers exhibit “leadership and skill at manipulating the environment of their organizations” and “good institutional inheritance” that can sustain success. Leonard (1991) amplified three attributes as very critical for managerial effectiveness: organizational mission, professional integrity and risk, which were key features in the DVLA success story.

The second success driver was capable human resource. Human resource with the requisite skills, in the right number, deployed for the right purpose and at the right time is a sine qua non for a responsive and result-oriented establishments and the DVLA was no exception. The vision demanded high caliber of human resource with renewed commitment. To achieve this, a fully-fledged human resource department was created to handle the human resource needs of the Authority such as training and development, employee motivation and emolument. It emerged that there were series of salary increases as a way of motivating the staff to put in their best (Fieldwork, March 2020). The provision of motivation for staff went a long way in delivering the needed results. In the words of Kotter (2011:3) “without motivation, people will not help and the effort goes nowhere”. However, the DVLA is not the most lucrative of public sector organisations in Ghana. The human resource department also ensured that new organisational culture and ethics like promptness, punctuality, and customer first were introduced to support the existing rules and regulations. According to Grindle (1997: 482) positive organizational culture could compensate for disruptive aspects of the environment. She defined organizational culture as a shared set of norms and behavioral expectations characterizing a corporate identity.

The sense of mission or “mystique” inculcated among the staff was a stronger determinant of performance than rules, regulations, or the remuneration structure and control. “Mystique” includes shared professional norms, a cherished reputation and prestige attached to the organization, a belief in being selected for their positions due to high levels of competence, and a strong sense of service to the establishment (Grindle, 1997).

In attaining the “pocket of excellence”, a sense of urgency was created in the employees to ensure promptness, a move away from the business as usual, employees were trained to align their work ethics with the vision of the organisation. In the words of Kotter (2011:7) when the urgency rate is not pumped up enough, the transformation process cannot succeed and the long-term future of the organisation is put in jeopardy. In addition, human resource management principles such as management by objective was adopted where each employee, unit and department set goals, there were constant monitoring and evaluation with feedbacks and annual reviews. During these annual reviews, stations

learned best practices from others. In the words of the Deputy Director Research, Business Development and Innovation *“the annual review was not to name and shame stations, but stations were to learn from what other stations were doing to get results”* (Fieldwork, November 2021).

The third success factor was the creation of the Department of Research, Business Plan and Innovation. The department was established in 2017 and headed by a Deputy Director. The department served as the innovation hub of the Authority. It conducted research into the existing products to ascertain how efficient, effective and responsive the Authority has been and how best the Authority could meet international standards as indicated in the vision and mission statements. The department conducts national and station level surveys. The surveys were aimed at getting firsthand information on the experiences of clients in accessing services. Clients accessing different services at different levels were interviewed to know their problems and expectations. The national surveys were limited to the 37, Weija, Tema and Kumasi stations. The collated data were reviewed and station specific problems addressed by the stations at annual reviews and general ones were resolved and policy directives formulated and implemented. During the survey review, stations were rated and those who fell below their own targets were queried to know the reasons accounting for the non-performance and remedial measures were recommended. The establishment of this department enormously contributed to the Authority being responsive and reliable in service delivery. In the words of a respondent *“the periodic surveys have been helpful because the Authority gets feedback from the clients and this assisted in problem solving”* (Fieldwork, November 2021).

According to some of the clients, *“through the surveys, we were able to put our challenges across to the Authority and in most cases, we experienced improvement in service provision the next time services were sought from the Authority”* (Fieldwork, October, 2021).

The fourth success factor was the existence of organisational vision, mission and mandate. These shaped the goal direction behavior of the workforce from top management to the least person in the organisational echelon. These manifested further, when the CEO together with the valued assets (workers) unanimously agreed to have short-term vision of two years. This largely kept all the internal stakeholders on their toes to be result-oriented. Tandler (1997) stressed the importance of organisational mission and vision as a contributory factor to “PoE”. Kotter (2011:9) reinforced that, without a sensible vision, a transformation effort could easily dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible projects that can take the organisation in the wrong direction or nowhere at all.

In addition, the Authority collaborated with other stakeholders involved in motor traffic issues. A classic example was the dedication of new mobile registration van to Citi TV’s (a private television station) “War Against Indiscipline” campaign. This campaign brought about reduction in road accidents and motorists being responsive in renewing their drivers’ license, road worthy certificates and vehicular insurance (www.citinewsroom.com). In addition, the DVLA also has existing collaboration with the MTTD in the form of a task force to enforce law and order.

Another success factor was the continuity in programmes initiated by previous managements. For instance, the preceding management under the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government initiated the outsourcing of Vehicle Inspection Centres in 2011, Mobile Van Services and Tertiary Students’ Drive in August, 2016. These policies were sustained by the management that succeeded it in 2017 following the defeat of the NDC by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the 2016 general elections. This finding is contrary to various studies that identified lack of policy continuity as the bane of PSRs in Ghana (Ayee, 2019; 2017; Ohemeng and Ayee, 2016; Ohemeng and Anebo, 2012). The finding rather affirms Article 35(7) of the 1992 Constitution, which enjoins succeeding governments to continue projects and programmes initiated by predecessor governments (Republic of Ghana, 1992:36).

### Challenges to the “Pockets of effectiveness”

The attainment of these “islands of excellence” was not without challenges that posed as threats to sustenance. These are discussed below.

First is the resistance to change. In the words of the Deputy Director in charge of Research, Business Plan and Innovation, *“it has been very difficult getting people to adjust to the new system, because they were accustomed to the manual system but now you have to sign in using finger prints with a special code and the entire architecture is audited”* (Fieldwork, October 2021). The finding is in consonance with the view espoused by Ayee (2007:187) that there were resistance and sometimes, even reversal of innovation and reorganization during PSRs.

Related to the resistance to change was the absence of the needed buy-ins. It became known that some of the stations submitted their annual plans about their intentions, however, in the process of execution; there were total deviations from the plans. *“Interrogation during reviews indicated that those stations did not actually internalize and assimilate the initiated reforms at the Authority”* (Fieldwork, October 2021).

The third challenge was intermittent political interference especially during political power transitions or change in government. During these periods, the

Authority often witnessed political directives to management. These took the form of termination of appointments, reassignments among others. For instance on 19th May 2017, it witnessed the summary dismissal of over 100 workers (myjoyonline.com 19th May 2017). Two reasons accounted for this:

- (i) The constitutional provisions in Article 195 which gave legion powers to the president to appoint directors of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and
- (ii) the “winner takes all” politics in Ghana.

In the words of Ohemeng (2019:224-225), these constitutional provisions culminated into over-politicization of the public sector, high administrative turnover rate, mistrust and organisational disloyalty.

Fourth was the fluctuation in the internet services, which undermined the technology deployed by the Authority. The Authority often encountered unreliable supply of internet services, which made the e-governance and technological architecture systems to go off intermittently thereby denying customers and workers the opportunity to use the facilities. In the words of some respondents *“the Authority has done well by going online, but the main problem is that their site (DVLA) goes off and sometimes, there is delay in getting your information uploaded and downloading information from the site”*. Another respondent also intimated *“the online is good, but sometimes, I don’t have reliable internet connection so it becomes difficult for me in using the online technology of the DVLA”* (Fieldwork, November 2021).

Finally, the decentralization of operations, adoption of modern technology and sense of urgency in the employees were not able to weed out the activities of intermediaries (*goro boys*) completely from its operations. In addition, prestige and premium services were limited to the Accra, 37, Tema, Kumasi, Tarkwa and Weija stations denying citizens in other parts of the country of these improved services. This undermined the decentralisation policy of the Authority.

### Effect of the strategies on service delivery

The implementation of the various strategies brought about improvement in service provision and quality. For instance, clients no longer queued at the Authority for services due to the deepening of decentralization at the Authority. As indicated by one respondent *“I no longer have to travel to a far place to get the services. The station is nearer to my location and the mobile van service has been very helpful”* (Fieldwork, November 2021).

Some commercial drivers also indicated, *“Now the DVLA comes to our lorry stations and we renew our drivers’ licenses and roadworthy certificates. We no longer have to go to the Authority. They are at our*

*doorsteps”* (Fieldwork, November, 2021).

A customer recounted during the Authority’s visit to the University of Ghana, Legon *“renewal of my driver’s license has been very easy. I spent less than 10 min to get the service on campus”*

The adoption of effective human resource management practices also influenced the work ethics of the employees with trickledown effect on service provision. Some clients intimated, *“now the staff have good human relations, they attend to you quickly and limited time is spent”* Another client said *“I went through every stage of the license acquisition without engaging services of middlemen (goro boys) and the experience is different from what I use to experience some years back”* (Fieldwork, July, 2021).

One respondent indicated that due to the Premium Service, *“I had my license renewed and did not have problem with the Motor Transport and Traffic Department (MTTD) of the Ghana Police Service (July, 2021).*

### Conclusion

The DVLA has indeed proven to be an “island of excellence” in Ghana’s public sector due to the leadership ability to navigate the political maze, innovation and best practices, responsive autonomy, the existence of mission and vision statements and the deployment and implementation of appropriate human resource management policies. These brought about improvement in the quality of service delivery as indicated above and customer satisfaction, receipt of awards by the authority, value for money and financial gains. These notwithstanding, there were plethora of challenges threatening the maintenance of the “pockets of effectiveness. These were the “political chess” during political power alternations, resistant to change among others.

### Recommendations

Based on the results, the following four recommendations are proffered:

One, steps should be taken to amend Article 195 of the 1992 Constitution to reduce the powers of the president in appointing heads of MDAs.

Two, the employees especially the top brass should be given permanent tenure to allow for execution of policies and programmes formulated. Three, DVLA and PVTSS outlets should be established in the three regions where they do not exist.

Fourth, the study deployed a single case study using the DVLA, it is recommended that future studies should employ a multiple case study of various regulatory authorities in Ghana to tease out the differences and similarities as well as what worked and what did not work



in accounting for the PoE in Ghana's public sector.

### Lessons learnt

The following forceful lessons have been learnt which should be internalized in Ghana's public sector organizations:

First, continuity of programmes, policies and projects implemented by predecessor administration hugely accounted for the "pockets of excellence. This made reforms to outlive the regimes that initiated them and the success of DVLA to persist as a "PoE".

Second, employee involvement in vision formulation to a large extent eased the pressure on management in drumming home the essence of support for implementation of the business plan, and third, technology, innovation and best practices were the game changers at the DVLA.

In fine, once the appropriate strategies are formulated and implemented with the requisite political commitment, resources and environment, MDAs will be efficient and result-oriented and will attract the accolade PoE "*ceteris paribus*".

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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